

**The *Retornados* in the Portuguese
Political Discourse: The Case
of the Solemn Parliamentary
Commemorations of 25 April
(1977–2023)**

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The *Retornados* in the Portuguese Political Discourse: The Case of the Solemn Parliamentary Commemorations of 25 April (1977–2023)

This article examines the way in which the repatriated population from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa is integrated into the speeches delivered during the solemn parliamentary commemorations of the Carnation Revolution. Based on a systematic analysis of the speeches of all the Portuguese political actors who took part in the commemorations of 25 April, from 1977, the date of the first session to be organised, until 2023, the aim of this article is to determine whether some periods stand out in terms of the frequency with which the former settlers are mentioned, and whether some political actors stand out from their peers in raising these issues. It also seeks to understand whether the emergence or disappearance of political actors over the years has influenced the way in which the issue of the *retornados* has been addressed during the parliamentary commemorations.

Keywords: *Retornados*; Carnation Revolution; parliamentary commemorations; political discourse.

Os *retornados* no discurso político em Portugal: o caso das sessões solenes do 25 de Abril no parlamento (1977-2023)

Este artigo analisa a forma como a população repatriada das antigas colónias portuguesas em África é integrada nos discursos proferidos durante as comemorações parlamentares da Revolução dos Cravos de abril de 1974. A partir de uma análise sistemática dos discursos de todos os intervenientes políticos portugueses que participaram nas comemorações do 25 de Abril, desde 1977, data da primeira sessão organizada, até 2023, pretende-se perceber se alguns períodos se destacam pela frequência com que os antigos colonos são mencionados e se alguns atores políticos se distinguem dos seus pares na evocação destas questões. Procura-se também perceber se o aparecimento ou desaparecimento de atores políticos ao longo dos anos influenciou a forma como a questão dos retornados foi abordada nas comemorações parlamentares.


Palavras-chave: retornados; Revolução dos Cravos; comemorações parlamentares; discurso político.

The Retornados in the Portuguese Political Discourse: The Case of the Solemn Parliamentary Commemorations of 25 April (1977–2023)

por Morgane Delaunay*

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Carnation Revolution, Portuguese settlers, most of whom had been living in Angola and Mozambique, arrived in Portugal or, in some cases, returned. While previous academic work has looked at the returnees' views on the Revolution and the process of decolonisation, the way in which political parties debated this migration in Parliament, and the reactions of the parties to their installation in Portugal,¹ the way in which this population was and is integrated into the political narrative and memory of 25 April remains to be studied.

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¹ Morgane Delaunay, “The *Jornal O Retornado*’s Readers and the Construction of a Narrative of the Return from Africa (1975–1976)”, in *The Retornados from Portuguese Colonies in Africa: Narrative, Memory, and History*, ed. Elsa Peralta (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2021), 61-77; Morgane Delaunay, “La question des *retornados* dans le débat parlementaire portugais (1975-1976)”, *Portuguese Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (2019): 177-199; Morgane Delaunay, *Les retornados. Accueil et intégration des rapatriés de la décolonisation portugaise* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2024); João Pedro George, *O Império às Costas. Retornados, Racismo e Pós-Colonialismo* (Lisboa: Objectiva, 2023); Christoph Kalter, *Postcolonial People. The Return from Africa and the Remaking of Portugal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

As part of the wider historiographical debate on the memory of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal,² this article aims to answer the following question: how has this migratory phenomenon, which is itself directly linked to the Carnation Revolution, been addressed during the highly symbolic occasions that are the solemn commemorations in the Portuguese Parliament over the last five decades?

To this end, the speeches of the representatives of the political parties, the Speaker and the President of the Portuguese Republic will be analysed, covering the period from 1977, the year of the first commemorative session ever held in Parliament, to 2023, two chronological milestones in which the *retornados* were indeed mentioned in different speeches. The aim of this article is to determine whether some periods stand out in terms of the frequency with which the former settlers are mentioned, and whether some political actors stand out from their peers in raising these issues. It also seeks to understand whether the emergence or disappearance of political actors over the years has influenced the way in which the *retornados* question was addressed during the parliamentary celebrations.

Based on the idea that “the centrality of 25 April has made it a particularly sensitive thermometer of the mutations that the country has undergone in the last four decades, as it has been the target of multiple, contradictory and sometimes truncated evocations”,³ this diachronic analysis seeks to contribute to an understanding of how fluctuating the political memory of the Portuguese Revolution has been, while also contributing to the construction of the history of the *retornados*.

A Note on Methodology and Corpus

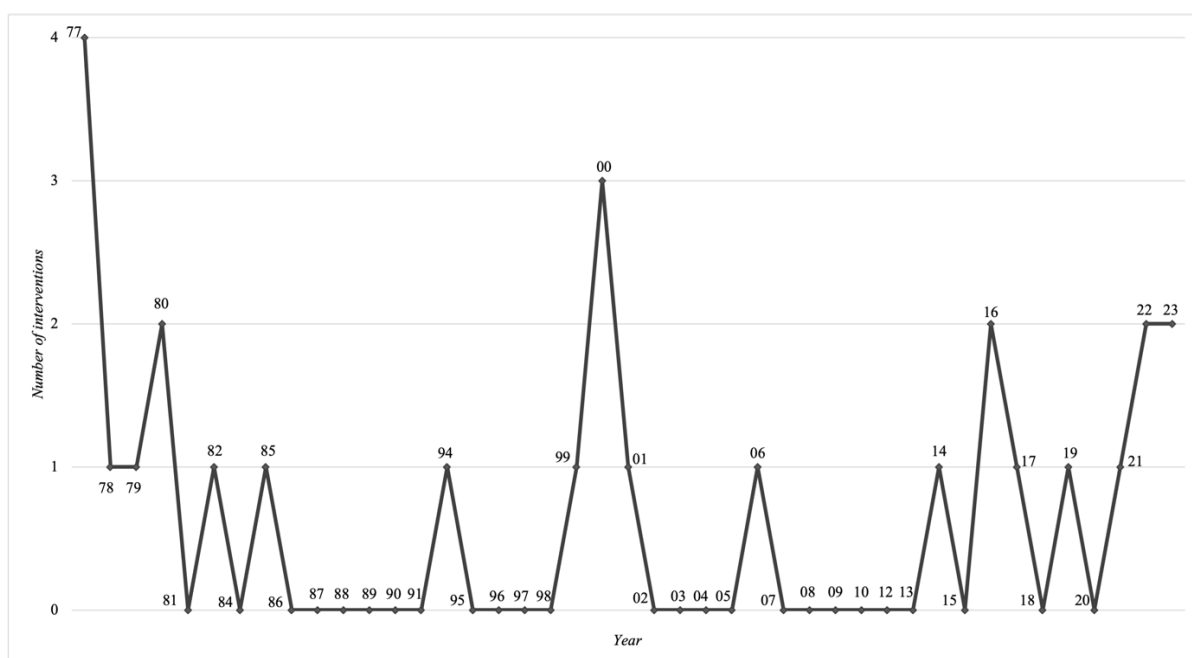
The first parliamentary ceremonial commemoration took place on 25 April 1977, three years after the Carnation Revolution, due to the fact that on

2 See Manuel Loff, “Estado, democracia e memória: políticas públicas e batalhas pela memória da ditadura portuguesa (1974-2014)”, in *Ditaduras e Revolução. Democracia e Políticas da Memória*, ed. Manuel Loff, Luciana Soutelo and Filipe Piedade (Coimbra: Almedina, 2014), 23-144; Miguel Cardina, “Memórias amnésicas? Nação, discurso político e representações do passado colonial”, *Sociedade, Autoridade e Pós-Memórias* 17 (2016): 31-42.

3 Cardina, “Memórias amnésicas?”, 35.

25 April 1975 and 25 April 1976 the first democratic elections since the fall of the New State regime were held, the first to elect the Constituent Assembly and the second to elect the first Assembly of the Republic.

