

The Moral Economy of Portuguese Postcolonial Return

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Introduction

In 1974, Portugal's 25 April revolution and the rapid decolonization that followed ushered over half a million residents from the former African colonies into the country within little over a year's time. Although all these "decolonization immigrants" (Smith) were termed "*retornados*" (literally translated as "returnees"), almost 40 per cent had actually been born in Africa and had never set foot in Portugal. Based on almost two years of field research, conducted intermittently between 1987 and 1996 in "Olival," this article explores the social trajectories of these decolonization immigrants, as they sought to negotiate a problematic entry into the Portuguese imagined community (Anderson) between 1976 and 1996. It traces the transformation of *retornado* identity from prominent public signifier of moralized and racialized social exclusion to private signifier of prestige.

This study explores how, in the immediate aftermath of decolonization, "*retornado*" was an ascription that simultaneously suggested the possibility of two distinct forms of social exclusion. On one hand, the "*retornado*" label implied a spoiled Portugueseness, produced by migration choices and practices that were cast as morally suspect by kin and community members who had remained behind in Portugal. In a country with a long history of emigration and return, "*retornado*" was a badge of stigma reserved only for those who had emigrated to and returned from Portugal's colonies in Africa, and was actually defined in direct contrast to the identity of Portuguese emigrants to other destinations. The exploration of this contrast reveals a moral economy that shaped understandings of migration and its meaning in popular Portuguese discourse. Choices to migrate to Africa were devalued within this moral economy, in ways that effected the hostile reception of those who returned to Portugal after decolonization as bearers of a morally polluted Portugueseness. Phenotypic evidence of African parentage among a significant minority of the *retornado* population also infused this label with connotations of racialized (and hence more essentialized) differentiation. Consequently, "*retornado*," as a public sign, stood at the

intersection of two public identity narratives, one presuming common (and betrayed) *ethnos* and the other, racially essentialized ethnic otherness. This ambiguity made it an ascription that was powerfully provocative in social interaction and bitterly contested by the postcolonial emigrants themselves.

This study also traces the counter-narratives constructed and deployed by decolonization migrants pursuing their claims to Portugueseness, examining how race, class, and the availability of kinship networks factored into the success of their strategies. It explores the paradoxical social consequences of the atrophy, since 1975, of the *retornado* label within Portuguese popular discourse, which has resulted in the aggravated marginalization of racial minorities, on the one hand, and the emergent reappropriation of the *retornado* label as a private marker of paradigmatic Portugueseness for "white" returnees, on the other. In its conclusion, this study explores the significance of these processes, as they relate to the changing contours of postcolonial discourses on national identity within Portugal.

Historical Background: Decolonization and the Socioeconomic Impact of the *Retornado* Influx

Portugal's 25 April revolution brought about the demise of Europe's longest continuous twentieth-century dictatorial regime and resulted in the last major African decolonization by a European colonial power. Pursuing the fastest possible route to decolonization, the Portuguese government ceded power directly to the various anticolonial, armed movements in the African colonies. Within three months, independence for the colonies had already been announced in Lisbon, a move that precipitated "white"-settler coup attempts in Angola and Mozambique. In the wake of these failed uprisings, nationalization of private property, and the outbreak of civil war in Angola, the majority of the "white" Portuguese settlers and many others associated with the colonial regime left en masse. While many fled to the neighboring countries of southern Rhodesia and South Africa, over 505,000 arrived in Portugal itself. Of this official number, the overwhelming majority arrived from Angola (61 per cent or over 300,000) and Mozambique (33 per cent or over 165,000 [Pires et al]). Consequently, Portugal's population grew by over 5 per cent between late 1974 and early 1976.

Most of these *retornados* arrived with little more than the clothes on their backs and a deep sense of betrayal. They came seeking housing and jobs, in a country with an historically acute housing shortage that was peaking at a time of unprecedented economic and political crisis. In the urban areas, unions organized frequent labor strikes, while peasants in the rural south pressed their claims to

land by forming communes. A plethora of political parties and military interests uneasily negotiated the political future of the state, in the wake of at least one coup and amidst abundant rumors of the possibility of more. Meanwhile, the Portuguese economy suffered severely from the loss of the colonies as a privileged source of raw materials and as protected markets and from the disruption of business, as owners and capital fled the country in response to large-scale nationalizations of industry. Portugal's economic woes were further accentuated by the global economic depression precipitated by the oil crisis of the mid-1970s (Downs).

The arrival of this massive demographic wave quickly aggravated economic conditions and placed the *retornados* at the center of the country's most charged political controversies. A predominantly leftist press vilified the *retornados* as "antirevolutionary reactionaries" and "minions of colonial oppression" and featured stories of *retornados*' unlawfully seizing the houses of vacationing or emigrant owners. Many of these reports erroneously conflated situations in which the government itself commandeered hotels and housing for the *retornados* with the much fewer actual seizures that did occur—not only by *retornados*, but by rural internal migrants as well (see Downs). Despite receiving relatively minimal levels of public assistance, *retornados* were increasingly accused of "stealing housing and jobs" from Portuguese residents. The few large-scale, temporary settlement schemes for *retornados* that were visibly erected in the urban or peri-urban areas (such as in Cascais, Leiria, and the large tent settlement in the Vale do Jamor area outside of Lisbon) were portrayed in the press as dangerous loci of criminality to be contained by the local communities and were described in much the same terms as those used for discussing gypsy encampments and settlements—another historically marginalized and strongly stigmatized population in Portugal. Questions of veracity aside, these accusations resonated powerfully with deep popular concerns and strongly shaped a negative stereotype of those arriving from the African colonies. The *retornado* label quickly became a mark of social stigma in the popular Portuguese discourse of the time.

