

# The *retornados*: trauma and displacement in post-revolution Portugal

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this article is to shed light on the traumatic experiences of the *retornados* and their strategies to cope with loss and displacement, by focusing on the cases of *retornados* from Angola and Mozambique, the territories that hosted the largest percentage (94%) of Portuguese settlers. *Retornados* is the word used to refer to the white Portuguese living in the African colonies who were repatriated to Portugal in the months leading to their independences, between the Spring and Autumn of 1975. Their exact numbers are unknown, varying between 500,000 and one million. 40% of them had been born in the colonies. The findings of this paper are based on semi-structured interviews conducted with six *retornados*, all with different professional and personal trajectories. The paper argues that the Portuguese case presents unique features that place it in a special category in the context of traumatic memory and displacement literature. First, by blurring the distinction between victim and oppressor – when colonists become the victims of a political power that used them as agents of an imperialistic power project. Second, by showing how the post-revolution Portuguese elites chose not to use the *retornados* to further the country's foreign policy goals, but rather *forgot them*, to further those goals, namely European Economic Community membership. Third, by demonstrating that the plight of the *retornados* has not been used for the sake of domestic political purposes in forty-one years of democracy.

**Keywords:** *retornados*, trauma, displacement, colonialism, Portugal.

## Introduction

*Retornados* are the white Portuguese living in the African colonies who were repatriated to Portugal in the months leading to their independence<sup>1</sup> between the Spring and Fall of 1975. Their exact numbers are unknown; estimates vary between 500,000 and one million (Pires, 2003; Rocha-Trindade, 1995). According to the 1981 census (the only census with relevant data available), their number was totalled 505,078, which accounted for more than 5% of the Portuguese population

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<sup>1</sup> Angola became independent on 11 November 1975, Mozambique on 25 June 1975, Cape Verde on 5 July 1975, Guinea Bissau on 24 September 1973 (recognised on 10 September 1974) and São Tomé and Príncipe on 12 July 1975.

at that time (Pires et al., 1987). 40% of them had been born in the colonies (ibid). The word “retornados” literally means *returnees* and is frequently seen as having a pejorative connotation. The *retornados* are a heterogeneous group composed of people from all walks of life and professions: from civil servants, to businessmen, to lottery ticket sellers, to shoe polishers, farmers, white-collar and blue-collar employees (Pires et al., 1987: 133-143, 225-228).

The integration of these people in a post-revolutionary Portuguese society was a complex and painful process. On the one hand, they left behind most of their possessions in the newly independent African states. On the other, Portugal was not prepared to cope with a massive influx of population, as it was undergoing political and economic turmoil in the wake of the Carnation Revolution.

This article attempts to shed light on the divergent ways in which the Portuguese state and the *retornados* dealt with the traumatic memory of forced displacement. Specifically, it has five main aims: to explain the *retornados*' perception of the reasons which led them to abandon the lands where they had settled; to assess how traumatic the processes of abandonment were; to analyse their integration in a post-revolutionary, agitated country; the reasons for their marginalisation by the Portuguese society and their strategies of coping with that marginalisation; and the usage of memory and traumatic displacement by Portuguese political elites. The article focuses on the cases of *retornados* from Angola and Mozambique, as these territories hosted by far the largest percentage (94%) of white settlers: 309,058 and 164,065 residents, respectively (Pires et al., 1987: 38).

The findings of this article are based on semi-structured interviews conducted with six *retornados* from Angola and Mozambique, all with different professional and personal trajectories. My goal was to find individuals who represent different socio-economic classes and were interested in sharing their stories. Perhaps it is not surprising that two community leaders (the presidents of the *Associação de Espoliados de Angola* (AEANG)<sup>2</sup> and of the *Associação de Espoliados de Moçambique* (AEMO)<sup>3</sup>; Manuel Reis and Clara Norton de Brandão, respectively), were among those who agreed to talk about their experiences. The two official associations represent the claims of settlers who lost their possessions during the decolonisation period. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and a half and were transcribed by the author. As requested by the interviewees, two names referenced in the article are pseudonyms: Ana and Marisa. Four interviewees were in their 60s during the time of the interview; one interviewee (Marisa) was in her 40s, and one (Mr. Ângelo Soares) was 93. I acknowledge that *retornados* have very different stories to tell about their experiences. Given the scarcity of research about this group, my hope is that this article, drawing on the literature on memory and trauma, will help to identify some dominant themes in their narratives and thus help to identify trajectories for future research.

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<sup>2</sup> Association of Expropriated of Angola.

<sup>3</sup> Association of Expropriated of Mozambique.

