

African Forced Labour and Anti-colonial Struggles in the Portuguese Revolution

A Global Labour History Perspective

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The Portuguese Revolution took place between 25 April 1974 and 25 November 1975, and was the most profound revolutionary event in Europe following the Second World War. During those 19 months, hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike, and hundreds of workplaces were occupied; sometimes for months at a time. At some stage, almost one third of the population of about ten million people was engaged in some form of power structure outside the scope of the state, whether workers, soldiers or committees of residents.¹ The Portuguese Revolution was such a social explosion that US president Gerald Ford considered it capable of transforming the entire Mediterranean into a “red sea” and causing the downfall of all the regimes of southern Europe like dominos.² Although it did not produce the predicted domino effect, the immediate results of the revolution were considerable, including the nationalization of banks and large companies without compensation, the birth of the welfare state and social security, the agrarian reform of large estates in the south of the country, and the introduction of workers’ management for 300 companies. These measures were not realized by state decree or by governmental action, as some have tried to frame them, but through popular assemblies. The banks were brought under the control of their workers, who prior to nationalization had stopped capital flight; the strikes in the major companies resulted in salary increases and price freezes; a number of hospitals and schools were occupied and managed democratically; public transport came under the control of workers and users, who decided to extend these to peripheral areas and to reduce fares; and land was occupied by salaried agricultural workers, more than tripling productivity and employment.

On 25 April 1974, a coup led by the MFA (Movimento das Forças Armadas; Armed Forces Movement) – a group of middle-ranking officials in the

¹ Raquel Varela, *A People’s History of the Portuguese Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

² *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), 23 March 1975.

Portuguese Army, opposed to the colonial war – toppled the Portuguese Estado Novo (New State). Established after the 1926 coup, the Estado Novo had been the longest standing dictatorship in Europe, and its downfall marked the beginning of a revolutionary process. Despite the MFA's plea – people were urged via radio broadcasts to stay at home – thousands took to the streets. The government's leader hid at Quartel do Carmo, in Lisbon, surrounded by people outside shouting “kill fascism”. In Caxias and Peniche, the prison gates were opened and all the political prisoners were released. The secret police (PIDE) was disbanded, the headquarters of the regime's newspaper (*A Época*) were attacked, and censorship was consequently abolished. The dictatorship's fall was unheralded, and the social forces carrying out the April coup were not a consequence of the country's backwardness, but instead of its colonial situation, as is explained in the next part of this chapter. The liberation wars in Africa had led to the deepest crisis the regime had yet to face, and by the time of the Portuguese Revolution, thirteen years of colonial war had been fought on three fronts: Guinea Bissau, Angola and Mozambique.

The story of the Portuguese Revolution often starts, incorrectly, with the Movimento das Forças Armadas. We argue that in reality it was triggered by the anti-colonial revolution in 1961, even if it was the MFA that opened up the gates of revolution. On Sunday 9 September 1973, amid stringent security precautions, 136 officers – none more senior than captain – met deep in the countryside ostensibly for a “special farmhouse barbecue”. They were drawn together by self-interest; they resented the dilution of their ranks with conscript officers who had briefly attended the military academy. By April 1974, the MFA had built a network of 200 supporting officers from all three services and had drafted its first programme calling for “Democracy, Development and Decolonization”. Europe's oldest dictatorship needed to reorganize and modernize its industry. The MFA wanted a democratic modern “mixed economy” based on the Western European model, and refused to accept the blame for colonial setbacks. At that time, none of the officers would identify themselves as “socialist”.³

By early 1974, the PAIGC (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde; The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) in Guinea was on the verge of victory and FRELIMO (the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) had opened a new offensive. There was no prospect of winning the wars in Africa. The number of Portuguese dead – an estimated 9,000 – was greater than in any conflict since the Napoleonic wars, and

3 *Jornal República*, 26 April 1974.

the army was being blamed for these failures. Some officers were ashamed to wear their uniforms in the streets of Lisbon, and a crisis had been developing in the middle ranks of the army. Over the course of 13 years, nearly 200,000 men failed to report for enlistment and 8,000 had deserted.⁴ The crisis that emerged in the state's backbone – the armed forces – through the importance of its defeat, led to the fall of the longest-standing dictatorship in Europe. The impact of this crisis within the Portuguese army can be measured by the absence of any acts of repression against the workers' movement in the early days of the revolution. For the working class in the modern industrial and services sectors, the successful struggle for civil, political and social rights following the Portuguese revolution could not be dissociated from its founding cause: the widespread resort to African forced labour and the resistance triggered by it. Further research will probably establish that the widespread struggle of the liberation movement in the Portuguese colonies, mainly based in peasant areas in countries subjected to forced labour, allowed the PAIGC (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde; African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde), led by Amílcar Cabral, to unilaterally declare Guinea's independence in 1973. Despite inflicting significant military defeats on the Portuguese colonial army in Angola and Mozambique, the war dragged on for thirteen years without the prospect of any political solution whatsoever in the framework of Marcelo Caetano's regime.⁵

The revolution profoundly changed Portugal, but it did not change the relations of production in a lasting way. The state recovered after a counter-revolutionary coup on 25 November 1975, the regime was stabilized and the government functioned without the involvement of the masses that had helped to make the revolutionary events in 1974–1975. The revolution was defeated, even if it was not crushed like that in Chile the year before or the uprisings in Hungary in 1956. As in other cases, the history of the Portuguese revolution was written by the victors, who left out the scale and the magnificence of the struggles from below and their transformative capacity. Some even likened it to a hallucinogenic dream.⁶ Most of the accounts that appeared at the time, and subsequently, have applied a top-down approach; they are often written by “important figures” who have focused on their own role. In other

4 Estado-Maior do Exército/Comissão para o Estudo das Campanhas de África 1988. Covered in more detail in Chapter five.

5 Caetano was Prime Minister from 1968 until the 1974 revolution. He was preceded by António de Oliveira Salazar, who died in 1970.

