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Who remembers what and why in Portugal?

Filipe Ribeiro De Meneses

Filipe.DeMeneses@mu.ie

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Who remembers what and why in Portugal?

Filipe Ribeiro De Meneses

If national anthems carry didactic meanings for those asked to sing them at regular intervals throughout their lives, then no people should be as aware of the power of a collective, or historical memory, as the Portuguese. After all, their anthem, *A Portuguesa*, asks them to consult their own individual memory in order to divine the way forward in times of crisis, in order to arrive at a collective outcome:

Pelas brumas da memória
Oh Pátria sente-se a voz
Dos teus egrégios avós
Que haverá de guiar-te à vitória.

This positing of a shared knowledge inherited from the past, which has to be rediscovered to solve the country's ills, was not a one-off poetic device by the lyricist Henrique Lopes de Mendonça; it lay at the heart of the late 19th century Republicans' explanation for Portugal's decline on the world stage, a decline that could be reversed by doing away with the institutions whose pernicious action had of late suffocated Portuguese virtues— the monarchy and the Church— and obscured the country's glorious past. Answering an insult to Portugal would be the event that would trigger this badly needed reaction, leading to a collective reawakening and redemption.

A Portuguesa was not commissioned as an anthem; it was a patriotic song adopted as the national anthem in 1911, after the Republican revolution of October 1910, precisely because it reflected so much of the Republican Party's agenda. It was a rousing call to arms after the 1890 British ultimatum over the fate of the territory that constitutes today's Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, an event which added much fuel to the republican flame during the “mapa cor-de-rosa” controversy.¹ But it was also an injunction to the Portuguese, an order to live up to their past and reforge their nation in a new guise. Republican education was modelled on this idea of allowing the

¹ This crisis, which shook the country and hurt the constitutional monarchy, adds weight to Valentim Alexandre's claim that “[t]he colonial question lies at the heart of modern Portugal's political life and of all fundamental national policy options. It has determined the fate of movements and regimes.” Alexandre adds that “[i]ts weight is largely a product of the longevity of the Portuguese imperial tradition, initiated in the 15th century when the first trading posts and fortifications were established on the western coast of Africa.” Alexandre, “The Colonial Empire,” in António Costa Pinto (ed.), *Contemporary Portugal: Politics, Society and Culture* (Boulder CO: Social Science Monographs, 2003), 63-84, p. 63.

Portuguese to rediscover their past greatness, of being guided by it.² It was present in school programmes; it was present in the propaganda that surrounded the country's participation in the First World War.³

Like the current flag, the anthem survived the other great changes of regime that marked the Portuguese 20th century: the gradual creation of Salazar's New State and then the emergence of a parliamentary democracy from the 1974-75 revolutionary period. If during the New State the spreading of Christianity was enshrined as the prime motivation for the 'Discoveries' and primary-school education focused on heroic deeds of Portuguese sailors and soldiers, after 1975 that reading of the past changed again. The spiritual dimension of Portugal's expansion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was replaced by more materialistic concerns, which sought to explain, in primarily rational and economic terms, the enterprise of Empire, setting aside more general ethical questions about its human cost. This still left room for a certain amount of admiration for the scientific achievements of the age and Portugal's pioneering role in bringing together the various parts of the world, while carrying a warning about the need for good government. In other words, it created a usable narrative about the Portuguese as a positive force in history, around which to hang the ornaments of the new, democratic, and European Portugal.

The anthem tells the Portuguese to look to the past for guidance, to learn from it. Do they do so? It could be argued that the reverse is actually the case— that, for the most part, they have avoided thinking critically about, or considering the consequences, of what happened in their distant or recent past. For a number of decades, the Portuguese have been able to coexist with significantly different interpretations of quite fundamental aspects of their recent history. What is the name, for example, of the current regime? In terms of the 20th century, one can talk about the Constitutional Monarchy (which lasted until 1910); the First Republic (1910-1926); the Military Dictatorship (1926-c.1932); and Salazar's New State (c.1932-1974). After that it becomes less clear: the acronym PREC (Processo Revolucionário em Curso) is used as a shorthand for the period between April 1974 and November 1975, but there is no consensus in terms of the regime created by the Constitution of 1976. Is

² Monteiro and Costa Pinto write, "[t]he cultural construction of the nation [...] accepted the declared objective of discovering the roots of a national identity within Portugal's historical legacy and its popular culture as the basis for the political order that they [the republicans] were seeking to create." Nuno G. Monteiro and António Costa Pinto, "Cultural Myths and Portuguese National Identity," in Costa Pinto (ed.) *Contemporary Portugal...*, 47-62, p. 53.

³ A useful summary of the republican approach to education can be found in Maria Cândida Proença, "A Educação," in Fernando Rosas and Maria Fernanda Rollo (eds), *História da Primeira República Portuguesa* (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2010), 169-89. On Portuguese war propaganda, see Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, "Sacred Union or Radical Republic? The Dilemmas of Wartime Propaganda in Portugal, 1916-1917," *Journal of Iberian & Latin American Studies*, Vol. 5, no. 1 (June 1999), 77-92.

it the Second Republic? The Third? It depends on one's ideological starting point. There is also no consensus regarding what happened between April 1974 and November 1975. The phrase 'transition to democracy' suggests a consensus about the process and its outcome that did not exist at the time. Was it a carefully negotiated process (more or less like Spain's) that finally saw the outcome that most Portuguese desired?⁴ Was it a genuine social revolution that went as far as it could in the face of Portugal's NATO membership and strategic location as the westernmost country in continental Europe, and whose inheritance lives on in the protections afforded by the Constitution? Or was it a genuine popular revolution that could have gone much further had it not been for the betrayal of the Communist Party?⁵ And what was the name of the conflicts fought in Africa in the 1960s and 70s, which indisposed the New State and the Army and brought about the events of 25 April 1974— did they form, taken as a whole, the *Guerra do Ultramar* (as they were known during the New State), the *Guerra Colonial* (the preferred designation of the left) or the more anodyne *Guerra de África*? What name should be given to the monuments that commemorate these conflicts?⁶

When we begin to drill down into these periods, we find that there are many other questions that have never been convincingly resolved one way or another, so that the Portuguese happily coexist with conflicting interpretations of crucial issues; the most telling of these, in relation to the present regime is whether Prime Minister Francisco Sá Carneiro and Defence Minister Adelino Amaro da Costa, with a number of other people, including their partners, were murdered in 1980 or whether their aeroplane crash was an accident.⁷ Yet

⁴ For a useful comparison of the Spanish and Portuguese transitions to democracy see Pamela Radcliff, "Unsettling the Iberian Transitions to Democracy of the 1970s," in Javier Muñoz-Basols, Laura Lonsdale and Manuel Delgado (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Iberian Studies* (Abingdon & NY: Routledge, 2017), 450-461.

