

# ANYWHERE THE WESTERN WINDS BLOW<sup>1</sup>

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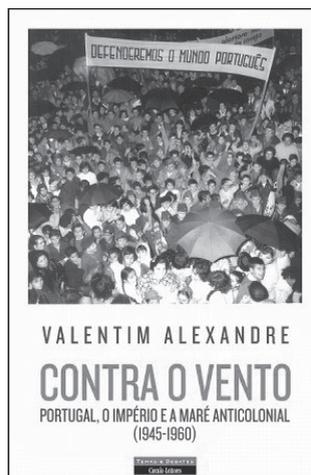
VALENTIM ALEXANDRE

## Contra o Vento: Portugal, o Império e a Maré Anticolonial (1945-1960)

Lisbon, Temas e Debates, Círculo de Leitores, 2017, 839 pages  
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This book by Valentim Alexandre, retired researcher of Instituto de Ciências Sociais (ICS-UL) and the author of reference works on Portuguese colonialism, addresses a historical time period that may be deemed the onset of decolonization; or, put differently, the process that will lead to decolonization. In the decade and a half in question, Valentim Alexandre analyses, debates and describes the subject with great precision.

The “winds” referred to in the title of the work, allusive to the famous “winds of change” mentioned by the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in 1960, first in a speech in Accra and later in Cape Town, relate to the changes that have been felt in the old new territories of the West. The fifteen years preceding Macmillan’s speech correspond to a time when the sovereignties of colonial territories were already under threat. As Valentim Alexander points out, the European powers were not taken by surprise. That is, in a way and ironically, Macmillan does not inaugurate or prophesy anything, because the wind had long been felt, first in Asia and subsequently in Africa.



In turn, the “against” in the title represents the position adopted by the regime in place, which was endorsed elsewhere. Portugal was not alone, nor did it ignore the new times. Salazar, in a speech delivered in 1957, spoke of the “inclemency of our time” that “would prevent us from carrying out our program in Africa”, showing his awareness of what was coming. Likewise,

the major European colonial powers France, the United Kingdom and Belgium, as Valentine Alexandre establishes, sought to maintain their possessions in the short and medium term and build multiracial societies; the unfolding of events was faster than the scheduled time, forcing the colonial powers to skip steps, a process which Estado Novo resisted (p. 763). The author follows and problematizes the changes which were then felt. In the years after the Second World War, the government's attention "focused mainly on white settlement and the promotion of the economy, which was finally able to start" (p. 78). The issue of overseas industrialization had not been forgotten (pp. 434-436), although it was not followed up and only with the 1959 development plan did a measure of development in the colonies begin to take place. Legally and constitutionally, it evolved first with the constitutional revision of 1951 and its legislative adaptation of "overseas provinces", in an attempt to elude the UN and its observations on "non-autonomous territories", and also with the organic law of the overseas in 1953. The system of control and repression accompanied this process with the gradual implementation of the PIDE in the colonies from 1946. And, ideologically, the mythicization of Luso-Tropicalism was beginning. The military also began to prepare for the changes, as Valentine Alexander tells us, in those provinces which had been practically unguarded until the late 1950s. Shyly and tentatively with Santos Costa, more resolutely with Botelho Moniz, but especially from 1958-1960 with reorganizations of the apparatus adapting it to the realities of the territories.

The problem of compulsory or forced labor and compulsory cultures, which, like the indigenous statute regime, all other European colonial powers abolished in the years after World War II, is virtually transversal to all the work. The ILO Forced Labor Convention of 1930 was not respected (although it had been signed by Portugal but only ratified in 1956, the same year when the Indigenous Labor Code was published), as shown by Henrique Galvão's reports cited throughout the book, which denounced the abuses of colonial authorities that, relying on traditional powers, coercively recruited indigenous people whom they called "volunteers" or 'hired men' in exchange for reduced or non-existent salaries. Valentim Alexandre lists a number of attempts that were made to change the situation, which however, amounted to no more than inconsequential intentions or words on paper without effect on the ground, demonstrating great resistance to the abolition of the indigenous statute regime. In fact, the excesses that took place led to situations of human abuse differing little from conditions of modern slavery, especially in São Tomé e Príncipe and Timor. In the remaining cases, abuses would still be less harsh than the conditions faced in compulsory military service, as exemplified by Ghana's complaint that the "hired men" were threatened with military service, which shows that, as a general rule, compulsory work was preferable to it'. The exceptions would obviously be São Tomé and Príncipe and Timor.

The book, already reviewed by Diogo Ramada Curto, Augusto Nascimento and

Cláudia Castelo, goes down several paths. In essence, it undertakes a profound and detailed analysis of the regime's dome, solidly documented especially with recourse to the António Oliveira Salazar archive kept at the National Archives of Torre do Tombo (ANTT). Other sources such as enacted legislation, parliamentary debates and memoirs are also used. But it is fair to say that it is almost always in Salazar's correspondence and notes that the author wanders, scrutinizes and reflects. A work of in-depth research and analysis, perhaps overly focused on the perspective enabled by a single archive and Salazar's notes, in which the author, aware of the excessive use of that archive, soon alerts that "this is not a work on Salazar and his politics" (p. 25). In parallel, the author carries out a comparative look on the colonial framework in Portugal and in other powers (France, England and Belgium) which greatly enriches the work and its reading.

