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**France, Italy or Britain? Foreign dimensions of policing in
Portugal's dictatorship (1926-1974).**

(ESSHC 2008)¹

Police forces are often seen as the face of the government, and sometimes the character of government and police action are virtually indistinguishable. The government is recognised as being authoritarian if its police are repressive, democratic if its police are restrained².

From 1926 to 1974 Portugal lived under a right-wing dictatorship. In 1926 it began as a military dictatorship, but after the approval of the *New State* constitution in 1933, it became a civil authoritarian regime under the leadership of Prof. Salazar. The long history of Portugal's dictatorship (1926-1974) defies any static definition of regime type. Scholars do not agree whether it belongs to the fascist type or not³, but it seems that they all agree that the police forces –and specially the political police (the PVDE/PIDE)– were the single most important political tool of the dictatorship⁴. At the same time, for the democratic opposition, coercion and fascism became almost synonyms, and as the leading historian in the field has written “the idea and the image of fascism were easily confounded and identified with the political police and its violence, because repression was the most resented face of the regime in everyday life”⁵.

On the other hand, the development of policing in the western world has accompanied political development, and the provision of policing services and the way they are provided are often seen as a symbol of modern governance. In Portugal, “modernity” –a notion usually understood as “the way things are being done in one or another country of reference”— has been a core

¹ This paper is still underresearched and no proof reading has been done. This is a first version that tries to make sense of some material willy-nilly collected during an earlier research on public order policies in Portugal, and here I organise it in order to put forward some ideas for further research. If you want to cite it, please contact the author in: dgplcs@yahoo.es

² (Bayley, 1990)

³ Political scientists normally classify the regime as “conservative authoritarian”. Nevertheless, Manuel de Lucena's comparative research shows that, in constitutional terms, if there was a single political regime similar to the Italy of Mussolini, it was Salazar's New State, which he labelled as “Fascism without a fascist movement” (Lucena, 1984; Payne, 1995)

⁴ (Rosas, 1998) (Gallagher, 1979)

⁵ (Ribeiro, 1995)

issue in every discussion about policing reform. Contemporary Portugal has always looked at other countries as inspiration for the creation of new police forces. In the 18th Century, French absolutism inspired the Portuguese *Intendência Geral de Polícia*, while in 1834 London's Metropolitan Police was the inspiration of the first police force created in Lisbon by the Constitutional Monarchy (albeit it became a militarised police in the following years). All the same, after the Republican revolution of 1910, the French Gendarmerie was the model for a new rural constabulary, the GNR, which became the first truly national police in Portuguese history. The choice of one country or another as inspiration for a police reform is a technical matter, but as long as policing and politics go hand by hand, it is much more than that: it can serve as an indicator of the political system a Government wants to mirror.

In addition, there are more international dimensions of policing other than benchmarking. Hatred of political repression has often influenced the views of liberal Europeans towards foreign policy questions, and international reputation has also been an important issue in government-opposition disputes⁶. In Portugal, the political opponents of Salazar's dictatorship frequently used a believed connection of the PVDE/PIDE with the German Gestapo to make evident a full identification of the New State with fascism, thus preventing any further discussion about the regime's (lack of) legitimacy⁷. Several works have stressed the little historical evidence of the "Gestapo alibi"⁸, but there are still a lot of issues to be addressed on the international dimensions of Portuguese internal policing.

In this text I'm going to explore first some of the changing foreign policing models that the Portuguese police took for inspiration during the dictatorship, with a special emphasis in the Public Security Police (PSP). We will see that in the 1930's the Italian fascist police had an important influence, but after 1945 the Portuguese dictatorship took a especial care in avoiding a too repressive image in the international arena. In addition we will explore this second dimension, the troubling reputation that harsh policing could bring to a right wing dictatorship after World War II, a reputation that could embarrass international cooperation when needed.

The origins of the New State's police.

In the 1920s, the only truly national police force in Portugal was the GNR. It was a gendarmerie that patrolled rural areas and garrisoned the main cities. Lisbon and Porto also had significant civil police forces, including modern criminal police sections, but in the rest of the Portuguese cities there were only small urban forces closely knit to local patronage.

