

**The retornados and their “roots” in Angola: a
generational perspective on the colonial past and the
post-colonial present**

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Chapter 4: The *retornados* and their “roots” in Angola. A generational perspective on the colonial past and the post-colonial present

A sketch of the field of investigation, Lisbon, May 2013

This year, the Africa Festival, including a celebration of Africa Day, is being commemorated in Portugal throughout the whole month of May.

24 May, in Lisbon, at the *Teatro do Bairro*: I am watching a performance called *The Last Message of Amílcar Cabral to the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde*. Some images from documentary films depicting the Portuguese presence in Africa are being projected in a very dark room. Pictures of a family of Portuguese settlers living in a hut are repeated over and over again—they are lost in the depths of Africa. A message is vigorously hammered home for several minutes by one of the performers, a Cape Verdean who describes himself as a political activist: “Decolonise your minds! Decolonise your minds! Decolonise your minds!” The few spectators are young: a dozen people, including a couple comprising a child of *retornados* and a young Portuguese-Angolan woman.

25 May, *Rossio* Square: The Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, the CPLP, is being celebrated by several hundred people and by associations of migrants from Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé, Angola and Mozambique, as well as some Portuguese families of *retornados*: they are all dancing. On the sidelines of this celebration of an Africa that is simultaneously “authentic” and “Lusophone”, a group of young Afro-descendant activists are denouncing the neo-colonialist ideology of Lusophony and racism in Portugal.

Forty years after the independence of the African colonies, with the repatriation of nearly five hundred thousand *retornados* at the end of what is referred to as the Colonial War, and then followed by postcolonial immigration, a noticeable multiplicity of narratives on various aspects of the historical experience of (de)colonization has emerged in Portuguese society. Critical voices have arisen within civil society, and within the research community. Some want to escape from the illegitimacy and the silences surrounding the topic of decolonization; others want to denounce a post-dictatorship society without memory, or even the racism of postcolonial society.

The following reflection looks at contemporary relationships with a painful past (Stora 2005), within a dual socio-anthropological perspective. On the one hand, the focus of interest is on the social conditions of reconstruction and expression of “memory”; on the other, it takes into account the ways in which traces of the past are mobilized and re-appropriated and may, from an individual perspective, even define existence (Jackson 2013).

The aim is to analyse the plurality of individual and family narratives told by the *retornados*, using a generational perspective: one made up of individuals born in Angola in the decade 1930–40; another made up of their children, also born in Angola, and

repatriated as children or adolescents; and yet another made up of individuals born in Portugal after 1975. This analysis is based on ethnographic research surveys carried out since 2012 in Portugal (Lisbon, Almada, Amadora, Évora, Caldas da Rainha), Angola (Luanda) and Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte) with about thirty individuals and their families, all closely linked to the history of the Portuguese presence in Africa, mainly in Angola.¹ The present study focuses on seven Portuguese settler families that were rooted in Angola for longer than a single generation.² These decolonization migrants arrived in Portugal more often than not without family networks to draw upon; they were also characterized by a large number of racially-mixed marriages, often dating back to before the 1930s (and before the Colonial Act of 1930). This mixed racial heritage is not always phenotypically visible in the third or fourth generations, precisely the people we are interested in here. These family trajectories also illustrate the difficulties and limitations of analysis in terms of “white *retornados*” and “non-white *retornados*”; the latter could also be included in the political category of “white Angolans”, or “Euro-Africans”³. This compels us to question historically-constructed racial stereotypes, that researchers must be careful not to reinforce.

As far as I am aware, Stephen Lubkemann’s research is unique in taking an interest in how the *retornado* population was “internally differentiated” (2002; 2003). He shows how at least three factors—race, class, and strength of family ties in Portugal—“affected the ability of *retornados* to negotiate their social position and identity in Portuguese society” (2003, 76). Using the metaphor of “internal strangers” to designate the *retornados* upon their arrival in Portugal,⁴ he identifies “the salience of the race as a pivotal factor” in their not outgrowing this status of “internal stranger”: “The atrophy of the label of *retornado* in public discourse has not translated into the treatment of this minority as ‘Portuguese’, but paradoxically has resulted in their increasing conflation with other populations of African origin (...)” (2003: 92). Although I have been influenced by Lubkemann’s work, my approach comes from a different perspective. What has attracted my attention is the question of the relationship to the past, and the constant

¹ This research, which was initiated as part of the FCT postdoctoral project “Legados contemporâneos do colonialismo na sociedade portuguesa pelo prisma das migrações” (SFRH/BPD/72232/2010), is part of a larger project, “Disrupted Histories, Recovered Past” (2016–2019), jointly developed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Care for the Future section (Swindon, UK), and the Laboratoire d’excellence (Labex), “Passés dans le Présent” section (Université de Nanterre), directed by Sian Sullivan (Bath Spa University) and Michèle Baussant (CNRS).

² Quoting Gerald Bender (1978), Lubkemann suggests that 30% of the European population in Angola extends back more than one generation (2003, 79). The number of “*retornados* of African descent” who arrived in Portugal between 1975 and 1981 has been estimated at between 25,000 and 35,000 (Baganha and Gois 1998–1999, 260): “a figure possibly amplified if we consider the fact that many of those of mixed racial descent would be likely to be classified as ‘black’ at least in terms of the way they would be treated in everyday interaction within Portuguese society” (Lubkemann 2003, 89). This category of “*retornados* of African descent” is problematic because it refers to socio-historical realities of (de)colonization which are diverse.

³ “(...) a significant number of mixed-race people joined Euro-African nationalist movements. They were mainly the children of colonists (usually the children of white fathers and mixed-race or black mothers) who, because of their fundamentally European background and socialisation, were more integrated into the social stratum of the coloniser (white) than into the social stratum of the colonised population (black)” (Pimenta 2008, 19); see also Messiant (2006).

