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COLONIAL WAR MEMORIES: SECRET ALLIANCES AND IMAGINED

MAPS

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Abstract

This paper presents preliminary results of a project about the Alcora Exercise. Established between Portugal, South Africa and Rhodesia in 1970, it aimed to fight African nationalist movements and preserve the white sovereignty in Southern Africa. Colonial War was a founding moment of the sociopolitical reality of present day Portugal, and was crucial to independencies of its former African colonies. A thorough understanding of Portuguese Colonial War gains relevance in the construction of national memories in all countries involved. Exploring these lines, Colonial War will be seen as part of a regional conflict – fight against black independencies in Southern Africa –, and as part of a global one – what some consider having been a Cold War subsystem in Southern Africa.

Keywords: Alcora, Southern Africa, Colonial/Liberation Wars

Introduction

This paper intends to be a brief report about the on-going research project *Secret alliances and imagined maps: Portuguese colonial war in the Southern Africa Chessboard*, of the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra.

As the title expresses, our main purpose is to try to untangle the complex mosaic of the Portuguese Colonial War, as part of a more complex regional reality in Southern Africa. The intention here is not to provide answers, but to address the right questions and, through it, challenge the official history around, on the one hand, Portuguese Colonial War, and on the other hand the African Independence Wars – mainly in Angola and Mozambique –, as having been influenced in its tensions and struggle by the complex reality of the Southern African geopolitical context.

This research project was born out of the discovery, in the Military History Archives, of secret files concerning a so-called *Alcora Exercise* – a code name for a military alliance in which Portugal had as partners the apartheid's South Africa and a racist Southern Rhodesia.

Portugal between NATO and UN

In 1884, at the Berlin Conference, the European powers divided Africa. Driven by economic and political interests, Portugal proposed free a transit between its two colonies, Angola and Mozambique, thus connecting them. This vision of a greater Portuguese Empire was to remain in history as the *Pink Map*. That proposal was in disagreement with Britain's dream of a "Cape to Cairo Red Line", and along with the British Ultimatum of 1890 led to the instauration of the Portuguese Republic, two decades after, in 1910.

Years later, the competition for power in Africa, permeated by two World Wars, announced a new *tour de force* between the USA and USSR blocs, with marginal interests from UK and China. These new rivalries found a shaken Portuguese Empire, struggling to avoid the newly formed United Nations¹ agenda.

Founded by the WWII winners, USA, USSR, China and UK – to whom other 51 new states joined along the way –, the UN purpose was to discuss the post-war context and the decolonization processes.

In 1949, with the birth of a new alliance – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization² –, the North American interests become established in Europe. This was a military coalition between the European States and the USA, which resulted in a mutual military assistance, and was classified by Salazar as the “US policy foundation against the soviet expansionism” (1961, p.6). The USSR response came in 1955, through the Warsaw Treaty – the military face of the COMECON, a Council for Mutual Economic Assistance for the Eastern Bloc States.

In this context, and after Stalin’s death – on December 14th 1955 –, Portugal was also invited, along with 16 other states, to become a UN member; a participant in a declared forum against colonialism. But Portugal’s candidature was contested both from outside as from within. Due to the Cold War conflict, several European countries were initially urged to join the UN, mostly because of the opposition manifest by the USSR. On the other hand, internally, in 1946 Salazar made an official statement regarding the validity of Portugal’s decision of joining the UN. Using a pretty critical tone he observes that the coalition’s general orientation was not so well defined, being trapped between power games instead of adopting the “idea of peace” (1946, p.3). Salazar continued by questioning, in particular, the Security Council’s position regarding

¹ Hereafter UN.

² Hereafter NATO.

the USSR abuse of the veto in order to silence its opponents and, broadly, the entrance evaluation criterions for an organization that intended to present itself as universal. He then decided towards a neutral position – difficult to preserve from within – when Portugal was invited to respond to Chapter XI, Article 73, of the UN Chart, regarding territories without self-rule. The UN members, having or assuming responsibilities for the administration of territories under the rule of a colonial power, recognized the interests of the inhabitants as prevailing and frequently had to report to the Secretary-General any kind of statistical, technical, economic, social or educational information required within the territories where the Chart applied. The Portuguese response was negative because, technically, Portugal did not have colonies, but ultramarine provinces – a part of the Portuguese State as expressed in the political Constitution.

