

Political Readings of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in Portugal

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The 1956 Hungarian revolution had a resonant echo in Western Europe, gaining large attention and media coverage. This article explores how the small, peripheral Atlantic country of Portugal, on the other side of the European continent (Lisbon lies more than 3,000 kilometers from Budapest), which was under the rightwing conservative dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar's New State at the time, became interested in the Hungarian events, allowing them to be written about in the most influential newspapers. The article begins with a discussion of the basic context of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and of the Portuguese political context in the mid-1950s (the Salazarist regime and the bulk of the oppositional forces) and then offers an analysis of articles found in seven important Portuguese newspapers. Essentially, it presents a survey of the coverage of the Hungarian Revolution in the Portuguese press and explores how those events were interpreted and how they had an impact on the ideological readings and positions of the government, the moderate opposition, and the radical opposition of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP).

The 1956 revolution merited extensive coverage in the Portuguese papers, with titles, pictures, and news boxes on the front pages sometimes continuing into the next pages of a given paper or on the last page. The stories were narrated, for most part, in a lively, fluid, sentimental, and apologetic language. The New State in particular, but also moderate publications which were oppositional to Salazar, endorsed the Budapest revolutionaries and criticized and denounced orthodox communism in the form of Soviet repression, either in the name of Christendom, national independence, and the Western European safeguard against communism (in the case of Salazarism), or in the name (and hope) of a democratic surge, which would usher in strident calls for civil liberties (in the case of oppositional voices). With the exception of the press organ which voiced the official position of the Portuguese Communist Party, supporting the Soviet response against the Hungarian insurgents (and thus was in sharp contrast with the larger share of public opinion), there was a rare convergence, despite nuances in the language, in the images, narratives, messages, and general tone of the articles in the various organs of the Portuguese press, which tended to show compassion and support for the insurgents in Budapest because their actions targeted communism and tended to decry the final bloody repression, which exposed the Soviet Union as a murderous regime.

Keywords: Portugal, New State, Salazar, Hungary, newspapers, public opinion, anti-communism, opposition, Portuguese Communist Party, Cold War, 1956

Introduction

During the Cold War, few major events in Eastern Europe made headline news in the West. Among the events that caught the attention of people in the West were occasions in which a “distant” and “forgotten” country in the East, behind the Iron Curtain, rose to the fore and dared challenge Soviet domination. To some extent, these occasions, which included national uprisings and anti-Soviet rebellions, were a political tool with which the West could denounce the Kremlin’s international rule. These cases included, first and foremost, the revolt in East Germany in 1953, the 1956 revolution in Hungary, and the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The events in Hungary in the autumn of 1956 had a resonant echo in Western Europe, grabbing considerable attention and media coverage. In a seminal essay authored in the aftermath of the revolution, world-renowned political scientist Hannah Arendt would make the following remarks concerning the uprising:

This was a true event whose stature will not depend upon victory or defeat; its greatness is secure in the tragedy it enacted [...] What happened in Hungary happened nowhere else, and the twelve days of the revolution contained more history than the twelve years since the Red Army had ‘liberated’ the country from Nazi domination.¹

The fact that Hungary caught the attention of the media and the political world in West Germany (where Hannah Arendt lived by then), France, Italy, or the UK (i.e., the major continental powers and the closest US ally) does not come as a surprise. In this article, I deal with a case which, by comparison, is a bit eccentric. I consider how Portugal, a small, peripheral Atlantic country on the other side of the European continent (Lisbon is more than 3,000 kilometers from Budapest) and under the rightwing conservative dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar’s New State, became interested in the events in Hungary, allowing them various spreads on the most influential newspapers. Recalling the basic coordinates of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and of the Portuguese political context in the mid-1950s (the Salazarist regime and the bulk of the oppositional forces) and offering an analysis of writings from seven important Portuguese newspapers, I present a survey of the Portuguese press and its coverage of the Hungarian revolution, to explore how those events were commented and impacted on the ideological readings and positions of the

1 Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism,” 5.

government, its moderate opposition and the radical opposition of the PCP, the acronym for the Portuguese Communist Party.

Salazar's New State exerted censorship over every form of media, though at times its visible activity could be reduced, because the intensity of the repression varied according to the nature of the national or international themes. All materials were read by the censors, who would cut the forbidden parts and force newsrooms to alter contents, with no blank spaces being allowed in printed papers. From 1936 onwards, because of Spanish republican propaganda pouring into Portugal to encourage anti-Salazarist opposition, all foreign publications and news had to be authorized before being allowed into circulation. Radio was also strictly censored, and only "friendly" broadcasters were tolerated, such as the state-owned national radio company and the Catholic broadcaster. When regular television started in Portugal in 1957, there was only a single channel, and it was state-owned and thus easily controlled by the political power.²

Despite this apparatus, in late October and early November 1956, "the Portuguese press became, overnight, a very free source of knowledge on the Eastern world, about which almost everything could be said or thought."³ The anti-communist revolution in Hungary was seen as meriting broad coverage in the Portuguese papers, with titles, pictures, and news boxes on the front pages, sometimes spreading into the interior or even the last pages, featuring, in most cases, a lively, fluid, sentimental, and apologetic language. Due to the political orientation of Salazarism, which sought to isolate the country from any undesired foreign influence, the Portuguese press had few correspondents working directly from abroad and none placed in the capital cities of Eastern countries. For international themes, newsrooms relied on dispatches from international correspondents, transmitted through news agencies, above all *France Press* and *Reuters*. In the particular case of Catholic newspapers and public opinion, close international ties were held with the Vatican State, and Pope Pius XII's diplomatic appeals concerning the fate of the Hungarian Catholics were the prime source for the faithful Portuguese. In 1956, information from Budapest reached Portugal via Paris, Rome (the Holy See), London, and Vienna, and the mere fact that papers could publish articles about what was unfolding in Hungary, quoting the political proclamations in Budapest and the insurrectionists' radio broadcasts and reproducing photographs, shows that censorship allowed newsrooms to do

2 Barreto, "Censura," 276–80; Azevedo, *A Censura de Salazar e Marcelo Caetano*, 69–75.

3 Farinha, "A Hungria em Portugal," 36.

this, since all foreign material had to be preauthorized before any public release. As for the clandestine Portuguese Communist Party, its sources varied, but there were underground ties with Spanish and French communist forces, chiefly with the Parisian newspaper *L'Humanité* (the official organ of the French Communist Party), which had its own correspondent reporting from Budapest.

Through most newspapers, during the days of the Hungarian revolution, Portuguese readers were provided with realistic journalism which used words such as “independence,” “nationalism,” “liberty,” “democracy,” “socialism,” “revolution,” “insurrection,” “hope,” “longing,” “fight,” “combat,” “repression,” “brutality,” “massacre,” and “death.” This vocabulary, usually absent from the Portuguese media in the Salazarist conservative, sanitized state, was displayed by Salazarist papers and also by titles where moderate oppositional voices were able to state their views. The vivacity, energy, and empathy of the language conveyed how something important was taking place far from Lisbon, on the other “enemy” side of Europe, worth following and commenting on. Not surprisingly, the New State expressed its support for the Budapest revolutionaries, but so did moderate oppositional sectors to Salazar. Both criticized and denounced orthodox communism in the form of Soviet repression, either in the name of Christendom, national independence, and the protection of Western European anti-communism (in the case of Salazarism) or in the name of (and hope for) a democratic surge, which it was hoped would be accompanied by recognition of civil liberties (in the case of oppositional voices). Apart from the official position of the Portuguese Communist Party, which supported the Soviet attitude response to the Hungarian insurgents and was in sharp contrast with the larger share of public opinion, there was a rare convergence, despite the language nuances, in the images, narratives, messages, and general tone of the articles in the Portuguese press and in the support for the insurgents in Budapest, because their actions targeted communism and the final bloody repression exposed the Soviet Union as a murderous regime.

