

Death and Politics: The Unknown Warrior at the Center of the Political Memory of the First World War in Portugal

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Abstract

In George L. Mosse's words, the modern war's most essential experience was the mass murder endorsed by the State (1990). The extent of the conflict and its path of destruction would affect not only the combatants, but society as a whole. Going beyond the veterans' individual or group memory, death ended up being a structural element in the construction of the political memory of the First World War. This analysis focuses not only on the impact death had on individual combatants or the soldiers as a group, but mainly on the way in which it was appropriated by society and political powers through processes specifically designed to disguise death. The aim of States was to erase the destabilizing impact that casualties had on public opinion, neutralizing it into new and old environmental and architectural structures, thereby creating a new lexicon for death. The idea was to avoid a revolt over the mass sacrifice. The government wanted to use death cult rituals to create a consensual pride in the name of the nation, an idyllic and metaphorical attempt to reevaluate death in a religious, political and ideological sense, trying to surpass the physicality of mass death on the battlefield. Taking into account the deeply funereal nature of the Great War remembrance processes in Portugal, this article will highlight the integration of Portuguese memorial rites into the European war culture and will enable an understanding of the central role of death in the Great War remembrance process. This text will also seek to describe the treatment of the dead and the delineation of places of memory, mostly focusing on the Portuguese Unknown Soldiers, as a way of understanding the nature and the main questions surrounding the official memory of the First World War in Portugal between 1918 and 1933.

Keywords

First World War; Republic; Memory; War Culture; Unknown Soldier.

Resumo

Nas palavras de George L. Mosse, a experiência mais marcante da guerra moderna foi o assassinato de massa sancionado pelo Estado (1990). A extensão do conflito e o seu rastro de destruição afetariam não só os combatentes, mas a sociedade como um todo. Muito além da experiência individual dos veteranos ou da memória do grupo dos soldados, a morte foi um elemento estrutural na construção da memória política da Primeira Guerra Mundial. Esta análise centra-se não só sobre o impacto da morte sobre os combatentes individuais ou os combatentes, como um grupo, mas principalmente sobre a maneira pela qual foi apropriada pela sociedade e pelos

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poderes políticos através de processos, especificamente concebidos, para a mascarar. O objetivo do Estado passa por apagar o destabilizador impacto na opinião pública das vítimas, neutralizando-as em novas e antigas estruturas ambientais e arquitectónicas, criando um novo léxico da morte. A ideia era evitar uma revolta pelo sacrifício de massa. Assim, o governo procurava, pelo culto dos mortos, estabelecer um consensual orgulho em nome da nação, uma tentativa idílica e metafórica de revalorizar a morte num sentido religioso, político e ideológico, tentando superar a realidade da morte de massa no campo de batalha.

Tendo em conta a natureza profundamente fúnebre dos processos de rememoração da Grande Guerra em Portugal, este artigo irá abordar a integração dos ritos memoriais portugueses na cultura de guerra europeia e irá permitir o entendimento do papel central da morte no processo de rememoração da Grande Guerra. Este texto procurará, também, descrever o tratamento dos mortos e a delineação dos lugares de memória, focando principalmente nos soldados desconhecidos portugueses, como forma de compreender a natureza e as principais questões em torno da memória oficial da Primeira Guerra Mundial em Portugal entre 1918 e 1933.

Palavras-chave

Primeira Guerra Mundial; República; Memória; Cultura de Guerra; Soldado Desconhecido.

The Unknown Soldier represented the zenith of official ceremonies in memory of the First World War. The ritual of choosing, transporting and ceremonially burying the Unknown Soldier was transformed into a homogeneous and key practice in European war culture. The ceremonial burial of Unknown Soldiers represented a generalized compensation, which reflected the power and the attraction of the cult of the dead at the end of the war (Mosse, 1990: 104). Thus, in keeping with what was happening throughout Europe, the existence of a body in Portuguese territory embodied the funereal dimension inherent in military cemeteries, which did not exist in Portugal, and tended to become an important focus of action.

The de-structuring caused by the “total war” in liberal societies created a space for new heroes, serving to ideologically reconcile an official interpretation of the historic past. Heroes were exceptional human beings who had sacrificed their lives for the homeland, offering a lesson in solidarity. Heroes thus served the purpose of regenerating the nation in the context of the postwar crisis, in which the value of nation states unraveled.

Mourning in the context of war is extremely specific. It reverses the natural order of things and the normal succession of the generations. Ever since the Great War ushered in human losses on a mass scale, combined with the aspect of mobilization, death became a theme that was hard to approach. The evolution of the cultural history of war brought death – its meaning, assimilation and representation – into the spotlight (Winter and Prost 2005). During the 1970s, while reinterpreting the memorials to the war dead, historians such as George Mosse (1975), Reinhart Koselleck (1979) and Antoine Prost (1977) made up for the scant attention paid until then to death and mourning against the backdrop of the armed conflict and brought these subjects to the center of the debate (Becker, 1991; King, 1998; Inglis, 1998).

Mosse’s structure of the myth of the war experience (1975) will be used to explain and understand the elements that comprise the historical remembrance of the First World War. The construction of this myth exalts death and cancels its horror by emphasizing the values of sacrifice in combat of a generation involved in a veritable crusade (Mosse, 1990: 7). In adapting Mosse’s “model” for Italy and Germany, it is important to emphasize the national differences and exceptions between those and other countries. According to George L. Mosse, the process of naturalization, trivialization and sanctification made mass death acceptable, disguising it in natural and architectural structures, and associating it with religious sentiments in a type of civic service. Antoine Prost partially disagreed with Mosse’s idea. Prost affirmed that the naturalization of tombs and the sanctification of the

dead did not mean indifference, but were instead a way of dealing with such strong emotions (Prost, 1994: 209). Jean-Jacques Becker and Prost framed this rememorative phenomenon in the new civic rituals of renewing the secular cult, serving to “(re)write” Republican values (Prost, 1977: 1984). Jay Winter views the commemorations as an existential response to universal loss (Winter, 1995: 3).² Thus, understanding the representations of the war in the context of cultural history encompasses multiple and overlapping explanations.

