

Popular education and republican ideals: the Portuguese lay missions in colonial Africa, 1917–1927

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This article aims to offer another reading of the Portuguese civilising process in Africa on the basis of an analysis of a set of alternative sources and to explore the role of other educational configurations, beyond those of the public school and the religious missionary school, such as the civilising missions. With the creation of the Lay Civilising Missions in 1913, a new and totally lay conception of missionary work in the colonies was instituted. In the context of European colonialism, this configuration is distinguished as one of the most peculiar moments of republican affirmation in the governing of African territories dominated by the Portuguese. Through the analysis of the letters exchanged between the civilising agents, between Portugal and the African colonies, the author will try to analyse the arguments, strategies and tactics of government in terms of wills, inventions, programmes, acts and counter-acts, thus discussing the discontinuities between the programmes of governing at a distance and local practices. Methodologically speaking, looking at alternative source materials opens up a series of theoretical-conceptual possibilities, unveiling the tensions and contradictions embedded in the colonial encounter.

Keywords: history; colonial education; missions; colonialism; Africa; education

With colonisation processes, State institutions extend the range and depth of their operations. They do this through a series of complex power strategies designed to link their governing objectives to activities and events very distant in space and time. Colonial domination, as an exercise of power from a centre that is distant from people, places and goods, involves the invention of intellectual technologies essential to the strategy and planning of government. Now, these inventions are not simply produced in the centres of power, in the colonial nation; they are the product of the exercise of power in a series of micro-places, where authorities of all types – military, governors, teachers, doctors, missionaries – exercise their power on the behaviour of others. This particular type of government can be called “governing at a distance”, a term used in

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many texts by Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller¹ to name political acts, distinct from each other constitutionally and spatially, that interlink the strategies of the centre with the authorities and specialists of the territories reached by the government. This link operates through the translation processes formed by political discourses, persuasion, negotiation and conflict that involve authorities in movable and relatively flexible networks of strategies that develop around common problematics.²

“To Govern” is not only a question of *time*, that is, of division, representation and celebration in accordance with a specific “imagined community”,³ but is, also, a question of *space*, that is, of becoming an intelligible area, marked by specific geographical limits and particular characteristics capable of adhering a group of individuals to a common coexistence. To the extent that the governmentalisation of space is not produced contrary to experience, the discourses that delimit and represent produce new forms of perception.

It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that in its material form – place, date, support, substance – colonial discourse is not independent of the field in which it is invested, being submitted to many different modifications, repetitions and manipulations.⁴ What I will try to show through *this* narrative is the movement of these translation processes, that is, the experience of these diverse authorities in their reception of the discourses that arrived from the distant nation; the tensions that existed between the various local social groups linked to the colonial government; the diversity of networks involved in the transmission of the message; the dynamic of the local pressure groups; the character of the specialist in the translation of the programmes of distance governing and, on the level at which the *events refer to larger structures*, the overlapping of distance-governing strategies involving diverse imperial spaces.⁵ All of these elements are present in the letter dialogues that link the general to the particular, connecting spaces and times to each other, redirecting political rationalities from the centre to a number of government power centres in the colonial territory.

I should clarify that the kind of empirical analysis involved here is not a hermeneutic analysis, which tries to find ideological motives or hidden causes, or an analysis that criticises power alliances or exposes government inefficiencies. I try to analyse the arguments, strategies and tactics of government in their own terms, that is, in terms of “the identities and identifications that they themselves construct, the objectives they

¹N. Rose and Peter Miller, “Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government,” *British Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (1992): 172–205, article reprinted in the *British Journal of Sociology* (2010): 271–303; N. Rose, *Inventing our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); See also Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The term was originally used by Bruno Latour in Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, “Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-Structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So,” in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro and Macro Sociologies*, ed. K. Knorr-Cetina and A. Cicourel (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 277–303 and in Michel Callon, “Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation,” in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, ed. J. Law (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 196–233; Engin Isin transposes the term for the analysis of colonialism in *Cities Without Citizens* (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1992).

²Rose, *Powers of Freedom...*, 49–50.

³Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso [7th edn], 1996).

⁴See Michel Foucault, *A arqueologia do saber* (Coimbra: Almedina, 2005 [1969]), 143–44.

⁵See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futuro passado: contribuição à semântica dos tempos históricos* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Contraponto/Ed. PUC-Rio, 2006), 132.

attribute to them, the enemies they identify, the alliances they forge, the categories they use to describe themselves".⁶ My aim is to open up space for critical thought, to bring the past to the present through a process of questioning and reflection on the grand narratives that have brought us "natural" and unequivocal histories of the Portuguese domination of Africa. Fundamentally, I will try to diagnose a series of lines of thought, wills, inventions, programmes and errors, of acts and counter-acts.

