

Slander, Ideological Differences, or Academic Debate? The “Verão Quente” of 2012 and the State of Portuguese Historiography

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Over the course of the summer of 2012 the Portuguese historical profession suffered a major blow to its image and reputation. Due initially to the efforts of a single colleague, the gloves came off within the Portuguese academy, with old battles being fought anew, and with veterans and newcomers alike joining in what at times became an unseemly war of words. Week after week, in the pages of the daily newspaper *Público*, historians—some known to the general public, others less so—argued about the relative merits of one work in particular, the state of historical writing in Portugal in general, and the links between history, ideology, and the political commentary on current events that so many Portuguese academics, historians included, engage in. This should not have been a problem, and indeed some valid points were made along the way; but they were made in the context of a discussion initiated by slander, or something very close to slander, and which was shaped by political passions at a particularly difficult and sensitive time in recent Portuguese life, when the country is gripped by apprehension over the effects of prolonged austerity. As a result, the overall value of the incident as a whole was negligible, and it certainly did not amount to a badly needed debate over how differing visions of the past can coexist in present-day Portugal. This article attempts to chronicle the dispute, setting it into its wider context for the benefit of readers outside Portugal. In so doing, it will try to establish why the dispute was so bitter, a task related both to wider questions regarding the uneasy relationship between academic debate and mass media outlets, and to the fine line between historical argument and political disputes.

Before the article goes any further, however, I must make clear that one of the figures at the heart of this historiographical dispute, Manuel Loff, of the University of Oporto, wrote a very negative review of my biography of Salazar (*Salazar: Biografia Política* (Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2010)). Technically, in fact, he wrote three reviews—which might be seen by some as excessive—but they say essentially the same thing. These were published in the Portuguese edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique* (February 2011), in the

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national daily *Público* (10 July 2011, shortly before Loff was announced as a regular contributor to that newspaper), and in *Análise Social*. The principal accusation Loff leveled at my book is that it deliberately panders to a readership nostalgic for Salazar and his New State. Loff's review in *Análise Social* finished by asking: "Convincente? Permita-me, então, o leitor que eu proponha que nos perguntemos por que teve esta biografia tão boa aceitação."² The reason was tied, presumably, to the allegation, made earlier in the same piece, that "É provável que uma parte do sucesso editorial, e da boa recepção mediática, que o livro tem tido decorra da forma como Meneses parece escrever para um leitor-tipo que parta sistematicamente do princípio da boa fé de Salazar."³

Over the course of the summer, the venerable political weekly *Expresso* announced, with great publicity, that it would be serializing the recent (2009) *História de Portugal* coordinated by Rui Ramos, of the Instituto de Ciências Sociais (ICS), in which Ramos himself covered the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴ This book had already met with extraordinary public success, going through a number of print runs. Ramos prides himself on the readability of his work, a quality abundantly displayed, for example, in his biography of King D. Carlos.⁵ The *História de Portugal* continues this tradition, reasonably rare in Portugal, which helps to account for its success. A staunch believer in the intrinsic value of political history, Ramos is also, and again unusually for a Portuguese academic, openly conservative, not shying away from political debate in the media, including television, where he makes his points forcefully. Much was written about this *História de Portugal* when it was first published, and it is worth recalling what Pedro Aires Oliveira had to say about the book and its reception some two years ago in the *e-Journal of Portuguese History's* special number on historiography:

The most negative reactions related, above all, to the author's approach to the period of the Portuguese Republic and the New State. More than seeing it simply as a revisionist exercise, some historians suggested that what we were witnessing was a kind of whitewashing of the iniquities of Salazar's dictatorship. It would be hard to think of a more unfortunate way of beginning the debate that this work undeniably

² "Convincing? Allow me, dear reader, to propose that we ask ourselves, why this biography was so well received."

³ "Part of the editorial success and good mediatic reception of this book probably results from the way in which Meneses writes for the kind of reader who systematically gives Salazar the benefit of the doubt."

⁴ The volume's other authors are Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) and Nuno Monteiro (Instituto de Ciências Sociais).

⁵ Rui Ramos, *D. Carlos. 1863-1908* (Lisbon, Círculo de Leitores, 2006)

merits, and my personal wish in this matter is that initiatives of the sort now being promoted by the *e-Journal of Portuguese History* will be able to pave the way for a more rational and calmer tone in this debate.