6 José Medeiros Ferreira, *História de Portugal*, Vol. VIII: Portugal em Transe (1974–1985) (Lisboa: Estampa, 2001).

cases, the narrative is about the army and the senior military personnel, or the bourgeois machinations, but almost never about the *povo*: the people. If the working class is referred to, it appears as “the threat of labour unrest”, and is thus seen from the outside, as a problem rather than the solution. These approaches have marginalized the working class in a political, administrative and economic sense, both in Portugal and in its former colonies. The current state’s short memory concerning historical facts is undoubtedly one of the key factors that have led to this dominant approach. Yet there is another set of pivotal causes related to the geographical and social aspects of the revolution: methodological nationalism, Eurocentrism and a limited conceptualization of the working class. These three major criticisms, which were raised in Marcel Van der Linden’s essential contribution to the global history of labour, are crucial to interconnect the Portuguese revolution, (anti)colonialism and forced labour.⁷

Some progress has been made in recent decades, with the publication of studies highlighting the exceptional history of a small country at the European periphery; a country that also was the last European colonial empire.⁸ Nevertheless, the social history covering the revolutionary period remains minimal when compared with the preponderance of political-institutional, diplomatic and military histories. As Manuel Redero rightly observed, “Research on dictatorships and revolutionary movements, quite abundant in the 1960s and 1970s, gave way to the study of democracy and the problems faced by transition processes and democratic consolidation”.⁹ More importantly, this chapter addresses a serious gap in the studies on Portugal, which have rarely established a link – either in terms of cause and effect, or of correlation – between on the one hand the dictatorship’s political regime, its “late modernization”, the revolutionary process and the end of the dictatorship; and on the other hand, the

7 Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008); Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1999).

8 Encarnación Lemús, *En Hamelín ... La Transición Española más allá de la Frontera* (Oviedo: Septem Ediciones, 2001); Ana Mónica Fonseca, “O apoio da social-democracia alemã a democratização portuguesa (1974–1975)”, *Revista Ler História* 63 (2012): 93–107; Muñoz Sánchez, António, “Cambio mediante acercamiento. La socialdemocracia alemana y el régimen de Franco, 1962–1975”, in *Zeiten im Wandel. Deutschland im Europa des 20. Jahrhundert. Kontinuität, Entwicklungen und Brüche*, ed. Jürgen Elvert and Sylvain Schirmann (Bruxelas: P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2007), 119–140; Tiago Moreira de Sá, *Os Estados Unidos da América e a Democracia Portuguesa (1974–1976)* (Lisboa: MNE, Instituto Diplomático, 2009).

9 Manuel Redero, “La Transición Española, Cuadernos del Mundo Actual”, *História* 16, no. 72 (1994).

forced labour in the colonies and the way workers subjected to it supported the liberation movements against the Portuguese army. The vast majority of the studies on the Estado Novo (1933–1974) and the revolution (1974–1975) have focused on Portugal as a territorial unit, and have pinpointed the colonial war as the beginning of the end for the regime.

Among the studies on forced labour, those focusing on “where, under what conditions and who carried out the work” prevail. There is in fact a great deal of literature dealing with forced labour within the different colonial empires, as well as some relevant work on forced labour taking place inside Portugal’s former colonies, but none relate the political organization of the resistance to forced labour. Likewise, the relationship between forced labour and the political-military groups fighting against Portuguese colonialism on the battle front is never addressed. For an overview of forced labour, we refer to the two general studies published by Oporto University’s African Studies Centre (2005, 2007),¹⁰ Alexander Keese’s work on Angola,¹¹ Eric Allina’s study on Mozambique¹² and Augusto Nascimento’s study about servants in São Tomé.¹³ Many records concerning forced labour have been preserved by organizations and individuals, ranging from commissions, missionaries, journalists and public servants, to researchers and historians. The matter cannot therefore be attributed to a lack of sources, even if one considers the degree of illiteracy in a population with few written records and with underground political or military organizations. In addition, the reports of the regime’s own colonial missions and of its military actions, together with the archives, constitute important sources. As Eric Hobsbawm reminds us, “plenty of the resources for the history of popular movements were only acknowledged as such because someone asked a question and then desperately searched for a way – any way – to

10 Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade do Porto (Org.), *Trabalho Forçado Africano – experiências coloniais comparada* (Porto: Campo das Letras – Editores, S.A., 2005); Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade do Porto (Org.), *Trabalho Forçado Africano. Articulações com o poder político*, Coleção Estudos Africanos (Porto: Campo das Letras – Editores, S.A., 2007).

11 Alexander Keese, “The constraints of late colonial reform policy: forced labour scandals in the Portuguese Congo (Angola) and the limits of reform under authoritarian colonial rule, 1955–1961”, *Portuguese Studies* 28, no. 2 (2012): 186–200.

12 Éric Allina, *Slavery By Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

13 Augusto Nascimento, *Poderes e quotidiano nas roças de S. Tomé e Príncipe de finais de oitocentos a meados de novecentos* (Lousã, s.n. 2002); Augusto Nascimento, *Desterro e contrato: moçambicanos a caminho de S. Tomé e Príncipe: Anos 1940 a 1960* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 2002).

answer it. We ought not to be positivist and accept that questions and answers arise naturally out of material research".¹⁴

Studies on forced labour in the production chain – which was legally abolished in 1961, but remained in four of the colonies until 1974 – have failed to establish a link between the Portuguese Carnation Revolution on the one hand, and on the other, its pivotal role in the creation of a world market, the regime's crisis and its colonial wars. Nevertheless, we place this link at the centre of our study in the current chapter. Although well-informed studies on the historical background of forced labour are rare, there are two that stand out. The first is Perry Anderson's pioneering work that links primitive accumulation in the colonies to forced labour and subsequent demographic anaemia, and applies to it the theory of uneven and combined development.¹⁵ The second is Dalila Cabrita Mateus' study on conflict among forced labourers at the outbreak of the colonial wars.¹⁶ Research using books such as the highly regarded *A Guerra Colonial* (The Colonial War), by Aniceto Afonso, provides a detailed account of the number of fatalities inflicted on the Portuguese army, as well as of the brutality of its actions, such as the use of napalm against civilians.¹⁷ However, no information is provided concerning the number of casualties inflicted on the liberation movement's fighters – or among civilians, for that matter.

We believe it is essential to study production chains, as this can shed light on the extent to which the development of distinct social classes across the different continents is interconnected, and can clarify how the unequal wealth distribution emerged among core and peripheral countries.¹⁸ It is therefore questionable, as highlighted by Perry Andersen, that the anachronistic Portuguese empire failed to provide for a relatively impoverished working class in the urban areas with no means of social mobility, and that even in the colonies there was unemployment amongst the white community.¹⁹ Accordingly, this chapter also contributes to the study of the making of the working classes in the Portuguese empire, focusing on some of the most marginalized areas in social history: the resistance, organization and political struggles of forced labourers, and the relationship between these labourers and the Portuguese

14 Eric Hobsbawm, *Sobre História* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998), 220.

15 Perry Anderson, *Portugal e o Fim do ultracolonialismo* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1966).

16 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, *A PIDE-DGS e a Guerra Colonial* (Lisboa: Terramar, 2004), 420.