The Portuguese lay missions in colonial Africa, 1917–1927

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, in Portugal, the clergy – especially the regular clergy – had suffered strong attacks from liberal governments. The re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Rome (1842), which permitted the moderate return of religious orders (1850) and their official recognition (1902), did not prevent the gradual decline of the clergy, the transformation of priests into State officials and, in general, the reduction of the social and educational role of the church in Portugal. However, the arguments used in the capital to reject the obscure, retrograde and even anti-nationalist role of the religious orders was in contradiction to the necessity to secure colonial Portuguese property. The rejection of State religion, in a territory in which foreign missionary competition threatened the authority of the temporal power, made it dangerous to take the anti-religious arguments to their ultimate consequences.

The final move against the reorganisation of the Catholic Church in Portugal is given by the proclamation of the First Republic (1910–1926), concretely, with the expulsion of all religious orders (1910) and with the institution of the *Law of Separation* between Church and State (1911). Through a range of measures aimed at creating a lay State, the Provisional Government published a number of anticlerical laws that started with the diploma that confirmed the Pombaline laws of 1759 and annulled all the liberal decrees that authorised religious congregations in that country.⁷ The extinction of all religious orders was therefore confirmed, expelling the Jesuits, Portuguese or not, from Portugal, as well as the foreigners of other congregations.⁸ Under this decree, the goods of the dissolved congregations remained under the guard of the State, with all of the Jesuit belongings being nationalised, this confiscation being later legalised with its exceptions.⁹ In May 1911 this law was declared valid for the Portuguese colonies, although the operational procedures resulting from this application were left for local definition.

At the same time as the First Republic in Portugal expelled all religious orders, be they of the capital or its colonies, other European colonies in Africa – specifically French Africa and the British sub-Saharan colonies – did the reverse. In case after

⁶See Rose, *Powers of Freedom...*, 50.

⁷Decree of October 8, 1910, D.G., no. 4, de 10; COLP, 1910, II, 3.

⁸It is known that, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Company of Jesus had various missions in Mozambique assisted by foreign personnel, namely in Zambézia (Boroma), and that the congregation of the Sisters of S. José de Cluny, of French origin, looked after the feminine primary teaching at the Institute D. Amelia and the Leão XIII Institute. See Freire Andrade, *Relatórios sobre Moçambique*, Vol. V (Lourenço Marques: Imprensa Nacional, 1910), 300. See also A.I. Madeira, "Ler, Escrever e Orar: Uma análise histórica e comparada dos discursos sobre a educação, o ensino e a escola em Moçambique, 1850–1950" (doctoral thesis in educational sciences (comparative education), Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Lisbon University, 2007), 235.

⁹Decree of December 31, 1910, D.G., no. 1, of January 3, 1911; COLP, 1910, II, 208–11.

case, the States looked to associate *State colonialism* with *civilising colonialism* and, despite the legislation to which the religious missions were subjected, their educational action was considered essential to the colonial enterprise.¹⁰ More than this, in the aftermath of the process known as the “Scramble for Africa”, Portugal had signed various international treaties with other colonial powers, in which the religious missions were given special status, permitting “the free and public exercise of all cults, the right to erect religious buildings and to organise missions”.¹¹ This scenario involving criss-crossing internal government strategies and inter-state relations is essential to understand how republican ideals intertwined with “governing at a distance” strategies.

Government strategies

The creation of “civilising agents”

The republican government was not content with denying the Church the task of educating the indigenous populations of the African colonies. It also assumed the task of educating, in the capital, the missionaries that would be destined to serve in the colonies naming them, from then on, as “civilising agents”.¹² To this effect, in the aftermath of the *Law of Separation of Church and State* of 20 April 1911, the Institute of Colonial Missions was created in 1917, initiating a reform process that profoundly modified the governing strategies related to the role of the Portuguese missions in Africa. With its headquarters in the old College of Overseas Missions building, the new institute came to be considered a lay *school* for the preparation of “civilising agents” for the colonial dominions. The education of “civilising agents” was organised on two levels: a preparatory course and a complementary course. The preparatory course was equivalent to the general secondary course functioning in the capital, being “supplemented by an art or practical trade of some useful knowledge”, as well as learning “practical work related to each of the subjects”.¹³ The complementary course lasted three years and was “destined to the better development of the subjects studied in the preparatory course and to give the future civilising agent the practical knowledge necessary for good colonising action”.¹⁴ This reform completely altered the study plan offered to the religious missionaries and administered by the College, offering, in its place, a modern, pragmatic curriculum destined to transmit “all the teachings of experience and the conquests of science on the subject of colonial

¹⁰See Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol I (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹¹See Marcelo Caetano, *Portugal e a Internacionalização dos Problemas Africanos* (Lisbon: Ática, 1971), 106–08. Among the international treaties that Portugal signed and obliged the missions to recognise are: the Treaty of Zaire (1884), the General Act of the Berlin Conference (1885), the General Act of the Brussels Conference (1890), the Portuguese–British Treaty (1891), the Treaty of Versailles (1919) and the Conventions of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1919).

¹²Art. 2, decree no. 3352 of September 8, 1917. In *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 2, May, 1920, 44–52.

