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“Portugal and the Dynamics of Smallness” in Ulf Hannerz and Andre Gingrich (ed.s) *Small Countries: Structures and Sensibilities*. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, in print.

## 16 PORTUGAL AND THE DYNAMICS OF SMALLNESS

João de Pina-Cabral



Figure 1. “Portugal is not a small country” – Henrique Galvão, c. 1935, Câmara Municipal de Peniche.

“Portugal is not a small country.” In Portugal, this poster-map, where the country’s colonial possessions at mid-twentieth century are superimposed in red upon the map of Europe, continues to have a *succès de scandale* – one of the most famous instances of the kind of vacuous imperial bravado that my generation of left-leaning anticolonialists so deplored (Vale de Almeida 2004 and Vale de Almeida *et al* 2006). The map was conceived and produced in the mid-1930’s by one of the more extraordinary figures of the period: Henrique Galvão was the most inspired propagandist of the early fascist regime and of Portugal’s African empire. At the time, he was the founder and first director of the National Radio Agency and a very widely read writer of colonialist

novels focusing on daring tales of hunting deeds. He was the organizer of the first colonial exhibition in Oporto in 1934, and deeply involved in the organization of the important Exhibition of the Portuguese World of 1940 (see Pina-Cabral 2001).

What *was* going through his head when he produced this map? Formally, he was validating Salazar's constitutional claim that the colonies were an integral part of Portugal just like the Atlantic Islands or the European Metropolis, as it was then called. But can it be as simple as that? Surely not. The very caption of the map makes it clear that doubts do legitimately arise; that he needed to counter some kind of assumed smallness.

Yet the ambiguities do not stop there. Considering that Galvão always had deep personal links with Brazil, one wonders why the Latin American giant is not part of the map (staining in red all of Russia ...). At the time, he would probably respond that Brazil was no longer part of Portugal like Mozambique and Angola. But that answer would always leave out the fact that, when Salazar finally put him in prison in the early 1950s, that is where he escaped to. At the end of World War II, he became one of the best-known critics of the dictator, after they fell out due to his outspoken reports as a member of the National Assembly representing Angola. He famously denounced the horrors of forced labor in the African colonies (Galvão 1975 [1959]).

Subsequently he became one of the first international terrorists who manipulated the media for political purposes, with the televised hijacking of the luxury liner *Santa Maria* in 1961. Galvão's media-oriented operation (involving the taking over of the liner mid-Atlantic, and handing it over to the Brazilian authorities, without any risk to the life of the passengers) was a political call for the plight of the people in Africa and in Portugal who were suffering under the yoke of the dictatorship. Galvão was even invited to speak at the United Nations against Portugal's fascist and colonialist regime in the late 1960s. Yet he was to die in 1970 as a lonely and deranged old man in a public asylum in Rio de Janeiro – a fitting end for someone whose life was always lived as a romantic tale, from the days of his youth as one of the military cadets that organised the failed putsch of the dictator Sidónio Pais in the early 1920s.

The least that can be said is that Henrique Galvão must have had a flicker of laughter in his eye as he produced his patently mischievous map. One thing is certain – and the survival of the map to this day suggests just that – he was pointing his finger at an important issue. He was sapping a significant ideological vein: Portugal's recurrent confrontation with a problem of national feasibility.

The assessment of the smallness of a country does not depend only on what counts as a country but also on how one conceives the encompassing political order at a specific historical moment. Witness the recent debates as to whether Catalonia or Scotland do or do not count as nations. Furthermore, the relevant smallness is not that conceived by the external analyst, but that which is part of the assessment of their own condition by the politically active members of that country. Smallness, therefore, is the outcome of a judgement of viability within a dynamic process of acquisition of the means to political and cultural autonomy.