"Retornados" versus "Emigrants": The Moral Economy of Popular Migration Discourse

Retornados were the target of social opprobrium, not only in the housing-starved urban areas, but throughout the country, including in the communities in which many had originally been born prior to departing for Africa. In contrast to decolonization migrants in France and the Netherlands,² the majority of the *retornados* (over 60 per cent)³ had actually been born in Portugal. The bulk of Portuguese colonial emigration to its settler colonies occurred

during the two decades *after* 1950, precisely when other European powers were contemplating or actually implementing decolonization. Thus, Bender estimated that the roots of over 70 per cent of the European population in Angola did not extend back even one generation (Bender 26). Portugal's archaic settler colonialism was an artifact of the Salazarian regime's attempt to counter mounting international pressure for Portugal to decolonize. The dictatorship's active promotion of Portuguese settlement in Africa in the decades following World War II was intended to substantiate its 1951 proclamation that the colonies were really "overseas provinces," while also coping with rising socioeconomic and demographic pressures within Portugal itself. Thus, unlike decolonization migrants in France and the Netherlands, most *retornados* retained active or at least easily traceable ties to kin in Portugal, and in fact, of those *retornados* born in Portugal, 53 per cent (or approximately 31 per cent of all *retornados*) ultimately returned to the districts where they had been born (Pires et al. 45).⁴ However, most *retornados* quickly discovered that the existence of extended family ties did not unproblematically facilitate their reintegration. Most postcolonial returnees found that they were treated very differently from other "returning" emigrants, who had worked abroad in places like France or Germany. Mr. Maia described his reception by family and neighbors in the following terms: "When we returned in 1976, even our own family members did not want to know us. I was told: 'you left us because it was not good enough for you here with us and did not come back—now you should make it on your own like you wanted before....'" Such an overwhelmingly negative reception by family members and in "home communities" is best explained not only in terms of the economic impact of destitute kin pressing claims on resources in times of crisis, but also in terms of how emigration to Africa had been negatively framed in rural Portuguese popular discourse.

Emigration has been an historically significant factor shaping Portuguese society and identity for at least four centuries (Brettell *Men*; Ferreira; Serrão; Rocha-Trindade *Estudos*; Higgs; Moniz; Baganha). Brettell has described emigration as a strategy focused on improving and reproducing peasant life in rural Portugal, rather than as a way of leaving Portuguese society altogether. Throughout the post-World War II period and well into the 1990s, emigrant remittances played an extremely important role in the local Portuguese rural economies (Graham). In "Olival," as elsewhere throughout rural Portugal (Brettell *Men*; Arroiteia; Boura et al.; Silva et al.; Klimt), emigrants sent sums of money regularly to their immediate family members.

Every August droves of emigrants arrived from abroad for several weeks to visit family members, enjoy festivities, and settle

business and social affairs that had transpired since a previous trip. These yearly visits represented an influx of money and gifts for relatives and were marked by a rotating series of Festivals of the Emigrant in the various towns of the Olival district. During these visits, many emigrants also worked on the construction and furnishing of their houses—one of the principle investments made with their earnings and a major motive cited by many for working abroad in the first place.

In many rural communities such as Olival, emigrants achieved considerable social and economic status in the local communities. Well into the 1980s and even to some extent in the 1990s, emigration was often considered the only possible route to material success. In Olival, emigrants aspired to build small mansions that visibly announced their material success. Not infrequently, these houses were expensively furnished, yet little used, by emigrants who spent most of their time working abroad. Grassy front lawns often made public statements about a level of material success, beyond the worries and need that led neighbors to plant vegetables and other consumables.

However, the local social status of emigrants has long depended not only on the ability of emigrants to achieve personal prosperity but, most importantly, on material manifestations of their concern for, connection with, and care for relatives who remained in Portugal and for their home communities. Those who remained behind in local communities closely monitored how an emigrant's extended family fared in the migrant's absence, as a measure of the emigrant's own ability and willingness to fulfill moral obligations. Similarly, they paid close attention to the frequency of visits by those working abroad, particularly on marked life occasions, such as the death of close relatives. Emigrants were expected to be major contributors to community projects, such as the building of local sports facilities, and to supporting local civic associations and clubs.

In rural communities throughout Portugal, like Olival, emigrants were thus evaluated in terms of how far they proved themselves willing and able to perform an idealized emigrant script. This script proposed a migrant whose commitment to home and hearth was continuously manifest in word and deed, who neither lost nor wished to lose connections to Portugal and retained ultimate roots there. In popular Portuguese discourse, migration was thus cast as a practice meant to enable and improve a future in Portugal itself for the emigrant's kin, community, and for the emigrant himself.

Popular migration discourse throughout rural Portugal has thus long been dominated by a strong ideology of return (Brettell *Men*, "Leaving"; Serrão; Moniz; Klimt), typically portrayed through the Portuguese concept of "*saudades*"—a term that implies "longing and nostalgia for," "rootedness to," and both past and future orientation

to Portugal itself. Migration has thus been responsive not only to the vicissitudes of the Portuguese rural economy, but to a moral economy as well—"moral" here in the sense of a socially constructed and sanctioned sense of what (non-negotiably) should be and thus, conversely, of what practices constitute recognized violations of these social prescriptions.

In spite of this ideology of return, it is a well-documented fact that many emigrants have in fact not returned to Portugal (Brettell "Leaving"; Higgs; Baganha). Emigrants have thus encountered a (not unfounded) skepticism about whether their rhetoric of return reveals genuine intentions, or alternatively conceals a private agenda that envisions a new home and primary social and economic investments elsewhere, outside Portugal.

Consequently, it is important not to underestimate the degree to which emigrants have attempted to respond to the imperatives of this moral script in their public performance, even as they engage in practices that stretch the credibility of their claims to abide by it. Emigrants have thus recrafted their prolonged absences and, in some cases, actual non-returns in terms of the discursive currency of this moral economy. Thus, prolonged absences have frequently been portrayed in letters home as "undesired" and "regrettable" consequences of unforeseen circumstances, such as illness, economic setback, or even sudden and spectacular windows of opportunity that, if taken, will actually speed an ultimate final return. Ultimate return home has been portrayed as a future inevitable, though often at an indefinite time in the future, specified in terms of as yet unrealized, and always ambiguously defined (and hence malleable), conditionalities (i.e., "when I earn enough," "when my son is established," etc.). As a case in point, during eight years in Providence, RI, I crossed paths every spring with a Portuguese emigrant who was holding a yard sale because he "was about to go back home"—every year, in the same place, at the same time—every year, our same conversation about his imminent return in the next few weeks, and every year, the same ironic and unselfconscious departing statement from him: "*Adeus* ('goodbye'), I'll see you back again *next year!!!*"

Thus, throughout the broad coastal plains of central and northern Portugal, the large, tiled houses that publicly marked the success of many emigrants stood side-by-side with a great many partially built, cement and red-brick skeletons of unfinished houses, the symbolic declaration of future return—houses that, nevertheless, remained entirely unchanged, often for decades, sometimes permanently. Despite actual attrition and the suspicion of abandonment, such performances often maintain some credibility among relatives back in Portugal as legitimate intentions of return. In part, the fact that such performances were often managed from

abroad rendered motives for non-return inscrutable (is he really not well? did the car break down and cost them too much to repair?) and facilitated the legitimating of such narratives of intended, postponed, and deferred return.