Aires Oliveira was referring, in part, to a survey of historians' verdicts on Ramos' work collected by journalist São José Almeida and published in *Público* on 31 May 2010. Those surveyed at the time included not only Manuel Loff, but also the better known Irene Flunser Pimentel, Manuel de Lucena, Fernando Rosas, and António Costa Pinto. One of the more interesting comments in the article was made by Flunser Pimentel, author of an important history of the PIDE,⁶ who suggested that it was time for a public debate on the subject of the New State. In the words of São José Almeida, who paraphrased her, "há varias correntes historiográficas que convivem em Portugal sem que isso seja assumido."⁷ Aires Oliveira's advice was not, however, heeded, notably by some who had already contributed to that 2010 article.

On 2 August 2012 Manuel Loff turned his attention to *Expresso's* offer, and Ramos's book, in his regular column in the pages of *Público*. If Ramos is well known for his conservative views, then Manuel Loff, whose area of expertise lies in the Salazar-Franco relationship,⁸ is known for his leftist stance; he was elected as an independent to the Oporto municipal assembly as part of the communist list. Characterizing Ramos as "uma das penas mais sólidas da direita intelectual portuguesa,"⁹ and his work as "puro revisionismo historiográfico política e ideologicamente motivado,"¹⁰ Loff then attempted, over the course of two newspaper articles, to characterize Ramos' portrayal of Salazar and the New State. Ramos, he said, presented a picture of a "Salazar sensato e algo neurasténico,"¹¹ very different from Franco, Mussolini and Hitler. In this Ramos was being typical of the historians 'da sua área'¹², presenting a Salazar who wanted to make Portugal live habitually, reduce political agitation, and find its lost equilibrium. But Ramos went further, according to Loff, presenting Salazar as a true liberal, by opposition to the totalitarian men of the Republic which preceded him. Against these men, 'arrastados por

⁶ Irene Flunser Pimentel, *A História da PIDE* (Lisbon: Temas e Debates, 2007)

⁷ "There are various historiographical currents co-existing in Portugal without this fact being recognized."

⁸ See, for example, "*O nosso século é fascista!*" *O Mundo visto por Salazar e Franco (1936-1945)* (Oporto: Campo das Letras, 2008).

⁹ "One of the stalwarts of the Portuguese intellectual right."

¹⁰ "Pure historiographical revisionism, politically and ideologically motivated."

¹¹ "Sensible and somewhat neurasthenic Salazar."

¹² 'Of his area'.

ideias de transformação radical'¹³, Salazar appeared as someone deeply rooted in the realities of Portugal, who merely wished to reconcile the Portuguese to those realities. He was, in other words, akin to pragmatic nineteenth-century British statesmen. Loff then established a link between Ramos' historical writing and his political commentary, in which austerity is described as the reality facing Portugal, now that illusions have been swept aside, and the country can no longer afford a welfare state. Since this was Salazar's recipe for Portugal's woes in the 1920s and 30s, the implication is, it seems to me, clear.

In a second article, published on 16 August, Loff upped the ante. Ramos, Loff wrote, had created a 'ficção sinistra e intelectualmente cínica sobre a ditadura salazarista, procurando aquilo que, até hoje, ninguém na historiografia séria e metodologicamente merecedora do nome tinha tentado: desmontar a natureza ditatorial do Estado Novo'¹⁴. For Ramos, then, the New State was merely a reformulated constitutional monarchy (a charge Loff had already made in 2010), with credible political events (in the shape of national elections) but without political pluralism; the badges of its fascism, such as national syndicates, 'casas do povo', and 'grémios', had been mere associations which allowed for popular participation in public events; the regime's recourse to violence was compared to, and found less severe, than the First Republic's; it had purged fewer public servants than the regime that followed the 25 April 1974 revolution. Loff berated Ramos for seeing the New State as unexceptional in a world where democracy was not the norm, and where, once the Cold War had begun, anti-communism was the order of the day in the West. He also berated him for minimizing the effects of the Colonial Wars, both among Portuguese, seen as generally accepting of the sacrifice they required, which was supposedly slight, and among Africans.

As can be expected, Rui Ramos attempted to preserve his good name and reputation. In a letter to *Público*, published on 21 August, he accused Loff of deliberate manipulation in order to present him (Ramos) as a defender of the New State. Thus, for example, Loff quoted the far-right French writer Henri Massis on Salazar and attributed the words to Ramos. Loff also, and deliberately, muddied the status of the New State's President of the Republic, whose constitutional role had been described by Ramos as similar to that of the King during the liberal monarchy (hence Loff's charge, detailed above). Ramos detailed the description he made in his book of the dictatorship's repressive

¹³ 'Swept along by ideas of radical transformation'.

