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Historiography 1918-Today (Portugal)

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This article attempts to chart the historiography of the First World War in Portugal from 1918 to the present. It notes that its development was largely conditioned by the country's political evolution, namely the experience of and the reaction against the New State (1933-1974). It discusses how the centenary celebrations of the Republic (2010) and the war itself have added a new impetus, leading to the existence of a healthy debate about the conflict, based on a multiplicity of new and complementary approaches.

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Introduction

The historiography of the First World War in Portugal was largely conditioned by the country's political evolution over the course of the 20th century. The legitimacy of António de Oliveira Salazar's (1889-1970) New State rested in part on the ruthless criticism of the preceding regime, the First Republic, depicted as the inevitably anarchic consequence of a democratic brand of politics unsuited to Portugal. The republican leadership's handling of the First World War was the focus of an important part of this criticism.

Few critical explorations of the war were attempted during Salazar's long hold on power. By the time his successor, Marcelo Caetano (1906-1980), was overthrown, in 1974, a renewal of interest in the First Republic and its leaders was under way, and it gained momentum with the change of regime. Simultaneously however, political, diplomatic and military history were being sidelined, with the First World War being seen primarily as a backdrop for the increased social tensions whose suppression had required the overthrow of the Republic. In the years that followed historians outside Portugal made the most telling contributions to the advancement of understanding the country's role in the First World War.

In the 1990s the situation changed considerably. On the one hand there was a renewal of domestic interest in political history, which allowed for a fresh interpretation of the First Republic; on the other, foreign-trained Portuguese historians placed the country's participation in the conflict squarely at the centre of their investigations, calling into question long-held assumptions about the war's limited role in transforming Portuguese life.

From the Post-War Years to Salazar's New State: Memoirs, First-Hand Accounts and Documents

In the aftermath of the First World War there was a flurry of publications written by returning veterans. Some were critical of the Portuguese intervention, [1] most were laudatory, [2] and almost all were devoted to the fighting in Flanders, the African campaigns quickly losing out in public and official interest. [3] In a number of cases the authors sought to justify the interventionist position, which they had defended until the departure of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (CEP: Corpo Expedicionário Português) for France in January 1917. Some of the leading players published their memoirs, most notably GeneralManuel de Oliveira Gomes da Costa (1863-1929), in charge of the Portuguese 2nd Division during the Battle of the Lys, on 9 April 1918. [4] His immediate superior, General Fernando Tamagnini de Abreu (1856-1924), also wrote his memoirs, but these – some excerpts in the press aside – did not see the light of day until long after his death. [5]

In terms of official documents, it is worth noting that a white book on Portugal's intervention, insistently called for since 1916, saw only a first volume published in 1920, and this with significant omissions and redactions. [6] The material assembled for the remaining volume vanished for a time. The enterprise was reviewed and completed by the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1990s, giving renewed impetus to researchers – even if the material was limited to that of the Ministry's archives. [7] The minutes of the crucial secret sessions of parliament, held in July 1917, were only published in 2002. [8]

In the early period of the New State a small number of works seemed to have closed the lid on the historiography of the war. General Luis Augusto Ferreira Martins (1875-1967), once a member of the deeply politicised general staff of the CEP and, like the rest of his colleagues, a committed interventionist, was able to reconcile this current with the army's more self-serving interpretation of the conflict in the two-volume work he oversaw, *Portugal na Grande Guerra*.^[9] Similarly, Hernâni Cidade (1887-1975), a rising academic figure who had fought with great distinction in the conflict, being taken prisoner in 1918, summarised the country's belligerence in a 1935 article, "Portugal na Grande Guerra: 1914-1918", published as part of a multi-volume *História de Portugal*.^[10]

After 1974

In the final years of the New State, historian António Henrique de Oliveira Marques (1933-2007) began to write on the First Republic.^[11] Alongside these early explorations, he also began to publish key primary sources such as the speeches and letters of Afonso Costa (1871-1937) and the minutes of his wartime cabinet meetings.^[12]

Also visible before and after the April 1974 Revolution was an interest in the experience of Sidónio Pais (1872-1918), who toppled Afonso Costa's interventionist government in December 1917. Once in power, eager to build a "New Republic", Pais sketched out a new approach to government which presaged the authoritarian solutions that would soon begin to proliferate across Europe. Vasco Pulido Valente considered Pais' year in power (December 1917-1918) in a pioneering 1965 article; [13] in 1978 António José Telo looked at this episode from a class point of view, arguing that it constituted a first attempt to secure power by those economic groups, beginning with southern landowners, who would later underpin the New State; [14] and Manuel Villaverde Cabral attempted to insert "sidonismo" into the wider context of the war. [15]