17 Aniceto Afonso and Carlos de Matos Gomes, *Guerra Colonial* (Lisboa: Bertrand, 2000).

18 Marcel van der Linden, "The Promises and Challenges of Global Labor History", in *Global Histories of Work*, vol. 1, ed. Andreas Eckert (Oldenbourg: Gruyter, 2016), 40–42.

19 Perry Anderson, *Portugal e o Fim*.

Carnation Revolution, in which the working class played a crucial role. As far as liberation movements are concerned, we do not refer simply to the armed struggle, but to the wider movement that was structured around the peasants and their social support networks, food supply, protective activities and resistance to forced labour.

1 Forced Labour in the Portuguese Colonies

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Portuguese colonies were facing a serious challenge: how to force black/native populations to work when slavery was no longer legal or accepted.²⁰ As Oliveira Martins stated:

It was still necessary to dry the swamps, navigate the rivers, pave the roads, build the warehouses and obtain the human working tool. Beforehand, slavery supplied all of this, while capital consolidated in the black people's (*market value*) – today, it consolidates on immigrants' wages, or on the black and ethnic workers hired to work in desolate areas. Capital acts similarly in regions inhabited by indigenous peoples liable of basic submission to civilization, although it might seem different at first glance. Force, instead of contracts, is its actual expression.²¹

In *Capital*, Marx looked at colonial relations in the eighteenth century to illustrate that the historical process severing the worker from the means of production is typical of capitalism anywhere it takes hold: "The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods".²² Primitive accumulation of capital, a concept developed by Adam Smith, is named by Marx as the root of the process of capitalism, whereas the expropriation of the agricultural producer's soil was the onset of primitive accumulation, a form of "original sin" in terms

20 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, "El Trabajo Forzado en las Colonias Portuguesas", in *Historia, Trabajo y Sociedad*, no. 4 (2013): 63–87; Valdemir Zamparoni, "Da Escravatura ao Trabalho Forçado, teorias e práticas", *Africana Studia*, no 7 (2004): 300.

21 Oliveira Martins. *O Brazil e as Colónias Portuguesas*, 1920. Cited in Zamparoni, "Da Escravatura", 301.

22 Karl Marx, *The Capital*, Vol 1, Part 8, Chapter 26, 508, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> [5 December 2016].

of political economy. Unlike in the Americas – where the flow of millions of Europeans together with enslaved Africans created the labour force required for capitalist modernization processes – in Portuguese Africa, European occupation remained relatively feeble. By 1955, Angola had fewer than 80,000 white European settler colonialists compared with over four million African natives. In 1925, the former numbered only 25,000, and in 1911, only 13,000. This fact is inextricably linked with Portugal's localization in the international state system as a weak metropolis, depending on an old alliance with England (negotiated in order to remain independent from Spain). The backward economy meant that until the 1950s, it was unable to settle a sufficient amount of its white population in the colonies, which thus attracted little capital from the metropolis – even though the regime had, from 1926 onwards, extended industrial restrictions to colonial possessions, controlling exports. In the 1930s, trade exchanges with the colonies remained as low as 15 per cent of the country's total. It was at this stage that cotton cultivation was imposed on the colonies. "It was not until the Estado Novo that the State apparatus is employed for colonial purposes",²³ despite the "peace-making" campaigns that took place between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1920s – a euphemism for the military occupation of African land.

Especially in Angola, the colonial regime tried to replicate Brazil, opening up coffee, cotton and large sugar plantations from the beginning of the twentieth century. Lack of investment, weather conditions and the soil turned this enterprise into a distant mirage. In fact, only the spirits industry prospered, aimed at the African market. The last years of legal slavery, between 1858 and 1868, saw a 30 per cent increase in the number of slaves in colonial possessions, but after 1878, cocoa production in São Tomé and Príncipe caused a spurt of new traffic from Angola. This growth of human traffic caused a boycott by the Cadbury company, since in 1909 the British chocolate maker learned that plantation owners, together with the Portuguese government, were to blame for the ongoing slavery in these islands. The boycott lasted until 1916.

In 1899, the Indigenous Work Regulation established the following types of forced labour: "compelled", "corrective", "in public interest works" and "hired". The "hired" workers left their villages, families and agriculture to work in large plantations for very low wages. The same regulation stated that the Portuguese colonies' indigenous peoples were subject to the moral and legal obligation of finding ways to survive and improve their social status by means of work.²⁴ In

23 Valentim Alexandre, "O Império Colonial", in *Portugal Contemporâneo*, ed. António Costa Pinto (Lisboa: D. Quixote, 2005), 71.

24 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, "El Trabajo forzado": 63–87.

1907, the “hut (*cabata*) tax” was introduced, only to be replaced in 1919 by an indigenous poll tax. In a similar way as in the remaining European colonies in Africa, this tax pushed Africans submitted to the colonial system into relying on a monetary economy, and forced them to work outside the scope of their own traditional livelihoods. However, the legal documentation claimed that this tax embodied a civilizing mission. At first, work assumed the form of cargo transport, effectively turning the men into packhorses. Then came compulsory farm work: in return for virtually no wages at all, men left their villages to go work on cotton, tea or rice fields. Afterwards, came work in the mines in Transvaal and Mozambique, on cocoa plantations in Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and domestic work throughout all the colonies. The 1928 Indigenous Labour Code asserted that indigenous people were not allowed to work for private purposes under any circumstances.²⁵ Nevertheless, it still underlined the moral obligation to work, and this code – which remained the backbone of all the labour schemes in the colonies – established a system of contracts that were only voluntary on the surface. On the other hand, any local administrator could label work carried out by Africans in private undertakings as “of public interest”.