### **EDDIES**

Portugal's liaison with countries of the Afro-Asian bloc present in the Bandung Conference with which it has maintained good relations or alliances, the case of Pakistan (Mirza's visit in 1957), Indonesia (Sukarno's visit in 1960) and Ethiopia (Selassie's visit in 1959) is left out. The author also delves little into the other emerging powers driven by expansionist and neocolonial ambitions. African, European and Asian. Perhaps a reflection of a postcolonial field of study still too attached to a view of colonialism as an exclusive feature of Western Europe. It would

be advisable to begin to include the analysis of the expansionism and ambition of the USSR, China or India in these realities in order to achieve a better understanding of emerging systems of domination, in a less Eurocentric and more global perspective. The author's consideration that the indigenous "overwhelming majority of the African population of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea" was subject to forced labor and compulsory cultures (p. 752) seems to be exaggerated, as only part of the population deemed "primitive" was employed, and usually in cotton and cocoa growing areas, diamond mining and public works.

The possibility of a referendum put forward by Salazar to resolve the Goa question, which Valentine Alexander sees as a search for "a path of solution" but will nevertheless amount to no more than "testing the waters" (pp. 694-695), raises interpretations that deserve to be explored. Was there a genuine intention to move forward with an unconstitutional plebiscite or was the solidity of the State's dome being assayed? Was it pure judiciousness a sign of the statesman's weakness? Or even, more remotely, the envisaged prospect of a future constitutional change? What might have been the point of letting the cat out of the bag?

An analogy between settlement plans in Angola and Mozambique and the "Nazi Germany's colonization plans for Eastern Europe" (p. 435) is perhaps the less successful point of the work. The description, offered by Valentine Alexandre, of a "precedent that no observer was aware of in Portugal at this time", is at best a rather

unscholarly comparison. Why not confront other settlement projects like a *kibbutz* or a *moshav* in Palestine? Or any other settlement project founded by any other colonial power in Africa? The similitude between Portuguese and Nazi colonialisms suggested by the author appears to be a truncated debate. The absence of an analysis of the Batepá Massacre in 1953, in the colony of São Tomé and Príncipe, is also noticeable.

### **THE FRAGILITY OF ENGLISH EXCEPTIONALISM**

Valentim Alexandre exposes the tensions created by the new waves of European settlers with the Portuguese-African and assimilated elites, an important part of the colonial administration and bourgeoisie (p. 752). The balance of colonial society shifted with the new settlers occupying the best positions and dominating the economy. The pressure of the mass immigration of European women called into question the myth of miscegenation. And new abuses on indigenous peoples were committed, as criticized by the ethnologist Jorge Dias in a report quoted by the author denouncing the “recent behavior of the settlers, who stray from our traditional indigenous policy, giving rise to abuses” (p. 43) and appealing to the re-education of the settler “teaching him to respect the natives” and to suppress the “use of the difference of skin colors” (p. 401). These relations, although mentioned abundantly throughout the work, are deserving of further reflection, especially with regard to the tensions between central power and settlers for more autonomy and less nation-

nal integration, and on the issue of assimilated people who, despite encountering competition from European settlers from the 1940s, continued to increase in number and influence as the development of the territory boosted opportunities. The nationalist leaders are the sons of assimilated people who do not see tensions eased with teaching and job opportunities alone. The attempt to build multiracial societies in the new colonies promoted by European and American governments failed. In this project, Portuguese colonies, unlike the others, were not eclipsed by internal factors, but by external reasons. The blowing winds that took effect in other colonies had a different outcome in Portugal. As Valentine Alexander writes, this was partly “because there was no full awareness, abroad, of the central role that the Empire had in the nation’s self-image” (p. 23). The difference between Portugal’s upwind movement and the European powers was resistance. While liberal democracies eventually skipped steps and sacrificed interests of colonial communities, moving directly to the neocolonial paradigm in which the “informal exercise of political and economic influence was more relevant than the sovereignty previously exercised over colonial territories” (p. 764), Portugal, authoritarian in public debate and repression, small in international influence, poor and clinging to the historical consciousness of the “sacred heritage”, could not or did not want do it. This original and solidly documented research falls into to an increasingly rare type of work, regrettably. Throughout its reading, it is notorious how the Portuguese

authorities and Salazar were aware of the swift changes experienced in the colonial empires and the fact that it was only a matter of time before they reached Portugal. Meanwhile, the country adopted a resilient stance, and remained unwavering in its *pax lusitana* based on a policy of repression and reform, the author concludes. The latter being a genuine effort and not merely instrumental. “Two sides of

the same political coin, aimed at preserving national sovereignty over the Empire” (p. 774).

An example of how to conduct sound research, with method and distancing, which makes the author and his work a true milestone. We undoubtedly look forward to the new chapters of this masterful reference work for the study of the colonial theme. **RI**

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**1** A Portuguese version of this book review was first published in *Relações Internacionais*, No. 66, 2020.

**2** MONTEIRO, José Pedro - *A Internacionalização das Políticas Laborais «Indígenas» no Império Colonial Português (1944-1962)*. Doctoral thesis, Universidade de Lisboa, 2017, p. 267.

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