⁵ The different interpretations reflect different political points of view. For different interpretations of what happened after 25 April 1974, see, for example, Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Raquel Varela, *A História do PCP na Revolução dos Cravos* (Lisbon: Bertrand, 2011); Zita Seabra, *Foi Assim* (Lisbon: Aletheia, 2007).

⁶See, for example, "Memorial do Porto aos Combatentes do Ultramar 'merecia debate público,'" *Público*, 6 March 2021. At issue is the name of a memorial in Oporto, which reproduces the terminology employed by the New State while the conflict was being fought, and the fact that, according to the left-wing Bloco de Esquerda and its councillor, Pedro Lourenço, it omits, and therefore perpetuates, the "forgetting about the principal victims of the war, those who were effectively oppressed for decades on end." In other words, the monument "subordinates the veterans, many of whom were forced to fight, to a certain vision of the New State." It is worth noting, however, that there exists in Lisbon a *Monumento aos Combatentes do Ultramar*, which serves as the focal point for national commemoration events.

⁷Much has been written about Camarate. The state of play, as far as the *Assembleia da República* is concerned, can be found in "X Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito à Tragédia de Camarate. Relatório Final." See <https://app.parlamento.pt/webutils/docs/doc.pdf?path=6148523063446f764c32467959584277>

despite this lack of consensus over fundamental issues, Portugal has ploughed its course since 1976, enjoying what has been a uniquely stable period in its long history: presidents are lawfully elected, as are parliaments; governments are appointed by the former taking into account the make-up of the latter; parties rotate peacefully in power. After a rocky start, it seemed as if absolute parliamentary majorities could be regularly achieved by individual parties; but coalitions are now the norm, whether formal or informal. The Constitution has been revised a number of times and, of course, the country joined the EEC, now EU, thereafter adopting the Euro and signing the relevant treaties (although neither the Constitution nor these treaties have ever been put to the people in a referendum). Portugal is also a founding member of the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP), an international organisation designed to coordinate the efforts of the Portuguese-speaking countries of the world. Portugal seems, then, to have navigated the transition from authoritarianism and colonialism to democracy, the European project and global citizenship with remarkable ease. It has provided a President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso while another former Prime Minister, António Guterres, is currently the Secretary-General of the UN—the first full Secretary-General from a former colonial power.

This is not to suggest, of course, that the country should, or even could, stop to debate these issues thoroughly, until agreement at last emerges: that, of course, is absurd. But it is remarkable how little consensus has existed on such weighty topics, and how violent controversies can become, despite which the country has lived its life, apparently untroubled, until the very recent past. For a long time, opposing views could be absorbed and contained as a matter of concern for a relatively small section of the population. Most Portuguese were content to focus on the future, secure in the apparent knowledge that the European Union was a sort of promised land, a guarantee that all would henceforth be well. However, changing circumstances are bringing divisions about Portugal's past to the fore in a way that politicizes them, reopening old wounds and threatening consensus on more fundamental matters. There is certainly a sense that something has changed recently. But what, and why?

While the memory debate was centered on the New State's domestic policies—on what, one might say, the Portuguese did to each other in the 20th century—it could only agitate a narrow sector of the population: those, mostly on the far left, including the Communist Party, who had direct experience of the Salazar regime's political violence, having suffered arrest, torture and/or exile because of their convictions and actions. Their experiences endow them, they believe, with the right, or even the duty, to speak out against anything they see as the whitewashing of the New State's crimes. Strong in the

4f6a63334e7a637664326c756157357059326c6864476c3259584d7657456c4a4c33526c6548527663793977616e49304d54457457456c4a587a45756347526d&fich=pjr411-XII_1.pdf&Inlin e=true.

historical profession and academia in general, members of this group and their younger coreligionists are happy to engage in violent polemics with those with a different reading of, or approach to, the New State.

This group finds it increasingly difficult to accept conflicting interpretations of Portugal's recent past, born, among historians, of different conceptual outlooks and methodological approaches (as should be the case) and, among the wider population, of different lived experiences— experiences which do not always (and sometimes never) match the official anti-fascist portrayal of the recent past, or the official narrative regarding the evolution of Portuguese colonialism. At times, when issues of historical memory surge to the fore, the specialised debate which, beginning in academic circles, spills into the press, reaches a fever pitch quickly, revealing how firmly entrenched certain views are. This is not to say that the majority of Portuguese are closet Salazarists. It is to say, however, that the official discourse about the past, as first unveiled in the Preamble to the 1976 Constitution (“On 25 April 1974, the Armed Forces Movement, crowning the long resistance of the Portuguese people, and interpreting its deepest sentiments, overthrew the fascist regime”), is not necessarily a factual description of how most Portuguese experienced the New State— as a constant struggle against a hated regime. This divide between much (although not all) of the active opposition to the New State and the rest of the country was subsequently aggravated by the far-from-universal experience of the PREC: what some saw as a liberating moment, full of revolutionary potential, others, including many who had fought against the previous regime, saw as a direct attack on their interests, property, and hopes for a democratic and tolerant country.⁸ The different individual memories of the New State and the PREC, passed on to family members too young to remember those experiences, cannot but take their toll on the emergence of a consensual, and usable, collective memory. But since eyes were for the most part firmly focused on the future, these divisions could be lived with.

Different readings of the New State can lead to historiographical disputes, such as the one that in 2012 revolved around the figure of historian Rui Ramos— not so much, curiously, about his co-authored *History of Portugal* but, instead, its subsequent distribution as part of a box set by the newspaper *Expresso*, which allowed the already popular volume to reach a much wider audience.⁹ A more recent controversy emerged this year, now

⁸António Costa Pinto writes, “[a]ccording to the official discourse of the PS, led by Mário Soares, and the democratic parties of the centre-right, Portuguese democracy was shaped by a ‘double-legacy:’ the authoritarianism of the right under the New State, and the authoritarian threat of the extreme left of 1974-75.” Costa Pinto, “Authoritarian Legacies, Transitional Justice and State Crisis in Portugal’s Democratization,” in *Democratization* Vol. 13, No. 2, April 2006, 173-204, p. 193.