¹⁴ 'Cynical and intellectually sinister fiction about Salazar's dictatorship, seeking to do something which so far no-one one within the bounds of serious and methodologically acceptable historiography had attempted: to undo the dictatorial nature of the New State'.

apparatus, and the violence inherent in the colonial relationship, but then claimed that there was no point in continuing the argument: the point of Loff's articles was to qualify him, Ramos, as 'fascist', and using the methods that Loff uses, anyone at all could be made to fall into this category. Thus, 'Esta não é uma polémica historiográfica ou uma questão de opiniões. É um simples caso de difamação pessoal'¹⁵.

Like Loff, Ramos is a public figure. Both men make no secret of their political views; but Ramos' are as legitimate as Loff's, or those of any other academic historian writing in democratic Portugal. But in Ramos' reply, Loff was deprived of even the "legitimacy," if that is the term, of naked ideological conflict: the two articles boiled down, in Ramos's view, to a prolonged personal insult. Ramos was certainly right to be indignant. Manuel Loff never called him a fascist, it is true, but he came very close to it—he accused Ramos of wanting to whitewash the New State's crimes. He not only criticized Ramos because of what he had written—which, if done correctly, is the basis of legitimate academic debate—but actually attacked Ramos because of the latter's motives, which he claimed to divine, and then linked these motives to a right-wing political agenda. This brings us to a first point of reflection. No serious historian should be subjected to this abuse, carried out in public, in the pages of a newspaper that thinks of itself as a "newspaper of record." Loff's articles fall a long way short of the historiographical debate called for by Flunser Pimentel in 2010, and one can certainly question *Público's* wisdom in giving them so many column inches. The decision to do so seems motivated less by a desire to allow for a sober reflection on the state of play in Portuguese history and more by the desire to set off a frenzy that would help sell newspapers.

There, with Rui Ramos' reply the matter might well have ended, but it did not. António de Araújo, a lecturer in the Lisbon University (Clássica) Law Faculty and a political advisor (consultor) to President Aníbal Cavaco Silva, who has also produced a number of significant historical works,¹⁶ weighed in with a letter to *Público*, published on 23 August, expressing his support for Ramos. Araújo referred to an earlier article published by Manuel Loff in *Portugal Diário*, on 17 March 2006, in which Araújo's writings had been deliberately misrepresented. Thus, Loff had criticized Araújo for opposing a Supreme Court decision concerning homosexual relations between adults and consenting adolescents *above* the age of sixteen, when in fact Araújo had written in relation to those *below* the age of sixteen. Araújo, in his letter, defined what he called the "Loff method": a lie, followed first by an

¹⁵ "This is no historiographical polemic or a difference of opinion. It is a straightforward case of personal defamation".

¹⁶ See, for example, *Jesuítas e Antijesuítas no Portugal Republicano* (Lisbon: Roma Editora, 2004).

“abusive extrapolation,” and then by a completely hypothetical situation that reinforces the original lie. He provided other instances of the “Loff method” present in that same *Portugal Diário* article: Araújo, according to Loff, was opposed to a new nationality law, and had written against it in the *Diário de Notícias*. This allowed Loff to bring in far-right leaders such as Jean-Marie Le Pen and Umberto Bossi, using their reputation to smear Araújo. But there was one problem: Araújo had never written any such article.

António de Araújo explained that while he had been willing, in 2006, to let the matter lie, he now realized that unless Manuel Loff was challenged directly, he would continue to slander others with impunity. He was not alone in his indignation; others rushed to Ramos’ defense. His colleague at the Instituto de Ciências Sociais (ICS), Maria Filomena Mónica, wrote in *Público* on 1 September that she had never heard of Loff before, and then proceeded to attack him with enormous, and unnecessary, violence:

Basta ver o que diz sobre as liberdades fundamentais na I República e a mistura que faz entre Salazarismo, Fascismo italiano e Nazismo alemão para se constatar o que vai naquela cabeça. Se fosse apenas estúpido, não estaria a escrever este artigo. A coisa é pior. Loff é um fanático que só concebe duas espécies de filiação ideológica: o comunismo e o fascismo.¹⁷

Since he wasn’t a communist, Ramos must by definition, for Loff, be a fascist. For Mónica, this was not a quarrel among historians, or even a political debate; it was calumny, hatred, and envy: ‘Loff distorce o que aparece num livro que vendeu milhares de exemplares, o que terá contribuído igualmente para a ira de alguém cujas obras nunca vi nos escaparates’¹⁸. Another ICS stalwart, António Barreto, also joined the fray, two days later, but in more measured tones. Barreto, who had launched Ramos’ book when it was first published, praised it once again:

Ainda não se tinha escrito uma história global, compacta e homogénea que rompesse com a alternativa dogmática, que viesse até aos nossos dias e que,

¹⁷ “It suffices to consider what [Loff] says about fundamental freedoms during the First Republic and the way he mixes up ‘Salazarism,’ Italian Fascism and German Nazism to take stock of what is going on in that head of his. If it was just a case of stupidity, I would not be writing this article. But it’s worse. Loff is a fanatic who conceives of only two ideological affiliations: communism and fascism.”