War culture enabled the “assimilation” of the mortal brutality of the conflict by means of its abstraction and generalization³, owing to the multiple dimensions of the conflict and its subsequent rememoration. It was an effort to cancel the destabilizing impact of mass deaths on public opinion, neutralizing it in new environmental and architectural structures incorporating local traditions, and offering a new lexicon for death. As Gibelli stated, “one does not die in war but rather falls on the battlefield, life is not lost but is given, the individual does not disappear into nothingness but lives eternally in the realm of patriotic heroism” (Gibelli, 1998: 341). War culture prevented consternation over the unjustified mass sacrifice and individual mourning; the ritual of the cult of the dead morphed into a consensual pride in death on behalf of the homeland. The paradoxical intention was to transform physical death in a religious, political and ideological sense in order to enhance its value (Gibelli, 1998: 341).

The war experience resulted in multiple representative and national forms, depending on the way in which it was assimilated and, above all, the way in which a consensual memory was constructed by the entities in power. What representative form emerged in Portugal? Was the process of making death abstract a guarantee that the nation would look beyond these losses? Did the phenomena of war culture serve to assimilate the mortal brutality of the conflict and smooth over ruptures or did they serve to perpetuate traditional and familiar forms of political culture?

² In *Sites of War, Sites of Mourning*, Winter develops an in-depth analysis of cultural codes and the language of mourning by selecting a group of artists and writers who are not included in the modernist canon. He proposed going beyond the usual divisions between modernism and traditionalism, suggesting, to the contrary, the adoption of a more careful formula for how Europeans imagined the war and its consequences, avoiding creating a rupture in terms of interpretations and results (Winter, 1995: 3). In this regard, see also Prost (1994). From a different perspective, pointing out a deep and modernizing rupture provoked by the war, see Fussell (1975); Eksteins (1991); Hynes (1991, 1997).

³ War culture is a set of mental tools that the men and women who live through a conflict use to make it intelligible. It was defined following two conferences organized in France, namely *Les sociétés européennes et la guerre de 1914-1918* (Nanterre, 1988) and *Guerre et cultures* (Historial de Péronne, 1992) (Lemoine, 2006: 136). It is important to add that the history of war culture should not be confused with the history of cultural, literary or artistic works or their creators (Prost, 2002: 96).

Through the elements that emerged and comprised the post-conflict war culture, this study will try to understand the nature of the official memory of the First World War in Portugal during the First Portuguese Republic⁴.

This text will analyze the immediate memorial construction, focusing on the glorification of the Unknown Soldiers as the maximum and ephemeral consecration of official rememorative projects in Portugal. Firstly, it highlights the inevitable integration into the context of a European war culture, safeguarding the specific national features of this culture, and paving the way for de-codifying the central role of death in the rememorative process of the Great War. Secondly, it examines the concepts of “nation” and “hero”, which were inextricably intertwined. It then follows the trajectories of Portuguese Unknown Soldier(s): from how these representative dead were selected to their fragile, but definitive, implantation in Portuguese territory. Finally it analyzes to what extent war deaths were a political tool used by the First Portuguese Republic, and seeks to understand how dead heroes were brought to the centre stage of the national liturgy and helped regimes, representations and political forms endure over time.

The Dead Hero in the Restructuring of Nations after the War – The Consecration of the Portuguese Unknown Soldiers

The extreme difficulty in dealing with mourning and death in societies in the interwar period resulted in the planning of memorial phenomena that allowed the living to experience mourning collectively, lightening the burden of death. The “myth of the lost generation” was created, used both by the German far right as well as by the English upper classes in the context of the postwar crisis. Discourses and memorials served processes of disseminating death, transforming soldiers who had perished into heroes of national salvation: “This heightened value of the First World War dead clung to a heroic and sanctifying dimension of their disappearance, rooted in this war culture resulting from the conflict, which transformed the dead into voluntary sacrifices in a great crusade” (Becker and Audoin-Rouzeau, 2000: 296). The discourse of the crusade of the “new man”, as well as the hero-fiction of the common soldier who “happily” sacrificed his life to defend the homeland, were an integral part of the *myth of the war experience*. A construction that

⁴ It is important here to clarify what is meant by official memory: “That one of the State structures focused on the glorification, mystification, concealment and building and maintaining an identity and national memory” (Frank. “La mémoire et l’histoire”. IHTP. <http://www.ihtp.cnrs.fr/spip.php%3Farticle233&lang=fr.html>).

perforce incorporated a necessary transcendence of death, creating alternatives for a catharsis, based on themes from classical antiquity and, even more so, from Christianity, i.e. the belief in the resurrection of men. This was the symbolic discourse present from the immediate cult of the dead to the monumentalization of the sites that became focal points for a “new” civil religion (Mosse, 1990: 34).

The idea of a national hero thus implied the idea of a nation as a space that recognized a national hero and a place where the concept could be applied. The role of a hero was intertwined with national identity and the political use of memory, revealing founding values and constituting an ideological patrimony. In this formulation, the hero worked as the “guarantee” of the salvation of the national destiny and the required messiah for faith in the future. In a secularized republic, where the hierarchies of homage had disappeared, the nation became a substitute for God or the king, changing the logic of political legitimization. The values of Christianity, just like the idea of voluntary sacrifice for greater good, are, in this context, subject to a re-appropriation. Common men are sacred heroes and are transferred to the national pantheon, conceived horizontally. Religion provided the guidelines of the new civic liturgy (Catroga, 2006: 177). In *Calvário da Flandres*, Augusto Casimiro, a Republican and war volunteer, explored this regenerating role played by combatants who had died during the war – a crusade in defense of the homeland:

Dead? Why is it so difficult for me to say this word? Death does not annihilate or reduce the true living [...] and those who died in this war have lived a true life. Death [...] made them transparent, and, integrating them into the great current of devotion flooding the world and renewing it, it gave those who had been condemned to silence and resigned to sacrifice, divine active forces, an immaterial existence, the inexhaustible strength of symbols, which have shielded hearts and safeguarded the world's dreams throughout the ages. [...] Those who died in the Great War will be the calm conductors of a painful hour. [...] The world will know then how, and to what extent, this war was, in heaven and on earth, at sea and in our souls – the great war of God (Casimiro, 1920: 177-183).