I have also analysed three websites and a Facebook page, authored by *retornados*. These websites are the official websites of the aforementioned associations: [www.aeang.com](http://www.aeang.com), and [www.aemo.org](http://www.aemo.org), respectively, and the personal blog of Mr. Soares that he runs with the help of his family: [www.espoliadosultramar.com](http://www.espoliadosultramar.com). All contain documentation, interviews and newspaper articles pertaining to their claims. The Facebook page, entitled “Os retornados, espoliados de Angola e Moçambique e a descolonização” is a group page composed of 162 *retornados*, including one of my interviewees, Ângelo Soares, and António Reis, the brother of the president of AEANG. Both the websites and the Facebook page are public.

The article starts with a theoretical discussion on the links between memory, trauma and displacement. This helps to relate my case study, presented in the next several sections, to a broader body of literature. The first section traces the settlement of the Portuguese in both colonies, their motivations and explains the causes of their displacement from the African territories. The second section presents the main findings through an analysis of their traumatic memories of displacement and integration in Portugal.

## Memory, trauma and displacement: a theoretical framework

Memory can be defined as the process through which events or impressions from the past are recollected and preserved (Bell, 2006: 2). In the same manner, collective memory involves shared perceptions of the past and the ways these shape the present and future, influencing the process through which groups of people perceive themselves (ibid). Maurice Halbwachs (1968) states that people acquire their memories and localize them in society, given the intersubjective nature of their content.

What one remembers and what one forgets is a political process. Though related to history, this process does not always necessary entail historic truth. Often, in fact, policy-makers and the wider public do not possess enough historical knowledge of the events that generate memory and identity. As Novick (2001) argues, present concerns determine what is remembered and when.

The past is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted to shape collective identities. In fact, memory of historical events influences and is influenced by identities, norms and interests. Although identities can be viewed as the stable perception of the self through time, they are subject to challenge and may be negotiable and flexible. A collective identity implies a shared understanding of history and its meaning and a construction of a narrative that connects past and present, locating both the individual and the community in time (Bell, 2003: 5). Different generations interpret historical memories according to their respective frame of reference, which changes from one generation to the next.

According to Edkins (2003), trauma involves political menace, betrayal and relations of power. Trauma betrays our faith in a social order seen as immutable:

“trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors” (p. 4). Our existence, she argues, relies on the continuance of the social order. A potential menace can easily destroy the sense of safety or security. This is the moment when one realizes that social reality is nothing but a construct. The state, as the product of force and violence (whether in the shape of war, revolution or civil conflict) and as the possessor of the legitimate monopoly on violence, is able to define and exert violence upon those it deems as the excluded ones. Elsewhere, Edkins (2006) contends that traumatic memory may reinforce state power and the sovereign political order.

The nation can be conceptualized as a “mnemonic community” (Mannheim, 1959). The relationship between memory, trauma and identity plays a significant and sometimes fundamental role in shaping political perceptions, affiliations and political action, in order to justify political projects, legitimacy and foreign policy. As Edkins (2006: 101) argues, “memory [...] is central to the production and reproduction of the forms of political authority that constitute the modern world.” Memory produces certain power relations. These political projects, in turn, justify the flexible nature of the historical memory and its fabrication. Memory and trauma help mould political perceptions and policy choices. The role of national elites in shaping national interests is closely related to this. Memory influences the role of political actors and particularly the role of elites. Memories may be used to further certain political aims (Edkins, 2006). The position of a state in world events is affected both by how the past continues to shape the present and by how states see themselves. In this sense, the nation is what Benedict Anderson (1991) terms as “imagined communities.”

As Becker (2014: 57) contends, traumas provide fertile ground for the instrumentalist manipulation of memory to serve a specific foreign policy purpose. In a constructivist approach, identities dictate states’ foreign policies. As such, states that experience trauma tend to adopt either one of these approaches: a more aggressive foreign policy or a more pacifist one. Thus, political leaders may make use of trauma either to engage or withdraw from international interaction. Subsequently, the memory of traumatic events is intimately linked to a state’s perception of its own security. This, in turn, requires a measure of forgetting, i.e., to rewrite history, namely to remove any trace of indigenous people from the country. Becker states that this is a common practice among settler-colonial historical memories and cites the examples of Israel and the United States (Ibid.).

Displacement necessarily produces trauma, especially massive displacement. As Edward Said (2000: 137) rightfully claims, modern Western culture is, to a great extent, the product of exiles, émigrés and refugees. War, civil war, revolution, terrorism, human rights violations, oppressive regimes, all contribute to involuntary migration. The dissolution of colonial empires also fits into this category: the British, the French, or the Portuguese, among others. These set of events make our era, in Said’s (2000: 138) words, the age of the refugee, of the displaced person and of mass immigration.