¹⁸ “Loff distorts the contents of a book which sold thousands of copies—a fact that contributed to the anger of someone whose works I never came across in a shop-front.”

especialmente para o Século XX, “normalizasse” a interpretação da Primeira República e do Estado Novo.¹⁹

At last, Barreto suggested, Portuguese contemporary history was being written “com igual serenidade académica, sem ajustes de contas.”²⁰ And while not naming Loff directly in the concluding paragraph, Barreto nevertheless admonished him:

Sinceramente, já não esperava que ainda houvesse demónios capazes de despertar o pior da cultura portuguesa.²¹

These two articles added fuel to the flames. They went too far; the medicine was as deadly as the symptoms it was trying to combat.²² Through their tone, or their apparent disregard for the quality of other historians’ work, they were hardly designed to contribute to any further debate.

This was quickly seen when, again in *Público*, Fernando Rosas, of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, stepped in, on 5 September. It is impossible to underestimate Rosas’ contribution to Portuguese letters; his importance is measured not only by the quality, and number, of his publications, but also by the large number of graduate students who, whatever their own political views, have had the pleasure and good fortune of being supervised by him. Rosas, for many years a leading member of the Bloco de Esquerda party, which he helped to found, and which he represented in parliament, claimed that he had not wanted to intervene in the debate, but that Mónica’s article, which he described as “inacreditável,”²³ had made him change his mind. But Rosas quickly turned his attention to Ramos’ book, which he considered “empapado em ideologia”²⁴—and this because, as Loff pointed, out, it attempted to present the First Republic as a dictatorial and terrorist regime and the New State as its orderly successor. This was a vision opposed by most historians, wrote Rosas, who went on to accuse Ramos of refusing to even debate these questions.

¹⁹ “A global, compact and homogenous history which broke with the dogmatic alternative, which reached the present day and which, in relation to the twentieth century, ‘normalized’ the interpretation of the First Republic and the New State, had yet to be written.”

²⁰ “The same academic serenity [as non-contemporary history], without settling scores.”

²¹ “In all honesty, I no longer suspected the existence of demons capable of awakening the worst in Portuguese culture.”

²² One might give Barreto the benefit of the doubt, allowing that he was merely lamenting the fact that it had taken until 2009 to produce a single-volume national history in which the twentieth century was treated in the same way as those that preceded it. If so, he did not make himself sufficiently clear.

²³ “Incredible.”

²⁴ “Saturated with ideology.”

Playing the wounded victim and taking offence at slights that did not exist in the first place, Ramos was merely avoiding his critics. Right in his indignation over Maria Filomena Mónica's words, Rosas failed to see that by his own criteria, Ramos too had been insulted, including by himself. Instead of appealing for calm, Ramos fanned the flames.

João Paulo Avelãs Nunes, of the University of Coimbra, also replied to Mónica and Barreto, on 7 September.²⁵ Unlike his predecessors, he attempted to strike a tone of moderation in his contribution to the discussion. Avelãs Nunes attempted to distinguish between revisionism (legitimate) and the outright denial of documented events (illegitimate); he chided Mónica for not taking Loff seriously and resorting to such emotional language; and he pointed out that it was not only “false historians” who saw the New State as Fascist or totalitarian. Finally, Avelãs Nunes took on Barreto's praise of Ramos' allegedly unprecedented impartiality head-on: accepting this meant rejecting the work of historians such as António Costa Pinto, António José Telo, César de Oliveira, José Maria Brandão de Brito, Luís Reis Torgal, Manuel Braga da Cruz, Manuel de Lucena, Maria de Fátima Patriarca, and Fernando Rosas. What Avelãs Nunes did not do, however, was call a spade a spade when it came to the nature of Loff's attacks on Ramos. His was the first of many articles which tried to move the debate towards the historiographical level, but whose timing was flawed, serving above all to legitimize Loff's attack on Ramos.