Writing about the war experience often uses the historical power of knowledge of the cause in order to project a tone of “political subject” or “self-justification”, a form of legitimizing the individual actions of the soldier, but also, consciously or unconsciously,

working as a political justification. As Ernesto Castro Leal has highlighted, “The war sentiment reflected in the Republican memorialisms of Jaime Cortesão, Augusto Casimiro or Carlos Selvagem [...] conveyed a redeeming prophetic vision, anchored in a dual justification of patriotic meaning” (Leal, 2000: 445).

With death on the horizon, what took shape here was a certain attempt to “relieve” its impact, by means of representative abstraction and uniformity. In other words, given that the nation did not have a pre-political existence, it was up to the new forces of power to create elements of collective identification, embodied in the character of the hero, which offered an example that other citizens of the nation could follow, and thus to overcome the rupture and trauma of the war. By going beyond individual mourning, through a collective consolation of glorification and the cancellation of death, reverence for the dead emerged as a key focal point in the nations that participated in the Great War.

Millions of people died as a result of the First World War, creating an “insurmountable” void in the communities of the countries that fought in the conflict. It was necessary for society, earlier moved by a belief in the nation’s prosperity, to once again be given hope and compensation. Thus, the political preparation of the mourning required, over the course of several years, a profound material investment and the definition of new symbolic codes – a set of forms capable of bringing together multiple and diverse experiences (Gibelli, 1998: 337).

The Unknown Soldier concentrated the patriotic and ethical value of the nation and enabled its political action. The abstraction of reverence at a distance would harden, or even inhibit, the recognition of the value of the sacrifice – intensified, with regard to Portugal, by the absence of combat in the national territory – and would transform the experience of death and destruction into an unbearable monopoly of veterans. The “body” needed to be present, in that place of memory⁵, to overcome individual compensation, serving the homeland, above all else.⁶

These heroes were not identifiable or liable to have a “finger pointed at them”, since they served first and foremost as an essential abstraction of mass death. It was necessary to have an idealized, transversal and universal symbol, without any identifiable

⁵ In an introductory approach to the collective work *Les lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora explains what is meant by places of memory: any significant identity, material or ideal, resulting from human will in a given time, becomes a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of a community. The book outlines a set of perspectives and interpretations in the context of cultural history, but the allusions to the Great War are rare and seen as the zenith of the Third Republic’s celebrations (Nora, 1984).

⁶ The concepts of “nation” and “homeland” are applied with the meaning given by the historical and political context.

elements, so that the official entities could confer “desirable qualities.”⁷ Although Portugal didn’t experience mass death like other belligerents, the idea of the Unknown Soldier responded perfectly to the impersonal mass dimension of the national sacrifice, as well as the massified and mechanical reproduction of figurative arts that occupied both public and private spaces (Gibelli, 1998: 345).

Neither the notion of an empty tomb nor that of the unknown soldier (used as effigies to compensate for soldiers who disappeared in faraway wars) are hallmarks solely of the First World War, but they became widespread due to this conflict. The idea of appropriating this symbolic resource appeared during the war itself in various forms.⁸ First in London and Paris, on November 11, 1920; in 1921, in Washington, Rome and Brussels; in 1922, in Prague, Belgrade, and then Warsaw and Athens.⁹

In Portugal, the consecration of two Unknown Soldiers, one from Africa and another from Flanders, occurred in 1921. During this decade, the cult of the Unknown Soldier was transformed into the high point of the war commemorations. However, it had a dual nature: concentrating the culmination of the fervor and controversy around the memory of the war and its implementation.

⁷ In Portugal, attempts were made to recreate an Olympus, providing a set of war heroes for the national pantheon. The intense media campaign and political appropriation conferred special qualities upon common soldiers, with a view to regenerating the epic of the Portuguese “race”. The dead heroes (the soldier Curado or Carvalho Araújo) and living heroes (the Serrano, the Minho Brigade, and the soldier Milhões) that were identified perfectly served the myths created during the war and developed during the remembrance processes. For example, the Serrano (an informal term for the Portuguese First World War soldier, meaning mountain man), purified by the simplicity of a rural life, acquires superhuman qualities to defend higher values that represented the homeland. On Carvalho Araújo, see *Diário de Governo*; Decree nr. 5.044 – *Diário do Governo*, I Series, nº 268, December 11, 1918. On the Minho Brigade, see “Honra aos que morrem pela Pátria!”, *Ilustração Portuguesa*, nr. 586, May 14, 1917: 381; “A Brigada do Minho”, *Ilustração Portuguesa*, nr. 650, August 5, 1918: 102-103. On the Serrano, see Rodrigues (2005). On the soldier Milhões, see *Diário da Câmara dos Deputados*, April 8, 1924: 4-5; “Comemorando o 9 de Abril”, *O Século*, April 6, 1924: 1; and “Um herói da Flandres”, *Diário de Lisboa*, November 21, 1924: 2).

⁸ Copying rituals from antiquity, the idea of having an Unknown Soldier from the Great War appeared initially in France, but it was Britain that embodied the phenomenon by first choosing a ritualized anonymous soldier killed in conflict and placing him in Westminster Abbey on November 11, 1920. France reproduced the same phenomenon under the Arc de Triomphe on the same date. In London, Sir Edward Lutyens, chosen by Lloyd George, created a (provisional) cenotaph in a perishable material. This was the first major manifestation of abstraction combined with the cult of the dead of the First World War to be integrated into the official process of the construction of war memory.

⁹ There were particular features in the memorial processes, including the fact that the Armistice Day ceremony takes place around an empty tomb in Protestant England, in contrast to the occupied tomb in Catholic countries, like France and Italy. In Paris, there were controversies surrounding the initial idea of putting the *Soldat Inconnu* in the Panthéon, until the Minister for Education chose the Arc de Triomphe. The ceremony took place in the presence of Communists and members of the Catholic Church, among others. It started at the Panthéon and ended at the Arc de Triomphe, where the body was interred. The same issues concerning the participation of members of the Church did not exist in Britain, mostly due to the placement of the tomb in Westminster Abbey and the position of the church in the British State. The procedure was however more or less the same. The corpses were brought from the battlefields and an officer, mother, widow, orphan or father that lost a loved one would choose between several unidentified bodies. From the selection process, to the arrival in the capital to the consecration ceremony, it was one of the most grandiose commemorations of the war effort.