⁹ See Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, “Slander, Ideological Differences, or Academic Debate? The ‘Verão Quente’ of 2012 and the State of Portuguese Historiography,” *E-Journal of Portuguese History*, Vol. 10, n.1 (2012), 62-77.

involving research carried out on the PIDE which some established historians (Luís Farinha, Irene Flunser Pimentel, Luís Reis Torgal) have decreed to be an attempt to whitewash the secret police's crimes. The fact that the alleged offender, Duncan Simpson, is a foreign historian, has added to the interest since, of course, he is harder to place on the domestic ideological spectrum; but nevertheless the customary debates have been thrashed out on social media and the pages of the daily newspaper *Público*.¹⁰ That this scholar might be bringing fresh approaches and shedding new light where Portuguese historians have feared to tread is generally ignored in the rush to uphold antifascist orthodoxy.¹¹ Simpson writes, "the efforts to construct and preserve a certain social memory of the PIDE have contaminated the process of historical understanding by dictating which aspects of the secret police are studied and which are not;" it might be fairer to say 'a certain social memory of the PIDE, the New State and the Revolution that ended it,' since ownership of the latter is certainly contested, although vested by the State, to a great extent, on the surviving officers who carried out the 1974 coup.¹²

Academic disputes aside there were many instances in recent years which demonstrated that not all was well when it came to the Portuguese and their history, even if the issues, after an initial burst of publicity, were contained with relative ease. The first, and best known, of these, was the firestorm that raged in 2007 when the Portuguese national broadcaster, RTP, adapted a BBC formula to find the 'greatest-ever Portuguese.' 41% of the audience, by way of a phone-in, chose Salazar, whose case had been made by the conservative writer Jaime Nogueira Pinto. This result placed Salazar well ahead of the rest of the pack (all ten finalists, remarkably, were men); second place (with 19%) went to the historic leader of the Portuguese Communist Party, Álvaro Cunhal. The choice of the two front-runners makes clear that something went amiss, but it should be remembered that the show's ratings were poor and that the number of calls logged was, on the whole, low. Still, a torrent of criticism rained down on the network, which over the course of the weeks the show was broadcast regularly updated the audience on how the vote

¹⁰ See, for example, Luísa Tiago de Oliveira, "Uma falsa questão," *Público*, 17 February 2021; Luís Farinha, "Os Portugueses Foram 'Vítimas' ou 'Cúmplices' da PIDE?," *Público*, 20 February 2021; Irene Pimentel, "Carrascos, Vítimas, Cúmplices e Passividade. O Caso da PIDE," *Público*, 21 February 2021; and Luís Reis Torgal, "*Os Portugueses Foram Vítimas ou Cúmplices da PIDE?: Carta Aberta a Duncan Simpson*," *Público*, 24 February 2021. For Duncan Simpson's reply, see "Os Portugueses e a PIDE: Algumas Respostas," *Público*, 2 March 2021.

¹¹ See Duncan Simpson, "The 'Sad Grandmother,' the 'Simple but Honest Portuguese,' and the 'Good Son of the Fatherland: Letters of Denunciation in the Final Decade of the Salazar Regime," in *Análise Social* Vol. 53, n. 226 (2018), 6-27, and "The PIDE Between Memory and History: Revolutionary Tradition, Historiography and the Missing Dimension in the Relationship Between Society and Salazar's Political Police," in *E-Journal of Portuguese History*, Vol 18, n. 1, 17-38.

¹² Simpson, "The PIDE...," 17.

was going. According to a letter signed by numerous historians, these updates were akin to putting blood in the water to call predators.¹³

This controversy had been preceded by the reaction to the news that the old headquarters of Portugal's secret police, the PIDE, was going to be converted into a luxury condominium. This was not, of course, done overnight, and permission for the conversion of the site was granted by Lisbon's municipal chamber. The building had been unused since the Revolution and was in an advanced state of decay. After smouldering for some years, the controversy became more public in 2005, leading eventually to the creation of a civic movement called *Não Apaguem a Memória!*, whose activities led directly to a significant and often overlooked parliamentary resolution (24/2008, of 26 June 2008).¹⁴ This called on the Government to support the establishment of a Museum of Freedom and Resistance, to be housed in another emblematic PIDE building in Lisbon, the prison at Aljube, around which a network of museums should be established, making use of sites significant in Portugal's struggle for freedom. It also called on the Government to make better use of an already established Museum of Freedom in another PIDE jail, the fort at Peniche, north of Lisbon. Finally, the Aljube museum should develop links with schools, universities, and other institutions already at work collecting documentation and other material evidence of the New State's repression and resistance to it. The *Museu da Resistência e Liberdade* was indeed created, and carries out all of the missions with which it was charged; its first director was Luís Farinha, a left-wing academic historian. He was recently, and controversially, succeeded by Rita Rato, a former Communist party member of Parliament without a background in History or indeed any aspect of museum management. Her appointment, as can be expected, raised eyebrows, not least because in a 2009 interview, Rato had "acknowledged" that the Gulag "might have existed" – as if there was still some possibility of it not having existed. As historian and left-wing politician Rui Tavares noted at the time of her nomination,

It is Rita Rato who must clear up once and for all if she denies or admits the historical reality of the Gulag as the mass repression of millions of human beings, if she condemns it or not, and if she is or isn't sorry about her past statements on this subject.¹⁵

¹³See Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes, "Jaime Nogueira Pinto's Portrait of Salazar: a New Departure?" in Alison Ribeiro de Menezes & Catherine O'Leary (eds), *Legacies of War and Dictatorship in Contemporary Portugal and Spain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011). The historians' open letter was published in *Expresso*, 3 March 2007.

¹⁴ <https://maismemoria.org/mm/>.

¹⁵ Rui Tavares, "O Único Problema de Rita Rato," *Público*, 10 July 2020.