This article is based on a systematic analysis of all the speeches made by the Portuguese political actors who took part in the commemorative ceremonies in Parliament, from 1977 to 2023.⁴ A total of 353 speeches have therefore been read and analysed,⁵ spread over the 43 solemn commemorations that took place until 2023.⁶ Out of this total, 23 directly mentioned the *retornados*, sometimes on several occasion during the same intervention. Keeping in mind that “modern



Chronology of direct and indirect mentions of the *retornados* during the parliamentary commemoration of 25 April 1974 (1977–2023)

4 The speeches that were made by foreign representatives were not taken into account.

5 The decision was made to read all the speeches in their totality, in order to avoid to potentially missing mentions of the repatriated population that would not use the terms of ‘retornados’, ‘displaced’, ‘refugees’ or ‘repatriated population’, which are the more commonly used terms.

6 The commemorations were cancelled on four occasions: in 1983, due to the general elections of 25 April; in 1992, after President Mário Soares decided to hold the official commemoration in the Belém area; in 1993, due to a boycott by journalists working in Parliament; and in 2011, following the dissolution of the Assembly on 7 April. “25 de Abril. As quatro vezes que a sessão solene falhou na AR em 44 anos”, *Diário de Notícias*, 24 April 2020, <https://www.dn.pt/pais/celebracao-sem-desfile-mas-com-sessao-solene-que-ja-falhou-4-vezes-em-44-anos-12111427.html>

politicians not always speak in straightforward ways”,⁷ in four other occasions, it can be assumed, given the context, as well as the terms used by the speakers, that the former colonists were mentioned, albeit indirectly. These 27 mentions took place during 18 different parliamentary sessions of commemoration.

Six of these interventions – in 1977, 1985, 1999, 2000, 2006 and 2016 – were made by MPs from the Democrat and Social Centre-Popular Party (CDS-PP), which until the general elections of 6 October 2019 and the entry into Parliament of the far-right party Chega was the most right-wing party on the Portuguese political spectrum with parliamentary representation. In second place is the Socialist Party (PS), with four mentions, in 1979, 1994, 2000 and 2017, and in third place is Chega (CH), with two interventions, in 2022 and 2023, followed by the ASDI – Independent Social Democratic Action – with a single mention in 1982.

		Speaker								
		ASDI	CDS-PP	CH	PCP	PS	PSD	UDP	Speaker	PR ⁸
Year of interventions	1982	1977; 1985; 1999; 2000; 2006; 2016	2022; 2023	1977 (indirectly)	1979; 1994; 2000; 2017	1977 (indirectly); 2000 (indirectly)	1978 (indirectly)	1977 (PS); 1980 (PSD); 2001 (PS); 2022 (PS)	1980; 2014 (PSD); 2016; 2019; 2021; 2023	
Number of interventions	1	6	2	1	4	2	1	4	6	

Speeches that, directly or indirectly, mentioned the retornados, by speaker (1977–2023)

7 Michael Billig and Cristina Marinho, *The Politics and Rhetoric of Commemoration. How the Portuguese Parliament Celebrates the 1974 Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 195.

8 In 1980, the President of the Republic was António Ramalho Eanes, elected with no party label. The same situation occurred in 2016 with the election as head of state of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, a former deputy and minister of the Social Democrat Party PPD/PSD, of which he was president between 1996 and 1999.

In terms of indirect mentions, the Social Democrat Party (PSD) made two, in 1977 and 2000, while the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Popular Democratic Union (UDP) indirectly mentioned the *retornados* in 1977 and 1978 respectively.

Finally, between 1977 and 2023, the *retornados* were mentioned in four speeches of the Speaker – 1977, 1980, 2001 and 2022 – and in six interventions by the President of the Portuguese Republic (PR), in 1980, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2021 and 2023.

The *Retornados* within the First Commemorations of 25 April 1974 (1977–1982)

When the first solemn commemoration of the Revolution took place in 1977, the *retornados* were still a hot topic. While the vast majority had arrived in the summer and autumn of 1975, during the airlift organised by the authorities with the help of the international community, in February 1976 11,000 returnees from what was then South West Africa, now Namibia, where they had fled from Angola in 1975, landed in the former metropolis,⁹ and it is estimated that nearly 73,000 new arrivals from the former African colonies were recorded between February and August 1977.¹⁰ Also, in April 1977, the IARN (*Instituto de Apoio ao Retorno de Nacionais*) created in March 1975 to deal with the issue of the return of Portuguese emigrants from the former colonies and other countries, was still operating, with, for instance, more than 32,000 *retornados* being housed by the authorities at the end of 1977.¹¹ The Commissariat for the Displaced People (*Comissariado para os Desalojados*), created in September 1976, was implementing measures, particularly aimed at the economic integration of the returnees.¹² Unsurprisingly, between 1977 and 1982, that is to say, one year after the disappearance of the IARN, the *retornados* were mentioned directly on

9 Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), *Relatório de Actividades do IARN*, 14-15.

10 Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 94.

11 AHU, *Relatório*, 198. On the housing policy, see Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 149-176, and Kalter, *Postcolonial People*, 100-177.

12 See Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 177-206.

six occasions, and possibly indirectly on three others, 1981 being the only year where they were not mentioned.¹³

The first two speeches to directly mention the former settlers came from the CDS MP Sá Machado, and from the Speaker, the socialist Vasco da Gama Fernandes. Although both speakers expressed a similar vision, embedded with lusotropicalism,¹⁴ of the role played by Portugal and its people throughout history, “a people that has more than once been able to decisively influence the destinies of the world”,¹⁵ a country “that has given new worlds to our common civilisation”,¹⁶ the issue of *retornados*, however, was addressed in a different way.

Sá Machado began his speech by acknowledging the victories of the Portuguese Revolution, but he was quick to point out the “deviations” that had “perverted” it. While applauding the independence of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, he also mentioned the “bitterness of the victims of decolonisation”, that is to say, the *retornados*, a bitterness fuelled by the “deep anguish” that he said surrounded Portuguese society as a whole.¹⁷ Since the arrival of the returnees, the CDS had adopted a language similar to that of the *retornados* themselves. This was the case, for example, during the parliamentary debates between June 1975 and the end of 1976, when CDS MPs, as well as some PPD/PSD MPs, had already presented the returnees as victims of the decolonisation process,¹⁸ which was, and still is, a key element of some of this population’s discourse.¹⁹ The use of these same linguistic

13 1977: 2 direct mentions by the CDS and the socialist Speaker, and 2 indirect mentions by the PCP and the PSD. 1978: 1 indirect mention by UDP. 1979: 1 direct mention by PS. 1980: 2 direct mentions by PSD Speaker and by the President of the Republic. 1982: 1 direct mention by ASDI.

14 As recently summarised by Miguel Cardina, “Lusotropicalism presupposes a harmonious relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, producing a fruitful cultural interpenetration. According to this conception, the specificity of Portuguese colonialism stemmed from the roots of Catholicism in Portugal and the broth of miscegenation that forged the country”. The author uses the expression of “lusotropical patriotism”. Miguel Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória. Colonialismo, Guerra e Descolonização no Portugal Contemporâneo* (Lisboa: Tinta da china, 2023), 28-30.

