

Memories of my life

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Then I went to the Aljube, where I was allowed a second visit from my brother Armando and my sister-in-law Maria de Lourdes (the first had taken place on November 26), the effects of that trial were probably still visible on my face, and my voice was almost inaudible. And, evidently, I could only speak of matters that were trivial, because the pidge agent who was between the two grids prevented any other kind of conversation.

In the so-called “curros” (bullpens) of the Aljube, I came into contact with a new reality, which was that of communicating with the prisoners in the cells adjacent to mine (...), that is, a “telegraph” based on knocks on the wall (one was “A”, two “B” and so on), and moving your palm against the wall meant the end of a word and the beginning of another. For those who were isolated, this form of communication made us feel less alone and gave us a certain 'strength'.

A few days later I was transferred to a huge room where there were other prisoners (students, members of the PCP and FAP - Popular Action Front, of a Maoist tendency). Prison conditions were not as harsh anymore (we were entitled to sheets and the bed covering curiously read “Portuguese Army” .,.), we could already request books from our families (the book “Conceitos Fundamentais da Matemática” [Fundamental Concepts of Mathematics] by Bento de Jesus Caraça did not “pass”, but the book of Physics by Linus Pauling did..)

In this room, I found my friend António Rego, from whom I learned a lot throughout my life (because we were "too much" in agreement, one of us would defend the opposite thesis, just to make the dialogue more stimulating...), but António Melo, Artur Gouveia (who was a member of FAP and who had been mutilated in a finger when handling the detonator of an explosive), Luis Salgado de Matos (who had the peculiarity of being almost always lying down, in an almost mystic pose, absorbed in profound meditations) and a militant of the PCP whose name is truly explosive, Joaquim Pólvora Garcia Labaredas, from Couço, where also there.

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Meanwhile, my friend António Rego (who felt like a bird locked in a cage) had been released, and I sincerely hoped that the same would happen to me since our situations were identical.

Inexplicably for me, this did not happen - was I paying the "price" for openly opposing Salazar's regime?

Christmas went by - and it is particularly hard to spend this season in jail - the desired release did not happen, and on January 27, 1965, I was transferred to Caxias, a fort with two wings, one for the women and one for the men. The entrance and the room for the family visits were in the middle, and there, the presence of indiscreet ears was ineffective because, with everyone speaking, it was very difficult to hear or be heard.

The rooms were also large, but the conditions were tougher than in my immediately previous situation, namely the room in the Aljube.

The detainees were students, members of the PCP and the FAP, elements of the "case of Beja" (assault on the barracks of that city by a quite heterogeneous group of anti-situationists), peasants (almost all of them had been brutally beaten in the Pide, which showed that it was selective according to social class), a small intellectual elite of engineers attached to the PCP (among which I only remember the name of Blasco Hugo Fernandes), individuals who had been caught when trying to flee from the country, "by foot" and, presumably, infiltrated informers of the Pide.

Perhaps because they recognized, in me, the capacity for dialogue with such heterogeneity of ideological sensitivities, when the standard was a certain radicalisation of positions, I was elected several times for the "room commissions", which were responsible for sanitizing small conflicts, distributing tasks (such as, for example, the cleaning of the rooms), organising classes (in which sometimes we were the teachers and others the students), one hour sessions of music (we could ask for turntables and records from the outside, but then it was necessary to conciliate the tastes between classical and light music, which was not always an easy task...) and also for the administrative part, in which we would share the purchase of a daily newspaper and other expenses

We were also allowed to make various objects with bread crumbs, bags made of skilfully twisted twines, pieces of chess and checkers, cameos and other things; for some of these works, we would improvise cutting instruments implanting a razor blade in a ballpoint pen that had been previously melted with a flame.

I remember particularly José Luís d'Espinay, who sang opera arias with me (in our own way, of course...) and with whom I would pair up in the gym sessions based on abdominal work, Ornar Karim (a fascinating personality due to his knowledge of

general culture, which he shared without being condescending, and who was one of my “teachers”), Carlos Saboga (who was taking his first steps as a film director), Aginaldo Cabral, the historian Fernando Rosas and his brother Filipe, Maximino Cunha, Crisóstomo Teixeira (who was secretary of State after April 25), the peasants who I started teaching how to read and write, in short, everyone who was close to me and who made my days there a little less bitter, as well as the visits of my brothers and sisters-in-law and also my girlfriend back then, Maria do Carmo (the correspondence we exchanged as well as that of my family members had to be open when it was delivered and received, which was one of the prepotencies we had to endure).