The summer of 2019 saw the country was once again apparently ablaze over the news that the Socialist mayor of Santa Comba Dão – in whose general vicinity Salazar was born and kept the house he would visit throughout his life – was going to turn a disused school building into a ‘Salazar museum.’ News of this seeming outrage spread so quickly and shrilly that it reached the outside world, the London *Times* reporting on 13 September that “Portugal’s parliament has criticised plans to build a museum dedicated to António de Oliveira Salazar, Europe’s longest-serving right-wing dictator, whose legacy still divides the country half a century after his death.” The text of a resolution, drawn up by the Communist Party and approved by the parliament’s left-wing majority (the right having abstained) noted that a museum dedicated to the memory of Salazar was an “affront to democracy and to democratic values” and “an offence to the memory of the victims of the dictatorship.” The problem, of course, was that no such museum was envisaged, rather an interpretative centre which would form part of a network of similar establishments whose contents and activities would be overseen by the University of Coimbra’s *Centro de Estudos Interdisciplinares do Século XX*; the network was to be called the *Rede de Centros de Interpretação de História e Memória Política da Primeira República e do Estado Novo*. Perhaps this was a case of Lisbon ignoring an initiative undertaken by other parts of the country until it was too late; but there was little or no middle ground. In any case the work went ahead, and then stopped: the building, it seems, was in worse condition than initially thought, and the monies allocated by the mayor are insufficient to continue. But already after the recent elections another organization, the *União de Resistentes Antifascistas Portugueses*, presented parliament with an open letter, signed by hundreds, calling on the government to bring to a halt the building works.¹⁶ Earlier this year, the academic component of the project walked out, leaving its future very uncertain.

What, if anything, do all these controversies add up to? Why is there no consensus in relation to the recent past in a country where an unloved dictatorship was overthrown, rather than being allowed to gradually transform itself, like Spain’s, into a parliamentary democracy, a process which in the latter country is increasingly looked back on as a missed chance for a reckoning with History and its crimes?¹⁷

The first point to make in this regard is, of course, that the popularity of the New State waxed and waned. And while the open-ended nature of the wars in Africa was increasingly obvious, and problematic, there is no doubt that Marcelo Caetano, Salazar’s successor, was for a time a reasonably popular figure; his appointment to the presidency of the council of ministers generated

¹⁶ <http://urap.pt/>.

¹⁷As Pamela Radcliff puts it, “the first phase of the Portuguese transition contained many of the elements that critics of the Spanish case wish had occurred in their own country.” Radcliff, “Unsettling...,” 457.

hope of meaningful change and coincided with an improvement in incomes and living conditions which most Portuguese felt, and appreciated (even if it was then lost as a result of the 1973 oil crisis).¹⁸ Caetano was initially able to project a desire for cautious modernisation which many Portuguese shared. Opposition— active, committed opposition— to the regime was not a universal experience, and the 25 April 1974 coup came as a surprise to almost all political observers— and certainly to all diplomatic observers. The point can be made that a substantial proportion of the Portuguese had learned to live with the regime, to use it and even to manipulate it to serve their ends.

The Carnation Revolution, which, as noted above, began as a secretive military coup, was undoubtedly a popular phenomenon, but what followed was not: the PREC, extending from April 1974 to November 1975, was extremely divisive and marked by frequent acts of political violence. These transcended the banishment of the New State's political and security leadership and included arbitrary arrests, political clear-outs in nationalized industries and firms, land and home occupations and, at times, a feeling of powerlessness in the face of an arbitrary administration whose revolutionary legitimacy was, as the months passed, increasingly threadbare.¹⁹ After March 1975 the institutions of the MFA were merged with those of the State in order to better protect the Revolution: but what this term covered was now much more ambitious— and controversial— than had previously been the case. The more radical elements within the MFA were not afraid to take the law into their own hands. By the summer talk of civil war, with a Lisbon 'commune' facing off against the north of the country, filled the air. Conservative parties like CDS found it almost impossible to operate openly and campaign; later the tide turned and the PCP and other leftist parties found their party offices turned into targets for

¹⁸ Rui Ramos writes, "no-one until mid-1973 predicted the imminent fall of the regime. Life had never been as good in Portugal, with full employment, rising salaries and the expansion of the welfare state. The opposition's organized forces seemed weak and the military situation in Africa was not dramatic." Ramos, "III Parte – Idade Contemporânea (Séculos XIX-XXI)," in Rui Ramos (Coordinator), Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa and Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, *História de Portugal* (Lisbon: Esfera dos Livros, 2009), 437-777, p. 704.

¹⁹ Pulling together a number of sources Rui Ramos writes of the PREC that by the end of March 1975 the Armed Forces believed 10,000 Portuguese to be in political exile in Spain and Brazil.

"In December 1974, the MFA's Coordinating Commission determined that the *saneamentos* [political dismissals] should not be limited to those 'in league with the fascist regime' but rather 'all individuals who, because they are not moving with the revolutionary process, are obstructing it.' Twenty thousand people thus found themselves out of work [...] As regards political prisoners, the Commission for the Investigation of Violence noted the existence of 1,000, seven times more than at the end of the New State, and it amassed proof of arbitrary arrests, carried out with no suspicion of criminal motives, no due process, and no concern for legality by a number of military entities. The prisoners testified to having been deprived of any legal aid and arbitrarily detained for periods up to seventeen months, never having even been informed of the reasons for their arrest. There were beatings and even cases of torture "with electric shocks." Ramos, "III Parte..." 732.

shadowy forces operating in the north. As António Costa Pinto puts it, “one of the limitations of some analyses of Portugal’s transition is their assumption of finality, based on the subsequent consolidation,”na shortcoming which “underestimates both the state crises and the ‘revolutionary critical juncture’ of the transition.”²⁰

While all of this was happening, of course, decolonization was taking place. This process had the initial support of all the principal political parties, but over time this unanimity was lost, not least because the Portuguese armed forces insisted on the immediate recognition of their former enemies as the legitimate voice of the nations being created, with the result that other voices in the former colonies were silenced. In Angola this process went further, with the Army’s preference for the militarily weak MPLA leading to the undercutting of the Portuguese government’s intended role as an honest broker, mediating between the three Angolan liberation movements (MPLA, UNITA, FNLA).²¹ Decolonization had, as its most visible consequence— as far as the Portuguese themselves were concerned— the return of some half a million *retornados*, most of whom had lost practically everything in the flight from Angola and Mozambique. This was a mass traumatic event. For many of those returning to Portugal, or rather coming to it for the first time in their lives, the new Portugal now being built was incomprehensible; for most of them, the claims of a ‘model’ decolonization process being advanced by the military authorities and some politicians were a slap in the face. And though they never adhered *en masse* to far-right parties, as in, say, France, they generally strengthened the right-of-centre formations like the Social-Democratic Party (PSD) and the Social-Democratic Centre (CDS) and added a dose of scepticism about the new course Portugal was on, and its anti-fascist rhetoric: they could not but compare their recent experiences with those of the deposed regime’s victims and ask why their own suffering and misery, more absolute and voluminous, was seen as a secondary preoccupation at best— why they were made to feel responsible for what had happened to them by their own country.

