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“THEY DEFENDED PORTUGUESE TERRITORY”: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE SON OF AN AFRICAN VETERAN OF THE PORTUGUESE ARMED FORCES

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169 interviews have so far been undertaken as part of the fieldwork of the project MEMOIRS – Children of Empire and European Post-memories, financed by the European Research Council (no. 648624) and based at the Centre of Social Studies at the University of Coimbra. These interviews have gathered information about the memories inherited by the children and grandchildren of the generation who lived through processes of decolonization of African territories previously occupied by Portugal, France and Belgium. The interview with Rui Barbosa de Andrade Lamarana that follows was undertaken on the 1st of August 2018, at the Armed Forces Handicapped Association, in Lisbon.



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Rui Barbosa de Andrade Lamarana is the son of Armando Carolino Barbosa, a veteran who fought for the Portuguese Army (FAP) during the colonial war. Carolino Barbosa de Andrade, the father, disappeared after having been detained in independent Guinea-Bissau. This text is based on an interview given by Rui Lamarana, and highlights some of the stories told to him about his father throughout his life. These stories belong to Rui's family memory. He wanted to share them with MEMOIRS, and they reveal the questions asked by someone who knows their father only through other people's memories. They are also stories that show the complexity of the transmission of memories which traverse political, social and ideological ruptures.

Rui was born in Bafatá, on the 29th of November 1970, in colonial Guinea-Bissau. He was born seven days after Operation Mar Verde [Green Sea], a particularly controversial moment in the colonial war. The operation was launched from Guinea-Bissau, and aimed to overthrow Sékou Touré's regime, and rescue various Portuguese military prisoners held in the country (1). Rui's father was born in Bissau, where his Cape Verdean grandfather lived. His grandfather, according to Rui, was murdered at the beginning of the armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-Bissau. He was told that on the 23rd of January 1963 forces from the PAIGC, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, took his grandfather, “carried him into woods and brutally murdered him”. A few days before the beginning of the civil war in Guinea, on the 7th of June 1998, when Rui was working in the cashew nut plantations, an old woman told him that she knew where his grandfather was buried. Rui remembers growing up hearing this story alongside those he was told about the disappearance of his father and the death of his uncle. These stories were told by his own family, as well as by others that he met throughout his life.

Along with many other African men, Rui's father and uncle fought for the Armed Forces of the colonizing nation against the independence forces of the territories where they were born. Guinea-Bissau was the first overseas territory to gain its independence from Portugal, on the 10th of September 1974, almost a year after the PAIGC's unilateral declaration of independence, and after a war that had started on the 23rd of January 1963. Shortly after independence the new government of Guinea-Bissau launched processes of discrimination, persecution, detention and execution of Guinean veterans of the Portuguese Armed Forces. In this context, after the war the Lamarana brothers were objects of suspicion. They were considered traitors against the project of Guinean independence.

For Rui, it is always painful to remember his father, but it is no less painful to remember his uncle's



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story, Sergeant Tchoca. Rui tells us that he was murdered along with his father. “I feel it deeply, I feel it deeply. It hurts me when I remember my father. But what hurts me more is my uncle”. Rui says that he was almost five when his father was arrested, and that the last personal memory he has in relation to his father is getting into a van to go and visit him in Gabu, where he was detained. He does not remember seeing him, and wonders whether “maybe they didn’t take me, and I stayed at home. And my father never came back from Gabu”.

In relation to his uncle, his father’s brother, Rui is particularly emotional. He recounts what he was told about how his uncle died: “my uncle, Sergeant Tchoca, was wounded when he was meant to be being executed, [...] he escaped, running into the woods of Bambadinca, and through to the entrance of Bafatá [...] He was wounded, he was tired, he needed help”. When he got to a river, Rui’s uncle found a man who knew his father. As he was wounded, he could not swim and he was fleeing, so he asked him “take me by canoe to the other side of the river”. And the man said yes, and told him: ‘Ok, I’m going to get my paddle!’ Get his paddle! He didn’t go and get his paddle. He called the PAIGC police officers and they arrested Sergeant Tchoca, and took him to the barracks in Bafatá. I don’t know how, but they murdered him. But I heard that they buried him alive [...] it was brutal, brutal. [...] I don’t understand. A person who fled a firing squad, who showed no resistance, was wounded—it was not worth killing a man like that. The members of the African Commandos had given up their uniforms, they had handed everything over. They wanted Guinea to achieve true reconciliation. Only the PAIGC didn’t want to, the PAIGC had already decided to shoot them all”.

Rui knows these stories above all through his grandmother, the mother of his father and his uncle. “I talked lots and lots and lots with my grandmother! I asked questions, she answered them. Because we were close to our grandmother. [...] me and my cousins asked: ‘So, Grandma, are our parents going to come back, or not?’. Sometimes she kept smiling. Because she never believed. She said he was still alive. [...] And she responded: ‘Let’s talk later’. [...] Our grandmother did not believe that her children were no longer alive. She always said that both of them were still alive. ‘They’re somewhere’. It’s sad, it’s sad. [...] She always had this on her mind. But afterwards she explained. Sometimes when she was happy she explained to us how it happened, and it is sad”.

