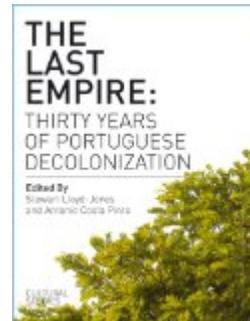




Steward Lloyd-Jones, António Costa Pinto, eds. *The Last Empire: Thirty Years of Portuguese Decolonization*. Bristol and Portland: Intellect Books, 2003. 156 pp. \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84150-109-3.

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Published on H-Luso-Africa (February, 2006)



The Last Empire

Thirty years have gone by since the disintegration of the Portuguese colonial empire, which in its glory days stretched out over three continents from Macao in the Far East to Brazil in South America. The overseas territories not only sustained Portugal's backward economy, but also embodied a heritage of a glorious past and a motive for national pride. Portugal's world empire was to last the longest. While other European colonial powers had reluctantly prepared their overseas territories for independence after the Second World War, the Salazar dictatorship devised a colonial policy strictly in line with the Estado Novo's narrow vision of its imperial mission. The collapse of the Portuguese empire, which already suffered serious cracks because of the guerrilla wars in the African colonies of Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, eventually became linked to the demise of the dictatorship in metropolitan Portugal in April 1974.

This book, which resulted from a conference organized by the Contemporary Portuguese Political History Research Centre and the University of Dundee in September 2000, explores the uniqueness of the decolonization process in the Lusophone world and analyzes the official relations between Portugal and its former African and Asian colonies ever since. The first of four sections is dedicated to a political history of Portugal itself. As Richard Robinson shows in his detailed account, as a consequence of Salazar's centralizing imperial policies and the formal existence of "overseas provinces," domestic and overseas affairs became tragically intertwined in Portuguese pol-

itics. Opposition to Salazarist integrationism, of which the first signs appeared in late 1950s, grew with the anxiety about the need for a political way out of the colonial wars. Disagreement about the decolonization policy continued to determine politics in Lisbon even after the emergence of democracy in 1974, but not for long. Subsequent to the independence of Angola, its last colony in Africa, the focus on domestic issues strengthened and the crumbled empire slowly vanished from the political agenda. As Robinson concludes, "overseas affairs brought authoritarianism to an end but were of declining significance for the revolutionary process that ended in the consolidation of pluralist democracy" (p. 13).

In his contribution on the transition to democracy and Portugal's decolonization, which partly overlaps with the previous chapter, António Costa Pinto equally states that the future of the dictatorship was inseparably linked to the outcome of the wars fought in the overseas territories. He argues that with Spínola's fall, Portugal's decolonization acquired a global character as the international community as well as the liberalization movements pressed heavily for a rapid decolonization. This desire fell on fertile ground as the ruling MFA sought to secure Spínola's definite defeat and free continental Portugal from the imperial logic. With the parting of ways with its former colonies, Portugal looked north, not south, for its future and joined the European Community. According to Pinto, this decision was a direct consequence of decolonization and of the institutional-

ization of democracy as “the democratic elite managed to engender the belief within the Portuguese public opinion that Europe was the only means through which Portugal could recreate important relations with the new Portuguese-speaking African states, particularly since almost all economic links had disappeared and political relationships had deteriorated following the granting of independence in 1975” (p. 33).

The second part of the book consists of two case studies. Malyn Newitt analyzes the ways in which the process of decolonization influenced the recent history of São Tomé e Príncipe. Its postcolonial endeavor aimed at rapid development with the support of Angola, and to a lesser extent of Cuba, but collapsed when the world cocoa price fell after 1980. Since then, São Tomé e Príncipe has failed to match the success of other island microstates, and “acquired an unenviable reputation for being, in its own small way, among the most corrupt of African regimes” (p. 51). The subsequent case study looks at the East: the impact of Portugal’s decentralization on the fate of Macao, Timor, and Portuguese India. In his analysis, Arnaldo Gonçalves compares the collapse of the Portuguese oriental empire to the vanishing of its territories in Africa, and gives a brief historical overview of the decolonization process of the eastern empire. He concludes that Goa and Macao (but not East Timor) face a bright future, and that “Macao will lead the way to China’s transformation from an economic dragon to a reliable democratic society” (p. 63). These assumptions, however, remain without argumentation and analysis.

Portugal’s relations with the Afro-Lusophone world, both outside and inside the country, are the focus of the third part of the volume. Luís António Santos describes the uneasy birth of the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP) in 1996, which also includes Brazil. He observes that, four years after the formal institutionalization of the CPLP, Portugal maintains a cautious position. Is it the fear of neo-colonial accusations, the demise of community lined to its “Lusotropical” beginnings, or are there other reasons? Santos concludes that each of the five countries have pursued their own regional and international goals according to their perception of national self-interests. Surprisingly, there is no mentioning of the link between the establishment of the CPLP and Mozambique’s accession to the Commonwealth in 1995, a move which greatly alarmed Portugal as it “saw one of the eight ships in the worldwide Lusophone fleet sailing away to join the Anglophones”.^[1]

“What good is Portugal to an African?” asks Michel Cahen in his contribution. He points to the “striking contrast between the relationships between Portugal and Brazil and Portugal and Africa,” concluding that in economic terms Afro-Portuguese relations are rather meager (p. 83). The striking continuity is of a cultural nature: the entrenched position of the Portuguese language in the PALOP (Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa). This shows, according to Cahen, a “paradoxical nationalism” as the African country’s choice of the Portuguese language was merely a linguistic tool for national unity, and not a sign of interest in privileged relations with Portugal. Martin Eaton, finally, presents an anatomy of the Portuguese immigrant labor market and shows that since decolonization Portugal has the highest proportions of African immigrants in the European Union, many originating from its former colonies.

The closing chapters of the book consist of testimonies: a previously unpublished paper on the unfolding events in revolutionary Portugal written in 1974 by historian Douglas Wheeler, and a personal account of the Portuguese journalist António de Figueiredo who was a political opponent of the dictatorship in his country. These testimonies serve as invigorating illustrations in a volume that at times lacks analytical strength and leans heavily on analysis of official, government perspectives. A further imperfection concerns the translation of the Portuguese texts into English, which is often done too literally, causing stylistic slip-ups.

Perhaps the value of the book is that the Portuguese decolonization process is considered from a kaleidoscope of angles. The contributions take into consideration not only the Luso-African relations, but also Portugal’s possessions in Asia and the most visible after-effect of its colonial past: the arrival of numerous immigrant workers from its former “overseas provinces.” The picture that emerges of the “Last Empire” is multifaceted: an isolated, conservative regime that deeply believed in its emperor role, an impoverished nation internally wrecked by the colonial ambitious, and a rather self-doubting contemporary Portugal seeking new forms of relationships with its former overseas territories.

Note

[1]. Malyn Newitt, “Mozambique,” in *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa*, ed. P. Chabal et al. (London: Hurst & Co, 2002), p. 234.

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Citation: Inge Ruigrok. Review of Lloyd-Jones, Steward; Pinto, António Costa, eds., *The Last Empire: Thirty Years of Portuguese Decolonization*. H-Luso-Africa, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.

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