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“Everything was possible”. Emotions and perceptions of the past among the former Portuguese anti-fascist activists¹

Abstract

In this paper, I analyse the way in which former anti-Estado Novo activists see their past, and the emotions and perceptions they associate to it. I argue that this activists' remembering process is shaped by what Antonio Costa Pinto called “double legacy”. He means that the legacies of the dictatorship in Portuguese consolidated democracy are strongly shaped by the way in which it ended, and by the way in which democracy was implemented in the country, through a revolution and a radical “cut with the past”. To study the way how former activists are affected by and contribute to building this double legacy, I used semi-structured interviews and open questionnaires. The article aims to strength the dialogue between social movement and memory studies, adopting an interactionist perspective, and thanks to the bridge of transition and oral history scholarship. It finally stresses the relevance of the co-construction of individual and collective memory.

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Introduction

“This is the dawn I waited for

The new day clean and whole

When we emerge from night and silence

To freely inhabit the substance of time”²

The Estado Novo was institutionalized in 1933 by António de Oliveira Salazar, along the lines of European fascism. Under the regime, any form of political participation other than through its channels was illegal and the persecution of objectors was fiercely pursued, above all through the political police, special courts, political prisons and detention camps (Accornero, 2013; Accornero 2013a; Accornero, 2016a; Palacios Cerezales, 2011). In 1968, António Salazar was succeeded by Marcelo Caetano, who embarked on a period of opening known as the ‘Marcelist spring’. Some political freedom was introduced, a modernising university reform was pushed through, the arbitrariness of the political police was reduced, and a certain level of political liberty permitted. This period was, however, brief and ephemeral, and as of the early 1970s the repression showed renewed exacerbation, the political doors that had opened were closed and the colonial war effort intensified further. Besides harsh repression, the regime was strongly contested by different opponents from the very beginning. During its last days, and also in the scenario of the Marcelist liberalisation, this opposition drastically strengthened diversified and radicalized.

On 25th April 1974, the *Estado Novo* was overthrown in a peaceful military coup led by the Armed Forces Movements (Movimento das Forças Armadas, MFA). The authoritarian institutions were immediately dismantled and, at the same time, an amnesty for all political crimes was approved, and approximately 130 political prisoners were

² “25 de Abril” (“25th April 1974”), poem by Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen in Log Book: Selected Poems, translated by Richard Zenith (Breyner Andresen 1997: 78).

released, and the decolonization process – that was at the very origin of the coup – was undertaken, and concluded less than a year and a half later.

As is well known, the 25 April 1974 coup was immediately followed by broad political and popular mobilization. This turbulent period in contemporary Portuguese history, which was referred to as the “Revolutionary Process Underway” (Processo Revolucionário em Curso, PREC), was marked by intense conflict between opposing political forces, attempted coups and countercoups, massive social mobilization and the occupation of land and factories. Even if there is no consensus on the reasons of this deep social unrest – the contingent crisis of the State (Palacios Cerezales 2003) or a longer cycle of protest, which would have been, on its hand, the cause for this crisis (Accornero 2013, 2016a; Ramos Pinto 2013) – scholars agree that the PREC was one of the periods of most intense mobilization in post-war Europe (Sousa Santo 1990; Rosas 2004; Ramos Pinto 2013).

This period entered in a declining phase from November 1975 onwards, when an attempted military coup by officers close to the extreme left created a pretext for a countercoup by moderates, and scholars consider that it definitely arrived to an end with the 1976 general elections, the first ones ever held in the country with universal suffrage (Palacios Cerezales 2003). Nevertheless, the PREC did not finish without leaving a deep and striking legacy in Portuguese society and institutions (Fishman 2019, 2011; Fernandes 2015). As various analyses have underlined, this social unrest was a key factor in strengthening the rupture dimension of the Portuguese transition, by pressing political forces – such as the MFA and the provisional governments – to adopt more radical measures, aimed at the criminalization of the authoritarian past and elites (Costa Pinto 2010), and at the adoption of fundamental social reforms and rights, many of what found a definitive institutionalization in the 1976 Constitution (Fonseca 2013).