However, the credibility of such claims from abroad also rested on the performance of previous parts of the migration script and, most critically, on the performance of leaving itself. In her study of rural migration strategies in Portugal, Brettell describes a typical "leaving performance," as an emigrant (named "Zézinho") attempts to assuage his mother's tears, not just with vague or abstract promises of return, but by elaborating on his concrete plans for what will happen back home upon return—a new house on that plot of adjacent land, a restaurant to be built in the patio area—plans that orient the whole migration enterprise back to home and hearth (Brettell "Leaving"; Klimt). Such performances of departure established frames (Goffman) that set the terms for interpreting future action in some particular ways, rather than in others. Thus, a missed visit was not viewed as evidence of rootedness elsewhere or of intentions of non-return, but instead as the product of thrift that would enable a more expeditious ultimate return back home.

In order to understand the stigma affixed to the *retornados* by kin and neighbors within their own home communities throughout rural Portugal, it is critical to note how their own departure discourses established a very different hermeneutic for interpreting the meaning of their migration and eventually for their return. In stark contrast to the departure of the *Zézinhos*, which carefully reproduced the ideology of return and attachment to home, those who migrated to the African colonies openly aspired to permanent departure from their local communities. Few *retornados* interviewed in this study described any intention, at the time of their departure from Portugal, of ever returning home. In the course of over a decade of interaction with the residents of Olival, I only encountered two *retornados* who claimed any original intention of returning to Portugal. Moreover, both stated that they had eventually renounced this intention, after residing in Angola for more than a decade. The Salazarian regime's policies played an important role in motivating permanent departure. The dictatorship's colonial policy specifically aimed at settler-driven development in Mozambique and Angola, and only provided financial incentives to those who would commit to long-term and, in principle, permanent relocation to Africa (Bender).

The decision to migrate to Mozambique or Angola was thus framed from the outset in terms of an entirely different script, one that signaled a break with home communities—an orientation directly in contrast to the ultimate allegiance to home community signaled in the performances of leaving of emigrants to other (particularly

European) destinations.⁵ Leaving for Africa was thus not the performance of eventual return—new homes at home, restaurants, and ultimate return remained un-envisioned in the colonial departure script. Land in Portugal was likely to be sold, instead of bearing the emerging frame and gradual fleshing out of a retirement house.

To those who remained in rural Portuguese communities such as Olival, migration to Africa contrasted starkly and very visibly with the migration of emigrants to other destinations. The choice to go to Africa was evaluated in light of understandings about what migration should mean, as represented in other migratory alternatives. Migration to Africa was thus often seen as a choice to *not follow* another proven and available migration stream to France or Germany or elsewhere, streams that not only remained oriented to Portugal but played an important role in enabling and maintaining rural Portuguese communities back home. Thus, choices to emigrate to Africa often sparked serious contention within families, in which intergenerational conflict often rose to the surface and sometimes further shaped motivations for leaving.

Moreover, those who left for Africa were far less likely to maintain regular correspondence with or visit extended kin back in Portugal. In contrast to France, Germany, Switzerland, and even Venezuela, the US, and Canada, Mozambique and Angola were never sources of major remittances back to Portugal, despite their sizeable populations of rural Portuguese origin. In one regional study, conducted in 1982 in the central region of Portugal, only 17.2 per cent of *retornados* reported ever sending remittances back to Portugal, in contrast to 91.7 per cent of returned migrants from other emigration destinations (Boura et al. 67)

It was precisely the fact that migration to Africa was a matter of volition—of *choosing* unsanctioned over sanctioned and viable alternatives—that cast the interpretations of emigration to Africa by those left behind in moral terms. Unlike other emigrants, those who migrated to Africa were seen by most other rural Portuguese as placing themselves above family and community—as having chosen the pursuit of a prosperity that was unshared and unresponsive to kinship and community obligations. The suspicion of corrupted morals, characterized by greed, self-interest, and laziness, was further stoked by tales of the exploitation of the labor of Africans by “white” colonists. Mr. Simões, a retired ceramic worker who had always resided in Portugal, expressed these sentiments in an interview conducted in Olival in 1993:

The *retornados* did not want to work in Portugal with their families, after a life of ease (*vida a larga*) in Africa, where the blacks did everything for them.... They went to where others

would do the work for them because they did not want real work, like my own in the factory for thirty years or in the field where life is hard ... even in France, they must work long hours, but in Africa, they could all have shops and sit and drink coffee. They would say to the blacks "do this, do that" and then they would say "we are working" ... they were successful because they exploited the government and forgot about their families so they would not have to work.... This is why so many have now become successful in commerce in the district, with grocery stores and clothing stores and in trade.. Even now, you do not see them lift their hand to work the land and they always have clean hands, without any calluses

...

The social differentiation implied by the ascription "*retornado*" can thus only be understood in light of an understanding of how African migration was evaluated within the moral economy that characterized popular Portuguese migration discourse. The assignment of *retornadoness* suggested a particular "(im) moral-act-history," embodied in migration choices and actions—it suggested that those who had left for Africa had acted (i.e., emigrated) in fundamentally immoral and un-Portuguese ways.