On December 14th, 1960, the UN passed the resolution 1514 (XV), named “Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples”, and considered to be fully applicable to the Portuguese territories in Africa. On the next day, December 15th, the UN General Assembly votes a new resolution (1542, XV) reminding Portugal of the compulsive character of Article 73. The resolution was approved by 68 votes. Six countries, such as Spain, South Africa, France and Brazil, voted against and, 17 more abstained. Once again, on December 19th of that same year, Portugal’s non-compliance was then condemned in a plenary meeting. The member States were requested under the points 7 and 8, respectively, “(...) to use their influence to secure the compliance of Portugal with its obligations under the Charter”, and “(...) to deny Portugal any support and assistance which it may use for the suppression of the peoples of its Non-Self-Governing Territories” (1961, p. 38).

Salazar justified the position of Portugal resorting to the problematic international context where the “indiscriminate terrorism” determined the Portuguese peoples, black or white, not to

abandon “their land” (1961, p.8) and continued saying that it was “the Portuguese colonial toil” (1961, p.15). In his perspective “the self-determination [is the] great principle of political chaos in human societies” (1961, p.8). Therefore, he argues that colonization as “human mission” should be well distinguished from colonialism as the enterprise of economic development, to be put aside if proven unsuccessful (1961, p.14). He further argued that “terrorism”, as part of the circumstances imposed by an outside context, had to be quelled, a task only possible with help from the outside, because Portugal (colonies included), did not know discrimination, being “imbued with the spirit of friendly, peaceful, coexistence” (1961, p.18). Finally, he justified his position for the defence of the national territory, and argued in favour of a fight against back terrorism, as imposed by all blacks, whites and *mestizos*, which by their martyrdom further “authenticate that Angola is a land of Portugal” (1961, p.23).

Portugal had constantly to deal with the lack of obvious support from the US, which tried to maintain its neutrality but on several occasions voted against Portugal’s intents. This happened, for instance, in June 1961 in the Security Council, when the US, along with eight other states, voted the resolution concerning the study of the situation in Angola. The pledge recommended that all the necessary steps should be taken for a power transfer to the inhabitants, granting them complete independence.

That motion had already been rejected twice in 1960, having the US at the time voted against it. In a speech from 1961 concerning the UN and the Portuguese overseas territories, Salazar pointed the finger to the US due to the backing of the Afro-Asian group “(...) with the avowed purpose of gathering votes on resolutions that interested America against Russia” (1961, p.5). He considers that “(...) the United States are doing in Africa, albeit with different intentions, a policy parallel of Russia’s” (1961, p.7). He added that that contravened NATO’s

principles and undermined the human, strategic and economic resources available for the defence of Europe and Africa.

Already before the end of WW2, in 1944, Salazar mentioned the importance of partnerships within the “international society”, along with economic and financial strength, the value of armed forces and the spirit of all citizens as basis for the Nation as a political reality. Apparently well aware of the new geopolitical configurations, and not that “proudly alone” after all, Salazar tried to reinforce the idea of a Portuguese nation from “Minho to Timor” united in solidarity by the same values and spirit (1951, p.58). This could appear as a timid integration project in the international community – by re-appropriating the idea of the “Nation” –, an empire now nationalized through the 1930 *Acto Colonial* (Colonial Act) – a primarily symbolic union, it intended to mislead the international attention. The Colonial Act was later on integrated in the 1933 Portuguese Constitution, which came to settle the geopolitical space for the multiracial and pluri-continental Portuguese nation, integrating the former colonies, by then called Portuguese overseas territories or provinces.³ The new “winds of change” had taken Portugal to the map of Atlantic and European alliances, but with a clear distinction regarding its territorial and internal affairs, that should remain untouched in *Estado Novo*.