The press survey below draws on seven Portuguese titles running at the time of the Hungarian revolution: *Diário de Notícias* (the best-seller generalist newspaper, broadly identified with the ideological stance of the New State), *O Século* (a generalist, more popular newspaper, also identified with the regime), *Diário da Manhã* (the official newspaper for Salazarism), *Novidades* (the official newspaper for the Catholic church), *República* and *Diário de Lisboa* (the two main newspapers voicing moderate liberal oppositional opinions), and, lastly, differing from all these, *Avante!*, the monthly clandestine title which was the official organ

of the Portuguese Communist Party. The survey will focus mainly on sample readings from two moments in the unfolding of the Hungarian revolution: the initial hopes in the late October days which seemed to bear witness to the triumph of the insurrection, and the disillusionment and criticism sparked by the final defeat of the revolutionary forces in the early days of November. Additionally, attention will be paid to the laudatory publicity given to many Portuguese civic pro-Hungarian demonstrations and campaigns or acts of solidarity mounted by the national authorities and the national Catholic church.⁴

The Events in Hungary in 1956 and the Portuguese Context: The Salazarist Regime and the Oppositional Forces

In February 1956, the denunciation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Soviet Party Congress encouraged dissidents within Eastern Europe communist parties. In Hungary, the winds of de-Stalinization ignited old national patriotic feelings and a deep anti-Soviet resentment, and various groups of intellectuals, students, and workers started crying out for freedom and a better standard of living. Khrushchev tried to tone down the Hungarian protests by encouraging the local Stalinist party leader Mátyás Rákosi to resign. Rákosi was replaced, in July 1956, by another hard-liner, Ernő Gerő, but this only intensified audible demands for change and democratization.⁵

On October 23, 1956, a massive popular demonstration broke out in the streets of Budapest as protesters demanded the end of the communist rule, the withdrawal of Soviet troops, a set of reforms, free elections, and the symbolic release of Cardinal József Mindszenty, the Hungarian Primate, who had been imprisoned since 1949.⁶ Recognizing that the appointment of Gerő had been but a mistake, the Soviet authorities allowed for a restructuring of the local government. Imre Nagy (who had previously led Hungary in 1953–55) became Prime-Minister and János Kádár became the First Secretary of the Communist Party. In the following days, from October 24 to 28, revolution seemed to have triumphed, even amidst acts of repression. Nagy called on reformists (social democrats), accepted multi-partisanship, released Mindszenty and roughly 5,000 other political prisoners, and started defending a “free, democratic, and

4 All translations of passages from the sources listed in the bibliography and of newspaper titles, texts, and image captions are by the author of this article.

5 Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, 123–24; Judt, *Postwar*, 313–14.

6 Gilbert, *A History of the Twentieth Century*, 392–93; Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, 124–25.

independent” Hungary, promising to abolish the secret police and secure the departure of Soviet troops from Budapest.⁷

On October 29, the Soviet troops stationed in Hungary withdrew. Two days later, Prime Minister Imre Nagy went one step further, and indeed in doing so took a step too far for the Kremlin, by announcing that Hungary would withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. Determined to crush the Hungarian “counterrevolution,” the Kremlin decided to act decisively. On November 1, 75,000 soldiers and 2,500 tanks crossed the border into Hungary heading for Budapest.⁸ At dawn of November 4, they reached the capital and violently repressed all demonstrators. The Soviet invasion of Budapest lasted 48 hours, with tragic numbers. An estimated 22,000 Hungarians and 2,300 Soviet soldiers were killed or wounded. In the aftermath of the repression, 100,000 citizens were imprisoned, 35,000 were put on trial, and 26,000 were found guilty and sentenced. In the following weeks, 13,000 Hungarians were dismissed from their offices or sent to Soviet camps, and some 200,000 people (two percent of the population) fled the country.⁹ On November 7, János Kádár was entrusted with the Hungarian government and given the task of saving the “Popular Republic” from any “fascist counterrevolutionaries.”¹⁰ Democracy in Hungary would have to wait until the revolutions of 1989–90, more than one generation later.

The Western reaction to the Hungarian uprising was primarily determined by the ruling Cold War status quo. Notwithstanding the détente that followed Stalin’s death (in 1953), the division of Europe was “a de facto state of affairs not to be challenged through military means,” and in that division, Hungary fell behind the Iron Curtain and was deeply embedded in the geographical area dominated by Soviet rule. Thus, as historians have noted, for the West, “the costs of any direct intervention within the Soviet sphere were simply too high.”¹¹ Even if the events which had taken place in Hungary had stirred an awakening in Western European public opinion, shattering some hopes and illusions about the Soviet model of socialism and exposing it as a form of totalitarian imperialism (to the dismay of many socialist and even communist voices), all the West was willing to do was to offer criticism of the Soviet atrocities which had been committed and

7 Palmer, *Dictionary*, 196; Judt, *Postwar*, 315; Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, 125–26.

8 Gilbert, *A History of the Twentieth Century*, 394.

9 Palmer, *Dictionary*, 196; Gilbert, *A History of the Twentieth Century*, 396; Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, 127.

10 Palmer, *Dictionary*, 196.

11 Best et al., *International History*, 233.

make pledges that the UN would support verbal condemnations of or sanctions against Moscow.¹²

This was also, as will be shown, the overall tone of media reactions in Portugal, where a rightwing, ultra-nationalistic, authoritarian, conservative, and Catholic-rooted dictatorship called the “*Estado Novo*” (New State) had been in place since the early 1930s. Led by António de Oliveira Salazar, an elitist catholic finance professor from the University of Coimbra, the New State had survived the Nazi-fascist defeat in World War II, entering a second period of its history, from 1945 until the end of the 1950s, of internal consolidation and external acceptance.¹³ A staunch anti-communist, Salazar always defined the ideology spreading from the Soviet Union as “the greatest heresy of our age.”¹⁴ Thus, he was able to enter the Cold War era as a tacit member and ally of the crusade against Soviet communism, or in other words as “an anticommunist bulwark of Western civilisation,”¹⁵ allowing Portugal to become a founding member of NATO in April 1949, to enter the United Nations in December 1955, and to be a founding member of EFTA (the European Free Trade Association, a rival of the continental EEC) in January 1960, all international ties which “lessened the relative isolation of Salazar’s authoritarian regime.”¹⁶ With the consolidation of the Cold War international scenario, the 1950s were the easiest and quietest years of Salazarist rule. The regime projected an image of “benign authoritarianism.”¹⁷ The Marshall Plan financial aid fostered economic development and helped calm social unrest, and the regime managed to secure more foreign endorsements of its hold on power.¹⁸ Salazar never lost sight, however, of the necessity of

12 Judt, *Postwar*, 321–23; Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, 127–28.

13 Sardica, *Twentieth Century Portugal*, 65–69.

14 Such a definition of communism was presented by Salazar in a speech delivered on January 28, 1934 (Salazar, *Discursos e Notas Políticas*, 308) and would not be altered until his death in 1970. According to Portuguese historiography, “hostility towards the USSR was an immobile and bedrock principle of Salazar’s foreign policy and the pivotal element of his anti-communist crusade. Salazar always deemed communism a deadly threat to Western civilization, one that should be fought against by every possible means” (Pereira, “União Soviética,” 555).

15 Pinto, “Twentieth-Century Portugal,” 43.

16 Barreto, “Social Change in Portugal,” 159.

17 Pinto, “Twentieth-Century Portugal,” 43.

18 As the young oppositional Mário Soares would lament, those were the years during which Queen Elisabeth and Princess Margaret from the UK, Presidents Eisenhower (USA), Sukarno (Indonesia), and Kubitschek (Brazil), the Spanish General Franco and the NATO fleets visited Lisbon, thus legitimizing the ruling Portuguese dictatorship (Soares, *Portugal Amordaçado*, 199–200).

intensifying ideological indoctrination and taming potential problems caused by oppositional forces.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the various oppositional factions (including the Communist Party) had coalesced against Salazarism, trying to take advantage of the pro-democratic wave of 1945. The MUD, the Portuguese acronym for the Democratic Unity Movement, was created and briefly tolerated by the regime, and the upsurge of anti-Salazarism lasted until 1949, when the opposition rallied around the presidential candidacy of General Norton de Matos. But after those initial collaborative strategies, the various sectors of the opposition seemed divided, withdrawn, and demobilized, and they had a diminished capacity to intervene.¹⁹ The consolidation of the Cold War, which split Europe and the World in half and sparked new conflicts (like the Korean War of 1950–53), led to the growing distancing between Portuguese communists and all the other oppositional forces.