2 Building a Racialist Ideology

Since the 1920s, many of the leading Portuguese figures in anthropology have come from the Oporto School, which in liaison with University of Porto and the Natural History Museum developed the subject’s close links with the colonial issue. Up to at least the 1940s, anthropology was a subject for doctors and biologists, who carried out anthropometric research into native populations and used racialist approaches, popular at the time, to assess people’s physical features and fitness for work. In 1934, the First Colonial Anthropology National Congress was held in Porto. In tandem with the Colonial Exhibit, which displayed a substantial amount of research material on physical, serological and psychological features of colonial populations, the subject was promoted based on the need to possess knowledge of such populations, specifically “towards a more rational colonization and the revaluation of the native workforce”.²⁶ António Mendes Correia, a professor in physical anthropology who was close to the regime and had served as Porto’s mayor and president of the Portuguese Geography Society, had for some time been in charge of the JMGIC

25 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, *Ibid.*

26 Rui M. Pereira, “Raça, Sangue e Robustez. Os paradigmas da Antropologia Física Colonial Portuguesa”, *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 7/8 (2005): 209–241.

(Junta das Missões Geográficas e de Investigações Coloniais; Colonial Research and Geographical Missions Junta). This was a body that was established in January 1936, under the direct responsibility of the colonies' minister. The JMGIC coordinated all the research missions carried out between 1937 and 1956 in Mozambique, Guinea, Angola, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor.

Around 1935, Orlando Ribeiro, the founder of Portuguese geography and a keen observer of social phenomena, was travelling throughout Angola. On one occasion, he was amazed to find a group of hired people, tied to each other with rope and guarded by two armed men, more than fifty years after slavery had been abolished. He wrote: "We took pictures and filmed such a de-basing display and asked the guards why those people were tied, what crime or offense had they committed. 'They are bums who do not want to work on their own land'".²⁷ Henrique Galvão, a colonial surveyor in 1947, disclosed his conclusions at a parliamentary session held behind closed doors: "the government has become the main recruiter and dealer of native labour, to such an extent that settlers unabashedly require in writing manpower 'supplies' from the Indigenous Affairs Office".²⁸ Both cases – Henrique Galvão's and Orlando Ribeiro's – illustrate the way in which prominent personalities in the country's political and academic life could react in face of the evidence of the brutality of forced work, risking their career and their own freedom in its denunciation.

There was also intensive use of African labour to build roads in Portuguese Guinea. With no other relevant investments to speak of, the communications network resulted in the Guinea population declining by more than ten per cent up to the mid-1930s due to internal migration, losing the capacity to sustain their own agriculture. The situation was different in Angola, where the native populations maintained control over their own crops. In Mozambique, the road maintenance impressed European visitors at the time, until they realized it was being carried out by women and children equipped with primitive tools and under the armed coercion of the colonial authorities. The situation was more blatant in the south, where natives were recruited to work in the South African gold mines. In 1966, Perry Anderson estimated that 100,000 Mozambican workers annually were sent to the mines in South Africa.²⁹ Introduced in 1909, this contract was successively extended and allowed a substantial proportion of freight transit to Johannesburg to pass through Lourenço Marques' docks. In addition to being paid 150 escudos for each worker, the government

27 Orlando Ribeiro, *A colonização de Angola e o seu fracasso* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, S. A., 1981), 192.

28 Cited in Perry Anderson, *Portugal e o Fim*, 51–52.

29 Idem.

kept half of their wages. This was paid in gold at the end of the contract, whereas the workers themselves were paid in the devalued colonial currency.

Marcelo Caetano, who had replaced Salazar as head of the government in 1968, estimated on a 1954 report that the number of Mozambicans working outside the province was about 500,000. That same year, the United Nations estimated there were a similar number of Angolans living outside the territory. With regard to Mozambique, over two thirds of the male workers were relocated, not only to the Transvaal mines, but also to cocoa plantations in São Tomé and Príncipe or cotton fields in Southern Rhodesia.³⁰ Anderson was adamant when describing what he labelled as “ultra-colonialism” that “human oppression experienced in Portuguese forced labour is so brutal and intense it has no parallel anywhere else in the continent. It is the absolute zenith of African misery”.³¹ He considered that there were more African emigrants, both legal and illegal, in Angola and Mozambique than in all the rest of Africa.

Since agriculture was the main activity and source of wealth, as much for the native populations as for the colonial occupation, its regulation by the state was of the highest importance. Thus, the Rural Labour Code was published in 1962. It permitted the government to defend itself against international bodies – such as the UN and the ILO – and international public opinion, because wages were fixed by collective bargaining. The truth was that with no trade unions in place, African workers’ wages were established in secret meetings or, as was often the case, they were never officially documented at all.³² It was all a mirage, as the wage gap in Mozambique in 1969 attests to.³³ In manufacturing, while unskilled native Africans earned 5 escudos per day, semi-skilled Africans earned 30 escudos; in agriculture, Africans considered to be citizens earned 5,478 escudos annually, Africans who were non-citizens earned 1,404 escudos and white settlers earned 47,723.

In its final stages, the Estado Novo regime bred an ideology of patronizing and protecting native populations, which provided a natural framework for the Christian civilizing missionary effort through work and assimilation. Rear Admiral Sarmiento Rodrigues, Mozambique’s Governor-General in 1962, described the Portuguese presence in Africa as follows:

30 Zimbabwe was a British colony with self-government established in 1923 and administered by the British South Africa Company. It remained a British colony until 1980.

31 Perry Anderson, *Ibid.*, 50.

32 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, “El Trabajo forzado en las colonias portuguesas”, 63–87, ISSN: 2172–2749.

33 Source: Anuário Estatístico [Statistical yearbook], vol. 11 (1970), cited in *Labour: forced or free?* CFMAG Topics, no 1.

From the onset, we did not ward off natives. We always dealt with them with humanity, and, quite often, welcomed them into our families. At the same time, we civilized them on our own terms, and gave them our laws and customs. In other words, moved by simple natural generosity, we wanted to turn them into equals. Nowadays, between us, in overseas Africa, there are only two classes of Portuguese people: civilized and natives. The latter are protected by their primitive customs. As for the civilized, we do not care whether they are black, white or mixed-race: they are all the same, all civilized. It could not be more Christian, human or kind. It is pure assimilation.³⁴

“Forced labour was, in reality, an in-kind tribute charged by the winner from the dominated peoples”,³⁵ as Phillip Havik described the situation. Portugal was a feeble empire, which turned the metropolis into a recipient of the wealth created by colonial despoilment. Paradoxically, from the 1960s on, it was the war economy that provided some investment to the colonies and started enabling a form of internal market. Nevertheless, destitution spread through the countryside, and with no industrial alternative in place this led to whole generations searching for better living conditions through emigration, mostly to France (around one and a half million emigrated between 1961 and 1974). At the same time, the regime produced one last imperial attempt in Africa: colonial war.

