

# Portugal's Empire in the Wake of WWI: Coping with the Challenges of Pan-Africanism and the League of Nations

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## Abstract

In the aftermath of the Great War, similar to other colonial powers, Portugal was under greater pressure to meet the requirements of the more 'enlightened' concept of imperial rule. Even if Woodrow Wilson's rhetoric regarding the condition of the colonial populations was quickly perceived as deeply flawed by nationalist and proto-nationalist leaders across the colonial world, the emergence of the League of Nations was a significant development in the new international landscape. In the 1920s, these new developments became the focal point for the critics of the colonial status quo. This paper sets out to explore various facets of this new chapter of European imperialism. It will start by assessing the challenges met by Portugal at the Peace Conference and the compromises that came out of it. It will then examine the agency displayed by some creole leaders from Portugal's empire who managed to forge connections with the Pan Africanist movement, as well as explore the ambiguities of their relationship with the Portuguese authorities. Additionally, it will also examine the challenges posed by the League of Nations in the fields in which Portugal's 'civilizing' record appeared more dubious (above all, matters pertaining to labour relations).

## Keywords

Portuguese colonialism; Paris Peace Conference; League of Nations; Pan Africanism; Creole Elites.

## Resumo

No rescaldo da Grande Guerra, e à semelhança de outras potências coloniais, Portugal enfrentava pressões crescentes para ir ao encontro das exigências de um conceito de domínio imperial mais 'esclarecido'. Mesmo se a retórica wilsoniana relativa à condição das populações coloniais depressa foi vista como dúbia por líderes nacionalistas e proto-nacionalistas no mundo colonial, a emergência da Liga das Nações constituiu um desenvolvimento assinalável na nova paisagem internacional. Nos anos de 1920, esses desenvolvimentos estiveram no centro das atenções dos críticos do status quo colonial. Este artigo procura explorar as várias facetas desse novo capítulo da história do imperialismo europeu. Começa-se por aferir os desafios enfrentados por Portugal na Conferência de paz e os compromissos que os seus representantes aí alcançaram. Seguidamente, examina-se a iniciativa evidenciada por algumas elites crioulas de partes do império português que forjaram ligações ao movimento Pan-Africanista, bem como as ambiguidades do seu relacionamento com as autoridades portuguesas. Adicionalmente, analisam-

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se os desafios colocados pela Liga das Nações num dos domínios onde o registo 'civilizacional' de Portugal aparecia como mais dúbio, designadamente o das relações laborais.

Palavras-chave

Colonialismo Português; Sociedade das Nações; Conferência de Paz de Paris; Pan-Africanismo; Elites Crioulas.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Portugal's overseas possessions were generally seen as a critical component of the nation's self-identity and standing in the world. Even though many contradictions and paradoxes can be identified in Portugal's imperial project, it seems indisputable that among the ruling classes and large sectors of the nation's public opinion there was a solid consensus regarding the necessity of defending the 'sacred heritage' of the overseas expansion.

As a small, backward, semi-peripheral, and near bankrupt country, Portugal struggled to mobilize the necessary means to take full advantage of its vast African possessions and hence meet the demands of the 'civilizing mission' that was imputed to every European nation engaged in the business of empire. Ever since the consolidation of its imperial frontiers in the late nineteenth century, the country had to deploy its scarce resources to undertake the effective occupation of Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique, which implied, first and foremost, the launching of several expensive military campaigns against some of the more independence-minded and bellicose African tribes. Those campaigns consumed most of the available fiscal resources of the state, leaving it with few means to promote the economic development of the territories. In order to prevent accusations of 'neglect' regarding its contribution to the 'progress' and 'well-being' of its colonial subjects, Portugal had to resort to 'outsourcing' schemes in some its overseas territories, granting the economic exploitation and the direct administration of huge regions to foreign chartered companies – a "kind of corporate feudalism," as Newitt has put it (Newitt, 1981:78). In colonies like Mozambique until the late 1920s, Portugal's sovereignty was therefore largely nominal, with the colonial state administering little more than 25 percent of the whole territory. But if this strategy of co-opting foreign investors from wealthy European powers to its colonial empire may have earned Lisbon a breathing space in the decades that followed the African 'scramble,' that does not mean that Portugal suddenly became free from external pressures regarding its performance as a modern colonial power. In fact, since the early twentieth century, labor conditions in the Portuguese African empire were closely scrutinized by a host of humanitarian critics, missionaries, journalists, and diplomats, who denounced the harsh conditions surrounding the recruitment and employment of African indentured workers in several Portuguese colonies. With a complicated record of resistance to abolitionist endeavors in the nineteenth century, Portugal became an easy target for liberal-minded critics in Britain, the nation that had spearheaded successive anti-slavery campaigns in that period, and was now

passionately following the campaign that denounced the appalling human rights violations in King Leopold's 'private' colony of the Congo (Grant, 2005).

Needless to say, the effectiveness of these campaigns, whatever the sincerity of some of its protagonists, relied on their capacity to gather concrete evidence against the accused. Between 1904 and the outbreak of the World War, a press report authored by a renowned British journalist, Henry W. Nevinson, was at the heart of a major scandal concerning the recruitment and crude exploitations of those *serviçais* in the cocoa farms of São Tomé, some of the main suppliers of Cadbury Bros. The operation of Portugal's plantation system in places like São Tomé was made possible by the supply of significant contingents of 'indentured labor' from Angola, the so-called *serviçais*, men forcibly recruited in the hinterland of the colony by officials of private agents who relied on the collaboration of village chiefs (usually obtained by threats or blackmail) – aspects well documented in Nevinson's report (Nevinson, 1963).<sup>2</sup> The scandal became a *cause célèbre* that instead of sparking a serious soul-searching exercise in Lisbon regarding the wisdom of condoning such crude methods of human exploitation in the colonies, in fact entrenched the 'siege mentality' and sense of victimhood of the nation's elites (Jerónimo, 2010). The notion that both Portugal's pioneering efforts as empire-builder and the 'special aptitude' of its settlers and officials to deal with 'lazy' and 'primitive' Africans were not recognized by jealous foreigners was voiced again and again by politicians and intellectuals across the political divide (even though some Republicans in the opposition were sensitive to the need of correcting the worse 'excesses' of the colonial situation). The fact that the 'slave cocoa' affair coincided with diplomatic leaks concerning an hypothetical carve-up of the Portuguese African empire between Britain and Germany in 1912-13 (actually, a remake of a previous negotiation which took place in 1898), only added to the sense of insecurity of the Portuguese ruling elites (Duffy, 1967 and Telo, 1993).

