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PORTUGUESE COLONIAL IMMIGRATION TO ANGOLA: A HISTORICAL-POLITICAL REVIEW OF SETTLEMENT AND AGRICULTURAL COLONIZATION POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

This review analyzes the process of Portuguese colonial immigration to Angola, from the mid-nineteenth century to 1975, as an integral part of a political project of settlement and agricultural colonization. From a historical-political perspective, the study revisits the main ideological foundations and policies that supported the occupation and population of Angolan territory. Drawing on historical and academic sources, it examines the articulation between immigration, domination, and acculturation within the framework of Portuguese colonialism. The article proposes a critical reflection on the role of immigration as an instrument for consolidating colonial power and reconfiguring social and economic structures, emphasizing the strategic nature of settlement policies and their impact on contemporary Angolan society.

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INTRODUCTION

Portuguese colonial immigration to Angola represents one of the central phenomena in the political and social history of Portuguese colonialism in Africa. Since the mid-nineteenth century, settlement policies became an essential instrument for consolidating Portuguese control over the territory, responding simultaneously to international pressures and internal socioeconomic demands in Portugal. This article aims to critically revisit the colonial immigration and settlement policy, understanding it as an articulated process of power, acculturation, and controlled modernization. The central hypothesis is that colonial immigration functioned as a political and ideological instrument, embedded in a broader project to build an "overseas nation" that extended Portuguese sovereignty beyond Europe. This historical-political review adopts a narrative approach based on primary sources (such as the reports of the Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola—JPPA) and on major scholarly works (Medeiros, 1976; Feio, 1998; Bender, 1978; Matos, 1933, 1953), all of which help to clarify the ideological and economic structure of Portuguese colonization in Angola.

METHODOLOGY

This study follows a narrative review methodology with a historical-political orientation. Primary and secondary sources addressing Portuguese immigration to Angola were analyzed, including JPPA reports (1962, 1963, 1969), colonial and post-colonial studies

(Medeiros, 1976; Feio, 1998; Neto, 1999; Bender, 1978), and theoretical works on "internal colonialism" (González-Casanova, 1969; Gortz, 1971; Hechter, 1975). The research method consisted of organizing and comparing discourses produced by the colonial administration and those by academic analysts of the phenomenon, identifying convergences and contradictions in the narrative that presented immigration as both a civilizing and developmental process. The qualitative and interpretive approach adopted here allows immigration to be understood not merely as population movement but as a political and symbolic practice of occupation, exploitation, and cultural imposition.

Review and Thematic Analysis

Historical context and ideological foundations of Portuguese

colonization: The colonization of Angola is closely linked to three decisive events: the independence of Brazil, the Berlin Conference (1884–1885), and the outbreak of the Angolan war of liberation in 1961. The independence of Brazil marked a turning point in Portuguese colonial policy, redirecting emigration flows and forcing Portugal to redefine its imperial project. The Berlin Conference imposed the principle of "effective occupation," leading Portugal to strengthen its administrative and demographic presence in Angola. As Medeiros (1976:137) observed, "só a efectiva ocupação, administrativa, militar e económica, podia ser invocada para justificar a soberania num dado território." This imperative fostered settlement policies that sought to legitimize Portuguese sovereignty through

demographic occupation and agricultural development. Consequently, Angola was redefined as a settler colony rather than merely an extractive one, and Portuguese emigration to Africa was presented as both patriotic duty and civilizing mission. The ideology underlying this project was rooted in a Luso-tropicalist conception of racial coexistence and in the belief that the Portuguese possessed a unique civilizing vocation. Immigration was portrayed as a solution to two problems: unemployment and poverty in Portugal, and the “need to civilize” the African territories. This narrative, however, concealed the coercive and hierarchical nature of colonial relations, in which settlement served as a mechanism of control and economic expansion.

Settlement and agricultural colonization policies: Historically, Portugal had been a country of emigration, but it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that Angola began to be conceived as a destination for settlement. The loss of Brazil and the pressures stemming from the Berlin Conference led the Portuguese government to develop emigration incentives directed toward the African colonies. Agricultural colonization became simultaneously an economic and political strategy. The arrival of families from Brazil to Moçâmedes in 1849 and of Madeiran settlers to the Huíla plateau in 1885 marked the beginning of organized agricultural colonization (Mirrado, 1989; Feio, 1998). In the early twentieth century, the policy gained new impetus under the administration of Norton de Matos (1912–1915), a fervent advocate of European settlement in Angola. According to Matos (1933 *apud* Feio, 1998), the presence of Portuguese settlers was key to “civilizar, educar e instruir os indígenas,” thereby fostering a multiracial society governed by European cultural values. From the 1960s onward, following the outbreak of the liberation war, the colonial state intensified its settlement efforts, creating in 1961 the Provincial Board of Settlement of Angola (JPPA), responsible for implementing colonization policies. The JPPA aimed to “absorver parte dos excedentes demográficos de Portugal” (JPPA, 1962:12) while ensuring political and social control of the territory. Agricultural development and the establishment of settlements were presented as modernization instruments but effectively functioned as surveillance and repression mechanisms. The number of Portuguese settlers increased dramatically—from approximately 1,500 whites in the mid-nineteenth century to 10,000 in 1900, 80,000 in 1950, and 400,000 in 1974 (Bender, 1978). Most came from Portugal’s poorest rural regions and were provided with logistical and financial support by the colonial state. According to Feio (1998), the objective was to install a European population of nearly one million within two decades, consolidating Portuguese dominance through demographic occupation. Economically, settlement policies sought to expand agricultural production and exports, particularly coffee - a commodity of major value on international markets (Ferrão, 1964). Politically, they were designed to counter nationalist movements and sustain the Portuguese empire under the guise of a “multiracial community.”