⁶ (Goldstein, 1983)

⁷ (Wheeler, 1983)

⁸ (Wheeler, 1983)

1926 *coup d'état* against the Republic that resulted in the Military Dictatorship was done in the name of the “restoration of order”⁹—in contrast to the perceived social and political disorder of the Republic— but the military lacked any clear project of police reorganisation.

In April 1927, George Guyomard –a French military advisor–, arrived in Lisbon with the secret mission of helping the dictatorship to reorganise his forces and prepare them to fight the “red menace” and “bolshevism”¹⁰. But he found that there was not such a menace anywhere in Portugal, so there were no good reasons for curtailing civil liberties. He also resented the lack of clear decision-making procedures in a desorganised regime that he called “a dictatorship without a dictator”, and he left the country despising the “selfish Portuguese military”.

Until 1931, the police reforms consisted mostly in the replacement of the higher officers that were politically unsound and in the creation of an Informations Police with loose powers of surveillance, detention and interrogation over the political opposition. The Information Police became infamous because of its harsh methods, and in 1931 the International Red Aid listed 16 workers who had been killed during detentions and torturing¹¹.

Synopsis of the main Portuguese police forces of during the New State (1933-1974)							
	Police Force.	Year of creation*	High ranks	Men	Area covered	Functions	
PVDE / PIDE	Vigilance and Defence of the State Police	1933*	Military	Civilians	National and international	Political police International police Passports	
PSP	Public Security Police	1935*	Military	Civilians	Urban	Security police Administrative police, Public order	
GNR	National Republican Guard	1911*	Military	Military	Rural Portugal	Gendarmerie force Security police Public order	
GF	Fiscal Guard	1885*	Military	Military	Frontiers Ports Coast	Douanes	
PIC / PJ	Criminal Investigation Police / Judiciary Police ¹²	1927*	Judge	Civilians	National	Criminal investigation	
*Every Portuguese police force has several antecedent forces.							

⁹ (Wheeler, 1978)

¹⁰ (Guyomard, 1927)

¹¹ The “harsh methods” in (Cruz, 1988) The International Red Aid list in (Moraes, 1931) Deportations in (Farinha, 1998; Farinha, 2007)

¹² (Sá, 1997)

Once Prof. Salazar became head of the government, he brought with him the political projects the military were unable to define. In 1930 he began to institutionalise a civil dictatorship, and in 1933 he passed the so-called New State constitution. His reforms aimed at building a State “so strong and irresistible that it will not need to draw on violence”, and the recipe for bringing life to this “strong State” comprised a further civil administration centralisation and a general reorganisation of the police forces.

In 1933 a new political police, the Vigilance and Defence of the State Police (PVDE) was created. PVDE’s assigned functions were many and went beyond that of defence or attack on political oppositionists. PVDE combined the functions of criminal investigative police, international police, internal security and counter-intelligence, foreign intelligence, immigration and emigration control service, and prison administration service¹³.

Two years later, in 1935, the scattered urban police forces that until then had been under the control of the provincial Civil Governors were merged into a national police force called the Public Security Police [*Polícia de Segurança Pública*], commonly known as the PSP. Its national headquarters were in Lisbon and its higher ranks were going to be filled with army officers.

As long as the new centralised PSP patrolled major cities, it became the principal face of the State. Its higher officers, all of them military men, saw themselves as a proud part of Salazar’s political reconstruction of Portugal. Freed from local patronage and petty politicking, the new national PSP was seen as “the spearhead of Portugal’s resurgence”¹⁴.

During the summer of 1936 Salazar created a voluntary official militia called the Portuguese Legion (mainly as a response to the beginning of the Spanish Civil War) and the militia had adopted the Roman salute and fascist-style parades, creating an external iconic identification of Salazar’s New State with fascism¹⁵.