Even though the preservation of the colonies may not have been the key issue behind Portugal's decision to play an active part in the Western Front in 1916, it was nevertheless an important element in the debates sparked by the outbreak of the hostilities in Europe and Africa in 1914. The defense of the colonial patrimony was a rallying cry for the Republican leaders, notwithstanding differences in opinion regarding the sort of contribution that Portugal was prepared to make to the allied war effort. Again, a consensus can be said to have existed as to the centrality of the empire in the nation's collective consciousness and sense of purpose. Apart from some legislative innovations

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<sup>2</sup> For the impact of the scandal in Anglo-Portuguese relations, see Duffy, 1967 and Stone, 2009.

(such as the administrative reforms of 1914, which barely had any sort of impact due to their suspension shortly after the outbreak of the war), the Republicans chanted the familiar mantra of the empire as key to the nation's 'regeneration,' while keeping in place, for essentially pragmatic reasons, the pillars of the colonial system ('corporate feudalism,' compulsory labor, *indigénat* laws, land expropriation, tightening of the fiscal apparatus, and use of military force to crush mutinies and rebellions) (Wheeler, 2000). Portugal's military performance in the African theatres in 1914-18 may have left much to be desired according to all sorts of contemporary accounts and recent historical assessments (especially in Mozambique), but the military mobilization required by the war greatly contributed to the consolidation of Portugal's effective rule in the vast hinterlands of Angola and Mozambique – even if such consolidation was in many instances secured as a result of particularly brutal and pitiless tactics employed against African rebels (Pélissier, 2006 and Meneses, 2014).

### **At the Peace Conference**

The fact that Portugal ended the war on the winning side, even though at the cost of immense sacrifices, both human and material, brought a sense of relief to the members of the *parti colonial* in the metropole. The minutes of the Portuguese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 underline the salience of the colonial question in its agenda in the French capital, from the conversations with eminent foreign diplomats to the work undertaken by its delegates in various committees (Cruz, 2009). It was, however, a very bumpy ride for the politicians and diplomats invested with the mission of safeguarding Portugal's colonial assets, on account of the expectations created by some of Woodrow Wilson's pronouncements as well as cruder, old-fashioned power politics (Ferreira, 1992 and Oliveira, 2011).

If the initial instructions of the delegation, set forth in a meeting chaired by President Sidónio Pais in December 1918, stressed the need to be cautious (avoiding the impression of seeking territorial aggrandizements) and follow Britain's lead (Cruz, 2009: 99), the arrival in Paris in March 1919 of Afonso Costa, the former leader of the Democratic Party and chief architect of Portugal's involvement in the war, brought a sudden change of strategy (Meneses, 2010). Portugal would no longer be satisfied with simply maintaining its colonial frontiers and reclaiming the small enclave south of the Rovuma river in Mozambique (the so called Kionga Triangle), which Germany had

annexed in 1894. True to his headstrong style, Costa decided to raise the stakes and seek a League of Nations Mandate for Portugal in Africa, having his eyes set on one of Germany's colonial morsels in Central-Eastern Africa – present day Rwanda and Burundi. When his intentions became known, the reaction of several influential figures among British and American circles was far from encouraging (Louis, 2006: 243-244). Belgium, a small power with a recent past of outrageous mistreatment of its colonial subjects in the Congo, but nevertheless an economic powerhouse in Europe and a nation which could claim an 'honorable' contribution to Britain's military manoeuvre in East Africa, was awarded the Mandate. It was one of Costa's bitter disappointments at the Peace Conference – the other being the loss of one of the League of Nation's Council non-permanent seats to neutral Spain, a decision that elicited one of his most energetic – and one might almost add, pathetic – protests (Ferreira, 2015: 153).

Throughout the Conference, there were a number of signs that Portugal's fragilities could be exploited by other players seeking to increase their leverage vis-a-vis Lisbon. A telling episode was the pressure exerted by the British following reports from their diplomatic agents in Mozambique that detailed several atrocities tolerated, or perpetrated, by Portuguese authorities, including some episodes involving British subjects. The British representatives demanded a thorough inquiry into such allegations, as well as harsh measures to punish the responsible officials. To emphasize the potential seriousness of the case, they alluded to the revulsion of their domestic public if the facts were to become known, something that would likely lead to a demand for the intervention of an international court (Hespanha, 2010: 173).

The awareness that a new colonial paradigm might be taking shape was, evidently, related to the impact obtained by some of Wilson's pronouncements prior to the Conference, particularly the allusion to the "interests of the colonial peoples" contained in point five of his famous "Fourteen Points" speech of 18 January 1918.<sup>3</sup> Naïve as Wilson may have been perceived to be in some European circles, the fact remained that in the first half of 1919, the statesmen from the old continent were hardly in a position to challenge his ideas. Moreover, they were not able to anticipate the US Congress non-ratification of the Versailles Treaty and the resulting room for manoeuvring that they would be able to secure in the future League of Nations. Portugal was therefore attentive to the need to polish its 'civilizing' credentials in Africa and seize every opportunity to make its voice heard in Paris. One of those opportunities was the Pan-African Conference of February

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<sup>3</sup> For Wilson's views on empire and the post-war settlement, see Knock, 1992 and, especially, Manela, 2007.