This being said, at the time of acceptance as an UN member, Portugal was – since 1949 – one of the members of the North Atlantic Treaty, invited in the second round of admissions due to the strategic position in the region and the USA’s direct interest for the Azores, a military base in the middle of the North Atlantic since the WW1.

In a speech held in front of the National Assembly, right after Portugal signed the Pact, Salazar underlines the importance of the Treaty in the framework of the new European policies;

³ See Rosas 1995, 2001.

England continued to be seen as the long run ally, and the USA, after two devastating wars have taken place in Europe, had gained importance for the defence of the North Atlantic and therefore an alliance with it would be in Portugal's best interests. The common enemy was identified as being the East, challenging peace and western values, and motivating a strategic move for Portugal. This reveals *Estado Novo's* constant concerns with the "communist danger", used as an argument for the discussions around the *Alcora Alliance*. Another manifest central point was the importance of the strategic unity of the Iberian Peninsula, and the inclusion of Spain in the Treaty. This had been already intensely discussed in the negotiations held before the official signature of the Treaty, and was a foregone conclusion for the other members.⁴

Furthermore, Salazar continued the 19th century Luso-tropical⁵ discourse, of a Portuguese colonizer that respected and happily lived – and lives still – in a non-racist, multicultural environment along with the colonized populations (1949, p.14). It culminates by presenting his romantic and, at the same time nostalgic, idea of a "glorious Europe", as "cultural and moral heritage", and pathetically asks if this would not be the "*finis Europae*" (1949, p.15). This justified the approximation of European needs for salvation with the USA's new capabilities for confronting an "enemy" menacing the Occidental Europe. Europe's only option, he added, would be to choose between the United States and Russia (1949, p.16); and apparently European countries made their choice when the *Marshal Plan* was signed. At a public speech given at Harvard University in 1947, the Secretary of State George Marshall spoke about the program of global and systematic help for the recovery of Europe, known also as the European Recovery

⁴ At this time intense discussions were held between the Portuguese and Spanish governments regarding this unfair option made by Portugal. Spain invokes the Iberian Pact and its additional protocol signed in 1939, that was guaranteeing a common effort in maintaining the security and neutrality of the peninsula.

⁵ The luso-tropical theory was thought and developed by the Brazilian sociologist Gylberto Freyre, and used to justify the supposed brotherly ties between the Portuguese colonizer and the colonized, leading to the idea of the Portuguese colonialism as an expression of "portugality in the tropics", building a "luso-tropical civilization".

Program (ERP). The declared purpose was to help European recovery, regardless of political affiliations. But given the USSR denial in signing the plan, a clear delimitation rose between the American and Soviet blocs. The Plan, functional for four years, was signed by 16 countries, among which Portugal. The political-ideological fracture in Europe was then deepened by an economic one. This was what lied at the birth of Cold War, enlarging the conflict from an European matter to a Worldwide problem. In that context, Salazar concluded his pro American speech underling the urge in being present for the accomplishment of one's own history:

(...) a large number of European countries, threatened in their life and liberty, are relying, from now on, on the United States' help and on each other's help for the defence of their civilization heritage. It seemed difficult to be absent in such circumstances. (1949, p.17)

Here he proved not to defend a continental vision of Europe, now neuralgic, but instead an Atlantic perspective capable of saving the extended Europe. But, as we previously mentioned, the messianic mission of the United States in relation to Portugal's interests in Euro-Africa did not met the expectations, at least not publicly; furthermore, in 1961 the United States was offering military help to the Union of Peoples of Angola (UPA), an independency movement operating in the north of the country with its basis in the neighbouring Zaire.

In Portugal, the signature of the Treaty was – although unofficially – disapproved by the communist opposition that saw it as a direct aggression against the country and, therefore, against USSR and all people's democracies (Teixeira, 1993).

Although facing strong opposition within the UN, well manifest even by USA's positions, Portugal continued its "western values crusade" backed by NATO, and with new allies in a Southern African context, as a consequence of the "winds of change".