Still the debate went on. Rui Ramos had written again, this time to take on Rosas, on 6 September. Rosas, he claimed, was generously laying down a smokescreen in order to allow Loff to withdraw in good order, but refusing to engage with the central accusation that Ramos made in his own defense—that Loff had lied in order to denigrate his opponents: “Para Fernando Rosas, tachar alguém de fascista “cínico” e ‘sinistro’ não é ‘pessoalmente insultuoso.’ Para mim, é.”²⁶ Ramos also accused Rosas of making the same mistake as Loff in twisting what he, Ramos, actually affirmed in his *History of Portugal*, so as to give an impression that he denied the New State's dictatorial nature. Finally, Ramos identified for the readers what he believed lay at the heart of the matter: While Rosas, in his books, could describe the First Republic as un-democratic and vindictive, he, Ramos, could not. Why this discrepancy?

²⁵ João Paulo Avelãs Nunes' works include *A história económica e social na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra: Ascensão e queda de um paradigma historiográfico, 1911-1974* (Lisbon: Instituto de Inovação Educational, 1995), and *O Estado Novo e o volfrâmio (1933-1947): Actividade mineira, “grande depressão” e Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2010).

²⁶ “For Fernando Rosas, labeling someone a ‘cynical’ and ‘sinister’ fascist isn't ‘personally insulting.’ For me it is.”

O que Fernando Rosas sugere, de facto, é que há coisas que só alguém com as credenciais partidárias de Fernando Rosas pode dizer sem que isso justifique de imediato uma suspeita política. É isso que eu rejeito: a História não tem donos, Fernando Rosas.²⁷

In his reply to Rosas, then, Ramos was drawing a distinction between Rosas and Loff. What lay at the heart of Rosas' criticism was old-fashioned politics, a crude ideological barrier that, in Portugal, prevented dialogue and the acceptance of a different view of the past, even of a different approach to the past. This was an idea Ramos had already expressed when interviewed by São José Almeida, in 2010:

Vivemos num mundo muito diferente do que eu vivi em Inglaterra ou em Espanha, onde nos mesmos seminários, congressos e departamentos convivem pessoas com ideias muito diferentes, discutindo acalorada ou friamente, mas debatendo e divergindo. Pessoas que se respeitam e veem o trabalho dos outros com respeito.²⁸

While Flunser Pimentel in 2010 had described the existence of different historiographical traditions as something that must be acknowledged, and debated, Ramos sees it as an acceptable, even self-evidently desirable, state of affairs. This divergence of views is in and of itself interesting, and constitutes a second point of reflection, one well worth exploring by Portuguese academics in a collective effort. At its heart, of course, lies the debate over the nature of history, and where it can be found on the continuum between science and literature.

Perhaps the most interesting and profitable of all the interventions made in the debate came from Diogo Ramada Curto, like Rosas from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, but, unlike the other participants in the debate, a specialist in early modern, not contemporary, history. In a text commissioned by *Público* and published on 8 September, Ramada Curto wrote:

²⁷ “What Fernando Rosas is suggesting is that there are, in fact, certain things that only someone with his party credentials can say without immediately arousing political suspicions. This is what I reject: History had no owners, Fernando Rosas.”

²⁸ “We live in a very different world from the one I experienced in England or in Spain, where in the same seminars, congresses or departments people with very different ideas coexist, arguing passionately or coolly, agreeing or differing. People who respect each other and each other’s work.”

Se a objectividade no fazer da História não existe por decreto, pouco ou nada adiantam as declarações de princípio relativas à autoridade dos historiadores universitários. É claro que, enquanto cidadãos, mais ou menos comprometidos politicamente, estes têm todo o direito de exprimir as suas opiniões políticas, mas não poderão fazê-lo em nome das famigeradas lições da História. De igual modo, tanto os historiadores de profissão como os leitores informados sabem que análises, narrativas, argumentos e instrumentos de prova expostos em livros de História se encontram sujeitos a verificação [...] nenhum historiador académico se pode considerar fora desse processo “normal” de debate e verificação analítica.²⁹

Ramada Curto then pointed out that while Loff's attack on Ramos was unfairly conducted (“donde não está ausente a deturpação pura e simples do sentido da obra de Rui Ramos”³⁰), the work itself should be debated like any other—and proceeded to attack it where it is indeed most vulnerable, the coverage of the war in Africa, whose impact on the local population is undoubtedly minimized by Ramos. But Ramada Curto fell into the trap that others before him had done, and others still would continue to do: he fed a public debate initiated by a piece of something close to slander, thus legitimizing the initial accusations and treating them as acceptable—just as acceptable, in fact, as Ramos' defense of his good name. The following day Vasco Pulido Valente, in some ways a mentor figure to Ramos, notably in his treatment of the First Republic, chided Ramos for feeding the “polemic,” which was merely the result of “generalized ignorance.”³¹

