
Alianças ameaçadoras: Etnografia portuguesa sobre a vida associativa indígena em Angola, Moçambique e Guiné (1945-1974)

Joana Dias Pereira

Alianças ameaçadoras: Etnografia portuguesa sobre a vida associativa indígena em Angola, Moçambique e Guiné (1945-1974)

Joana Dias Pereira

AUTHOR’S NOTE
This article is part of a research project funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (CEECIND/00764/2017) on long term institutionalised collective action.

Introduction

Worldwide, the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation in Africa have driven both major rural-urban migration flows and the emergence of new social movements, in the form of voluntary associations. (Mazrui & Wondji 2010). However, studies of African civil society remain few and far between, despite the fact that “one of the most vociferous and voluminous debates in African politics has been over the concept of civil society” (Orvis 2001). These debates focused on the concept’s usefulness in African contexts. There is a tendency to analyse civil society through a Western lens, ignoring
the historical colonial legacy and eclipsing those organisations that fail to fit its prescriptions, which are based on imagined past stages of Western civilisation. An analysis of the historical processes that have shaped civil society in Africa is therefore necessary (Lewis 2002).

2 Osaghae’s influential paper on the enduring legacies of colonialism argues that the “uniqueness” of civil society in Africa is rooted in its ethnicization (Osaghae 2006), while Mamdani traces this back to the exclusionary nature of colonial policies and civil society itself, which institutionalised differences between groups of citizens and ethnicised subjects (Mamdani 2018). Makumbe highlights the fact that colonial governments throughout Africa destroyed most pre-existing civic groups and organisations. Moreover, colonial regimes across most of sub-Saharan Africa actively discouraged the emergence of associational life; the only civic groups actively involved in politics during the colonial era were those whose membership comprised the settlers and the colonialists themselves (Makumbe 1998).

3 This paper aims to broaden our knowledge of the evolution of African civil society during the late colonial period. Though several studies have stressed the need to historicise this process, the historical data are not easy to recover. As in other ex-colonies, indigenous associations have never been legally recognised in the former Portuguese colonies. As will be demonstrated, Africans (other than a tiny minority of those who were “assimilated”) were never granted civil and political rights, (Silva 2009). As a result, historical research on indigenous civil societies has focused mainly on this minority (Nascimento 2005, Neves 2008, Freudenthal 2013, Marzano 2013). Sources on associations created by settlers and migrant communities of other origins are also relatively accessible (Melo 2004, Pimenta 2013), yet references to indigenous associations are rare, as the few studies that do exist are based on oral tradition (Trajano Filho 2006, Semedo 2010). Of the available sources, colonial knowledge has yet to be explored, despite comprehensive field surveys on indigenous associations having been conducted since 1950; their results constitute an alternative to the historical sources commonly used to study the emergence of associations in other contexts, such as via their bylaws. However, their institutional and political framework cannot be overlooked.

4 Postcolonial critique has examined these accounts as sources through which an understanding can be gained of the various aspects and impacts of the colonial process including the evolution of Eurocentric representations of other world cultures. This evolutionary perspective has led to underestimation of the ‘rest’ of the world’s knowledge, silencing its experiences and history (Meneses 2018). Recent decades have seen the development of a research trend for the history of nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism, in a bid to challenge the historical myths constructed since the late 1800s (Castelo 2006). This trend confronts a long period of “scientific occupation” as well as a vast “colonial library” in which African history has been analysed according to Eurocentric and racist assumptions (Mudimbe 2013). By taking the post-colonialist critique seriously, this analysis hopes to engage with colonial knowledge while considering its production contexts and limitations, and highlighting the impact of the colonial encounter on African civil society (Roque & Wagner 2013).

5 The primary purpose of this analysis is to engage with knowledge on associations within the colonial library, considering the cases of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea—all former Portuguese colonies in which the Indigenous Statute was in force. As
Angolan historian Maria da Conceição Neto argues, from 1926 to 1961 the Indigenous Statute shaped every sphere of economic, social and political life in these places (Neto 2015). By organising society along racial lines, and not officially recognising local populations’ right to freedom of assembly, the Indigenous Statute generated specific social bonds and institutional designs among the indigenous associations, even though these were widely spread across the colonial urban suburbs. From the 1950s onwards, indigenous associations captured the attention of the colonial academic elites, and in the 1960s, these were even thought of as valuable tools for the promotion of acculturation among indigenous populations, giving rise to a relevant set of academic studies on this subject.

This article is based on these studies—namely those resulting from field surveys that focused directly on indigenous associations, starting with the pioneering mission led by Silva e Cunha on “Associative Movements in Black Africa” (1956-1959) and following his students’ dissertations and reports on the 1960s. By examining these sources, this article provides new insights on the development of civil society in a colonial situation, showing both European representations and indigenous agency. First, it seeks to highlight specific features of the post-WWII Portuguese colonial situation, that is, perpetuation of the indigenous regime despite social change and international pressure. Second, it aims to frame the sources analysed within the context of the evolution of Portuguese colonial science, and elucidate their production contexts and objectives. Lastly, it seeks to engage with the results of ethnographic surveys undertaken between 1945 and 1974, to provide new insights into the origins, social ties, typologies, and internal norms of African indigenous associations.