Richmond (1994) speaks of reactive migrants – people who have little control of the environment which surrounds them and whose choice concerning when and where to leave is greatly hampered. This is the case of people who have been expelled from their homes, of stateless people, of slaves and of forced labourers. Weiner (1995) places displacement in the context of the underlying political motivations of the sending countries, namely: achieving cultural homogeneity or state control over certain social groups. These policies are intimately linked to processes of state and identity building and nationalism (Soguk, 1999).

Said (2000: 137) describes exile as the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.” Even if the exiled is able to prosper in his new location, the sorrow of estrangement never leaves him/her. The exile, according to Said (2000: 140), experiences a kind of solitude outside a group and therefore is immersed in the “perilous territory of not-belonging.” It is a discontinuous state of being, setting the exile apart both from where he once lived and from where he now lives. They are estranged from their roots and from their past. The challenge lies thus in the (painful) adoption of a new identity. Voutira (2006) describes how the processes of displacement, dispossession and resettlement help incorporate new elements into those groups affected, to an extent to which their identity becomes a hybrid mix of old and new experiences. As place is an integral part of one’s culture, the memory associated with it never leaves the group’s imaginary.

Zweig (1947) captures the sense of security that stems from the stability provided by the state and from having a homeland. The collapse of this feeling emerges when that homeland turns against an individual or community of individuals and, with it, the sense of rootlessness that comes from the collapse of a known world. The author conveys the despair of not belonging anywhere that comes with displacement and which turns citizens into immigrants, refugees and even criminals. Displacement thus demonstrates the precariousness and frailty of all things once taken for granted: life, possessions, lifestyle. All of them can be extinguished almost without a trace, a process that cannot easily be grasped by the individuals affected by it. In this respect, Agamben’s work on the state of exception (1998) and how it can deprive individuals of their citizenship rights turning them into *homo sacer* comes to mind. However traumatic forced displacement and migration are, they prove, nonetheless, as Chatty (2010: 10) argues, “the unique adaptive quality of human social life and its resilience.”

It is my contention in this article that literature can learn from the case of *retornados*, which has not been explored as it should, given the number of settlers involved and the fact that Portugal was the last colonial power. Lubkemann’s (2002) study, with a focus on moral economy, continues to be one of the few pieces on the subject on an international level, while, from the viewpoint of traumatic memory of forced displacement nothing has been written. In many features, the experiences of the *retornados* confirm the insights from the existing literature summarised above, but at the same time present fascinating aspects that place the Portuguese case in a unique category. In fact, Portugal provides an example of how a state decided to

forget its colonial past and the visible remnants of that past – its settlers. Contrary to literature, the new political elites that took power after the revolution did not *use them* to further the country's foreign policy goals, but rather *forgot them*, to further those goals, namely European Economic Community membership. And neither were they used by elites for domestic political purposes in the forty-one years of democracy. Those elites decided to bury a colonialist past seen as shameful and also because it was tied to dictatorship.

## From colonisation to repatriation

The origins of the Portuguese presence in Africa can be traced to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Slave trade<sup>4</sup> would become Portugal's main goal throughout the colonies until the complete abolition of slavery in 1869. The Portuguese authorities started investing in the colonies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a response to a crisis in metropolitan agricultural exports and to the weak dimension of the internal market (Rosas, 1994: 129). Concomitantly, the 1884-85 Berlin Conference launched the colonial powers' partition of Africa. Effective occupation thus became the official Portuguese policy. The exploration of minerals and agriculture in both Angola (diamonds, oil, coffee, rubber, sugar, cotton) and Mozambique (sugar, cashew, copra, cotton) would become the main activities.

Investment in the colonies increased after the 1929 crisis. The 1930 Colonial Act materialised this interest in the colonies by affirming the historical mission of the Portuguese state to “possess, civilise and colonise” overseas territories. Mass emigration to the colonies started after the 1930's and accelerated after the 1951 constitutional changes, which revoked the Colonial Act. These changes, in particular, transformed the legal status of the colonies. Instead of colonies, they were to be called “overseas provinces.” Assimilation was thus transformed into the national policy for these territories, in a response to mounting international pressure against colonialism (Rosas, 1994: 486).

From 1961, as other colonial powers decolonised, the influx of Portuguese white settlers increased, as the war of independence started in Angola. The settlement of white people was promoted by the regime through subsidies to those who wanted to establish themselves permanently in the colonies. In this sense, apart from colonial civil servants, who enjoyed seasonal paid trips, those who left Portugal knew they would not be returning (Pires, 2003; Lubkemann, 2002: 8). The power project of the Portuguese state included a stimulus package (introduced in the 1950's) to the emigration of white farmers to the African territories, particularly Angola and Mozambique.