1919, a forum that brought together Caribbean and African creole elites (prominent among these being the Senegalese Blaise Diagne, French Undersecretary for the Colonies), African-American activists and intellectuals, and European officials (Contee, 1972: 12-28). Originally planned as a meeting that would allow representatives from the segregated black minorities of America and colonial populations from Africa to take a stand against the harshest features of racism and imperialism, the conference seems to have been effectively neutralized by the intervention of the colonial powers' representatives. One of the speakers was a Portuguese official who would be assigned important positions in the League of Nations, Colonel Augusto Freire de Andrade, a former Mozambican governor and Foreign Affairs minister. Andrade delivered his address in a room in the Grand Hotel in Paris, sitting next to the president of the Congress, Diagne. The content of the speech – much appreciated by the audience, according to another Portuguese diplomat – was a classic apologia of Portugal's alleged 'universalist' imperial project: its Constitution made no discrimination between the metropole's inhabitants and the overseas territories' respective populations; all of them enjoyed the same political rights, Africans occupying seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic, having been elected "not only by their fellow Africans but also ... by European citizens." Andrade even went to the point of contradicting one of the key complaints made by the African creole elites since the late nineteenth-century (the downgrading of their social status due to segregationist measures issued by the metropole), when stating that Africans were commonly found in Portugal as "ministers, judges, professors, public servants and army officers," treated always without the slightest prejudice. The only distinction, Andrade conceded, was the one established by the "education, knowledge, work, and moral value of each individual."<sup>4</sup>

Since the tone of the final resolutions of the Pan-African gathering was a fairly moderate one, and the approach of the Peace Conference to all matters involving the rights of the colonial populations was a markedly paternalistic one, revolving around the imperial concept of 'tutelage', the Portuguese delegation had, for the time being at least, few reasons to perceive an immediate threat from the expectations raised by Wilson's remarks among the non-white populations of the globe.

More threatening to Portugal's imperial standing, however, were some of the ambitions and blueprints which circulated in the diplomatic corridors in Paris. Two types of challenges can be identified. One was spearheaded by figures affiliated with the British

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<sup>4</sup> Arquivo Histórico-Diplomático (Lisbon), 3º P., A 3, M. 626. Text of Freire de Andrade's speech at the Congrès Pan Africain Pour la Protection des Indigènes d'Afrique et des Peuples d'Origine Africaine, 19 February 1919.

humanitarian movement (H. N. Brailsford, S. Webb, L. Woolf, E. D. Morel, among others), or those espousing 'liberal-imperialist' views (J. A. Hobson), who had attained some influence in the War Cabinet headed by Lloyd George. It was they who, according to historian William Roger Louis, supplied the intellectual basis for the doctrine of 'international trusteeship' which threatened to disturb the imperial status quo: self-determination (although in a long-term perspective), a provisional supranational control, free-trade, and the primacy of the well-being of the native populations (Louis, 1967). One of the most articulated advocates of this overhaul of the colonial system, E. D. Morel, a key figure in the Congo Reform Association, had helped to set the parameters of the colonial debate in British liberal and radical circles with a tract entitled *Africa and the Peace of Europe* (1917). Morel argued that a future peace settlement should fulfil some of the neglected goals of the final Act of the Berlin Conference (1885): on the one hand, the 'neutralization' and safeguard of free-trade through 'open-door' regimes would give the Western powers unrestricted access to African resources and markets, thereby eliminating one of the causes of interimperial rivalry and violent competition; on the other hand, the recognition of the paramountcy of the well-being of the Africans should allow for the creation of a supranational authority that would act as the vehicle for the Western powers to perform their 'civilizing mission' among the continent's 'backward' peoples (Grant, 2005: 148-14). Morel's proposals would somehow be echoed in the book *Portugal: Old and Young* (1917), authored by George Young, a former member of the British embassy in Lisbon, in which the stability of the future international system was perceived as closely linked to the "neutralization of the national character of some of the colonies." Young put forward the idea of a major reorganization of Central Africa, preferably along federal lines. Portugal, as a decapitalized nation, should make its contribution to the creation of the aforementioned scheme and surrender its "imperial privileges," albeit with the guarantee of a relief from its crushing debt (Young, 1917: 331-332).

Having secured a representation in the committee that would prepare the draft of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Portuguese delegation was well placed to follow the evolution of the debates concerning the 'internationalization' of the African question. The entry of 31 January 1919 of the Portuguese delegation's Conference diary is a telling one. For the record, Freire de Andrade stated that Portugal should close ranks with Belgium in order to resist the "strange doctrines" of President Wilson, particularly his attempt to submit all the colonial possessions to "a special economic and natives affairs regime, under the supervision of the League of Nations." According to Andrade, the

consequences of such an outcome were ominous to a country like Portugal: “Put into practice, such doctrines would have as a result the loss of our colonies ... since they would leave us under circumstances which would make life impossible to us. For this reason, we cannot remain aloof in these discussions, we cannot but make our voice heard” (Cruz, 2009:28). These remarks went to the heart of Portugal’s predicament in the age of modern imperialism – a greater transparency and accountability of its colonial administration was perceived as deeply threatening to its imperial sovereignty, which rested upon methods and policies deemed as ‘archaic’ or ‘immoral’ in the light of the international norms which underpinned the performance of the colonial mandate. In an interview with Robert Cecil, his counterpart in the commission appointed to draft the League’s Covenant, diplomat Batalha Reis drew the ‘red line’ for Portugal in the reform of the international system. Although favorable to the League’s creation, Portugal could not condone a regime of “supervision that bypassed its [colonial] administration” (Cruz, 2009: 217). As in many other related issues, Portugal was lucky enough to find common ground with other European powers, equally fearful of the repercussions of a reform of the imperial status quo along the lines suggested by certain liberal and radical thinkers and experts. Acting jointly, the old imperial powers were able to check the wave of internationalism that had been sweeping the globe in the aftermath of the war by limiting the application of the ‘trusteeship doctrine’ to the German and Ottoman possessions, now converted to international mandates. Portugal may have not been a winner in the carve-up of the German and Ottoman empires in Versailles, but at least was able to prevent the destabilizing impact that would result from the triumph of the reforms envisaged by the liberal internationalist critics.

