

Changing Lusospheres

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between centers and peripheries**

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in the lusophone world
From Édouard Luja to the Société Colonial Luso-Luxembourgeoise**

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Luxembourgers in the global exploitation of natural resources in the lusophone world. From Édouard Luja to the Société-coloniale-luso-luxembourgeoise

Régis Moes

The links between Luxembourg and the Portuguese-speaking countries in the first half of the twentieth century can be understood only by taking a global approach, in the context of a period forged by colonialism. We therefore need to be aware of the colonial mindset that underpinned the economic, political, and social relations of the time. The links between different regions of the world cannot be considered without placing them in the context of the colonial and imperial globalization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Rosenberg 2012). As Sebastian Conrad defines it,

[The] globalization of the late nineteenth century cannot be conceived outside of the colonial structures that shaped it. The mobility of things, people, ideas and institutions—the interlinking of the world—took place before the First World War under conditions of colonialism. The world economy was based on the asymmetric use of raw materials, labor and demand interests of non-European societies. Colonialism was a condition and central ingredient of the political world order—but also of the legal and ideological legitimacy of that order. [. . .] In any case, globalization around 1900 was directly shaped by the asymmetrical relationships of the colonial situation even outside the effects of formal colonial empires. For that reason, the specific character of global interactions before the First

World War can be described as “colonial globality” (Conrad 2010, 40–41).

Global structures and local networks

The history we are interested in here must therefore be seen through the lens of global mobility and as being marked by strong colonial and social hierarchies, which existed before the First World War (Hoerder 2012). We consider the links between Luxembourg, Brazil, and the Portuguese colonies in Africa to be part of this colonial globality. In the following paragraphs, we will focus on a few examples of how scientific and economic networks enabled Luxembourgers to take part in the colonial economies of Brazil, Angola, and Mozambique before 1940. While Mozambique and Angola were official colonies of Portugal until 1975, Brazil was an independent state from 1822 onward—but the country remained colonial in the sense that the living conditions and modes of social and political participation there were clearly marked by colonial relationships, with persisting differences between Brazilians of European ancestry and indigenous people and descendants of slaves. In view of more recent migratory movements between Luxembourg and Portugal, it is surprising that before 1940 the links between the two countries were less significant than those between Luxembourg and Brazil. The mass immigration of Portuguese workers and people fleeing the dictatorship did not begin until the mid-1960s.

Particularly for a small country like the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (with a population of 296,000 in 1935), it can be very revealing to approach global and colonial history through the prism of individual biographies that allow to understand the workings of certain networks. We will see that the main link between Luxembourg, Brazil, and the Portuguese colonies in Africa was not Portugal, but Belgium. Through a micro-historical approach (i.e., by tracing individual paths), we will try to understand the political and economic channels through which the network of Luxembourgers has been able to operate throughout the Portuguese-speaking world. We will thus draw attention to certain elements of Luxembourg’s involvement in (post)colonial relations and processes of global economic exploitation. The present article must, however, be

considered as a first attempt to highlight this hitherto largely neglected research field.

The life histories presented here are part of a broader field of mobilities and places embracing Luxembourgers who emigrated to France, the United States, the Belgian Congo, Algeria, etc. The common elements in these life histories are the importance of work and economic migration. The mobility of the people in question reflects a global mindset that allowed them to go beyond their national borders or identities. Adopting a methodological nationalist approach by focusing on “Luxembourgers” might therefore seem paradoxical. We must bear in mind, however, that these migrations are part of a much wider context of European migrations overseas while at the same time relying on a narrow network of local and national ties. The examples make it possible to look at these different levels and to recognize the overlapping relational structures that constitute the migration networks.

The historiography of the last fifty years shows the contribution that a micro-historical approach can make to understanding global history. Bernd Hausberger has highlighted the explanatory potential of “global life courses” (*globale Lebensläufe*) as an epistemological contribution to understanding the historical complexity of the world (Hausberger 2006). Micro-history thus tends to understand the globality of the world through particular cases. “Games of scales”, that is, systematic switching between different levels of analysis (global, national, regional, local, individual, company, etc.) always aim for a more complete understanding of history and of the global relationships throughout time (Revel 1996).