15 Sá Machado, *Diário da Assembleia da República (DAR)*, 26 April 1977, 3363.

16 Vasco da Gama Fernandes, *DAR*, 26 April 1977, 3369.

17 Sá Machado, *DAR*, 3363.

18 Delaunay, “La question des *retornados* dans le débat parlementaire portugais”, 186.

19 Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 210-219.

elements has led the CDS to be accused on several occasions of using *retornados* solely for electoral purposes.²⁰

In his speech, Sá Machado mentioned them on a second occasion, in a list of grievances against the 1st Constitutional Government led by the Socialist Mário Soares,²¹ accusing it of not dealing quickly enough with the “problems of the displaced people”.²² As an opposition party, criticising the government’s action towards the returnees was a way of directly criticising the government and, by extension, the Socialist Party, with which, however, the CDS would form a short-lived coalition the following year.²³

In the socialist Speaker’s speech, the “poignant problem of the return of our African and Asian compatriots” was presented as an additional challenge that contributed to Portugal’s post-revolutionary economic difficulties. The *retornados* are referred to as “African and Asian compatriots” to emphasise their belonging to the Portuguese nation, to the national body, as Portuguese citizens with full rights. Since their arrival, the authorities had constantly insisted that they were “brothers and sisters” in need of national solidarity on behalf of Portuguese society as a whole,²⁴ while the *retornados* themselves had asserted their “portugality” and criticised the way in which they had been received by their compatriots.²⁵ If the repatriated population represented an additional challenge, according to Vasco da Gama Fernandes, the Portuguese people successfully overcame it, proving once again the country’s ability to overcome difficulties:

In the midst of the confusion that seemed to be the
prelude to disaster, we decolonised, clasped the frightened

20 Delaunay “La question des *retornados* dans le débat parlementaire portugais”, 199.

21 This government was in office from 23 July 1976 to 23 January 1978.

22 Sá Machado, *DAR*, 3363.

23 This coalition formed the 2nd Constitutional Government (23 January 1978 – 29 August 1978), following the rejection of a motion of confidence.

24 Delaunay, “La question des *retornados* dans le débat parlementaire portugais”, 193.

25 Elsa Peralta, “Remembering the Return: Personal Narratives of Paradox and Bewilderment”, in *The Retornados from Portuguese Colonies in Africa*, 78-100.

hearts of our compatriots in crisis to our chests, opened the ballot boxes, voted freely, elected the members of the Constituent Assembly, drafted the Constitution, elected the Assembly of the Republic, elected the President of the Republic and legally established our local authorities.²⁶

We can also assume that, in two others interventions, the speakers mentioned the *retornados*, even if indirectly. This is the case of the PCP's speech:

We know that around decolonisation and its bumpy course and painful aspects, [...] a large part of the attacks against the 25th of April, against the men of the 25th of April, against the democratic forces, are concentrated and that resentments and human dramas that need social solutions and not reactionary manoeuvres are miserably exploited.²⁷

Without directly naming them, it is safe to assume that Octávio Pato was referring to the returnees. Indeed, since the first mass arrivals of Portuguese from Angola and Mozambique, the PCP had expressed its fear that the difficulties they were facing could be exploited by the other political parties, as well as by extreme right-wing and reactionary organisations not represented in the Portuguese Parliament.²⁸ Although the party was generally portrayed as seeing the *retornados* only as a reactionary threat, however, it soon drew a distinction between a minority, which it considered to be made up of fascists and die-hard colonialists, and the overwhelming majority, made up of working men and women who were nothing but victims of capitalism and the former colonial regime. Like the CDS, the PS and the PPD/PSD, just before

²⁶ Vasco da Gama Fernandes, *DAR*, 3369.

²⁷ Octávio Pato, *DAR*, 26 April 1977, 3361.

²⁸ Delaunay, "La question des *retornados* dans le débat parlementaire portugais", 192.

the elections of 25 April 1976, the PCP created a separate sector for returnees, the “Organisation of Returnees of the Portuguese Communist Party” to provide assistance to those in need.²⁹

Finally, Barbosa de Melo, a PSD representative, may also have been referring to the *retornados* when he mentioned the “tragic side” of 25 April 1974, adding, however that this was not the place to remember it.³⁰

In the years that followed, the returnees were mentioned less frequently. In 1978, Acácio Barreiros, the MP elected in 1976 for the Marxist party UDP was the only speaker to do so, albeit indirectly, declaring: “[...] today [...] there’s all this reaction around Kaúlza and Sá Carneiro, making appeals, saying that we need to find a leader capable of saving Portugal”.³¹ As mentioned above, political forces on the left of the political spectrum feared that the *retornados* could be manipulated by extreme right-wing organisations. Although the returnees were not directly mentioned in this speech, an intervention that provoked an outcry from the PSD bench, it is known that a section of returnees publicly expressed their support for Kaúlza de Arriaga, as well as for the PSD and its leader, Francisco Sá Carneiro.³²

With the exception of the speech on 25 April 1980 by the PSD Speaker, Leonardo Eugénio Ramos Ribeiro de Almeida, in which he criticised the previous governments for the reintegration process of the civil servants of the former colonial administration,³³ the three other speeches that mentioned the returnees between 1979 and 1982 emphasised the success of their integration. In 1979, after presenting a portrait of Portugal before 25 April 1974, the socialist deputy Herculano Pires enumerated a list of positive aspects of the revolution, including

²⁹ Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 233-235.

³⁰ Barbosa de Melo, *DAR*, 26 April 1977, 3365.

³¹ Acácio Barreiros, *DAR*, 26 April 1978, 2460.

³² This was particularly the case with the *Jornal O Retornado*, a weekly newspaper founded by Angolan returnees in October 1975. Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 232-233; Kalter, *Postcolonial People*. Although a study of the political behaviour of the returnees has yet to be conducted, the results of the first elections demonstrate that the effort made by the far-right to mobilise the *retornados* were a failure. Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire. Decolonization, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 246.

³³ Leonardo Eugénio Ramos Ribeiro de Almeida, *DAR*, 26 April 1980, 1697.

the process of decolonisation, which he presented as the best it could have been given the circumstances in which it took place, as well as the integration of the returnees into Portuguese society and economy, presented as a success. The following year, the decolonisation process was also addressed by the first democratically elected President of the Portuguese Republic, António Ramalho Eanes:

The problems the Portuguese had to solve in this short period were serious and very complex. While other European countries had two decades to carry out their decolonisation programmes, Portugal had to find solutions in just over a year, and had to cope with the considerable impact of integrating hundreds of thousands of displaced people.³⁴

The President makes a comparison with other former colonial powers in order to highlight the exceptional nature of the Portuguese case. Although it is not clear which case he is referring to, given that the European colonial powers only reluctantly accepted the independence of their colonies, and in some cases only after long and violent wars, this statement aims to develop a post-colonial discourse of exceptionality in which the returnees occupy a central place. They are presented as a consequence of hasty decolonisation, as an additional problem to be solved by the authorities, but also as fully integrated into Portuguese society. Two years later, the same ideas were expressed by Jorge Miranda, elected for the ASDI.³⁵ In his speech, he highlighted the fact that, despite the “most complex vicissitudes” that marked the first years of the new Portuguese democracy, “hundreds of thousands of refugees were integrated”, presenting this integration as one of the victories of 25 April 1974.³⁶

34 António Ramalho Eanes, *DAR*, 26 April 1980, 1704.

35 The ASDI was part of the FRS (Socialist and Republican Front) coalition alongside the UEDS (Left Union for Socialist Democracy) and the PS, which won 26.65% of the vote on 5 September 1980, while the AD (Democratic Alliance) coalition between the PSD, the CDS and the Monarchist Popular Party won the parliamentary elections with 44.91% of the vote.

36 Jorge Miranda, *DAR*, 26 April 1982, 3295.

During the first parliamentary commemorations, some interventions focused on the difficulties encountered by the *retornados*, criticising the actions put in place by the different governments, such as in the CDS' and PSD speaker' speeches. At that time, however, the emphasis was on the success of their integration and the fact that Portugal had successfully managed to overcome the additional challenge that their installation represented for the new democracy, a view expressed by the socialists (ASDI and PS), as well as by the first elected President, António Ramalho Eanes.

From the Decolonisation Process to the Thorny Issue of Reparations (1985–2015)

Over the next thirty years, the *retornados* were mentioned directly in only eight interventions, and possibly indirectly in one more.³⁷ One might have thought that returnees would be more likely to be mentioned, especially between 2011 and 2015, when the Portuguese government was led for the first time by a *retornado*, the PSD's Passos Coelho, who appointed four members of his government who were also returnees.³⁸ In reality, during this period, they were mentioned only once, by the PSD's President of the Republic, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, in 2014, at the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the revolution. The most likely explanation for the diminution of mentions since 1985 is that, ten years after their massive arrival in Portugal, the repatriated population was already considered fully integrated into Portuguese society. However, how we will see, it continued to be mentioned during the commemoration of 25 April 1974, including in speeches expressing views on the process of decolonisation.