In 1937 the PSP high command began to publish a periodical called *Polícia Portuguesa*. It appeared every two months and was mainly addressed to the PSP men. Analysing the editorial line of *Polícia Portuguesa* and the topics it covers during the New State may help us to assess the self image of the PSP. In addition, sometimes the police officers used the pages of *Polícia Portuguesa* to express their views on police reform, even if the government seldom was responsive to the proposals.

¹³ (Wheeler, 1983)

¹⁴ (Pais, 1938; *Polícia de Segurança Pública*, 1940)

¹⁵ (Rodrigues, 1996; Sá, 1997; Faria, 2000)

Mussolini's Italy: a "friendly nation".

During the first issues of *Polícia Portuguesa*, the journal published little about foreign police forces. Some international developments such as the use of tear gas or mobile radio-telephones were discussed in their pure technical value, without references to any general model of policing.

But things were soon going to change: in July 1937 a big bomb had exploded in Lisbon at the arrival of Salazar's car. Although the attempt failed to hurt the dictator, it revealed some fragilities in the preventive policing. The PVDE reacted fast and in three days announced the detention of the terrorist cell.

The PVDE's success was highly praised in the official press, but a disbelieving PSP officer soon discovered that everything was a farce: the supposed terrorists had confessed only after harsh torturing and, in reality, they had nothing to do with the anarchist underground organisation responsible for the bombing. Even if censorship suppressed the true story, PVDE's lack of professionalism became apparent in the corridors of power¹⁶.

As we have already mentioned, in 1927 the Portuguese government had asked France for advice on political policing. Now, ten years later, the Salazar turned to Mussolini's Italy, signing a cooperation agreement. In August 1937, a high official from the Italian General Direction of Police, Leone Santoro, arrived in Lisbon with the assignment to "examine the means the New State has adopted in order to defend itself from communism" and "to teach the Italian approach"¹⁷.

Even if political policing was Leone Santoro's main concern, his view was that if the New State wanted to be a *strong State*, a further reorganisation of the entire police system was necessary. He worked on the PVDE, PSP, PIC, and GNR for two years, analysing each organization and its activities. He visited command offices, police stations and frontier posts; he attended drill sessions, field exercises, parades and theoretical lessons; he had interviews with officers and men, discussed with them Italian books and regulations and pronounced several lectures. At the end, he wrote two reports on the reorganisation of the Portuguese police. The first one dealt with the political police itself, the second report proposed a general reorganisation of the Portuguese police forces that followed what he called "the fascist teachings".

¹⁶ (Cruz, 1999)

¹⁷ (Santoro, 1986) We have still little information about Leone Santoro himself, but in 1946 the British MI5 found him taking part of a secret meeting of high State officials that prepared an anti-communist network (Casarrubea y Cereghino, 2007). See also (Canali, 2004; Ivani, 2007)

Santoro concluded that the main advantage of the Italian system was a better coordination between the different forces and a higher degree of professional training. He proposed the creation of a *Directorate of Public Security* with authority over every police force in Portugal and the unification of PVDE, PIC and PSP into a single national police. He also proposed that this new force should be in charge of all the administrative policing duties that were then in the hands of local authorities, such as granting permits and superintending marketplace regulations¹⁸. Finally, he proposed the creation of a Police Officer Corps independent from the Army Officer Corps and the improvement of training for enlisted men.

The presence and the proposals of Leone Santoro were received with different degrees of enthusiasm by PVDE, PSP, PIC and GNR officers and commanders. It seems that PVDS' high command resented Santoro's interference, but Lt. Silva Pais of the PSP became fully interested in his proposals¹⁹. As Santoro wrote, he took "active interest in my work, demonstrating enthusiastically his admiration for the Italian system and expressing his support for Portugal adopting the Italian police law"²⁰. Santoro even wrote to the Portuguese interior Minister that "if [after my departure] your Excellency needs any other information about the Italian police law, you can ask to PSP's Lt. Silva Pais, who so closely worked with me"²¹.