Going to Portuguese Africa through Belgium

A figure who links Luxembourg with both Africa (Mozambique) and Brazil is Édouard Luja. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Luja lived and worked in both of these parts of the Portuguese-speaking world. It is likely that Luja’s personal relationships with his compatriots living in Belgium played an important role in his recruitment for various jobs overseas. The importance of the personal links between certain Luxem-

bourgers living in Belgium and Belgian economic decision-makers—some of whom had attended the same schools or universities or had family ties dating back to the period before the separation of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg from the Kingdom of Belgium in 1839—is a common factor in explaining what appears to have been a veritable chain of migration through Belgium.¹ In 1835–1836, when the majority of the population of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (except in the capital city) was taking part in the Belgian Revolution that had begun in 1830, two young Luxembourgers who had studied at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), Jean-Jules Linden (1817–1898) and Nicolas Funck (1816–1896), were hired by the Belgian government and the National Museum of Natural History in Paris to collect plants in Brazil. Linden went on to make a fortune as one of Europe's leading orchid merchants (Ceulemans 2006). It was his son, Lucien Linden, who had taken over the family business (L'Horticole coloniale) at the end of the nineteenth century, who hired the young Édouard Luja in 1897–1898 to harvest plants in the independent state of Congo for the 1900 Paris World Fair (Wey 2016).

Luja's first contact with the Portuguese-speaking world came when he went overseas again between 1900 and 1902, to the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. Half a century later, when he published a travel account in the *Bulletin de la Société des naturalistes luxembourgeois*, he explained:

The Zambezi Company, whose head office is in Lisbon, hired me to go and explore its vast concessions in Mozambique from an agricultural point of view. (. . .) The Zambezi Company is a chartered company whose purpose is to explore, exploit and develop the immense territories that the Portuguese Government has granted it on a long lease in its Mozambique colony.²

Luja worked for one of the very large companies colonizing Mozambique. He was involved in establishing Portugal's modern colonial domination

¹ I would like to thank Claude Wey for the inspiring conversations we had on the subject of this article. I am indebted to him for providing me with numerous sources related to the subject and for making me aware of part of the bibliography.

² Cf. Luja 1950, 213; see also "Ed. Luja." *L'indépendance luxembourgeoise* 37, no. 329/330 (25.11.1911): 1. [Digitized by the National Library of Luxembourg, <https://persist.lu/ark:70795/n6jw7b/pages/1/articles/DTL62>].

in this part of Africa. The Companhia da Zambézia was a Portuguese company, but it had been created with international capital through the merger of a French and an English company in 1892. It was active mainly in large-scale farming in the Zambezi region.³

Luja had been hired to acclimatize plants, in particular rubber-producing trees, in this part of Portuguese-speaking Africa.⁴ After returning to Europe in 1902, he was hired by a Belgian company and worked as manager of a coffee plantation in the Belgian Congo from 1903 to 1913. From 1913 to 1921, he was employed in Luxembourg at the museum of the Société des naturalistes before leaving for Brazil to work for ARBED (Aciéries Réunies de Burbach-Eich-Dudelange) and Belgo-Mineira. Luja's entire career thus revolved around Belgian companies. The episode with the Zambezi Company was an exception, although it is likely that it was his contacts in Brussels—according to his own account, he had been recruited by the Portuguese company in Brussels—that enabled him to be recruited.

In the case of other Luxembourgers who were later active in Portuguese colonial Africa, the link with Belgium is much clearer. They worked directly for companies incorporated under Belgian law. In 1917, Pierre Jentgen (1884–1959), who had studied law in Paris and spent two years as a lawyer at the Luxembourg bar, became manager of La Luinha, a company in Angola, where he supervised cocoa plantations. La Luinha was an agricultural and industrial company founded in 1906 in Brussels. At that time, Jentgen had already been living in Angola for two or three years, where he had been trying to set up his own small trade company.