37 1985: 1 direct mention by CDS. 1994: 1 direct mention by PS. 1999: 1 direct mention by CDS-PP. 2000: 2 direct mentions by CDS-PP and PS, and 1 indirect mention by PSD. 2001: 1 direct mention by the PSD Speaker. 2006: 1 direct mention by CDS-PP. 2014: 1 direct mention by the PSD President of the Republic.

38 During his political campaign, Pedro Passos Coelho presented himself as “the most African of the candidates”, not only because he is a *retornado*, but also because he had a Guinean wife. Christoph Kalter, “Traumatic Loss, Successful Integration. The Agitated and the Soothing Memory of the Return from Portugal's African Empire”, in *The Returnados from Portuguese Colonies in Africa Narrative*, 35-60 and 55.

In 1994, the Socialist MP António Guterres responded to critics who claimed that the Portuguese economy had only grown since 1985 by pointing out that the national economy had grown, even in a context of economic hardship, which Portugal had experienced since 1973. “We all wish that decolonisation had gone better, but it wasn’t easy, it wasn’t possible. It came too late, after 13 years of war”, he said, before going on to list “the loss of the colonial empire and the need to welcome the *retornados*” as some of the economic difficulties Portugal faced after 25 April 1974, difficulties that the country nevertheless managed to overcome.³⁹

Six years later, in 2000, the socialist Helena Roseta also presented her views on the decolonisation carried out by Portugal:

Some argue that 25 April is incomplete. I disagree. In essence, and beyond the ups and downs of a journey that hasn’t been easy, the MFA programme has been fulfilled. Let’s remember the famous three ‘D’s’ that defined it: democratise, develop, decolonise. We have come a long way in each of these three directions. [...] From a colonial country mired in an intractable war, we have become a friendly country, a partner of the new independent [states], the welcoming country of more than 600,000 returnees who have rebuilt their lives here since 1976, contributing to the development and modernisation of our economy.⁴⁰

The Socialist deputy presented a positive assessment of the decolonisation process, focusing on the end of the colonial wars, on the post-colonial relations with the former Portuguese colonies and on the integration of the former settlers, who are portrayed as active agents

³⁹ António Guterres, *DAR*, 26 April 1994, 2065.

⁴⁰ If the numbers presented are the most accurate, it is not the case of the date, given that some *retornados* arrived in 1974, and the majority during the summer and autumn 1975. Helena Roseta, *DAR*, 26 April 2000, 2232-2233.

of modernisation in the economic development of post-*Estado Novo* Portugal.⁴¹

The following year, the socialist Speaker, António de Almeida Santos, himself a *retornado* from Mozambique and the “father” of the decree-law that redefined access to and maintenance of Portuguese citizenship in June 1975,⁴² stressed that the process of decolonisation, which in his opinion “could hardly have been less agonising, conditioned as it was by pressures, if not impositions, military and civil, internal and external, often contradictory and almost always inescapable”, as well as the “return of hundreds of thousands of Portuguese citizens living overseas, who, having lost their property, their jobs, the balance and comfort of their lives, were condemned to start again in despair and from scratch”, were some of the “tensions and conflicts” that marked the period between 25 April 1974 and the adoption of the Portuguese Constitution in April 1976.⁴³ The *retornados* are presented as having suffered the loss of their belongings and ways-of-life as well as having rebuilt their life on their own, not mentioning the policies implemented by the different governments, including those to which the Speaker belonged.⁴⁴

However, socialist MPs were not the only ones to mention the *retornados* and to simultaneously express their views on the decolonisation process. In 2014, on the fortieth anniversary of 25 April, in his first and only speech in which he referred to the *retornados*, the PSD’s President of the Republic, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, highlighted the path that Portugal had taken since the fall of the *Estado Novo* regime and the decolonisation that followed:

41 To present the *retornados* as active agents of development was not new in 2000. Since their arrival, the authorities were of opinion that Portugal should seize the opportunity that represented the installation of a population presented as *entrepreneur* in order to participate in the economic development of democratic Portugal. Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 203-204.

42 This law had a high impact on the way the Portuguese authorities defined the status of *retornado* and the state support the repatriated population could pretend to receive. Elsa Peralta, Morgane Delaunay, and Bruno Góis, “Portuguese (Post-)Imperial Migrations: Race, Citizenship, and Labour”, *Special Issue of Journal of Migration History* 8 (2022): 415-423.

43 António de Almeida Santos, *DAR*, 26 April 2001, 2920-2921.

44 He was part of the first four and the 6th provisional governments, and of the first two constitutional ones.

We have successfully integrated the many thousands of Portuguese who came from the African territories that became independent. Without traumas or complexes, we have built a fraternal alliance with the new countries, affirming the value of Lusophony throughout the world.⁴⁵

In his statement, not only are the returnees presented as having been “successfully integrated” by the Portuguese people, but the colonial past is also presented as having produced neither “traumas” nor “complexes” that could have jeopardised the establishment of post-colonial relations within the framework of Lusophony,⁴⁶ a notion often mobilized in an lusotropicalist aestheticisation of the past.⁴⁷

During the 1999 commemoration, which was attended by the Mozambican President and the President of the People’s Assembly of Guinea-Bissau, CDS deputy Luís Queiró had expressed a much more critical view of the decolonisation process than Sá Machado did in 1977⁴⁸: “We assume that 25 April means different things to different people. We share the 25th of April of freedom, democracy and the welfare project; we don’t share, don’t ask us to share, the 25th of April that didn’t know how to control a decolonisation that should have been an example” he says. But if he criticises some aspects of the Revolution and decolonisation, he also congratulates the Portuguese people for having gone through everything that has happened as a result of it: “And yet we are all here without any tension, decolonising and at the same time receiving a million Portuguese who have returned from the former colonies”, he added.⁴⁹ This statement once again highlights an extraordinary capacity that would characterise the Portuguese people as a whole, a characteristic that has enabled the *retornados*’ “absorption”. Although the figure of one million is not historically correct, it has been used on several

45 Aníbal Cavaco Silva, *DAR*, 26 April 2014, 20-21.

46 On the Lusophony, see for instance Michel Cahen, “Lusitanidade e lusofonia. Considerações conceituais sobre realidades sociais e políticas”, *Plural Pluriel* 7 (2010): 3-17.

47 Nuno Domingos, “Les reconfigurations de la mémoire du colonialisme portugais: récit et esthétisation de l’histoire”, trans. Victor Pereira, *Histoire @ Politique* 29, no. 2 (2016): 41-59.

48 See the previous section.

49 Luís Queiró, *DAR*, 26 April 1995, 2775.

occasions throughout history, as the following pages will show, to emphasise the massive aspect of this migratory phenomenon and, consequently, the miraculous aspect of the returnees' integration.⁵⁰

It was also the CDS that, the following year, introduced to the parliamentary commemorations a new theme related to the *retornados*, in the voice of Basílio Horta. In his speech, he also began by expressing his views on decolonisation:

We celebrate the peace that the 25th of April brought to Portugal, to a Portugal martyred by years of war, and where the honourable memory of heroes and martyrs cannot make us forget the collective sacrifice of those times of separation and pain. But let's not forget that peace will only be complete when we feel it in our own consciences. And that will only happen when the guns fall silent in the African countries that speak our language and have shared our destiny. The victims of a decolonisation made up of abandonments and concessions, the result of compromises for a new sharing of Africa, were not only the Portuguese who lost their lives and property there, but also the Africans, abandoned to the fury of internal and external greed and subjected to powers incapable of respecting the most basic rights of their peoples.⁵¹

Once again, it seems clear that this intervention was an opportunity for the CDS to criticise the process of decolonisation carried out by the Portuguese authorities, expressing an opinion shared by a section of the *retornados*: not only the returnees were victims of this process, but also the African population, a discursive strategy used on different occasions in order to question the validity of the decolonisation, as well as the representativeness of the African liberation movements.⁵²

⁵⁰ It was particularly the case of the *Jornal O Retornado*. Delaunay, "The *Jornal O Retornado*'s Readers", 64.