In fact, the most threatening move to its colonial interests was the one made by the Union of South Africa, created in 1910 as a Dominion of the British Crown, whose chief representative at the Peace Conference enjoyed immense prestige in Britain’s political scene, general Jan Christian Smuts. Among the ideologues of South Africa’s expansionism, many believed that the Zambezi, and not the Limpopo river, was the natural border of the Union’s eastern half, with Lourenço Marques (or Delagoa Bay) serving as the Transvaal’s best harbor, an ambition that became ever more pressing with the formidable mining development of the region.<sup>5</sup> With the political settlement of 1910, London’s opposition to the Afrikaner’s ambitions vis-à-vis southern Mozambique tended to become more diluted – and Smuts and other South African politicians were quick to recognize the potential

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<sup>5</sup> On this topic see Hyam, 1973.

dividends that could be reaped from a South African military intervention in German East Africa (Hyam, 1973: 29). In 1916, Pretoria informed London that a general recomposition of Central-Southern African should not limit itself to the spoils of the German empire, but also include Mozambique. Shortly after taking his seat in the Imperial War Cabinet in 1917, Smuts submitted to Lloyd George a secret memorandum laying out, in a rather candid manner, his views for the territorial adjustments to take place in the region. Under various pretexts (Portugal's poor administration, a 'revolutionary atmosphere' in Lourenço Marques, difficult access of the British Central African territories to the Indian Ocean), Smuts deemed as 'imperative' the liquidation of the 'Portuguese colonial situation,' something which he expected to resolve with Mozambique's incorporation into the Union. The Portuguese, he argued, could be financially compensated (and even territorially, "with small bits of Togo and Cameroon"), and they might even retain their suzerainty and a "separate flag;" but the effective administrative control of the province had to be transferred to Pretoria. Smuts' ambitions went further than Mozambique, though – his idealized territorial reconfiguration foreshadowed an aggrandizement of the Union that would include Southern Rhodesia, German's Southwest Africa, the Angolan plateaus up to Benguela, and the Katanga mining region (Katzellenbongen, 1982: 122-123). Even if some of these proposals were eventually dismissed in London as impolitic – they presupposed a sacrifice of one of Britain's allied territory – Smuts was nevertheless able to exercise significant influence throughout the Peace Conference. His views were supported by former British imperial pro-consuls, such as Earl Buxton, and even by Woodrow Wilson himself. Smut's pamphlet, *The League of Nations: a Practical Suggestion* (1918), which rapidly caught the President's attention, sought to create a pretext to place Portugal's territories under international supervision, followed by a South African intervention. Both Louis Botha, the other key South African figure in Paris, and Smuts considered that the negotiation of the peace settlement was, most likely, the best occasion that South Africa had ever had to annex Delagoa Bay, and they did not miss an opportunity to enter into conversations with the Portuguese to see if such a goal might be negotiable bilaterally (Hyam, 1973: 32). Such a scenario was, needless to say, a taboo for the Portuguese, who were equally pressed by Lord Alfred Milner, Britain's Colonial Secretary and the man who had helped to bring about the reconciliation between his country and the Boers in South Africa. In a conversation with Afonso Costa in March 21 1919, Milner practically made himself the spokesman of the Union's ambitions when he advised Portugal to "come to terms directly with South Africa" in all matters concerning the common usage of ports and

railways, while adding that the best solution for Mozambique would be an association with the Union as one of its “dominions” (Ferreira, 1992: 30-32). Costa understood the seriousness of these suggestions and was quick to grasp what was at stake. He therefore argued that Portugal would be willing to step up the development of Mozambique, even if this might require a major overhaul of its colonial administration (and, ideally, he added, with Britain’s financial assistance). The diplomatic records show the determination with which Costa pressed this subject to Lisbon, urging the Foreign Ministry to prepare a speedy approval of a new regime of High Commissioners to Angola and Mozambique (Cruz, 2009: 267 and Meneses, 2010: 96-97). Even if the appointment of two of his trusted colonial pro-consuls (Álvaro de Castro and Norton de Matos) was only partially fulfilled, with the latter becoming the High Commissioner in Angola in 1921, Costa’s reaction was swift and, eventually, an important factor in frustrating Pretoria’s ambitions vis-à-vis Portuguese territory in Mozambique south of the Zambezi.

Portugal’s accomplishments in the Peace Conference were, therefore, of an essentially negative nature: lacking prestige, bullied by allies, its territories coveted by greater powers, the Portuguese delegation was at least able to hold its colonial assets and close ranks with other like-minded imperial powers who felt uncomfortable with the demands for change unleashed by Wilson’s high-minded rhetoric. All things considered, it was possibly the best outcome to which they could aspire.

### **Lending a Hand: Pan-African Activists in Portugal and the Colonial Establishment**

With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see how some of the aspirations of the ‘subject races’ were easily neutralized by the ruthless action of the imperial powers and the withdrawal of the United States – the Wilsonian Moment was indeed a very short-lived experience. In the case of the Portuguese empire, one might say that it was in the 1920s and early 1930s that the illusions of those who claimed to speak on behalf of the colonial underdogs came to an end. This was a process that had started to unravel some time before the Great War, since the First Republic’s inception in 1910. From Cape Verde to Mozambique, associations of members made up of the creole elites of the five African territories sprung up in Lisbon and in several African cities.<sup>6</sup> In their newspapers, pamphlets, and manifestos they tried to articulate their demands and somehow change the

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<sup>6</sup> See the survey by Andrade, 1997. For the nativist elites in São Tomé at the time of the Republic (1910-1926), see Nascimento, 2005; for Guinea-Bissau see Sousa, 2012; for Angola see Rodrigues, 2005 and Wheeler and Pélissier, 1972 and Wheeler, 2007; and for Mozambique see Rocha, 2006.

terms of the colonial relationship. They have sometimes been identified either as the forerunners of local nationalisms or as 'proto-nationalists', but some caution is in order when one tries to assess the link between their grievances and aspirations and the nationalist protest of the second half of the twentieth century.