The Portuguese oppositional field was indeed plural rather than singular, with dividing lines whose rigidity or fluidity varied over the course of the decade.²⁰ Two major factions can be identified: the broad spectrum of the moderate, non-communist opposition and the clandestine opposition of the Portuguese Communist Party. Tolerated by Salazar as a sort of a “semi-legal and controlled political competition,”²¹ the moderate opposition was a set of liberal and old republican voices mixed with younger socialist voices, the former rallying around the so-called DDS (the Portuguese acronym for Social-Democrat Directory), led by prestigious figures such as António Sérgio, Mário de Azevedo Gomes, Jaime Cortesão, and Francisco Cunha Leal, the latter consisting of the so-called RRS (the Portuguese acronym for Socialist-Republican Resistance), led by emerging figures such as Piteira Santos and Mário Soares.²² They all voiced support for Western-type democracies, and they repudiated totalitarian communism and

19 Rosas, *O Estado Novo*, 518; Tengarrinha, “Os caminhos da unidade democrática contra o Estado Novo,” 392; Pimentel, *História da oposição à ditadura*, 277.

20 Cruz, “A oposição eleitoral ao Salazarismo,” 777; Pimentel, *História da oposição à ditadura*, 241 and 273.

21 Cruz, “A oposição eleitoral ao Salazarismo,” 701.

22 Cruz, “A oposição eleitoral ao Salazarismo,” 705; Soares, *Portugal Amordaçado*, 195. Mário Soares, the future Prime Minister and President of post-1974 democratic Portugal, had started his political activity in the ranks of the Portuguese Communist Party. In the beginning of the 1950s, however, he became a critic of the “intolerable rigidity” of it, leading the Party to label him an “opportunist” and “renegade.” In 1951, Soares broke with the communists and went on to become one of the most important democratic socialist voices against Salazar’s dictatorship (*Portugal Amordaçado*, 171, 177–78).

tried to foster a peaceful (electoral) evolution for a post-Salazarist path.²³ Among their ranks, a lively debate went on concerning whether or not to seek or accept communist cooperation, since doing so would render them less tolerable in the eyes of the regime and thus make it more difficult for them to attract Salazarist dissidents.²⁴

Persecuted as an “illegal, clandestine, and radical”²⁵ opposition, the PCP had been created in March 1921, and it was later one of the forces fighting against Salazar’s ascent to power. Deemed an “atheist,” “revolutionary,” and “foreign” negative influence by the New State, the PCP was able to survive underground, with secret passwords and informants, a ciphered language, and some discreet typographies, and the party was able to keep a monthly newspaper entitled *Avante!* in circulation.²⁶ The communist opposition went through two different periods in the 1950s. In the first half of the decade, following the capture and arrest of Álvaro Cunhal, PCP’s key figure, by the political police (in 1949), communists were dominated by internal sectarianism, ideological dogma, persecution, and purges, and the party became increasingly isolated from and closed off to other oppositional factions as it clung to its revolutionary plans to overthrow Salazarism without first forging any “anti-fascist” unity.²⁷ But in the aftermath of Stalin’s death, the international détente, and its tone of peaceful cohabitation between the two blocs, the PCP adopted a new strategy that would dominate the second half of the decade, seeking to overcome sectarianism and opening collaborative platforms with all oppositional forces in search of what was termed a “peaceful solution to the Portuguese problem.”²⁸ This internal détente, this “transitional policy,” this openness, which was later characterized as a “rightist deviation,” was a reaction against the isolation and weakness felt inside the party and was also significantly influenced by a parallel path followed by the Spanish Communist Party.²⁹

23 Rosas, *O Estado Novo*, 519–22; Ventura, “A crise da oposição democrática no início dos anos cinquenta,” 255; Pimentel, *História da oposição à ditadura*, 277.

24 Rosas, *O Estado Novo*, 523.

25 Cruz, “A oposição eleitoral ao Salazarismo,” 703.

26 Cunha, “Partido Comunista Português,” 24–30.

27 Raby, “A crise ideológica da oposição,” 47; Rosas, *O Estado Novo*, 521–22; Madeira, *Os Engenheiros de Almas*, 251–54.

28 Rosas, *O Estado Novo*, 522; Madeira, *Os Engenheiros de Almas*, 268–69; Pimentel, *História da oposição à ditadura*, 292–93.

29 Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 352. Santiago Carrillo, a “moderate” communist, would reach the leadership of the Spanish Communist Party in August 1956, moving past the old orthodox leaders from the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

Such an ideological shift was introduced during the PCP's Central Committee meeting of August 1955, where it was advocated by Júlio de Melo Fogaça, who essentially had replaced Cunhal as the leading name in the Party.³⁰ This is why some historians contend that the PCP anticipated some of the main conclusions of the Twentieth Soviet Party Congress of February 1956, i.e., de-Stalinization, peaceful coexistence, parliamentary transition towards socialism, and collaborative platforms among communists, social-democrats, and liberals.³¹ In April 1956, the Portuguese and Spanish communists issued a joint note defending "peaceful," "democratic solutions" for their countries through the rallying of the "broadest social and political forces" that opposed both Salazar and Franco.³² In October of that year, perhaps coinciding with the Hungarian uprising, the Portuguese communist Central Committee issued a document conveying the new acting line of a "vast anti-Salazarist electoral front," which could even extend to Catholics and dissidents from fascism, and expressing criticism of past sectarian positions.³³ The party's official program in the PCP's V (clandestine) Congress, which was held in September 1957, confirmed this line.³⁴ Less than a year later, in June 1958, this oppositional catch-all platform would coalesce behind General Humberto Delgado and his daring campaign in the presidential elections, won, through electoral fraud, by the regime's candidate, Admiral Américo Tomás.³⁵ Had the Portuguese Communist Party maintained such a reformist and collaborative approach, it could have been converted into what would later be labelled a "euro-communist" party, like many similar parties in Europe, escaping the tight orthodox grip of Moscow's tutelage.³⁶ But in the early 1960s, Álvaro Cunhal, having escaped from prison, where he had been a critic of Fogaça's "rightist deviation," reentered the communist leadership and

30 Rosas, *O Estado Novo*, 522; Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 367.

31 Raby, "A crise ideológica da oposição," 49; Cunha, "Partido Comunista Português," 27; Pimentel, *História da oposição à ditadura*, 293.

32 Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 371.

33 Raby, "A crise ideológica da oposição," 54; Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 382–83.

34 The communist party's new program of September 1957 was entitled *The Unity of Anti-Salazarist Forces. Decisive Factor for National Liberation* (see Raby, "A crise ideológica da oposição," 55; Ventura, "A crise da oposição democrática no início dos anos cinquenta," 256).

35 Rosas, *O Estado Novo*, 522–23; Madeira, *Os Engenheiros de Almas*, 353–56; Gorjão, *Mulheres em tempos sombrios*, 209.

36 Raby, "A crise ideológica da oposição," 57; Pimentel, *História da oposição à ditadura*, 308.

cut short that evolving path, reinstating the isolationist strategy of an armed revolution against the ageing Salazarist regime.³⁷

Other shades or factions of opposition were also surfacing in the late 1950s. A diffuse student protest movement emerged in universities and high schools, rising to the fore and gaining the attention of the public news outlets in December 1956, when a large part of the Portuguese youth opposed a decree that threatened the autonomy of academic associations. Protesting against this was a mixture of non-partisan students, alongside others who were militants of the RRS, the PCP, and even Catholic Universitarian Youths.³⁸ Students and Catholics would also react to the 1956 Hungarian events and show their support for the revolutionaries (as I will discuss), but their strength as an oppositional force (the latter under the label of “Progressive Catholics”) would be much more recognizable as a phenomenon in the 1960s.³⁹

A solid postwar and internationally recognized dictatorial regime facing a feeble opposition comprised of different actors who were divided between a collaborative anti-Salazarist strategy and separate legal or revolutionary options—this was the overall portrait of the Portuguese political scenario in the 1950s. How strong was Salazar’s position, both in the international arena and within the national context? How determined and effective could the tolerated moderate opposition be? To what extent would the communist party actually be open to other elements of the anti-Salazarist front? These issues and others influenced how the Hungarian events were received, interpreted, and instrumentalized in Portugal in 1956 by the various commentators.