3 Forced Labour and Colonial War

For decades, the prison raid carried out by the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola; People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola) was depicted as the starting point of the colonial war. The main historical archive for the revolution (Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril) still labels it as such: “On the 4 February 1961, members of the MPLA raided the military confinement building, PSP headquarters and the National Broadcaster’s delegation in Luanda. 4 February 1961 marks the beginning of colonial wars in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique”.³⁶ The next milestone is usually credited

34 Sarmiento M. M. Rodrigues, *Caminhos do Futuro nos Horizontes da Nação: Grupo de Estudo e Trabalho* (Lourenço: Marques, 1962), 119.

35 Philip J. Havik, “Estradas sem fim: o trabalho forçado e a ‘política indígena’ na Guiné (1915–1945)”, in *Trabalho Forçado Africano – experiências coloniais comparadas*, coord. Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade do Porto (Porto: Campo das Letras, 2006), 243.

36 <http://www.ci.uc.pt/cd25a/wikka.php?wakka=Tc1312> [3 December 2016].

to the UPA (União dos Povos de Angola; Angola Peoples Union), when its militants attacked ranches and colonial villages in Northern Angola on 15 March 1961, brutalizing its populations. However, before these canonical events took place, something else had already happened. This was described by the historian Dalila Cabrita Mateus, who had already taken Portuguese historiography by surprise with her book *A PIDE-DGS e a Guerra Colonial* (PIDE-DGS and Colonial War).³⁷ Based on an assessment of the morphology regarding the secret police in the colonies – using African archives, as well as a number of interviews with freedom fighters – Dalila Mateus provided evidence for the brutal repression of the colonial freedom fighters. This came somehow as a surprise for those who had studied PIDE's behaviour in the metropolis, because it was regarded as relatively ineffective, despite the atrocities committed against Communist Party members. In the colonies, the police were just as callous: they arrested and tortured thousands of combatants, with widespread support from the settlers. An information and surveillance network was pivotal in assisting the war effort, as were the close links with the military leadership. Above all, it was extremely efficient: "The acts of colonial violence were a sort of lifeblood fuelling PIDE/DGS' crimes and brutality. In Africa, it embarked upon mass repression and played an instrumental role in Colonial War".³⁸

In February 1961, the Portuguese army reacted to the Baixa do Cassange (in Angola) cotton workers' strike, by bombing the communities with napalm. This strike had begun in earlier that month and lasted only around two weeks. Between ten and twenty thousand people were killed, and whole villages were razed.³⁹ This northern area was a monoculture monopoly exploited by Cotonang, a Portuguese-Belgian company: "There was open revolt on 4 January, when Cotonang foremen were tied at the Soba Quivota Sanzala, ten kilometers away from Milando. ... Then came the population's threat to bash whoever tried to force them to work in the cotton fields",⁴⁰ in

37 This historiographic output had been addressed before in some news features and literary novels. In this regard, Diana Andringa's documentaries *As Duas Faces da Guerra* (The Two Faces of War) and *Tarrafal: Memórias do Campo de Morte Lenta* (Tarrafal: Memories from the Slow Death Field) are crucial, as well as Joaquim Furtado's, *A Guerra* (The War). These made a successful attempt to display the two sides of the conflict, as well as the colonial army's inhumanity. With regard to literature, we could single out dozens of writers and poets, many of whom were active in the ranks of liberation movements: Luandino Vieira, Pepetela and Mia Couto are amongst the most popular.

38 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, *A PIDE DGS e a Guerra Colonial* (Lisboa: Terramar, 2004), 420.

39 Ibid. This was considered the starting moment of the colonial war, which continued until 1974.

40 Aida Freudenthal, "A Baixa de Cassange: Algodão e Revolta", *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos*, no. 18–22 (1995–1999): 260.

public works like roads and other infrastructures or paying the annual tax. Production stopped for a whole month, and nothing would subsequently be the same again:

Gathered in large groups, the insurgents attacked both private and official buildings, damaged vehicles, bridges and rafts, brought down the Portuguese flag's pole, but no Europeans were killed. In remote areas, such as Luremo, Cuango and Longo outposts, burnt cottonseeds piled up and native carnets were torn, alongside other signs of hostility. Gatherings became more frequent and threatening. Despite Cotanang's expressed concerns as the uprising was unfolding, and multiple requests by European dealers' for armed intervention to bring it to an end.⁴¹

No systematic survey was ever carried out into the conflicts or the collective action undertaken by forced workers within Portuguese colonies. However, there was a partial one, based on both oral and written sources from the army and secret police – sources that had never previously been scrutinized by history – and it provides evidence of much more widespread resistance to forced labour than previously thought, both in terms of the dimension of events and continuity over time. The Portuguese army's psychological action guide flags up the “non-improved group” (the masses) as the staunchest supporters of liberation movements – in contrast to “tribal lords”, “intermediate groups, and “improved groups” and settlers – in a typology based on qualification levels and territorial origins. According to the army, the “non-improved” group tended to “support subversion” because liberation movements pursue the struggle against the “moral duty to work”, “food and income culture” and taxes: “subversion capitalizes on taxes, portraying them as a kind of violence aimed solely at making the white man richer”.⁴²

Let us take the example of Pidjiguiti, Guinea-Bissau, a Portuguese colony on the African West Coast. Bissau itself used to be in the Bissau's docks catchment area, but fishing and coasting boats, sailing inside Guinea, used the adjacent Pidjiguiti docks. On 3 August 1959, a strike began in the general workshops, and spread to the whole of Pidjiguiti docks. Amongst others, it included sailors providing cabotage services, as well as those working for Casa Gouveia, linked to the powerful CUF (Companhia União Fabril; Industrial Union Company), the largest Portuguese industrial conglomerate. Detention orders for those on

41 Ibid.: 263.

42 General Staff of the Army, Memorandum of the functions of psychological officers in the overseas units (Lisboa: Estado-Maior do Exército, 1970), 37–68.