⁴ “(...) the fact that for *retornados* the grounds for exclusion as ‘internal strangers’ were ‘performative’ rather than ‘essentialized’ — seen as the product of voluntary choices rather than inherent essences — opened up the possibility of challenging this status over time through counter-performances that could reestablish their public commitment to community and family” (Lubkemann 2003, 84).

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updating of links with the “lost territory”. Through the “returnings”⁵ to Angola that are happening today in the context of professional projects, returns that also take the form of journeys of memory and of identity (Dos Santos 2016; 2017a), the research reveals a continuity in the present and in the future of the *retornado* past, at both the individual (descendant) and social levels.⁶

These “returnings” are also sometimes detours. Indeed, in Portugal some of these youthful Portuguese⁷ realize that the society that they live in is fractured by its colonial past. This raises the question for some of these children of former “internal strangers” (Lubkemann 2003) in Portuguese society, of where do they belong, and of their identification with the “outsiders” of today—those who have arrived since the 1980s as immigrant labourers (Machado 1994; 1997) from the former Portuguese colonies.

“We left civilisation behind when we left Angola.”⁸ On the love for Africa and rejection of Portugal: personal narratives of two generations

The memory analysed here is above all the personal and intimate domain of remembrance conjured up in family spaces in the presence of the researcher.⁹ In some cases, this past is shared in particular circumstances, such as *retornado* gatherings, and this draws our attention to the effects that belonging to a collective has on memories preserved by individuals (Lavabre 1994).

At this stage of the research, it is not possible to develop a typology of all the collected life narratives. Such a typology would simultaneously take into account the length of the family’s presence in Angola, the social groups that they belonged to (professional, political) and possible racial classifications, gender, as well as the experience of repatriation—or “exile”¹⁰—and reintegration into Portuguese society. It is possible, however, to classify the narratives by generation, and according to the links maintained or reconstructed with Angola since the repatriation in 1975.

As such, this chapter presents a dialogue between the narratives of two generations, one made up of individuals born in Angola in the decade 1930–40, and the other made up of their children, also born in Angola, and repatriated as children or adolescents.

The impossible Return of the “second-class portuguese”

⁵ The problem of “returning” in connection with the phenomena of migration has given rise to numerous studies in the last ten years (see Markowitz and Stefansson 2004). The scare quotes here are intended to call attention to the fact that the idea of Return cannot be taken as a given, that not everybody understands it in the same sense, and that more in-depth research is needed to fully comprehend these experiences in a postcolonial context. See also Fabbiano 2016.

⁶ Unlike the French *Pieds-Noirs*, for whom the past is not a bearer of continuity (Baussant 2006).

⁷ The categorisation of these individuals is problematic. Some consider themselves to be more Angolan than Portuguese, but in other respects these identity choices vary according to class, phenotype and racial discrimination, living spaces and social interactions with “Luso-Africans” (Machado 1994) or “Afro-descendants” and lived experience, especially the “return” to Angola.

⁸ [*Deixámos a civilização quando partimos de Angola*].

⁹ “Memory” is used here in the sense of narratives and evocations of the past, which should not necessarily be confused with memories of experiences lived or transmitted by individuals (Bloch 1995).

¹⁰ This expression was encountered during the research in Brazil, and was used to express the impossibility of returning to a postrevolutionary Portugal which my interlocutors could not identify with.

The common thread in the stories collected from men and women born in Angola between 1930 and 1940 is above all the chronology of family narratives: the emigration of ancestors—the great-grandparents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—and family ties with and marriages to local black or mixed-race women: “that’s how Angola was made.”¹¹ There is also the question of the vast resources of the territory (diamonds, oil, timber), the multiplicity of possessions that were acquired (houses, businesses, cattle ranches), and the professions practised by each family member. In general, few details are offered about why they were in Angola, or on colonial emigration, and nothing on the living conditions at the “beginning” of their settlement. This shows that links with the colonial metropole were almost non-existent. These narratives relate “ordinary destinies” (Haegel and Lavabre 2010), and in this way, as narratives on genealogical rootedness they constitute a performative statement of territorial legitimacy.

Individuals of this generation represent themselves as protagonists in a collective history that is more about family or community than nation. It is a history of a venerable and natural presence in Africa, which was not supposed to be interrupted, at least not in the way that it happened. Indeed, while the idea of an independent Angola is often mentioned, it is an independence in which the “true men of Angola”, “white Angolans” (Pimenta 2008), would have seized power following the logic of a system of colonial autonomy as in Rhodesia.¹² A comparison with other types of colonization is brought up in the stories. Apartheid South Africa is sometimes mentioned as a contrast to the Portuguese colonial model, which is considered less violent.¹³ There is, however, a criticism of the Portuguese model, namely, the plundering rather than the development of Angola, a theme that is mentioned by mixed-race Portuguese families who stayed on after independence, as well as by some recent Portuguese migrants in Angola (with Angolan roots) (Dos Santos 2016).

For some, who became “second-class Portuguese” for the colonial administration—starting in the 1930s, in the context of a state policy of social and racial discrimination (Messiant 2006)—the feeling of rejection by the metropolis has left its traces. Although not obvious, this feeling is manifested through the expression of a strong sense of belonging in relation to Angola:

(...) a segment of the white population began to believe that it was the object—perhaps even the “victim”—of Portuguese colonialism and no longer one of its agents. As a result, the metropolis came to be seen as “other” by the settlers. Their degree of political identification with Angola increased exponentially, so that they began to build their sense of nationality with their backs turned towards Portugal (Pimenta 2008: 429–430).