The ceremonies, organized by the Ministry of War¹⁰, began with an important convocation of the participants, encompassing national and international associations and individuals¹¹, and seeking to ensure an enduring international memory of Portugal's participation in the conflict.¹² The commemorations began on April 5, 1921, as soon as the first diplomatic delegations arrived in Lisbon, parallel to the disembarking of the Unknown Soldier from Africa. Between April 7 and 9, 1921, the bodies were kept at the Parliament, where they were awarded honors by the President of the Republic and a wake was held by the Portuguese people. The main day of the commemorations – April 9 1921 – was marked by a triumphal parade in Lisbon. The parade began with due pomp and sobriety, “the war wounded and foreign contingents being hailed by heartfelt popular demonstrations. On every street along the way, the windows were full of people who tirelessly lauded the representatives of the allied nations [...] the windows were draped with ornamental banners, some of which were very valuable, and flowers were showered down from above as the coffins went by”.¹³ The parade ended at the Rossio Station, where the coffins remained until they were taken the following day to the Santa Maria Vitória monastery in the town of Batalha. A final ceremony was held there and the coffins were deposited in the tombs.¹⁴ Finally, the Unknown Soldiers became part of the pantheon of

¹⁰ The Ministry for War negotiated a program for paying homage at quite an early stage. Everything went through this ministry: discourse, policing and invitations to national and international delegations. Starting in March of that year, correspondence was exchanged extensively with local, public and private institutions and associations that would participate in the celebrations (AHM, 1.^a Divisão, 35.^a Secção, Caixa 443).

¹¹ They were Maréchal Joffre; Generalissimo Díaz; Admiral Don Pedro Zofia, and the Governor of Gibraltar, General Smith-Dorrien, and L. Carnegie, the English attaché in Portugal (reflecting little effort on the part of Britain to be represented); the chiefs of the Spanish Army and the Spanish battleship *Alfonso XIII*, a senior officer from the Romanian Army; Major Lucien Busini from Belgium and the American Army (AHM, 1.^a Divisão, 35.^a Secção, Caixa 441).

¹² As can be seen in the large amount of correspondence exchanged with the allies (AMAE, Correspondance Commerciale et Politique, Europe, 1918-1929, Portugal – n° 9 – Armée, dossier Générale. DOCS. 56; 65; 72).

¹³ “Na Praça Dom Pedro e no Largo Camões”, *O Século*, April 10, 1921, 1. The parade went through the main streets of Lisbon up to the Parliament (Rua do Ouro, Rossio, Praça dos Restauradores, Avenida da Liberdade, Rua Alexandre Herculano, Largo do Rato and Rua de São Bento). The national anthem was played at the entrance to the Parliament and then national and foreign political and ecclesiastical entities entered the building to attend the special ceremony paying homage. After dignitaries mourned the heroes, the doors were opened to the public until 12 pm on the 9th. During the parade, attention was respectfully directed towards the central core, comprising foreign diplomatic representations, disabled veterans, war generals and members of the Government, who formed a guard of honor that escorted the Unknown Soldiers' coffins (“As homenagens aos heróis desconhecidos”, *O Século*, April 8, 1921: 1; *O Século*, April 9, 1921: 2).

¹⁴ The ceremonies on April 10 began in the Rossio Station with a journey in three special trains that carried not only the two bodies, but also the President, the Patriarch, the Government, the entire diplomatic corps and foreign military missions. In Batalha, the “triumphal parade” went from the train station to the Monastery where the corpses would be placed. Here, the final ceremony began at 5pm with speeches, first by the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Abílio Marçal, then by the President of the Republic and later by other dignitaries, until the end of the festivities honoring the Unknown Soldiers. The press, regardless of political affiliation, covered the events widely in several articles published in April 1921. See *O Século*, “Chegou a missão italiana” (April 5); “O Heroe de África” (April 6); “Programa de homenagens” (April 7); “Glória aos heróis” and “O desfile do povo no átrio do Congresso” (April 9).

recognized and accepted national heroes.

“To the Unknown Soldier / who died by the Homeland”

“Ao seu soldado desconhecido / morto pela pátria”

Placing the coffins in the Chapter House at the monastery in Batalha was the finishing touch to the most important phenomenon that served as the basis for the construction of the myth of the war experience. This did not, however, prevent the immediate eruption of controversies and debates about choices relating, in turn, to time, space and rituals, as well as, above all, to the subsequent neglect of the Unknown Soldiers. The passage of time did not forgive Republican negligence and the biers fell to ruin in full sight of everyone. In 1922, “[i]t is in a state of utter negligence. It looks like the chapter house has been dismantled. Instead of covering the coffins of the Unknown Soldiers, the national flags are torn and in disarray. Rats have nested there. In short, everything is in a comatose state.”¹⁵

Public opinion was aware of the neglect that had befallen the Unknown Soldiers and a campaign emerged in the press to entomb their bodies. Three years passed before the bodies were brought there and were finally buried. In 1924, the “burial” of the Unknown Soldiers finally took place in the chapter house of the Santa Maria Vitória Monastery.¹⁶ Widely reported in the press, the ceremonies were held between the burial of the Unknown Soldiers (April 7)¹⁷ and the lighting of the Eternal Flame (April 9).¹⁸ Once the Flame had been lit, the Minister for War, Américo Olavo stated, “The dead who lie there, heroes and martyrs, anonymous and glorious, are the eternal example of the effort that it is necessary

¹⁵ Ramos Costa, *Diário do Senado*, May 16, 1922: 23.

¹⁶ The idea did not come from the parliament, but from António Augusto Gonçalves, an art critic and professor in Coimbra, who began the debate in the press about the urgent need to bury the Unknown Soldiers. Accordingly, on October 29, 1923, a special credit was created for the burial costs, after a decision by the Ministry for War (June 13, 1922). See *Diário da Câmara dos Deputados*, June 13, 1922: 35; October 29: 49; Law nr. 1.674 – *Diário do Governo*, I Series, n° 262: 22 November 1924; Decree nr. 10.398 – *Diário do Governo*, I Series, n° 283, December 20, 1924.

¹⁷ The burial ceremony began on April 7, 1924, at about 10.30 am. The charter was read at the end of the ceremony. It concluded with the graves’ inscription: “Portugal/eternal at sea/ and in its races/in honor of its unknown warrior/who died by the homeland/1924”. See “Comemorando a data gloriosa”, *O Século*, April 8, 1924: 1-2).