But even that autonomy cannot simply be assumed. Today, we automatically interpret "country" to mean "an independent nation-state," but that interpretation is in some ways deeply misleading. The notion of the world as an inter-national field is a fiction that never allowed for the actual complexity of the processes of enchainment that historically produce the world as a political field. Independence is hardly a simple thing as the case of the European Union or the British Commonwealth amply validate. To give another example: in the 1820s, was it Brazil that became independent from Portugal, or Portugal that became independent from Brazil? After all, the capital of the kingdom was in Rio de Janeiro at the time. The senior branch of the royal family is that of the Emperors of Brazil, not that of the subsequent Kings of Portugal. Over most of its nine centuries of existence as a political entity, and even though its European borders are probably the oldest in the continent (having been broadly established in 1249), Portugal cannot be said to be territorially closed in any way.

There are two senses in which this is the case and they correspond to the two axes of ecumenic proximity (cf. Mintz 1996) that continue to play a role today in the political condition of this country/nation/state/people ... well, let us leave that undecided for the moment (Pina-Cabral and Feijó 2002).

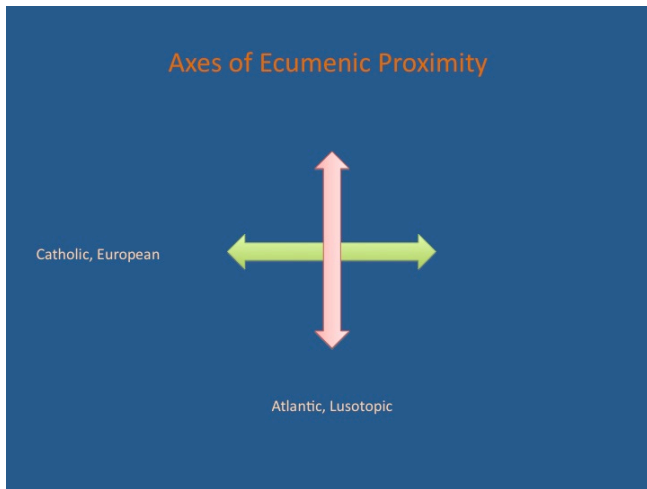


Figure 2. Axes of ecumenic proximity: European/Catholic v. Atlantic/Lusotopic.

The *first axis* is clearly the insertion in Europe's Catholic world, represented by the allegiance to the Pope. One of the most bitterly debated questions, leading to a series of revolts and revolutions at the beginning of the twentieth century was precisely that one. Can Portugal be conceived at all as a lay state along the liberal logic of separation between Church and State? If so, can it continue to be itself without the association to the Catholic Church? The so-called Integralists adopted that name precisely because they claimed that the nation's integrity was being wrenched apart by the instituting of a lay state. Those who attempted to restore the monarchy in the north with Paiva Couceiro in 1911 had at the top of their list of demands the ending of the Civil Registry of births, claiming that Catholic baptism should be the only source of civic existence (cf. Pulido Valente 2006). It was as a response to the unresolved nature of that debate between Republicans and Integralists that the following generation turned as a compromise to the Church-inspired republican totalitarianism governing Portugal up to 1974.

In fact, this allegiance to the Catholic Church as a politically relevant entity must not be seen as unidirectional. From roughly 1460 to roughly 1911, the Portuguese Crown was entrusted by the Pope with overlooking the wellbeing of the Church in its territories, including the management of Church property and the appointment of bishops and priests – the famous *Padroado Português* (cf. Neto 1993/4: 265-283). This sense of interpenetration has deep political implications not only in the way in which this royal authority shaped the social and religious institutions of the various lands ruled by the Portuguese Crown, but also in the way they created allegiances that went well beyond the boundaries of anything that can be considered today a "country", a "State" or even an "empire".

Two very distinct examples will suffice to clarify this. The first is how the Monomotapa kings based at the Zimbabwe, in what is today the eponymous country, had a personal guard of around four hundred Portuguese soldiers for about a hundred years, from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth, and were ultimately "converted" to Catholicism by members of this guard. Yet these men are more aptly called Catholics than Portuguese. Most of them belonged to the mixed populations that arose throughout the Indian Ocean at the time, and whose links to European Portugal were never too certain (cf. Axelson 1973).