¹³Art. 3, § 1 e 3, decree no. 3352 of September 8, 1917. In *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 2, May, 1920, 44.

¹⁴Art. 3, § 2, decree no. 3352 of September 8, 1917. In *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 2, May, 1920, 45.

teaching”.¹⁵ To terminate their education the students would be placed “at the disposition of the Ministry of Colonies” and would be named “civilising agents” destined to serve in a civilising mission, on the terms of the decree of 22 November 1913.¹⁶ In exchange for the education received, the students were obliged to serve the State as civilising agents for 12 years, in either Angola or Mozambique.¹⁷

The creation of the civilising missions

With the creation of the civilising missions in 22 November 1913, a new and totally lay conception of missionary work in the colonies was instituted. In the context of European colonialism, this configuration is distinguished as one of the strongest moments of republican affirmation in the governing of African territories dominated by the Portuguese, without parallel in other European colonies. In this manner, in “our colonial dominions twelve civilising missions” were created, “six being in Angola, four in Mozambique, one in Guinea and another in Timor”.¹⁸ Each of these missions should be constituted by five graduates of the Colonial Missions Institute, denominated “civilising agents”.¹⁹

With regard to the objectives of this civilising work, Abílio Marçal, director of a recently created institute, compared “the religious missions with the civilising missions” distinguishing them only by the objectives:

...the two organisms don't collide or exclude each other ... they are different institutions, with the same end, it's true – to civilise the African races – but with diverse objectives. The former are propaganda missions, the latter missions of occupation and colonisation. The former are the civilising work of large missionary associations ... the latter are the action and initiative of the State, in completing its duty, in the expansion of its nationality, by the teaching of its language, of its history, of its customs and its institutions, in strengthening and affirming its sovereignty ... I really do think that they complement each other and in this crusade can walk hand in hand.²⁰

The widening of missionary activity to a group of religious and lay agents denotes common territory in which the Republic thought that there was space for joint work, which consisted in civilising the Africans. The creation of the new republican man found in this strategic cooperation a new regenerating élan, not only on the political and economic plane but, equally, in the ethical and scientific domain sustained by the modern science of colonisation.

¹⁵See A. Oliveira Gomes, *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 1, April 1920, 7.

¹⁶Decree no. 233, of November 22, 1913, extended the Law of Separation of Church and State to the colonies, established the basis of the civilising missions and authorised the government to create them. This creation would be consecrated six years later, in decree no. 5778 of May 10, 1919 (The Missions Law).

¹⁷Arts. 11, 12 and 13, in decree no. 3352 of September 8, 1917. In *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 2, May, 1920, 46.

¹⁸Art. 1 of decree no. 5778 of May 10, 1919. In *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 4, July, 1920, 25.

¹⁹Art. 2 of decree no. 5778 of May 10, 1919. In *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 4, July, 1920, 25.

²⁰Abílio See Marçal, *Missões Coloniais. Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras* (Instituto de Missões Coloniais. Cernache do Bom Jardim. Tip. do Instituto de Cernache do Bonjardim, 1920), 19.

From the point of view of their functioning, the missions were administered democratically, by all of their members, and led by someone proposed by the institute. One of the more interesting aspects of this configuration was its composition, each mission admitting spouses, brothers and children of the civilising agents as part of its personnel, as long as they were adults and had completed at least the third year of secondary school.²¹ The notion of family – the creation of a home on overseas soil – the emphatic expression that republicanism attributed to the integrating function of this social institution, did match the social moralising function of the Protestant religious missions. To exemplify this, Abílio Marçal wrote:

The civilising agents, taking their wives to the interior, leave us with the guarantee of an exemplary life free from the old abuses and incorrigible immoralities, and take to the negro the example of a civilised family. It's under the constitution of a family that, according to indisputable modern theories, a new civilising action should be based.²²

The Bulletin of the Civilising Missions

With the creation of the *Bulletin of the Civilising Missions (BCM)*²³ an essential source for analysing the history of the implementation of the civilising lay missions during the First Republic was constituted. Despite its character as propaganda and vulgarisation linked to the study of colonial affairs, this publication makes it possible to access a large quantity of data on the composition and the activities of the lay missions in the colonies, namely information related to daily life and the conditions in which their pedagogic and scientific attributions were exercised.²⁴ The *BCM* presents a number of doctrinal texts centred on the educative function of the missions whose content, beyond revealing the debates and polemic around the religious or lay dimensions of the civilising agents, makes explicit the republican missionary strategy for the colonies. Abílio Marçal, director of the institute, collaborated in the publication from its first number until his death in 1925, tracing the profile of the civilising programme that he intended to implement in Africa. The bulletin treated subjects of a pedagogic and educational nature related, in the majority of cases, to the ideological foundations of the missionary activity and to the institutional education of its agents, without being a journal for teaching or pedagogic reflection in the proper sense.