All of this meant that by the time the Constitution was approved by the Constituent Assembly early in 1976 the right had managed to create a working parity of suffering by which the wrongs inflicted during the PREC cancelled the wrongs suffered by its rivals at the hands of the New State. This allowed a standoff to ensue— a sort of Mutually Assured Destruction, in Cold-War parlance. Every time the left raised the past to claim the moral high ground in a political dispute, the right responded in kind, until the two sides wore each

²⁰ Costa Pinto, “Authoritarian Legacies...,” 175.

²¹ There is a voluminous bibliography on the decolonization process, notably in relation to Angola. See, in relation to military support for the MPLA, the memoirs of General Silva Cardoso, High Commissioner in Angola, *Angola: Anatomia de uma Tragédia* (Lisbon: Oficina do Livro, 2000).

other out. By 1979 the right had taken power through the Aliança Democrática coalition (made up of the PSD, CDS and the Popular Monarchist Party (PPM), along with the ‘reformist’ group high-profile dissidents from the Socialist Party (PS); in the late 1980s and early 1990s, under Aníbal Cavaco Silva, the PSD enjoyed back-to-back absolute majorities while CDS leader Diogo Freitas do Amaral came within a whisker of being elected President. Clearly, the right could be in power. In academia, matters were not quite as straightforward, but its internal rows tended to have little bearing on the public at large. Reserved for academic publications or the columns of the press, notably, after its launch, *Público*, the memory debates, no matter how violent, did not really cut through to the public.

One quick note in this regard, before moving on: because it can tie itself to the wider anti-fascist struggle of the 20th century, the Portuguese left’s hand is, in this instance, stronger: the PREC’s footprint is smaller and will, in time, disappear. To an extent, the national political scene in Portugal since 2015 reflects this fact, with the Socialist party relying on the votes of the Communists and the *Bloco de Esquerda* (a successful conglomeration of once-disunited far-Left parties and movements) for support in parliament— a situation unthinkable decades ago.

As noted earlier, however, the situation has changed in a short space of time, and it is important to explain how and why. The 1976 Constitution’s already cited Preamble states, “[...] freeing Portugal from dictatorship, oppression and colonialism represented a revolutionary transformation and the start of a historic change of direction for Portuguese society.” This clever formulation turned Portugal, and the Portuguese, into the victims, not the perpetrators, of colonialism. The MFA would go a long way towards portraying itself as a partner of the African liberation movements in the task of defeating Portuguese fascism and colonial domination. This was the great sleight-of-hand of the revolutionary period, carried out by men who, in truth, had been very deeply involved in the colonial wars, none more so than General Francisco Costa Gomes. Costa Gomes, the second post-25 April President, who had managed to restore the military situation in Angola in the early 1970s by less than conventional means, including increased cooperation with South African units and those set up and led by the PIDE. Backed by all existing and newly formed political parties, from the far left to the Christian Democratic CDS, the principle of immediate decolonization received, as has been mentioned, unanimous assent (if not quite its practice). Those who opposed it, like General Spínola, were quickly ejected from the political scene. This left the over half a million *retornados* without a clear and distinct political home in a country that viewed them as an embarrassment, but it also served to create an important illusion: that since taking power in the late 1920s, and especially by going to war in 1961, Salazar had essentially turned his back on a tradition of constructive and positive engagement with the peoples of the colonial world

which the new, democratic, Portugal being established could take up once more.

Expo-98, devoted to the theme of ‘The Oceans,’ marked the popular culmination of the democratic regime’s near-consensual vision of the past, according to which the ‘Discoveries’ period was marked above all by the widening of cultural and scientific horizons and a positive coming together at last of all the world’s peoples—a task now continued by the Expo itself.²² This was, in the main, the central thrust of the activities undertaken by the more scholarly *Comissão Nacional dos Descobrimentos Portugueses*, which operated from 1986 to 2002. Such an interpretation, untroubled by the darker side of what ensued from these contacts, provided what might be considered a usable narrative, capable of rallying most Portuguese around a positive depiction of their common past which might allow them to face into their European future with confidence.

This narrative has, however, exhausted itself, as can be seen by the growing opposition to an oft-proposed Museum of the Discoveries. Whenever the project reappears on the horizon, it is immediately met with denunciations and reminders of the abuses committed by and in the name of the Portuguese Empire, notably the slave trade, the most sinister characteristic of the violence that was inherent in Portugal’s colonial enterprise.²³ If some years ago the dispute over the historical accuracy of the paintings *O Chafariz d’El-Rei* and *Rua Nova dos Mercadores*, with their depiction of Africans mingling freely with the white inhabitants of Lisbon, remained one for the specialists, the situation is very different now.²⁴ We have, in fact, reached a point where even

²² Rui Ramos posits Expo-98 as the democratic counterpoint to the 1940 *Exposição do Mundo Português*. “One in Western Lisbon, with temporary constructions close to the Monastery of Jerónimos and the Tower of Belém, the other in Easter Lisbon, rendering habitable the old industrial area, both were the shopfront wished for by the governing elites: the Empire from Minho to Timor, turned in on its own history, existing as a separate world in a planet at war or the modern actor in a global space of communication and interchange, which harnesses all cultures and tries to project itself onto them. Both kept the link to the period of the Discoveries, imagined the second time around as a trans-oceanic “meeting of cultures”, with no mention made of warriors and missionaries.” Rui Ramos, “III Parte...,” 774.

²³ Portugal’s involvement in the slave trade was a constant from the 15th century until the mid-19th century, when an already independent Brazil finally closed its ports to slaving ships. Pedro Aires Oliveira writes of the final phase of the slave trade that “this Portuguese inertia might be explained with recourse to the indifference manifested by public opinion towards the moral dimension of the problem, or even by its agreement with many of the arguments which sought to justify slavery and continued to be heard in the Portuguese public sphere.” Aires Oliveira, Aires Oliveira, “O Ciclo Africano,” in João Paulo Oliveira e Costa (Coordinator), José Damião Rodrigues and Pedro Aires Oliveira, *História da Expansão e do Império Português* (Lisbon: Esfera dos Livros, 2014), 341-549, pp. 363-64.