In most of the cases, the core constituency of these groups was an intermediary class of creole or 'assimilated' Africans who had a long past of collaboration with the Portuguese, something that is important to recognize in order to make sense of the ambivalence of their attitudes and trajectories. Those from São Tomé and Angola, for instance, came from families who, until the mid to late nineteenth century, either held a prominent socio-economic position as land owners and traders, or occupied intermediary positions in the local bureaucracies, the armed forces, or the ecclesiastical apparatus. In other places, the situation was more nuanced. In Guinea-Bissau, a colony which the Portuguese were only able to 'pacify' between c. 1912-c.1915, the equivalent elite was actually tiny. In Cape Verde, the best lands were monopolized by the Church or by white landowners, but the local creoles constituted a significant strata of clerks, bureaucrats, 'men of letters,' and professionals. In Mozambique, the establishment of the large chartered or concession companies after 1890 brought with it a process of dispossession of land from the Africans, but in expanding cities like Lourenço Marques there was a group of educated natives who managed to secure some intermediate positions in the local government apparatus and in certain economic sectors (ports and railways).

In the final years of the Monarchy, these groups experienced a growing sense of alienation towards some of the key features of Portugal's imperial project: the attempts to reserve the intermediary bureaucratic positions to whites from the metropole; the enactment of *indigénat* norms, and the intensification of compulsory labor schemes; land expropriations and the tightening of the tax system; plans of urban 'hygiene' and renewal which resulted in the segregation of Africans; and a general complaint about a metropole that seemed focused only on the exploitative character of the imperial enterprise, thereby neglecting the 'civilizing' and 'humanitarian' component of its mission. Their resentment, therefore, was already transcending the narrow boundaries of their class interests and they were claiming a legitimacy to speak on behalf of their 'race brothers', echoing some of the claims put forward by figures from the Pan-African movement. Most of them, though, still presented themselves as genuine Portuguese 'patriots'. They appealed to an idealized notion of Portugal's liberal-humanitarian traditions (the name of Sá da Bandeira was sometimes invoked), and placed their best hopes in the reforms promised by the Republic.

In the first years of the new regime they were quite active; the year 1912 witnessed the creation of the Junta da Defesa dos Direitos de África (JDDA), a federation of the main groupings from Portuguese Africa, dominated by an elite of relatively affluent assimilated natives from São Tomé and Cape Verde. Its founding charter stated as its main goal the attainment of 'an autonomy regime for the colonies, based on the premise that modern colonization should fundamentally consist of the exercise of a humanitarian and civilizing action, the purpose of which is the education of the colonies for its own self-government'.<sup>7</sup> The Junta was energetic in its demands for the abolishment of the 'exception laws' that brought discrimination against the Africans,<sup>8</sup> and expressed its solidarity with the Africans persecuted by authoritarian governors like Teixeira Pinto in Guinea and Norton de Matos in Angola. Overall, though, the Junta's spokesmen espoused a moderate discourse: the improvement of the African race was to be achieved through education, which was perceived as key to the acquisition of the skills required by a modern economy, and, afterwards, for the enjoyment of full civic rights. This very gradual reform agenda, though, did not find many supporters in the midst of the Republican establishment. Some Republican figures may have paid lip service to a vaguely humanitarian rhetoric regarding the plight of the Africans, but their on the ground legislation and decisions were defined by a fundamental continuity in relation to policies pursued by the Monarchy or theorized by some of its colonial ideologues – in no other field was this more evident than that of the 'native policies' and the labour legislation.<sup>9</sup>

While some of the organizations led by 'assimilated' natives in the African colonies were harshly persecuted by the local authorities (this was particularly the case in Angola, where Norton de Matos imprisoned and deported several assimilated journalists and outlawed the Liga Angolana, the main nativist association which had emerged after 1910) (Wheeler and Péliissier, 1972: 120-128), in the metropole their counterparts were able to carry on their activities. In 1919, there was a schism in the JDDA with the establishment of two splinter groups – the Liga Africana (1919), closer to the gradualist approach favoured by Diagne and Du Bois, and the Partido Nacional Africano [PNA], which proclaimed its affinity with the more militant line associated with the Jamaican Marcus Garvey (Andrade,

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<sup>7</sup> See the Junta's *Estatutos* (Lisboa Typographia Colonial: 1912). On the JDDA and the nativist associations in the metropole see Andrade, 1997 and also Santos, 1968 and Oliveira, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance their vigorous protest against the project for a new labour code (which would result in the General Regulation for the Native Labour in the Portuguese Colonies of 4 October 1914), JDDA (1914), *A Lei do Garrote*. Lisbon: Typografia Industrial Portuguesa.

<sup>9</sup> On the Republican regime and the colonies, see, among others, the edited volume by Sardica, 2010 and Meneses, 2014.

1997). Most likely, they were tolerated by the Portuguese government for two reasons: either they were perceived as inoffensive; or they were seen as potentially useful pawns in Portugal's public relations operations abroad.