True to form, Manuel Loff, with a newspaper column to fill, returned to this theme, on 13 September. Complaining of the chorus of personal insults directed against his person, and quoting the choicest among them, Loff claimed that ‘não sou seguramente o único a achar que esta polémica tem permitido perceber melhor por que valores se pautam alguns dos nossos académicos’³². He quickly resumed the offensive: As a work of synthesis, based in part on secondary readings, Ramos' *História de Portugal* was a manipulative text,

²⁹ “Since objectivity in the writing of History does not exist by decree, there is not point to declarations of principle regarding university professors. Of course they have the right, as more or less politically involved citizens, to express their political opinions, but they cannot do so in the name of the [in]famous lessons of History. Equally, both professional historians and well-informed readers know that analyses, narratives, arguments and evidence presented in History books are open to verification [...] no academic historian can rule herself/himself out of this “normal” process of debate and analytical verification.”

³⁰ “In which one can find the plain and simple deturpation of the meaning of Rui Ramos' work.”

³¹ He also added, interestingly, that Ramos could not have “white-washed” the New State, because there was nothing left to white-wash: “O ‘fascismo’ passou por Portugal quase sem deixar vestígio” [“Fascism’ passed through Portugal, leaving almost no traces behind.”]

³² ‘I am surely not the only person to think that this polemic has allowed us to understand better the values which guide some of our academics’.

establishing constant but misleading conclusions in order to guide the reader down blind alleys: the result is indeed a whitewashing of the recent past, punctuated by false assertions and by speculation. All in all, ‘200 páginas de qualidade mais que duvidosa...’³³

There were other contributions to the debate. José Neves, a young prize-winning historian also of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa,³⁴ wrote in *Público* on 12 September, that both Loff and Ramos had made important contributions to Portuguese historiography, and that both deserved a ‘crítica despida de elogios fáceis e de insultos gratuitos’³⁵. Loff went too far, Neves wrote, in suggesting that Ramos’s historical writing was designed to further a political agenda. Puzzlingly, however, Neves wrote that ‘nesta sugestão de instrumentalização tem tido origem parte dos equívocos do debate que Loff em boa hora lançou’.³⁶ I write puzzlingly, because there is little in Loff’s articles beyond this brand of accusation—an accusation which, rather than being ‘suggested’, is in fact made very forcefully. Neves also overplayed his hand by placing on the same level the erroneous accusations made by Loff and Ramos’ angry replies. While it is true that, word per word, writing that Ramos’ text is ‘a ficção sinistra e intelectualmente cínica sobre a ditadura salazarista’ does not equate with calling someone a ‘fascista “cínico” e “sinistro”’, the difference is not great, and it is a terrible aspersion to cast on someone in a newspaper of record, before a mass audience; why would all that cynicism and sinister writing be deployed if not to confuse the New State’s record, and to whitewash its crimes? And why would someone engage in that activity if one wasn’t a covert Salazar supporter, a covert fascist? Or is Ramos (like, allegedly, the author of these lines,) only out for an easy cash score by giving nostalgic supporters of Salazar what they want?

On 20 September, it was the turn of Luís Reis Torgal, a retired University of Coimbra Professor, and, like Fernando Rosas, a historiographical heavyweight,³⁷ to contribute his thoughts to the question at hand. Reis Torgal wrote that since he too had consistently been calling for a public debate on historiography, he could not abstain from the ongoing discussion. But what followed can hardly be described as informative, and leaves one apprehensive about whether such a debate can be engaged in. For Reis Torgal,

³³ ‘200 pages of less than dubious quality’.

³⁴ See, for example, his *Comunismo e Nacionalismo em Portugal - Política, Cultura e História no Século XX* (Lisbon, Tinta-da-China, 2008).

³⁵ ‘Criticism free of empty compliments and gratuitous insults’.

³⁶ ‘This suggestion of manipulation is at the root of the misunderstandings in the timely debate initiated by Loff’.

³⁷ Luís Reis Torgal’s works include *A universidade e o Estado Novo: O caso de Coimbra, 1926-1961* (Coimbra: Minerva, 1999) and *Estados novos, Estado Novo: Ensaios de história política e cultural* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 2009).