Silva Pais was a young military engineer that worked in the PSP headquarters attached to the national PSP commander. In 1937 he led the creation of the first (but short-lived) anti-riot unit and fostered the use of tear gas in civil disturbances. In late 1938 he became the chief editor of *Polícia Portuguesa*. The close association of Silva Pais and Santoro was reflected in the journal, which started to publish devoted pieces under the title "The police forces from friendly nations: Italy". Issue after issue, the *Polícia Portuguesa* praised the technical perfection and the "fascist mystique" of the Italian police²². Leone Santoro himself wrote a piece on the Italian police portraying "fascism" as a way of building an efficient police organisation in Latin countries such as Italy and Portugal²³.

This repeated presence of the Italian police as a model of modern policing in the PSP journal became the highest explicit identification of the Portuguese police with fascism.

Fascists were part of the coalition that ruled Portugal, but there were also right wing monarchists, conservative republicans and Catholics, all bound together by their extreme

¹⁸ (Santoro, 1986)

¹⁹ PVDE's mistrust in (Ribeiro, 1995)

²⁰ (Santoro, 1986)

²¹ (Santoro, 1986)

²² *Polícia Portuguesa*, n° 10, 1938, p.17; *Idem*, n° 11, 1939; *idem* n° 12, 1939; *idem*, n° 19, 1940.

²³ *Polícia Portuguesa*, n° 16, 1939. pp. 4-5.

nationalism, economic conservatism and the fear of social turmoil²⁴. Once World War II started, Portuguese government maintained a balance between its pro-axis and its pro-allies factions, trying to stay neutral. During the war *Polícia Portuguesa* almost stopped writing any appraisal of other countries police forces. Only a descriptive work on the Dutch police was published in 1941, a piece that did not even mention that the Netherlands were under German occupation²⁵.

Changing friends

In may 1945, the democratic opposition took enthusiastically the streets welcoming the Allies' victory. They interpreted Mussolini's and Hitler's defeat as a defeat for Salazar's dictatorship. But since 1943, although Portugal remained neutral, Salazar had favoured the Allies: he had stopped wolfram exports to Germany and conceded the Allies a valuable military base in Azores.

After the war, Portuguese democratic opposition tried to isolate Portugal from the international forums, stressing the lack of freedoms in Portugal and that Salazar was a kind of fascist dictator. But the Portuguese regime also aggrained its image and abandoned the fascist-style parades that had been so usual since 1936. As a response to British pressure, most of the political prisoners that were held in Tarrafal –an unhealthy camp in Cape Verde Islands– were brought back to serve their terms in Portugal²⁶.

Most of the changes were just token concessions. Salazar's announcement of “free elections as free as those in free England” was a farce, because the opposition didn't have the right to free press, to held meetings, to organise political parties or to supervise vote counting. The name change of the political police, from PVDE to PIDE, was also a token concession in which the word “Vigilance” -with totalitarian resonances- was substituted by “International”. But even if the government presented PIDE as a fully conventional “Scotland Yard-style” investigation police (and it became the Portuguese Interpol correspondent), its powers of surveillance and detention were far greater than those of any democratic police: telephone bugs, correspondence violation, torturing and unlimited preventive detention of “dangerous suspects” without judiciary control²⁷.

In the PSP, past associations with fascism also became embarrassing, and *Polícia Portuguesa* changed its foreign references. In contrast to the previous eulogy of the Italian fascist police, in

²⁴ Some fascists had tried to create an independent movement 1932-1933, but were outmanoeuvred by Salazar (Pinto, 1994).

²⁵ *Polícia Portuguesa*,

²⁶ (Farinha, 2007)

²⁷ (Ribeiro, 1995; Pimentel, 2007a) The PIDE could even retain in prison political prisoners once they had completed their prison terms (Pimentel, 2007a).

1945 *Polícia Portuguesa* initiated a new series of articles dedicated to “British police forces”, praising that “as it is usually known, every Englishman is rightly proud of the highly professional and good mannered policemen”²⁸. In 1948 *Polícia Portuguesa* dedicated another favourable article to Scotland Yard, and from then on the PSP presented itself as a professional police of a similar kind of any other west-European police force.