The second example of this is my own personal discovery, when studying the Eurasian population of Macau in the 1990s, that its notion of collective identity in an ethnically divided city could in no way be described simply as Portugueseness. In fact, it constituted a compound of three

factors that counted in equal terms as both differentiating and identifying features: (i) some form of mixed phenotype; (ii) some sort of connectedness to the Portuguese language or culture; (iii) some kind of allegiance to Catholicism (even if merely formal – see Pina-Cabral 2002).

But there is a *second axis* of ecumenic proximity that crosses the European, Catholic axis. It is constituted by the links formed across the Atlantic through a sense of shared cultural past, which I have elsewhere called Lusotopy, claiming that it forms an ecumene in the sense that Ulf Hannerz (1991) and Sidney Mintz (1996) have given to the word. As a political entity, Portugal was launched in the early twelfth century by the Crusader movement in a process of political expansion of the Catholic Church – the so-called *Reconquista*. From the beginning, it found itself territorially enclosed by the growing presence on its back of León and Castille as a political entity. However, its location facing the sea provided it with considerable assets. At first, its feasibility was ensured by its strategic position on the commercial and military sea route from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. After the fifteenth century, when the technological means for offshore sailing became available, this set the country on its way to territorial expansion through conquest (cf. Pina-Cabral and Feijó 2002).

From this perspective, the expansive nature of Portugal's smallness makes for a very different kind of smallness from that, for example, of Switzerland. It casts the trope of smallness into a dynamic mode more akin to that of naval potentates like ancient Athens, Holland or England. That is probably why the Portuguese continue to look at Galvão's map with a kind of bemused surprise. It points to a form of collective existence that is belied by the hegemonic notions of "country," of "nation-state," of "state," or even the notion that the world's order is represented graphically in New York in the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Allow me to refer here to a verse in a song by a very popular Oporto rock star, Rui Veloso. When I first heard it on my car radio I could hardly believe how true it was, but I trust he actually wrote it in that tone of self-deriding humor that the Portuguese so readily engage upon, but that they so resent when enacted by foreigners. I have tried it out on a number of friends and acquaintances and they invariably responded with a smile. My own belief is that – like most jokes – what makes this one work is that it states something that is both obviously untrue and yet, somehow, inescapable.

Rui Veloso's verse goes: *Portugal é Guimarães, tudo o resto são conquistas* – literally, "Portugal is Guimarães, all the rest is conquered land." Guimarães is the small town where the Count of Portucallem, a vassal of the King of León, had his seat in the early twelfth century (cf. Mattoso 1993/4: 11-21). In short, Portugal was originally constituted as a movement of conquest southwards on the part of a military elite. What Rui Veloso implies is that, the original seat being insignificant, the dynamic of outward conquest and subsequent retreat is all that there is to Portugal.

In the course of the tenth century, the small Christian kingdoms of the north of the Peninsula started pushing southwards across lands that had been in disputed Muslim control for around three centuries since the fall of the Visigoth Empire (the area is still called today "Beira", etymologically meaning border, even though today it is in the middle of the country). This southward conquest was achieved with the help of groups of crusaders coming from the North Sea, sailing round the Peninsula in order to reach the Holy Land. With them came the North Sea merchants that contributed to the wealth of Portucallem (today's city of Oporto), whose name the country eventually adopted.

From 1139 onwards, as his land increased, the Count conceived of becoming politically autonomous and assumed the title of King. In 1147, with the help of crusaders coming from Dartmouth in England, he finally managed to conquer Lisbon – the only large natural port on the western coast of Iberia. By 1179, Pope Alexander III recognized him as King of Portugal, finally freeing him of vassalage to the King of León, later of León and Castille.

