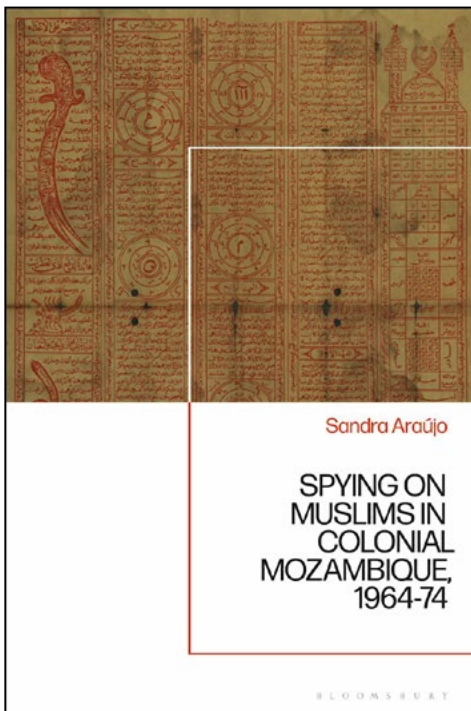


## Araújo, S. (2025). *Spying on Muslims in Colonial Mozambique, 1964-74*. Bloomsbury.

Mark Lawrence



Sandra Araújo's *Spying on Muslims in Colonial Mozambique, 1964-74* is a welcome monograph which brings new insights into Portugal's gruelling Overseas War (1961-74). The topic remains key for both post-imperial countries. Turning first to the metropole, around 20% of the Portuguese population spent some time in the armed forces in the colonial wars. The traumatic impact this had on the population meant that in 1974 a military coup overthrew a military dictatorship. The so-called *retornados* (returnees) – the more than half a million Portuguese settlers who gave up their homes in Africa and headed abroad (most to Portugal) – became virtual pariahs in a new democracy seeking scapegoats for the hated 'overseas wars'. Yet unlike all this contemporary flux, Portugal, more than other comparable colonial powers (Britain, Netherlands, France, even Spain), continues to suffer a 'memory vacuum' concerning its identity as Europe's first overseas empire (Peralta, 2022, pp. 52-69).

This oversight is remarkable, considering how no country in the western world bar Israel was more militarised than Portugal at the time of the 'Carnation Revolution' in 1974. The Salazarist doctrine of Luso-Tropicalism made Lisbon cling to its African empire to the bitter end. The global view of Lisbon's African Wars had become catastrophized

by the early 1970s. The 'Hastings report' into the Wiriyamu massacre (December 1972) caused consternation in the Anglo-American press, led to heavier sanctions on arms exports to the Caetano regime, a redoubled campaign by human rights organisations (especially by Amnesty International), as well as the usual hypocritical excoriation of Portugal by the Communist world (Lawrence, 2024, p. 195). But as Sandra Araújo shows in this fascinating new study, the unhappy conscript armies of Portugal's Overseas Wars were not solely agents of the 'butcher and bolt' violence of legend. The Cold War context gave political oxygen to the Salazar-Caetano regime to divide and rule Muslim elites in northern Mozambique by making common cause against godless communism (as represented by the FRELIMO independence struggle), perfecting intelligence operations, and investing in civilian infrastructure. Araújo's regional approach, based on a diverse range of sources, presents Portuguese Mozambique as a going concern right up until disgruntled officers toppled the Lisbon regime on 25 April 1974.

Araújo's study is a labour of love and an intricate examination of archives and oral history testimony. She offers an unrivalled English-language study of the contemporary history of northern Mozambique, using to good effect several oral interviews of those who lived through the violence of 1960s and 1970s. A generous introduction and clear chapter structure help navigate non-Lusophonist scholars through the contending ideologies of sensitivity towards Catholicism, Islam, and Luso-Tropicalism. She explains centralization of colonial governance underway since 1933, and the creation of the notorious International and State Defence Police (the PIDE), which soon faced bureaucratic infighting with other organs of the dictatorship. Readers are thus acquainted with an institutional history of the late Portuguese empire which has been absent from English-language scholarship hitherto.

Araújo's conclusions align with some of the recent Anglophone scholarship on counterinsurgencies in colonial warfare environments. Authoritarian regimes, because of their weak civil societies, were paradoxically more vulnerable to public opinion than the democratic states (Britain, France, Netherlands) which waged their own wars of decolonisation, supposedly with techniques focused on winning 'hearts and minds' (Ucko, 2016, pp. 29-61). Araújo shows Portuguese policy to have been more creative in counter-insurgency techniques than the consensus allows (Counterinsurgency historian, Ian Beckett, for example, judged Portugal as too poor and militarised to pursue a 'hearts and minds' counterinsurgency) (Beckett, 2001, pp. 130-135).

Araújo gives some credence to the catastrophist view. Thus, early Portuguese responses to armed anti-colonial movements in Angola and Mozambique were at least as hardline, and usually more brutal, than comparable examples in British and French territories. The ingrained power of secret police networks empowered by the long-running Estado Novo regime (1926-74), Portugal's beleaguered 'Luso-Tropical' identity in an age of superpowers, along with the economic weight of plantation interests for one of western Europe's poorest economies, all predisposed Lisbon towards a 'butcher and bolt' approach of airstrikes, punitive missions, infiltration and propaganda. But where Araújo departs from this view is in her study of a kind of counterinsurgency '1968 moment'. Her final chapter is a fascinating study of Governor Amaro Monteiro who overrode usual hardline 'securitized' counterinsurgency and who also curtailed the promotion of Catholicism (core to Luso-Tropicalism) by reaching out to Muslim elites in insurgent area. His task was eased by the outsized presence of more 'liberal' Sufi Muslims in northern Mozambique (Araújo, 2025, pp. 72-73). Thus, we discover Monteiro's rule sponsoring the building of a mosque in 1969 (an event apparently welcomed by ecstatic crowds carrying the governor's car over a bridge). The new propaganda of atheistic anti-colonial communism (qualities attributed to the pro-independence FRELIMO movement) posited independence as a threat to Islam and Catholicism alike. Findings from the colonial SCCIM's Confidential Questionnaire, which was sent out to community and tribal leaders, suggest that Portugal's Alliance of Civilisations *avant la lettre* approach did not fall entirely on deaf ears.

Historians of dictatorship often express surprise at why the lengthy Salazar regime (1926-68) and that of his successor (Caetano, 1968-74) did not soak itself in the same levels of blood as Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy or Hitler's Germany (e.g. Diktöter, 2020). The apparent calm of Portugal's Estado Novo was contrasted with the violent oppression of Lusophone Africa. Sandra Araújo concedes the authoritarian violence implicit in Portuguese rule in Mozambique. But in explaining the counter-intelligence and efforts at civic action, she leaves us with a more complex understanding of Europe's first and last colonial empire. Of course, the sudden collapse of Portugal's African empire in 1974 doomed the remaining outposts of 'White Africa' and offered the clearest example in Cold War Europe of the boomerang effect of conflicts of decolonisation on domestic politics. But Araújo's research shows how this collapse occurred not just because of a mindless 'butcher and bolt' approach to counterinsurgency. Peripheral officials operated in sophisticated ways. Ultimately, as Sandra Araújo argues, Portugal's Islamic policy in Mozambique found its limits in the face of Islam's diversity and power dynamics among these otherized and subaltern populations (Araújo, 2025, p. 167).

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