²⁴ See, for example, Diogo Ramada Curto, “Lisboa Era uma Cidade Global,” *Expresso*, 26 February 2017. Ramada Curto expressed doubts about the authenticity of the paintings and attacked the concept behind the then forthcoming “The Global City. Lisbon in the Renaissance” exhibition, to be held in the *Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga*. He wrote, “[t]here

the existence of long-standing Lisbon landmarks associated with Empire are being questioned. Since 2015 a debate, marked by petitions on all sides, has raged over the fate of the shrubby coats of arms of the old ‘overseas provinces’ in the *Praça do Império*. The city proposes to get rid of these coats of arms, first installed in 1961, but now much faded, and to return the square to its original layout, established in 1940 as part of the centenaries then being celebrated, at great expense, by the New State. Conservative (and other) voices have been raised, clamouring for the recuperation of these floral features, ignoring the fact that these were coats of arms of extinct colonies, now turned into independent states. Just across the road stands the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos*, first put up in temporary fashion as part of the 1940 celebrations and then built anew, in stone, in 1960, the fifth centenary of Prince Henry the Navigator’s death. Why, ask some, should this unreconstructed and unthinking fascist-era monument to Empire continue to exist?

What, then, is new about the situation that Portugal is facing? Very simply, this: that after the dashing of all the optimism visible in the late 1980s and 1990s, and in the context of both economic stagnation and Portugal’s transformation into a country of both emigrants (a sign of that stagnation) and immigrants, the debate over Portugal’s colonial past is coinciding and overlapping with the increasingly loud denunciations of the racism evident in Portuguese society and the clear evidence of the lack of progress being made at integrating minorities, especially those of African origin (in comparison with, say, those newly arrived from Eastern Europe). The view is being put forward, with growing insistence, that Portuguese society is structurally and inherently racist, not least because it has never faced up to the nature and consequences of the colonialism it practiced. In other words, an admission of guilt and acceptance of reparations for past misdeeds is necessary to begin to unwind Portugal’s structural racism, allowing current discriminatory practices to be identified and dealt with. The present regime’s much-vaunted lack of racism (witness, for example, the decision not to include race or ethnicity in the latest census, as well as the progress made in the ease of acquisition of Portuguese citizenship), intimately related to the founding principle of the regime— that Salazar’s brand of colonialism was an aberration, at odds with Portuguese

is much to say about this perspective of Lisbon, of Portugal, of its empire and the glorious Manueline era. Far from original, it has become a sort of nonsense which has taken root, unthinkingly, in theses, books and exhibitions. It corresponds, in the main, to a euphemistic vision of the glorious Portuguese past, now shrouded by a vocabulary imported from the social sciences, wherein the idea of network, the travel of objects and the relations between knowledge, information and power are the subject of superficial conceptualizations. More: it is a perspective that tends to turn itself into a luso-tropicalist primer, updated, which includes a reference to economic and commercial aspects, and which alludes to mixed populations, which suggest a sort of hybrid new-age character.” The exhibition was curated by Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and K.J.P. Lowe, who had edited *The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2015). Subsequent scientific tests confirmed the genuine nature of the two pictures.

principles— is, it is alleged by anti-racism campaigners, only a fig-leaf. This view provokes one or more denials from its opponents: that the Portuguese are racist, that they were ever racist, and that their brand of colonialism was anything other than benign: luso-tropicalism— as opposed to Salazarism— lives on in many quarters, not least the State itself. The denials become more fervent, it seems, when the criticism is advanced by Black Portuguese. Of these, no-one is more of a lightning rod than Mamadou Ba, who heads up the *SOS Racismo* organisation and who was, until recently, a leading figure of *Bloco de Esquerda*: the party which, unlike the staid Portuguese Communist Party, has been at the forefront of fighting the culture wars in Portugal.

The latest, and in many ways most shocking example of this thin skin was played out in 2021, and it involved a very divisive Black figure, Lieutenant-Colonel Marcelino da Mata. Marcelino da Mata died in February, aged 80. Born in Guiné-Bissau, he joined the elite commandos at the start of the colonial wars and rose through the Army's ranks, becoming an officer; by 1974 he was a war hero, having been awarded the highest military decorations on offer. He was accused, after the Revolution, of being involved in war crimes. Guiné-Bissau never allowed his return to home soil; in Portugal, he was arrested and tortured by far-Left (*Movimento Reorganizativo do Partido do Proletário*, MRPP) militants and sympathizers, civilian and military, having been accused of participation in a right-wing terrorist movement, the *Exército de Libertação de Portugal*; he subsequently exiled himself in Spain until the end of the PREC in November 1975. A resolution lamenting his passing was introduced in parliament and was approved, having garnered the votes of all the right and, surprisingly, the ruling Socialist Party. Six of the latter's deputies voted against it, staying true to their party's anti-colonial past. One of them, Ascenso Simões, explained,

I was profoundly saddened by the fact that we showed ourselves incapable of separating the sentiments of those brave soldiers who were forced to go to war [...and...] who experience today a certain disenchantment and even a nostalgia which I understand completely, and am not insensible to, from the manipulative reality constructed by Portuguese fascists.

He added, looking to the future,

Our History needs to be decolonized; it needs to be rid of outdated historiographical impulses which were also shaped by positivist research. An anachronistic History will not be tolerated, just as a false History is intolerable.²⁵

²⁵ *Público*, 20 February 2021.

The rest of the left voted against the resolution, but was defeated. The President of the Republic attended Mata's funeral, as did the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces— Portugal's highest-ranked officer— and the Army's Chief of the General Staff. But Mata's alleged crimes were denounced in a furious crescendo. In an editorial, Ana Sá Lopes, of *Público*, noted, ironically,

[j]ust imagine the German minister of Defence paying homage to the 'dedication' and giving the 'deserved recognition' to Nazi commandos. Wouldn't it seem strange? Here in Portugal it doesn't matter, because the colonial war, war crimes and massacres never happened. What's more, and unlike Nazi imperialism, the Portuguese Empire was a 'good Empire.'²⁶

The most violent denunciations came from Mamadou Ba, who tweeted, on 12 February,

CDS wants national mourning to be decreed as a result of the death of the bloodthirsty Marcelino da Mata, who once confessed, 'I never handed a *turra* [the military's deprecative term for its African enemies] over to the PIDE, I used to cut off their balls and stuff them in their mouths and then watch them die.' How disgusting!