¹¹ Interview with a cattle-breeder and trader who was born in Angola, in Sá da Bandeira (which became Lubango after 1975) in the late 1930s (the first city name mentioned is the one used by my interlocutor, a comment that applies to the rest of the text). His mother was the daughter of a mixed couple, “a pure white man” from Douro and a “black woman” [*preta*]. For more on such marriages and the complex character of race relations in Angola, see Barbeitos 1997. The terms *Preto/a* [Black], *Branco/a* [White], and *Mulato/a* [Mullato] are used here as social constructs that are based on the racial stereotypes inherited from colonialism.

¹² For a detailed analysis of Euro-African nationalism in Angola—nationalism in the sense of being anti-colonial and pro-independence—see Pimenta 2008. The comparison with Rhodesia reveals, in the Portuguese model, the very weak political integration of the colonists in the government of the colony.

¹³ See Castelo 1999.

For these families, rooted in Angolan territory for several generations, the return to Portugal was ontologically impossible. The theme of leaving Angola appears often in the stories of these adults, parents of young children in 1975, but not in the narratives of the children themselves (analysed below). The story is gendered: the women describe the loss as associated with the intimate family sphere, with domestic life: “Everything stayed there ... a life!”. In turn, the men meanwhile talk of economic activity: “The year before all blew up we bought cattle in Sá da Bandeira”.¹⁴ The violence of their forced departure from Angola and the exclusion that they experienced before and after 1975 were obstacles that were overcome over time and within the intimacy of the family. The long-term impact on their sense of belonging is an issue that has not yet been sufficiently addressed in the research conducted on *retornados* as a differentiated population. The experience brings back negative memories, a feeling of illegitimacy that is simultaneously social, racial, and to do with citizenship.

In these families, what is evoked is not so much exclusion and loss, but rather an ongoing sense of an origin that has lost its legitimacy. Continuity is constructed through the recollection of memories, and memory building is based on lived and/or transmitted experiences. Social and cultural practices—culinary as well as religious¹⁵—are superimposed on the remembrance of past experience, and (re)constructed in the social context of Portuguese society, linked to the former colonies through the movement of people and cultures—including members of transnational Portuguese families.¹⁶ Memories and practices are shared at regular meetings of *retornados*—for example the “Inseparables of Huíla”¹⁷ which has met every year since 1978, or others which discreetly reproduce African practices of socialisation.¹⁸ Such events constitute social spaces for the construction of a memory of exile, not merely nostalgia for a lost past (Baussant 2002; 2016).

Meetings with relatives who are scattered across different countries offer other opportunities to share memories and to update the past, especially for families—often the same ones—whose members travel between Portugal and Angola and between Portugal and Brazil. They are occasions where the present moment can be brought to mind, recent news from family members who are still in Angola can be shared and the political situation can be discussed. They also provide an opportunity to evoke Angolan customs: traditional ceremonies such as those connected with betrothals [*alambamentos*] or the celebrations and music at funerals. These are examples of a paradoxical fascination with, and an “exoticisation” (Saïd 1978[2005]) of, a culture. It is composed of both a close identification with and a distancing from a country that no longer belongs to them.

¹⁴ See footnote 169.

¹⁵ For research carried out on the *Terreiros* of Candomblé in Lisbon, mentioning the presence of *retornados* among the initiates, see Guillot 2009.

¹⁶ Old settler families exiled in Brazil, Luso-Angolan families that stayed on in Angola after independence and came and went during the civil war, depending on the situation; they sent their children to study in Portugal, and some of them owned houses in both countries.

¹⁷ These were organised by an association with the same name, which officially had 750 members in 2013. Huíla is a province in southern Angola. Originally established in Buçaco, Portugal, the meetings took place for several years in the forest of Caldas de Rainha, Portugal, and lasted for two days, including photographic exhibitions of the Angolan past as well as of recent journeys, communal meals of Angolan *muamba* chicken stew, a Catholic mass, music concerts and dancing.

¹⁸ The regional groupings organised around a *soba* require further ethnographic investigation.

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The moral condemnation of the colonizer that was levelled at the *retornados* in Portugal¹⁹ became explicit in the interviews that were carried out at reunions with relatives who had opted for exile outside Portugal. These narratives were recounted by a multiplicity of voices, and constituted confrontations with a range of experiences, highlighting aspects that were often forgotten when I asked the same interviewees and their children about reintegration into Portuguese society: the collective (negative) imagination around the phenomenon of the *retornados* and the political context of the period, along with their refusal to live in a country that was “in the hands of the communists”.²⁰ The meetings also produced a narrative of an imperial territorial continuity, through comparisons made between Brazil and Angola:

The greenery is the same in Brazil. The air smells the same, the atmosphere, and the smell of nature. It’s the green smell of the plants that you meet when you get off the plane after ten or twelve hours.²¹

This sharing of “sensory experience” (Candau 2000) unites individuals and groups who see themselves as members of the same community, the Portuguese empire which remains present in their imagination (Silvano and Vilar 2015).

Finally, the narrative of loss becomes explicit when the return to Angola is brought to mind. After the end of the civil war in 2002, such journeys became more frequent, especially for members of transnational families who maintained links with the country since independence. These stories evoked “shame... and revulsion” in the face of the “filth and the disorganization”: “This country used to be ours!”²²

“The Portuguese don’t like africa!”: Genealogical rootedness in Africa and the sense of otherness in Portuguese society

Maria Manuela²³ introduced me to her relatives, living in a quiet suburb north of Lisbon, on the occasion of a visit by family members who settled in Brazil after 1975. At that point in the research I had already met Maria Manuela several times, as well as her brother and some mutual friends. All of them had in common the experience of having lived in Angola and having been repatriated to Portugal during their childhood or adolescence.²⁴

¹⁹ Portuguese settlers, in the context of the *Processo Revolucionário em Curso* [Ongoing Revolutionary Process or PREC], were characterised as “agents of colonialism”, and slandered in the predominantly left-wing press as anti-revolutionary reactionaries and minions of colonial oppression. See Lubkemann 2002; Ovalle-Bahamón 2003.