⁵¹ Basílio Horta, *DAR*, 26 April 2000, 2228.

⁵² Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 119.

However, the novelty of this speech lies in the part in which Basílio Horta lists the areas in which improvements must be made. According to the deputy,

there is unacceptable discrimination even in the status of citizenship. Some, the European Portuguese, have the right to compensation in the event of expropriation and to have their working time counted towards their retirement, while others, the overseas Portuguese, don't have the right to compensation and don't even have their working time counted towards their retirement.⁵³

For the first time, the issue of compensation claims for assets abandoned by former settlers and/or nationalised by the new independent authorities of Angola and Mozambique was raised in Parliament during the commemoration of the Revolution.⁵⁴ The timing is not surprising, given that the CDS had presented a bill on the subject on 15 December 1999,⁵⁵ that was discussed at the plenary session on 26 January 2000 in a very heated and agitated debate, in front of an audience that included a number of *retornados*.⁵⁶

53 Basílio Horta, *DAR*, 2229. The deputy is referring to law 80/77, which article 40 excludes from the beneficiaries of compensation following expropriation procedures, the properties located in the former Portuguese colonies. According to this law, the responsibility for compensating their former Portuguese owners lies with the new independent States. Morgane Delaunay, "Le processus d'intégration des *retornados* au Portugal (1975-2018): analyse comparée avec le cas français des pieds-noirs d'Algérie" (PhD diss., Université Rennes 2 and ISCTE-IUL, 2020), 346. Since then, in 1992, a Support Office for the Dispossessed (GAE) had been created, operating for five years and whose mission was to collect and study the cases presented by the *retornados*, and to negotiate with the Portuguese-speaking countries where the properties were located.

54 Associations had already been created in the 1970's by returnees, in order to claim compensations. Isabel Lourenço, "Retornados – Representações sociais na integração (1974-1979)" (PhD diss., Universidade do Porto, 2018), 274. But the two main associations that still exist today, AEANG and AEMO, were founded in the second half of the 1980s. The 1990s were marked by a series of actions, at the national and international level. Kalter, *Postcolonial People*, 118-257.

55 Bill n.º 52/VIII, *DAR*, 6 January 2000, 177-183.

56 During the debate, Paulo Portas and the CDS group complained that *retornados* were unable to enter the Parliament building, accusing the authorities of deliberately preventing them, prompting these MPs to leave the chamber in protest. *DAR*, 27 January 2000, 1158-1184. A report from the RTP channel on the debate and this incident is available at <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/indemnizacao-para-os-espoliados-do-ultramar-chumbada-na-ar/>

If, on the one hand, the CDS uses its familiar rhetoric in this bill, presenting the arrival of the *retornados* as a “dark page in recent Portuguese history” caused by the “aesthetes of ‘exemplary decolonisation’”,⁵⁷ it is worth noting that it also mentions the different policies implemented in favour of the *retornados*, although highlighting their limitations.⁵⁸ The bill accuses the Portuguese authorities of failing to take into account the “legitimate interests” of the Portuguese living in the overseas territories when negotiating with the liberation movements, and demands that the Portuguese state be held accountable in order to “repair the material damage suffered by these Portuguese citizens, since it will never be able to repair the moral damage”.⁵⁹ To this end, the text proposes the creation of a commission of nine members, including a representative of the two associations of returnees, the Association of the dispossessed of Mozambique (AEMO) and the Association of the dispossessed of Angola (AEANG), which would be responsible for compiling claims and settling the situation through a special fund. Even though the CDS had participated in different governments since the Revolution,⁶⁰ Paulo Portas, the party’s leader, explained that the reason it had chosen to introduce its bill at this time was because 25 years had passed since decolonisation. After the debate, the bill was rejected.⁶¹

Surprisingly, the following year, the CDS did not mention the *retornados* in its 25 April intervention, despite the fact that, the day before, the party had presented another bill on the subject, almost identical to the one rejected the year before, but which was not debated in Parliament until 25 October 2001 when it was, once again, rejected.⁶²

57 On the history of the “exemplary decolonisation” expression, see Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 211-212.

58 The CDS bill presents this migration in two different, and contradictory, ways: as a forced migration, and as a “voluntary exodus”.

59 Bill n.° 52/VIII, 180.

60 2nd Constitutional Government (CG) (23 January 1978 – 29 August 1978); 6th CG (3 January 1980 – 9 January 1981); 7th CG (9 January 1981– 4 September 1981), and 8th CG (4 September 1981 – 9 July 1983).

61 The PS, the PCP, the Greens and the Left Bloc voted against, and the PSD and the CDS voted in favour.

62 Bill n°442/VIII/2. The debate took place in a more peaceful atmosphere than in 2000. The results of the vote were, however, the same as in 2001. *DAR*, 26 October 2001, 575-591.

Between April 2002 and March 2005, the CDS was part of the coalition, with the PSD, that formed the 15th and 16th constitutional governments.⁶³ It was in this context that was created, in February 2005, a working group whose aim was to “analyse and propose solutions”⁶⁴ regarding the returnees’ compensation claims. If these governments had committed to addressing this issue in their manifestos,⁶⁵ the members of this group, however, were never appointed, which prevented it from functioning, as the mandate of the 16th constitutional government ended in March 2005 after the dissolution of Parliament.

It was not until 2006 that this issue returned to the parliamentary commemoration, once again in the person of a representative of the CDS. Telmo Correia, himself married to a woman born in Angola, in 1973,⁶⁶ criticised the decolonisation process, mentioned “mistakes” that had been made and also mentioned the *retornados* who had fled from Angola to what was then South West Africa. But the crux of his argument was that not only did they “had lost everything” as a result of decolonisation, but that they are still being denied “reparations” by the Portuguese authorities, thus reopening the issue of the bills presented by the CDS in 2000 and 2001. Although the MP announced that the CDS would present a new one, there is no empirical evidence that this has happened.

If the *retornados* were less regularly mentioned between 1985 and 2015 than in the previous period, we can highlight various elements. First of all, once again, the CDS is the political party that mentioned the most the returnees, followed, as before, by the PS. In terms of content, the socialists (the PS and the Speaker in 2001) stressed that, although they had represented an additional challenge to the decolo-

63 The 15th CG was in office between 6 March 2002 and 17 July 2004, and the 16th between 17 July 2004 and 12 March 2005.

64 *DAR*, 3 February 2005, 1688-1689.

65 15th CG program, 168, <https://www.historico.portugal.gov.pt/pt/o-governo/arquivo-historico/governos-constitucionais/gc15/programa-do-governo/programa-do-xv-governo-constitucional.aspx>; 16th CG program, 141, <https://www.historico.portugal.gov.pt/pt/o-governo/arquivo-historico/governos-constitucionais/gc16/programa-do-governo/programa-do-xvi-governo-constitucional.aspx>.

66 https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telmo_Correia.

nisation process itself and to the Portuguese economy, they had ended up being fully integrated into Portuguese society and had actively contributed to the economic growth that the country has experienced since then. Of the CDS, it continued to use the rhetoric it had adopted since 1975, presenting the returnees as victims of the decolonisation process, but it also went further, by bringing, in 2000 and 2006, the issue of the reparation claims of part of the repatriated population. Regarding the impact of Coelho's government on the mentions of the returnees during the parliamentary commemorations, it can be explained by the fact that this period coincided with a "rehabilitation of the image of the *retornados* [that] represented a major shift in the country's memory politics since 1974",⁶⁷ resulting in a greater visibility of the repatriated population within Portuguese society.

The (Re)emergence of Political Actors and the *Retornados* (2016–2023)

During the following years, of the nine interventions that, between 2016 and 2023, mentioned the *retornados* during the commemoration of the Revolution, six came from two political actors: President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, elected on 24 January 2016 with 52% of the vote, and then re-elected five years later with 60%, and one of the newest political parties to enter Parliament, in 2019, the far-right Chega.⁶⁸ While Rebelo de Sousa is not a new political actor *per se*, having been a political figure since April 1975, when he was elected to the Constituent Assembly, 2016 marked, however, a new turn in his political journey, as he became the President of the Portuguese Republic. It is also important to highlight that this period has been characterised by the emergence, since 2017, of a new debate on Portugal's colonial past and its current ramifications, a debate that has continued to grow,

67 Elsa Peralta, "Introduction. The History and Memory of the Portuguese Return from Africa", in *The Retornados from Portuguese Colonies in Africa*, 17.