The Post-WWII colonial situation under Portuguese rule

Historians have highlighted both the standard features of the colonial situation under Portuguese rule, and the doctrines used to justify it. As Maria da Conceição Neto argues, during the last 25 years of the nineteenth century, the essentials of European colonial ideology were broadly agreed-upon. There was widespread consensus on the idea of the superiority of “Western” civilisation, and this served to legitimise the conquest and exploitation of African territories and peoples. The rise of totalitarianism in the interwar period strengthened discriminatory and segregationist laws and practices such as the Estatuto do Indígena (Indigenous Statute) of 1926, in Portugal.

As Cristina Nogueira da Silva argues, the totalitarian and conservative trend of the Portuguese dictatorship formalised racial discrimination in a legal duality that was imposed in colonised Africa and incorporated white racial supremacy into the law, distinguishing between indigenous people and citizens. The Indigenous Statute of 1926 presupposed a formal definition of rights (and the lack of them) with implications for various aspects of social life, including associational life (Silva 2009). This new legal framework was guided by the idea that “due to a lack of practical significance”, it was neither possible nor desirable to attribute rights related to European institutions to the indigenous people.

Both during and after the WWII, colonial ideology was in many places superseded in the African colonies by new ideas and policies—but while Portugal did not follow this
trajectory, its own colonial ideology did evolve from explicit racism to Lusotropicalism. This was the idea that, because of its special capacity for integration, Portugal was a “multiracial and pluricontinental” nation. Even though forced labour, compulsory cultures and discriminatory legislation were maintained, the Portuguese regime returned to the liberal discourse of “assimilation” (Neto 1997).

The 1954 Indigenous Statute revision also revealed the new concept of “detribalized indigenous people”. Article 21 attributed jurisdiction over these people to colonial administrative authorities, on the basis that they were no longer integrated into traditional political organisations. They were however still considered “indigenous” and as such had neither civil nor political rights with regard to Portuguese institutions. It is worth analysing the categorisation of these social strata, since it is among these that modern African voluntary associations have proliferated.

According to Silva e Cunha, the social structure of Portuguese colonies was typical of Black African societies; these societies created three heterogeneous social groups, by ethnicity and culture. The first group was made up of Portuguese settlers from the metropolis (or other overseas provinces) alongside elements of the indigenous population, which had evolved by fully assimilating Portuguese culture. The second group consisted of indigenous people whose lives were integrated into tribal institutions, practicing traditional culture. Also influenced by Portuguese culture, this group was undergoing an ongoing process of cultural evolution. The third group was made up of indigenous people who, having reached a higher degree of cultural evolution by cultivating proximity to Portuguese culture, had abandoned the tribe and ceased practicing the essential concepts of their ancestral culture, but could not yet be considered assimilated (Cunha 1959a).

The 1950 census revealed that in Angola (the African territory in which Portuguese colonisation was most significant), the first group was divided between 78,000 Europeans and 30,000 assimilated indigenous people, while 4,036,687 people were subjugated to indigenous status. Concerning this third group, Silva e Cunha states:

“...it should be noted that the numerical data do not faithfully reflect reality, insofar as they are based on legal rather than sociological concepts. In reality, the number of ‘assimilated’ people exceeds that figure. Among those who have ended up assimilated, yet fail to fulfill the formal legal requirements for the acquisition of Portuguese citizenship—understandably, it is materially impossible to determine their number exactly.” (Cunha 1959b)

Despite statistical limitations, detribalization (as census data confirm) was a rapidly expanding phenomenon in the post-war period. For example, in Angola (according to the 1940 census) there were 106,279 detribalized people, rising to 201,696 by the time of the 1950 census. In Guinea, where colonisation had been less effective, there were just 6,653 Portuguese citizens for 537,300 indigenous people, plus 28,000 individuals considered detribalized (Cunha 1959a). In Mozambique, the composition of the population was more complex as a result of the advent of Asian immigration, with the assimilated African population in 1940 accounting for just 1,776 people out of a total of 55,451 ‘civilised’ people of different nationalities. The majority of indigenous people remained 'on the lands', that is to say, beyond the reach of the wage system, though 279,144 were either already employed by European companies or conducting profitable activities independently—149,418 of whom were active in commerce and industry. ¹
Here it is important to cite the characterisation of this social stratum in the Amadeu de Castilho Soares thesis, which will be analysed below, and which distinguishes between two distinct groups of detribalized people.