²⁰ An anti-communist military dictatorship was in power in Brazil between 1964 and 1985. One interviewee who was repatriated from Angola in 1975 with his parents when he was eight years old, and then moved to Brazil, explained: “We weren’t fascists, we left for economic reasons.” However, my interviews in Brazil with Portuguese who chose to go into exile instead of “returning” to Portugal, reveal political and economic dimensions entangled in a Brazilian society characterized by an independence that was achieved without decolonization (Cahen and Dos Santos 2018b, 196).

²¹ Statement by a woman born in Angola in the early 1940s to a white father and a mixed-race mother. In 1975, she became a refugee in Brazil with her husband (Interview, Lisbon, June 2013).

²² Idem.

²³ Physiotherapist, born in Angola (Huambo, called Nova Lisboa under colonization) in the early 1960s; her father was a cattle breeder (see footnote 169). She was repatriated to Lisbon as a teenager, and was married to another *retornado* (they later separated).

²⁴ The group consisted of people in their fifties, characterized by a strong endogamy between *retornados*. They practice independent professions: restaurateurs, small traders, paramedics. The social status of their

All the relatives shared long family histories in Africa, across three generations: parents, grandparents and great grandparents. It might perhaps be possible to reconstruct the family history from narrative fragments related to social background and profession—owners of small commercial establishments, teachers, officials in public administration or public companies—but nevertheless, my interviewees rarely had a very clear idea of what their elders did in Africa. Some imagined that the men in their family were diamond smugglers “just like everybody else back then,” but the history of colonization was never made explicit. When I asked them about several generations of their Portuguese family members having lived in Angola, their answers were extremely vague: “those generations were already here for a quite a long time...”²⁵

What is presented about Angola, therefore, is a genealogical memory rooted in the territory. This antiquity is closely linked to the relationships of their male ancestors, Portuguese white men, with African women:

My great-uncles married black women or mixed-race women. On the female side of the [maternal] family, the women always married white men;²⁶

My maternal grandmother wasn't white, she was mixed-race... we were five brothers and sisters and we all had a different colour!²⁷

Such narratives are always the stories of male experience, and further field research is needed—with a focus on the relationship between gender, sexuality and race-mixing—to explore the female subjectivities of women in mixed unions in this specific colonial situation (Stoler 1989).

One of the reasons why Maria Manuela decided to introduce me to her parents, is because she wanted her father to tell me about their *filiação* [affiliation], their ancestral connection to Queen Ginga, who lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁸ Recounting this kind of narrative shows how important it is for these individuals to be able to demonstrate the antiquity of the presence of their ancestors on Angolan and even African soil (one of the grandmothers was from São Tomé), as well as the social prestige enjoyed by some of them. In this regard, Arlindo Barbeitos reminds us that this type of relation developed before the contemporary colonial regime dating back to the Angola of the slave trade, corresponded to “the way the old mixed-race and black bourgeoisie, and sometimes even the ‘traditional’ aristocracy, integrated or absorbed foreign influences that they thought were worth their attention” (Barbeitos 1997, 310). In other words, if mixed marriages are to be analysed from a viewpoint that allows for the interweaving of power relations in a given “colonial situation” (Balandier 1951), it cannot be reduced

parents and grandparents in the colony was heterogeneous and ranged from trader to colonial administrator, an aspect that needs to be considered when analysing the loss of social status experienced as a result of repatriation, a feeling that seems to be stronger among individuals who belonged to the colonial elites. Unlike the *retornados* of African descent described by Lubkemann, these families did not live (or did so only temporarily) in the segregated suburbs [*bairros sociais*] of the great metropolis of Lisbon.

²⁵ Fernando, about fifty years old, repatriated from Angola (Luanda) at the age of 14 in 1975; the mother and the maternal grandmother were both born in Angola.

²⁶ Idem.

²⁷ João Luís, about fifty years old, repatriated from Angola (Luanda) at the age of 11 in 1975. He is a grandson of anti-Salazar republicans, the son of a colonial administrator and a woman from the Cape Verdean elite (she died before 1975 and is buried in Angola).

²⁸ See Heywood 2017.

simply to the relations of domination between the colonizer and the colonized.²⁹ However miscegenation is here deployed within an ideological discourse on the non-racism of the Portuguese: in this case, the non-racism of their forbears. João Luís refers to the concept of lusotropicalism to explain to me how Portuguese colonialism differed from other kinds of colonialism (Castelo 1999). Even today, for the generation of children of the *retornados* who were born in Angola, this rhetoric of miscegenation constitutes an internalized narrative of colonial domination.

All of the interviewees speak of a “love for Africa”, as a sentiment that will make them distinct from other Portuguese: “The Portuguese don’t like Africa! (...) We had to make unbelievable efforts in order to fit in here”.³⁰ The distinction between those who like and those who do not like Africa reveals an othering—“we” who carry within us some element of Africanness, and “them” —which is strongly felt in these narratives. This othering is linked to a cultural identity, a self-identification—or better, the construction of such an identification—with Africa. Although miscegenation is by no means always visible in the phenotype—and is subjective in any case—they do not describe themselves as mixed race and miscegenation is never mentioned as an explanatory factor for any personal experience of racial discrimination within Portuguese society. They consider the latter, incidentally, to be characterized more by a “racism of class” than by a racism of colour.