The Salazarist and Catholic Press Coverage of the Events in Hungary

In late October and early November 1956, three international themes made the headlines in the majority of the Portuguese press: the Suez crisis, which brought Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Arab nationalism in Egypt into direct confrontation with Israel, the UK, and France; Eisenhower’s reelection campaign in the United States; and the Hungarian revolution. In particular in the tense days when Budapest

37 Tengarrinha, “Os caminhos da unidade democrática contra o Estado Novo,” 408; Madeira, *Os Engenheiros de Almas*, 371–372. Cunhal was elected Secretary General of the party in early 1961 with a program entitled *The Rightist Deviation in the PCP 1956–1959*, which harshly condemned any moderate reformist ideas.

38 Rosas, *O Estado Novo*, 521; Pimentel, *História da oposição à ditadura*, 301; Accornero, *The Revolution before the Revolution*, 43–46.

39 Martins, “Oposição em Portugal,” 65–66.

was the stage of confrontations between pro-democrats and Soviet forces, the Hungarian events were the domineering theme, overshadowing the other two international issues, especially within the pro-Salazarist and traditionally Catholic press, for which, clearly, Hungarian events offered an important “propagandistic breath” for a renewed “anti-communist campaign.”⁴⁰

The Hungarian events were first reported on in the pro-regime newspapers in an ideological editorial published on October 23 in *Diário de Notícias*. The editorial, which bore the literary title “Something new on the Eastern front,” offered an analysis of the eroding dynamics of communism:

There is an evident crisis in Russia. The gigantism of the Stalinist massive construction is under severe threat [...] Stalin was a bloody tsar, no doubt. But his tyranny represented unity. A harsh unity through asphyxia, but unity nevertheless [...] It would be absurd not to consider, within Western defense policy, this transformative tendency, not for premature celebrations, but for the consolidation of Western solidarity.⁴¹

Two days later, an article entitled “Budapest in Flames” (which included two photos of Rákóczi Avenue in Budapest), offered a narrative of the fighting in various areas of the city, with explicit mention of the hundreds of dead and wounded. Considerable attention was given to the symbolic act of the destruction of Stalin’s statue and to the use of unmarked Hungarian military uniforms and flags.⁴² Imre Nagy, the newly appointed Prime Minister, defined as “a liberal communist,” was quoted as saying that he would be enforcing “a program for the liberalization of Hungarian communism.”⁴³ In *O Século*, the tone was the same, though the approach was more sensationalistic, with a large picture of Budapest’s parliament square under the “horrors” (“10,000 victims”) committed by “the Red Army.” News from Moscow made references to pressure on Khrushchev, since the Hungarian uprisings were allegedly “direct consequences of the liberalizing policies of de-Stalinization.” It thus seemed that the “democratization of Hungarian public life” was underway, especially because of the announced withdrawal of Soviet forces and the “end of repression and

40 Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 392.

41 *Diário de Notícias*, October 23, 1956, 1.

42 Communist symbols (such as the red star) were ripped from revolutionary banners and uniforms, which then simply displayed the Magyar colors, as in Lajos Kossuth’s Hungarian revolution of 1848–49 (See *Diário de Notícias*, October 28, 1956, 1; October 29, 1956, 1).

43 *Diário de Notícias*, October 25, 1956, 1 and 5.

the political police.”⁴⁴ On October 29, after the initial confrontations between revolutionaries and state authorities in Hungary, considerable space was given to international reactions to what apparently had been a victory for the insurgents. According to Nagy, events in Hungary should be understood as “a democratic movement to guarantee our independence, which is the only basis of a true socialist democracy.”⁴⁵

Diário da Manhã and *Novidades*, the official newspapers of the regime and the Catholic Church in Portugal, adopted more conservative approaches to their reporting on the Hungarian revolution, but they were unambiguously supportive of the revolutionary forces. In an editorial by Jacques Ploncard d’Assac (a French far-right activist and counsellor to Salazar) entitled “the Red Danube,” the Portuguese readership was informed of how

[t]he Budapest leaders were surprised and surpassed by the violence of a truly nationalistic uprising. The Communist party soon understood that if such a rebellion was not immediately crushed in blood, the Hungarian communist regime would suffer the same fate experienced, 37 years ago, by Béla Kun’s first Hungarian Soviet republic.⁴⁶

Instead of praising Nagy, whose “democracy” and “reformed socialism” were too radical for Salazar, publicity was given rather to both the “valiant people” of Hungary, the figure of Cardinal Mindszenty, and to Mindszenty’s radio appeals to the UN and Western powers for support. In accordance, the Portuguese Catholic Church publicly called for a mass to be celebrated in Lisbon for “the sufferings of the Hungarian heroes killed in the largest tragedy in our recent times” and for “the liberation of all the peoples enslaved by Moscow’s tyranny.”⁴⁷

The counterattack launched by the Soviet forces, which invaded Hungary and smothered the nationalistic uprising, was given even greater attention by the Portuguese newspapers. *Diário de Notícias* informed its readers that “Hungary is totally occupied by the Soviet army, which yesterday at dawn invaded the country with massive forces,” and it offered dramatic claims concerning the pleas made by the victims: “We will be massacred”; “God save our souls.” Such “unmatched ferocity” deserved harsh international criticism, and the article quoted Adenauer’s plea for the Hungarians and Eisenhower’s urgent message to

44 *O Século*, October 27, 1956, 1.

45 *Diário de Notícias*, October 29, 1956, 1.

46 *Diário da Manhã*, October 30, 1956, 1.

47 *Novidades*, October 31, 1956, 1; November 3, 1956, 1.

Nikolai Bulganin, the Premier of Soviet Union under Khrushchev.⁴⁸ According to *O Século*, “Western public opinion” was unanimous in its “indignation,” condemning “in unprecedented terms the brutality and cynicism of the Soviet Union,” because the “Hungarians fought with astonishing energy [and were] willing to resist until death.”⁴⁹ Large titles filled the *Novidades*: “Budapest is a huge brazier after massive Soviet attack.” The Vatican Radio was quoted as having said that “violence is the true spirit of communism.” And in its reporting on Cardinal Mindszenty’s decision to take refuge in the American Legation and how the Portuguese episcopate was calling for a day’s prayer for the Hungarians, the paper explained that the “humane” intentions of the Nagy government had been overthrown by a “killing machine” totally alien to any concern for “human dignity” or “respect for the will of the people.”⁵⁰ *Diário da Manhã* offered doctrinal considerations concerning each nation’s due legitimacy in fulfilling its political self-determination:

At this moment in Hungary, one of the greatest acts of violence recorded in the saddest pages of modern history was committed, violence exercised in the name of an ideology which, even bringing with it a disgusting flow of atrocities, overcomes itself by refusing to accept that a people, entitled to its destiny, can repudiate it and expel it.⁵¹

The extinguishing of the “Nagy hope” was attentively and empathically followed not only by political and Catholic circles in Portugal but also by the broader readership of the organs of the press. On November 6, a spontaneous crowd of some 20,000 to 30,000 people filled Rossio Square in downtown Lisbon and marched up to the Portuguese parliament holding Hungarian flags, “singing in tears,” and “voicing loudly” their disgust and their solidarity with the massacred people of Hungary, with banners reading “Hungary wants freedom,” “Down with the Soviet aggression,” “Tanks cannot withstand a people’s soul,” and “Hungarian colleagues are martyrs.”⁵² A picture of Rossio and another of the Portuguese parliament square showed “a sea of people tarnished by indignation and demanding freedom for Hungary.”⁵³ Portuguese *Cáritas*, a Catholic relief

48 *Diário de Notícias*, November 5, 1956, 1.

49 *O Século*, November 5, 1956, 1.

50 *Novidades*, November 5, 1956, 1.

51 *Diário da Manhã*, November 5, 1956, 1.

52 *Diário de Notícias*, November 7, 1956, 1.