68 2016: 2 direct mentions by CDS-PP and the President of the Republic. 2017: 1 direct mention by PS. 2019: 1 direct mention by the President. 2021: 1 direct mention by the President. 2022: 2 direct mentions by CH and the PS's Speaker. 2023: 2 direct mentions by CH and the President.

especially from 2020, leading to polarized reactions from the different political organisations.⁶⁹

In his first speech during the commemoration of the Revolution as President, in 2016,⁷⁰ Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa described the decolonisation as “belated” and “carried out in the middle of a revolution” to explain why it did not happen without difficulties. He identifies four main challenges that Portugal had to face after 25 April 1974: the decolonisation and democratisation processes, the European integration and the construction of a new economic model, noting that no other former European colonial power had to face so many challenges “almost simultaneously”, before mentioning the “exceptional integration of 700,000 compatriots”.⁷¹ The use of the adjective “exceptional” to compare Portugal with other European countries that also faced decolonisation and the repatriation of settlers is worth highlighting. As well shown by Edward Saïd, “every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort”.⁷² But it also applies to the integration of returnees in the former imperial metropolis. Soon after the arrival of the *pieds-noirs* from Algeria, in the beginning of the 1960’s, the French authorities were keen to declare their integration an incomparable success, when, in the years following the installation of the *retornados*, the Portuguese authorities also developed a similar discourse.⁷³

It was only in 2019 that the *retornados* were mentioned again by the President, in an intervention imbued with lusotropicalist discursive elements.⁷⁴ Listing the achievements made possible by the Revolution,

69 Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória*, 59-84, Delaunay, *Les retornados*, 300.

70 In 2016, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was not the only speaker to mention the former settlers. The CDS once again took the opportunity to criticise the decolonisation process and portray the *retornados* as “those who, without fault or responsibility, as a result of a late and less than exemplary decolonisation, were forced to abandon their affections and possessions and start a new life”. Nuno Magalhães, *DAR*, 26 April 2016, 8.

71 Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 26 April 2016, 21.

72 Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 2003), xxi.

73 Delaunay, “Le processus d’intégration des *retornados* au Portugal”, 446-450.

74 On 25 April 2017, a few days after his statement on Portuguese abolition of slavery during his

such as “education, health, housing, infrastructure, social security”, he stressed that all these improvements had been achieved while Portugal was still in the process of decolonisation. He described this process as “the transformation of a five-century-old colonial empire into a member of communities that were not new in their roots, but in their political, economic and social contours”, before adding: “Of course, in essence, we are still what we have always been – and rightly so! – because it corresponds to our primary vocation: [to be] a platform between cultures, civilisations, oceans and continents.” As during his 2016 speech, the President reiterated the lateness of the decolonisation, which has resulted, in his view, in the “uprooting of so many returnees”.⁷⁵

Two years later, as 2021 marked the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the liberation struggle in Angola, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa seized the occasion to develop his speech around Portugal’s colonial past and the decolonisation wars,⁷⁶ thus becoming the first President

official visit to the highly symbolic Senegalese island of Gorée, presenting Portugal as a precursor of abolition, without mentioning Portugal’s central role in the establishment of the slave trade, statements that prompted a number of prominent figures from academia, arts and civil society to publish an open letter in which they criticised the president’s rewriting of history (“A return to the past in Gorée. Not in our name”, *Diário de Notícias*, 19 April 2017, <https://www.dn.pt/portugal/un-regresso-ao-passado-em-goree-nao-em-nosso-nome-6228800.html>), the President expressed his vision of Portuguese past: “There are two very different ways of loving the nation. One, unfortunately widespread in other societies, is to call oneself a nationalist against the world, against those who are not ours, rejecting, excluding, living in constant fear of everything and everyone. Another, ours, the one that has been at the root of our expansion across oceans and continents, with all the limitations that we know and accept, and of our communities scattered all over the world, is to love the nation with an open heart, with a universal soul, not denying the roots of our identity, but knowing that they were made [...] from a sum of Greek, Roman, Phoenician, Lusitanian, Germanic, Celtic, Moorish, Jewish and later African, Asian and American cultural traits, among others. A patriotic nationalism with a universal vocation, not an egocentric nationalism that clings to a supposed past, recreated because it isn’t real, and incapable of facing the future” (Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 26 April 2017, 19). If Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa mentioned “all the limitations” of Portugal’s imperial past, a gentle euphemism to name the wrongs of that past, and presenting the benefits of “patriotic nationalism”, whose lusotropicalist ascent is easily recognisable, the following year he did not address the colonial past, decolonisation or the repatriates, even if he was, two months before, in February, the first Portuguese President to go on the site of the memorial of the massacre of Batepá that took place in São Tomé and Príncipe in 1953, where he recognised the “good and the bad” of Portugal’s history. Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória*, 62.

⁷⁵ We can also assume that the President was also referring to the *retornados* in another part of his speech when he declared: “25 April was worth it! It was really worth what it has cost so many over the decades, in terms of sacrificed destinies and unrealised goals.” Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 20.

⁷⁶ He manages, however, to almost never directly use this word as he only used the term once, in order to highlight the experience of Costa Gomes and Spínola on the field of the “guerrilla war”. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 26 April 2021, 22.

in the history of the parliamentary commemorations of the Revolution to entirely devote his intervention to these issues. He highlighted the permanent impacts the three fronts of the liberation wars have on the different components of Portuguese society, including the veterans, on those who “lived and died on the other side of the trench”, but also on the *retornados* “who were already living” in the Portuguese colonies when the wars began.⁷⁷ In his speech, he also called for a “reappraisal of History”: “The priority is to study the past and dissect everything in it: what was good and what was bad. [...] To take it all in, all that past, without excessive global self-justification or self-contemplation or excessive global self-flagellation.”⁷⁸ In the words of the President, this historiographical exercise must be carried out with caution, given that

for the Portuguese over 50 or 55, revisiting their childhood or youth is more difficult, it’s a mixture of memories, of new worlds discovered, of uprooting or new roots, of the first desertification of the continent’s interior, of migrations and many more, of personal, family and community changes, of deaths mourned, of signs of health and life, of the most varied traumas and, at different times, of what they dreamed of and what was shattered, of what they suffered and what remained, of what they waited for and endured, and of what they feel has never been sufficiently recognised. For all of them and many more, the judgement is as complex as the historical change.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ If vague terms, such as “colonial relationship” and “colonial situation”, were used in this speech, the President emphasised, however, the “centuries of political, economic, social and cultural domination” that, in his opinion, the “linguistic sister-nations”, who were able to “judge their common journey” with Portugal, have, however, managed to overcome.

⁷⁸ This indicates a certain lack of up-to-date information on the progress of the debate and scientific production on these issues, for which he was already criticised in the above-mentioned open letter published in 2017.