The feeling of otherness is expressed through the categories used for self-identification: “I’m a Portuguese from Angola”, “a white Angolan”, “I’m an Angolan man/woman”. These terms call to mind the location of identity for individuals who believe that they “belong” to different cultures.³¹ It also expresses distancing from Portugal—which “doesn’t like Africa!”—and the validation of the civilizing mission that the families participated in: “We left civilisation behind when we left Angola!”³² This assertion must also be understood in the light of the experience of the urbanized Africa that had been the lived reality of half the *retornados* (Lubkemann 2003, 87) and for whom Portugal in 1975 was a “poor”, “grey” country without highways or supermarkets: “There was already a Jumbo³³ in Luanda in 1966!”³⁴ Instances of American products that were banned in Portugal but permitted in Angola (Coca-Cola is a classic example) are often mentioned, as are the freer manners and the lighter censorship. This, however, is never connected to any explicit criticism of the political system of the Salazar-Caetano dictatorship.³⁵

²⁹ This must call our attention to the complexity of the issue of miscegenation, both as an historically-situated social practice and as an ideology that has taken on diverse forms in the case of the Portuguese colonial empire: see Vale de Almeida 2002; for the Angolan case see Messiant 2006. As pointed out by Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, certain concepts such as hybridity, syncretism, miscegenation, may lose their critical, emancipatory element, when travelling to other contexts (Sanches 2009, 16).

³⁰ João Luís, see footnote 185.

³¹ A kind of “in-between situatedness” that does not always fit into ideas of “miscegenation” characterized by identities or fixed affiliations; see Laplantine and Nouss 2001.

³² João Luís, see footnote 185.

³³ A supermarket chain.

³⁴ João Luís, see footnote 185.

³⁵ Nor are there any detectable traces of political socialization that would be linked to Euro-African nationalism (Pimenta 2008); however, a study of João Luís’s social ties shows that among his friends is the daughter of a historical MPLA activist in exile in Portugal after the events, internal to the MPLA political party, of 1977.

For the individuals who locate their narrative within the long history of the Portuguese presence in Angola, Africa is rarely mentioned as a colonised territory. In the descriptions of social relations, there is no mention at all of a relationship of domination. On the contrary, we see, rather, an emphasis on the closeness of families to their “servants”, and the role played in social assistance to local people by public companies, such as Diamang and others, is often mentioned.

The interviews with Maria Manuela and other individuals of her generation turn away from adult experience in favour of childhood: “It’s hard to leave a country where one had a happy childhood”.³⁶ The photographs that the interviewees showed me illustrate their desire to show positive memories of an ordinary life on ancestral soil, the conquest of which raises no awkward questions. These are images of family togetherness, of camping holidays, of hunting, as well as many images of African landscapes; but these images from family albums make no contribution to the construction of a collective memory that would challenge the nostalgic and acritical attachment to the past (Garraio 2016).

This is also a memory that seems to counterbalance not only the biographical rupture of the forced departure from Angola, but also the family separations that followed. The families are scarred by the many breakups, divorces and separations (both in Angola and after the Return). Many of them left their dead behind, abandoned mortal remains that symbolise their links with Angolan soil: physical traces guarantee that the deceased are always present and connect different places (Lestage 2012). The separation is also geographical in character, as when brothers or sisters decided not to be repatriated to Portugal and instead left for Brazil or South Africa, either directly, or later, after the Return to Portugal. Others moved to Mozambique or Macau in the 1980s and 1990s. These families, scattered in countries that were formerly Portuguese colonies, with transnational links kept up between their members, are building a *Lusotopy* with an imaginary that is inherited from the history of the colonial empire, and which still needs to be investigated (See Cahen and Dos Santos 2018a).

The “Return” journey to Angola and the denunciation of the “Persistence of History”³⁷: the post-1974-75 generation

Since the end of the civil war in 2002, Angola has gradually begun to attract Portuguese investment, and at the same time it has become a preferred emigration destination for qualified Portuguese expatriates (Åkesson 2016; Dos Santos 2016). In addition, the Portuguese who were repatriated in 1975 have sought to renew their ties with Angola, particularly with those family members who stayed on after independence. Economic and trade links have been re-established, taking advantage of kinship ties as well as other connections from colonial times (a former classmate, somebody’s godfather who became a member of the MPLA central committee, and so on). During the 2000s, some Portuguese who were born there tried to acquire Angolan citizenship. These procedures resulted in return trips to birthplaces in order to obtain birth certificates [the *assento de nascimento*] needed to prove the right of “nationality by origin”.³⁸ The process

³⁶ Maria Manuela, see footnote 181.

³⁷ Carvalho and Pina Cabral 2004.

³⁸ This was still possible until February 2016, when a new nationality law was passed that prevented “holders of foreign citizenship and their descendants born in Angola in colonial times from becoming Angolans.” Indeed, “Citizens who are the children of foreigners, born in Angola before independence and

also impacted the younger generation, the children who had been repatriated at a very young age or were born in Portugal after 1975. Angolan citizenship had become desirable because the Angolan labour market provided opportunities for graduates, allowed for free movement of people between the two countries and obviated the need for lengthy procedures to get work permits.

At the beginning of the 2010s, the constant flow of emigration to the former colonies, although small in comparison with labour movements within Europe (Peixoto et al. 2016), attracted intense media coverage in Portugal, at a time when Angolan influence in the public sphere was also increasingly visible. This took the form of massive investment of Angolan capital in Portuguese companies (from 2006–2007) (See Oliveira 2015), the high-profile presence of Angolan elites in Lisbon, and the promotion of Angola as a new *Eldorado* by Portuguese politicians and entrepreneurs with partnerships in the country. These expatriates and migrants belong to a new generation of young graduates who saw a chance to improve their socio-professional mobility by going overseas for a short time. They also saw it as an opportunity for significant economic benefit, and a way of avoiding the subaltern experience with which European migration is associated in the minds of graduates from the Portuguese middle classes (Dos Santos 2016, 37), previously unaffected by structural emigration.