It was non-Portuguese historians, however, who took the lead in placing the First World War squarely at the heart of their research into Portuguese affairs. John Vincent-Smith considered the nature of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance in the years leading up to Portugal's belligerence, in a doctoral thesis published in 1971.^[16] Douglas Wheeler wrote the first political history of the First Republic in decades, naturally considering the war years in some detail.^[17] René Pélissier investigated, at long last, Portugal's wartime colonial campaigns, noting that the contemporary "pacification" attempts were as important, if not more so, than the struggle against the German forces operating in the area.^[18] Finally, Hipolito de la Torre Gomez looked at Portuguese-Spanish relations after 1910 in a series of volumes, doing so on the basis of a very thorough description of the political situation pertaining in each country.^[19] Alongside these scholars, some Portuguese historians attempted, in isolated initiatives, to broaden the existing understanding of aspects of Portugal's wartime experience. João Medina, for example, edited an innovative collection examining the Portuguese home front and the divisions caused by the interventionist debate.^[20] José

Medeiros Ferreira considered the Great War as part of a wider study into Civilian and Military Power in 20th century Portugal, and also produced the first investigation into the Portuguese delegation at the Paris peace talks.^[21]

Renewed Interest

In the 1990s, the situation changed dramatically. Portuguese historiography in general was evolving away from the Marxist and structuralist concerns and approaches that had dominated it since the 1974 Carnation Revolution, and political history was slowly making a comeback. A lead was taken by historians training outside Portugal. Nuno Severiano Teixeira's *O Poder e a Guerra*, published in 1996,^[22] revisited the reasons for Portugal's intervention and found them in the political instability which characterised the republican regime; Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses' *União Sagrada e Sidonismo*,^[23] published four years later, took this as a starting point and considered the consequences, for Portugal, of its incomplete wartime political and cultural mobilisations. As was noted by a recent survey of the war's historiography, these works set the tone for much subsequent writing by reaffirming the primacy of the domestic sphere – by, in other words, subordinating the republican government's foreign diplomatic options to their immediate need to shore up the young regime at home.^[24]

The following years saw a growing interest in the First World War. There was a renewed focus in military history, be it relating to the Western Front, [25] or to the African campaigns. [26] Two recent works have gone a long way towards reminding a wider Portuguese public of the importance – and the cost – of the Portuguese campaigns in Mozambique. [27] In relation to the war in Europe, attention was finally paid to the circumstances faced by Portuguese soldiers in the trenches. [28] A general round-up of all the campaigns was produced by Aniceto Afonso in 2008. [29] These works were almost exclusively written on the basis of Portuguese documentation.

New explanations have also been advanced for the origins and consequences of Portugal's military intervention, a topic that naturally allows for many very different readings. Noémia Malva Novais focused on the role played by João Chagas (1863-1925), arguably the most influential and dynamic interventionist voice in Portugal from 1914 onwards. Chagas was Portugal's minister in Paris from 1914 to 1917, and his diaries remain essential reading for anyone interested in the Portuguese participation in the war. Chagas's vision was problematised further by Luís Alves de Fraga, who posited the war as a great strategic gamble designed to allow Portugal to emerge from the debilitating shadow of Great Britain. A good starting point to the debates on the war's strategic dimension can be found in a special number of *Nação e Defesa*, published in 2014.

Also significant has been a second wave of interest in the figure of Sidónio Pais. João Medina focused his attention on the President's cult of personality before and after his murder in December 1918. [33] In 1998 Miguel Nunes Ramalho published a study of the future President's time as minister to Berlin and later, as a conspirator, in Lisbon. [34] These years and indeed the whole of Sidónio Pais' life and thought would be considered in minute detail by Armando Malheiro da Silva in his two-volume *Sidónio e Sidonismo*, in many ways a counter to all those who continued the view of Sidónio Pais as a proto-fascist [35] Pais' "New Republic" was the subject of further work by Maria Alice Samara, who attempted to reconnect wartime conditions in Portugal, and their political evolution, with the working-class struggle in Portugal and the reaction it provoked. [36] Other biographical works have added to our understanding of the period's leading political figures, notably General Joaquim Pimenta de Castro (1846-1918), António José de Almeida (1866-1929), and Afonso Costa. [37]

The year 2010 marked the centenary of the Portuguese First Republic. The event was marked by considerable official festivities and a number of publications devoted to the regime. All of these naturally addressed the war.^[38] Soon after this anniversary a number of other detailed studies widened understanding of the conflict and its consequences, denoting the benefits of the growing internationalisation of the Portuguese historical profession. Ana Paula Pires published the first analysis of the profound economic consequences of the Portuguese intervention in the First World War in her PhD thesis.^[39] Sílvia Correia produced probably the finest-yet cultural history of an aspect of the war in her investigation of post-war commemoration of the fallen by veterans and the rest of Portuguese society.^[40] And Noémia Malva Novais published an important study of the Portuguese press and censorship in wartime.^[41]