⁷⁹ Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 22. If President Rebelo de Sousa called for “each day to bring [Portugal] a step closer to assuming the glories, that honour us, and the failures for which we take responsibility”, he also drew attention to the “consequences of today’s view” on the past, which could lead “to the point where we move from an uncritical, triumphalist, exclusively glorious cult of our history to a global and equally uncritical demolition of all of it, even that

But the President went further. He called for “justice to be done” for the Portuguese veterans, for the African soldiers that fought the Portuguese colonialism and those that fought alongside the Portuguese, and for the citizens of the new independent countries “who, in their new homelands, have suffered from internal conflicts inherited from colonisation or the conditions of decolonisation”. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa also included in this list of recipients the *retornados*, “the many – and there were almost a million – who arrived with nothing, having planned a life that was or became impossible”, without, however, giving any concrete elements on how this justice was to be done.⁸⁰

The following year, if the President did not mention the returnees, the socialist Speaker,⁸¹ Augusto Ernesto Santos Silva, did so, in an intervention centred around the migration history of Portugal, presenting the country as open to immigration, where xenophobia has no place.⁸² According to him, this is due to the history of Portuguese emigration and the fact that Portugal is “the cradle and home of people who, in their own way, are cosmopolitan, peaceful, humanist, supportive, open to others, who travel the world and everywhere break down walls and build bridges”,⁸³ a view echoed later by the President when describing the Portuguese as “scattered throughout the worlds and serving as a

which is emphasised in many ways in other latitudes and longitudes”. In saying this, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa seemed to be expressing a “third way” with regard to the growing and polarised debate on Portugal’s colonial past that has emerged since the second half of the 2010s, but other parts of his speech make it clear that, in his view, this debate suffers from what could be called “the sin of anachronism”. He declared: “Many people, including myself, believe that the way we see things today was often not the way we saw things then, which forces us into the thankless task of judging the past with today’s eyes, without [...] asking those who lived through that past to anticipate values or understandings that we now take for granted, timeless and universal, especially if they were not adopted by the most advanced societies of the time.” Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 20.

80 Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 20.

81 Augusto Ernesto Santos Silva was not the only socialist to mention the *retornados* between 2016 and 2023. In its 2017 intervention, the PS presented the return migrations as a result of the refusal of the New State regime to accept the independence of the colonies, “a tragic and inhumane error [...] that ended up precipitating the return of thousands of Portuguese to their country, in empty conditions of sacrifice and hopelessness”. Alberto Martins, *DAR*, 25 April 2017, 11.

82 He declared: “At a time of closure and hatred, the openness of a country like ours, where citizens of almost every nationality now live together without this being a problem, where every religious denomination is welcome [...] is a precious asset that we should cherish.” Augusto Ernesto Santos Silva, *DAR*, 26 April 2022, 18-19.

83 Augusto Ernesto Santos Silva, *DAR*, 18-19.

platform for encounters between them”.⁸⁴ It is in this context that the Speaker mentioned the *retornados*:

Many of the “doors that April opened” were opened by migrants. Just look at the way in which, between 1974 and 1976, 1 million Portuguese returnees from Africa – in such difficult and traumatic conditions – and from Europe, fully integrated into Portuguese society and recovered the local economy there, without any fractures. These returnees are one of the foundations of the regime that emerged from 25 April, and let’s say it loud and clear on the day of the celebration.⁸⁵

As previously shown, these statements are in line with the vision according to which *retornados* have been active agents in the economic development of post-25 April Portugal, therefore highlighting the success of their integration.

In 2023, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa once again mentioned the *retornados*, in a speech addressed to those nostalgic for Portugal as it was before 25 April:

There are many people in Portugal who feel that 25 April is incomplete, imperfect, unfulfilled, and does not correspond to the dreams of the past or the aspirations of the future. Some because, strictly speaking, they would have preferred 25 April not to happen, because of what they have lost here or in the African territories, or because, rightly or wrongly, they have an image of the time before 25 April that, if not their dreams, at least corresponds to many of their expectations and desires. To these people, whose nos-

⁸⁴ Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 25 April 2022, 10.

⁸⁵ Augusto Ernesto Santos Silva, *DAR*, 18-19.

talgia and yearning we respect, it must be said that time never goes back and that what they see as the 24th of April, in many of its global features, didn't really exist.⁸⁶

If the President mentioned the *retornados*, the most striking thing about his speech was his declarations on Portugal's colonial past. Before presenting their content, it is important to consider the context in which the 2023 parliamentary commemorations took place. As on several occasions in the past, a foreign head of state was invited to attend and participate in the commemorations. In 2023, the guest was the Brazilian President Lula da Silva. In Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa's word, the presence of this guest

helps us to look back at Brazil, but it would also be possible to look back at all colonisation and decolonisation and take full responsibility for what we have done. It's not just about apologising – which we should do, of course – for what we've done, because apologising is sometimes the easiest thing to do. You apologise, you turn your back and you've done your job. No, it's about taking responsibility, for the future, for the good and bad things we've done in the past.

Before concluding: “What is important is for us to be what we have been and what we are, in so many cases irreplaceable: a platform between oceans, continents, cultures and peoples”, drawing applause from the PS, PSD and People–Animals–Nature party.⁸⁷ As in his previous speeches, the President operated a mix between recognizing the

⁸⁶ Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 26 April 2023, 20.

⁸⁷ In his list of the wrongs figures “the exploitation of the natives, denounced by António Vieira, the slavery, the sacrifice of the interests of Brazil and Brazilians, and even the arrogance, for a long time, of our near ignorance, dazzled as we were by other, more oriental places and other riches”, a list that, according to the speaker, also applied for the rest of the Portuguese empire. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *DAR*, 20.

wrongs of the past, and focusing on the good of it, always highlighting the present characterized by a linguistic brotherhood formed by the former metropolis and the former colonies, never missing an opportunity to repeat the time-honoured lusotropicalist formula that Portugal was and still is a platform for building bridges between cultures and worlds, bringing however the issue of official apologies and therefore entering in the international debate on this issue.⁸⁸ In the President's speech, as in his previous ones, the *retornados* only play a minor part, being only briefly mentioned.

During the period of 2016–2023, the second political actor to stand out, in terms of mentions of the *retornados*, was the far-right party Chega. Since its entrance in Parliament, in October 2019, his then only representative and leader, André Ventura, had taken stance regarding issues linked to the Portuguese colonial past.⁸⁹ It was the case in January 2020, when the restitution to the former Portuguese colonies of the art and cultural objects currently held in the Portuguese museums and archives was defended by the Livre party. In response, André Ventura published on his social media a message calling for Joacine Katar Moreira, the Livre's MP at the origin of the proposal, born in Guinea-Bissau, to be “sent back to her country of origin”.⁹⁰ Regarding the *retornados*, however, it was only during the 2022 and 2023 commemorations that Chega mentioned them. On 25 April 2022, in a heated characteristic style in which he declared “April has failed so badly! And these carnations are worth nothing to the people who have to use their pension money to go to the supermarket, not a red carnation to pay for their food. We have failed, Portuguese people! All of us

88 Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória*.

89 Right before the 2019 elections, the party published on its website a set of 70 measures to “put Portugal back on its feet”, the first of which was to “develop an educational project to pass on knowledge of Portugal's history and its contribution to civilisation, with the emphasis on [...] the discoveries”. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200204194152/https://partidochega.pt/70-medidas-para-reerguer-portugal/>.

90 “André Ventura ‘propõe’ que Joacine ‘seja devolvida ao seu país de origem’. Livre acusa-o de racismo”, *Público*, 28 January 2020, <https://www.publico.pt/2020/01/28/politica/noticia/andre-ventura-propoe-joacine-devolvida-pais-origem-livre-acusao-racismo-1902024>.

sitting here have failed!”⁹¹ Chega’s leader, André Ventura, mentioned directly the returnees: “Mr President, perhaps today would be the day, as we salute freedom, to remember [...] all the *retornados* who left their countries and found here a country that didn’t help them and should have helped them. [...] Yes, Mr President, we have failed them too. We have failed the *retornados*, we have failed the veterans [...]”⁹²

Later that day, André Ventura was invited on CNN Portugal,⁹³ where he not only strongly criticised the celebrations of 25 April 1974, but also raised the issue of the *retornados*, admitting to the journalist that he had thought carefully about whether or not to include them in his commemorative speech. According to him, he was the first to ever bring the issue of compensation for the *retornados* on 25 April in Parliament, which, as we have seen, was not true. He also reiterated that the former settlers were victims who had been abandoned by the authorities who had “completely turned their backs on [them]”.⁹⁴

This statement marked the beginning of Chega’s parliamentary activity on the returnees. The following month, it presented a bill on the issue of compensations with the objective of nominating the members of the above-mentioned working group that had been created in 2005, in order for it to begin its work.⁹⁵ Then, in June, during a debate on the nationality law, Chega’s representative Bruno Nunes declared: “There is obviously a lot that needs to be rectified, historical mistakes that you have made, like what you did to the *retornados* and the chil-

91 This type of statement has been made since the Revolution, for example by the newspaper *ABC* (formerly *Jornal O Retornado*) in August 1979. On the frontpage one could read: “The Portuguese children want bread... not carnations!”. *ABC*, 8 August 1979, 1.