The handful of studies on the presence of Portuguese migrants in Angola—estimated in 2012 at between 130,000 and 150,000 people (Oliveira 2015, 117)—show that social relations between white expatriates and the Angolan black and mixed-race middle class are racialized, and that inequalities between Angolan and Portuguese employees are associated with colonial history, which is to say, with forced labour, suffering and submissiveness (Åkesson 2016, 276).³⁹ These studies shed light on the complexity of these postcolonial power relations, constituted by continuities but also by breaks with the past. This is illustrated by the example of migrants who do not belong to the expatriate elite, and who often live in conditions of great insecurity and vulnerability (Åkesson 2016, 276).

Some of the young migrants and expatriates come from *retornado* families, and for them their presence in Angola has aspects of memory and identity (Dos Santos 2016). It drives their search for material traces of places associated with a past family life, and the reconstruction of intergenerational memories:

When I found the house, it was in good condition, it had been well restored. It was occupied, people were living there... a couple. The wife was a bank manager there in Cuito and the husband was an officer in the army. I saw the house from the outside, I knocked on the door to visit, I had photographs with me ... The husband was out, it was only the wife, and she seemed a bit anxious, she didn't really know what to do. I said that I was born there, that I was curious ... Anyway, she phoned her husband, and he said that now the house belonged to them, and a long time had passed ... I agreed that the house was theirs, I was just curious, that I was born in the house, but he said no, he wouldn't let me come in ... (...)

who have not regularised their situation, may no longer acquire Angolan nationality, and lose their claim from the date for publication of this law" (*Diário da República*, 27 March 2017).

³⁹ See also Oliveira (2015, 120). On the category of "expatriates" in the context of professional mobility from the countries of the Global North to Africa, and the ethno-racialized debate with which it engages see Quashie 2016.

I spoke to them [the parents] once a week, on Sunday evening, and he [the father] answered the telephone and began to talk at length in Umbundu. He always asked where I was living, where I was. At the beginning, I sent lots of photographs by post, and when I went there I showed them photographs of the house when it was my parents' house, as well as of the city and other places where I had been. My father talks with nostalgia, but at the same time he doesn't want to go back. He's old and he knows that this is a lot different to the country that he lived in at that time, it would be a big shock for him to come here nowadays...⁴⁰

Of the interviewees in Luanda who were the children of former settlers, some had roots going back generations, some had been repatriated when they were very young and had no recollections of their Angolan experience, and still others were born in another country, Portugal. These repatriated children do not intend to return to Angola to mourn a country that no longer exists; they belong to a different generation from that of Maria Manuela and her friends. An analysis of the narratives of migration/expatriation of this generation shows that they deploy representations transmitted through family memory, and then appropriate them. Nuno, for example, states that in April 2006 he was the first civil engineer from his company to go to Angola, when the company won construction contracts for public works "at a time when most Portuguese didn't want to go". He was then 32 years old and he explains:

I always heard stories about Angola and I was always very curious, although my ideas were different from what I found when I arrived here ... Because I grew up hearing nice stories about Angola, and because my parents lived here for so many years and spoke so well about Angola, I came with expectations, I planned to stay here for ten years! When I arrived, I saw that it wasn't the way I thought it would be, what I'd heard about; it wasn't that country any more.

Pedro's⁴¹ family was repatriated by the airlift in 1975; they had been in Angola since the early twentieth century, although he does not know the exact date when his maternal great-grandmother emigrated from the Minho region.⁴² The family kept a "memory of the exile" (Baussant 2002) alive, with no plans to return, and participated in annual meetings of *retornados* until the death of his grandmother, in the mid-1990s. Pedro remembers: "I was 11 years old, I had no idea what racism or independence meant... I was 18 or 19 when it all hit me." That was in 2007, when he made his first trip to Angola, accompanying his mother for the first time to his place of birth. Apart from reuniting with a maternal uncle, for his mother the trip offered a chance to complete the task of mourning her father, who had died in an accident and was buried in Angola: "The memories haunted her". At the same time, she began the process of applying for Angolan citizenship, thus making it possible for her son subsequently to acquire citizenship by birthright.

For Pedro, the key element in this trip was his mother's position in relation to her past: "If she had been hankering after the past, I don't know how our relationship would have been..." He speaks of sharing a relationship with Angolan culture and with Angolans

⁴⁰ Nuno is a civil engineer, born in Angola (Cuíto, called Silva Porto under colonialism) in 1974 to parents who were themselves born in the country. He left at the age of nine months and emigrated back to Angola in 2006 (Interview, Luanda, November 2012).

⁴¹ Aged about 30, with a doctorate in history, born in Portugal after 1975. The mother and one grandmother were both born in Angola (Huambo, called Nova Lisboa under colonialism).

⁴² Region in northern Portugal.

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themselves: “We talked in Kimbundu... we ate street food... we discovered local food, not the food that the whites eat: I still can’t eat the food that the *retornados* eat!”⁴³

After a year, Pedro returned to Angola by himself, with a professional contract at a private university in Luanda. He describes this experience as traumatic, revealing a critical attitude towards the behaviour of the Portuguese. His criticism is made up of three elements. The first is their refusal to give up a longing for the past. Pedro emphasises the importance of his mother’s refusal to adopt a nostalgic posture during their earlier return to Angola. Instead, she broke away from that relationship with the past, as the family had relived it at the various meetings of *retornados*. The past is no longer solely associated with an ordinary, happy life lived in Africa, as reflected in the narratives of *retornados*. The past has the political form of a system of colonial oppression, something that is ignored in narratives that implicitly claim that “the empire was a good thing”.

The second element in Pedro’s rejection of colonial continuities is economic, and has to do with the role played by foreigners, including the Portuguese, in the reconstruction of Angola since 2002. Foreigners, including international consulting firms, have participated directly in all the key sectors of the economy. The logic at work is an emphasis on the short-term: the Angolan authorities show almost no interest in technology transfer or the acquisition of knowledge (Oliveira 2015, 115–124). Pedro deplores the “economic predation” engaged in by many Portuguese joint ventures and their employees. He describes a system of individual enrichment based on the wastage of public resources, facilitated by local corruption and by real estate speculation: “The Portuguese take huge amounts of money, millions of dollars!” Pedro could have participated in the system, but he refused, and eventually, warned by his employers, he was forced to return to Portugal.