“The group of stabilised individuals who are either indigenous to the region or have lived there for some years. These were usually people who showed marked professional (and even family) stability, demonstrating ‘civilised’ life habits (assimilated or not from a legal perspective), but assimilated, from the social and cultural point of view—which is, in spite of everything, what is most important. There is a great mass of floating individuals in continuous displacement between the city and the home community—without professional stability, free of any discipline, living on the fringes of social materiality and civilised society.” (Soares 1961a)

In addition to this process of social change, surviving colonialist regimes were under increasing internal and external pressure during the post-WWII period. The newly-established United Nations (UN) became the arena for African countries’ demands for self-determination—especially from the late 1950s, when the newly-independent African countries became members. The Bandung conference of 1955 brought together representatives of the then-colonised territories in defence of political independence; this was a historical milestone. The Portuguese colonial regime was thus required to promote a set of cosmetic reforms that were reflected linguistically, rather than in a radically different legal framework. Nevertheless, in 1960, the Salazar dictatorship was obliged to ratify the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, which was adopted by the International Labour Conference. This last also focused on the question of semi-tribal populations, and was committed to the right of assembly and freedom for all lawful trade union activities. By 1961, the “indigenous regime” was abolished, and in parallel with nationalist movements and the expansion of the war, other structural reforms were being discussed among colonial academic and political elites.

**The post-WWII “turn” in colonial science**

Overall, social and political change shaped a major turn in post-WWII colonial science and schooling, giving rise to a number of studies of indigenous associations. These last were part of a broader discontinuity in the role assumed by the social sciences in colonial governance, and reflected in the official reform of colonial schooling. In 1946, the Escola Colonial (Colonial School), founded in 1906 to train overseas officials in the administration, was reorganised. Postgraduate courses in colonial administration were provided, ensuring that those in senior positions would have in-depth knowledge of colonial problems. In 1954, the Colonial School was renamed Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos (Higher Institute of Overseas Studies), and its activities were expanded. Research centres, study missions and new courses were created to broaden the culture and debate the role of the Colonial State in the new environment (Abrantes 2012).

One of the most important research units was the Overseas Research Board’s Centre for Political and Social Studies, created in 1956 and headed by Adriano Moreira—future Minister of Overseas Affairs (Barbosa 2008). That same year, a Study Mission on Associative Movements in Africa was set up (Executive Order 16158). This mission resulted in the publication of three volumes devoted to associative movements in Black Africa (1956-1959). This was coordinated by Joaquim Moreira Silva e Cunha, Professor at the Superior Institute of Social Sciences (who later became Minister for Overseas
Affairs, and then of National Defence). Several of his students later dedicated dissertations and research projects to indigenous associative life, as will be shown.

This new attention to indigenous collective activity was related to the growing threat presented by the ongoing decolonisation process. More recently, however, some authors have also highlighted the process of administrative rationalisation and modernisation that was being trialled, which included a more effective scientific occupation as well as the involvement of Portuguese scientists in international forums. The colonial knowledge thus produced resulted in part from the relationship between participation in national and international academic debates and field research undertaken as part of the overseas administration. As Ágoas and Castelo argue, it was at this point that modern social anthropology and sociology developed among colonial academic elites (Ágoas & Castelo 2019).

With regard to the subject of this article, it is important to mention Portuguese academic contact with George Balandier’s research on Messianism and African associations in the French colonies, since this work had a significant influence on Portuguese ethnography in the post-WWII period. Balandier was a pioneering researcher on African indigenous associations, and stressed the strong impact the colonial situation had had on their emergence. To him, the salient feature of this colonial situation was the imposition of domination, in the name of a dogmatically-asserted racial and cultural superiority, by a foreign minority that was both racially and culturally different, on an autochthonous majority said to be “more backward” or “primitive”. Moreover, prolonged domination created a system of pseudo-justifications and representations about the other. Balandier highlighted the agency of the colonised peoples, their processes of adaptation and refusal as “points of resistance”. He also argued, at the time, that anthropology and sociology surveys preferred to study the impact of the “modern” economy on “primitive” social organisation and failed to consider critical phenomena—including the emergence of new patterns of assembly within colonised society (Balandier 1951).

Beyond Balandier’s work, post-WWII literature on associations in “developing” societies was vast, and the ensuing international debates were reflected in the Portuguese research. Following the evolutionist perspective, which conferred to the colonial powers a “civilising mission”, the phenomenon of associative life in the colonial context continued to be understood in the light of a supposed late modernisation process in comparison with that of nineteenth-century Europe. Kenneth Little’s research on the role of voluntary associations in the social change of West Africa stands out for its appreciation of the adaptation of traditional values and social ties to new instrumental and expressive functions (Little 1957). Other studies including a comparative focus conceived of indigenous associations as “intermediary institutions” in an ongoing process that played a pivotal role in connecting traditional peasant social relations to modern economic demands (Geertz 1962, Eisenstadt 1956). This tendency to overvalue the relationship between African associations and tribal ties found its greatest exponents in the concept of “supertribalization”, coined by Jean Rouch. He argued that, against all expectations, the study of migratory movements towards Accra in Ghana (1950-1951) revealed a strengthening of community ties (Rouch 1956).