Nevertheless, as Onslow (2009) points out, this was not an exclusively bipolar agenda between the United States and the USSR but a writing of one's own history by local actors, summing up both white minority governments and new black liberation movements, all in search for outside support.

The *Alcora Exercise*: A white alliance in Southern Africa

*If we want to last in Africa, we will have to endure, and back on those that want to last in Africa?*⁶
Alberto Franco Nogueira⁷

On November 11th, 1965, Portugal under Salazar was publicly recognizing South Rhodesia's self-proclaimed independence from the United Kingdom (UDI). Salazar was, thus, willing to back Ian Smith in the maintenance of a white government and white supremacy in Rhodesia. It was a strategically planned move, meant to put an end to the spreading of nationalist movements in Angola and Mozambique by preventing those movements from receiving influence and help from its neighbours, in a regional context of a continent in flames.

Further on, in 1967, in a speech held on the November 30th – *Africa's Politics and its Mistakes* –, Salazar anchored the colonial speech in a need for salvation of the countries in Southern Africa from “anarchy, misery, political and civil conflicts”, as it happened with the newly independent nations in other parts of Africa (1967, p.10-13). Revisiting the elderly concept of “Euro-Africa” as the ultimate white bastion on the African continent, he highlighted the importance, in such difficult times, of preserving both the peace and the Western values in

⁶ Nogueira, F. *apud* Barroso, L., 2010, p.213.

⁷ Franco Nogueira was the last Foreign Minister under Salazar. Appointed in 1961, he was considered Salazar's “right arm” in leading the Portuguese overseas policy. In 1968, was one of the most suggested names for Salazar's succession, but Marcelo Caetano was preferred instead. Defending the “lusu-cause” he feared that Caetano would not demonstrate the strength in continuing the politics in the overseas provinces.

there. As a contrast, he presented the North of Africa as a nest for “African subversion”, and a source of continuous financial and military help for nationalists further south. The “typical African” Africa was unveiled as a land in agony, struggling for an independence that neither countries or populations would be able to handle, given the still tight relations with the colonial powers and the backwardness in all financial, economic and technical areas. The position of guardian of western values seemed to be threatened, as he had put it, by several nationalist independency movements – synonyms of terrorism – and, as a consequence, Portuguese citizens should be protected wherever they were (1967, p.14).

This was the geopolitical heritage that Marcelo Caetano – Salazar’s successor as head of the Portuguese Council – had to deal with, and revert in Portugal’s favour from September 1968 on. He had understood, maybe even better than his predecessor, that under the constant pressure of UN resolution 1514 (XV),⁸ and within the Cold War conflict arena, Portugal’s Luso-tropicalist myth had to be substituted for practical actions able to secure Portugal’s interests in the region. As such, investing in the Southern African political agenda – and organizing against a common enemy decided to expel the white colonizer from Africa – seemed to be the right thing to do.

On the other hand, and defending a similar viewpoint, the South African Prime-Minister – Henrik Verwoerd – responded on February 3rd, 1960, to the speech held by the British Prime-Minister in front of the South-African Parliament,⁹ by affirming the right by nature, not of the Europeans in Africa but of the “white men in Africa”, to defend the “motherland” to which they brought civilization, education and wealth. He pledged for equal rights and opportunities, but more equal for those who created them initially, and transmissible from generation to generation.

⁸ Declaration over the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples, voted on December 14th, 1960.

⁹ The speech, also known as “the wind of change”, announces the British position in recognizing the wave of black independencies in the continent: “The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it” (MacMillan, 1960).

This was intended, he added, to bring balance and to do justice to all black and white men in Africa. It is important to notice that he maintained a generalist description in relation not only to the white men but to the Union,¹⁰ and also for other regions of Africa. He then went further and narrowed down to the “southernmost portion of Africa”, not only as the “motherland” but as the only country they know and possess.

In this line of reasoning, and from 1969 on, Portugal, South Africa and Rhodesia had begun secret meetings for discussing about a possible military alliance in the region – the first official meeting being held in March, 1971. The alliance became effective after it was signed by all members, in July 1971.