To these two elements of a refusal to adopt a nostalgic posture, and a critique of economic neo-colonialism, Pedro finally adds the racism of the Portuguese. He recalls his experience at parties where whites are a minority. Single expatriate men assume his complicity in the sharing of degrading, “dehumanizing” remarks about black women: “It’s very common when you enter a place in Luanda, and if you’re the only white man, another white man will come up to you and immediately start up a conversation like that...” He remembers the violence of his emotions when confronted with these racialized social relationships, and the continuation of racial hierarchy. When his cousins⁴⁴ came to visit him at his workplace, a private university, they were denied access to facilities such as bathrooms, the kitchen, and bedrooms that had been allocated to white teachers:

When I tell this story to people from here, they don’t want to hear it. They accept that you would have been traumatized, but by the racism of the blacks who are even more racist than we are!

In Portugal, when expatriates and migrants talk about their experiences, it is quite common to hear about Angolan anti-white racism. The concept is also current in academic

⁴³ For example: *muamba de galinha* (chicken prepared with palm oil and served with manioc flour), a dish that has become very popular in Angola.

⁴⁴ Maternal cousins, the children of relatives who Pedro classifies as “black” or “mixed-race”. They live in Lisbon and came to visit him while on holiday with their grandparents in Huambo (formerly Nova Lisboa, but Pedro uses the post-1975 place names).

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circles, and helps to mask the emergence of the question of race as a public problem in a society where the ideology of Lusotropicalism still retains its power (See Vala, Lopes and Lima 2008).

Is it possible to generalize Pedro's critical attitude to the persistence of these vestiges of colonialism? Narratives from other Portuguese of his generation of expatriates in Angola show awareness of an historicity—a collective meaning attributed to history—that they no longer share. Pedro recalls with astonishment the attitude of one of his colleagues in terms of his empathy for the black population: “He didn't react like a Portuguese, in fact he reacted very well!”

Plurality of memory and “public uses” in Portuguese society

In Portugal, the absence of reflection (a kind of unthinking) on the colonial experience (Lourenço 2014) led to a late emergence of the critical questioning of colonialism, in the academy (Castelo 2005–2006) as elsewhere.⁴⁵ Representations of the colonial past were extremely homogeneous: “Colonialism was not a subject that was discussed in polite society. As a general rule, opinion about of the expansion, the ‘Discoveries’ [*Descobrimentos*] and Portuguese colonialism was positive” (Castelo 2005–2006, 12). After 1974, the Portuguese state played a crucial role in maintaining this persistent and hegemonic historical narrative.⁴⁶ A “politics of the past” (Hartog and Revel 2001)—for example the establishment of the *Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses* [National Commission for the Commemoration of Portuguese Discoveries] in 1986—activated an “expansionist and imperial rhetoric around the reconfiguration of postcolonial identity” (Vale de Almeida 2000, 161). Since the loss of empire, Portugal has reinvented its place in the world through its “diaspora” (See Feldman-Bianco 1995; Caetano da Silva and Dos Santos 2009) and through the construction of a “Lusophone community” based on the idea of a reified human community (Cahen 1997; 2012) and on silence about the common past (Domingos 2016).

The colonial question was a theme in the Portuguese literature of the 1980s, particularly with regard to the Colonial War (See Ribeiro, 2004). However, the real break with the “long period of silence” (Valentim 2005–2006, 38) dates from the late 1990s, when multiple stories by ex-combatants were published.⁴⁷ The emergence from the shadows of a “colonial memory” based on the experiences of *retornados* dates from the 2000s. More inaudible than silent and marked by an illegitimacy of memory (Peralta, Góis and Oliveira 2017), these recollections found an echo in Portuguese society more than thirty years after the end of empire and the repatriation. Thirty years is sufficient time for a generation to reach adulthood. The bearers of memory are most often the children of the *retornados*. The transfer from a private family space to the public sphere was effected by the publication of numerous novels and biographies describing repatriation by airlift and nostalgia for Africa—“the promised land”—as well as

⁴⁵ “The longevity of the dictatorship explains the weakness of anti-colonial historiography and the relative abundance of a hagiographic historiography of the Portuguese empire” (Castelo 2005–2006, 17).

⁴⁶ The fact that the protagonists of the Revolution of 25 April 1974—the armed forces—had also been the main agents of colonial oppression has contributed to this silence (Castelo 2005–2006, 18).

⁴⁷ On this question, see the work of M. J. Lobo Antunes (2015), anthropologist and daughter of the renowned writer António Lobo Antunes, who highlights the role played by young Portuguese researchers (anthropologists and historians in particular, working on their own personal narratives) in the collection and publication of these memoirs; see also Basto 2017.

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photographic montages posted on the Internet. The establishment of public historical websites and archival blogs shows how the Internet has played a role in publicizing and connecting narratives around the world, in Canada, the United States, Brazil, Australia, Portugal and South Africa. These social networks of memory need to be understood, especially if they are as diverse as one would imagine.⁴⁸

This context of memory is characterized by a homogeneous narrative describing positive aspects of life in Africa. According to Stephen Lubkemann, from the 1990s onwards some *retornados* would have taken on board the rhetoric of a Portuguese post-postcolonial identity that serves to validate their past experiences (Lubkemann 2002). Such narratives of nostalgia may have been associated implicitly with a condemnation of decolonization (Castelo 2005–2006), but above all they constitute an acritical and even ahistorical discourse: narratives of daily life in an ordinary context.