strike led to clashes, and the strikers fought back with sticks and stones. In response, the police shot and killed seven people.⁴³ The French newspaper *Le Monde*⁴⁴ mentioned a riot that had left five people dead and a significant number injured. According to the account of Pinto Rema, a Franciscan priest:

The insubordinate have paddles, sticks, iron bars, stones and harpoons. Both sides refuse to give in or talk to each other. On the first clash, two police chiefs, Assunção and Dimas, are brutally attacked after firing warning shots. The fray causes injuries to seventeen guards, the police loses control and starts shooting to kill without restriction to exact vengeance; the result is that thirteen to fifteen people laid dead on the Pidjiguiti docks. The bodies of more sailors and dock workers were swept away by the river Geba, we do not know how many.⁴⁵

Historian Dalila Cabrita Mateus points out that this strike was at the root of the PAIGC's decision to turn to armed struggle, with peasant support:

A confidential report on this meeting, the "most crucial" in PAIGC's history, according to Cabral, states it was the place where the move from nationalist unrest to national liberation struggle was prepared. Three instrumental resolutions were adopted: first, to shift the party's activity to the countryside, mobilizing the peasantry; second, to get ready for armed struggle; third, to move a share of the party's leadership abroad.⁴⁶

A PAIGC memorandum – undated, but archived between the 1959 and 1961 files – addressed to the Portuguese government urged an end to the brutality towards natives, and drew attention to the starvation caused by rice exports, since this was the sole food source for Guinean people, and increasing exports meant that food reserves were being drained. Between 1942 and 1947, the death toll reached "thirty thousand people, mown down by hunger", while their

43 Letter from 15 August 1959 (National Archive Torre do Tombo) – ANTT-PIDE-DGS-Proc.299-46-SR-Pt.9-1 (Pasta 81944).

44 Cutting from the newspaper *Le Monde*, 15 August 1959 (National Archive Torre do Tombo) ANTT-PIDE-DGS-Proc.299-46-SR-Pt.9-1_c0009 (File 81944).

45 Henrique Pinto Rema, "História das Missões Católicas da Guiné", ed. Franciscana (Braga, 1982), 856, cited in Dalila Mateus, "Conflitos Sociais na Base da Ecloração das Guerras Coloniais", in *Greves e Conflitos Sociais em Portugal no Século XX*, ed. Varela, Raquel et al., (Lisboa: Colibri, 2012), 180.

46 Basil Davidson, "Révolution en Afrique: la Libération de la Guinée Portugaise", ed. Seuil (Paris: Combats, 1969), 36–37, cited in Mateus, "Conflitos Sociais", 181.

children were forced to accept being exported as “hired workers on Portuguese farmsteads in other colonies”.⁴⁷

Other examples concern Mozambique, which had close ties with neighbouring countries, including South Africa and some that had already achieved independence. In the early hours of 11 June 1960, Faustino and Chibilite, members of a mutual assistance association for the Macondes Peoples Organization, insisted on talking to the Portuguese authorities to negotiate the return to Mozambique of the Macondes⁴⁸ who were in Tanganyika. In Tanganyika,⁴⁹ they had gained more rights, so should come back as “*uhulu*, meaning they could live freely, dismissed from forced labour”.⁵⁰ For four days, Faustino and Chibilite put pressure on the Portuguese authorities, and were followed by an increasing number of men, women and children, “on foot or bike”, heading to the Macon constituency. On the morning of 15 June, they numbered five thousand. It should be borne in mind that about 60 per cent of the wages of Mozambicans forced to work in South African gold mines was handed directly to the Portuguese state in gold, and workers only received a proportion of this, in local currency; the rest went straight into the metropolis’ coffers.⁵¹ On that day, the authorities met the Macondes’ demands with a barrage of gunfire – the Mueda Massacre – leaving fourteen dead according to an official report, or 150 as claimed by FREMLIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique; Mozambique Liberation Front): “From then on, the Macondes wanted war and were ready to follow FRELIMO when the organization sparked it on September 25th 1964”.⁵²

The secret police archives include several accounts of conflicts in Mozambique, at the docks, for example. On 11 January 1971, reference is made to a protest in 1970, during which production was halted: “low wages and ill-treatment at the hands of stowage officials in Nacala were at the root of the refusal to work, as for some time, stowage work was done by prisoners”.⁵³ A confidential

47 PAIGC memorandum addressed to the Portuguese Government (National Archive Torre do Tombo, n.d.), 1. Ref: PT-ANTT- AOS-CO-UL-32-C_0001, 1. (File 84619).

48 The Marcondes are a Bantu ethnicity living in the southeast of Tanzania and northeast of Mozambique, mostly on the Mueda plateau.

49 Tanganyika used to be a republic in Eastern African and a member of the British Commonwealth. It was named after the Tanganyika Lake, at its western border. Between 1880 and 1919, it was a German colony, but in the aftermath of the First World War it became a British one between 1919 and 1961. In 1964 it was unified with the island of Zanzibar.

50 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, “Conflitos Sociais na Base das Guerras Coloniais”, 183.

51 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, “El Trabajo forzado en las colonias portuguesas”, 69.

52 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, “Conflitos Sociais na Base das Guerras Coloniais”, 183.

53 Report, 11/17/1971, Ref: ANTT-PIDE-DGS-Proc.SC-12918-CI(2)-NT7664 (File 80320).

report from 2 August 1972 mentions a gathering of 60 men hired by CFM (Caminhos de Ferro de Moçambique; Mozambique Railways) at the Nacala Dock Police building on 29 April that year. The men were protesting against being scheduled to work a 24-hour shift with no assurance that they would ever be paid at all. An inquiry established that on the aforementioned date “one 160 men were hired by CFM to work on the Nacala docks, divided in two groups. One comprised one hundred men, who were to work from 7 a.m. to midnight, while the remaining 60 were expected to work for twenty-four hours, from 7 a.m. to 7 a.m. in the following day”. This second group would only be allowed breaks to eat. The report indicates that the demands of the “strikes” (the word is never used) were met.⁵⁴

4 Between the Metropolis and the Colonies

In July 1974, the revolution in the metropolis, the soldiers’ refusal to fight in the colonies and the fissures within the state’s leadership forced the government to concede and endorse the colonies’ independence law. As a consequence, one sector of the state felt side-stepped, and moved towards a more extreme political stance, culminating in a failed coup on 28 September 1974 led by the conservative General António de Spínola. As claimed by Kenneth Maxwell, events in Lisbon, Luanda and Maputo were indissociable.

