Abstract

The policies aimed at seducing the Islamic dignitaries of Guinea-Bissau and northern Mozambique, designed in the mid-1960s for enrolling the Muslim communities in the war against the nationalist movements, were based on the collection and production of knowledge about the cultural specificities of those populations, their insertion in clanic and ethnic networks and their allegiance to foreign centres of Islamic teaching. This knowledge was mainly developed by members of the colonial apparatus, who were often (but not always) outside the academic field, such as Catholic missionaries, local administrators and agents of the intelligence services. There was, however, knowledge trading between the academia and the colonial staff, so much so that boundaries distinguishing these two fields became somewhat blurred. This was a fertile terrain for the emergence of hybrid categories and behaviours: anthropologists who delivered intelligence reports and officials of the information services who gathered data with procedures drawn from social sciences.

The Islamic policies aforementioned followed some of the counterinsurgency strategies already set up by French authorities in Indochina and Algeria, while French influence was also felt in their Orientalist portrait of African Islam. Therefore, those policies were part and parcel of a larger scheme of Psychosocial Operations, typical of counterinsurgency doctrine, which used scientific knowledge to strategically mould or manipulate the perceptions of subaltern colonized populations in order to align them with the Portuguese side of the colonial war.

My paper will try to summarise these different dimensions of the Islamic policies implemented in the last stage of Portuguese empire, questioning the complex interaction of science, intelligence, Islamology and the politics of colonialism.

Keywords: Islamic policies, colonial knowledge, social sciences, colonial intelligence, Portuguese colonialism