This aspect is even more important because the missions law had not been explicit, in the strict sense, in relation to the educative and pedagogic role of the missionary stations, that is, on the level of their intervention in the school sphere, a silence that was increased by the absence of a explicit strategic programme of intervention in the colonial context. In article 3 of the “Missions Law” it was affirmed that they would exercise “their action by way of schools for the teaching of our language and our history, of art and trades, agricultural explorations, the establishment of health centres and other means of education and occupation”.²⁵ In the same law, in article 17, it is stipulated that “the teaching of the Portuguese language and the history of Portugal” was obligatory in all of the missions and their branches and that they could “only be

²¹Art. 5, decree 5778 of May 10, 1919. In *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 4, July, 1920, 26.

²²See Marçal, *Missões Coloniais*, 21.

²³Hereafter, *BCM*.

²⁴*Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras* [1920, no. 1 – 1925, no. 24].

²⁵Decree no. 5778 of May 10, 1919.

taught by the Portuguese”.²⁶ Nevertheless, for the director of the Colonial Missions Institute, Abílio Marçal, who was also the general attorney of the Lay Missions, the central role of the missions focused more properly on the “civilisation” and the “occupation” of the territory, officially affirming, for the indigenous population and the foreigner, Portuguese authority and nationality. With regard to the “civilising action”, the education of the indigenous population was based on the “practical example of the civilised family”, for which motive the personnel of the lay missions had to be married “to guarantee the moralisation of the missions”.²⁷

The subsequent legislation on the missions added ambiguities to the attributes of the civilising missions. For example, the decree that organised the missionary service considered the “civilising missions” as those that had been organised by the Colonial Missions Institute; another article of the same decree led one to believe that the “Portuguese civilising missions” were religious missions that received subsidies from the State, designating as “religious civilising missions” those that had been transformed into missionary stations. In effect, the initial idea of transforming religious and lay missionaries into “civilising agents at the service of the State” seems to hesitate in the article of the decree where “civilising agents” are clearly distinguished from “missionary ministers” and “missionary auxiliaries”.²⁸ In virtue of this legislative lack of definition, it was left to the local government authorities – governors-general, high commissioners, administrators and the actual civilising agents – to interpret and translate these general programmes into practical and concrete governance, according to their experience and perception of the local political reality.

The increase in the executive competence of the governors-general in the colonies, consecrated from 1920, attributed to them an increased margin of manoeuvre that permitted them to adjust these programmes to their political strategies and individual motivations.²⁹ In this way, in Angola, the high commissioner Norton de Matos attributed to the civilising missions the principal objective to teach indigenous peoples of the Province, including the direction, management and administration of the “workshop schools”. Within this remit it was their function to spread Portuguese civilisation, to give prestige to the homeland and to nationalise the indigenous populations; to popularise the Portuguese language; to educate farmers and workers; to create the habits of cleanliness and material and moral hygiene in the indigenous people; to provide nursing assistance to the indigenous population; and, lastly, to provide assistance to pregnant women, children and the newborn, the old and the ill.³⁰ On the other hand, Hugo de Azevedo Coutinho, high commissioner of the Republic of Mozambique, understood that the lay missions established in the province had other priorities, namely: elementary teaching of the first and second classes of primary school; the development of morals and physical education; the specialised teaching of one or more professions or trades; the preparation of students for agricultural work; and, finally, the reproduction of indispensable knowledge of hygiene. Beyond these priorities, the high commissioner also understood that the lay missions could fulfil other correlative objectives, namely, to promote the prestige of European civilisation as well

²⁶Art 17 of decree no. 5778 of May 10, 1919.

²⁷See Marçal, *Missões Coloniais...*, 7.

²⁸Decree no. 6332 of January 2, 1920. In *Boletim das Missões Civilizadoras*, no. 8 e 9, December, 1920, 25–29.

²⁹Laws no. 1015 and 1023, of August 7 and 20, 1920 and Decree no. 7008, of October 9, 1920.

³⁰Art 14, only paragraph, Decree no. 242 of February 22, 1923.

as the prestige of Portuguese civilisation and sovereignty; to promote the popularisation of the Portuguese language; to create a love for work amongst the indigenous population; to provide medical assistance for children and adults and teach them the principles of hygiene; and, additionally, to collect botanical, zoological and ethnographic data that should be sent to the provincial departments.³¹ Azevedo Coutinho put a great deal of emphasis on professional teaching for women and underlined that *the example of the civilising agents* constituted the Gordian knot of the civilising and nationalising educative action of the missions. The two governors, each in his colony, thus seemed to attribute to the civilising missions a central role in professional education and the rudimentary instruction of the indigenous peoples, together with their role of civic (moral) intervention in the communities.