All these studies help us understand the very specific case of regime change which was the Portuguese transition, a coup d'état which became a revolution, and which, 30 years later, continued to be considered by many Portuguese as one of the main reason of ‘pride’ in their history (Costa Lobo, Costa Pinto and Magalhães 2016). To describe the way in which this recent history was framed in the Portuguese collective memory and embodied in the Portuguese institutions, Antonio Costa Pinto used the expression of “double legacy”, meaning that the legacy of the dictatorship was strongly shaped by the

way in which it ended, and by the way in which democracy was implemented in the country, through a revolution and a radical “cut with the past”. He argued that: “the transition’s powerful dynamics served to constitute another legacy for the consolidation of democracy, strongly counterbalancing those of the authoritarian regime” (Costa Pinto 2010: 397). According to him, thus, the transitional measures during the PREC – especially in terms of punishment of the old elites, revelation and condemnation of the recent past, nationalization of large businesses, banks, insurances, and media – definitely shaped the Portuguese attitude and memory towards the previous regime, as well the emerging democratic institutions and political actors.

But if this double legacy has been so relevant for the democratic building process in the country, what is the perception, in respect to these recent historical events, of people who were more directly involved in them, namely the former anti-Estado Novo activists? Looking at the way in which they see their past, and at their associated emotions (in other words, their memory), this paper aims to address this question. I argue that, the double legacy referred to by Costa Pinto in terms of collective memory at the basis of the Portuguese democratic consolidation is also present at the individual level of activists, and that the two levels are closely interconnected and in constant process of construction. On the other side, it should also be considered that these activists were not just passively influenced by the political process, but they also actively participated to it.

The ‘cognitive shock’³ (Bergstrand 2013; Accornero 2016) that many former activists declared having experienced during the revolution – revolution they were actively part of – contributed to framing the sense they give to their previous experience of fighting against the dictatorship, often seen in a teleological perspective. Moreover, the emotions

³ The concept of cognitive shock, even if close, is different to the more famous one of moral shock. While the latter refers to “moral situations in which an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action, with or without the network of personal contacts emphasized in mobilization and process theories” (Jasper 1997: 106), cognitive shocks are “widespread societal shifts in perception that challenge a priori assumptions about how people think about or perceive the world in a way that primes individuals for future activism” (Bergstrand 2013: 322). In this sense, a cognitive shock may be described as a rapid reconfiguration of the cognitive perception of social reality, and of the meanings related to it, due to the sudden “appearance” of new information and/or the “collapse” of previous information. In this last case, mobilization is the result of the perception of new possible patterns of interpretation of reality and, as a consequence, new possible opportunities for engagement. This is more of a cognitive experience than an emotional one, even if I agree with James Jasper that the two levels are difficult to separate and we need to recognize that “feeling and thinking are parallel, interacting processes of evaluating and interacting with our worlds” (Jasper, 2011, p. 286).

and the feelings associated to that fight and to the following revolution was determinant for their activist trajectories (Accornero 2019). The revolution is seen as a moment when ‘everything was possible’, and this expresses the perception of a drastic augmentation of the potentialities of engagement which, as an effect, strengthened their participation. On the other side, the disappearing of this feeling (‘after this was lost’) motivated their disengagement (Accornero 2019). These activists did not merely take advantage of the opportunities opened by the collapse of the regime and by the crisis of the state, but they were players in these processes, contributing to the specific form the Portuguese transition took, and, as a consequence, to building their own and the collective memory.

In order to address the previous mentioned research question and to build my argument, in the first part of the article I develop a dialogue with the scholarship that inspired my study, especially in social movement and memory studies. Then, I discuss the main theoretical implications of my approach as they are connected to my methodological choices. After I will move to the discussion of the empirical information, and, finally, in the conclusion, I will explain how my analysis can contribute to strengthening the dialogue between social movement and memory studies. My aim is particularly to contribute to enhance our understanding of the memory co-building process, and how it is linked to the interaction between biographical trajectories of activists and political processes.

Memory, sensitivity, and biographies

In this paragraph, I develop a dialogue with the scholarship that inspired my study, especially in social movement and memory studies, trying to explicit how I situate my work in it and in which way this theoretical choice is connected with my empirical work and analytical questions. In this article, I adopt an interactionist approach for the study of social movements, that partially blurs any strong boundary between institutional and contentious actors, state and challengers, or bottom up versus top down processes. In this sense, I agree with James Jasper when he underlines that “Recently the pendulum has begun to swing to questioning whether ‘movements’ and ‘states’ are not a bit of a fiction, implying a unity for each that does not really exist”, and when he consequently asks:

What exactly are social movements? A kind of public opinion in favor of change? Networks of individuals and organizations? A collective identity? A series of public events and statements? What are a movement's boundaries? Does the movement include an individual shows up for one demonstration? Similarly, what is the state? What are its boundaries with the rest of society? With the rest of the world? How much unity do we see in the decisions made by its various agencies, officials, and politicians? How often do legislators and the police, for instance, pursue the same goals? What happens when they do not? Or when the army clashes with the president? Does it make sense analytically (as opposed to rhetorically) to even speak of the state, or a social movement, as an agent doing something? (Jasper 2015: 10).