53 *Diário da Manhã*, November 7, 1956, 2; *O Século*, November 7, 1956, 2.

organization, had already received money (400,000 escudos), food, and clothing to send to the Hungarians by air using transportation granted by Swissair and also some 1,900 letters from all corners of Portugal praising the Hungarian cause.⁵⁴ Appeals were made everywhere for the Salazarist government officially to condemn “in strong terms every cruel act committed by the invading army against the courageous people of Hungary.”⁵⁵

The Portuguese government reacted by having the secretary of the Premiership issue a press declaration and also by making a formal declaration of the Council of Ministers. In the first, entitled “Portugal will be present wherever help can be given to oppressed Hungary,” the popular demonstrations in the country were greeted and very critical terms were used against Moscow:

The perfidious and sinister intervention of the Soviet Union in Hungary provoked the greatest revulsion and emotion in all the countries of the civilized world [...] The Lusitanian soul could not contain itself without letting out its cry of revolt against the infamous affront launched by the savage Russians, whose ultimate goal is to establish world domination.⁵⁶

The next day, Salazar and his entire government were cited as having made a “condemnation of the Soviet aggression against Hungary” and a public offer of “every possible form of support by the Portuguese nation for the victims of Russian repression.”⁵⁷ The Ministry of Defense allowed an arms parade in the Military College, with the flags of Portugal and Hungary side by side, and the Portuguese Legion (the paramilitary organization created to protect the country against the Spanish “red threat” of 1936) was instructed to collaborate with the Portuguese Red Cross in the collection of donations destined for the Hungarian people.⁵⁸

The Hungarian events were carefully used by the Portuguese ruling power to issue political messages to the public and even to perform a planned indoctrination of the crowds supportive of the Salazarist regime. Addressing the pro-Hungarian demonstrators in Lisbon, Marcelo Caetano, who held the unofficial post of vice-Prime-Minister and would later succeed Salazar (in 1968), was clear about these intentions:

54 *Diário de Notícias*, November 7, 1956, 8. 400,000 escudos, the Portuguese currency of those days, would be the equivalent today of roughly 142,350 €.

55 *Diário de Notícias*, November 7, 1956, 8.

56 *Novidades*, November 7, 1956, 1.

57 *Novidades*, November 8, 1956, 1.

58 *Diário de Notícias*, November 9, 1956, 4.

We are an old nation, deeply rooted in the sacred ideals of God, Homeland, and Family, ideals for which the Hungarian people has fought with valorous despair. Like Hungary, we hate any foreign dominance and any system destructive of human personality. We have witnessed with hope and anguish the Hungarian drama—which resembles the dramas of so many other countries submitted through violence to communist tyranny. One should learn the lesson that matters: to stand for the nation’s liberty, defending the civilization that we hold dear and opposing the propagation of ideologies which offend this [civilization] and the spread of imperialisms threatening our world.⁵⁹

The Portuguese Catholic church was proactive in the aftermath of the Hungarian bloodshed, in no small part because of its solidarity with Mindszenty. Catholic scouts rallied parishes in Lisbon, Oporto, and elsewhere to pray for a people (the Hungarians) defined as “martyrs of faith and of human liberty.”⁶⁰ At the highest level, and in accordance with the universal pledge issued by Pope Pius XII,⁶¹ the Cardinal Patriarch, Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira, called for an appeal for solidarity to be made in every mass and for a “crusade of prayer” to be held in the Marian sanctuary of Fátima on November 18, solemnly to invoke “the protection of Holy Mary” for European peace and for the “sacrificed nation of Hungary.”⁶²

The official resolution of the Portuguese cabinet to condemn the invasion of Hungary and the solace of faith offered by the episcopate and a myriad of acts by the Catholic Church in Portugal show how the country adopted a clear stance in defense of the righteousness of the Hungarian rising. The charitable donations collected by many were sent to Budapest via Switzerland or Austria, and the public authorities announced that Portugal could willingly accept and shelter 5,000 young children from Hungary.⁶³

Despite the seriousness and drama of the events in Hungary, as shown above in the content of the news articles and in the anguished titles with which

59 *Diário da Manhã*, November 7, 1956, 1.

60 *Diário da Manhã*, November 7, 1956, 1.

61 Farinha, “A Hungria em Portugal,” 37.

62 *Diário da Manhã*, November 8, 1956, 1.

63 *O Século*, November 8, 1956, 5. There are no official numbers concerning the Hungarian refugees who entered Portugal, though it seems that there were far fewer of them than the figure of 5,000 announced by the political authorities. Some did travel to Portugal, where they rebuilt their lives, without ever returning to their home country. But others, perhaps the majority, were relocated in other countries upon entrance into Portugal.

they began, there was space, at moments, for more or less satirical cartoons, a type of visual language which Salazarism did not approve of. Fig. 1 shows one example which was published in *Novidades*. A large intimidating bear (the Soviet Union) looks down on two smaller bears who represent two defiant “satellites” of the Soviet sphere, Nagy’s Hungary and Gomulka’s Poland. One of the little bears is holding a bottle of “De-Stalinization Vodka.” Above the drawing a caption reads “Awfully strong alcohol.”



Figure 1. *Novidades*, October 31, 1956, 1

Fig. 2 is also a cartoon, though a much less humorous one, published in *Diário da Manhã*. Russian Secretary Khrushchev and Premier Bulganin are standing on top of a Red Army Soviet tank which is crushing a delicate feminine figure representing Hungary. To the right of the image, the title reads “Red Peace!”



Figure 2. *Diário da Manhã*, November 7, 1956, 1

The four newspapers analyzed above were unanimous in their praise for the Budapest insurgents and their condemnations of the bloody Soviet counterattack. From the perspective of the international arena, both the newspapers that were more in tune with the regime (*Diário da Manhã*, *Diário de Notícias* and *O Século*) and those that voiced the views of the Catholic Church (*Novidades*) contended that the final outcome of the Hungarian national uprising clearly showed the violent proselytizing energy of Soviet communism, its “solar vocation” (a metaphor meaning that communism sought to spread its “radiating” influence) to secure the political homogenization of the “popular democracies” of Eastern Europe.⁶⁴ 1956 was thus proof of the dangers of communist totalitarianism, something that Salazar had always hated and warned against. For the Portuguese leader and his press spokespersons, the events in Hungary were a useful tool with which to fuel the “black legend” of communism and reinforce the idea of the need for a Western Euro-American stance against it, a stance to which the New State had been a loyal and daring bulwark ever since its creation.

64 Madeira, “O Sonho Húngaro,” 23.

For die-heart Salazarists and also for the Portuguese Catholic Church, the Hungarian insurgents were above all “nationalists” and “Catholics” who had fought for the freedom of their nation against external interference and had upheld Christian faith against the atheism of the hammer-and-sickle ideology. 1956 should then be understood as a confrontation between Hungarian Catholic nationalists and international communism. The Portuguese regime wanted the Hungarian nationalists to win not only over pure communists, but also over Nagy’s reformers, whose “social democracy” or “democratic socialism” were perhaps too menacing for the ruling authoritarianism.⁶⁵ It was known that Hungarian rightwing nationalist sectors had ties with Miklós Horthy, the former leader of Hungary’s nationalistic regime, who had been in power between 1920 and 1944. After his fall from power, Horthy had briefly lived in Germany before settling in Portugal in 1950. It is true that the press survey reveals no sign of Horthy’s words or noticeable attitudes in Portugal during the 1956 Hungarian crisis. But among members of the inner circle of Salazarism, he may have symbolically influenced the pro-nationalistic and pro-Catholic stance publicly adopted by the Portuguese regime.⁶⁶

In Salazarist voices, the struggle for a Christian and independent nation was combined with another theme which remained implicit but nonetheless clearly present in the articles published in the press: the condemnation of the Portuguese Communist Party. The press was not allowed to make any references of any kind to that clandestine organization, but the Hungarian events were used to convey to domestic public opinion how those who followed the communist ideology were accomplices of those who had committed the bloody acts of violence in Hungary. The more the Portuguese communists could be denounced and perceived by others as mere “Moscow servants,”⁶⁷ the more the clandestine PCP could be isolated in the domestic political arena, hampering any planned or possible collaboration (feared by Salazar) with other (democratic) oppositional forces, which as noted above was precisely the new strategy that PCP was trying to adopt in 1956. The violence of the Soviet Red Army response

65 Farinha, “A Hungria em Portugal,” 38; Madeira, “O Sonho Húngaro,” 30. Notwithstanding, the Portuguese ambassador to the UN, Vasco Garin, was always keen to mingle an internationalist discourse in favour of the Soviet withdrawal from Hungary with calls for “free elections,” “liberty,” and “democracy” for the people of Hungary, all of which were political rights that the people of Portugal did not have. (Farinha, “A Hungria em Portugal,” 38).