This was, to all effects, a very wide group of objectives whose amplitude and, above all, magnitude did not match the means and resources that the Republic made available to the Institute and, equally, to the colonial governors. In fact, the number of tasks expected of the “civilising agents”, together with the huge and unrealistic expectations that befell these young people, above all taking into account their incipient training and their inexperience in colonial space, are surprising. In any case, given the ambiguity of the State, whether in relation to the status of the religious missions or in relation to the role the lay missions should play, the “civilising agents” had no other solution than to go ahead with their own pragmatic interpretation, taking into account the specific context to which they were sent. The “Motherland” mission programme, sent to the governor of Inhambane by his senior Cândido Teixeira, sought precisely to translate and operationalise these government programmes within a strategic project with well-defined priorities and objectives:

1st – Creation of boys’ and girls’ schools to teach our language and our history;

2nd – set up woodworking and carpentry workshops, dressmaking and domestic teaching, weaving, book binding and others judged convenient or necessary for the professional education of the indigenous population, in order for them to become useful to themselves and to society;

3rd – Set up a boarding school for the indigenous peoples, for us to be in permanent contact with them, slowly and persistently influencing them, with the teaching of our language and the love for our homeland, our customs and mores, civilising them, in short, and making them good friends of Portugal;

4th – Creation of indigenous nursing homes;

5th – Preparation of an experimental farm where the indigenous population will be taught farming skills, teaching them to cultivate the land in a more rational manner, thus improving their material conditions;

6th – Set up a musical band with mission personnel, in order to train their ears and their feelings and creating in them a taste for music through the knowledge and adoption of our patriotic hymns and truly national songs;

7th – Creation of a network of branches in all districts so as to neutralise the bad influence of “mafundiça”, the most pernicious organ of denationalisation.³²

³¹Art 1, 2 and 3 of the provincial edict no. 42, of February 7, 1925.

³²*BMC*, no. 14, Novembro e Dezembro, 1921, 25–26. The term “mafundiças” was the name accorded to the African “teachers” trained in the Protestant missionary schools, who were considered, in the administration official’s eyes, foreign to the Portuguese allegiance.

It was with this kind of programme that the young republicans established targets for concrete action, in accordance with their local interpretation of the priorities and objectives of governance. The dialogue that developed in letters between the “civilising agents” and the attorney general of the Missions, Abílio Marçal, constituted, for many years, the only support the lay missionaries could count on from the point of view of regulating their work. Some of these letters, published in the *BCM*, represent portraits of life, animated by enthusiasm – and by loss of heart – inherent in missionary work in the African interior. But, more importantly, this dialogue permits us access to the mechanisms of governance implied in governing at a distance.

Governing at a distance: the analysis of colonial discourse through letter dialogues

To govern is not only a question of *time*, that is, of division, representation and celebration in accordance with a specific “imagined community”,³³ but is, also, a question of *space*, that is, of becoming an intelligible area, marked by specific geographical limits and particular characteristics capable of adhering a group of individuals to a common coexistence. The space of the mission, from the choice of its location to the questions related to its accessibility and functioning, constitutes a prime indicator of the organisation of these spaces of governance. It is important to remember that, in the middle of the 1920s, a journey by sea to Mozambique would take about two months, correspondence would arrive every three months and to travel around the province was difficult, if not impractical, not only because of the lack of motorised vehicles but also because of the climatic conditions that made roads and tracks impassable, principally during the rainy season. The first task of these missionaries consisted in choosing adequate locations in which to establish the missions, decided on the basis of the proposal of the leader of the respective mission, in consultation with local authorities. The first serious difficulty with the missions resulted precisely from problems related to the lack of knowledge of the local context, namely the tropical climatic conditions, it not being rare to have to move territory and reconstruct everything from scratch. The criteria for choosing a location were dependent on various factors: the population density of the region, the conditions necessary for initiating the cultivation of *machambas*, the existence of a source of water and, above all, the proximity of foreign missions, especially Protestant missions. In the first phase of installation, the need for access to construction materials and manpower made them very dependent on the help of the district administrators, at a time when the income of the missions was at a minimum and the concept of *lay missions* still badly understood and poorly received in the colonies. The descriptions of the time tell of various conflicts between the authorities linked to colonial governance: on the one hand, between the local administration and the lay missionaries and, on the other, between these and the Portuguese religious missions. In fact, the incomprehension of the local authorities with regard to the role of the lay missions and the relative indifference in which they functioned were the object of correspondence sent by diverse mission leaders in Mozambique to the Attorney General of Missions, Abílio Marçal.³⁴ In a letter from civilising agent Joaquim José de Sousa, from the “Motherland” mission, one can read:

³³See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso [7th edn], 1996).

³⁴*BCM*, no. 11, February and April, 1921: 22 and *BCM*, no. 14, November and December, 1921, 25–26.