The attribution of "*retornado*" status also signified a suspicion of the future immoral behavior of those so described. One *retornado*, who returned with his young family to a town near Olival where he had been born, described the consequences of such suspicions:

Most of these people refused to rent houses if they found out that you came from the colonies ... even though there were so many houses here that were empty because of those (emigrants) in France. They said once a *retornado* gets in, they will never leave⁶ and they will spoil everything. They only thought and said the worst if they knew you were a *retornado*, like that we would not act civilized because we were used to the way things were in Africa.... What do these imbeciles know of Africa, where we had houses that were more advanced than these *saloios* ("provincials")? ... I was born in (nearby) Aldeial and my parents were born here—we had land we sold.... And yet we were not treated as Portuguese in our own land.... When I wanted to work I was called an "exploiter" by people who did not even know me. If I could not find work, then I was called a degenerate who wanted to "abuse the charity of the Portuguese"—all this by the same individuals! Who are these people from the place where I came from to tell me about my life and that I am not as Portuguese as they are and their fathers, as mine, and telling me: "go back to Africa"?

Retornados faced the double bind of a social interpretation of their personal past that provided them with a stigmatized identity, and the fact that this identity, in turn, constituted a frame that explained their social behavior as a product of (im)moral character. I interviewed Mrs. Marta, a woman who had returned to Olival, after having left, as a "procured wife," for Angola in 1966. She and her husband and two children returned to Olival in 1975. Despite the fact that her husband had left for Angola at the age of 16 and severed ties with his father, they had inherited a house and some land a year before independence, when her husband's father had died without a will. She described the challenges she, in particular, had faced in her first years back in Olival:

It was very difficult when we first came.... [E]ven though we had lost everything, people would say that we had not worked to get what we had in the first place.... [I]t was especially hard for the women because we had to work very hard, even harder than they do in the Alentejo (the often negatively stereotyped rural south of Portugal) ... and then because some of us had forgotten some of the customs and obligations, the women from here would say that we had forgotten who we were and that we thought we were more than they were because in Africa *eramos gente* (we were someone).

In her study in the 1970s of "São Miguel," a pseudonym for another small town in the central coastal plain of Portugal, Riegelhaupt described ideologies of local social interaction that were typical throughout the rural center and north, ideologies in which households strove to maintain balanced reciprocal relations among themselves: "good relations depend on their symmetry; no one should give more than is received, and the objective is to return the like amount as soon as possible" (Riegelhaupt 174). In Olival, as in São Miguel, such processes of "social balancing" presumed a continuously practiced connectedness, which allowed important knowledge to be constantly updated, in a process of "social accounting" used to evaluate the appropriateness of behavior and thus status in the local community. By way of concrete example, within twenty-four hours of someone's death in Olival, information about a deceased individual quickly circulated through an informal network, giving the cause of death and the time and date of the funeral. Funerals were fulcrum social occasions for enacting reciprocity in ways that established status and community membership. Decisions about whether to attend a funeral depended on a host of important factors, including the status of the deceased and his/her family and, perhaps most importantly, the record of the deceased's family in attending the funerals of one's own relatives and the forms of

homage and support provided on those occasions. Families kept careful track of who went to whose funerals and gave what flowers or gifts—women maintained special books with an elaborate record of this information, which sometimes extended back several generations. Yet, these decisions were always arrived at in complex and contingent ways that were the outcome of negotiations within (primarily women's) social networks rather than the straightforward translation of a written record or of an abstract formula, applied in an unvarying manner from case to case. Dense social networks were crucial so that these negotiations could be adequately informed; *retornados* (like Mrs. Marta) often lacked both this information and the locally rooted social relationships that informed such social performances. Their inability to fulfill many of the aforementioned prescriptions was typically attributed not to the duration of their absence abroad but instead to the fact that they were *retornados*. By contrast, similar disjunctures and failings on the part of emigrants to other destinations were often overlooked and excused or even compensated for through greater social interaction.

Thus, as a label whose narrative grounding suggested moral differentiation, the ascription of "*retornado*" proposed a powerful frame for interaction between arrivals from Africa and local Portuguese communities and family members. As a framing that ascribed their status to (im)moral choices related to their departure, the "*retornado*" ascription clearly devalued the claims of African arrivals on the resources of community and kin upon return. It undermined rights enshrined in understandings of community and the moral economy of migration that these arrivals might otherwise have claimed by emphasizing their Portuguese roots; it did so by strongly suggesting that their migratory actions had violated the meanings of Portugueseness itself as enacted in migration.

The "Race" Complicator

If the "*retornado*" label was stigmatizing because it implied moral marginalization within the Portuguese imagined community, it also contained the suggestion of a more essentialized differentiation, which threatened to place those so described outside the Portuguese moral community itself, as racial others. The best estimates indicate that between twenty-five thousand and thirty-five-thousand returnees (Baganha) were of African rather than European descent. Yet, in the years immediately after decolonization, all arrivals from Africa, regardless of parentage, skin phenotype, or actual birth in Portugal, were designated as "*retornados*," leading, to some extent, to the term's impregnation with connotations of potential racialized difference. The association of *retornado*-ness

with racial minorities was also a product of this subpopulation's disproportionate public profile. Benefiting from fewer kinship networks in Portugal, *retornados* of African descent were more likely to settle in the peri-urban shantytowns and government-sponsored projects that received most of the media's negative attention.

Mr. Anibal, a retired Portuguese civil servant, who lived on the outskirts of Lisbon, provided typical commentary on the arrival of the decolonization migrants that clearly depicted the *retornados* as racialized others:

When the *retornados* arrived it created a nightmare. In the end they abused the Portuguese way of hospitality because they did not act with respect, but like this was their land in Africa. And it is important to note that the ones who came were the more civilized ones who had more Portuguese influence and exposure to some culture ... *senão* ... (an idiomatic expression, literally translated as "if not," but silently implying the idea, "can you imagine how much worse it might have been"). Even so, they remain much the same.... Even in the *bairros* (social housing) they could not take advantage of the basic amenities because it was not their way.... [N]ow even the water and the electricity in the buildings don't work and everything that they could burn was burned in cooking fires so that the buildings look like craters. Even the poor Portuguese who come from the Alentejo [rural south] would not do this. It's a tribal thing ...