Rui’s mother told him little about his father, not least because she didn’t live with him a lot. Some time



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after the disappearance of his father, Rui, his sister, his brother and their cousins (children of his uncle) went to live with his paternal grandmother, while his mother returned to Bissau to her parent's house. “Our grandmother was mother and father. Grandma was everything, everything, everything. She was a woman who was strong, so strong. Because she resisted, because in that period anyone associated with the African Commandos [in the Portuguese Armed Forces], was frowned upon [...]. They called them traitors and everything. Everything. But my grandmother was oblivious to all that. I heard hints from the neighbours, what they said, which is normal. [...] But they're not, they're not traitors. They only fulfilled their oath to the flag. Because in that period military service was compulsory. And they swore to the flag and they had to obey. But after, right up to now, they have been called traitors”. Rui believes that, after the 25th of April 1974, the PAIGC could have created a framework for reconciliation and avoided the executions of people who were part of the Portuguese Armed Forces in the colonial period.

Rui does not know where his father's body is. He supposes that it is in a forest in Bambadinca. Unlike those of other veterans of the Portuguese Armed Forces found in a mass grave in Guinea Bissau after the coup of 14th November 1980, the body of Carolino Barbosa de Andrade, Rui's father, was never found. Rui was a child then, but he remembers what happened in this way: “Because I remember that period well [...] because the 14th of November 1980 happened just a few days before my tenth birthday. [...] And I remember I even asked my grandmother: ‘And what about our parents?’ She did not respond to me. She said nothing”.

As well as listening, and questioning, Rui keeps his father's 4th class ‘cross of war’ medal, and various documents and photographs that he was given, or that he has found in his search for more information. The majority of the documents that Rui has were kept by his grandmother. Rui says that his grandmother kept everything that belonged to his father and his uncle, even their clothes. “Every Friday she would take them out, dry them, and lay them in the sun. She would tell us: ‘This is your father's shirt, his shoes, his trousers.’ And she explained, explained”.

Rui says that among his father's colonial era documents that he keeps none stand out as more important than the others: “I sometimes spend a few days looking at the photographs, reading the texts and, for me, everything, everything that is there is special”. However, on the day of the interview, the first document that he wanted to show us were the marching orders that showed that his father was taken



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to prison. He admits that this document is particularly marking for him, above all because he thinks that his father, like the other veterans of the Portuguese Armed Forces, believed in reconciliation, and that he would be integrated into the Guinea-Bissau army after independence.

Rui has lived in Portugal since December 2001, and hoped to get a war pension awarded to his mother, as a result of the death of his father in service for Portugal. On the 1st of August 2017, precisely a year before this interview was done, his mother died without ever having received such a pension. Rui does not understand why they did not grant this right to his mother, in spite of recognizing that his father disappeared after independence after being demobbed from the Portuguese Armed Forces. This is because, he argues, “[...] they were murdered because they defended Portuguese territory. Why? Because of this. They defended the Portuguese flag, and if they had not, they would not have been murdered. [...] And, therefore, the Portuguese State must reconsider, and re-analyse this situation”.

As long as he is not working abroad, Rui takes part in the National Meeting of Veterans every 10th of June at the National Monument to Overseas Veterans in Lisbon. As of the 14th of November 2009, the names of the former soldiers killed in 1975 in independent Guinea have been inscribed on this monument, after many years of silence and indifference. For this reason, the memorial is very special to Rui. He says: “This year I went there, I was there. I even took a photograph with Folques (2) and my son”. He adds: “I had to go. Why? We never found the remains of our parents. My father, my uncle, and others too. The Commandos too, the children of some Commandos. And there, for me, is somewhere I can go. It’s sad, it’s sad”. This symbolic place, and the Carregueira regiment where the names of all the Commandos who died in the war are inscribed on two plaques, are two places where Rui says he can meet his father, and where he can take his son to tell him his history.

Throughout the interview, Rui shared his opinions on various subjects with us, including racism in Portugal, colonialism, and his relationship with Guinea today. But his narrative always returned to his feelings about the disappearance of his father. “It sticks in the memory. Because a son born without knowing his father, who listens to the story of how his father was murdered [...] that sticks in the mind. Because I, in truth, when I remember my father, it causes me pain, deep in my heart. It hurts a lot. It hurts, and it continues to hurt. But life is like that, it is destiny”. What seems to comfort Rui is the fact of having realized one of his greatest desires, as he told to us at the end of the interview. When he had a son, Rui did not hesitate to give him his father’s name.



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(1) See António Luís Marinho (2005), *Operação Mar Verde: um documento para a história*, Lisboa: Círculo dos Leitores.

(2) Raul Socorro Folques was the commander of the Battalion of the Commandos of Guinea-Bissau which led three companies of African Commandos during the Colonial War.

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