The real purpose and objectives of that alliance were defined during the meeting of the sub-commission for the common doctrine, held in Pretoria in September 1971. This sub-commission established a Manual for Anti-Subversion Operations as a basis for the resolutions to be followed by members. In the first place, participants agreed over the definition of some common terms of major incidence, such as insurrection, terrorist and anti-subversion, and also on anti-terrorist, psychological and effective means to be applied over all identified as such.

It should be mentioned that “insurgent” meant guerrilla, partisan, terrorist, dissident and agitator, since the perspective was that these were only different denominations describing the same position. Therefore, the sub-commission centred its efforts in the search for means for anti-terrorist actions against this common enemy, drawing from the already existing Portuguese manual of “Operations Against Armed Groups and Guerrillas”, rectifying some of the terms in accordance to domestic agendas and realities.

¹⁰ Reference to “The Union of South Africa”, name maintained until the 1961 Constitution, when the name change and status were voted and officially recognized as “The Republic of South Africa”.

Another major common concern was the security of the harbours and vessels, more exposed to subversive and terrorist attacks. The need of consistent additional discussions about the final structure of the Manual was expressed, and a future meeting in Lisbon, not later than March, 1972, was set.

The terms recognized in this discussion clearly upheld the military common interests and support, in accordance with the regional instability that was contravening and undermining their already poor levels of stability.

But why the need of secrecy underlying those meetings? As we have showed, from 1945, in an international context dominated by the new alliances that had come out of WW2, pressured was being exerted over Portugal to grant independence to its colonies. The official discourse strived for equilibrium between an overture imposed by the needs of the time – where the USA played a central role, although initially against the Portuguese policy – and the real need for salvation of its territories, what seemed less possible every day. Formally, if the luso-tropicalist speech continued to exist, unofficially the need for another alliance was felt. But how was Portugal able to assume an alliance with a system that was being criticized since the 1950s? Hence, Portugal's cooperation with both South Africa and Rhodesia had to be non-visible, so as to prevent the rising criticism, both internally and externally.

Back in 1910, Portugal's concerns with Britain increased with the formation of the Union of South Africa, seen as a British desire for expansion in the African continent. In addition, concerns regarding the validity of a segregationist government were questioned. Despite these inadvertences in their domestic affairs, Portugal and South Africa had economic agreements – Mozambicans were working in the diamond mines in South Africa since 1870 (Correia, 2007). Starting in the early 1960s, with the outburst of the Liberation War in Angola, cooperation

between the two countries intensified and new military and security agreements were signed. During the years the *Alcora Alliance* was in operation significant military cooperation was registered and consistent tactic indications were suggested for the campaign led in the southeast of Angola. A report of 32 pages, written by General Fraser – of South Africa – and covering the period between 1968 and 1970, shows the Portuguese will to accept part of the actual military and munitions help, plus any advice for the success of the fight in southeast Angola.¹¹ This is proof enough that the Portuguese fear of losing its colonies was greater than the danger once represented by South Africa. At the same time, it also shows, on the other hand, that the common counter-insurgency strategy was never a reality:

My purpose is to analyse the reasons for the continued penetration of the subversion forces in the south of ANGOLA and consider the means for the counter-insurgency campaign that are necessary for the safety of both PORTUGAL and RAS (1970, p.2).

(...) I don't want to give the impression that I am teaching you, the strategists, how to lead your war. However, I have mentioned previously the need of having a strategy and, simultaneously, tactical and common operational procedures (1970, p.3).

The other *Alcora* meetings – seven in total – were held alternately in Lisbon and Pretoria, within the initial terms of the alliance.

The last meeting of the *Alcora* Top Level Committee was held on July 24th, 1974, in Pretoria, after the Portuguese Military Coup of April 25th. Another meeting was held between 1975 and 1976, having Portugal and South Africa as the only participants, precisely in order to discuss Portugal's devolution of materials and equipment of war. The importance of the *Alcora*

¹¹ This document is called "South-African perspective over the general conduct of the campaign in southeast Angola", and can be found in Portuguese in the Archive of Military History (referenced AHM, 2, 2, Cx 163, 9).