Such narratives explained behavior as the product of essentialized, and therefore involuntary and immutable, difference, rather than voluntary choice. These narratives also explained the behavior of individuals with reference to the attributes of a social group, rather than as a product of individual choices or idiosyncrasies (Hicks). Consequently, this behavior was explained as an involuntary by-product of social difference, rather than as a voluntary decision by a moral actor. Those whose skin color identified them, within Portuguese social constructions of race, as being of African descent consistently confronted discriminatory interpretations of their behavior, grounded in racial stereotypes. In 1994, Mrs. Faria, a fifty-two-year-old woman who described herself as of mixed race, born in Angola, described her early experience upon arriving in Lisbon in 1975, when she found work on a cleaning crew at a local clinic:

After I had arrived it was very traumatizing.... [I]t was a year before my husband was able to come and all that time I

was living in a shack in Cascais, without any conditions or anyone I knew except for a cousin.... Because of this, I often got sick and sometimes I would stay home because it was too much.... Still sometimes I went in extra days to work in order to make up the time. The crew boss was very abusive and always said that we *retornadas* stole work from the Portuguese and should go back to our own place in Africa.... [H]e said I did not do things the way he wanted because *retornadas* did not know how to clean properly.... [H]e would even say when someone else did something wrong that they had caught the *jeito da retornada* (*retornada* "way"). One week I had to take off three days because I was sick. When I came back he had convinced his superior to fire me because she said *retornadas* are lazy and cannot work because that is how it is in Africa and that we were all liars and I was lying when I said I was sick because he had seen me the day before at the market. It was a great lie and injustice ...

The association of a large racial minority with *retornado* status positioned this label at the intersection of at least two identity narratives that framed difference and suggested explanations for behavior that were distinctly, and in some ways even contradictorily, stigmatizing. On the one hand, *retornado* identity often suggested moral differentiation resulting from a history of immoral (migratory) action. Yet, such histories could only be deemed immoral if their perpetrators were, in fact, part of the imagined community to whom these moral prescriptions purportedly applied—that is, they could not be criticized for betraying their Portugueseness by acting in an “un-Portuguese” fashion unless they were assumed to be (ethnically) Portuguese to begin with. On the other hand, *retornado* identity at times was used to suggest an essentialized ethnic difference. Rather than marginalization within the imagined Portuguese community, this narrative suggested exclusion from it, essentializing difference in terms of a distinct origin (Africa as opposed to Portugal), signified by phenotypic difference.

This potential for racialized othering loaded into the “*retornado*” term was perhaps most clearly revealed in instances in which skin phenotype itself was racialized and ethnically assigned on the basis of *retornado* status. Mrs. Olinda was 43 when I interviewed her in 1993 and had been born in Angola. Her father had been “white” and her mother, “*mestiça* like her.” Her family had owned a small farm in Angola, where she had received a high-school education and some post-secondary vocational training. Her parents had sent her, in 1975, to Portugal. Her brothers and sisters had followed over the next two years, while her parents remained in Angola, where they

both died in early 1980. Her father's extended family refused to help her or acknowledge their relationship. Unassisted by relatives, she had lived in the infamous Vale do Jamor tent city outside Lisbon for several years after arriving and had met her "white" husband there in 1978, a fisherman who was born and raised in Mozambique. She described how her daughters were reassigned from "white" to racial-minority status on the basis of their *retornado* status:

People were very hard on us.... They said we had come to steal jobs from the Portuguese. I was treated badly sometimes. I use to ride the bus to Alges and people would treat me badly because they could see where I had gotten on and that I was from Jamor. The people in the surrounding communities said we all lived like animals down there and were uncivilized ... sometimes they would not let me in to buy food. They said that we lived in filth and stank ... but we had very little water and the river was a *porcaria* (filth). My children went to school in Linda-a-Velha and they enjoyed it very much ... until the others found out they lived in Jamor—after that they started to call the children "moors" (a highly derogatory racial term) and "stupid." Sometimes even the teacher did this.

It was the lurking suggestion of racialized ethnic difference that above all else led to its vigorous contestation by the "white" *retornado* majority. The ways in which pervasive racism characterized and structured colonial society in lusophone Africa has been well-documented by numerous analysts (see, for example, Bender; Pennevenne)—understandings that both informed the sense of self and benefited the "white" settlers in Mozambique and Angola. "White" settlers arriving from Africa thus remained particularly sensitive to the potential implications of the term. Mr. Castro, a *retornado* from Angola, described his own reaction in one incident as follows:

In 1977 I was trying to get a building permit at the county office. I had been there three times because of the bureaucracy. Finally, I was getting tired of running back and forth and I said it would be easier to just build without a permit. One individual in the office—I did not know him—stated that I was just like all the other *retornados* who thought they could come and *mandar* ("boss around") in Portugal but they were mistaken—that we should go back to our own land because Portugal was for the Portuguese not for foreigners and racists. ... It was too much—I vaulted the counter and attacked this ignorant—my friends saved him from more damage than he

should have gotten. I told him that I was Portuguese and that his parents must be the ones that were probably *retornados* because it was obvious he was such an imbecile ...

Two Decades Later: Successful *Retornado* Counter-Narratives

A quarter of a century after the massive influx from Africa and in stark contrast to the immediate years that followed decolonization, the term "*retornado*" had lost its salience and visibility in Portuguese public discourse and interaction. Unlike with the *pieds noirs* in France, there is no longer a publicly recognized, *retornado* ethnic minority in Portugal. It is not an identity that organizes either political opinion or daily social interaction in the same ways that it once did. By the late 1980s, the term was rarely if ever seen in newspapers. By the 1990s, it was rarely if ever heard in Olival outside of the private interviews in which this researcher invoked it. Most of those who arrived from Africa had reestablished themselves in Olival and elsewhere throughout the country and were no longer imagined or approached by neighbors, strangers, and family as "*retornados*"; they were seen as "sisters," "clients," "retirees," "cousins," and "neighbors"—that is, in roles that accrue to all those accepted as members of the broader Portuguese community. In short, there was a radical atrophy in the public sphere of "*retornado*" as an identity label. The final part of this study examines the process by which the "*retornado*" label lost its salience for social interaction and the socially differentiated consequences of this process for different segments of the population that arrived from Africa as a result of decolonization.

From the very outset, the "*retornado*" label and all the forms of stigmatized differentiation it implied—(im)moral history and ethnicity alike—were rejected and hotly contested by all postcolonial arrivals from Portuguese Africa. These migrants pressed their claims to inclusion in the Portuguese imagined community, through counter-narrative strategies of their own. Their narratives sought to suppress and subvert the different forms of marginalization within, and disconnection from, the Portuguese imagined community, by offering alternative interpretations of the meaning of migration experiences to Africa and by appropriating the overthrown dictatorship's own official rhetoric, a rhetoric that proclaimed culture, language, and citizenship (rather than race) as the defining criteria of "Portugueseness."