In 1922, the Dutch consul, who was responsible for defending the interests of Luxembourgers, along with the Portuguese authorities, suspected Jentgen of being a German agent; he was therefore arrested and put

³ See presentation of the Company's Archives at the Portuguese National Archives in Torre de Tombo *Companhia da Zambézia*, PT/TT/CMZ-AF-GT/E/22-1, <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3682215> and also Zambézia Company, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Zambézia_Company&oldid=118111364; The Rhodesian Study Circle, *Companhia da Zambézia*, <https://www.rhodesianstudycircle.org.uk/companhia-da-zambezia/> (last visited Feb. 17, 2024).

⁴ Anonymous, "Portugal. Companhia da Zambézia." *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, 13th year, nr.1 (3 January 1901): 6.

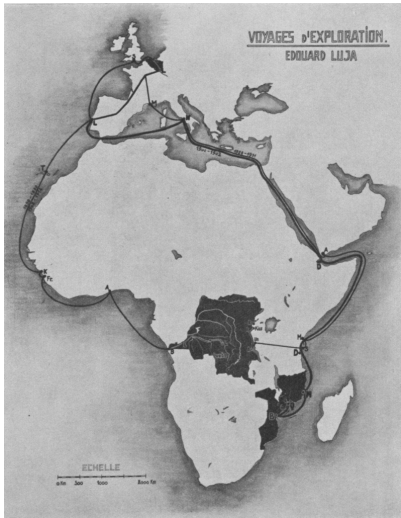


FIGURE 1: Eduard Luja's voyages of exploration. Luja, Edouard, «Récit d'un voyage au Mozambique (1900-1902)», in *Bulletin de la Société des naturalistes luxembourgeois* : 44^e année, n° 55 (1950), p.194. The map shows how the presence of Luxembourgers in Portuguese-speaking Africa is linked to the Belgian Congo.

in jail. He was released following the intervention of another Luxembourger, Pierre Miny (1883–1958), who had become director of the Agricultural Service of the Belgian Congo after carrying out research missions for Belgian companies around the world, notably in Angola.⁵ Upon release from jail, Jentgen was expelled from the Portuguese colony. In 1928, he went on to begin a brilliant career, first as a prosecutor in the Belgian Congo and then as a senior civil servant at the Ministry of Colonies in Brussels.⁶

Other Luxembourgers also worked for Belgian companies, or companies financed by Belgian capital, in Portuguese Africa; among them was Léon Colbach, who, shortly before the Second World War, worked as a diamond

⁵ On Pierre Miny's interesting career, see Staner (1968).

⁶ In the "official" biographies devoted to Jentgen after 1945, the years he spent in Angola are rarely mentioned. His lawyer in Luxembourg, G. Ziegler de Ziegleck, wrote in 1921 to Luxembourg's Prime Minister Émile Reuter that Jentgen had tried to set up his own company in Angola in 1913. His personal file of the Ministry of Colonies in Brussels at the Archives in Brussels, in which his *Curriculum Vitae* is included, doesn't mention this earlier episode in Angola and only states his position as director of La Luiha in Angola from 1917 on. See Durieux (1968); see also Ping-Pang [= Frantz Clément], *Splitter, Escher Tageblatt* 1922. no. 217 (16.09.1922): 3.; Jean Fosty, "La mort et les funérailles de M. Pierre Jentgen," *Luxemburger Wort* 112, no. 276/277 (03.10.1959): 21. See also the files in the Archives nationales du Luxembourg (ANLUX) AE-02298 Expulsion of Pierre Jentgen from Angola, 1921 and in the Archives générales du Royaume à Bruxelles (AGR2), Archives du Service du Personnel d'Afrique, AA SPA 4107 (K1730).

prospector for the Companhia de Diamantes de Angola (DIAMANG), which had been set up with Portuguese, French, American, and Belgian capital. The Société Forestière et Minière (Forminière), a subsidiary of the Société Générale de Belgique, was a shareholder in DIAMANG and was in charge of prospecting in Angola after the First World War.⁷ It should be noted that Pierre Miny, mentioned above, worked for the Forminière since 1925 (Staner 1968).