Immigration, domination, and acculturation: Within colonial discourse, the Portuguese settler was regarded as an agent of acculturation. His presence in Angola embodied the mission of transmitting European moral and cultural values to the indigenous population. As Matos (1953:164, 188) emphasized, the task was to “transformar estes homens enquanto os seus usos e costumes (...) tornando-os úteis, melhorando as suas condições de vida (...): nisso consiste a assimilação.” Agricultural colonization and settlement were thus not only economic instruments but also ideological tools. The Luso-tropicalist narrative promoted the illusion of racial harmony, masking systemic racism and coercion. The settler became the mediator between “civilization” and “barbarism,” legitimizing domination. The JPPA institutionalized this vision, describing immigration as a process of “social integration” and “improvement of living conditions” for indigenous populations. Yet, in practice, integration meant the forced incorporation of local communities into the colonial economy. Peasants were often displaced from their lands to make way for settlers, justified as part of “rural reorganization.” Neto (1999) notes that these policies led to “a concentração compulsiva das populações camponesas”, facilitating administrative control and labor exploitation.

The concept of “internal colonialism” and the contradictions of the model: From the 1960s onward, the settlement policy came to fit within the framework of “internal colonialism”, as theorized by González-Casanova (1969), Gortz (1971), and Hechter (1975). This concept describes how a colonial power imposes within its own territory structures of exploitation and domination that reproduce externally oriented colonial dynamics. In Angola, internal colonialism manifested through the systematic occupation of the best lands by settlers, the concentration of agricultural credit and state subsidies in Portuguese hands, and the exclusion of indigenous people from productive and decision-making processes. As Jordão (1968:11) noted, “fomento e povoamento são dois conceitos que andam frequentemente ligados; de tal forma que, especialmente quando se trata de zonas sub-povoadas e subdesenvolvidas, a sua interpenetração é tão grande que praticamente se identificam.” Although couched in technocratic language, this formulation reveals the assimilationist and utilitarian logic of colonial policy: settlement was a means of consolidating economic exploitation and social control, under the pretext of rural development. However, criticism of this model gradually emerged within the colonial administration itself.

At the “First Symposium on Angola” (1967), participants acknowledged that it would be “more viable to portugalize the blacks than to achieve a strong migratory influx of Europeans.” Although still framed within the colonial worldview, this statement reflected growing awareness of the limitations of agricultural colonization, particularly given the settlers’ lack of preparation and professional motivation (Mirrado, 1989). In reality, state-sponsored immigration functioned also as a mechanism of metropolitan social control, relocating marginalized individuals, the unemployed, or those convicted of petty crimes. As Mirrado (1989) observed, the colonies served to both reduce demographic pressure and remove “undesirable elements.” Thus, migration was instrumentalized for social and political ends. During its final years (1969–1973), the JPPA attempted to reform its image by introducing community development programs and socioeconomic initiatives intended to legitimize Portuguese presence in the face of growing international criticism and UN pressure. Yet, as Morín (1992:20) points out, these programs aimed merely “to mitigate social tensions, not to transform them,” and remained subordinated to the colonial logic of domination.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of settlement policies reveals that Portuguese immigration to Angola cannot be understood merely as a demographic phenomenon but as a political and ideological project of social engineering. Colonization was portrayed as a civilizing mission but operated as a mechanism of domination and exclusion. The propaganda of “multiracial integration” concealed a deeply hierarchical colonial order in which Portuguese identity was imposed as the universal norm. The rhetoric of agricultural development and modernization obscured the structural inequality that sustained the colonial system. The introduction of capitalist production methods into rural areas sought to transform subsistence farming into an extension of the metropolitan economy, reinforcing economic and political dependence. As Feio (1998) observed, “a colonização agrícola de Angola fracassou porque tentou reproduzir um modelo europeu num contexto social e cultural profundamente distinto.” Moreover, internal colonization reshaped Angolan social and cultural identity. The imposition of Portuguese culture and language as criteria of “civilization” produced forms of alienation and resistance that would persist long after independence. Far from creating a harmonious multiracial community, colonial immigration reinforced racial and social boundaries that the regime claimed to overcome. From a theoretical standpoint, the Angolan case illustrates how immigration can be used as a form of colonial biopolitics - a way to manage populations and territories according to criteria of economic utility and political control. Settlement became part of a broader “total colonization” strategy designed to transform Angola into a Portuguese extension and neutralize nationalist movements.

Final Considerations: The political and strategic motivations behind Portuguese efforts to populate Angola were deeply shaped by historical and geopolitical circumstances. The independence of Brazil and the Berlin Conference marked the beginning of a new colonial phase characterized by the need to demonstrate effective occupation and consolidate sovereignty. From that point on, immigration became the central axis of the colonial project in Angola, symbolizing Portugal's attempt to construct a "second Brazil" on African soil. This historical-political analysis demonstrates that colonial immigration was a multifunctional instrument: it served to legitimize Portuguese rule, control the native population, exploit agricultural resources, and reaffirm a nationalist and expansionist identity. At the same time, it represents one of the most revealing episodes of the contradiction between ideology and pragmatism, between the 'Luso-tropicalist' utopia and the material realities of colonialism. The settlement project ultimately failed in its declared goals of modernization and integration but succeeded politically in sustaining the colonial system until Angola's independence in 1975. Portuguese colonial immigration to Angola thus constitutes a paradigmatic case of how migration policies can be appropriated by colonial regimes as instruments of power and domination.

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