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THE FRENCH STATE AND THE PORTUGUESE STATE IN THE FACE OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE *PIEDS-NOIRS* AND THE *RETORNADOS*

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During decolonization after the Second World War somewhere between 5.4 and 6.8 million people who lived in former colonies arrived in the metropolises of the former European empires (1). Algeria became independent in July 1962, after eight years of its war of liberation. In that year 650,000 French people arrived in France from Algeria (2). More than a decade later, in 1975, in the midst of the revolutionary process that started with the coup of 25th of April 1974 and put an end to 48 years of dictatorship,



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Portugal received around half a million Portuguese from Angola and Mozambique (3). These two migratory movements took place in very different national, international, political and economic contexts. Yet the ends of their empires forced both European States to contemplate policies that would respond to the questions raised by the arrival of these “national migrants” (4), known as *pieds-noirs* (literally, black-feet) in France, and *retornados* (literally, returnees) in Portugal.

It would be wrong to say that these two countries had not anticipated these arrivals or, in some cases, returns. In fact, before the mass arrivals of 1962 and 1975, the two States set up mechanisms, like the French *Secrétariat d'État aux Rapatriés* (1961) [the Secretary of State for Repatriation] and the Portuguese *Instituto de Apoio ao Retorno de Nacionais* – IARN (March 1975) [the Institute of Support for Returning Nationals]. They also passed legislation aimed at protecting French and Portuguese citizens who arrived from overseas.

The two states' first task was to repatriate their citizens. France conducted a maritime and aerial evacuation of French people from Algeria, and Portugal did something similar from Angola, beginning in the spring of 1975, including the famous “air bridge”. Portugal relied on the cooperation of various foreign governments (the United States, the United Kingdom, The USSR, West Germany, France, East Germany and Belgium) to organize 265 flights in the month of September 1975 to transport thousands of Portuguese every day to Portugal (5). The conditions in which these repatriations took place were, however, chaotic. Neither France nor Portugal properly anticipated the true scale of these population movements. The infrastructures put in place by the authorities were very inadequate. This frequently obliged colonists to wait for their aerial or maritime evacuations in tricky conditions which only served to reinforce the traumatic character of departure.

Contrary to a notion held by many *pieds-noirs* and *retornados* that they were abandoned as soon as they were repatriated (6), the authorities in fact designed policies specifically for them. France and Portugal both considered the integrations of repatriated populations from their former colonies as an absolute priority (7). A consensus was established that the repatriated had the right to national solidarity as full members of the nation. Beyond this demand for national solidarity, integration was imperative in order to pacify these populations. The authorities of the two countries feared that pre-existing social and political tensions would increase with the arrival of the repatriated peoples. In France, there had been attacks by a terrorist organization created in 1961 by Jean-Jacques Susini and Pierre Lagaille,



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the *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS) (8) [The Secret Army Organization]. They wanted to fight for a “French Algeria” and block independence. After attempts to assassinate de Gaulle, they were very present in the minds of metropolitan France in the summer of 1962, while thousands of French from Algeria were arriving in the country. In Portugal the political and social revolutionary context of 1975 put the young Portuguese democracy at risk from possible political manipulation of *retornados* by right-wing organizations yearning for the deposed regime. The authorities, therefore, were determined to resolve the set of problems associated with arrival and relocation.

One urgent problem was housing. The two States found themselves with a shortage of housing so took temporary measures, including putting repatriated people up in hotels in Portugal. In France, as in Portugal, collective accommodation centres were established which had poor conditions. For example, 57 Portuguese prisons were requisitioned for this purpose in February 1976 (9). Bad housing conditions were engraved in the memory of people who were the subjects of these policies. From a longer term perspective, house building policies for the *pieds-noirs* and *retornados* were set up, and a system established to access property ownership. In spite of these housing policies, which cost a great deal, some of those repatriated still lived in terrible conditions.