There were also more direct economic interests in Portuguese Africa, as shown by the case of the Luxembourg company Société coloniale luso-luxembourgeoise (Granducol), which was active in Mozambique from 1932 to 1942. Granducol was incorporated under Luxembourg law and its main shareholder was the Grand Ducal family, which held 87% of the shares. Prince Félix, husband of Grand Duchess Charlotte, and Prince de Schwarzenberg, brother-in-law of the grand duchess, sat on the board of directors together with company executives who had worked in the Belgian Congo. With no experience in the field, lacking the necessary capital, and underequipped with machinery, Granducol acquired a reputation for poor agronomic practices in the Namialo region. During the Second World War, the German occupiers tried to take control of the company, prompting the Luxembourg shareholders to sell the concession to a Portuguese firm (Dinerman 2006; Fortuna 1993, 130–132).⁸

In 1934, Granducol's board of directors was made up of the Belgian Anatole de Bauw, a recognized expert on cotton plantations in the Belgian Congo, and the above-mentioned Luxembourger Pierre Miny. The board was chaired by the Luxembourger engineer Nicolas Cito (1866–1949) who, after directing the construction of the first railway in the Congo between 1892 and 1903, had a long career in railway companies in which the Société Générale de Belgique was a shareholder. In 1913–1914, he inspected the feasibility of modernizing the railway line between Beira and the Zambezi in Mozambique (Lederer 1989). Nicolas Cito, appointed

7 “Neues aus Übersee” *Obermosel-Zeitung*, 58, no. 84 (11.04.1938): 2.; Diamang Digital, <https://www.diamangdigital.net/index.php?module=content&id=2>; Endiama - Empresa nacional de diamantes de Angola, <https://www.endiama.co.ao/en/history> (Sites consulted on 18 February 2024).

8 The archives of the Luxembourg Office of GRANDUCOL are today at the Archives of the Grand-Ducal House (Maison du Grand-Duc) in Luxembourg.



FIGURE 2: Working for Granducol in 1938. Photographs taken from the album presented to the President of the Portuguese Republic, Óscar Carmona, during his visit to Mozambique in 1938. Museu da Presidência da República, Lisboa



FIGURE 3: Working for Granducol in 1938. Photographs taken from the album presented to the President of the Portuguese Republic, Óscar Carmona, during his visit to Mozambique in 1938. Museu da Presidência da República, Lisboa

Honorary Consul of Luxembourg in Belgium in 1927 after his definitive return to Brussels, was the Luxembourg colonial figure *par excellence* who ensured that many Luxembourgers found work in sub-Saharan Africa. His role as intermediary, like that of Pierre Miny, for Luxembourgers who worked in Angola and Mozambique seems to have been crucial. An analysis of the individual biographies of Luxembourgers who left for Portuguese Africa shows that interpersonal relations via the economic, scientific, and political center of Brussels were central to the establishment of this colonial migration.

Brazil: the special case of Édouard Luja

The fact that these migratory movements were not limited to the African continent, but also included South America, has already been hinted at above. With Jean-Jules Linden and Nicolas Funck, we have encountered two Luxembourgers who were already travelling in Brazil in the nineteenth century. More important in this context, however, is Édouard Luja, who arrived in Brazil in 1921 and worked for a steel company that asked him to study ways of cultivating rapidly growing trees, such as eucalyptus, for use as fuel in the factories. Luja's arrival in Brazil came at a time when the Luxembourg steel company ARBED had important Belgian shareholders, in particular the Société Générale de Belgique. The fact that the company in question was called Compagnie Sidérurgique Belgo-Mineira, even though it was mainly engineers of Luxembourgish nationality who managed it, is revealing. This confirms once again the importance of the concrete political and economic links between Luxembourg and Belgium in the overall reflections on the integration of Luxembourgers into colonial globalization. The economic importance of the Belgo-Luxembourg Economic Union (UEBL) for the development of Belgo-Mineira is well known and is also relevant in the case of Édouard Luja—though we will not go into detail here on this well-documented history.⁹