The same crises that shifted Portugal decisively to the left were the ones determinately pushing Portuguese Africa towards independence. They arose as a range of conflicts, sometimes long-term, whereupon political tension in Portugal, events in Africa and external pressure combined, leading to serious confrontations. The majority of those in Portugal who were politicized were fully aware of the underlying causes of these crises, although the national press seldom reported on them, or did it in rather vague terms. When the crises were over and their consequences became visible, what was publicly discussed was the resignation of Prime-Minister Palma Carlos on the 9th of July and Vasco Gonçalves’ appointment for the job, or General Spínola’s resignation on the 30th of September and his substitution by general Costa Gomes. Notwithstanding, no one involved in these crises ever doubted that the shape and substance of Portugal’s

54 Report, 2/8/1972 (National Archive Torre do Tombo) ANTT-PIDE-DGS-Proc.SC-12918-CI(2)-NT7664 (File 80320).

political future and the independence of the colonies were inextricably linked. Achievements on one sphere would either consolidate victory or bring defeat to the other.⁵⁵

“Prompt independence for the colonies”, was the slogan on a famous poster. “At five o’clock, the situation at the gates of Estrela, the Hospital Militar Principal (Main Military Hospital), did not allow predicting the evolution of the events related to the demands for the release of Captain Peralta”.⁵⁶ Pedro Rodriguez Peralta, a short man with Caribbean features, was a Cuban armed-forces Captain, who had been captured and injured by the Portuguese military in Bissau in 1969 and later taken to Lisbon under arrest. Five years later, in 1974, the demand for his release was the motto for one of the many anti-colonial “demos” called by the far left. The demonstration turned out to be a large mobilization, despite facing an impressive repressive apparatus. The GNR (national guard) on horseback and some PSP (another police force) agents were stationed near Pedro Nunes High School, while Maoist militants of the MRPP (Movimento Reorganizativo do Partido do Proletariado; Movement for the Reorganization of the Proletariat Party) and the Trotskyists of the Liga Comunista Internacionalista (Internationalist Communist League) and other activists carried banners displaying anti-colonial slogans. A few Cape Verde workers who lived nearby joined them. Yet Captain Peralta was not released that day; only at the end of September 1974, as a result of the political friction that led to General Spínola’s resignation.

There were several demonstrations against the war throughout this period, organized mostly by the far left, that actually managed to prevent some soldiers from travelling to the colonies: on 3 May 1974, a group of MRPP demonstrators prevented the boarding of a military unit headed for Africa; the following day, the same happened at the Figo Maduro airport; on 5 May, an anti-colonial protest went from Estrela to Rossio, in Lisbon, and an anticolonial demo was dispersed by the GNR and PSP; on the 6th of May, the Movimento de Esquerda Socialista (the Socialist Left Movement) organized a gathering in Cabo Ruivo, supporting the liberation movements. These protests were usually led by far-left groups and students:

After successive preparatory assemblies, a final meeting took place yesterday afternoon, at the Faculdade de Ciências [Science Faculty],

55 Kenneth Maxwell, *A Construção da Democracia em Portugal* (Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 1999), 99.

56 *Diário Popular*, 26 May 1974, 28.

attended by people from Angola and other colonies living in Lisbon, as well as plenty of progressive young students. Attendees headed to Casa de Angola [Angola House] and occupied its premises. Later, a military unit came up and, after being informed of the motives for the occupation, left. In a general meeting, the Angolans elected a provisional steering group and adopted a motion in support of their brothers and sisters who are fighting colonialism with guns in their hands, and addressed the salute not only to MPLA, but to all movements fighting for independence at the colonies.⁵⁷

The colonies' independence came about thanks to a combination of interweaving factors. These included a crisis within the army, reflected in a divide among the generals, the officials' refusal to continue the war and the demoralization of soldiers, who were still being killed after 25 April 1974 in areas where the war was continuing.⁵⁸ The political crisis fuelled the military crisis and vice versa. In the international framework of the Cold War, doors had been opened to allow the Soviet Union and the US to exploit the former colonies without having to share the gains with the Portuguese capital. However, one must not overlook the instrumental role played by the combination of social struggles in the metropolis, both those undermining the government by industrial action – even if they were not in outright opposition to the war – and those organized mostly by students and far-left organizations that challenged the colonial war directly. Albeit often forgotten, the strikes and shutdowns that took place in Angola and Mozambique at this time were also pivotal, insofar as they were an example for other workers in the region, specifically in South Africa. In May 1975, a wave of strikes hit companies and the public service sector in Angola and Mozambique, in the cities of Luanda, Lobito, Lourenço Marques, Beira and Vila Pery.

Rail traffic on the Benguela line was brought to a total halt, from Lobito to the border . . . The Rail Workers Union instructed all staff at Companhia dos Caminhos de Ferro de Buenguela [Benguela's railway company] to go on strike in order to push for collective bargaining, something rail workers had been fighting for over a long time. This strike does not only affect the Angolan economy, but also those of neighbouring countries such as Zaire and Zambia.⁵⁹

57 *Diário Popular*, 26 May 1974, 9.

58 *Diário Popular*, 19 May 1974, 11.

59 *Diário Popular*, 29 May 1974, 11.

The legendary Benguela line originally linked Lobito, the Atlantic harbour, to the inland areas. Its construction had begun in 1899 – in the early stages of inland colonization – at the hands of the also legendary explorer Cecil Rhodes, who died in 1902. His friend Robert Williams completed the project. It turned out quite rewarding, as it was the shortest route to bring mineral wealth from the inner African Congo to the Atlantic, to be shipped to Europe. However, strikes were not restricted to the transport sector. On 15 May 1974, in Lourenço Marques, Mozambique, staff at the *O Diário* newspaper went on strike, while suburban transport workers threatened to stop work if the “immediate dismissal of management”⁶⁰ did not take place. Two days later, the city faced widespread strikes. Towboat workers at the Lourenço Marques docks claimed they were working up to twenty-four hours in a row without extra pay; hence they went on strike on 17 May 1974. Workers at the cashew factory in Machava rejected a wage increase from 37 to 45 escudos, demanding 200. At the Fábrica Colonial de Borracha (Colonial Rubber Factory), where pay was on average 800 escudos, a rise to 2,500 was called for. On the same day, railway connections with South Africa, Rhodesia and Swaziland were suspended due to a strike by rail workers that involved all three thousand employees.⁶¹ In Lobito, workers on strike at the Sorefame company remained at their work stations, demanding “better wages and better working conditions”.⁶² Luanda was also “on fire”. Rosa Coutinho, who was appointed president of Angola’s Government Committee just before these events, made the following observation about the causes of the violence: “The first reaction I met in Luanda was the expulsion of cantineiros [local food merchants] from the musseques [slums]. Luanda seemed on fire. Houses were burned down. The population’s outrage against the cantinas ended up causing some trouble, for there was a shortage of supplies afterwards”.⁶³