From the bulletin that arrived this week ... I see that at this time you were convinced that our definitive installation would be in Mocodoéne. That did not happen and you will know shortly of the motives for this. And you already know why we could not occupy Mongué – a crude plot of the religious missions, with the help and knowledge of certain authorities.³⁵

On another occasion Cândido Teixeira, mission leader of the “Motherland” mission wrote: “I ask that you give us whatever help you can as soon as possible because time passes and our friends spy on us, and, at the first opportunity ... they will manifest, with infernal shouting, against the civilising missions”.³⁶

It is worth mentioning here that, to the extent that the governmentalisation of space is not accomplished alongside experience, the discourses that delimit and represent produce new forms of perception. In this way colonial discourse is fertile in inventing perceptions based on notions such as “risk”, “enemy”, and “motherland”, with which are associated many others notions such as “language”, “identity”, and “civilisation”, always articulated in the name of territory, of an internal configuration, of a conceptual space for the exercise of power in which diverse authorities proclaim their legitimacy over the individuals and activities that make up a nation. The confrontation between the “civilising agents” and the numerically and materially superior foreign missions made the desire to go against the denationalising action of these missions almost obsessive, particularly those that were formed by ecclesiastic personnel of English or American nationality, to the extent that the discourses around the “Protestant threat” assumed almost mystic proportions. Effectively, despite the fact that the republican legislation of 1913 recommended restrictive measures in relation to Protestant missions, the foreign personnel considered themselves protected by international treaties and used their almost “diplomatic” status well, taking into account the protection that had been given them by the signatory nations. This “diplomatic superiority” was well exploited by the Protestant missionaries, whose strategy consisted of making complaints about the warnings given by the Portuguese colonial administration, appealing for the intervention of their respective consulates.³⁷ This situation gave the Protestant missions, together with the international associations that supported them, a clear advantage relative to the Portuguese Catholic church, with which the diplomatic strife had existed, in fact and *de jure*, various times in the past.

The lay missionaries were particularly open to the “Protestant threat” but were also an example of the impotence of the republican government caught between international conventions and the project of a lay State. António Alberto Moura, leader of the “Republic” mission, knowing that foreign missionaries wanted to install themselves in the Maganja da Costa district, decided to propose the creation of a branch there. The correspondence of this civilising agent with the local authorities provides an image of this republican idealism:

³⁵*BCM*, no. 11, February and April, 1921, 30–31

³⁶*BCM*, no. 11, February and April, 1921, 28–29.

³⁷*Historical Archive of Mozambique*. Governor-General fund, Box. 37 [Exposition of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and the High Commissioner of the Province of Mozambique with a copy to the Navy ministry]; *Historical Archive of Mozambique*. Governor-General fund, Box. 26 [Letter no. 164/12/L.A., of 8-10-1912, sent by the British Consul in Lourenço Marques to the Governor-General of the Province of Mozambique]; *Historical Archive of Mozambique*, Administration, Instruction and Cults fund, Box. 23 [17-12-1912 – Letter from the Reverend John S. McGeary, superior of the Free Methodist Church of North America, sent to the Consul of the USA in Lourenço Marques].

Knowing that these foreign missionaries intend to obtain licences from the competent powers to establish themselves in the area of the administrative post of ... and it being our first obligation to prevent these missions from denationalising our colonies ... we resolve to set up a branch there, also because we have instructions from the Attorney General of Lay Missions to do so ... I solicit all the protection that your Excellency's patriotism is able to give.³⁸

The same effort directed towards the administrator of the Ile district and the governor of the Quelimane district came to nothing, because of the death of the young "Republic" leader. At the other extreme of the province, the "Motherland" mission revealed itself impotent in the face of the expansion and superiority – in human, material and financial resources – of the *American Board Mission* in Maxixe, situated in Chicuque. The letter sent by the leader of the mission, José Joaquim de Sousa, to his superior in the Colonial Missions Institute constitutes a precious document, not only from an ethnographic point of view but, above all, because it testifies to a set of government practices and devices rarely documented regarding the American Protestant missions in the African space of Portuguese colonisation:

I had the intention of visiting a foreign mission to see how they live, how it functions and what they do. For the sake of curiosity. And to know the enemy camp ... I was received with great caution and manifest suspicion regarding my identity. Everything there is big: hospitals, schools, workshops, residences. Movement and life.... The leader is Dr Charles Stauffacher. He is a doctor, lively eyes, friendly manners, but not very forthcoming. The mission is a village, so to speak, constituted by various buildings, all covered with zinc and some constructed of stone.... The hospital is an excellent one-floor house, for women and children, with various extensions for the installation of diverse hospital services, excellently organised and full of apparatus and instruments that would be novelties for the majority of our hospitals.... I visited the classes in one of which some seventy young women, between fifteen and twenty years of age, taught the Bible translated into ... *chilande*, which is the indigenous tongue! ... In a pavilion some distance away a large group of children sang a hymn ... in English! All of this in a large mission which we could appropriately call a colony or an American outpost!³⁹

The idea of the "risk" of losing national character provoked by the "Protestant threat", the clash between the values of the "homeland", above all language, and the methods of the American and English "enemy" missionaries provoked a true crusade for the education of the indigenous people. In the impetus to establish a national character, the civilising agents constructed "schools", "boarding schools" and "workshops" that were built from one day to the next, on the verandas of their own homes, in improvised huts, almost always paid for out of their own salaries, furnished with their sparse belongings and organised according to the temporalities of colonial everyday life:

The school is the most modest of huts that has never had windows and, if it has a door, this is thanks to the gift of a friend. Of civilisation it only has the whitewash. And the school furniture....⁴⁰

Until now we have given classes in a small covered area, but we are building a house, before the winter surprises us and prejudices the school work.⁴¹

³⁸*BCM*, no. 22, January 1925, 32–33.