In a subsequent tweet, written that same day, he added, "Marcelino da Mata is a war criminal who deserves no respect." What followed was a furious campaign of denunciation of the Senegal-born Ba, who is a Portuguese citizen. Numerous petitions against him were started; the most important, which has gathered over 32,000 signatures, asks for his deportation, arguing that his statements run counter to the values of the common citizen and foment hatred and ill-will between the races. The committed anti-racism organizer— already at the centre of the storm following his comment, in an online conference, about the "need to kill the white man" (which was taken out of context and used as a battering ram against him)— thus stands accused, not for the first time, of fomenting racism and of profiting from it. A similar charge is made by the unashamedly luso-tropicalist movement *Nova Portugalidade*, which places on the same level the racism of the xenophobic far-right and that which, it alleges, animates SOS Racismo.²⁷ This movement

²⁶ Ana Sá Lopes, "A guerra colonial nunca existiu (nem a ditadura)," *Público*, 17 February 2021.

²⁷ <http://novaportugalidade.pt/>.

delights, for example, in noting that Joacine Katar Moreira, elected to the *Assembleia da República* in the 2019 general election, was not the first Black woman in the palace of S. Bento, where Portuguese parliaments sit: Sinclética Soares dos Santos Torres was first elected to represent Angola in the *Assembleia Nacional* in 1965.

In a recent interview to *Público*, Prime Minister António Costa, asked if he was worried by the “spectre” of “the cultural wars around racism or historical memory,” replied,

This worries me deeply [...] I think that two very dangerous phenomena are appearing among us and feeding off each other. One is a self-flagellating revision of our history and the other is the unleashing of racist or xenophobic reactions. And I think as well that these two phenomena, which egg each other on, are extremely dangerous in a country which benefited from the fact that the antifascist struggle was also an anticolonial struggle, that colonial liberation occurred simultaneously with, or was a direct consequence, of our country’s democratic liberation. A country which, throughout the centuries, was able to miscegenate itself throughout the world and which developed a great capacity for intercultural and interreligious dialogue need not be put on a pedestal as having remained immune to all the barbarism which colonialism encompasses, but it need not be demonized as is being done, even by my own comrades, who think that the monument to the Discoveries should be torn down. I believe that a dangerous fracture is being artificially introduced within our national identity, our relationship with the world.

He added,

We have, be it in terms of immigration policy, or of refugees, a record which has resisted all government changes and which, bar the occasional slippage, has always been the subject of consensus. And neither André Ventura nor Mamadou Ba represent the general sentiment of the country. Fortunately.²⁸

²⁸ António Costa, “Está-se a Abrir de Forma Artificial uma Fratura Perigosa para a Nossa Identidade,” *Público*, 4 March 2021.

This ‘fortunately’ raised eyebrows, since it seemingly put racists and anti-racists on par with one another. Costa used his Indian heritage to position himself as an honest broker on racial matters, but Ba took aim at him in an open letter, accusing him of putting political interest ahead of justice, of resurrecting “dogeared lusotropicalist mumbo-jumbo,” and of ignoring recent surveys, including the 2018/19 European Social Survey, which revealed the widespread existence of racist beliefs and assumptions among the Portuguese. What is more, Costa had brushed aside his own government’s anti-racism initiatives, such as the creation of a ‘Working Group for the Prevention and Fight against Racism and Discrimination’ (of which Ba is a member).

What all of this means, then, is that the struggle against racism in Portugal has been twinned, by forces on much of the left, with the issue of colonialism, which is not an abstraction for the Portuguese, as it is for some other Europeans, but which, conversely, is not an issue about which the Portuguese, on the whole, have reflected on as fully and as critically as they should. Portuguese political leaders, since 1974, have taken refuge in the idea of an older Empire as a first bout of globalization whose positive aspects were later betrayed by Salazar, democracy and decolonization arriving naturally together in 1974. Much is left out of this narrative, not least when it comes to the issue of slavery and, after its abolition, the forced labour practices which survived well into the 20th century. In this way, the link between colonialism and racism has been, at the political level, articulated by the far left. By its content it strikes at the heart of what many, if not most, Portuguese see as an important part of their identity, as the “Heróis do Mar, nobre povo” and “nação valente, imortal,” mentioned in the anthem. Portugal may be small and, in European terms, poor; its people may be at the bottom of many continental league tables when it comes to development, productivity, and educational achievement: but once the country and its people mattered, making a positive contribution to world history. That is a conviction which most, comfortable with the post-1974 narrative about Empire, share. For a smaller but very significant number, the attachment to Africa, based on direct lived experience, is more intense still.²⁹

This twinning of racism and colonialism, which many see as self-evident but more still see as an unacceptable libel, is also being driven from abroad. It found an international outlet in the Council of Europe’s recent “Memorandum on combating racism and violence against women in Portugal,”

²⁹ Pedro Aires Oliveira writes of how difficult it is for the Portuguese to turn their backs on Africa: “the emotional attachment of many Portuguese who were born or lived part of their lives in Africa, the belief that the country’s international clout depends, to a large extent, on a repertoire of links inherited from overseas expansion, and, more recently, the search for employment and business opportunities brought about by economic stagnation in the European rectangle are, however, factors which give long life to the spell cast by Africa in the mindset of democratic and post-imperial Portugal.” Aires Oliveira, “O Ciclo Africano...,” 542.

published this year by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic.³⁰ Having consulted leading government ministers, as well as some other appointed officials and “representatives of several civil society organisations,” the Commissioner noted “a number of assaults on people of African descent and other persons perceived as foreigners, as well as against anti-racist and other civil society activists in Portugal.” One of these assaults was the tragic and very public murder of actor Bruno Candê. She also noted that an increase in racist and misogynist discourse was in part associated with the far-right Chega party, represented in parliament since 2019 by its leader, André Ventura (who subsequently attracted 11.90% of the vote in the 2021 presidential elections). Having considered the situation from various angles, Mijatovic issued a number of recommendations. One of them, paragraph 48, states,

The Commissioner believes that further efforts are necessary for Portugal to come to terms with past human rights violations and to tackle racist biases against people of African descent inherited from a colonial past and historical slave trade. In order to tackle Afrophobia more vigorously, it is important to provide society with narratives that adequately shed light on the historically repressive structures of colonialism, ingrained racist biases and their present-day ramifications. School curricula, including citizenship education, are a particularly useful tool to achieve this goal. Against this background, the Commissioner stresses that the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024 offers a relevant framework for state initiatives to eradicate ingrained social injustices and to combat racism and racial discrimination against people of African descent. She invites Portuguese authorities to make increased use of this framework.³¹

This international pressure is unlikely to go away. But if acted upon, it should be applied carefully, and not as part of a one-size-fits-all-countries approach. As João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, José Damião Rodrigues, and Pedro Aires Oliveira noted, in 2014,