At the time, however, both concept and thesis were subjected to criticism—from Georges Balandier first and foremost. He argued that, like any other social
phenomenon, analysis of the phenomenon of associative life in a colonial context could not be compared with the same phenomenon in a European context, because to do so would be to neglect the impact of the colonial process (Balandier 1951). The role of colonial authorities in perpetuating and sanctioning tribal ties was, as Wallerstein argues, crucial to demystifying the concept of supertribalization. The author argues that often, the group from which an individual is ‘detribalized’ may not necessarily be the same group to which he is “supertribalized” (that is, the ethnic group with which he feels strong ties of attachment in the urban context). Furthermore, this identification was promoted and sanctioned by colonial authorities “in the form of census categories, or through the recognition of “town chiefs” and “associations d’originaires”—the main form of ethnic (tribal) ‘government’ in West African cities today” (Wallerstein 1960).

Max Gluckman also stresses that it is impossible to compare tribal relations in an urban context with their predecessors from a rural context, where tribal membership involved both participation in a functioning political system and domestic life with kin. Tribalism in cities was also the basis of new kinds of associations established among Africans—namely leisure, burial and mutual aid societies. These associations were geared to meeting the needs of urban life, with class solidarity becoming increasingly important. He argues that colonial authorities supported the survival of tribalism, promoting its chiefs in both in rural and urban areas, as well as in mining communities (Gluckman 1960).

This unprecedented awareness and discussion of how the repertoires of collective action were evolving in developing countries was related to the emergence of nationalist movements, and an attempt to follow (and adapt) the emergent developmental theories and practices promoted by new international organisations such as FAO and UNESCO. Portuguese research on indigenous associations in the 1960s (the UN’s “development decade”), were thus framed by worldwide interest in the classification, analysis and reform of indigenous institutions (Cooper & Packard 1997). As Carla Susana argues, on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the Colonial School’s final degree theses of the 1950s-1960s, academics trained in the metropolis post-WWII were supposed to produce new knowledge about colonial “problems” and to find and apply “solutions”. There was a need to show other nations that the Portuguese colonial regime was aware of the problems concerning the populations under its rule, and was promoting social progress in accordance with the dominant developmental tendency (Abrantes 2012). Within this framework, new concepts such as “rural well-being” or “community development” emerged in colonial research and discourse, which envisaged using the sense of community that existed in these traditional communities (Castelo 2014).

One solution suggested by Colonial School students and aimed at combatting “subversion” in Colonial Africa, was the promotion of cooperatives, in line with ILO, UNESCO and UN recommendations (Neto 1959, Silva 1960, Estrela 1964, Araújo 1965). These proposals were reflected in the legislation regarding the indigenous settlement regime, which provided for the establishment of agricultural cooperatives as well as “Agricultural Cooperative Working Groups”, to encourage their creation.

These studies also tended to consider spontaneous indigenous associative life as a relevant mechanism of both social development and control, arguing that
“The help of social visitors (or indeed any other form of help) will be the best forms of control over the association’s activities, control that is all the more effective and well-accepted because, in practice, it goes unnoticed.” (Pereira 1962)

The authors of these studies were also concerned with exclusively-indigenous football clubs and suggested that enquiries be made into ascertaining the existence of all clandestine sports groups (Pinto 1962). These studies, analyses and proposals allow us to better understand how the colonial situation has shaped African civil society.

Engaging with Colonial Ethnography on African Associational Life

Silva e Cunha and his followers date the emergence of modern associations in developing countries back to the post-WWII period. Although the ancestry of “primitive type associations” was confirmed (Cunha 1956), the general tendency was to relate the germination of associative life among indigenous urban populations as a direct result of the need to compensate for the lack of individual security (Cunha 1956). Referring to the situation in Luanda, senior colonial official Ramiro Ladeiro Monteiro argued that indigenous associations constituted new, sociable formulas that compensated for the weakening of traditional ties (Monteiro 1973).

As already mentioned, colonial ethnography and sociology began to take a serious interest in the associative movements of Black Africa, especially after the Bandung conference—which is not to say that they did not exist earlier. Although few in number, testimonies to the associations created among indigenous populations do exist. One such is that of Angolan writer Óscar Ribas, who described a set of associations and clubs founded in Luanda during the interwar period, whose antecedents dated back at least to the nineteenth century (Ribas 1965). A more recent thesis reveals the existence of mutual aid associations among Mozambican migrants in Southern Rhodesia, dating back at least to WWI (Neves 1998). Though further research is needed to highlight the origins of indigenous associations, these accounts suggest it could be argued that post-WWII studies were not, as was believed at the time, focusing on a radically new phenomenon determined by Western modernisation.