Ramos was not a specialist in the New State, and this showed in the work, which was not sufficiently theoretical, nuanced, or capable of suggesting contradiction, difficulty, and alternatives. This questionable assertion aside, Reis Torgal's tone was highly paternalistic, if not actually insulting: "Seria bom que Ramos entendesse que a História se compreende numa lógica diacrónica, mas também sincrónica,"³⁸ he wrote, as if Ramos was a first year student. Reflecting on the book as a whole, Reis Torgal concluded, "Palavras e frases, provavelmente bem construídas, mas sem nenhuma reflexão profunda...—é esta a técnica de divulgação de Ramos, parecendo não entender que a História supõe sempre uma análise e uma reflexão problematizadoras."³⁹

Last but not least, Dalila Cabrita Mateus, of ISCTE, a specialist in Portuguese colonialism and its aftermath,⁴⁰ also picked up the anti-Ramos baton, criticizing, in a letter published on 14 September in *Público* both the idea he created of a war in Africa that was sustainable 'ad eternum' and even winnable, had it not been for the April 1974 movement, and the view that the Portuguese in Europe had never had it as good as they were having it by the early 1970s: full employment, increasing salaries, and the expansion of the welfare state. She then went on to add that the economic situation by the end of 1975 was actually a good one, comparing it to that of today for reasons best understood by herself in what is meant to be a piece on historiography. While correct in what she wrote about Ramos' treatment of the Colonial Wars, Cabrita Mateus, like others before her, ignored that the ongoing debate had started in the worst of circumstances, with a violent personal attack, and that to prolong it, without acknowledging its flawed origin, served only to legitimize that attack.

The very next day, in the course of a long interview published in *Expresso Online*, António de Araújo was asked about the ongoing historiographical controversy. He refused to call it a polemic, since

³⁸ 'It would be good if Ramos understood that History should be understood both diachronically and synchronically'.

³⁹ "Words and sentences, probably well constructed, but free from any deep reflection...That is Ramos' technique of dissemination, failing to understand that History always presupposes a problematically fertile analysis and reflection."

⁴⁰ See, for example, her *A PIDE-DGS na Guerra Colonial (1961-1974)* Second Edition (Lisbon: Terramar, 2011) and *Purga em Angola: O 27 de Maio de 1977* Fourth Edition (Lisbon: Texto, 2009).

Não se inicia honestamente uma discussão sobre um livro com base em falsidades e citações truncadas, como Manuel Loff fez no caso da História de Portugal coordenada por Rui Ramos.⁴¹

Araújo was correct, and his words bring us to a third point of reflection. Academia does not sit well with either the press or political debate; it moves at a different speed, and is regulated by different codes of behaviour. If its debates are to be opened up to a wider public, then they should not be turned into the kind spectator blood sport witnessed in Portugal in the summer of 2012. But in a country where the lines between academia and politics are blurred (in part by the large number of academics who appear regularly in media outlets to comment on ongoing events), where the University has long been a trampoline for a political career, and where contemporary history was for a long time the preserve of Marxist historians, who cling to the view of their discipline as a science, this is especially hard to ensure. In a review article published in this journal as far back as 2003, the difficulties faced by the practitioners of political history when investigating the twentieth century—the First Republic and the New State—was alluded to.⁴² This year's controversy suggests that considerable ideological resistance remains in place against those who focus their investigations on the lives, writings, and actions of the country's political elite.

Can anything useful be learned from the recent controversy? Firstly, it is impossible to speculate on why Manuel Loff argues the way he does. It is not far removed from the way he writes History; as one reviewer of his *O Nosso Século É Fascista!* put it, “Loff adopta uma postura de advogado de acusação.”⁴³ In his reviews and newspaper articles Loff moves one step further still and adopts an entirely confrontational posture that leaves normal academic language far behind. Non-academic ideological cheerleaders have elected him as their champion, and egg him on. One can, however, speculate about his timing, which seems related to the free distribution of Ramos' *História de Portugal* at a time of harsh austerity and great national apprehension about the future of the country. Loff opposes the idea that austerity is necessary, wants the country to mobilize against it, and wants as well to demonize those who propound it; but, in addition to this, he seems to fear that Ramos'

⁴¹ “One cannot honestly begin a discussion of a book on the basis of falsehoods and truncated citations, as Manuel Loff did in the case of the History of Portugal coordinated by Rui Ramos.”

⁴² Manuel Baiôa, Paulo Jorge Fernandes and Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, “The Political History of Twentieth-Century Portugal,” *e-Journal of Portuguese History*, Vol. 1, no. 2, Winter 2003.

⁴³ “Loff adopts a prosecutor's stance.” Bruno Cardoso Reis, “Este século não foi fascista. Salazar, Franco e a efêmera nova ordem internacional nazi-fascista,” *Relações Internacionais*, n. 27 (September 2010), 129-138.

interpretation of the past might be internalized by people outside his normal catchment area. Loff seems to fear, in other words, that Ramos' view of Salazar's New State might, via the free distribution by *O Expresso*, reach an unsuspecting and ideologically unprepared readership, resulting in yet another step in the destruction of the vision of the recent past upheld by the left in Portugal: that of a great popular anti-fascist struggle that finally emerged victorious in April 1974. If a popular struggle defeated the New State, then it can defeat the EU/ECB/IMF "Troika." Keeping this flame alive is a political imperative for the left in Portugal today: but immediate political imperatives and academic pursuits are not happy bedfellows.