The *aggiornamento* did not mean a discrimination of pro-fascist police officers, and Silva Pais – the most enthusiastic proponent of the fascist police in the 1930’s–, latter became the General Director of the political police (from 1962 to 1974).

International public opinion and PSP reforms.

During most of the 1950’s Portugal was a quiet country. Unrest was confined to the southern countryside, where the Communist Party was strong and landless peasants struggled for better wages and working conditions. In urban Portugal, the police could claim that its mission was all civic and in 1956 the PSP started patrolling without firearms, “like the English bobby”.

Nevertheless, even if Salazar praised the virtues and values of poor but honest peasants, the country modernised. Urbanisation progressed and the productive structure was changing. In 1958 General Delgado campaigned for president. His high level connections allowed him to make the most of the limited political freedoms allowed during election time, and the campaign produced great political mobilisation. The results were a fraud and Salazar’s appointee was elected, but the elections started a new cycle of social and political unrest²⁹. Between 1958 and 1964 there were frequent strikes and political demonstrations and the police killed at least seven demonstrators³⁰.

At the same time, the international public opinion became interested in Portugal. It was a colonial empire that did not agree do decolonise and a dictatorship that, even if was a member of NATO and EFTA, for the international liberal opinion was a remnant of the fascist Europe of the 1930’s³¹. The first Amnesty International campaign in 1961 was concerned with Portuguese prisoners of conscience.

In fact, international public opinion became a key actor in Portuguese politics. First, Portugal needed support in the UN to resist the international condemnation of its colonial policy. Later,

²⁸ *Polícia Portuguesa*, nº 27, 1945, pp13-17.

²⁹ (Raby, 1988)

³⁰ José Adelino dos Santos, 23 Junho 1958, Montemor-o-Novo; Candido Capilé, 11-14 de novembro de 1961, Almada; António Graciano Adângio y Francisco Madeira, 28 de abril 1962, Aljustrel; Estevão Giro, 5 de mayo 1962, Lisboa; Francisca Rosa Bezerra, 8 de Maio de 1963, Lisboa; David Almeida Reis, 1º de Maio de 1964, Lisboa. José Dias Coelho y Agostinho Fineza también murieron en la calle esos años, pero parece que fueron víctimas de acciones policiales dirigidas específicamente contra ellos.

³¹ (Oliveira, 2004)

when the colonial war began in Africa, Portugal needed the support of its NATO allies to avoid arms embargoes³²..

The coverage of 1958 repression over political demonstrations in the *New York Times* and other media had an impact, and numerous government officials were afraid that a too repressive image could harm Portuguese interests abroad³³. In 1960 Portugal resented the lack of international support when a group of political opponents kidnapped a ship in international waters and the NATO “allies” did not treat the case as an act of piracy³⁴. Every police report on policing demonstrations also expressed the concern with internal and international public opinion³⁵. As a minister wrote to Salazar after violent clashes in 1962 May Day demonstrations:

“it is necessary to graduate violence and police beatings [because] I saw several photographers amidst the crowd and we can expect that the pictures will appear tomorrow in the International Press as documents of, as they say, the terror suffered by Portuguese population”³⁶

Since 1958 the PSP high command had been aware of the new situation and the need to adopt a softer approach to the policing of demonstrations. In 1959 the PSP paid two study visits, one to west Germany and the other to France. The object of the visits was "to analyse the tactics employed in case of riots and the accessory weaponry such as batons, helmets and vehicles"³⁷. Both France and Germany were now democratic countries, but as a high official said “they were not soft with dissidence”³⁸. After those visits, the government approved the creation of an antiriot unit called Mobile Police that was a copy of a French CRS. Even the tactical instructions and the training manuals were translated from the French³⁹. The British bobby was still used as a model for urban unarmed patrolling, but the more militarised French police was more akin to the Portuguese ruthless use of force against political demonstrators.

In 1961, the beginning of the nationalist struggles in Angola, Guinea and Mozambique pressed for the modernisation of policing in the colonies, so 12 Mobile Police units were sent to Africa.