Luja arrived in a Brazil that already had numerous links with Luxembourg. In 1924, the memory of several waves of emigration from Luxembourg to Brazil—in 1828, 1850–1860, and especially at the end of the nineteenth century—had not been forgotten. Ties remained between families scattered across two continents.¹⁰

Having returned to Europe in 1924, Luja went back to the Belgian Congo for the last time between 1928 and 1931, where he ran coffee plantations. After returning to Luxembourg permanently with his wife and daughter

⁹ See the *Terres rouges* series edited by Charles Barthel and Josée Kirps, (Luxembourg: Archives nationales du Luxembourg-Centre d'études et de recherches européennes Robert-Schuman, 2009-2022, 7 volumes); see also Trausch 1995.

¹⁰ On these immigrants and their descendants in present-day Brazil, see Carlo Krieger in the present volume.

in 1931, Luja worked for a time at the Museum of Natural History (now the Naturmuseum). He died in 1953 at Limpertsberg in Luxembourg-City.

We have tried to present here a very partial history of the links between Luxembourg and the Portuguese-speaking colonial world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of course, studies also exist on mass migratory movements from Luxembourg during the same period, mainly to Brazil (Krieger 2021; Wey 2010; Even 1993; Gonner 1889). Reading this literature confirms the intuition—which is more or less self-evident, especially in a landlocked country like Luxembourg—that the preconditions and concrete modalities of migration processes are to be sought in larger political-territorial and socio-economic contexts. In the nineteenth century, the German emigration channel was important—and the links between Luxembourg and German colonialism and its globalizing effects would merit a more in-depth study.

Conclusion

We have tried to show how personal networks played a crucial role in establishing the migratory routes of the travelers presented above. The role played by a number of Luxembourgers in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique is less well known than the emigration of Luxembourgers to Brazil in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These migrations to Africa are, however, partly in line with the same logic. Since Portugal did not have the capital needed to set up companies to exploit the natural resources of the African colonies in the early and mid-twentieth century, it had to agree to open up the colonial companies to foreign capital. It was thus, in a way, forced to continue until the inter-war years the policy of the globalization of capital that had predominated before the First World War, while other colonial empires could afford to adopt the imperial protectionist policy that was being put in place in the 1920s and 1930s (Enders 2016).

This particular economical context, where Belgian capitalism played an important role in Luxembourg's economy, explains why Luxembourgers from the fringes of Belgium were able to take advantage of personal relationships with managers and decision-makers of Luxembourgish ori-

gin in Belgian companies to obtain positions in the Portuguese colonial empire and in Brazil. It should not be forgotten that all the journeys described above—even if, as in the case of Édouard Luja, they were presented as voyages of exploration—took place in a context of economic exploitation and in the service of major private companies. Despite the fact that these companies were not capitalized in Luxembourg (with the ambiguous exception of Granducol), many Luxembourgers were involved in the expansion of the Belgian economy around the world and personally benefited from the economic and social links between Belgium and Luxembourg. Édouard Luja's career would have been unthinkable without his links with Brussels: his recruitment as a “plant hunter” in the nineteenth century, as well as his job for ARBED, were closely linked to the expansion of Belgian capitalism overseas. As part of the UEBL, Belgian companies that were active overseas recruited massively in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

By combining the micro-historical biographical approach with a historico-structural perspective, an analysis at different levels (global capital, personal and economic networks, and national politics) makes it possible to understand interesting dynamics. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the links between Luxembourg and the Portuguese-speaking world were marked not by the frank and sincere friendship so often evoked in political discourse, but by complex economic relations between the dominant and the dominated, and unequal power relations. Luxembourgers were part of the colonial elite, as the biographies presented here reveal. Recalling the particular colonial context also helps to qualify and challenge this dominant discourse today.

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