A break in the historicity of the Portuguese colonial and imperial past seems to have been slowly taking place in Portuguese society since the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It is apparent in literature,⁴⁹ documentary film⁵⁰ and the performing arts, in dialogue with researchers in the social sciences and humanities.⁵¹ The break demonstrates the specific role played by the post-memory generation (Hirsch 1997), those who did not experience dictatorship, colonialism, the loss of empire, and the Return.⁵² For them, the connection with the past does not happen through memory but through imagination, articulating visions that are both intimate and distanced from the past. This is a post-memory of (de)colonization and return that is revisited via present experience, as in the case of Pedro.

These stories, both public and private, contribute to the building of a critical perspective towards the past, and reveal a “negative memory” (Rouso 1987) that has been “buried” (Basto 2012, 37). They demonstrate that a “taboo is beginning to fracture, to do with Portugal’s relationship with its former colonies, the absence of any work on memory, on responsibility, on the political system that kept colonialism alive” (Basto 2012, 37). These narratives also pose questions on how to live together in the present, in a fractured post-colonial society, in which a hegemonic historical narrative has silenced in public space a plurality of social memories (Dos Santos 2017b).

⁴⁸ We will have to understand an appropriation of the past through identity in a post-imperial and diasporic context, if it enters into dialogue with processes of trans-nationalization of Portuguese culture and identity in the rest of the Portuguese diaspora, and its successive generations. See Dos Santos 2015.

⁴⁹ Among the most noteworthy examples are Figueiredo 2009 and Cardoso 2011.

⁵⁰ For an analysis of some of examples from this body of work, see Basto 2012. See also Part IV of the book.

⁵¹ See Elsa Peralta on the exhibition entitled *Retornar* [Returning], organized in Lisbon in 2015–2016 (Peralta, Góis, and Oliveira 2017).

⁵² The concept of post-memory is deployed in the field of postcolonial studies by scholars working on these issues, notably Maria Calafate Ribeiro in the projects that she coordinated: *Children of the Colonial Wars: Postmemory and Representations* (2007–2011, FCT, Portugal); *Memoirs: Children of Empires and European Post-memories* (from 2015 to 2020, ERC, H2020); see Ribeiro and Ribeiro 2018a; 2018b. Academically speaking, in Portugal the concept of social memory (Halbwachs 1925 [1994]; 1950 [1997]) has been under-utilized, and oral history has been undervalued (see Oliveira 2010) until this period (Dos Santos 2017b).

At present, it seems to have become ever more acceptable “to campaign for memories” (Hourcade 2015)⁵³ and to question the diversity of actors—the State, associations, spokespersons and memory entrepreneurs—as well as the ways in which these memorial projects are understood. In 2005, thirty years after the end of the dictatorship, the civil society movement Don’t Wipe Out Memory! [*Não apaguem a Memória!*]⁵⁴ was set up. Various memories, related to both contemporary and ancient history, all begin to assert themselves: slavery, dictatorship, colonization/decolonization, the colonial war/desertion and exile, emigration. Alongside these political claims to memory we find, more often than not, demands for public recognition (Gensburger and Lefranc 2017), and the founding of museums. An example is the establishment in 2015 of the *Museu do Aljube: Resistência e Liberdade* [Museum of the Resistance and Liberty], which is “dedicated to the history and memory of the struggle against the dictatorship and in recognition of the resistance in the name of freedom and democracy”⁵⁵. The museum is housed within the walls of a prison in Lisbon where opponents of the dictatorship were imprisoned and tortured. Other municipal and national museum projects have been announced: a Resistance Museum in the old political prison at Peniche; a Discoveries Museum in Lisbon, provoking controversy about what it is to be called;⁵⁶ as well as a memorial to slavery. This last is supported by the claims of Afro-descendant people, who denounce the racial discrimination that is the heritage of slavery and the colonial past, the invisibility of black people in Portuguese society, and institutional racism.⁵⁷

The phenomenon of a “return” to recent painful memories, has been observed in many countries after periods of latency lasting thirty to forty years (Stora 2005). The Portuguese case shows us how the political positioning of the post-1975 generation—post-dictatorship, post-colonization, post-war, post-repatriation—has allowed a critical distancing to emerge in relation to the “persistences of history” (Carvalho and Pina-Cabral 2004). In the families of the former *retornados*, the plurality of memories, which go beyond the affirmation of a nostalgic Africanness, and the links with the former colonies through ongoing personal and cultural exchanges, demonstrate that some children of *retornados* are not merely “passive recipients of a legacy from the past” (De L’Estoile 2008, 268). Is it possible that what we are seeing here is the disappearance of the idea of a “competition among victims” (Chaumont 1997) and a struggle over memory (Lapierre 2011) among the descendants of the former colonizers and the descendants of those who were colonized?

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⁵³ The concept of memory is both a category of analysis and a political category mobilized by the individuals and social groups on which we work (Lavabre 2000).

⁵⁴ “... the intention is to contribute to the promotion of public and collective memory about the reality of the struggle against the fascist and colonialist regime of the Estado Novo, for freedom and democracy in Portugal, and committing it to the safety of the places of memory” (Castelo 2005–2006, 14).

⁵⁵ <https://www.museudoaljube.pt> (21 March 2018)

⁵⁶ <http://expresso.sapo.pt/cultura/2018-04-12-A-controversia-sobre-um-Museu-que-ainda-nao-existe.-Descobertas-ou-Expansao-#gs.kONP0ok>: “(...) in Portugal debates about Portuguese colonial history have intensified, and groups of people of African descent have emerged demanding a historical pluralism in which the academy, journalism, and civil society would begin to speak more critically and more openly. It is also important that a new museum should also reflect this wealth of problematizations.” (7 May 2018)

⁵⁷ The *Associação Djass* was established in Lisbon on 25 May 2016.

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