¹⁸ The *Chama da Pátria* (National Flame), an adaptation of the *Soldat Inconnu* flame (Paris, 1923), was the brainchild of Henrique Lopes Mendonça and António Augusto Gonçalves. It was built by a veteran, Lourenço de Almeida (Infantry Battalion No. 23), and was sponsored by the old 5. Division (Coimbra) commanded by General Simas Machado, who chaired the Great War Monuments Commission. This Commission was responsible for creating the Offerings Museum at the monastery (1925) and for maintaining the cult of the *Chama da Pátria* (CPGG 1936, 153).

to make and the sacrifice that it is necessary to bear, whenever called upon to do so for the sacred interests of the Homeland.”¹⁹

In much the same manner, other exhortations contributed towards the epic legitimization of the Portuguese effort. The Portuguese experience in the war was “historically transfigured” into an act of sacrifice to benefit the nation, whose heroism once again demonstrated the “nature of the Portuguese race”. Extremely “rhetorical”, “stereotypical” and “moralistic” discourses emerged that championed Portugal’s historic past as a way of legitimizing a new liturgy, serving to satisfy the need to believe in a future that the war had shattered²⁰. In his speech to Parliament on April 7, 1921, paying homage to the Unknown Soldiers, António José de Almeida, the President of the Republic, outlined the basic guidelines of the official liturgy for remembering the war. The discourse of the “lay cult theologian” summarized the significance of the event with three fundamental purposes, in an apologetic and justificatory tone: “strengthening national unity, emphasizing their significance in the present, highlighting and honoring tradition and preparing lessons for the future”.²¹ The suffering of the men in the trenches purified them and they were an example to be followed. However, the “most important service that this use of Christianity provided the war was how it helped overcome the fear of death and of dying. The hope of an eternal and full life – the continuation of a patriotic mission – made it possible not only to transcend death but also to inspire life before death” (Mosse, 1990: 87).

The celebration of the Unknown Soldier embodied the primary instance of the immanent reconciliation of all forms of the cult of the dead and the Republican liturgy in the most effective manner. The site where the bodies were interred, the “Batalha Monastery is, simultaneously, a work of poets, warriors and believers. [...] Everybody can enter there, everybody, starting with the Republic-Regime itself, the Republic-State itself, which, without adopting any religious faith, but while respecting all religions, cannot help

¹⁹ “Últimas notícias. Foi hontem acesa, na Batalha, a Chama da Pátria”, *O Século*, April 10, 1924: 2. See also “Jornada gloriosa do 9 de Abril”, *O Século*, April 9, 1924: 5).

²⁰ “The Portuguese Homeland lives and will triumph! In the crazy ardor of the battle, the [heroes] felt both their independence and their fulfillment of duty. [They] fell brave and heroic, watering the soil with the blood of the holy sacrifice of their life, given for the homeland. Just as three years ago, today steel and bronze stand together to celebrate the same belief, praising and glorifying the memory of those who, in France, in Africa and at Sea, knew how to die for their country. Portugal dignifies itself, paying the highest tribute of appreciation and gratitude to its sons who gave their lives for it in a massive effort! Portugal, which once had the New World and long seemed to have fallen into a lethargic sleep, appears again in all its splendor over the whole earth. Glory for our immortal comrades, honor to their patriotism and their courage!” (AHM, 1.^a Divisão, 35.^a Secção, Caixa 442 – Alocuções de 9 de Abril de 1921: Quartel do Funchal [Infantry Regiment nr. 27], April 9, 1921).

²¹ António José de Almeida, *Diário das Sessões do Congresso*, April 7, 1921: 1-8.

but feel a special deference for the religion that, apart from being the faith of most Portuguese, has Christ as the supreme deity, Christ, who, there in Batalha, as I have said in the past, in the name of the Government of the Republic, at the doors of the temple itself, is not just the God of Catholics, but in the History of Portugal is also the companion in arms of Nun'Alvares.”²² This reverence made use of elements derived from a traditional and “historic” liturgy. The death experience resulted in a reinforcement of a familiar, intimate, non-clerical and non-official Christianity, more in keeping with popular devotion. Those who died in the war were compared to Christ, as they had sacrificed themselves for the whole – the homeland.

More than the standardization of military cemeteries in faraway lands in Flanders²³, the Unknown Soldier allowed for the necessary consolation in the homeland, reinforcing the idea of the equality of those who rendered homage and those to whom homage was paid. Both the discourse of the President of the Republic, as well as that of the Minister for War, in 1924, revealed the dynamics that these men wished to see implemented in the Sacred Union²⁴ and now in the remembrance of its greatest cause: the participation in the war. They urged the formation of a national union to defend the homeland, in a “common” prayer of recognizing the sacrifice of its heroes. It was suggested that all men were equal before the homeland and in the face of death, so equal as to be indistinguishable, bereft of connotations of military rank and social status (Gibelli, 1998: 346). No matter how much the inscription on the tombs of the Unknown Soldiers – PORTUGAL/ ETERNAL AT SEA / AND IN ITS RACES / IN HONOR OF ITS UNKNOWN SOLDIER / WHO DIED BY THE HOMELAND – sought simply to glorify the homeland and put an end to criticism focusing on this phenomenon, it was unable to avoid the biting comments. *O Dia*, a monarchic daily newspaper, criticized this inscription, namely with regard to its inability

²² António José de Almeida, *Diário das Sessões do Congresso*, April 7, 1921: 1-8.

²³ The end of the war left unimaginable destruction and death. The dead accumulated on the battlefield or in improvised graves, requiring the government to issue legislation to regulate the burial of corpses. Until the Great War, dead soldiers had no special space in graveyards and they were mostly interred in mass graves (largely due to the difficulty of identification) and honored through impersonal or hierarchic monuments. However, the idea of building the nation's army demanded that these men should be respected and honored regardless of their rank. In Portugal, the first legislation regarding the treatment of the war dead appeared in 1917. The Portuguese War Graves Commission (CPSG) was created and was responsible for the identification, concentration and burial of bodies in a single Portuguese cemetery in Richebourg l'Avoué (France). This “presents itself as a sanctuary. You enter through a wrought iron fence; the graves are lined up in front of a stone altar. It is both a place of Christian sacrifice and dedication to the Portuguese homeland. Faithful among the faithful, the fighters are already installed among the great mass” (Becker, 1991:121). It is a simple example of design and iconography, where the symbols of the homeland guaranteed the continuity of classical historicism from mid-nineteenth century art, perpetuated by the First Republic. On the First World War Portuguese cemetery, see Correia (chapter VIII, 2011).