The Liga's participation in the Pan African Congresses, which the Du Bois 'tendency' helped to organize in 1921 and 1923 in several European capitals (London, Paris and Brussels),<sup>10</sup> provides a clear illustration of this. In September 1921, José Magalhães and Nicolau Pinto dos Santos, leading figures of the Liga Africana (the former an Angolan physician and professor at the School of Tropical Medicine in Lisbon; the latter a rich mulatto landowner from São Tomé), took part in the Paris and Brussels sessions of the Pan African Congress, a gathering where the influence of the colonial interests was again quite evident (the social program, for instance, included a visit to the Tervuren Museum for Central Africa, in the outskirts of Brussels, the showcase of Belgium imperialism). Magalhães' and Pinto's interventions probably had a greater effect than anything that might have been said by a Portuguese official – and the possibility that this might have been arranged between them and the Portuguese Foreign Affairs or Colonial Ministries cannot be ruled out. Addressing the second session of Congress at the Palais Mondial in Brussels, Pinto 'protested against the mischievously spread opinion that slavery still existed in the Portuguese colonies'. 'That,' he claimed, 'was completely false'<sup>11</sup>. His colleague Magalhães made an appeal for a policy of 'conciliation' in colonial Africa and argued that it was in the best interest of the colonial powers to have 'self-reliant and educated Africans' in places that were unfit for a massive colonization of white settlers.<sup>12</sup>

Unsurprisingly, such statements were denounced as a 'glorification' of Portuguese colonialism by the anarchist newspaper *A Batalha*, sympathetic to the views of the PNA, which added that the likes of Diagne and the Liga Africana were only representative of "the aspirations of some hundreds of mulattos", not of the African masses.<sup>13</sup> Be that as it may, the fact was that Magalhães and the Liga were able to position themselves as the interlocutors of the respected Du Bois when the idea of organizing a special session of the third Pan-African Congress in Portugal took shape in 1923. The reasons for the staging of such a session in Lisbon are not entirely clear, but they were most likely related to the

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<sup>10</sup> For the Pan Africanist initiatives (and schisms) in the first half of the twentieth-century, see Thompson, 1971: 23-63.

<sup>11</sup> *Correio de África*, 22 September 1921.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> See *A Batalha*, 4 October 1921. Comments on the Pan African Congress of 1921 can also be found in several issues of late September and early October of the same newspaper. On *A Batalha's* dissenting comments on colonial affairs, see Castro and Garcia, 1995.

persistence of evidence which attested to the practice of compulsory labor in some of Portugal's colonies (for both public and private purposes), or, possibly, the persecutions that Norton de Matos was carrying out against the nativist associations in Angola. Some of these matters had been recently addressed by Kamba Simango, an American-educated Mozambican pastor, working for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, in the London sessions of the Pan-African Congress. Du Bois's initial plans, however, met with the opposition of the Liga's leaders, who invoked 'logistical' reasons for the postponement of the meeting (Andrade, 1997: 174-175).

A compromise solution was then found: the African-American scholar would come to Lisbon and deliver a public conference. Du Bois' address took place on 1 December 1923 (Portugal's national holiday that marks the restoration of its independence from Spain in 1640), at the Liga Africana headquarters in Lisbon. Portugal's press paid little or no attention to the event.<sup>14</sup> The most complete account comes from Du Bois himself, who describes a session attended by "mostly black men, students, well-dressed and courteous in manner" from Portugal's eight colonies, but also by "black physicians, lawyers, engineers, merchants." Among other guest speakers were people like Vicente Ferreira, the Portuguese Minister for Colonies, and Vieira da Rocha, who had twice held that same position (Du Bois, 1924: 170).<sup>15</sup> Du Bois was clearly flattered by the attention he received from his Portuguese guests and in a strikingly uncritical tone went on to praise the remarkable racial 'inclusiveness' of the Portuguese empire. Writing in the recently launched journal *Foreign Affairs*, Du Bois admitted that it was unlikely to "find a black man married to a Portuguese of family and wealth, but on the other hand it seemed quite natural for Portugal to make all the blacks of her African empire citizens of Portugal with the rights of the European born". (Du Bois, [1925]). Perhaps even more significant were his extremely flattering remarks on the situation in São Tomé and Príncipe, where the 'slave cocoa' scandal of the early years of the century had, allegedly, allowed for the rise of a new class of African cultivators, willing to endure slimmer margins of profit:

Thus in this part of Portuguese Africa the worst aspects of slavery melted away and colonial proprietors with smaller holdings could afford to

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<sup>14</sup> The event was not reported by either *Diário de Notícias* or *O Século*, two leading newspapers of the time.

<sup>15</sup> For the context of Du Bois' trip to Lisbon, see Lewis, 2000: 110-117, as well as the recollection of Du Bois' talk by the Santomense Manuel Graça Dias in *A Mocidade Africana*, 1 January 1931, quoted in Oliveira, 1998: 360-361. According to Graça, Du Bois urged the Africans present to follow a 'a quiet policy, in which collaboration with the whites should be a paramount feature' ['uma política calma, na qual a colaboração com o branco seja um elemento principal'].

compete with the great planters; wherefore democracy, both industrially and politically, took new life in black Portugal. Intelligent black deputies appeared in the Portuguese parliaments, a hundred black students studied in the Portuguese universities and a new colonial code made black men citizens of Portugal with full rights. (Du Bois, [1925]).

Du Bois's observations, of course, could not be more distant from the crude social and racial realities of Portuguese Africa in that specific moment, notwithstanding the existence of a thin layer of relatively well-off, literate natives who felt that an improvement of the colonial injustices might be accomplished through a dialogue with the imperial establishment.