On the other hand, the start of the hostilities by the UPA (Union of the Peoples of Angola, *União das Populações de Angola*), later designated as FNLA (Angola

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<sup>4</sup> Slave trade from Angola began in 1575 and in Mozambique since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Alexandre, 1993: 54).

National Liberation Front, *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola*), had contributed to a greater will to invest in the colonies and reinforce the regime's view of national unity. In this sense, the regime started to bet on the development of the colonies by promoting public and private investment through foment plans, launching the construction of major infrastructure such as roads, railways, hydroelectric power plants, ports and airports. As a result, Angola's GDP grew at an average of 7% between 1963 and 1973 (Rosas, 1994: 489).

Mozambique's growth rates were more modest. The territory's relations with Portugal took place in a different scenario. Geographically more distant from Portugal, it had always had less white settlers than Angola, counting also with Indian and Arab-origin populations. Turned mainly to the Indian Ocean, it enjoyed British and South-African influence – the presence of Mozambicans in the Rand mines in South Africa was an example of this preferential relation. As in Angola, the start of the independence war, in 1964, stimulated the investments of the Portuguese authorities in infrastructure (e.g., roads and ports). The greater proximity of Angolan territory to Portugal and the higher growth rates may help explain why intermarriage was more common in Angola than in Mozambique (cf. Mata, 2007).

The first white settlers were mainly civil servants, sent by the Portuguese authorities, however, as the population and the economy grew, other professions became necessary. The settlers consisted of people from all walks of life and professions: from businessmen to farmers, white-collar and blue-collar employees (cf. Pires et al., 1987: 133-143, 225-228).

Those who chose to settle in the African territories did not necessarily share the motivations of the Portuguese state. Economic reasons were paramount, as the growth rates of Angola and Mozambique soon attracted the hopes of those who wanted to build a better life. Another motivation lay in the hope for greater freedom from the shackles of the Portuguese dictatorship (cf. Pires, 2003). Some were also motivated by a spirit of adventure associated with the African landscapes (ibid.).

This migration process to the colonies was suddenly put to a halt by the 25 April 1974 coup in Portugal.<sup>5</sup> After the revolution, the military started negotiating peace with the national liberation movements – FNLA, MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*), PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*), FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front, *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*) – with the aiming of granting independence to the colonies.

The relations of the military with the white settlers were tense: the settlers accused the military of incompetence and opportunism and of not protecting them against

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<sup>5</sup> The coup put an end to 48 years of dictatorship and it was led by the intermediate officers of the military – the captains – unsatisfied with the course of the colonial war and also highly politicised and with links to the opposition. As they saw it, democratisation was the only way to terminate the war. Democratisation and decolonisation were to be simultaneous processes. For details, see Loff and Pereira (2006).

the violence perpetrated against them by the black guerrillas (Dacosta, 2013). In fact, as the influence of the guerrillas spread, intimidation, psychological pressure, violence, destruction of property and looting became increasingly used against the white settlers, particularly as the date of the independence approached. Because of this, the white settlers who had initially planned on staying changed their minds. Dissatisfaction with the military only increased amid rumours that some radicals within the army wanted to abandon the white population, so that the “blacks could throw them into the sea” (Dacosta, 2013: 18).

In 1974, Angola was home to the second largest white population in Africa after South Africa – 324,000 residents (Pires, 2003: 337). In Mozambique, there were about 190,000 residents (ibid). Faced with the need to absorb these people, the Portuguese government put into practice, in just a few months, a repatriation scheme, between the spring and the autumn of 1975. 61% of the *retornados*, 309,058, came from Angola. From Mozambique, 164,065 people arrived in Portugal (33% of the *retornados*). According to the 1981 census, 505,078 people arrived in Portugal (Pires et al., 1987), over 5% of the Portuguese population at the time. Many arrived by their own means, including in small fishing boats (Dacosta, 2013). This was the second largest repatriation of white settlers in history, in proportional terms. The exact numbers remain unknown, varying between 500,000 and one million (Pires, 2003; Rocha-Trindade, 1995). Not more than 60,000 emigrated to other countries (Pires, 2003: 198), particularly South Africa and Brazil.

The *retornados* benefited from economic assistance to integration, from the Portuguese authorities and from international donations and loans from the US, the Council of Europe and the Swedish government (Almeida, 2014). The Portuguese government did not concede the *retornados* any indemnities, given the economic and political turmoil in the wake of the revolution. This meant that most *retornados* lost their possessions. Many arrived in Portugal just with the clothes they were wearing.