²⁴ The Sacred Union government (March 16, 1916 to April 25, 1917) emerged from the need to create an alliance that would guarantee national unity in times of war. In practice, only two parties joined this union.

to create an original national memory:

Eternal at sea... in continents... and in its races... What does this bunch of broccoli mean!? Why isn't Portugal also eternal in the adjacent islands, in São Tomé & Príncipe, in Cape Verde and in Macao and Timor? And above all, what does it mean by saying eternal... in its races? We all know that this doesn't mean anything; but if that is the case then what was the need to desecrate this marvel of seriousness, which is the Chapter House, with the vacuity of this flowery charabanc!? And in the terrible translation of 'mort pour la patrie', which translates as "died for the Homeland", but has instead been translated as "by the Homeland". In grammatically correct Portuguese this would signify that it was the Homeland that killed the poor soldier. And perhaps that really was the case!²⁵

The "consecration" of the Unknown Soldiers did not leave much scope for illusion. Despite its grandeur and imposing presence, the Unknown Soldier as a process for remembering the Great War, a moment when the nation consensually united around a universal and egalitarian representation, was not an effective balm. The war heroes – whether living or dead – did not become unquestionably indispensable. Not even a grand reformulation of the cult in this final act of burial made it possible to overcome underlying errors and incapacities while constructing the Republican memory of the Great War. The burial of the dead also buried this possibility and once again revealed an inability to construct a consensual, uniting and enduring myth of the experience of the war.

The hardening of published opinion and the fragility of the national hero

Thus, those who believed that the magnificence of the event would in itself bring about a generalized agreement were mistaken. In truth, not just on that day, but over the course of the anniversaries of that date, there was opposition to the formal commemorative choices that had been made, to the implications of the meaning of the celebration and, even, its subsequent loss of meaning. Just like the national decision with regard to intervening in the conflict on the western front, the consecration of the most significant symbol/ritual of the myth of the war experience was distanced from the atemporal success that was inherently implied in it in most European nations.

The chosen date, April 9, was associated with the greatest defeat that the Portuguese army had suffered on the western front, as well as, primarily, death as a

²⁵ *O Dia*, April 11, 1924: 1.

consensual and unifying element.²⁶ The possible use of Armistice Day for this act could weaken the development of a national identity, owing to the essentially universal dimension of Armistice Day.

The need to have two Unknown Soldiers was due to the important efforts that had been made on two battlefields. One soldier came from Flanders – the European front – and the other from Portugal’s empire in Africa, two fields of Portuguese interest and international influence in the conflict. Despite this, the symbolic choice, exceptional among the warring nations, of having two Unknown Soldiers was not enough to smooth over the internal disagreement about Portugal’s intervention on the European front. The apparently consensual symbols were not enough to overcome internal schisms about intervention in the war²⁷.

Despite everything, and just as in other nations, the item that provoked the most heated debate was the choice of the site where the coffins were to be interred.

The first site proposed was the Jerónimos Monastery, which was situated in the capital and served the purpose perfectly because of its grandeur and central location. The idea was presented in Parliament on November 11, 1920²⁸, but the ensuing debate was not an entirely peaceful process, with discussions continuing in the two Houses until March 1921. The reason for the controversy was, as immediately pointed out in December by Bernardino Machado, the coexistence with the tomb of Sidónio Pais²⁹. The Republicans feared that installing the tombs of the Unknown Soldiers in the same space would allow for an association of the cults, and a consequent reinforcement of the veneration for the “president-king”. António Granjo³⁰ was the main figure behind this heated debate and proposed that the soldiers be interred at São Vicente (the national pantheon) or in Batalha as alternatives. After the tomb of Sidónio Pais was violated, this MP stated, “[It saves] the

²⁶ With regard to the dates of the Portuguese commemoration of the First World War and their meaning, see Correia (chapter VI, 2011).

²⁷ On the Portuguese participation in the First World War and the Republican and Military Dictatorship governments, see the works by Filipe Ribeiro Meneses, such as *União Sagrada e Sidonismo: Portugal em Guerra, 1916-1918*, or *Portugal 1914-1926: From the First World War to Military Dictatorship*. On the disagreements regarding the Portuguese intervention at the European front, see Teixeira (1996).

²⁸ António Granjo, *Diário do Governo*, November 11, 1920: 1. On this same day, Bernardino Machado presented to the Senate his proposal for a monument/mausoleum in Jerónimos Monastery to soldiers killed in the war, a proposal that was sent to the House of Representatives and was later approved by the War Commission (*Diário do Senado*, November 12, 1920: 3; AHP, SECÇÃO VII – CX 58A: 2314-2376, SENADO, November 30, 1920). See also Law nr. 1.099 – *Diário do Governo*, I Series, nº 267, December 31, 1920; Decree nr. 7.351 – *Diário do Governo*, I Series, nº 37, February 21, 1921.)

²⁹ Cf. António Granjo, *Diário do Senado*, December 8, 1920: 1.

³⁰ António Granjo was a lawyer and Freemason. He was affiliated with the Portuguese Republican Party, and was a Liberal and Evolutionist; he took part in the CEP as a lieutenant, and held various ministerial responsibilities between 1919 and 1921. He was murdered during the “bloody night” (October 19, 1921).

need to have to take any stance, whose purpose is to prevent the unknown soldiers from the Great War from reposing in Jerónimos, alongside the body of Sidónio Pais.”³¹ The government, through the Ministry for the Interior, authorized the bodies to be taken to Batalha only on April 6 1921, and declared April 9 1921 to be a national holiday.³²