Current and Future Debates

Interest in Portugal's participation in the First World War continued to grow in subsequent years, thanks in large measure to the centenaries of the conflict. In October 2014 the organisation of a "Collection Day" at the Portuguese Parliament, under the banner of "Europeana 1914-1918", as a part of which the general public was invited to contribute their memorabilia, contributed to raise awareness of, and facilitate knowledge transfer on, Portugal's involvement in the war. The materials collected were made available in two specific online platforms. They were then used in an online exhibition, developed by the Google Cultural Institute, titled "We Know this War by Heart". They were then used in an online exhibition, developed by the Google Cultural Institute, titled "We Know this War by Heart". They were then used in an online exhibition, developed by the Google Cultural Institute, titled "We Know this War by Heart". They were then used in an online exhibition, developed by the Google Cultural Institute, titled "We Know this War by Heart". They were then used in an online exhibition, developed by the Google Cultural Institute, titled "We Know this War by Heart". They were then used in an online exhibition, developed by the Google Cultural Institute, titled "We Know this War by Heart". They were then used in an online exhibition, developed by the Google Cultural Institute, titled "We Know this War by Heart". They were then used in an online exhibition, developed by the Google Cultural Institute, titled Portugal to 2016 António José Telo and Pedro Marquês de Sousa returned to military aspects of the country's participation in the conflict.

In more recent years international historiography started to expand spatially the study of the conflict, moving beyond Europe. Portugal, due to the overlap between its colonial empire and the African war front, started to be included in the narrative that sustained this "new global history" of the First World War. In 2014, Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses analysed the Portuguese Empire in the volume *Empires at War*,^[48] edited by Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, while Ana Paula Pires and Fernanda Rollo studied the economic impact of the conflict in Portuguese East Africa.^[49] This global approach can also be seen in the recent works by Sérgio Rezendes^[50] focusing on the Azores and on the Atlantic dimension of the First World War, and in the recently published volume *The Global First World War and its Aftermath*,^[51] coordinated by Ana Paula Pires, Jan Schmidt and María Inés Tato.

A very different approach was taken by a workshop held at Brown University in March 2016, entitled The Lusophone World at War, 1914-1918 and Beyond. The premise was to investigate the way in which the war affected the bonds between the Portuguese metropolis, the colonial empire, emigrant communities abroad and Brazil, which entered the war late in 1917. The proceedings, which combine a variety of approaches, from the cultural to the social and diplomatic, were published in the *e-Journal of Portuguese History*.^[52]

Conclusion

Within the New State's skewed narrative of Portuguese history, participation in the Great War was rarely mentioned, and then only to be portrayed as a foolhardy enterprise undertaken by amateurish politicians who put faction politics over national interest. A long road has been travelled since then, with a much better understanding having been developed over the nature of Portugal's participation in the conflict, in Europe and in Africa, as well as on the home front. The diplomatic and military interest in the conflict is now matched by an equally active social and cultural historiography which is well integrated with prevailing foreign currents and networks. Nevertheless, a number of issues remain contentious among historians writing on Portugal's experience of the First World War – issues surrounding the primacy of domestic over foreign policy, the impact of the conflict on the First Republic's political project, and the relations between the British and Portuguese commands in France, notably in the run-up to the battle of the Lys.

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Notes

- 1. † See, for example, Amaral, João Ferreira do: A Mentira de Flandres e...o Medo [The Flanders lie... and fear], Lisbon 1922.
- 2. † Among the most significant eyewitness accounts of the CEP's existence one should mention: Brun, Major André: A Malta das Trincheiras: Migalhas da Grande Guerra [The men in the trenches. Crumbs of the Great War, 1917-1918], Lisbon 1923; Casimiro, Augusto: Nas Trincheiras da Flandres [In Flanders' trenches], Oporto 1918 and Calvário da Flandres, Oporto [1918] 1920; Cortesão, Jaime: Memórias da Grande Guerra [Memories of the Great War], Oporto 1919; Malheiro, Coronel Alexandre: Da Flandres ao Hanover e Mecklenburgo (Notas de um Prisioneiro), Oporto 1919; Mardel, Coronel Eugénio: A "Brigada do Minho" na Flandres: O 9 de Abril. Relatório da Batalha e sua Documentação, Lisbon 1923; Olavo, Américo: Na Grande Guerra [In the Great War], Lisbon 1919; Olavo, Carlos: Jornal de um Prisioneiro de Guerra na Alemanha, Lisbon 1919; and Ribeiro, Joaquim: Na Guerra: Depoimento de um Voluntário, Lisbon 1919.
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- 10. ↑ Cidade, Hêrnani: Portugal na Grande Guerra: 1914-1918 [Portugal in the Great War: 1914-1918], in Peres, Damião (ed.): História de Portugal [History of Portugal], volume 7, Barcelos 1935.
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- 19. ↑ See especially his Na Encruzilhada da Grande Guerra: Portugal e Espanha, 1913-1914 [At the crossroads of the Great War. Portugal and Spain, 1913-1914], Lisbon 1980.
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- 43. † https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/we-know-this-war-by-heart/gQyoPck7 (retrieved 2 September 2021).
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