In the meantime, my brother Armando had managed to find a lawyer for my defence (and he did it so graciously, as did the other defendants' lawyers), Dr Francisco de Sousa Tavares who, when reading the charges against me almost assured me of my absolution, since my connection to the PCP was not stated anywhere.

The trial took place on 12 July 1965, in the Plenary Court of Boa Hora, presided by the judge Correia Barreto, assisted by the judges Bordalo Soares and Serafim das Neves, and the public prosecutor was Dr Lopes de Melo.

The lawyers included Heliodoro Caldeira (father of the defendant Alfredo Caldeira), Abranches Ferrão, Mário Soares, Jorge Sampaio, Luís Francisco Rebelo, Salgado Zenha, Magalhães Godinho, Acácio Gouveia, Adão e Silva, Duarte Vidal, Paradela de Oliveira, Xencora Camotim and the already mentioned Francisco de Sousa Tavares. All renowned names of the forum, and some who would, later on, have illustrious political careers.

There were hundreds of defence witnesses - for the 31 defendants - but, curiously enough, there were only two (!!!) prosecution witnesses, two pides who had enough ubiquity to witness all the interrogations and all the spontaneous confessions (!!!) but when, in turn, they were questioned by the lawyers, and despite the “little help” that the judges gave them, naturally they just put their feet into their mouths.

There were unforgettable oratory pieces, such as that of Heliodoro Caldeira, who must have spoken for about six hours straight! But, of course, I was always deeply grateful to Dr Francisco de Sousa Tavares, married to the poet I so admire Sophia de Mello Breyner, and father of the public figure Miguel de Sousa Tavares.

Dr Sousa Tavares created a genuine "Gordian knot" for the pide agent who served as a "prosecution witness", to whom he threw a few "decoys", which the agent hastily followed, until, in a somewhat Machiavellian turning point, Sousa Tavares exploited the contradictions in which he had incurred. Then, it was almost painful to see the pide agent struggling in the spider web he had been caught in.

It was also fun to see the astonishment on the judge's face when my lawyer expressed his perplexity for defending a defendant who was not explicitly accused of anything, not even of belonging to the PCP (by the way, the Pide, in the case-file, wrote the name of the party in lowercase letters, go figure). At that moment, the judge read (or re-read) the indictment realising that, in fact, this was true. I should have been released right away but I was not, I had to endure another month to the day, which was the length of the trial.

Very impressive and moving was the testimony of the defendant Crisóstomo Teixeira, who recounted the two series of "sleep torture" he was subjected to which, if I am not mistaken, were of one week each. But there were other courageous testimonies reporting the trials that had been experienced.

I only met the female part of the defendants in the courtroom and, among them, I highlight Sara Amâncio, who was a very courageous and determined young woman, Maria João Gerardo, Teresa Pacheco Pereira, Lígia Calapez Gomes, Ana Massano de Amorim and Maria Antonieta Coelho.

My defence witnesses included, among others, my colleagues of the Bank, Nuno Cabeçadas, Abel Rodrigues, Jorge Macieira and Vitor Fidalgo, and my fellow countryman José Moura, and to all of them, once again, I want to express my gratitude for their courage since, back then, fear reigned, and the tentacles of the Pide and its "bufos" (informers) seemed to encompass the entire territory, so being a defense witness of a political prisoner created all kinds of excuses.

During the trial, the public prosecutor was the protagonist of a ridiculous moment: when he intended to dismiss a defence witness (!!!), all the lawyers, as if propelled by a spring (may they forgive me but with their black robes they looked like a band of crows fluttering...), stood up, protesting the obvious infringement of the rules and the incompetence that such a request revealed. Like a schoolboy caught in the act, the said deputy withdrew the unusual pretence.

Although I was acquitted, I was still taken back to Caxias where I was finally released.