Chosen, in 1924, as the “*provisionally definitive*” site, due to the eschatological imperative of the deterioration of the tombs, these clearly divergent opinions became public. The section of the press that was favorably inclined towards the regime justified the choice “historically”, as did members of the government, “Your place [is], there in Batalha, – there under the shadow of the Master of Aviz and Nuno Álvares. [...] In no other place would you be so visible in the memory of your compatriots, for whom you are the most symbolic and unsullied personification. Commemorating you means taking part in your heroism: the grandeur of a people can be gauged by the vitality of their memories”.³³ The opposition saw this decision as representing the Democratic Party’s need to divest itself of responsibility. At the time of the definitive burial, *O Dia* stated, “The Republic has consigned the body resulting from its nefarious crime far away, like a nightmare, to the remote fog of royal legends. The victims will rest well in Batalha, because executioners do not frequent temples”.³⁴

The debate continued and, in October 1926, the Commission for the National Monument to the Dead of the Great War (Lisbon) proposed that the tombs be moved to the base of the monument being built, since Batalha, being a remote site that was difficult to access, discouraged pilgrimages and virtually eliminated visits by foreign dignitaries. This idea was debated and strong objections were raised, both for artistic reasons (owing to the changes that would have been necessary in the design, and the expenditure that would have had to be made on the national monument) and “due to a strangely religious education, our people cannot witness without astonishment the unprecedented fact of a human being

³¹ *Diário da Câmara dos Deputados*, March 10, 1921: 34; March 8, 1921:10.

³² At a session of the House of Representatives on June 13, 1922, the Minister for War, Correia Barreto, presented the “final” decision – “with respect to the Unknown Soldier, the Parliament has decided that this grave will be in Batalha. We will designate a retired sergeant and four soldiers to care for the Chapter House, in order not to embarrass the army or the Nation” (*Diário da Câmara dos Deputados*, June 13, 1922: 35). Also see Law nr. 1.148 – *Diário do Governo*, I Series, nº 76, April 3, 1921; Law nr. 1.140 – *Diário do Governo*, I Series, nº 70, April 6, 1921; *Diário da Câmara dos Deputados*, April 4, 1921: 11.

³³ Lieutenant-Colonel Mário de Campos, *Ilustração Portuguesa*, April 19, 1921.

³⁴ *O Dia*, April 9, 1924: 1.

buried among us above the ground for this purpose, at the side of the road like an animal”.³⁵

Placed outside the capital, the chosen site, Batalha, which was a medieval Gothic monastery with all the inherent religious connotations, revealed the Republic’s lack of confidence and its inability to create its own temples. While the placement of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey was due to the peculiar nature of the Church in the United Kingdom, in Portugal the insertion of a memorial in a religious space reflected the precarious state of the Republic, which needed to legitimize its memorials with the old and deep-rooted traditions of the Church and the Monarchy³⁶.

One cannot, however, overlook the vast and complex universe of meanings appropriated from history to be found at the Santa Maria da Vitória monastery, as Batalha was called until it was restored in the 19th century under the aegis of the liberal Luís Mouzinho de Albuquerque. This restoration included a discernible effort to remove religious symbols and showcase the monastery as the pantheon of the Aviz dynasty, or at least of the illustrious generation of Camões, the generation repeatedly evoked by Republican historic patriotism.

The choice of Batalha, far from the capital Lisbon, as the site offered a way for the Republic to lessen its friction with the Church. After Sidónio Pais³⁷ and the Vatican had forged closer ties, the postwar period marked the re-emergence of the *distance* between the government of the Republic and the Church. In this context, the cult of Nuno Álvares Pereira (beatified in January 1918) was renewed. Influenced by the cult of Joan of Arc, which was being promoted by the French Republican right, this new devotion revealed the “political militancy against Republican Jacobinism, bringing together multiple focal points (Republicans, Monarchists and Catholics)” (Leal, 1993: 68). It consecrated (in 1920) yet another hero for the pantheon of civic religion to celebrate on August 14 – a reconciling hero in social and political terms – “enabling the political-ideological and moral audience of the social symbol Nuno Álvares to be expanded, at least until the commemorations of the 5th centenary of his death, in 1931” (Leal, 1999: 78). The Batalha Monastery thus brought

³⁵ These justifications were pointed out by the Association of Veterans of the Great War, which complained to the Portuguese Association of Monuments to the Great War “on behalf of all combatants”, persuading it not to do so (LCGG, 1929: 89-91).

³⁶ Doubts still remain as to why the National Pantheon (São Vicente de Fora – Lisbon) was not used for the burial of the Unknown Soldiers. Although the pantheon could be associated with a monarchic past, since the kings had been responsible for building the edifice, its construction was already completed and would have avoided several costs (<http://www.ippar.pt/monumentos/se_staengracia.html> [Accessed on September 14, 2009]). To understand more about the First World War memorials in Portugal, see Correia (2013).

³⁷ *Sidonismo* was a conservative and anti-parliamentary regime headed by Sidónio Pais. It was established on December 5, 1917, and lasted until the assassination of the Head of State in Lisbon on December 14, 1918.

together a desired (although not always achieved) consensus. Not only did it evoke a hero of the “renewed” national consensus³⁸, born of a victory against Castilian troops – an underlying element of the belligerence on the European front (recognition as compared to a neutral Spain) – but it also symbolically brought [the battle of] Aljubarrota and one of its symbols into the public domain. It thus removed the Unknown Soldiers from the discussions associated with the pantheons in Lisbon, the heated political struggles of the capital, and created, by the will of the Republican government, yet another element of pacification and reconciliation.

The symbolism of this event had an impact and showed even the most revolutionary bases of the First Republic to be “corrupted”. The violent secularization of the early years of the regime were diminished in the context of the war, a phenomenon that is evident in the official commemorative initiatives, which gave prominence to members of the Church and associated spaces in consecrating the two anonymous soldiers. This outcome was not as surprising as it might at first appear to be. Throughout this memorial process, there was an attempt at political and social pacification on the part of the Republicans. This situation is, in fact, clearly evident in the reports sent by foreign missions in Portugal, as well as in the speech given by the President of the Republic on April 7, 1921. In his final report about the diverse ceremonies to bury the two Unknown Soldiers, L. Carnegie emphasized three important elements. Firstly, the numerous allusions to religious themes by the President of the Republic in his speech paying tribute on April 7: “The Republic, without adopting any religious faith, but respecting all religions, cannot but feel especial deference for the faith which, besides being that of the vast majority of the Portuguese, has at its supreme divinity that same Christ. who at Batalha [where the soldiers were to be buried] is not only the God of Catholics, but is also a companion in arms of Nun’Alvares [a national hero] in the history of Portugal³⁹. Secondly, the prominent presence of monarchical representatives at the religious ceremonies held on April 8: “It was evident that Count Sabugosa, representing the former monarch, King Manuel, occupied the main place in the Church, opposite the presidential box”. Finally, one of the most striking images of the ceremonies was the cordiality of relations between the Church and the State: “On every occasion positions of marked importance were assigned to the

³⁸The President of the Republic continued to participate in the *Festa da Pátria* (homeland celebrations), an ephemerid that was officialized with António Granjo’s support. Granjo, who had opposed the placing of the tombs of the Unknown Soldiers in the Jerónimos Monastery, recognized the importance of this “monarchic” hero in the national liturgy (*Diário do Senado*, August 6, 1920: 12).