Be it as it may, the memory of Empire continues to be internally cultivated as a way for us to understand ourselves and our relationship with the world. In effect, the

³⁰<https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-combating-racism-and-violence-against-women-in-portugal-1680a1b977>

³¹<https://www.un.org/en/observances/decade-people-african-descent>

Portuguese constitute an important, an insurmountable, even, element in the history of many countries, like Morocco, Japan, Turkey, China, India, Thailand, Uruguay, or Sri Lanka. And this memory, although marked by some controversies, continues to be a mark of identity of great significance, as was shown by the almost unanimous acceptance with which parties, press and public opinion followed the activities of the *Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses*, from 1987 to 2002.³²

Such a consensus cannot be easily undone and is being supported by a number of historians who reject what they view as the manipulation of the past, and the way it is taught in schools, in order to suit present-day political needs. Of these the most interventionist is João Pedro Marques.³³ In a recent op-ed for the conservative *Observador*, Marques takes issue with recent statements by figures such as the *Bloco de Esquerda*'s Beatriz Gomes and Mamadou Ba about the need to change how History is viewed and especially taught in Portugal. Marques cites Ba as writing that “[w]e want to reinvent it [History] so that the whole ethnic mosaic of Portuguese society can be reflected in it well and with dignity” in order to make his main point: “[t]here is, today, an enormous effort to reinvent History, to make it politically correct or politically ‘useful’ and the most alarming aspect is that this is relying on the passivity, the silence or even the connivance of many historians.”³⁴ There is clearly a clash here between history as an academic discipline, with all that academic rigour and freedom entail, and history as a school subject, a nation-building and value-affirming tool at the disposal of a state. The further back one travels in time, the more difficult it becomes to generate political lessons for the problems of today— but that does not mean that these problems can be ignored, or that the necessary study of the past in Portugal’s schools should ignore its intended audience, more mixed, and therefore more sensitive to curricular omissions than ever before.

Two final notes, by way of a conclusion. The first is that the allegation of a blanket silence on Portugal’s imperial past, and the Empire’s connection to slavery, is somewhat exaggerated. Some years ago, Lisbon’s municipal

³² João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, José Damião Rodrigues, and Pedro Aires Oliveira, “Conclusão”, in João Paulo Oliveira e Costa (Coordinator), José Damião Rodrigues, and Pedro Aires Oliveira, *História da Expansão...*, 549.

³³ João Pedro Marques is the author of a significant exploration of the processes that brought about the abolition of the slave trade in Portugal: *The Sounds of Silence: Nineteenth-century Portugal and the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (New York and Oxford: Berghann Books, 2006. Translated by Richard Wall).

³⁴ João Pedro Marques, “Espero que o Governo Não Vá na Conversa,” *Observador*, 5 April 2021.

authorities commissioned a memorial to the enslaved people transported by the Portuguese to the Americas. The winning design was chosen last year; it belongs to Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda and it is destined for the Campo das Cebolas (now Largo José Saramago), on the Tagus river front. Entitled *Plantation: Prosperity and Nightmare*, it is composed of 540 black aluminium sugar cane plants, some as high as three metres. Behind the memorial is the desire to underline the economic motivations for slavery and it is due to be completed this year. Also significant as a reckoning with the past was the speech delivered by President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, at the yearly session of parliament which marks the anniversary of the 25 April Revolution.³⁵ Rebelo de Sousa ventured into the field of historical memory, a field that, in the past, has not always been kind to him.³⁶ His speech, deeply personal (Rebelo de Sousa recalling his father's role as Governor-General of Mozambique and Overseas Minister) moved the debate on Portugal's past by a considerable distance. He acknowledged, importantly, that the colonial war, started sixty years earlier, "was what it was because the decades which preceded it, the century that preceded it, the five centuries that preceded it, created or prolonged the contexts that would define and condition it." In other words, the war was the product of centuries of Portuguese history, not just the New State's short-sightedness. The time has come, the President explained, to engage in a thankless task— to stare the past squarely in the face and to reflect on it. Rebelo de Sousa noted how this should be done— avoiding anachronistic readings; learning to view the Portuguese through the eyes of the colonized; and accepting that for all Portuguese over the age of fifty these are profoundly personal matters, bound up with individual memories, triumphs and disappointments. Above all, Rebelo de Sousa pleaded for respect in the process: given its importance, the past should not be used as a political weapon, notably at a critical time like the present, marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting social and economic difficulties. With that respect will come, he suggested, a greater understanding among all sides: the veterans who had fought for "what they understood, or were made to understand, to be the national interest;" those who fought against them, African or Portuguese; those who "arrived with nothing after having devised a life that was, or became, impossible;" and all those who, in the newly independent countries, suffered the effects of civil war, a consequence of colonialism or the way in which decolonization occurred. "The 25 April," stated Rebelo de Sousa, "was

³⁵The text of the speech can be found at <https://www.presidencia.pt/atualidade/toda-a-atualidade/2021/04/discurso-do-presidente-da-republica-na-sessao-solene-comemorativa-do-47-o- aniversario-do-25-de-abril/>.

³⁶ In April 2017, visiting the island of Gorée, in Senegal, Rebelo de Sousa had noted how Portugal had abolished slavery in part of its territory in 1761. He recognized that it was only in the 19th century that abolition was extended across the whole of the Empire, but still much criticism was heaped on the President for not addressing squarely the country's role in the slave trade at such a sensitive location.

carried out to liberate, neither forgetting nor hiding” the past. The speech, in other words, is a plea to rescue the past and the memory debates from the political extremes, turning them into a source of unity rather than a tool for division.

The second note is a reminder that the Portuguese have not always had a sickly sweet view of their imperial past. At the close of the 19th century the debate on Portugal’s past could be as ferocious as it is today; this too first the Republic, then the New State, and finally the present regime obliterated, each for its own purposes. Historian and statesman Oliveira Martins wrote, of the Portuguese in the East, in his *História de Portugal* (first published in 1879),

Portuguese domination quickly acquired the double-edged character which it never lost, despite all the subsequent attempts to regulate it and to create order. At sea, it was a robbery-driven anarchy; on land, a series of bloody depredations. Vasco da Gama had taught how to rule through fire and blood; Sodr  how to reap the harvest of the Mecca-bound ships, by boarding them. Piracy and plunder were the two pillars of Portuguese domination. Its sinews were cannon; pepper was its soul.