Throughout the colonial regime, cantina shops were controlled by white or black settlers. Most were PIDE informants, because owning a cantina required a license from the secret police: “The level of exploitation was such that sugar was not sold by the kilo but by the spoon . . . Sewing thread was not sold in reels, but by the meter”.⁶⁴ The struggles with the burgeoning workers’ movement in the colonies added to another long-standing strain on the regime from

60 *Diário Popular*, 15 May 1974, 9.

61 *Diário Popular*, 16 May 1974, 1.

62 *Diário Popular*, 29 May 1974, 11.

63 Dalila Cabrita Mateus, *Memórias do Colonialismo e da Guerra* (Lisboa: Edições Asa, 2006), 150.

64 *Ibid.*

anti-colonial revolutions: soldiers' refusal to go to war. By 1973, the deployment of soldiers had reached unprecedented figures. The metropolitan troops in the African war theatres numbered 87,274, supplemented by 61,816 locally recruited troops.⁶⁵ In percentage terms, only Israel has deployed more men than Portugal, despite the fact that over the course of 13 years, about 200,000 men avoided the army call-up.⁶⁶ A study by the Army's Central Headquarters itself revealed that the scale of desertion⁶⁷ was huge and on the rise: in 1961, the percentage of those skipping the draft was 11.6 per cent; in 1962, it had risen to 12.8 percent, and reached 15.6 per cent in 1963. In 1964, the figure was 16.5 per cent, between 1965 and 1968 it hovered around 19 per cent and between 1970 and 1972, it remained close to 21 per cent.⁶⁸ In the early summer of 1974, three months after the military coup, Mozambique (25 June), Cape Verde (5 July) and São Tomé and Príncipe (12 July) became independent. Angola joined them on 11 November 1975.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to demonstrate that the Portuguese Carnation Revolution (1974–1975) should be understood as a process that began not in Lisbon in 1974, but in the Portuguese colonies in 1961. In between lay 13 years of war and revolts in a socio-political space that connected a highly developed economy – with one of the youngest and largest industrial working classes in Western Europe – to the extractive economy and forced labour in African territories. While these two regions and their social dynamics have been treated separately in the historiography, we have underlined their entanglement, which is reflected for example in the fact that the revolutionary liberation movements in Angola, Guinea and Mozambique began after the resistance to

65 Estado-Maior do Exército, 1988 1: 260, 261 in J. P. Borges Coelho, "African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army, 1961–1974: Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique", *Portuguese Studies Review* 10, no.1 (2002): 129–150.

66 Miguel Cardina, "Guerra à Guerra. Violência e anticolonialismo nas oposições ao Estado Novo", *Oficina do CES*, no. 334 (2009): 14.

67 As an example, a statement from the most important leader of the officers' desertion in the whole Estado Novo, Fernando Cerdeira, exiled in Olof Palme's Sweden: "I speak primarily to those who know me best, the officers I taught in Mafra. ... I speak to you to tell you, once again, that the war they are taking part in is a crime. It is a war against people fighting for independence and freedom" (statement from Sweden to PAIGC radio).

68 Estado-Maior do Exército/Comissão para o Estudo das Campanhas de África, *Resenha histórico-militar das Campanhas de África (1961–1974)*, 5 vols. (Lisboa: EME, 1988).

forced labour was repressed in these countries by the metropolis. Hence, in the study of the Portuguese Revolution, it is crucial to reorient our historical gaze onto forced labour. There is no single explanation for the existence of forced labour in the colonies. It is beyond doubt that labour supply played a pivotal role in the period between the 1960s and 1970s – a view that is corroborated by the documented sources and by the statements of state officials and colonial authorities. As nationalist ideologies became influential, international opposition to colonialism increased, the colonial war intensified and resistance to forced labour in the colonies became stronger. The wave of resistance that emerged in this context in the Portuguese colonies is now considered as having been significant and widespread, but more research is needed to explore its various actors, dynamics and outcomes.

In turn, forced labour and resistance to it in the colonies had an indisputable impact on Portugal in the second half of the twentieth century. At that time, Portugal was going through a rapid industrial revolution that was centred around the industrial belts of Lisbon, Oporto and Setúbal; each strongly infused with foreign capital and investment from Northern Europe and the USA. It is therefore not surprising that Salazar said “All to Angola in full force” in his famous war speech on 13 May 1961, reacting to the UPA massacre, and sending several thousand young men to their death. In the words of the Portuguese poet Sophia de Mello Breyner, “That primary day, so whole and clean” was made possible thanks to African resistance and its contamination of the occupying army, and it also was the last day of forced labour under the colonial rule scheme.

There is a fine line between free labour and forced labour systems to produce value in capitalism, and the same applies to how it is resisted, as combined and hybrid forms demonstrate that even the most advanced capitalist system can encapsulate the most backward practices. Its demise came from its imperial features – its “colonial possessions” – and the impulse to undermine the Portuguese State’s might throughout 13 years of war came from forced labour, the most “backward” form of labour within the empire. The large scale involvement of the late industrial organized labour movement and its impact on African independence are combined parts of the whole process. We can no longer ignore the centrality of this “backwardness” in European “modernization”. Although, formally seen as being on opposing sides of the “Colonial war”, or the “Liberation war”, depending on one’s perspective, workers in Portugal and its colonies in Africa alike embarked on a process that created the conditions for the Carnation Revolution and the independence of new African states in 1974 and 1975. Together, they succeeded in defeating the longest-running colonial dictatorship of the twentieth century.

It is up to future research to further explore the forms of resistance, social ties and organizational relations that existed between forced labourers and liberation movement organizations. This will contribute to a non-Eurocentric perspective that is necessary to think of “class as a whole”, in order to include the formal and informal working class, and free and forced labourers in different territories, both in the colonies and in the metropole.

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