Secondly, it is certainly the case that many academics in Portugal—especially historians of the contemporary age—are still putting political or personal allegiances ahead of scholarly considerations, and allowing these allegiances to intrude on their public utterances, despite the obvious cost to their discipline. This was undoubtedly the case in the ham-fisted interventions of Maria Filomena Mónica and Vasco Pulido Valente on behalf of Rui Ramos. But it was as true in the case of Ramos' detractors, who refused to even acknowledge the slanderous, or quasi-slanderous nature of Loff's charges, and then proceeded to criticize, correctly or not, Ramos' book. This created the impression that there was nothing really wrong with Loff's initial articles, and allowed him to return again and again to the fray, portraying himself as the victim along the way. At the same time, Loff's own work was not subjected to any sort of scrutiny, and what in some cases was a well-meaning attempt at historiographical discussion became, in the public's eye, part of a concentrated and even co-ordinated attack on a single author. Only in an article published much later (on 29 October 2012) in *Público* and, in an expanded version, in the blog *Jugular*, did Irene Flunser Pimentel, who in 2010 had called for a proper historiographical debate to be initiated, finally criticize a concrete aspect of Loff's work, being thus the first writer to do so as part of this controversy:

[...] errado, quanto a mim, é concluir que a ditadura salazarista nos anos trinta e quarenta se assemelhava, na sua essência, ao nacional-socialismo alemão, sem ter em conta a diferença de monta que é a ausência de anti-semitismo na ideologia e no estado salazarista, como o faz Manel. *O Nosso Século é Fascista!* (2008)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "I think it a mistake to conclude, like Loff does, that Salazar's dictatorship in the 1930s and 40s was, in its essence, similar to German National-Socialism, without considering the enormous difference which resulted from a lack of anti-Semitism in the Salazar state."

But this criticism was delivered in the context of a wider discussion of repression in the New State, which had Rui Ramos very much in its sights.

Thirdly, recent events have reminded academics that they must be careful about how, when, and where to speak out about each others' work. They must be exceptionally careful when doing so to a non-academic audience. Pedro Aires Oliveira's words, cited at the start of this article, should be heeded, as should be the instructive silence of so many other Portuguese historians over the course of August and September 2012. They stayed silent not because they lacked an opinion on Ramos' work, but rather because they understood that they should not participate in a debate that had, at its base, a vitriolic personal attack which fatally skewed what followed. My impression is that most professional historians wish the controversy had never occurred and were pained by its course and the continual reopening of the wound.

Fourthly, the controversy shows that the dual identity assumed by so many Portuguese historians—that of academics and political actors, or commentators—is damaging to their academic credibility. They are not political scientists, economists, or sociologists, whose expertise revolves around the present, and who see the vindication of their theories and their research in the world around them. Historians deal with the past, which cannot talk back, respond to stimulus, and be altered. It can only be analysed and interpreted. And while politically engaged historians' ability to interpret the past is not necessarily impaired by the views they defend in party political campaigns, or in the press—not more so, in any case, than the private political views of other historians—the reception of their work most certainly is. They can be—and are—labelled “communist” or “conservative” and dismissed, or interpreted exclusively as proponents of certain views, so that years of careful work is ignored. The urgency of political battles and media disputes then invades academic life, poisoning personal and professional relationships.

Finally, and turning to what Portuguese and non-Portuguese academics who live and work abroad can do to help the situation, the way forward seems clear. Just as, through their seminars and publications, departments such as Brown's Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, as well as the learned associations to which academics belong, provide a crucial outlet for Portuguese historians to publish and disseminate their work abroad, as is now increasingly demanded of them, so too should they not remain aloof from controversies such as the one that erupted in this year's “Verão Quente.” They should work to cool tempers; to provide a space where debate can take place in an orderly fashion; to act as honest brokers, stitching together with patience what has been torn apart

so that the slanderous words of some cannot form the basis for generalized debates which degenerate into ideological free-for-alls. If it is true that there are rival historiographies at play in today's Portugal, and that these find it hard to communicate peacefully with each other, then it is the task of foreign-based academics to mediate between the currents, so that the attempts to engage in dialogue do not degenerate into name-calling or obscure and off-putting discussions about the interpretation of events long ago. This could even be done in partnership with the Portuguese media, in order to bring the resulting debate to a wider readership which, like never before, is interested in the country's recent past. It is a difficult and perhaps unenviable task, but a necessary one.