In the early 1980s, they founded two associations in order to fight for their right to indemnities – AEANG and AEMO – but to no avail. These associations are still active, petitioning courts and even EU institutions. 81,000 asked for indemnities from the Portuguese state for the loss of their property (Lusa, 2014). These properties include, according to my interviews with Mr. Reis and Mrs. Brandão, houses, land, bank deposits, or companies. The total worth of the assets still has to be determined. In 1975, the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a registry of the individual claims. The issue, however, was left unattended until 2005, when the Parliament created a working group to study it but this group never convened. Still according to the presidents of AEANG and AEMO, all political parties represented at Parliament have agreed, in 2014, to reconvene that working group in 2015. When I asked my interviewees why the matter has not been solved, they stated that there was a lack of political will from the part of the rulers. AEANG and AEMO claim that Portugal is the only colonial power that did not compensate the losses of their citizens. Mrs. Brandão told me that in 1977 the Portuguese authorities passed law 80/77, which transferred all responsibility for indemnities to the former colonies.



Another issue the Portuguese government had to deal with was the attribution of nationality to the incoming flux of population. As Pires (2003: 227) mentions, the term *retornados* had a racial connotation, referring exclusively to the white population. The law passed by the Portuguese authorities reflected this understanding: according to government decree No. 308-A/75, of 24 June 1975, the word *retornado* pertains to those who, maintaining their Portuguese nationality and having resided in the former colonies, were born in Portugal or have great-grandparents who were born in Portugal (ibid). All those who did not fit the category were considered immigrants. Minister António de Almeida Santos, who was responsible for the decree, aimed at avoiding flooding the country by an estimated number of one million *retornados*, a figure the impoverished country simply could not absorb. According to Baganha (1999), between 25,000 and 35,000 *retornados* were of mixed (African and white) descent.

## Memory of the return

The *retornados* were seen with suspicion by the Portuguese population and were not well accepted at first upon their repatriation to Portugal. One of the main reasons lies in the fact that they were seen as a symbol of a dictatorial regime that had to be forgotten – especially in a country where, at that particular moment, the left dominated the political sphere. They were accused of being colonialists and reactionary. This was one of the reasons why many did not want to go to Portugal after the decolonisation process, instead choosing South Africa and Brazil, the cases of Mr. Soares and of Ana (pseudonym), a white woman born in Angola, respectively. This burden they carried involuntarily was particularly heavy as Portugal was in a transition: abandoning 500 years of a colonial past and turning to European integration, as ascertained by the bid to become a member of the then European Economic Community in 1977. Another reason why they were discriminated against – the main reason, according to my interviewees Mr. Reis and Mrs. Brandão – was that, in a country facing economic recession, the financial help they received was seen as unjust, other than the fear they would steal people's jobs, given their better qualifications (Almeida, 2014).

Despite this hostility, they managed to integrate into and be accepted by the Portuguese society, and the word “retornado” disappeared from public usage. They became entrepreneurs, founding several businesses (small shops, restaurants, cafes), helping revitalise the Portuguese economy in the wake of the revolution, benefitting from the experience of the more modern and managerial methods they had acquired in Africa. As Mr. Reis told me, as they had fought nature to build a new country in Africa, so they also managed to overcome difficulties in a Portugal burdened by a faltering state apparatus and by the lack of money. They quickly became the best in their field of work (Dacosta, 2013). Their better qualifications helped integration and facilitated social mobility: 11% of them had a university degree, compared to only 2.3% of the Portuguese; only 7% of the *retornados* were

illiterate, while that percentage was 30% for those residing in Portugal (Pires, 2003: 200). These qualifications were instrumental in helping develop the welfare state in Portugal in the early 1980's. In effect, according to the 1981 census, of the *retornados* employed, 10.8% were teachers or professors, 9.54% were doctors and 9.66% were high-level officials (Pires et al., 1987: 133-135). Discrimination (and racism) however, continued for those of African descent, as skin tone continues to determine their negative labelling by the white population.

Despite the relatively fast integration and the official narratives describing the integration of the *retornados* as a success and an example (a narrative also shared by a number of researchers, e.g. Pires et al., 1987; Pires, 2003; Dacosta, 2013), this account is strongly rebuked by those who endured the whole process. Instead of *retornados*, they prefer to designate themselves as "refugees," "homeless," and "expropriated," as Mr. Reis, Mrs. Brandão and Mr. Soares told me. The general perception among the *retornados* is that the decolonisation process was hastily and poorly conducted, and that they were not treated fairly, nor were they protected by the Portuguese authorities.

Mrs. Brandão told me that the decolonisation was certainly not exemplary, as voiced by Portuguese politicians at the time: "They were in a hurry to decolonise. Why? I think the will to become a member of the European Economic Community can explain that hurry." As she mentioned, the white settlers had no idea they would have to abandon Mozambique, especially in hasty and chaotic conditions. Although realising that the independence had become, at some point, inevitable, they believed they could stay there, as all people, regardless of colour or religion,<sup>6</sup> got along very well.