In the face of claims of moral and racial exclusion, *retornados* sought to construct identities that emphasized their connections to Portugal and their claims on Portugueseness. Consistently throughout my own interviews, *retornados* appealed to the Salazarian

regime's legal redefinition of the African colonies as "overseas provinces of Portugal and an integral part of Portuguese territory." The same symbolic story was recounted to me frequently, by mutually unacquainted arrivals from Mozambique—how in front of one of the colonial administration buildings in Lourenço Marques, black-and-white cobblestones similar to those in one of Lisbon's most famous plazas (the *Rossio*) spelled out in capital letters: "This is Portugal." This emphasis on the rights enshrined in citizenship represented an inversion of the claims of moral differentiation. Through this inversion they cast themselves in the role of victims whose rights had been betrayed by a government that was supposed to protect its own. For those who had to renegotiate their status in communities of origin they had once left, emphasis on the betrayed rights of citizenship inverted claims of moral failure, portraying those in Portugal as the ones who had acted in "un-Portuguese" ways by allowing the severing of the nation and the abandonment of fellow countrymen.

The mere existence and deployment of such counter-narratives in and of themselves do not necessarily explain the demise of the "*retornado*" label in Portuguese public discourse—a demise more remarkable when seen in comparison to the persistent salience of *pied noir* status in France, despite the far more amenable social and economic conditions in which that "return" occurred. Nor does it explain how throughout rural Portugal most *retornados* have proven capable, with the passage of time, of reactivating atrophied social networks and of successfully relegitimizing their activities as realizations of the script written by local moral economies.

One of the major reasons for this success has been the *retornados*' ability to translate advantages in human capital into material success. As a population, the *retornados* had benefited from considerably more education and professional experience than the rest of the Portuguese population. Whereas 51 per cent of the total Portuguese population in 1981 had not yet completed at least primary school, only 17 per cent of the *retornados* suffered from the same problem. Despite figuring as under 6 per cent of the total population, *retornados* represented 16 per cent of all Portuguese with a "professional degree" and 11 per cent of those with higher education degrees (Pires et al. 114–5). The *retornados* arrived in Portugal during a time when many professionals were leaving the country because of the uncertain political climate and the socialist economic policies of the post-25 April period. They were, accordingly, well placed to fill needed vacancies and get in on the ground floor of Portugal's economic expansion in the 1980s. By 1981, *retornados* represented over 14 per cent of all professionals in the banking, financial service, and insurance industries and occupied just under 11 per cent of all civil service positions in the country.

Just over 50 per cent of *retornados* exercised what was ranked as a "skilled profession," as opposed to under 29 per cent of the rest of the total Portuguese population. Such differences in human capital were likely to be even more accentuated in rural areas (Pires et al.).

Drawing on their business experience in Africa, which had required a form of entrepreneurship stifled under the corporatist models of the Salazarian state back in Portugal (Riegelhaupt), the *retornados* were at the forefront of post-revolutionary small business initiatives throughout Portugal. Frequently named after places in Africa, such as "Café Luanda" and "Lourenço Marques Market," restaurants, small grocery shops, and numerous other small businesses throughout Portugal soon signaled *retornado* enterprise and success. By 1981, five years after decolonization was completed, the *retornados* represented just under 10 per cent of all small-business owners (Pires et al.). In 1981, when over 20 per cent of the total Portuguese population was involved in mostly small-scale peasant agriculture, only 6 per cent of the *retornados* followed this occupation, whereas 65 per cent worked in the tertiary sector and 29 per cent, in the secondary sector.⁷ Arriving in Portugal without access to agricultural lands had reinforced the tendency for *retornados* to move into the service and industrial sectors. The relative advantage of *retornados* vis-à-vis rural counterparts was significantly reinforced as a result, since it was precisely these sectors that experienced growth during two decades in which returns on small-scale agriculture suffered a significant downturn. The entrepreneurial achievements of those who arrived from Africa and their material success after having "lost it all" allowed many *retornados* successfully to challenge differentiation and marginalization within the Portuguese community on moral grounds. Their material success and the passage of time allowed them to reinsert themselves into patterns of reciprocity characteristic of local moral economies and strengthened the interest of local populations in having them participate in local networks of reciprocal exchange—funerals, baptisms, weddings, public works, festivals, and associations. The success of many *retornados*, particularly in the small rural communities throughout Portugal, involved a very public and self-conscious performance of virtue, as evidenced in hard work and investment in the local community. In Olival, Mrs. Letra described this change over time as follows:

[T]he women from here always said "*retornadas* don't work, *retornadas* don't work" ... but then they watched me open up the foundation of this house alone with a hoe, while my husband worked ... and later on they saw me help the mason laying bricks because my husband could not. And he kept working even in his condition to keep bread on the table. Even

after his surgery he drove a truck, delivered bread, collected scrap metal. Now we have better houses and cars than these people who always lived here do and they must be quiet because they saw the work we did and that when we came we had nothing and that now we have more than they do ...

The Demise of *Retornado* Identity and the Reinforcement of Racial Stigma

Despite the successful suppression of the "*retornado*" label and its virtual disappearance from the public sphere, not all those who arrived from Africa escaped the social stigma and marginalization that the term once denoted. No longer designated as *retornados*, those whose phenotype differentiated them, within Portuguese social ideologies of race, as "black" remained excluded, if not legally from Portuguese citizenship, then certainly, in the manner of their treatment in everyday social interaction, from the Portuguese imagined community.

The successful suppression of the term "*retornado*" did not translate into the acceptance of this minority as Portuguese but, paradoxically, resulted in their conflation with other populations of African origin who did not have claims to Portuguese citizenship. The 1980s witnessed a massive influx of (often illegal) Cape Verdeans, who came to work during the construction boom in the metropolitan areas (Muir). Increasingly, non-"white" *retornados* found they were assumed to be Cape Verdeans and were discriminated against as foreigners.