66 Miklós Horthy died in Portugal (in his exile residence in Estoril, near Lisbon), shortly after the Hungarian revolution, in February 1957, aged 88.

67 Farinha, “A Hungria em Portugal,” 38.

to the Hungarian revolution was seen as showing the outrages which would be committed under communism were it one day to prevail in Portugal, and the resistance by the insurgents against orthodox communism was seen as a justifiable means of saving the Hungarian nation from what, in the end, came to be its defeat at the hands of Moscow.

The Portuguese Democratic Opposition Press Coverage of the Events in Hungary

The plural, moderate, democratic Portuguese oppositional front was also captivated and troubled by the unravelling of the Hungarian drama, and it devoted considerable attention to it in its newspapers *República* and *Diário de Lisboa*. Both were old liberal titles, the former dating back to the early days of the first republic, in 1911, and the latter from 1921. Since they worked as exhaust valves and expression channels for the acceptable opposition, the authorities allowed them to run rather freely, despite the censorship screening that filtered everything that was written in the Portuguese press. At a glance, the overall editorial tone of their reports on Hungary did not differ radically from what one finds in the regime's newspapers. Nevertheless, a more in-depth content analysis reveals two important general features. The first is that both *República* and *Diário de Lisboa* were more descriptive, objective, shrewd, and restrained in their language, and their articles offered less comment and more citations from local and international sources, thus avoiding the hyperbolic, dramatic tone of Salazarist and Catholic newspapers. The second feature is that, while praising and supporting the heroism of the Hungarian popular uprising and Imre Nagy's attempted reforms, the articles contained a far less vehement attack on the communist ideology than the attacks found in the pro-regime press. Moderate conservative oppositional forces clearly knew what was at stake, what sharply divided Hungarian reformism and Moscow's hard-line; those who wrote for and read *República* and *Diário de Lisboa* were sometimes republicans, socialists, and others who hesitated in openly condemning the whole of communism, because the collaboration of the Portuguese Communist Party was seen as potentially useful for internal anti-Salazarist purposes. In the end, these organs of the press still made general criticisms of the Soviet response to the Hungarian revolution, but the Salazarist and Catholic newspapers were much blunter and more categorical with their attacks on orthodox communism. As the socialist Mário Soares would claim, expressing what many other non-communist opponents to Salazar thought, "when the revelation of the Twentieth Soviet Party

Congress and the events of Hungary came, the communist language and methods left me rather indifferent.”⁶⁸

República's coverage of the events of late October 1956 in Budapest was mainly drawn from dispatches coming from Vienna, Paris, or some British papers, such as *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*. On October 24, after the front page title “The problems of communism: is Khrushchev preparing the Soviet Union’s democratization?,” attention was paid to Nagy’s statement concerning the “possibility of Hungary establishing democracy in all parts of the country.”⁶⁹ Over the course of the next few days, the Portuguese paper continued to provide coverage of the crude facts of the Hungarian political process, referring to the many deaths that bloodied local streets, but above all how the “nationalistic” and “pro-independent” rebellion was apparently led by “various forces with diverse and contradictory ideas and goals.”⁷⁰ Until October 31, *República* hesitated to give a specific label to the insurgents: they were referred as “rebels,” “revolutionaries,” “youths,” “democrats,” and “reformists,” and the very relationship between the new Prime Minister Imre Nagy and those forces remained uncertain. On October 31, the paper mourned the human losses of the week that had passed, underlined the political significance of Cardinal Mindszenty’s release, and praised Nagy’s solemn promises to hold “free elections” for a “new government.”⁷¹

In the early days of November, *República* echoed the growing feelings of expectation, anxiety, and fear kindle by the thought of an increasingly probable Soviet repressive intervention in Budapest, seemingly to crush the “patriot work” already developed by the “enthusiastic Hungarian nation,” all because the Russians were anticipating that “within a couple of months, there would be no more than a handful of communists and Hungary would eventually lean towards the West.”⁷² The “Hungarian drama” of Budapest’s recapture by the Red Army was reported through the sequenced reproduction of foreign dispatches issued from Hungary via Vienna and Paris or the protests in the United Nations, with strikingly less detail or drama than found in the Salazarist newspapers quoted above. The conclusion was a rather detached one: “liberals, socialists, and Titoists lost, and with them, an entire people was humiliated and disappointed,” while the Soviet Union had gained

68 Soares, *Portugal Amordaçado*, 186–87. Khrushchev’s 1956 report was allowed to circulate in Portugal in a copy translated and published by anarchist circles, censorship thus “collaborating” in the denunciation of Stalin’s cult of personality, totalitarian rule, and crimes.

69 *República*, October 24, 1956, 1 and 12.

70 *República*, October 25, 1956, 8; October 26, 1956, 1; October 27, 1956, 1 and 8.

71 *República*, October 31, 1956, 1 and 12.

72 *República*, November 2, 1956, 12.

“a victory whose fruits will perhaps be poisonous in the future.”⁷³ On the aftermath of the suppression of the Hungarian revolution, *República* continued to use titles suggesting that in the streets of Budapest the mood was one of “hunger, terror, and looting” and containing references to the “winter cold” and “epidemic threats,” while some final “struggles and summary executions” were still unravelling.⁷⁴

While siding with the position of the Hungarian insurgents, as the liberal republican Portuguese opposition did, *República* was the only Portuguese newspaper surveyed (aside from the communist *Avante!*) in which not a single photograph of Budapest’s attempted revolution was published. And it was also the only one in which the parallel pro-Hungarian stance of the Salazarist regime was totally ignored, even to the point of making no mention whatsoever of the popular, anonymous, student, and Catholic demonstrations and charitable actions that the regime’s press was so eager to report on and praise.⁷⁵ A moderate oppositional paper, *República* was unwilling to support the instrumentalization of the events by Salazar and his spokespersons and journalists. Therefore, the political readings were more restrained. One could refer, for instance, to a rare editorial entitled “Oppression,” which was published on November 8, in which *República* refers to the events in Hungary, Poland, and even Egypt to underline how the whole world seemed to be going through “a violent convulsion,” as “public opinion” everywhere indicated that people wanted to become “their own masters,” free from “the hardships of dictatorial rule.”⁷⁶ In other words, the editorial referred not simply to the struggle of the Hungarians against the communists, but also, implicitly, to the struggle of the Portuguese against Salazar.

Because of this, the events in Hungary actually served as a pretext for a verbal confrontation between the regime and the moderate opposition of *República*, through a controversy involving the vice-Prime-Minister Marcelo Caetano and Francisco Cunha Leal, one of the leading names of the DDS, the Social-Democrat Directory. Caetano had criticized the “men in the opposition” for their “silence,” or at least lack of energy, when confronted with the “martyrdom of the noble Hungarian nation.” In an open letter published in the paper (and then printed in a small booklet), Cunha Leal replied that “no one but us, true

73 *República*, November 4, 1956, 1 (front page title); November 5, 1956, 12.

74 *República*, November 9, 1956, 1; November 12, 1956, 1.

75 In *República*’s edition of November 7, 1956, there are numerous references to international signs of solidarity with the Hungarian people still in Budapest or seeking refuge in other foreign countries, but none to what Portuguese supporters and the Catholic Church were doing in Lisbon and other Portuguese cities.

76 *República*, November 8, 1956, 1.

democrats, feel in the flesh and in the soul the pain of a sacrificed people.” But because the opposition in Portugal was denied freedom of opinion and action, “we find it worthier to shut up and just pray to God, in the silence of our souls and consciences, that He may save poor Hungary.”⁷⁷ Leal added that the aspirations of the Portuguese liberal opposition were very close to those of Nagy’s supporters, namely free elections, the legalization of political parties, the freedom of the trade unions, and political pluralism.⁷⁸

Diário de Lisboa (the other important and tolerated oppositional paper) also started reporting on the situation in Hungary on October 24, 1956 through Austrian dispatches concerning the possibility of Imre Nagy reassuming power in Budapest.⁷⁹ The following day, Yugoslav sources were quoted which suggested that the Hungarian events might lead Moscow to adopt a hard-line policy against other Eastern countries, while Nagy was labelled as the “Hungarian Gomulka” and Kádár as a “Titoist.”⁸⁰ An interpretation of what was happening in Budapest followed: the “confusing situation in Hungary” was due both to the “irresponsible and criminal activity” of its past leaders and to the “misery” of Hungarian society and the “bankrupt” Hungarian economy.⁸¹ The martyrdom of the Budapest population in the Parliament Square triggered the first critical news about the Soviet responses: “men, women, and children could not do anything but await their death” as “anti-communist Hungarians who had fought to express their hate for the regime and its protectors.”⁸² The first photograph in *Diário de Lisboa* of the events in Hungary, which shows a group of demonstrators singing the French Marseillaise anthem, appeared on the front page of the October 29, issue, next to the title, “Budapest has returned to its normal life.”