Many blame the Portuguese politicians for the shattering of their lives. Claiming that the Portuguese government did not protect the property or the lives of the Portuguese settlers (as stipulated by the Alvor Agreements, which recognised the independence of Angola), Mr. Reis is convinced that politicians had no intention of doing so, particularly the Minister of Foreign Affairs who negotiated the independence of the colonies, Mário Soares: "the vast majority of the expropriated blame him for everything. He knew the agreements would not be kept and he never intended for that to happen. It was politically motivated. He was pressured into signing the agreement. The West and the USSR wanted the independence of Angola in order to exploit the country. The main motivation of the 25 April Revolution was to give independence to the colonies" (this is what the interviewee said).

Mrs. Brandão also stated that the Portuguese government did not protect the people and their property. My interviewee Ângelo Soares also blamed Mário Soares for the shattering of his world, mentioning the politician's declarations throughout the years<sup>7</sup> and the absence of references to the property of the Portuguese in Mozambique in the Lusaka Agreements (which recognised the country's independence) as evidence.

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<sup>6</sup> As mentioned before, Mozambique had Indian and Muslim populations.

<sup>7</sup> The statement "blacks could throw the whites into the sea" mentioned above is attributed to Mário Soares in an interview he gave to *Der Spiegel* in the 1970s.

Another argument that contradicts the successful integration of the *retornados* was the change in their status: many of the *retornados* were at the top of the social ladder while in the colonies. Upon their return, the money, property and privileges they enjoyed were replaced by a situation in which they depended heavily on the help of others to survive. In 1981, the unemployment rate among the *retornados* was double of that of the Portuguese (Pires, 2000: 194), forcing about 10,000 to emigrate (ibid: 184).

Ana explained that the economic difficulties of the *retornados* in Portugal led her to choose Brazil when she decided to leave Angola: "Some of my relatives had gone to Portugal by then. They were living in pensions, depending on alms from IARN. I was not born to be a beggar. I wanted to build a new life." She and her husband found poorly paid jobs within weeks. Ana stated that for two years, due to their low salaries and the need to take care of their daughters, her grandmother and her parents, her lunch was bread with butter, while for the family dinner she invariably cooked meat that was usually used to feed the dogs.

More excruciating than the loss of their property was the emotional trauma. Only when the independence dates approached did many realise that staying in Africa would be impossible. Needless to say, they had no idea what to expect when arriving as an uncertain future awaited them. A profound feeling of victimhood was thus one of the first forms of trauma associated with the hasty, unprepared departure from their homes, lives and friends. Many had lived in Africa for decades or were born there and realised those were not their homelands anymore. For these reasons, a sense of humiliation, fear, discrimination and injustice prevailed in those early years following their repatriation and can still be ascertained.

Ana's story embodies much of what has been said above. She stated that a large part of the white community was in favour of the independence of Angola. They felt the Portuguese dictatorship was holding back progress in the territory. When they heard of the 25 April Revolution, her family and many others rejoiced. When I asked her if she wanted to return to Angola, she said no: "Angola will never again be that Angola that I knew – simple, beautiful, pleasant to live in, where we could go to Baleizão [an ice cream shop], where there was time to enjoy life."

Mrs. Brandão told me that at the time of repatriation, she was studying at a university in Lisbon. Her parents, who left Mozambique at the last minute, went to live at her house in Portugal. As she stated, Mozambique was a magical land and people would not have built what they built (entire cities, with schools, hospitals, the Cabora Bassa dam) or eradicated all tropical diseases in the colonies if they did not love that land, considering it theirs. She further stressed that "historical truth must be told." Mr. Reis has a similar opinion: the Portuguese were building a country and not exploiting Angola, as other countries. According to him, no other colonising power had built universities in Africa. Hence, he added, colonialism does not have to be a pejorative term. Mr. Soares also told me he and his acquaintances were building a second homeland, which they loved. Mr. Joaquim Pereira de Almeida, born in Mozambique and living in Angola since the age of 9, shares these opinions as well: "the Portuguese colonisation was more humane than the others and culturally different," citing secular intermarriage in Angola as proof.