Portuguese colonial science followed the evolutionist trend by presenting indigenous associations as “intermediary” institutions typical of “developing” societies (Little 1957), though it also contradicted contemporary “supertribalization” theories (Rouch 1956). After three years of fieldwork in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, Cunha concluded that

“In traditional associations, those who have integrated a tribe continue to find the protection they need against the outside world. However, as tribal solidarity becomes weaker, new societies emerge in order to perform this function. Logically enough, this phenomenon is particularly intense among those indigenous people who have settled near the European nuclei.” (Cunha 1959a)

Later, based on field work in the Luanda suburbs, Amadeu Castilho Soares also argued that the new associations among indigenous populations arose out of

“the need to transcend ethnic pluralism, in order that new units, new harmonious syntheses may be organised to replace the syncretic sets created by colonisation. It follows that attempts at social reorganisation are associated with attempts at emancipation [...]. The detribalised, in their fear of individualism, seek to build a
new social solidarity based on the ties of language, religion, kinship and colour.”
(Soares 1961b)

Though Portuguese authors did recognise the contentious nature of these new social ties (Soares 1961b), they were unenthusiastic about policies seeking to halt the so-called detribalization process—such as those proposed by Belgian Jesuit Pierre Charles (Curto & Cruz 2021). While this rejection could have been related to Gilberto Freyre’s luso-tropicalism, it was more likely to be due to the ethnographic observations that indicated the overcoming of ethnic ties. In his report on Guinea, Silva e Cunha addressed the question of how grassroots associations could fit in with a broader social movement. He believed that this integration was favoured by the religious community among Muslims, which conferred additional stability and organisation on the associations—as illustrated by the Mandinka and Fula clubs in Guinea, where there was a tendency for religious unity to transcend not just ethnic diversity, but also political boundaries (Cunha 1959a).

Research conducted by António Rita-Ferreira in Mozambique also indicates that, among indigenous populations, new associative bonds tended to overcome traditional ties in larger cities. Data collected by Lourenço Marques reveals that in certain circumstances, in the professional, economic, sporting or recreational environments, these differences were partially surpassed by interests of a common nature (Ferreira 1968). This researcher, relativising the theory on the survival of “tribal” ties, even argued that African associations based on home community have parallels with those organised by European settlers:

“In their social and family behaviour, rural Africans do not differ much from metropolitan, rural people, who emigrate to escape poverty, have only an elementary education, and group themselves into regional associations.” (Ferreira 1968)

It is also essential to consider the information provided by these studies that relates to modern women’s associations, which goes along with the same thesis—that new ties forged in urban environments exist at the expense of traditional ties. According to a study conducted by Jaime da Guia Pereira in 1962,

“associative movements are more numerous, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in urban centres or on their edges, i.e. where there is a greater number of detribalized people.” (Pereira 1962)

Moreover, these studies admit that this “integration” excluded relations between Europeans and Africans, confirming Balandier’s thesis defending the idea that what was predominant in the configuration of the new urban social bonds was the racial boundary imposed by the colonial situation. According to Rita-Ferreira:

“Beyond obligatory (and predominantly impersonal) relationships such as those imposed by work, the two main racial groups do not seek to associate. Just one exception seems to arise, and that is in the field of sport.” (Ferreira 1968)

Data collected by other academics, however, points to a predominance of solid racial segregation lines in sport, too. According to Pinto,

“Until the extinction of the indigenous regime, a certain limitation was inherent to the creation of sports clubs, since only non-indigenous people could be members and participate in the sport. We know, however, of the existence of many clandestine indigenous clubs.” (Pinto 1962)

According to the Provincial Inspection of Civic Education, this may have been an ongoing and lasting situation, given that in the 1970s, there were twenty official clubs
in the Luanda Musseques and more than fifty that had no legally-approved status (Monteiro 1973).

Regarding the classification of typologies, we note that in the 1950s, both the data collected and the resulting analysis were subordinated to the primary objective of identifying potential threats to Portuguese sovereignty. Because of this, the prophetic-messianic movement attracted far more attention than other forms of indigenous associative life. The first Portuguese missions directed by Silva e Cunha were inspired by studies that had been carried out in other colonial contexts, and tended to pursue evidence of previously-identified typologies. As a result, the first report (based on secondary sources) is limited to those typologies studied by earlier researchers: mystic-religious associations, primitive in both form and content, mystic-religious associations, primitive in form and new in content, mystic-religious associations of a prophetic-messianic type, and mutualist, cooperative and political associations (Cunha 1956).

Studies carried out in Angola between 1956 and 1958, revealed traces of all previously-defined associative typologies (Cunha 1956). Nevertheless, the report focused mostly on the mystical-religious associations, even where “concrete information about their current existence” was “scarce”. These descriptions were based on police reports and referred to experiences that were short-lived as a result of “immediate and energetic action” by the authorities. Research on mutual and cooperative associations was however neglected, even though it was recognised that they “were widespread among the indigenous people of Angola, mainly in the agglomerations near urban centres” (Cunha 1959b: 17-75).

The primary purpose of a 1958 study in Guinea was to identify any “movements of reaction which could serve as a channel for the penetration into our territory of ideas similar to those stirring up the populations of French West Africa”. Only identified Muslim brotherhoods and mutualist associations were identified during the fieldwork, and no signs of “movements of reaction” were found. According to this report, Muslim brotherhoods became increasingly important among the 180,000 Muslims who made up a third of the population. Though these groups were essentially dedicated to religious worship, they also had welfare and educational functions. Mutual aid groups in traditional communities were organised for the purposes of agricultural work, religious worship or recreational events, and their energies were divided between religious, recreational, mutualistic, cultural and judicial ends (Cunha 1959a).