Roughly one century later, in 1249, his descendants had conquered all the land to the south of his original possessions and the country's present frontiers were finally established. As Portugal

expanded to the south over lands previously controlled by the Almoravids, so did León and Castille. The result is that Portugal found itself bound by a political entity that was always to remain both larger and wealthier, due to the vast fertile plains to the interior (today's Andalusia and La Mancha in Castille).

The Black Plague arrived in 1348 and decimated nearly half of the population before it receded in the last decades of the century. During this crisis, there was a failed attempt on the part of Castille to take over what was no longer a mere fiefdom, but a nation with a sense of its own political identity and its own language. The resistance by the urban merchant sectors connected to the naval trade led to the eviction of the Castillians and the consolidation of a new native dynasty. Once again, English support was decisive – the new queen was a daughter of John of Gaunt. The population was growing fast and the dynasty needed to establish its own moral legitimacy, so the process of expansion into the Atlantic started immediately with the conquest of Ceuta in 1415. The Island of Madeira was populated in 1418 and the Azores Islands from 1427 onwards. The first shipment of sugar from Madeira reached Bristol in 1456.

However, the occupation of North Africa did not lend itself to the sort of permanent erasure of Muslim presence that had been possible in the southern provinces of Portugal. By the time the Portuguese lost Tangiers in 1437, it had become clear that a new policy of expansion was required. A movement of exploration in the Atlantic toward the south was launched. The Cape Verde Islands were occupied from 1456 onwards and by 1482, the fort of St. George of Elmina (São Jorge da Mina) was built in what is today Ghana, starting a long and dark history of Atlantic slave trading.

Over the following half century the Portuguese established a commercial naval empire reaching as far as Japan. They were permanently present on the China coast from the mid-1540's until they handed over the administration of Macau in 1999 (see Pina-Cabral 2002). With the possible exception of Goa, however, none of this involved permanent extensive administrative occupation. Their control of the naval routes was based on the establishment of strategic, territorially insignificant commercial forts. The only real possibility of the kind of extensive administrative occupation that had characterized the conquests of southern Portugal arose in Brazil, and it demanded the massive importation of African slaves. The Portuguese had established a claim to the Brazilian coast in 1500 but it was only with the foundation of the city of Salvador, half a century later, that the process of territorial administration started in earnest.

The aim of this historical sketch is to highlight my principal argument: Portugal's smallness is as politically questionable as it is territorially obvious. Thus it establishes a dynamic imbalance in political terms. As Rui Veloso implies, either Portugal is nothing but the few square kilometres of the count's stronghold at Guimarães or, if not, where does it stop precisely?

The question is not really rhetorical as one might be tempted to believe. For example, when the Regent moved to Brazil in 1807 impelled by the Napoleonic invasions, he founded a new political entity called the "United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil, and the Algarves" with its capital in Rio de Janeiro. Eventually, his son would declare himself Emperor of Brazil, but only after the Portuguese forced the King to return to Portugal in 1820. They did so by preventing the landing in Lisbon (on his way back from Rio) of William Beresford, the British Governor who had ruled the country for the King during the Peninsular Wars.

Now, in 1815, the King's Brazilian title included three named territorial entities: Portugal and Brazil seem obvious, but he added also "the Algarves." Etymologically, this last word derives from *el-Garb*, short for *garb el-Andalus*, the Arabic name of the Western part of the Almohad Empire in the Peninsula. Note, however, that, in the King's title, it is always used in the plural. It describes not only the southern province of Portugal in Iberia, to the west of the Strait of Gibraltar, but also the possessions in Africa conquered after 1415 and last abandoned in 1769 when the population of Mazagão, the strong fortress, was taken to Brazil, there to refound the city in the Amazonian basin (cf. Vidal 2005), where it is still today. Ceuta was by then Spanish, having failed

to acknowledge the Duke of Bragança's claim as King when Portugal recovered its independence from eighty years of Castilian dominion in 1640.

In the late fourteenth century, Manuel I's royal title had been "By the Grace of God, King of Portugal and of the Algarves *on this side and that side of the sea in Africa*, Lord of Guinea and of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Persia and India." (my emphasis) The plural concept of the Algarves *on both sides of the sea* captures this processual nature of conquest and shows that, in the constitution of this political entity, smallness is merely the starting point.