After a couple of days of silence, on November 4, the theme was again raised in the oppositional newspaper with reports relying on the telegraph according to which the Hungarian capital was under siege by “Russian troops” who had “imprisoned Imre Nagy’s government.”⁸³ In the editions of November 5 and 6, the violent counterattack and occupation of Budapest by the Soviet

77 Leal, *Coisas de tempos idos*, 33–34. The text was first published as a public letter in *República*, November 21, 1956, 1–2.

78 Leal, *Coisas de tempos idos*, 34.

79 *Diário de Lisboa*, October 24, 1956, 1.

80 *Diário de Lisboa*, October 25, 1956, 16.

81 *Diário de Lisboa*, October 26, 1956, 16.

82 *Diário de Lisboa*, October 27, 1956, 16.

83 *Diário de Lisboa*, November 4, 1956, 1.

Red Army were reported on and characterized as “a tragedy,” “the crushing of Magyar patriotism,” preventing the “defenseless” and “brutalized” Hungarian nation from “freely securing its destiny,” away from a “set of political institutions against which it rose up in arms.”⁸⁴ Particular attention was also given to the United Nations maneuvers to condemn the actions of the Soviet Union and to the humanitarian drama of the refugees fleeing Hungary towards Austria. On November 6, siding with the bulk of the Salazarist papers, *Diário de Lisboa* quite extensively reported on the massive pro-Hungarian rally that marched from Rossio square, in Lisbon, to the Portuguese parliament, quoting the interventions of students who cheered the crowd with the slogans “Liberty to Hungary” and “Down with Russian colonialism.” A conclusive sentence served as a moto for the newspaper coverage: “The Budapest events cannot cease to alarm all free men (if they still exist, on this ill-fated planet where we live).”⁸⁵

Even with sometimes different editorial options, in the moderate oppositional newspapers’ coverage, the nationalistic cum-Catholic tone that dominated Salazarist press was secondary, and the praise was focused on some of policies and aims suggested by Imre Nagy, including free elections, a general amnesty, free trade unionism, perhaps even worker’s participation in factories and corporate management, a free press, and civil liberties. *República* and *Diário de Lisboa* did not dare to depart openly from what Nagy was promising to Hungarians and write instead on what the Portuguese should be granted, but their analysis of the 1956 drama served to remind domestic readers that Salazarism was also a repressive regime. Unlike the communists, the moderate opposition did not label the insurgents “counterrevolutionaries” or “fascists”; but unlike the Salazarists, they did not harbor any sympathies for all-out rightwing Hungarian nationalists.⁸⁶ Theirs was a hope, or a longing, that somehow the Hungarian cries of freedom would inspire Portuguese cries of freedom, not against a radical leftwing dictatorship, but against rightwing authoritarian rule. And this is also the reason why Salazarism, as was shown, was so eager and keen to cast the 1956 Hungarian uprising as a patriotic recovery of national independence, rooted in Christian traditions, and not merely as an attempted social-democratic revolution.

84 *Diário de Lisboa*, November 5, 1956, 9, and November 6, 1956, 1.

85 *Diário de Lisboa*, November 6, 1956, 1 and 3.

86 Farinha, “A Hungria em Portugal,” 39.

A Dissonant Voice: the Portuguese Communist Press Coverage of the Events in Hungary

Within the Portuguese communist realm, where Khrushchev's de-Stalinization thesis had reinforced a collaborative strategy with other oppositional forces in the mid-1950s, the Hungarian events created a paradox of surprise, shock, and unease among many, though in the end these sentiments remained hidden and stifled by the official position of obedience to Moscow's guidelines.⁸⁷ In 1956, the PCP wanted to collaborate with moderate anti-Salazarists, but the manner in which the Kremlin's hardliners ferociously crushed reformists in Budapest compromised and darkened the very image that communists had been working to build up in Portuguese public opinion. Many anonymous militants, actually, resented the Soviet violence against Hungary and recognized the contradictions therein: how could the PCP attack Anglo-French intervention in the Suez crisis while at the same time accepting and even praising the Soviet Union's intervention in Budapest? And could the PCP collaborate with other oppositional forces that were now closer to the Salazarist regime in their condemnations of the outcome of the Hungarian crisis? In the Portuguese context, "the PCP seemed cornered again, and the meager gains made with the non-communist opposition forces were endangered."⁸⁸

As challenging as the dilemma may have been, domestic needs or aspirations could not go against the structural loyalty or dependency that the PCP always showed towards whomever ruled the Kremlin and whatever those powers dictated.⁸⁹ Thus, internal critics, disoriented or even disgusted, were silenced to avoid any possible "alignment" with the Salazarist anti-Soviet propaganda, and they were indoctrinated with the thesis that the Soviet intervention had been called upon by Hungarian communists to prevent the "fascist imperialist military offensive" from gaining momentum in Budapest behind Imre Nagy.⁹⁰ Some of the internal critics may have become party dissidents who refused this official narrative, but all in all, it seems that the PCP's Hungarian debate was insufficient

87 Madeira, *Os Engenheiros de Almas*, 349; Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 392.

88 Tengarrinha, "Os caminhos da unidade democrática contra o Estado Novo," 396; Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 394.

89 Throughout the 1950s, as in earlier and later decades, the Portuguese Communist Party received financial aid and even printing material for its clandestine publications directly from the Soviet Communist Party or through other Moscow clients, like the Spanish, the French, and even the Czech communist parties (Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 342–43).

90 Madeira, *Os Engenheiros de Almas*, 349–50.

to “fundamentally question the communist identity” of the party and its “close dependency on the Soviet Union.”⁹¹ Therefore, while the Portuguese organs of the press mentioned above displayed a more or less emotional solidarity with the fallen Hungarians who had supported Nagy and Mindszenty, the Portuguese Communist Party’s newspaper *Avante!* stood as a clearly dissonant voice, attacking the reformist intentions and defending Moscow’s intervention and its hard-line communist stance.

On the front page of *Avante!*’s November 1956 edition, an editorial entitled “The Egyptian aggression and the fascist coup in Hungary threaten peace” revealed the Portuguese communist interpretation of the two leading (and interrelated) international events of those days:

There is a joint plan, drawn by international reaction, captained by the leading power, the United States. The intent of these imperialists is evident: to undermine the forces of the Socialist world and to hide from general public opinion blunt acts of piracy. The fascist coup in Budapest aimed to topple the Socialist regime to give power to a fascist and capitalist government [...] The darkest forces of international reaction helped prepare this fascist coup, among them the government of Salazar, who turned our country into a saddlebag of conspirators supported by funds of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹²

Accordingly, Imre Nagy was characterized as a mere puppet of “counterrevolutionaries,” or in other words rightwing nationalists, perhaps in conspiracy with the remnants of the deposed Horthy regime, certainly backed by the United States to throw the whole Soviet sphere into turmoil and create a “fascist” and “capitalist” (the two words were presented as synonyms in the Portuguese communist propaganda) government in the heart of Eastern Europe, much as the United Kingdom and France were allegedly trying to do in Egypt, fighting alongside Israel against Nasser’s government. There followed a clear accusation against Salazarism, who had allowed the country to help the rebels in Hungary and had even mobilized forces to do so, thus siding with all the “international reactionary forces.” Unlike the moderate opposition gathered around *República* and *Diário de Lisboa*, the PCP openly contested Salazar’s right to support the alleged Hungarian freedom quest, inasmuch as the Portuguese people had been totally deprived of basic liberties and of any social or economic

91 Ibid., 350.

92 *Avante!*, November 1956, 1.

wellbeing⁹³. In order to counter and diminish the governmental, Church, and popular initiatives of solidarity with the Hungarians, communists even printed a boycott poster that read: “Christmas 1956. While the workmen’s sons have a hungry Christmas, *Cáritas* sends tons of food to Hungary. Protest!”⁹⁴

In December, the PCP celebrated the “failure of the national and international reactionary plans against the liberty and independence of the people” and the “victory of the forces of peace” in Hungary. The Soviet Union was praised as “a paladin of world peace,” which its enemies had tried to sabotage by interfering in Hungary and enraging “the Cold War climate,” putting an end to “the peaceful coexistence of states with different political and social regimes.”⁹⁵ The events in Hungary thus had heroes and villains, victims and executioners. But the communist narrative in Lisbon reproduced Moscow’s interpretation, according to which the villains, the provocative agents, had been the people of Hungary and the despised Nagy, who had forced the Soviets to defend themselves and rightfully to cut short an illegitimate, foreign imperialist interference in the Russian *pax*.