³⁹*BCM*, no. 13, October 1921, 28–34

⁴⁰*BCM*, no. 20, May and August 1924, 32–33.

⁴¹*BCM*, no. 17, October and December 1922, 36–37.

We will start a class in reading and sewing for the feminine sex, on the very veranda of our poor cabin, which we will conceal with straw partitions, but what straw partitions, my God!⁴²

But the “civilising agents” went even further, namely, on the pedagogic plane, they invented curricula adapted to the wide age range of their students, introducing teaching methods adapted to the everyday experiences of the Africans, experimenting with pedagogic materials that had been successful in branches of other lay missions, with whom they corresponded in order to discuss their successes and failures. The urgent need to transmit language, values and national symbols exerted pressure for the utilisation of learning methods for reading and writing that worked and it was this need that induced a certain pedagogic experimentalism. The object-lessons related to reading and writing with local artefacts and activities arose “naturally” and the teachers improvised with the best teaching strategy. It is known that the indigenous people learnt to read with the *Cartilha Experimental*, a kind of adaptation to African reality of the *Cartilha Maternal*.⁴³ This was a small, simple manual for teaching children to read and write that had seen at least 25 editions and that followed, according to the words of its author, the “global method”, presenting first the words, then the syllables and finally the letters, “because children do not start to speak in phrases but in words”.⁴⁴ The manual was accompanied by a *vialitra*, a board to supplement the *Cartilha*, composed of a board-box with movable, framed and coloured letters. The author of the *Cartilha*, Alfredo Fernandes (1888–1966), was a native of Proença-a-Nova, and it would be the proximity of this place to where the Colonial Missions Institute was situated, and where the civilising agents were trained before going to the colonies, that facilitated the circulation of this work amongst the lay missionaries. Despite not being among the manuals used for teaching this *Cartilha* worked, as declared in the letter from missionary Ermelinda Oliveira, of the “Motherland” mission, sent to Abílio Marçal: “We also need many books: I ask for this, that you send me 50 copies of the *Cartilha Experimental* that, in truth, for the blacks seems to me to give excellent results.”⁴⁵ It was very probably through the lay missionaries’ action in Angola and Mozambique that the use of the *Cartilha* referred to was later adopted by the overseas provinces.

Concluding remarks: history by testimonial or the experience of translation

In the pages of the *Bulletin of the Civilising Missions*, the images sent by the lay missionaries proudly reproduced the constructions and work realised through the efforts of all. Framed by the moralising example of the family, “workshops”, “nursing homes”, “schools” and “boarding schools” lived side by side with the cultivated *machambas*. The missionary zeal did not leave the local authorities, religious and civil, totally indifferent. An initial reserved attitude, and even one of suspicion towards to the lay missions, was rapidly transformed into one of praise. The prelate of Mozambique, Dom Rafael, was impressed by the work of the young missionaries,

⁴²*BCM*, no. 22, January, 1925, 32–33.

⁴³At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *Cartilha Maternal* or the “João de Deus” was one of the most common manuals for learning to read.

⁴⁴See Alfredo Fernandes, *Cartilha Experimental: processo intuitivo, analítico, sintético, inventivo, fonomímico, legográfico* (Lisbon: Bertrand, 1923).

⁴⁵*BCM*, no. 18, January 1923, 28–30.

above all in their fight against the “foreign invasion”;⁴⁶ on the other hand, the impressions of the governor of the Lourenço Marques district, Eduardo Martins, registered in the visitors’ book at the “Motherland” mission in Nhambel, emphasised the tenacity of the lay mission personnel and the reach of their civilising action.⁴⁷ However, these discourses were merely rhetorical, given that the republican government did not delay in accepting the demagogy surrounding the secularisation of the missions, declaring the closure of the Institute of Colonial Missions and the extinction, in 1927, of the lay missions.⁴⁸

In reality, from the beginning it was an enterprise condemned to failure, for a number of reasons. The first of these resides in the logic underlying the functioning of the lay missions that reproduced, essentially, the functional organisation of the religious missions, in their structural organisation as well as their constitution and functioning. The attempt to organise missions constituted by families and the assimilation of African customs to the models of European subjectification did not conceal that the republicans felt, at the same time, intimidated and fascinated by the pastoral power of the Anglo-American missions, exposing the contradictions of the government project. On the other hand, the republican rhetoric, despite suggesting cooperation between the religious missions and Protestants, as well as between the lay missions and the State, abandoned the lay missionaries in their work with the indigenous populations in the fight against the foreign “enemy”. Despite every effort and patriotic sacrifice, the results of the lay civilising missions were very few, given that the 10 missions spread throughout the province were manifestly insufficient to compensate, even less to combat, the influence of the foreign missions. Without offering help and resources compatible with the expectations demanded, the State left the concretisation of the republican political project to the individual conscience of those involved. This experience demonstrated that this failure was due as much to a demagogic lack of realism as to the forms of action taken, although their commitment was as high as the effort demanded of the civilising agents. Despite all the difficulties, namely financial, the lay missions, with their weight (perhaps excessive) of idealism did manage some achievements. The maps of school attendance among the mission schools and their branches reveal the effort exerted by the agents in their diverse functions of instruction and civic education (Table 1).