I seek thus to connect my contribution in the field of social movement studies – particularly centred on the micro dimension of activists' trajectories, their continuous interaction with other players and "arenas"; and on the role of emotions in (de)mobilization – with a reflection in the field of memory studies. In doing so, I pay my tribute to what was called a "cultural turn in social movement studies" (Ullrich, Daphi and Baumgarten 2014), opened by a new generation of social movement scholars who has been heavily contributing to rethinking the role of memory in social movements analysis. Drawing on Francesca Polletta's arguments against the myth of spontaneity in understanding the origin of social movements, Lorenzo Zamponi and Priska Daphi show the relevance of continuity between the global justice movement and the anti-austerity mobilizations, stressing that "memories provide activists with crucial interpretative frameworks for understanding mobilisations and demarcating them from others" (Zamponi and Daphi 2014: 220) so that movements can be seen as "movements' outcomes" (Zamponi and Daphi 2014: 194). Following on Maurice Halbwachs' argument that it is impossible for individuals to remember outside of their group contexts, and focusing on the role of collective memory in creating collective narrative and identity in the global justice movement, Priska Daphi argues that this is the basis for movements' continuity and she shows "how GJM identity was maintained over many years based on a broad narrative plot capable of adapting to new developments and events" (Daphi 2017: 112). Lorenzo Zamponi's study on the role of continuities in students' movements in Italy and Spain proposes a "phenomenological typology", instead of "a theoretical one", which is "based on the appearance that memory takes in the activists' own experiences, not on predetermined analytical differences or shared traits" (Zamponi 2018: 196).

In the case of Portugal, Britta Baumgarten analysed how activists make use of aspects of collective memory, concluding that: "Even if the anti-austerity groups in Portugal did not experience the Revolution themselves, its impacts on them cause differences between

the Portuguese anti-austerity movement and anti-austerity movements in other countries.” (Baumgarten 2017: 60). In this respect, Guya Accornero underlines that: “in Portugal, the revolutionary nature of the transition, mentioned in the 1976 constitution, naturally represents an important resource for mobilization” (Accornero 2015: 41) and this situation is radically different from that one described by Kostis Kornetis in Spain, where, the indignados movement: “also involved, in some way, a radical reconceptualization of the past” (Kornetis 2014: 6).

All these reflections, particularly centred on the role of collective memory in the action of social movements, are essential for my analysis. Nevertheless, for the purpose of my article, which addresses former activists’ experience and perception of the past, rather than the underlying memory of ongoing social movements and cycle of protest legacies, a focus on the micro dimension of activists’ memory appears more suitable, yet without excluding the strength and continuous interaction with meso and macro-processes of collective remembering. At his regard, I agree with Susan Crane when she stresses that “A revised notion of collective memory may provide a theoretical basis for imagining a different kind of historical memory, which would focus on the way individuals experience themselves as historical entities” (Crane 1997: 1375). Thus, I will recognize, in my paper, the “capacity of individuals to engage critically and constructively with inherited ideas and beliefs” (Green 2004: 35) aimed at “exploring how and why ideas, values and beliefs are critiqued, reassembled, juxtaposed or rejected” (Green 2004: 39).

The relationship between collective and individual memory, far from coming to an end, is at the very centre of a debate involving, among others, sociologists, psychologists, historians and linguistics. The strength of this debate and of the questions it poses for research motivated scholars such as Gary Alan Fine and Aaron Beim to ask: “Can the creation of collective memory be separated from the actions of social actors in their negotiations of meaning?” (Fine 2007: 1). This is similar to what happens in many other social science fields in respect to the classical distinction between agency and structure, as is, for instance, the case of the debate between political process model and interactionist approaches in social movement studies (see Goodwin and Jasper 2004). From another perspective, Olick too gives relevance to this debate. He describes two main

approaches to look at the relation between individual and social process of remembering: “collected memory” and “collective memory”:

From the point of view of what I would call this “collected” memory approach, notions of collective memory as objective symbols or deep structures that transcend the individual risk slipping into a metaphysics of group mind. There is no doubt, from this perspective, that social frame works shape what individuals remember, but ultimately it is only individuals who do the remembering. And shared symbols and deep structures are only real insofar as individuals (albeit sometimes organized as members of groups) treat them as such or instantiate them in practice. It does not make sense from an individualist’s point of view to treat commemorative objects, symbols, or structures as having a “life of their own”: only people have lives (Olick 1999: 338).