This 1950s trend for research that focused on movements threatening Portuguese colonial rule was confirmed in the work of Jorge Dias—considered the leading Portuguese anthropologist of the twentieth century. He studied ethnic minorities in Mozambique and alerted the authorities to religious conflicts between Islamic and Catholic movements. Since they helped build solidarity, he saw these movements as the main danger to Portuguese sovereignty (Dias 1960). We can conclude that, given the political priorities to which these studies were subordinated, their typological classification fails to reflect the diversity of indigenous associative life.

A more comprehensive range of indigenous associative typologies was uncovered by research conducted in the 1960s in specific urban settings as part of ‘community development’ projects. Focusing on the data collected by the administration of Luanda, it becomes possible to catch a glimpse of which typologies had developed in its suburbs—or at least those not hiding their existence from colonial authorities. According to
Soares, the Luanda administration was aware, among indigenous peoples, of recreational groups (whose primary purpose was to participate in festivities and dances during Carnival), and sports groups, which also sought to help members during times of illness or bereavement (Soares 1961). Studies of Mozambican associations also reveal that the organisation of funerals for members and their families was a crucial concern among the African population. (Ferreira 1968). This analysis is confirmed by police reports on funeral associations.

Another type of association that was widespread among “non-assimilated” Africans in urban environments was mutual aid. Rita-Ferreira described the Xitique as an institution that stimulated saving among members via the payment of dues, bypassing difficulties arising as a result of low wages and income, and a lack of access to credit. Many varieties of Xitiques existed—for furniture, clothes, entertainment and even home rental (Ferreira 1968). Several studies conducted in Mozambique address this practice, which is considered “one of the most common forms of informal savings” (Nhatsave 2011). These associations are not substantially different from the rotating credit associations that have been identified in other colonial contexts (Geertz 1962).

Among the wealth of information provided by colonial research, it is worth highlighting those studies focusing specifically on women’s associations. A considerable number of these were reported (Pereira 1962, Fernandes 1966), in particular those with an occupational basis, such as those bringing together washerwomen, fruit sellers and fishmongers in Luanda. Another type of association created among indigenous people were those that offered excursions, hiring buses and organising visits to indigenous villages (Soares 1961b).

As mentioned above, official interference in African associations was directed at those considered to represent a threat to Portuguese sovereignty. Associations of a mutualist, recreational or sportive nature were generally excluded from this category, and this explains their proliferation. They were tolerated by the colonial regime—yet the indigenous peoples’ ability to self-organise was never recognised. This is not to say that those indigenous populations passively submitted to colonial strategies; on the contrary, evidence identified in the surveillance files points to tolerated associations as resources for resistance to colonial oppression. Mutualist groups founded for the purpose of organising and mobilising African workers to defend their own rights is a case in point. One telling example of this was the 1961 case relating to the Union of African Workers of Mozambique (Sindicato Obreiro Africano de Moçambique) or the Union of African General Workers of Mozambique (União dos Trabalhadores Gerais Africanos de Moçambique). This dossier includes a set of correspondence between a Mozambican activist and his international contacts around setting up a trade union association while “taking advantage of a mutualist association that some indigenous people intended to found.” The contents of this correspondence shed light on the activists’s strategy, with the first letter (signed by Zola Moewe, from Rome) stating: “I think that the idea of something like an African mutual aid association in Mozambique will sound much better, even if your work is substantial”11.

Because these were unofficial groups, we do not have detailed knowledge of their internal rules. The sources did however include some information on this matter. For instance, the report on Guinea mentions that all the clubs identified collected funds for the constitution of a savings account, which then enabled them to assist members in certain circumstances. Their organisation is described as rudimentary, and the idea
that there was neither any written statute nor official recognition is confirmed. According to the results of this mission, revenues were made up of fees and dues paid by the members. In those ‘clubs’ having rudimentary organisation, funding was based on collections being made whenever money became necessary, and even in the better-organised associations, extraordinary subscriptions were commonplace whenever funds were scarce. Member contributions could take the form of cash or valuables (Cunha 1959a). In the associations of Luanda, “the system of collecting dues is periodic—weekly or monthly, but most people prefer to promote collection campaigns in the course of meetings”. Also, “football groups do not keep an organised system of dues, but when it becomes necessary to make any immediate expenditure, the exact amount of money always appears, almost as if by magic.” (Soares 1961b)

46 Rita Ferreira reported that Mozambican associations,

“to avoid fraud and the difficulties of book-keeping and accounting...preferred to collect equitable contributions, destined to cover funeral and bereavement expenses for each death. In the savings associations known as Xitique, groups of friends, colleagues, neighbours and fellow citizens agree to pay in a fixed amount at specific periods, the total being handed over to a trustee. The money collected benefits each participant in turn.” (Ferreira 1968)