Notwithstanding, even considering that the schools were considered a supplement in the State effort to civilise the indigenous children, this project was a drop in the ocean. Compared with the public schools and the Portuguese Catholic missionaries, which between them attended about 7000 children, for an estimated total population in 1921 of five million souls, the few hundred natives affected by contact with the “civilising agents” symbolised, on a cost-benefit analysis, an enormous liability for the republican Project.⁴⁹

However, the expression of these initiatives in the context of European colonialism cannot be reduced, *tout court*, to their quantitative dimension. The descriptions of the “civilising agents”, published in the *Bulletin of the Civilising Missions*, reconnect us to the historical time and the material conditions of existence that surrounded the operating of colonial processes at the beginning of the twentieth century. They tell us,

⁴⁶BCM, no. 19, April 1924, 20.

⁴⁷BCM, no. 19, April 1924, 19.

⁴⁸Decree no. 12886, B.O. no. 6, 1927.

⁴⁹See *The Catholic Missionary*, no. 33, Year III: 174–75.

Table 1. School attendance of the lay civilising missions in Mozambique, 1920–1925.

Year	Lourenço Marques district	School attendance			Civilising agent
		Masculine	Feminine	Total	
1918	Xinavene, na Manhiça	—	—	61	José Lopes Xisto
1919	Xinavene, na Manhiça	—	—	84	José Lopes Xisto
1920	Xinavene, na Manhiça	—	—	90	José Lopes Xisto
1921	—	—	—	—	—
1922	Capulana (branch)	—	—	44	António da Silva Veiga
1923	Xinavane, Manhiça (head)	—	—	124	
	Ilha Mariana (branch)	—	—	51	Claudino dos Anjos Alves
	Capulana (branch)	—	—	55	António da Silva Veiga
1924	Xinavane	40	24	64	José Lopes Xisto
1925	Capulana	37	27	23	António da Silva Veiga
		—	—	—	
“Republic” mission					
Year	Quelimane district	School attendance			Civilising agent
		Masculine	Feminine	Total	
1920/25	Luá-Ile	—	—	—	—
“Camões” mission					
Year	Mozambique district	School attendance			Civilising agent
		Masculine	Feminine	Total	
1922	Meconta	—	—	36	Pedro Alves Gago

Table 1. (Continued).

Year	Inhambane district	School attendance			Civilising agent
		Masculine	Feminine	Total	
1922	Nhambel	56	15	71	Cândido Teixeira
1923	Nhambel	—	—	138	Cândido Teixeira
	Dackalo	—	—	83	—
	Elén, Zavala	—	—	84	Ermelinda Teixeira
	Mocodoene	—	—	70	António dos Santos Leão
1924	Nhambel	—	—	194	Cândido Teixeira
	Elén, Zavala	—	—	53	José David da Silva
	Maxixe	—	—	208	Joaquim and Margarida de Sousa
	Mocodoene	—	—	95	António dos Santos Leão
1925	Maxixe	—	—	222	Joaquim and Margarida de Sousa

Source: *Bulletin of the Civilising Missions* (1920, no. 1–1925, no. 24).

also, of the circumstances that surrounded colonial contact, and of the inter-institutional conflict between the authorities that shared the exercise of government; the notions, concepts and ideologies that demarcated these same government practices; the inventions that guided their stratagems; the contradictions and ambiguities that the grand narratives of colonialism have suppressed from official records. On the other hand, from a methodological point of view, the reading of colonialism from alternative document sources, in this case grounded in an analysis of letter discourses, allows us to dislocate the analysis from State–Church relations, centring the locus of attention on the actors that effectively participated in the colonial encounter. The incorporation of these “new” actors makes it possible to lay out a series of theoretical-conceptual ramifications. Amongst these are the identification of a plurality of perspectives, world-views and life experiences that cross each other in African space; the analysis of translation processes to which the official discursive productions are subjected and the possibility of understanding the discontinuities between discourses and practices; and, finally, the tensions and contradictions of the processes of “governing at a distance”. The aim of this text was based on precisely these two themes: to offer another reading of the Portuguese civilising process in Africa on the basis of an analysis of a set of alternative sources; and to explore the role of other civilisation configurations (beyond those of the public school and the missionary school) in the production of diversified cultural responses, thus opening space for questioning the discontinuities between the programmes of governing at a distance and local practices.

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