Some of them may have sensed that a fragile and beleaguered Republican regime would appreciate the advantage of working with their organizations – more specifically, they could be mobilized to act as advocates of Portugal's imperial project in the European arenas where matters pertaining to colonial administration were being discussed, and not always in positive terms in relation to a country like Portugal. This was the case of Geneva, the headquarters of the League of Nations (and its sister organization, the ILO), where questions involving the persistence of forms of compulsory labour once more invited a critical scrutiny of Portugal's colonial reputation. Even though on a less grandiose scale than was initially hoped, the 1920s were an epoch of economic expansion in tropical Africa, with colonial governments committed to large infrastructure projects that would serve the needs of private investments in the agricultural and mining sectors (Maul, 2007: 479). Portuguese Angola became one of the best examples of this short-lived colonial boom: the Benguela Railway project, originally planned to serve the mining regions of Katanga and Northern Rhodesia, was completed in 1927; some years before, in 1921, a multinational mining consortium (Diamang) was invited to explore the diamond reserves of the Lunda region, in the Northeast of Angola; and the High Commissioner Norton de Matos (1921-24) pressed ahead with a grandiose plan of infrastructural modernization across the colony, which ran parallel with an expansion of the number of Portuguese white settlers, hungry for the best agricultural lands. This new scenario was hardly congenial for the black African peasants, who in many instances were deprived of their lands, burdened with taxes, and forcibly enrolled into public works schemes (Wheeler, 2000).

As might have been expected, Portugal followed with some anxiety the emergence of what Daniel R. Maul has called “a European/North-America dominated ‘international

colonial issue network”, rooted in the anti-slavery humanitarian tradition, and drawing support from a wide range of actors – “philanthropic and academic associations to individual members of parliament, ministerial bureaucrats in the colonial metropolises, isolated local colonial civil servants and representatives of Christian missions” (Maul, 2007: 480). It was from this milieu that in 1925 a new *cause célèbre* involving Portugal’s administration broke out. This was, of course, the impact made by a report produced by an American sociologist from Wisconsin University, Edward Alsworth Ross, which detailed the extremely harsh methods of labor recruitment in the colonies of Angola and Mozambique (Ross, 1925). Supported by evidence obtained from first-hand observation, the Ross Report was appreciated by the Temporary Slavery Commission, appointed by the League’s Council in 1924, and enjoyed a wide international circulation.<sup>16</sup> These sorts of initiatives, though, were perceived by the Portuguese imperial establishment as a kind of smokescreen for unaltruistic interests, which were willing to use all kinds of expedients to discredit Portugal’s colonial oeuvre before the international public opinion.<sup>17</sup> Portugal’s strategy in the mid-1920s, though, was not one of pure obstruction of the critical inquiries concerning the social conditions in its African territories. For domestic consumption, some of its spokesmen were quick to denounce the ‘jealousy’ and veiled ambitions of unnamed external powers vis-à-vis Angola, Mozambique, and their ‘splendid’ ports (Andrade, 1925). Nevertheless, until the end of the decade, Portuguese policy seems to have involved a measure of appeasement; that is, the introduction of a number of cosmetic changes that would accommodate the accepted international standards in matters related to the recruitment and employment of native laborers.

Portugal’s reaction to the process leading up to the adoption of the Anti-Slavery Convention (25 September 1926) is a good illustration of this. A result of the lobbying efforts carried out by well-connected British humanitarians, such as John Harris, from the Anti-Slavery Society, the Convention took some three years to organize and, in several stages of the process, faced the opposition of several European powers (Miers, 2003, Chap. 8 and 9). Enjoying a permanent seat in the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC), the organ which appointed the members of the Temporary Slavery Commission, Portugal was able to secure an active voice throughout the whole process of the drafting of the Convention – Freire de Andrade, who acted as the Commission’s vice-chairman and found a trusted ally in Chairman Albrecht Gohr, the Belgian representative. They both worked effectively to circumscribe the

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<sup>16</sup> See Miers, 2003: 123 and Jerónimo, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> See Alexandre, 1993 and Jerónimo and Monteiro, 2012.

input of non-state actors in the gathering of information – for instance, petitions could only be addressed through national governments, who were apt to reject them – (Grant, 2005: 163) and made sure that the imperial policies of member states would not be under discussion. The result of this activism from the representatives of the colonial establishments was a paradoxical, almost perverse one – by laying down the specific conditions under which forced labor could be mobilized for public purposes (article 5), the Convention ended up, as Kevin Grant has observed, legitimizing “the continued coercion of labor by the imperial state” (Grant, 2005:165)<sup>18</sup> Slavery and coercion were defined in appropriately narrow terms and not a word on indigenous land rights was said. Africans were thus left in a position in which they would only be able to fulfil their tax obligations by joining the colonial labor market. Portugal would ratify the Convention on 26 August 1927, some months after the breakdown of its parliamentary regime. Even though a more assertive and chauvinistic stance prevailed in Lisbon since the advent of a military dictatorship on 28 May 1926, the new authorities believed in the advantages of enacting legislation that appeared to comply with the new international norms regarding the conditions of the native populations – thus, the new Labor Code for the Natives of the Portuguese African Colonies was promulgated on 6 December 1928, followed by the Political, Civil and Criminal Statute of the Natives on 6 February 1929 (Ferreira, 2015: 163-173).

With the support of the British Labor government, the humanitarian lobby was able to keep the issue of forced labor on the top of the international agenda, its efforts resulting in the drafting of a new convention on that very same issue (Miers, 2003, chapt. 10). Predictably, a strong opposition to a distinction between forced labor for public ends and private interests emerged from countries like France, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, and South Africa. The final version obliged the signatories to abolish forced labor “in all its forms,” allowing only for “transitional periods” in schemes involving “public purposes” (Maul, 2007: 481-483). In the debates that took place in Geneva, familiar figures from the Pan African movement again attempted to legitimize the opposition put forward by those governments. Blaise Diagne, advisor to the French delegation at the ILO Conference of 1929, endorsed the employment of coercive measures to bring Africans to work in the name of France’s “civilizing mission” (Maul, 2007: 481-483).<sup>19</sup> In Portugal, even though the political atmosphere had become less congenial to the expression of nativist opinions after

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<sup>18</sup> And, as Suzanne Miers has remarked, ‘no mechanisms were established for enforcement or even for monitoring its results.’ Miers, 2003:130.