My point is essentially that the notion behind this title that the Portuguese kings used from 1471 to 1815 cannot be grasped in purely territorial terms. It has to be understood as one of political movement. It is imbued with a post-Renaissance view of power as outward conquest; it implies a notion of development, of expansion, of growth by colonizing freely available land. This is a movement that follows on the Crusader expansion; it did not start with Pedro Álvares Cabral, Américo Vespucio or Cristóbal Colombo. Rui Veloso was right: "Portugal is Guimarães, all the rest is conquered land." As a political project, Portugal is a process of expansion and retraction. That is why historians have argued convincingly that we cannot speak of one imperial process, but must distinguish three distinct imperial drives: the Asian commercial empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the Brazilian slave-based empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and the African colonial empire in the twentieth century (Clarence-Smith 1985). In that sense Portugal is not different from many other Western nations. Bertrand Russell (1934: 290) makes this point in a characteristically racist and bigoted passage from his essay "The settlement of the West":

"The men who conquered the West had courage, tenacity, hope, self-reliance, and a fundamental instinct towards civilised society. To understand their achievement, one should compare it with what happened in most parts of Latin America, where a thin stream of white blood was lost amid Indians and negroes, leaving most of the primeval jungle untamed, while the government, such as it was, combined tyranny and anarchy."

Geographic difference, economic difference, demographic factors, cultural differences, slavery, racial violence and discrimination, genocide – all go to the winds, and we are left with a John Wayne type cowboy ideology that balances all modern imperialisms one against the other, coming out with a clear preference for those who speak Russell's own language and share his own racial prejudice.

But the passage continues with some really prophetic words. Remember, the essay was written at the time of the Great Recession – a period not at all unlike our own – and Russell must have had that in mind as he finished his essay on the following troubled note.

"They succeeded in the conquest of the earth; they succeeded in preserving political freedom; but economic freedom was lost by a process which we can now see to have been inevitable. They did their work well, but their philosophy depended for its success upon the empty spaces, and cannot solve the problems of our more crowded world." (1934: 290)

What we have to ask is: in what sense were those spaces really empty? What allows for the mirage of emptiness in southern Iberia, America or Africa? Were the vast prairies of Alentejo and Andalusia really empty, or did the crusader kings just simply slaughter, convert and push off the earlier occupiers? Were the western prairies really empty of Amerindians? Were the green hills of Africa really depopulated, as Henrique Galvão so often stated (see Pina-Cabral 2001)? We all know what the balance of today's answers is likely to be. My interest in this passage, however, goes further. Is today's world (after all, Russell was writing 80 years ago) no longer empty? If the earlier emptiness was nothing but a mirage, is today's fullness an equally immeasurable phantom?

To my mind, Russell's observation signals the coming to an end of the modern mode of imperial expansion outwards. He was merely ahead of his time in seeing the economic implications of continuing to treat the world as if it were permanently expandable, without taking into account what, nearly eighty years after, seems blatantly obvious to us all: there are no longer any empty lands out there. And that's not because there is no land, but because no one will allow us to ravage it as if it were free for the taking.

For the Portuguese, the moment of reckoning came at the time of the Bandung Conference in April 1955. Suddenly, it became clear that Portugal might be a small country. The immediate response of the elite who surrounded the aging dictator was to grasp on the Brazilian model. People like Marcello Caetano and Adriano Moreira believed that they could prevent Portugal from confronting its smallness at the end of the colonial era by building a new ideological formulation of transcontinental integration. The humanist, Lusotopic ideas of the Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre (1946 [1933]) were used in an attempt to open up the path for new political solutions, since simple colonial domination was patently unsustainable. These attempts failed for a number of reasons, one of them being the very nature of the process of political binarization that characterised the Cold War.