92 André Ventura, *DAR*, 25 April 2022, 7.

93 André Ventura, interview by Judite Sousa, *CNN Portugal*, 25 April 2022 [video], 16:21, <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/videos/como-dizemos-a-um-jovem-que-recebe-800-que-foi-tudo-bonito-no-25-de-abril-entrevista-a-andre-ventura-na-integra/62670ab60cf2ea367d384498>.

94 This statement originated an article from fact-checking website *Polígrafo* two days later, which concluded that André Ventura’s declarations were false. <https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/fact-check/ventura-diz-que-o-estado-virou-completamente-as-costas-aos-retornados-depois-do-25-de-abril-confirma-se>.

95 Bill 59/XV/1, <https://www.parlamento.pt/ActividadeParlamentar/Paginas/DetalleIniciativa.aspx?BID=121473>.

dren of the *retornados* after a shameful decolonisation.”⁹⁶ Finally, on 25 November 2022, a highly symbolic date for the Portuguese right, and the day the State budget for 2023 was approved, the party once again addressed the issue through the voice of its leader: “I would like to make a heartfelt appeal to the millions of *retornados*, veterans [...] we are still here and we will be your voice for years to come. We will always, always be your voice for years to come”, once again presenting the formers settlers, as well as the veterans of the colonial wars as victims.⁹⁷

In fact, André Ventura’s party continued to mention the returnees throughout 2023. For the second year running, the Chega’s leader used the occasion of 25 April to reaffirm his party’s commitment to their cause:

Is this the clear and noble morning of April? [...] And what kind of April is this that has forgotten the millions of *retornados* and dispossessed from overseas, to whom we have never given the dignity they deserve? (*Applause from CH*). For them, for those millions who are watching us, who have come from an abandoned and forgotten Africa, where many have buried their families and where many have left behind their children’s uniforms, we leave them with the word that, if the alternative ever comes, our first priority will be for those men and women, for those millions of families who, while watching others steal everything, have been left with nothing in Portugal (*Applause from CH, standing*).⁹⁸

Given the party’s history, it is safe to assume that the issue of compensations underlies in this intervention, an issue that came back

⁹⁶ In this statement, is it safe to assume that CH’s MP was referring to the decree-law 308-A/75 that redefined access to and maintenance of Portuguese citizenship in June 1975. Bruno Nunes, *DAR*, 24 June 2022, 10.

⁹⁷ André Ventura, *DAR*, 26 November 2022, 36.

⁹⁸ André Ventura, *DAR*, 25 April 2023, 12.

in Parliament on 18 October 2023, when Chega MP Bruno Nunes asked the socialist Prime Minister whether he was willing to reopen this issue.⁹⁹ Finally, in November 2023, as part of the 2024 budget vote, the party presented a new bills relating to the repatriated population, calling for the constitution of the working group created in 2005, a proposal that was recused in Commission on 24 November 2023.¹⁰⁰

Comparatively speaking, since 2016, the *retornados* have been mentioned more often than they have been since the first parliamentary commemoration in 1977, a situation that we owe to two political actors: the President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and Chega. In his interventions, the President presents the decolonisation process as late, explaining the fact that the majority of the Portuguese settlers had to leave the soon to be independent Portuguese colonies, only briefly mentioning the *retornados* in parts of his speeches dedicated, in the majority of cases, to Portugal's colonial past. On its part, the far-right party Chega, seized the occasion of the 2022 and 2023 commemorations to present the *retornados* as victims of abandonment in Africa during the decolonisation process, as well as in Portugal, accusing the authorities of having done nothing, especially regarding their reparation claims.

Conclusion

Even if there are more years when *retornados* are not mentioned than when they are mentioned, since the first parliamentary commemorations of 25 April 1974, political actors stood out as mentioning the most the *retornados* during their speeches. It was the case of the CDS, that since 1977 most frequently addressed these issues, until stopping to do so from 2016. The fact that the returnees could still then represented a high number of potential voters, associated with the critical view of the party on the decolonisation process, can appear as the main reason to explain this interest, focusing from 2000 to 2006 on the thorny issue

⁹⁹ Bruno Nunes, *DAR*, 19 October 2023, 57.

¹⁰⁰ CH, PSD and PAN voted in favour, PS, PCP, BE and Livre against, while the Liberal Initiative abstained. Bill n°109/XV/2, <https://www.parlamento.pt/OrcamentoEstado/Paginas/DetailPropostaAlteracao.aspx?BID=19246>.

of the compensation claims. This attitude prompted criticism in 2000 from the parties situated on the centre-left and the left of the political spectrum, accusing the CDS of electoral manoeuvre, accusations that had already been directed to the party on several occasions since the arrival of the returnees.

If the CDS presented the *retornados* as victims of the decolonisation process, and of a lack of interest from the authorities, the PS, in second position in terms of number of mentions, presented them throughout the years as successfully integrated in Portuguese society and economy, despite having represented an additional challenge during the first years of Portuguese democracy, and without mentioning the different measures implemented by the successive governments.

In 2016, the election of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa as President marked a rupture, not only because he regularly mentioned, although briefly, the repatriated population like no other President before him, but also because of the way, between 2016 and 2023, he exposed his views on Portugal's colonial past, in a context of a renewed debate on this issue.

Another political actor recently stood out. From 2022, Chega assumed the role of defender of the *retornados*, a position left vacant by the CDS since 2016, presenting them as victims of abandon and injustice, in a belligerent tone characteristic of the far-right party. It only began to address the issue of the returnees when it had become the 3rd political force, and when the CDS had, simultaneously, lost its seats in Parliament. 2022 also coincides with the election of Gabriel Mithá Ribeiro, born in Mozambique in 1965, of mixed descent, who has a doctorate in history and has on several occasions expressed his views on colonial history and the current debate on racism, which could participate to explain this sudden interest.¹⁰¹ If André Ventura promised on 25 April 2023 to make the *retornados*, as well as the veterans, his party's first priority in the event of victory, these issues did not feature in the party's manifesto for the general elections of 10 March 2024.

101 Gabriel Mithá Ribeiro, *O Colonialismo Nunca Existiu! Colonização, Racismo e Violência: Manual de Interpretação* (Lisboa: Gradiva, 2013).

The speeches given in Parliament during the commemorations of 25 April are both “situated in time and sensitive to contemporary debates”,¹⁰² and those that tackled with the *retornados* were no exception, explaining the fact that they were mentioned more often in certain periods. As shown by various speeches analysed in these pages, the parliamentary commemorations of 25 April are a highly symbolic occasion for political actors to express their views on the colonial past and on the decolonisation process, speeches in which the *retornados* are often mentioned. In these interventions, lusotropicalist discourses, which have not undergone major changes since the development of this imperial mystique by the Portuguese authorities,¹⁰³ except from the fact that the integration of the *retornados*, rapidly presented as a “success story”,¹⁰⁴ is mobilized for the diffusion of the “heroic tale”¹⁰⁵ of Portuguese history, are reproduced.

At a time when the colonial past is getting under a higher level of scrutiny and is the subject of a polarised debate, to mention the *retornados* during the parliamentary commemorations of the 25 April 1974 is, for the political parties situated on the right and extreme-right Portuguese political spectrum, to defend a certain vision of this past. If in the 2000s the CDS-PP’s positions on the returnees could be easily explained by their electoral weight at that time, Chega’s recent stance raises the question of the weight of the electoral behaviour not only of the *retornados* but also of their descendants in contemporary Portuguese politics, a question that only an in-depth study of the issue could answer.

102 Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória*, 10.

103 Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória*.

104 Kalter, “Traumatic Loss, Successful Integration”.

105 Domingos, “Les reconfigurations de la mémoire du colonialisme portugais”, 2.

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