In the early days of January 1957, *Avante!* published an entire supplement with the full interview given by János Kádár, the new figurehead entrusted by the Soviets to serve as the leader of the Hungarian communist party, to the French correspondent of *L’Humanité* in Budapest. According to the editorial introducing the interview, his words should be considered “the ultimate and pure version” of what had happened in those October and November days, echoing the theory of the “fascist” and “imperialist” conspiracy against peaceful communist rule in Hungary since 1949. Imre Nagy and Cardinal József Mindszenty were characterized as “a hidden right-winger” and “the face of the reaction,” and public praise was given to the Soviet Union for having dealt appropriately with the “white terror,” which had threatened to compromise “the security of the whole socialist sphere” and separate the Hungarian people from its well-deserved “socialist regime.”⁹⁶

Despite some possible internal divisions or dissent within the party, the interview published in *Avante!* indicates unambiguous support for the Soviet Union’s response to the Hungarian rising, even if the bloody intervention by the Red Army in Budapest had hurt international reputation of the communist

93 *Avante!*, November 1956, 1–2.

94 Facsimile in Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 393.

95 *Avante!*, December 1956, 1.

96 *Avante!*, January 1957 (Supplement).

forces, thus isolating the PCP within the Portuguese anti-Salazarist opposition. By praising Khrushchev's final decision to crush the insurgency and, indeed, by denigrating the insurgency, the PCP, some of its militants feared, was isolating itself even more in Portuguese political life.⁹⁷ These views, however, did not represent the official position of the party, which was totally loyal to Moscow.

Conclusion

The 1956 Hungarian revolution challenged the European status quo and awoke the hope in the West that a piece of the Soviet domino could eventually lessen its dependency on Moscow or even liberate itself from the Soviet grip. This was followed by shock, despair, and lamentation when Kremlin hardliners made it clear to the world that even in the era of de-Stalinization, Hungarian independence and democratic socialism were threats that would be crushed, as indeed they were in a blatantly repressive manner.

Despite the ruling censorship and a cautious prudence with regards to any foreign matter (in a traditionalist inward-looking country), the Portuguese press and Portuguese public opinion followed the events in Hungary with keen interest. Indoctrination against the "heresy" of communism had gained ground in nationalistic circles, and for the Salazarist regime, the most logical response was to expose the brutality of the Soviet reaction to an attempt by a comparatively defenseless nation (and also a Christian one) to assert its independence. The demonstrations and acts of solidarity came from many in the literate Portuguese middle class that consumed newspapers, including young students, members of university communities, public servants, the middle ranks of the army, Catholic organizations, and the episcopate.

Censorship was certainly eased to allow news, titles, images, and even cartoons about the Hungarian revolution to appear more easily on the pages of the newspapers. Salazar and the government wanted to let the facts and the reactions of the international community suffice as a condemnation of communism and to use the martyrdom of Hungary to show how Portugal's nationalistic stance should be pursued in a world which lay in the shadow of proselytizing Soviet expansionism. In addition to this international reading of the events in Hungary, the regime also fashioned a domestic one to strengthen its internal solidity. It sought to profit off the splintering of the opposition as a consequence of the

97 Madeira, "O Sonho Húngaro," 35.

Hungarian crisis, with democrats criticizing (alongside Salazar) the violent Soviet response to the uprising, while the vast majority of communists felt that the Soviet response had been appropriate and the outcome of the events had been justified. An otherwise immobile regime thus went “revolutionary,” praising the movement and novelty represented by the nationalists, the Catholics, and the “democratic” insurgents surrounding Imre Nagy and siding with or finding themselves side by side with moderate oppositional voices who also stood by the Hungarian cause in order to denounce *all* repressive regimes, i.e., not only the orthodox communist ones, but also, indirectly, the New State dictatorship. Salazar was not unaware of this. And through the Catholic approach and carefully chosen official declarations saluting the country’s pro-Hungarian demonstrations, he instrumentalized the demonstrations, highlighting how the national newspapers were acknowledging, if not cheering for, the righteous stance of the regime in the face of the Hungarian tragedy. As one Portuguese historian writes,

Someone who travels today through the Portuguese press to examine the coverage given to the 1956 “Hungarian Spring” will be impressed by the quantity and quality of the information published in a country used to censorship [...] However, this strange freedom is only incomprehensible if we fail to grasp the political and ideological usefulness of the “exemplary” Hungarian case for Portuguese nationalists: it showed the failure of the Soviet model and, above all, alerted the country to the danger of new political alliances—namely the possibility of reifying the unitary opposition movements that had preoccupied the regime in the years after World War II.⁹⁸

One must not forget that in the mid-1950s, the New State was strong enough to allow newspapers and people to use strong words like “revolution,” “independence,” “reform,” “freedom,” and “democracy.” In comparison, the openness to and tolerance or even support for the expression of these kinds of attitudes would disappear when Portugal (and Europe) was faced with another Eastern anti-Soviet rising: the “Prague Spring” in August 1968. By that time, the regime had become weaker (the colonial wars waged by Portugal in Africa started in 1961), the demands for domestic democratization by the Portuguese public were much stronger, and the “Prague Spring” sympathizers were too enraged, too influenced by the May 1968 Parisian slogans for Salazar to ride the wave or accept that the major organs of the press could or should do it.

98 Farinha, “A Hungria em Portugal,” 39.

Although critical of the ruling Salazarist status quo, the plural field of liberal, republican, and moderate socialist opposition forces did side with the regime in its responses to the news coverage of the Hungarian crisis and in its criticism of the final outcome of this crisis, even if its tone was not so openly outraged or openly anti-communist. But while in other European countries 1956 created a severe split between orthodox communists and other leftist factions, in Portugal, the events in Hungary had comparatively “little impact”⁹⁹ on their mutual relationship:

The [Portuguese Communist] Party dissidents, as well as non-communist sectors of the opposition may have seen in the Soviet intervention the confirmation of their opinions or an added argument for political and ideological divergences; still, their [the Portuguese Communist Party dissidents'] public interventions were timid and fleeting.¹⁰⁰

The pro-Salazarist press was not timid in its staunch attack on Soviet communism. The discourse in *Avante!*, however, which was supportive of the Soviet response and which fell on the opposite side of the Portuguese political scenario, also was not timid. Silencing internal critics, the otherwise clandestine revolutionary communists expressed a very situationist, conservative, and immobile stance towards the 1956 Hungarian uprising, criticizing all hopes and schemes for change and praising the reassertion of Moscow's control over the Eastern country. The same thing would happen in 1968 in response to the frustrated pro-democratic attempts of Alexander Dubcek in Czechoslovakia. In other words, while keeping its essential anti-communist stance, the New State changed its ideological attitude from 1956 to 1968 when considering the protesters. In contrast, the Portuguese Communist Party did not, condemning Dubcek in the late 1960s as it had condemned Nagy and praising Brezhnev as it had praised Khrushchev.

In conclusion, most of the Portuguese newspapers surveyed from the perspective of their coverage of the 1956 Hungarian revolution (*Avante!* was the clear exception) and the overall political and collective mood present a sort of a paradox or perhaps an unintended irony: that of a profoundly anti-revolutionary and anti-liberal regime—the Salazarist New State—praising and endorsing, hand in hand with the larger part of domestic public opinion (even anti-Salazarist public opinion), a foreign revolution in which the insurgents tenaciously, if unsuccessfully, fought (and died) in the hopes of winning independence.

⁹⁹ Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal*, 394.

¹⁰⁰ Madeira, *Os Engenheiros de Almas*, 350.

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