



CONTESTED IMPERIAL ENDINGS

8-9 SEPTEMBER 2025

NOVA FCSH, ROOM B304
AV. DE BERNA, 26C — LISBON

In the twentieth century, the dissolution of several European empires occurred in the context of armed conflicts, whether major conflagrations such as the First World War or the counterinsurgency wars in colonial spaces. Some of these imperial break-ups were sudden, happening after military defeats, such as the capitulation of the German and Habsburg empires in 1918, or as the culmination of protracted colonial wars which proved to be deeply divisive among the metropolitan publics, such as the Algerian war of Independence or the decolonization wars of Portuguese-speaking Africa.

The circumstances surrounding some of the major political decisions which involved capitulations or negotiated agreements with nationalist movements may have been quite different, but there were significant similarities as well. In all these cases, a sense of wounded pride or deep resentment surfaced in the discussions that followed the political settlements that allowed for the surrender of territory. Accusations of 'scuttle', 'abandonment', 'neglect', 'irresponsibility', or even 'treason', came to the fore in several debates, poisoning political discussions for quite some time. The myth of the 'stab in the back', which emerged after the German and Austrian imperial collapse in 1918, and was also present in several debates in European metropolises after 1945, influenced conspiracy theories that shaped debates in the following years, with echoes that reach the present day.

Based on an ongoing research project that assesses metropolitan reactions to the conduct of the Portuguese military in East Timor in 1975, this workshop will explore a comparative discussion on some of these themes in various contexts, with a greater emphasis (but not exclusively) on those which unravelled in the aftermath of post-1945 European decolonization.

8 September

9h15: Opening Remarks

Zélia Pereira and **Pedro Aires Oliveira** (Institute of Contemporary History — NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST), and **Major-General João Vieira Borges** (Comissão Portuguesa de História Militar)

9h45: Keynote lecture

Mark Cornwall (University of Southampton) | *The rise and fall of 'traitors' during eras of regime change*

10h45: Coffee Break

11h15: **David Anderson** (University of Warwick) | *The Empire Loyalists League and the "white man's world" in Africa: British decolonization and imperial nostalgia, 1955-65*

12h15: Lunch Break

14h:

Samuel Andre Bercovici (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne) | *"An equivocal trial". Judging activists and officers in Paris during the last years of the Algerian war of independence*

Victor Delaporte (Université Paris Nanterre — ISP) | *Bound to be traitors: the French who refused to maintain the colonial status quo in Algeria*

15h45: Coffee Break

16h15:

Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (University of Leiden / Netherlands Defense Academy) | *"The ultimate stab in the back"? Comparing Dutch soldiers to the German occupier during and after the Indonesian War of Independence*

Rigó Máté (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) | *Decolonization through the Iron Curtain: East European Perspectives on the Collapse of the French Empire*

9 September

10h:

Zélia Pereira (Institute of Contemporary History — NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST) | *The aborted decolonisation of East Timor under scrutiny: the hearing commission into the events of 1974–1975*

Pedro Aires Oliveira (Institute of Contemporary History — NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST) | *The poisoned well. The backlash against decolonization and the polemics surrounding the role of the Portuguese military in East Timor (c. 1975-1982)*

11h45: Coffee Break

12h15:

Filippo Barsi (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa) | *Betrayal from the Metropole: Connolly's Ireland and the Emotional Grammar of Imperial Disintegration*

13h15: Lunch Break

14h45: Concluding remarks

Bruno Cardoso Reis (Centro de Estudos Internacionais, Iscte-IUL), **Zélia Pereira** and **Pedro Aires Oliveira** (Institute of Contemporary History — NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST)

This workshop is part of the FCT research project DecTiL - Auditing Decolonization in Timor-Leste, 1974-82: the Riscado Report (2023.10636.25ABR / DOI: doi.org/10.54499/2023.10636.25ABR)

ORGANISERS:

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY, NOVA UNIVERSITY LISBON
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