This trend was dramatically evidenced in one *retornado* family I knew personally for over twenty years. Of the three children, only the youngest one was noticeably of darker complexion (the great-grandmother was of African origin). Placed in different schools than his older siblings, he was constantly singled out by classmates and school officials and called "Cape Verdean" and "*preto*" ("black"), while his two siblings never suffered similar racial ascription or discrimination.

Paradoxically, it was those who were most likely to be discriminated against on the basis of their skin color and marked as non-Portuguese in everyday interaction who proved most likely to deny the existence of systematic racism in Portugal, in order to press their own claims to Portugueseness. Time after time in my own interviews with those who described themselves as *mestiços* ("mixed race") Portuguese, popularized and abbreviated versions of Gilberto Freyre's theory of lusotropicalism would follow denials of the existence of systematic racism in Portugal.

Ironically, these narratives appropriated the fictions of racial miscegenation and non-discrimination propagated by the Salazarian

state to justify the colonial enterprise, in order to defend the narrators' claims to Portugueseness. Organized around an emphasis on legal status (citizenship), cultural affinity, and linguistic commonality, such narratives challenged a racialized imagining of the boundaries of the Portuguese imagined community. They emphasized common citizenship and common culture as the defining criteria of "Portugueseness." Thus, as did many others, Mrs. Olinda, the *mestiça* woman from Angola, was quick to point out that

[w]e were always Portuguese and even had a better Portuguese education than many of those who lived here on the continent. In school we learned all the kings and history of Portugal. The geography they taught us was the rivers and mountains of Portugal and not of Africa.... [T]his is the geography I know, not that of Angola....

Yet, in everyday social interaction, the claims of all racial minorities to Portugueseness have been systematically rejected (see Valle de Almeida; Sieber). With the disappearance of the "*retornado*" label, as a result of its systematic contestation by the "white" *retornado* majority, those decolonization immigrants who were racial minorities were reclassified. Their identity was renegotiated in terms of a social ideology of Portuguese national identity, in which race, nation, and increasingly, location (see Noivo) were believed to coincide. Phenotypically designated, race remained a non-negotiable cornerstone of the way in which the Portuguese community was socially imagined. *Civitas* ("legal rights to inclusion"), and even kinship itself, were thus subordinated to racial ideologies in the definition of *societas* ("the social practice and perception of inclusion") (Werbner). This was most clearly and poignantly evidenced in the denial by the Portuguese of kinship affiliation, in cases of mixed-race parentage and descent. Mr. João, a returnee born in Olival, who returned there in 1976, while married to an Angolan woman of partial African descent, recounted his experience with this form of rejection:

Those from here (in Olival) who could have helped us—they did not want to know of us or see our faces. They said the Portuguese did not need to take responsibility for what Africans had brought on themselves.... Were we not Portuguese like they were?.... My oldest son was born in Luanda (Angola) when Luanda was Portugal and now is he not Portuguese?.... Do they forget that his father was born here in this house because [the son] is *mestiço*? ... I am revolted above all by those who [are] of the same blood [but] will nevertheless

not speak to my children nor to me—but once and then we came to blows. To be treated by my own blood as a stranger—this is too much.... [T]hese are a treacherous people (*povo traiçoeiro*), who strike from behind like no people I knew in Africa ... and yet they say these beautiful children of mine are “unintelligent” and treat them like beasts at school ...

Ultimately, the demise of the “*retornado*” category did not reaffirm the citizenship or culturally-based claims of non-“white” *retornados* to inclusion in the Portuguese imagined community. If anything, the public demise of the “*retornado*” label further reinforced their exclusion, by emphasizing their connection via phenotype to a population that had no rights of citizenship and a far more tenuous cultural-linguistic connections to Portugal than those the *retornados* legally claimed.

Postscript: The “Private” Revival of De-Racialized *Retornado* Identity as an Emblem of Portugueseness

While the social trajectory of the *retornados* themselves has been highly differentiated over the last twenty years, the trajectory of the term “*retornado*” itself is still in the making. The social re-designation of all non-“white” arrivals as ethnically non-Portuguese “Africans” has paradoxically freed the term “*retornado*” from the racialized implications that initially impregnated this label in the immediate post-decolonization environment, creating the possibility for its re-appropriation as a signifier with positive connotations within national identity discourse. By the late 1990s, there were indications that some (“white”) returnees were beginning to re-explore and re-appropriate the term “*retornado*” itself, in ways that infused the term with entirely different meanings—as a claim to prestige and centrality, rather than marginality, within the imagined Portuguese community.

As Portugal has attempted to reimagine a postcolonial national identity, it has engaged in a process of reinventing its past through a carefully crafted process of selective remembering and forgetting. The emergence of an active public discourse, at several levels—within the state, within intellectual and academic circles, and in popular media and discourse—centered around notions of Lusophonia, emphasizes Portugal’s role in world history in a particular way: as the bridge between civilizations, the catalyst for cultural interaction, and the historic forbearer of multiculturalism and globalization. This multilayered discourse represents an effort to claim a geostrategic social and political place for Portugal in the present, based on a sanitized and selective representation of the past, one that emphasizes the greatness and global extension of Portugal and Portuguese activity in the past.

It is within this discourse that the term "*retornado*" has regained some value as identity currency, as some have acknowledged being *retornados*, in order to indicate their own personal connection to a "Portugal that was once greater than it is today"—the Portugal of world destiny and significance, for which present-day Portugal increasingly seems to evidence *saudades* (roughly translatable as "nostalgia") and in which it selectively seeks a way to imagine a national destiny. Those who arrived from Africa thus sometimes use the term to allude to themselves, as the last remnants of this greater Portugal—of the true Portugal—thus transforming their past migration to Africa from an act that violated a Portuguese moral script to one that fulfilled it. This sentiment was articulated on my return visit in 1998, by Mr. Alia, a *retornado* who once worked as a railroad conductor in Mozambique: "We were all Portuguese there and Portugal was only something when it had the overseas provinces.... [W]e were the real Portuguese, who did something for Portugal.... Portugal was made by discovery and by those who went.... They cut off the right hand that did all the country's work with *Abril* (The revolution of 25 April 1974)".