<sup>19</sup> On the meaning of Diagne’s alignment with French imperial propaganda (along lines very similar to the ones which motivated the endorsement of Portuguese policies by members of its nativist intelligentsia), see Atlan and Jézéquel, 2002: 102-106.

the downfall of the Republic, the PNA had been able to stage a sort of a comeback in 1927, relaunching its newspaper *Voz de África*. It may have been the case that the prestige enjoyed by the League in that decade provided a stimulus for this resurgence of the nativist movement in the metropole – some of its newspapers expressed the hope that a thorough reform of the international organization might enhance its profile, allowing it to accommodate the representation of “all the world’s races”.<sup>20</sup>

Their leaders also made appeals to a reorganization of the Portuguese state (to ensure “the adequate representation of the important material and moral interests of the African peoples”) and were bold – or naïve – enough to put forward a proposal, a month after the promulgation of Salazar’s highly centralizing Colonial Act (July 1930), for a constitutional scheme that contemplated a separate jurisdiction “for each of Portugal’s peoples,” and their federal association and confederate link with Portugal.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, though, they were also eager to ingratiate themselves with the dictatorship. The way they found to show their usefulness was to lend the new rulers a hand in refuting some of the charges brought against Portugal’s African labor policies – this seems to have happened by the time of the ILO Conference of May 1929 (Andrade, 1997). Mário Domingues, a mulatto journalist who had established his credentials as a fearsome critic of the colonial project in a series of articles for *A Batalha* in the early 1920s (Garcia, 2012), wrote to the Minister for Colonies in that year to offer his services as an independent journalist of African origin who, for that reason, could provide Portugal with additional credibility when endorsing its positions in Geneva (Jerónimo, 2010: 261-262). In November 1930, Domingues’s party, the PNA, was still addressing the government headed by Domingos Oliveira to solicit an official backing to an international Congress of the Negro Race to be held in Lisbon in the following year. Such an event, they argued, would demonstrate to an international audience the complete absence or racial prejudices of the Portuguese people and its willingness to recognize the Africans’ useful cooperation in the “general work of civilization,” while also allowing the PNA members, in their conversations with representatives from other black nations, “to dissipate the malevolent canards that have been circulating abroad with the purpose of exciting the conscience of the world against the civilizing work of Portugal in Africa.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Voz de África*, 1 December 1927.

<sup>21</sup> *Voz de África*, 8 August 1930.

<sup>22</sup> AHD, 3º P, A 12, M 280 – Congresso Pan-Africano (Raça Negra). Copy of a letter from the Secretary General of the PNA to the Minister of the Colonies, 20 October 1930.

However, while in previous years the Portuguese authorities may have acknowledged some utility in such offerings, the zeitgeist of the early 1930s had changed quite significantly. Portugal's willingness to play an active role in the international stage, and particularly in Geneva, was now replaced by a more autarchic and chauvinistic outlook, sometimes verging on the paranoid whenever there was a suspicion of bolshevist inspiration or involvement (as was the case with the initiative of the International Negro Congress). Social Darwinism, sometimes tinged by unashamed racism, was about to become the dominant strand in the official mindset of the regime that emerged from the Military Dictatorship.<sup>23</sup> In the context of the 1930s, the high tide of the New State's imperial 'mystique,' there was very little tolerance for the assertion of a Pan Africanist identity, or even for the expression of creole autonomist aspirations within Portuguese imperial formation.

## Conclusion

Portugal displayed reserve and suspicion towards some of the features of the international setting that emerged after the Great War, particularly the agency of international actors that tried to take advantage of the possibilities opened up by the League of Nations to promote changes to the imperial status quo.<sup>24</sup> For various historical reasons, Portugal was never home to a humanitarian movement resembling the one that emerged in Britain and other European nations since the early nineteenth century, triggered by the outrage against slavery, the slave trade, and all kinds of abuses committed in the colonial territories acquired during the 'scramble.'<sup>25</sup> An uncompromising nationalist approach to the empire was widely shared in Portugal since the mid to late nineteenth century, with few individuals and organizations questioning the myths of Portugal's imperial benevolence. Such a consensus rested upon certain assumptions, such as Portugal's 'exceptional' vocation to colonize and civilize overseas territories, as well as its singular aptitude to 'assimilate,' in a gradual way, the native populations which fell under its authority. Part and parcel of this mindset was also the notion that Portugal's pioneer efforts at empire building were the cause of jealousy among other nations, who were constantly waiting for an opportunity to seize a portion of its overseas assets. They were usually prone

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<sup>23</sup> For the imperial 'mystique' of the 1930s, see Léonard, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> On this topic, and the role played by several Portuguese officials (Freire de Andrade and Penha Garcia) in the PMC in Geneva, see Pedersen, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> See Marques, 2006.

to use 'humanitarian' or 'philanthropic' pretexts to claim Portugal's inability to pursue its colonial mission, and, according to this view, the pressure for 'internationalizing' colonial issues was but a smoke screen designed to conceal those predatory attitudes. Hence, until the early 1930s, Portugal's policies in Geneva followed a very precise script: its representatives should remain vigilant and take steps to thwart each initiative that threatened to infringe upon Portugal's colonial sovereignty or enhance the oversight of any international body vis-à-vis its internal colonial affairs, particularly those which lent themselves to a more 'moralizing' reproach – the compulsory work schemes and some illicit traffics, like the opium trade in Macau (Oliveira, 2011).

With the advent of an authoritarian, quasi-fascist regime in the early 1930s, Portugal would take an even more defensive line in Geneva, accompanied by a reversal of the decentralizing tendencies of its colonial administration (the High Commissioners' regime was cancelled in 1930) and an assertion of a deeply ethnocentric 'imperial mystique.' By then, international colonial exhibitions, like the one which took place in Vincennes, Paris (1931), seemed to attract much more attention from its decision makers than most of the meetings and debates held in Geneva.

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