47 In sum, as Rita Ferreira has admitted:

“The integrating ideology of the state, coupled with the lack of a specific legal framework to facilitate the formation and functioning of these rudimentary groupings, must be considered hindrances to the proliferation and recognition of associative movements in our urban environment.” (Ferreira 1968)

Conclusion

48 Engaging with post-WWII colonial knowledge, this article intends to historicize the evolution of colonial policies and their impact on indigenous associative life. In terms of colonial knowledge per se, these findings ratify those studies on colonial knowledge that frame ethnographic surveys within “colonial scientific” policy, intending to dominate (Castelo 2006; Costa 2013). However, they also endorse more recent research on post-WWII scientific trends in a bid to justify and preserve late colonialism by following international developmental trends (Abrantes 2012, Ágoas & Castelo 2019). Both Portuguese colonial schooling and administration researchers characterized African culture as “backward”—an idea used both to underestimate the capacity of indigenous populations to self-organise, and to justify the obstacles that were imposed on their associations (Ferreira 1968). However, they also acknowledged that there was an urgent need to discuss and implement new policies regarding “detribalized” populations, advocating “social control through institutions” being introduced by a “dominant group” (such as a trade union or cooperative)—and these were adopted in several sub-Saharan countries. These researchers believed that although “a great number of these organisations tend to take part in the struggle against the superior social status of the colonisers”, it was the Portuguese integration policy that was preventing this threat from arising in the Portuguese colonies (Soares 1961a). This is why they valued the integration of “indigenous people” and their acculturation within settler-led organisations (Bettencourt 1965). Some of the proposals put forward by
these studies were tested out—namely the creation of cooperatives, and the official framework for suburban football groups.

49 However, as Nuno Domingos argues, when it came to one of the most widespread types of organisation—the football club—the state did not control the ways it was appropriated by indigenous people. Moreover, though colonial officers saw African associations as an appropriate way of enabling indirect rule, they were also capable of turning them into a resource for resistance to racial discrimination. The author highlights one example, in which the Bissau Sports and Recreational Club a gathering-place for anti-colonialist activists (Domingos 2020), has parallels with similar examples concerning mutual aid organisations (Pereira & Henriques 2022). Once again, it is possible to catch a glimpse of African agency and strategies as to how it was possible, under colonial regimes, to come up with workarounds that allowed the formation of tolerated typologies of associations.

50 By considering existing research into indigenous associative life, a significant evolution in the period under analysis can be discerned. Back in the 1950s, the very first studies sought, above all, to identify those organisations and movements that threatened Portuguese sovereignty. Because the content of these studies was heavily conditioned by previous research from other contexts (in which Messianism and Islamism were identified as the main danger), they neglected to examine any form of self-organisation that—in their opinion—was not political.

51 However, as mentioned earlier, one dominant theme of international research during this period was the phenomenon of detribalization—which was related to colonial strategies that were based on indirect domination via traditional authorities. Portuguese academic and political elites tended to reject proposals that might encourage a reorganisation of populations based on tribal ties. Such a refusal could be based on an observation that these ties had already been superseded in an urban context. The research of the 1950s had pointed in this direction, and that of the 1960s confirmed it.

52 In the 1960s, studies of indigenous associations had a different purpose; they were framed within local development projects, whose primary objective in the Portuguese colonies was to frame and control detribalized populations. Because this research aimed to identify and characterize all indigenous association typologies, the information gathered can provide further evidence of the phenomenon in rapidly growing urban environments.

53 Though the first missions led by Silva e Cunha privileged those movements suspected of threatening Portuguese sovereignty, the data they produced also tells us that the most widespread typologies were those devoted to recreation, mutual aid and social integration in the new urban contexts. This was confirmed by later research on community development. According to these studies, it seems that the strategy of African populations was to prioritise organising themselves into mutual aid, recreational and sporting associations, since these were the types tolerated by colonial authorities—even though their existence was never legally recognised.

54 In terms of the institutional designs of indigenous associations, these studies also offer relevant data. For the most part, they describe associations whose procedures sought to circumvent the constraints imposed by the denial of official recognition. Indeed, associations considered rudimentary by Portuguese researchers may in fact have been
astute strategies conducted by indigenous populations, matching their associations to the informal functioning imposed by the colonial situation.

We argue that engaging with colonial knowledge in the post-WWII period enables us to historicise its evolution, in a period of significant social and political transformations that were both internal and external. This analysis also allows us to glimpse the relationship between colonial knowledge and the evolution of colonial policies, and their impact on indigenous associational life. Lastly, this process may explain the non-institutionalised nature of African associations (Linden 1996) as an enduring impact of the colonial representations and policies that have shaped African civil society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Cunha, J.M. da S. 1953, O Sistema Português de Política Indígena (Subsídios para o Seu Estudo, Coimbra, Coimbra Editora.


Nascimento, A. 2005, *Entre o mundo e as ilhas: o associativismo são-tomense nos primeiros decénios de novecentos*, S. Tomé e Príncipe, UNEAS.


Pereira, J.D. & Henriques, R. 2022, *História do mutualismo nas ex-colónias portuguesas*, Lisboa, UMP.