Alliance for the Civil Wars that followed is indisputable, as it explains some of the continuities and collaborations that did not end with the retreat of Portugal from its African colonies.

Why questioning is important

The “scientific revolution” gave even more weight to the European past and its values, leading to a linear and absolute reckoning of time in opposition with the eastern circular time characterized in terms of local ethnographies.

The existence of a single, generally accepted, chronological frame is obviously necessary. But the questioning of the imposed monopoly of the western one is equally important and we, of course, refer to the values and “definitions” associated with it. The criticism rose when this, indiscriminately, begun being imposed to other parts of the world and to different cultures, as happened with the colonial situation. This teleological history implied a static, changeless “other”: someone incapable of self-transformation and certainly not without some outside help.

The “white man’s burden”¹² implied, from the beginning, a certain approach to time and space as something put under the service of the colonial project (Meneses, 2008). The “colonial historiography” also, by creating conceptual categories related to values such as humanism, democracy or freedom, constructed a stereotyped and homogenized appropriation of time – of the time in Africa and of the Africa itself –, always opposed to Europe¹³ and to these western values.¹⁴ This Eurocentric colonial reading was considered superior obviously not only to a

¹² Reference to the famous poem *The White Man’s Burden: the United States and the Philippine Islands*, written by the British poet Rudyard Kipling in 1899; used mainly to symbolize imperialism.

¹³ In this example Europe stands for a homogenous space, characterized by its own means of knowledge which, through the colonial project – and therefore by unequal power relations – imposed itself upon other territories.

¹⁴See Goody, 2006; Meneses, 2008.

Portuguese specificity, but as a reading of a big part of the world since the 16th century, and becoming hegemonic from the early 19th century.

The current interpretation of both time and space was established by the West (Goody, 2006). By being identified as different – and thus inferior –, exclusivist racist hierarchies were easily applied to Africans. The instauration of the *Estado Novo* period in the Portuguese Empire enabled the *Estatuto do Indigenato* – Statute of the Indigenous, a legal system of separation between the native African populations and the settlers. Another major Portuguese example is the category of *assimilados* (Africans that meet certain requirements, such as a good knowledge of the Portuguese language and usages in order to be, at least theoretically, considered citizens in almost similar terms with the Portuguese population), which was in fact just another word for “second-class citizens”. These were legal frameworks that maintained and justified the hierarchic racial and social distinction between the “civilized human” and the “other”, who can, in theory, become civilized if given the “proper training”. These “others”, namely Africans, were therefore imagined in a vacuum, an underdeveloped realm that needed to be reasoned with western values dictated within the framework of progress and development (Meneses, 2008).

The civilizing mission of the Europeans was brought up in contrast to the “uncivilized”, “barbarians”, “savages”, “pagans”, who were subscribing to different customs, religions, world views and interpretations. But colonization was awakening the “de-civilization”, the de-humanization within a colonizer controlled by a racist and relativist behaviour.¹⁵ Thus, the colonized was “thing-ified” and the colonizer itself was a tool, but the dominating one at any costs (Césaire, 1955). In Southern Africa, the clear delimitations that were being imposed

¹⁵ See Césaire, 1955; Sartre, 1963; Memmi, 1991.

through segregationist measures betrayed this need for hierarchizing in order to maintain control and to mask the fear of losing power in the area.

This was the card to be played in that area, and the decolonization of modern history of the still existing continuities between the power relations among the ex-colonized and colonizer is still a task to accomplish. In the same speech referred at the beginning of the second chapter, Salazar said:

This process, in which each and every one will assume his share of responsibility before History, falls over the Occident. The future will tell if we are guilty as charged, or the victims that the true responsables seem not to grieve (1967:4).

Hence, as Salazar himself suggests, a re-visitation of history is inevitable and it implies opening ourselves to a silenced history of the past. In this sense the *Alcora Exercise* is just a drop in an ocean yet to be observed and questioned.

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