Some white settlers stayed in the former colonies,<sup>8</sup> to help rebuild the new countries after the colonial war. Many were politically motivated: they thought that Portuguese colonisation had not helped native populations and thus looked to the Portuguese revolution and decolonisation with enthusiasm (Dacosta, 2013). Some even joined the independence movements. This was the case of Ana's uncle (born in Portugal), who was a member of the opposition to Salazar and a member of MPLA. However, many of the whites that stayed were caught up in the fight between political factions in the new countries and thus returned to Portugal disillusioned. These also came to the conclusion that the land in which they had lived did not exist anymore. Mr. Almeida, who became a journalist and worked with Agostinho Neto [Angola's first President] is one such case. He left Angola in 1985 disillusioned with the pressures and blackmail of the authoritarian government. When I asked him if he would like to return to Angola, he said no: "I do not recognise that country anymore. It has nothing to do with what it was, even after the independence. Those days, there were no people living in the streets."

Upon arriving in Portugal, the general perception among the *retornados* was that Portugal was a retrograde country, economically and in terms of mentality (Dacosta, 2013). This was mentioned to me by Mr. Almeida: "Portugal was less developed than I thought. I could see it in the quality of journalistic equipment. Also in my resume; it was better than those of my colleagues in Portugal." The *retornados*, as mentioned above, were more liberal and open-minded, something which reflected in the way they dressed: colourful and less conservative clothing. All my interviewees mentioned these different traits, stressing that the white settlers were more open and relaxed, a characteristic they adopted from the African populations. As Mr. Almeida explained, black people have a *joie de vivre* that became ingrained in the white population.<sup>9</sup> This suggests that *retornados* created a specific identity, differentiating them from the Portuguese.

For these reasons, it is not hard to understand that the *retornados* felt and still feel they do not belong anywhere. Many still feel that Portugal is not their homeland, while those who left Africa as children live in a limbo (Almeida, 2014). Ana told me she feels Angolan and also Portuguese, but not in the same way as she feels Angolan. Mrs. Brandão told me the same – she feels Mozambican and Portuguese adding that one never forgets the place where one was born. Mr. Almeida feels more African than Portuguese: "I talk to people very easily and I like the mixture of cultures." It has also been noted that there is a hereditary trauma, as memories are transmitted from parents to children. Marisa (pseudonym), Ana's daughter, mentioned to me she does not wish to return to Angola. When I asked her why, she told me she remembers the stories her grandmother told her about how wonderful life was in Angola and she therefore does not wish to see how all of that was shattered.

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<sup>8</sup> About 20,000 to 30,000 in Angola alone, according to Mr. Almeida.

<sup>9</sup> This does not mean there was no racism in the colonies. As all my interviewees told me, they knew of stances of mistreatment of black people by whites.

When analysing their websites and testimonies, a profound feeling of *saudade* emerges. It is a Portuguese word that may be translated as “homesickness,” a nostalgia for their homeland – of the landscape, of the happiness, of the human touch, of the warm weather – and, for some, the will and the hope to return to Africa. Ana, Mr. Almeida and Mrs. Brandão also mentioned these aspects, stressing the difficult adaptation to the weather, the lack of space (compared to the vast spaces of Africa), and the coldness of the Portuguese. Mrs. Brandão stressed for several times that her father died with grief and never overcame the loss. Mr. Soares told me he was several times near the border with Mozambique since abandoning the country, but always refused to go back and “visit what cost him so much to build only to be destroyed.”

## Conclusions

Individuals and groups are, by definition, powerless in their relations vis-à-vis political power held by governments. The case of the *retornados* provides a clear example of this predicament. The Portuguese settlers were sent to the African colonies as pawns at the service of the power project of the Portuguese dictatorship, a project that aimed at reinforcing the regime and a nationalistic cultural homogeneity, in the line of Weiner’s (1995) and Soguk’s (1999) understandings. In the process, they became the victims of the ambitions and power projects of not only the Portuguese state but also of the African politicians and the superpowers US and USSR. As my findings suggest, the majority of those *retornados* were ordinary people whose motivations had little or nothing to do with those of the Portuguese authorities. While colonisation certainly presupposes, on the part of the coloniser state, a notion of supremacy, most of the settlers left in search of a better life, some to escape dictatorship, all or nearly all permanently and made Africa their new home, truly falling in love with the land, as my interviewees told me. Upon departure from Portugal, the Portuguese government encouraged them to settle permanently and to invest in their new homelands, thus making the settlers believe they would enjoy a stable and possibly prosperous life.

As the independence dates approached, though, they realised the promises of the Portuguese state were of little value as they hastily abandoned their homes and, especially lost the feeling of security they felt was permanent, shattering their trust in the world, as Zweig (1947) rightfully noticed. According to the accounts of some of my interviewees, the feeling of insecurity was artificially fuelled by foreign powers and the settlers could have remained in the territories, as was the case of some thousands who did so. This discrepancy between perception and factual existence of a menace points to the creation of a power project that looked to the white settlers as disposable “objects.” Regardless of these power projects of foreign powers or of the new African rulers, the traumatic experience of the hasty abandonment can be mainly attributed, as interviewees explained, to a betrayal (one of the main traits pointed out by Edkins (2003), in the case of traumatic events) by the new Portuguese

political elites, whom they see as having abandoned them and failing to protect their lives and properties, as Portuguese citizens which they in fact were. That they were treated as second-class citizens by the Portuguese authorities, the very state that had the obligation to protect them can be attested by the lack of indemnities for the loss of their property. In this sense, the Portuguese state decided to forget – in what was a political decision designed to have fruits in its foreign policy (as Becker, 2014, contends) – its colonial past, focusing on its European future.