NOTES

1. Decree 12.533 of October 23 1926, the “Political, civil and criminal statute of the natives of Angola and Mozambique”. Later extended to Guinea and successively modified by Decree 13.698 (November 30 1927); Decree 16.473 (February 6 1929) regulated on October 28 1939; and Decree-Law 39.666 of May 30 1954. See also Decree 16.474 (December 6 1929): “Organic Decree of private law relations between indigenous and non-indigenous people”.


5. C107 - Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107)


7. Notable among these are Joaquim da Silva Cunha, Professor at ISEU/ISCSPU and Researcher at CEPS, who became Under-Secretary of State for Overseas Administration (1962-1965) and Minister of Overseas Affairs (1965-73) and later Amadeu Castilho Soares, collaborator at CEPS and Professor at ISEU, who worked in the Cabinet of Political Affairs of the Ministry of Overseas Affairs before becoming Provincial Secretary of Education and Social Action in Angola (1961-63).


10. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo (ANTT), PIDE, Serviços de Centralização e Coordenação de Informação de Moçambique, Processo n.º 50, Relatório Confidencial, julho de 1969, 2 p.

11. Arquivos Nacionais Torre do Tombo (ANTT), PIDE, Delegação de Moçambique, Processo n° 3256, 1961, Código de Referência: PID/DGS SC CI(2) Proc. 3256 NT 7259
Ethnography is widely recognised as essential to the analysis of colonial representations and policies in Africa. Though many studies have been conducted since the end of WWII, few have explored these sources on African civil society. This article aims to historicise the evolution of Portuguese colonial knowledge on indigenous associational life. The approach is based on the anthropological and sociological research carried out by academic and governmental elites who, from the onset of the decolonization process, began to seriously consider indigenous collective action. Following the comprehensive investigations that were conducted in the 1950s in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, in-depth research was undertaken in Luanda and Lourenço Marques (now Maputo), as part of local development projects. This article illustrates how, under Portuguese colonialism, indigenous associations were initially perceived as a threat—until they became an invaluable tool in promoting the acculturation of “detribalized” populations. Through critical engagement with post-WWII colonial knowledge, this paper provides fresh insight into how the colonial process was instrumental in shaping African civil society.

L’ethnographie est largement reconnue comme essentielle pour analyser les représentations et les politiques coloniales en Afrique. Peu d’études ont exploré ces sources relatives à la société civile africaine, malgré les abondantes enquêtes menées à partir de la période de l’après-guerre. Cet article vise à historiciser l’évolution des connaissances coloniales portugaises sur la vie associative indigène. L’approche se base sur des recherches anthropologiques et sociologiques menées par des élites académiques et gouvernementales qui, dès le début du processus de décolonisation, ont commencé à considérer sérieusement l’action collective indigène. Dans les années 1950, des enquêtes approfondies en Angola, au Mozambique et en Guinée ont été menées, suivies de recherches approfondies à Luanda et Lourenço Marques dans le cadre de projets de développement local. Cet article illustre la manière dont, aux yeux du colonialisme portugais, les associations indigènes ont d’abord été perçues comme une menace, avant de devenir un outil précieux pour promouvoir l’acculturation des populations « déttribalisées ». En s’engageant de manière critique dans le savoir colonial de l’après-guerre, cet article offre de nouvelles perspectives sur l’impact du processus colonial sur la formation de la société civile africaine.

A etnografia é amplamente reconhecida como essencial para analisar as representações e políticas coloniais em África. Poucos estudos exploraram estas fontes relacionadas com a sociedade civil africana, apesar dos abundantes inquéritos realizados a partir do pós II Guerra Mundial. Este artigo visa historicar a evolução do conhecimento colonial português sobre a vida associativa indígena. A abordagem baseia-se em pesquisas antropológicas e sociológicas realizadas pelas elites académicas e governamentais que, desde o início do processo de descolonização, começaram a considerar seriamente a ação coletiva indígena. Inquéritos exaustivos sobre Angola, Moçambique e Guiné na década de 1950 foram seguidos de uma investigação aprofundada em Luanda e Lourenço Marques, no âmbito de projetos de desenvolvimento local. Este artigo ilustra como, aos olhos do colonialismo português, as associações indígenas foram inicialmente percecionadas como uma ameaça e mais tarde como um dispositivo valioso para promover a aculturação das populações “destribalizadas”. Ao envolver-se criticamente com o conhecimento colonial pós II Guerra Mundial, o presente artigo fornece novos dados sobre o impacto do processo colonial na formação da sociedade civil africana.
INDEX

Mots-clés: science coloniale, politiques coloniales, ex-colonies portugaises, associations, Afrique
Palavras-chave: ciência colonial, políticas coloniais, ex-colónias portuguesas, associações, África
Keywords: colonial science, colonial policies, former Portuguese colonies, associations, Africa

AUTHOR

JOANA DIAS PEREIRA

Board Member at the Institute for Contemporary History and Researcher at FCSH-UNL
joanapereira[at]fcsh.unl.pt