³⁹ NAUK, Western Europe, Western Europe, War Office/W4425/3044/36, April 25, 1921 – Portuguese Unknown Warrior.

Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon and other high-placed Church dignitaries, who were moreover, frequently to be seen engaging in friendly and intimate conversations with members of the Government and the political world. I noticed also that one of the coffins of the unknown soldiers bore a large silver cross on the lid, a concession to religion which would hardly have been allowed by the Government a few years ago.”⁴⁰

Conclusion

The Republic’s inability to stimulate recognition of the interventionist cause and, more controversially, the muted celebrations of Portugal’s allied victory, precipitated the decline and banalization of the commemorative efforts. The possibility of transforming the conflict into a tool to ideologically reinforce the identity of the First Republic as the *legitimate representative* of the Portuguese people thus came to naught. However, the policies adopted in relation to the memory of the war during the First Republic showed that this process did not lead linearly to a political and cultural rupture in the postwar period.

This article has proposed an alternative to Mosse’s generalized explanation of the radicalization of politics. Representations of the Great War in Portugal were imbued with a profound traditionalism, visibly connoted with Republican values, far removed from the modernizing forms that had marked some efforts in countries such as Italy or Germany. A set of funereal commemorative processes was planned, rather than commemorations of victory, centered on the cult of the dead and reinforcing the idea of their sacrifice for the Republican Homeland, more than for the nation. The most evident vestiges of the war remained profoundly attached to traditions, fearing a rupture and constructing a historical memory that guaranteed continuity in terms of a national identity.⁴¹ This study has incorporated Mosse’s model regarding the cult of fallen heroes, but has cautioned against generalization. In this respect, there is a crucial divergence with regard to understanding the funereal investment. The direct relationship between the massification/abstraction/sacralization of death and the brutalization of politics, with an underlying uniformity in the participating countries with regard to the construction of the myth of the war experience, can be compared with different forms of nationalism.

A set of rituals and symbols were transposed into the ceremonial process being analyzed, present not only in the military cemeteries and the mythology surrounding those

⁴⁰ NAUK, Western Europe, Western Europe, War Office/W4425/3044/36, April 25, 1921 – Portuguese Unknown Warrior.

⁴¹ On the politics of the memory of the First World War in Portugal, see Correia (2011).

who had died in the war, but also in the symbolic reconstruction of the Portuguese nation-state, which was largely due to the Republicans (Republican nationalism) and which was now condensed into a single ceremony and into a single image – the Unknown Soldier.

The Unknown Soldier became the national hero around whom the Republican liturgy was renewed on Armistice Day, as well as, above all, on the national holiday of April 9. It can be noted that the manifestations of war culture tend, in this context, to be profoundly sustained by a religious type of hope (irrespective of the entity responsible) and by the “antiquity” of the values of national identity constructed (Hobsbawm and Terence, 1996: 86). Just as in France, in Portugal too new and old political, cultural and social groups appeared or reappeared against this backdrop commemorating the war, as was the case with the Church.⁴² The strong secularization that characterized the Republic now disappeared, since, in a country with a deep-rooted Catholic tradition, it would be problematic to think of a process to instrumentalize pain and death without resorting to a *transcendent* compensation for the losses and the solutions of the Christian liturgy, officially adapted to the temporal and spatial formats of the official framework for representing the war. Although the effects of war in Portugal were far less “dramatic” than in the other European countries, the Republican Government had to promote social and political reconciliation to overcome the consequences of a “mutilated victory”. The national and international dimension of the April celebrations allowed interventionists, once again in power, to legitimize their decision to take part in the European front.⁴³ In short, as Ravignan, the French representative in Portugal, stated, an effort was made, whether desired or not, to ensure national reconciliation at least with regard to the processes necessary to remember the war, “[t]he fact that the Portuguese clergy, especially the Cardinal Patriarch, took part in all the ceremonies and that the President of the Republic, as well as members of the government, attended a religious service in one of the city’s main churches is worthy of note. This rapprochement in terms of the political passions that divide Portugal will probably not last long; nevertheless it is interesting to see.”⁴⁴

⁴² An analysis of the role that the Church played in the Great War remembrance project does not fall within the scope of this article, which focuses on the official memory policies of a secular state. For further information about the critics of the rapprochement that took place between the Government and the Church during the war commemorations, see “A reação religiosa triunfante”, *A Batalha: Suplemento Literário e Ilustrado*, April 14, 1924: 2; Catroga (2006).

⁴³ In order to understand the gradual forgetfulness of the Unknown Soldier, it is important to place it within the wider process of war remembrance. See Correia (chapter VI and conclusion, 2011).

⁴⁴ Cf. AMAE, Correspondance Commerciale et Politique, Europe, 1918-1929, Portugal n° 9 – Armée, dossier Générale. Doc. 66.

One can thus conclude that this process was far from assuming modern configurations, worthy of dictatorial pictorial languages. It resorted to familiar and traditional molds and broke with the “radicalism” of the regime’s early years, which the Republic invoked, both in terms of the Christian tradition and in terms of the ideological construction of the nation-state in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century.

Figures

Figure 1. Triumphal parade in Lisbon (9 April).



Source: Fundo LC

Figure 2. Marechal Joffre among foreign representatives waiting for the Unknown Warriors tombs outside the Parliament in Lisbon (9 April).



Source: Fundo LC

Figure 3. Unknown Warrior tombs held by generals Abel Hipólito and Gomes da Costa at Batalha's entrance (10 April).



Source: Fundo LC

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