Come what may, by the time the Portuguese Democratic Revolution took place in April 1974, the country found itself in need of building a new national project. For a while it looked like the Atlantic, Lusotopic axis had simply faded beyond repair (see Pina-Cabral and Carvalho 2004). Naval routes had lost their earlier significance, imperial expansion was unavailable, ex-colonies were aligned with the Soviet bloc, and the country was still blocked off by Spain from access to what was seen as the only path to economic well-being, Europe. The Portuguese had to reinvent themselves.

The answer came in the form not of conquest but of assimilation, into the European Union. For about fifteen years after 1986 it looked like the European axis had absorbed Portugal, allowing for a bypassing of Castilian oppression. The Portuguese responded enthusiastically: the infrastructures were fully renewed, the educational system completely renovated, scientific research institutions were launched with considerable success, Portuguese business carved an important position in Eastern Europe and Latin America, the administrative system became far more competent and modernized, public services were standardized and on the whole, levels of corruption were brought down significantly.

By the early 2000s, it looked like Portugal was on the way to a new form of political and economic viability. In political terms, Portugal's participation in the common institutions of the European Union was ample and seemingly successful. European federalism became a widely supported option (cf. Soromenho-Marques 2002). However, there were clouds already forming in the horizon: together with all of Western Europe, Portuguese economy simply stopped growing in the mid-2000s. The ever more insistent application of neo-liberal cures only sped the train further towards its inevitable wreckage. By 2008, although Portugal had a rate of sovereign debt smaller than that of Germany, France or Britain, it had no firewall when faced with financial blackmail coming from Wall Street, then desperate to recoup its own losses.

It may seem incredible that I should need to point this out, but most people do not know that Portugal never had a banking crisis (its banks remained very solid to this day), never had a construction bubble, and never had a problem of administrative and political enforcement like Greece or Italy. Portuguese economy was stopped on its tracks and a whole generation of young people left out of economic life for the simple fact that Portugal is small. The heirs of Bertrand Russell succeeded in giving life to their prejudices by first enforcing economic atrophy (under the neoliberal banner of reducing the size of the State) and then throwing Portugal in the hands of international usurers (under the name of "austerity"). Never in its history has Portugal felt as small as it feels today. With the collapse of the ideals of European integration at the hands of northern European populist politicians, it utterly lacks any project of a viable political future.



Truth to say, new phenomena do emerge that are, to say the least, unexpected and interesting, since they point towards new forms of activation of the Atlantic, Lusotopic axis of ecumenic proximity (see Pina-Cabral 2002/3 and 2005). Most of the large Portuguese firms with significant international presence are in fact owned and headed today by representatives of the Government of Angola, in a process that has now gained increasing speed due to the alliance of Angolan capital with Chinese commercial interests. Portugal's largest commercial private bank is a case in point. The sale by the Portuguese government under orders from the IMF of Portugal's electricity provider to Chinese interests was mediated by Angolan capital. When faced with sudden, long-term unemployment, Portugal's now educated youth is finding employment in extraordinary large numbers both in Angola and Brazil.

Yet another question arises, however: is this problem really particular to Portugal? Is this really a matter of the lack of viability of a country that is an outlier in Europe, too small to possess its out financial firewalls in a world where international finance is essentially deregulated? We return to the open ending of Russell's paper on North America's settlers: are there any more empty lands to conquer out there? We have lived through a period of growing financial deregulation at global level, during which the impossibility of growth through expansion has been camouflaged by processes of financial hyperaccumulation. Such at least seems to be the assessment of a number of reputed economic analysts.

I conclude, therefore, that the problem of smallness is no longer really one that countries like Portugal have to face alone, but one that faces the whole world. The world today is small in the sense that there are no empty spaces out there anymore; we have reached the limits of the model of growth that drove modernity. That model was imperial and wasteful of resources, and it has increasingly turned against itself. The smallness of Portugal, both in political and economic terms, is no longer alone a Portuguese problem, but one of global dimensions: in environmental, legal, financial and social terms.

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