³² (Telo, 1994; Rodrigues, 2004)

³³ (Rodrigues, 1988)

³⁴ (Rosas, 1998)

³⁵ *Policía Portuguesa*, nº 151, 1962.

³⁶ Arquivo Oliveira Salazar (AOS) / CP-54 2.2.1; 2 de mayo de 1962

³⁷ Carta del MI al agregado militar en la embajada portuguesa de Bonn, 10 de octubre de 1959; AMAI-ANTT/GM, PSP 103 Cx.198 (1960).

³⁸ A more scientific approached to harsh/soft policing of political demonstrations in the 1950s in Europe in (della Porta y Reiter, 1998)

³⁹ (Min. do Interior. Comando Geral da PSP, 1961a; Min. do Interior. Comando Geral da PSP, 1961b)

The use of police units in Africa could embody the Portuguese official position: that there was not a colonial war, but a struggle between a sovereign State and some unrepresentative terrorist forces. Nonetheless, the police forces were not enough and the Army became fully entangled in a protracted war.

Inspired on a democracy but undemocratic

The specialised Mobile Police and the use of non-lethal weapons made possible that the police did not kill any demonstrator in metropolitan Portugal from 1964 until the end of the dictatorship in 1974. Nonetheless, several opponents were killed by the PIDE (renamed DGS in 1969) or died in prison⁴⁰. But the PSP, even if had a violent professional culture and often punished demonstrators with heavy beating, proved itself capable of weighting the amount of force it needed in order to disperse a crowd. The technical side of breaking demonstrations with non lethal weapons had been well learnt from the French model.

In 1972, Major Baptista e Silva of the PSP paid a study visit to Paris and Madrid. Back in Lisbon, he wrote two valuable reports comparing the French, the Spanish and the Portuguese policing systems⁴¹. In the first place, he found that in the three countries the antiriot units were very similar, mainly because both the Spaniards and the Portuguese had adopted the organisation, training principles and non-lethal weapons of the French CRS. He also compared the policing of street demonstrations, taking note that in Franco's Spain and in Portugal alike, the police tried to break up any demonstration from the beginning. In France, in contrast, the police had to respect the right to demonstrate, so the police only intervened if the demonstrators acted unlawfully. Putting aside the differences over political rights in democratic and authoritarian policing, he underlined that

“the study of the French case [was] the most interesting for the Portuguese police [because] the French police organisation is the most similar to the Portuguese [...] and has been the model in Portugal for several police reforms in the past”.

Finally, he noticed that societies were changing and that “everywhere individual rights are more and more appreciated”. In addition, “the communications revolution politicise local matters, that now have an impact in the international level”, so policing had to adapt to this new international public arena.

⁴⁰ (Pimentel, 2007b).

⁴¹ (Escola Prática da PSP, 1972; Escola Prática da PSP, 1973)

Conclusion

As we have seen in the past pages there has been an important twofold international dimension in the evolution of policing in the Portuguese right-wing dictatorship.

- The first place, there were the technical models: other countries' experiences were taken into account in order to modernise policing in Portugal and better achieve government policing aims.
- In the second place, the government was worried about having a politically unsound or a too repressive image, because repression was a political cost in international forums. During the 1930s the dictatorship and its police forces were not ashamed to collaborate with Italian fascism, but after 1945 they tried to get rid of fascist symbols without recognising public freedoms.

The two changes of name of the political police (1945 and 1969) were only token adjustments to deceive international public opinion. But worries about the political costs of the most spectacular repression (killing people in pacific street demonstrations), led to the implementation of well proved non-lethal antiriot tactics imported from France. This adoption meant a drastic reduction of street casualties, but had nothing to do with democratisation, because the right to demonstrate was not recognised.

Political Science has stressed that democratic institutions increase the cost of using repressive behaviour⁴². This text has also explored the possibility that a dictatorship may be compelled to restrain some repressive behaviour because of the need of international recognition.

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⁴² (Davenport, 2007)

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