The need to economically integrate a great number of workers as quickly as possible was also a priority for the French and Portuguese states. While the two States effectively and quickly reintegrated the majority of their colonial functionaries through special policies, the question of the integration into the metropolitan labour market of independent repatriated workers was more complex. In France, in spite of the economic context of the *Trente Glorieuses* being favourable to the absorption of labour, the socio-professional characteristics of the French people who arrived from Algeria did not correspond to the needs of the French labour market, which required industrially qualified workers. In the Portuguese case the inverse situation pertained. The economic context of the country threatened a sudden and rapid rise in an already high unemployment rate. Nevertheless, the professional profile of the Portuguese from Angola and Mozambique – many active in the tertiary sector, in services and commerce – was an advantage for the Portuguese economy.

For its part, the Portuguese State actively participated in the economic integration of the *retornados*, through the creation of a programme of credits to incentivize repatriated people to create small and medium-sized businesses, that led to the creation of nearly 65,000 jobs across the national territory (10).



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The French State also implemented a programme of credit for *pieds-noirs* to create businesses, but it was reserved only to those who had had a business in Algeria. Thus the State decided to incentivize the *pieds-noirs* to into existing salaried jobs. In these two cases, state policies, associated to the context and characteristics of repatriated populations, resulted in the absorption of a large portion of repatriated people into national labour markets.

The housing and economic integration policies, as well as sets of subsidies (unemployment benefit, family benefit, study grants...) were essential for the active integration of the *pieds-noirs* and the *retornados* in France and Portugal. It did not, however, solve all the problems they experienced. There were tensions created through integration. We should not forget that in developing unprecedented, and similar, policies, the two States, in very different political, economic and social contexts, showed that when political will exists, it is possible to find the financial means to integrate migrant populations into society.

(1) Smith, Andrea L. (org), *Europe's Invisible Migrants*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003, p.11.

(2) Jordi, Jean-Jacques, *De l'Exode à l'Exil. Rapatriés et Pieds-Noirs en France*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 1993, p.66.

(3) Pires, Rui Pena, *Migrações e Integração. Teoria e Aplicações à Sociedade Portuguesa*, Oeiras : Celta Editora, 2003, p.203.

(4) Scioldo-Zürcher, Yann, *Devenir métropolitain, Politiques d'intégration et parcours de rapatriés d'Algérie en métropole (1954-2005)*, Paris : Éditions EHESS, 2010, p.16.

(5) Ribeiro, António Gonçalves, *A Vertigem da Descolonização. Da Agonia do Êxodo à Cidadania Plena*, Mem Martins : Editorial Inquérito, 2002, p.414, p.376.

(6) Scioldo-Zürcher, Yann, *op. cit.*, p.391; Comtat, Emmanuelle, *Les pieds-noirs et la politique. Quarante ans après le retour*, Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2009, p.89. This idea is very common in the Portuguese case, for instance in the letters from readers of the *Jornal o Retornado* (1975-1981), and in the interviews I conducted with *retornados* for my doctoral thesis: Delaunay, Morgane, *Le processus d'intégration des retornados au Portugal (1975-2018). Analyse comparée avec le cas français des pieds-noirs d'Algérie*, Rennes, Lisbonne : Université Rennes 2, ISCTE-IUL, 2019 [tese de Doutoramento].

(7) Scioldo-Zürcher, Yann, «Accueillir les Français rapatriés d'Algérie, Histoire d'une régulation sociale par l'évitement des bidonvilles. L'exemple de Paris, 1962-1969», *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 3, Winter, 2013c, pp.45-64, p.46; Delaunay, Morgane, "La question des *retornados* dans le débat parlementaire portugais (1975-1976)", *Portuguese Studies Review (PSR)*, 27 (1), 2019, pp.177-200.

(8) Ruscio, Alain, *Nostalgie. L'interminable histoire de l'OAS*, Paris : La Découverte, 2015, p.20.

(9) Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Relatório de Atividades do IARN, p.31.

(10) Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Relatório de Atividades do Comissariado para os Desalojados, p.52.



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