Upon arrival in Portugal, they soon found out how their fellow Portuguese citizens also betrayed them, by marginalising, labelling and defaming them as “colonialists” or “fascists” as my interviewees explained. This article has no intention of whitewashing the mistreatment, exploitation or the massacres of many blacks at the hands of the Portuguese, nor does it intend to deny the colonial and racist project of the Portuguese authorities, or contest the legitimacy of the independence wars. What the findings show, however, is that the coloniser-colonised, victim-aggressor dichotomies are quite simplistic in explaining the case of the Portuguese *retornados*. As the findings show, the settlers created a different, unique identity, dissimilar from the Portuguese, as a result of migration to the colonies, incorporating specific traits (perceptions, behaviour, customs, ideas and habits) from black people. This certainly helps explain why they found adaptation to Portugal so difficult. Simplistic narratives cannot equally capture why many white settlers were in favour of independence of the colonies, why some joined the black liberation movements, why they married blacks or why they repeatedly claim to love Africa. In this sense, we might say the trauma they endured was triple fold, not only because of the way they left the African lands, but also because of the way they were received by their fellow citizens and how they could not fit in society because of their different identity. That that identity continues to be revisited and constructed can be seen in the way memories are passed from generation to generation, as Ana’s daughter, Marisa, exemplifies.

We might say that the way they found to overcome stigmatisation and discrimination was to prove their worthiness by means of hard work and economic success in Portugal. The *retornados*’ contribution to building a new country after the revolution confirms Said’s (2000) contention that migrants are instrumental in shaping modern societies. The need to start anew and ensure survival in those first years after repatriation to Portugal (or emigration to other countries) meant that many had no time to mourn their unexpected displacement and loss. What my findings show is that it was the older people – as Mrs. Brandão’s father – who were most affected by the trauma and who did not heal, as Said (2000) referred, as younger people had to rebuild their lives and were more susceptible of adapting faster. The way the *retornados* managed to rebuild their lives, with great difficulties, in some cases, as my findings demonstrate, provides thus proof that the resilient and adaptive capacity of human beings prevails, as Chatty (2010) has pointed out.

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## Grižusieji (*retornados*): trauma ir vietos netektis porevoliucinėje Portugalijoje

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**SANTRAUKA:** Šio straipsnio tikslas – atkreipti dėmesį į trauminę grįžusiųjų (*retornados*) patirtį ir jų naudotas strategijas įveikiant netektį ir išstūmimą. Analizuojama patirtis asmenų, kurie grįžo iš Angolos ir Mozambiko – iš šalių, kuriose gyveno daugiausia (94 proc.) portugalų persikėlėlių. Terminas *retornados* Portugalijoje vartojamas apibūdinti baltiesiems portugalų tautybės asmenims, kurie gyveno Afrikos kolonijose, o paskelbus šių šalių nepriklausomybę 1975 m. pavasarį–rudeni buvo repatrijuoti į Portugaliją. Tikslus grįžusiųjų skaičius nėra žinomas, tačiau manoma, kad jis svyruoja nuo 500 000 iki milijono. Apie 40 proc. grįžusiųjų buvo gimę kolonijose. Šiame straipsnyje aptariami duomenys yra gauti atlikus pusiau struktūruotus interviu su šešiais grįžusiaisiais. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad Portugalijos atvejui būdingi išskirtiniai bruožai, leidžiantys jį išskirti trauminės atminties ir vietos netekties literatūroje. Pirmas išskirtinumas – tai ribos tarp aukos ir engėjo išnykimas, kai kolonistai tapo tos politinės galios, kuri juos naudojo kaip imperialistinės ekspansijos agentus, aukomis. Antras išskirtinumas – tai Portugalijos elito pasirinkimas nesinaudoti grįžusiųjų ištekliais įgyvendinant užsienio politikos tikslus, juos tiesiog *užmirštant*, ypač siekiant Europos ekonominės bendrijos narystės. Trečia – grįžusiųjų padėtis per pastaruosius 41 demokratijos metus netapo vidaus politikos objektu.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** grįžusieji (*retornados*), trauma, vietos netektis, kolonializmas, Portugalija.