Yet, rather than an identity displayed in the broad marketplaces of public interaction, "*retornado*" in this vein is a term used privately and quietly with children and in intimate "safe" settings, often with others who themselves returned from Africa as well. It is a way of privately signaling moral worth, not only in terms of greater connection to a mythical and essentialized Portuguese identity, but as a sign of having prevailed, in the face of unusual hardship and discrimination, through hard work. Thus, many *retornados* will tell you that they know that if they meet another *retornado*, that person will be a good employee, a hard worker, and a reliable and congenial or more cosmopolitan person. This carefully revived and much less publicly deployed *retornado* identity is only possible in light of the term's prior purging of implications of racial and ethnic otherness. It is thus, critically, not made available to "black" or *mestiço* *retornados*, nor is it even acknowledged by "white" *retornados*, when minorities of color attempt to use it. Neither is it exhibited in the public marketplace, lest racial minorities attempt to reclaim it.

Conclusion

Narratives establish connections.... [W]e must ask how do the connections in this story suggest or invoke other stories? How do they invite us to write stories of sociation? Given all the possible arrangements and presentations of events what is gained and what is lost by the arrangement the story under-states? (Wells 228)

Identity labels, such as "*retornado*," both implicitly and explicitly invoke narratives that suggest particular types and qualities of differentiation. These qualities, in turn, frame behavior in ways that attribute it to certain causes and not others—perhaps as moral choice or, alternatively, as involuntary product of purportedly essential qualities. Yet, identity signs such as "*retornado*" may signal difference in ambiguous ways, by pointing simultaneously to different narratives for explaining behavior and attributing distinction. It is often the very ambiguity that arises from the positioning of such signs at the intersection of multiple, and even mutually contradictory, narratives that imbues them with their social power and historical significance. Emigration to Africa was interpreted in rural Portuguese communities in terms of a particular moral economy, which devalued and decried migratory practices that espoused the possibility of non-return or of an alternative rootedness, outside of what was regarded as Portugal proper. While leading to an initial marginalization of those who eventually returned after decolonization, this moral economy also provided the terms for that marginalization to be successfully challenged eventually.

Perhaps the broader import of this moral economy may be the inherent claims it stakes against the legitimacy of any permanency of Portuguese communities outside of national borders (see Noivo). The terms of exchange within this symbolic ideology render suspect the authenticity of any narrative claims to Portugueseness that do not renounce intentions of permanency elsewhere and publicly ascribe to an ideology of return. Arguably, in the moral economy that informs popular discourse (if not that of the state—see Sieber), diaspora as a condition—inasmuch as it implies permanent daughter communities abroad—is not a possible "state of Portuguese being" or a state in which "genuine or unspoiled Portugueseness" can exist. Yet, as the rejected claims to Portugueseness of *retornado* racial minorities demonstrates, return has only been possible for those who can meet the non-negotiable, racialized criteria for inclusion in the Portuguese imagined community. In the end, phenotype as race trumps citizenship, class, culture, and kinship alike. In a process of selectively interweaving memory and amnesia, postcolonial Portuguese society has accommodated former colonial subjects only as evidence of Portugal's global imagination of itself, inherently positioned, nevertheless, outside the Portuguese imagined community.

Notes

1. This paper draws on two primary fieldwork sessions—a year I spent as a Fulbright Fellow in 1990–1991 and four more months in 1993. I formally and informally interviewed over forty *retornados* in two areas—residents of the greater Lisbon area and those living in a small town

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south of the city of Aveiro, which I have given the pseudonym of "Olival." I was also able to interview many extended-family members, neighbors, and other residents of the communities that witnessed their arrival. All individual names given are pseudonyms. This work also draws on a review of several-hundred press articles on the *retornados*—a comprehensive archive, generously made available to me by the Instituto 25 de Abril at the University of Coimbra. However, this analysis owes as much or more to critical reflection on seventeen years of my early life that were spent living in post-revolutionary Portugal (1972–1986; 1991–1992), within sight of the infamous *retornado* camp in Jamor, and interacting with many friends and acquaintances who had arrived from Mozambique and Angola in 1975–1976. This analysis is thus deeply influenced by a lifetime of being part of, and formed by, the field itself.

2. It has been estimated that only 20 per cent of the *pieds-noirs* who emigrated to France had originally been born in France (Baillet 64), and, according to Kraak, only 30 to 40 per cent of those who arrived in the Netherlands in the wake of Indonesian decolonization were believed to have been born in Europe (qtd. in Pires et al. 30).

3. This number reflects an even stronger level of original connection to Portugal among the *retornado* population when broken down by age, since 85 per cent of those actually born in the colonies themselves were minors in the under-15 age group and therefore dependents. Among older age groups, the proportion of the Portuguese-born was considerably higher (15–39 age group—60 per cent born in Portugal; 40+ age group—85 per cent born in Portugal [Pires et al. 38–9]).

4. A larger percentage of *retornados* is likely to have had kinship ties than is reflected in the percentage returning to districts of origin, once we consider two additional demographic characteristics of the *retornado* population: (1) younger *retornados* born abroad who were accompanying dependents of parents returning to districts of origin were counted as new immigrants to these districts (yet obviously had kinship ties through their parents); and (2) *retornados* were much more likely to have emigrated to Africa before marriage and then married in Africa (Bender). Consequently, married *retornados* who immigrated to their spouse's district of origin would also be counted as new immigrants to these districts. In both of these cases, however, family ties through a parent or spouse who was returning to an area of origin existed, even if only one of the two spouses was technically returning to his (or her) district of origin. It is, therefore, highly likely that the majority of *retornados* settled in areas where they had some form of family ties. More demographic analysis and region-specific study is needed to decide this issue.

5. Portuguese emigration to North America has historically been dominated by Azoreans rather than continental Portuguese (Baganha; Moniz).

6. Portuguese rental laws at the time made it extremely difficult for a tenant to expel a renter.

7. The secondary sector refers to employment in manufacturing (19 per cent); gas, water, and electricity (0.7 per cent); and extractive industry—i.e., mining (0.3 per cent). The tertiary sector refers to employment in banking and insurance activities (5.8 per cent); public and private service industries (34.4 per cent); restaurants, tourism, hotels, and related small business (18.9 per cent); and communications and transportation (5.9 per cent) (Pires et al. 131).

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