Acknowledging that it is impossible to resume and solve this debate in the few pages of this article, nevertheless a more interactionist approach appears to me more suitable in this specific analysis. In agreeing with Cranes that we need to reopen the possibility that “collective memory is itself an expression of historical consciousness that derives from individuals” (Crane 1997: 1381), I do not deny that collective memory is relevant for individual memory, but I see this relevance in a more relational way than structural, that is, as a process of co-building, in which individual memory (necessarily shaped by life histories, biographies and trajectories) also influences collective memory.

Consistently with my micro-sociological biographical approach to the activists’ trajectories, I also agree with Crane when she defends that “Lived experience and collective memory “interpenetrate” each other through autobiography, the self-conscious memory of individual members of a group” (Crane 1997: 1377). In this sense, I see the revolution not just as a collective event, but also as an individual biographical experience. This means that what particularly interests me, in this article, are the “lived experiences”, where macro dynamics of institutional change and micro dynamics of activists’ trajectories cross with one another shaping the perception of the past. Especially in this, I pay my tribute to the interactionist perspective, which can be defined (notably in its symbolic declination) as a “microsociological and processual approach which systematically links the individual and the study of situations to broader contextual factors and social order rules and norms. In this perspective, not only are individuals and society interdependent but they also mutually construct each other” (Fillieule 2010: 3).

In respect to memory studies, this implies seeing “collective memory” as “a living concept, linked to the behaviours and responses of social actors that generate meanings. The recognition that history results from agency, even while it is based on an obdurate reality, demonstrates that the field of social memory studies is ripe for rigorous symbolic interactionist analysis” (Fein and Beim 2007: 1).

Oral history bridging memory and social movement studies

In this methodological section I discuss the main theoretical implications of my approach as they are connected to my choices in terms of method. In analysing the way in which former anti-Estado Novo activists look at their past and how their perceptions and emotions associated to it influenced their decisions and actions, this article will adopt a micro perspective, focusing particularly on the experience and subjectivity of the activist, instead of the collective dimension of social movements and protest cycles.

I agree that needs and emotions are also mediated by the social experience, and the collective exigences of the groups and networks in which the subjects (in this case, former Portuguese activists) are embedded in space and time. Moreover, I am also aware of the role of media – especially and increasingly the new media – in shaping the memory.⁴ Nevertheless, I argue that the way in which some of these needs and emotions are selected in a range of possibilities and expressed through the channel of oral history is closely connected to actors’ historical and biographical experience and subjectivity. In this specific study, thus, what interests me “is not that individuals draw upon contemporary cultural discourses to make sense of their lives, but which ones, and why and how” (Green 2004: 42).

⁴ As stressed by Kitch, media (such as texts, photographs, cinema, television, radio, newspaper, digital media, etc) are not just the ‘first draft of history’ but also ‘the first draft of memory, a statement about what should be considered, in the future, as having mattered today’ (Kitch 2008: 312). Thus, necessarily, ‘we understand the past (our own, our family’s, our country’s, our world’s) through media discourses’ (Garde-Hansen 2011: 6). Related to this even if it is not the topic of this article and it would be impossible to deal extensively with the issue in its space, it is opportune to mention here the ‘digital oral history’, which includes both the way in which digital tools are changing the way to collect and share information through the oral history method, and the way in which they are changing also the very process of remembering. At this respect, Thomson says we are facing a “dizzying digital revolution in oral history” (Thomson 2006: 68) in the way oral history is recorded, preserved and shared, while Frisch shows that digital oral history is different in terms of its reach and methods, but that it is also changing the ways people engage with remembering (2006: 68-70).

Studies on transitions adopting the perspective of “state crisis” and fluid conjunctures, and interactionist approaches in social movement studies are essential to connect the different levels of my argument: the personal level of the activists and their memory and the dynamic of collective memory building associated to the political process. In this, I follow Michel Dobry’s advice when he says “critical events and processes, revolutions, or political crises, by their nature, require a completely different type of approach: one that focuses on actors” (Dobry 2009: 2).

Accordingly, my methodological choices are strictly connected to my theoretical concerns. The analysis is based on 2 semi-structured interviews to former activists and on 11 written interviews I used to contact people that, for different reasons (times, distances, etc.) were not available for a personal interview. I tried to make the written interviews as interactive as possible, coming to the respondents on numerous occasions in order to clarify and deepen specific parts. In a certain way, they be considered oral sources – information focused on the subjectivity and formulated at the request of the researcher – even with all the limitations due to the absence of physical presence and personal interaction (which is important in this method) and the awareness that the time of writing is not that of talking, because it allows more room to think about possible answers and interpretations. Accepting these limitations, I nevertheless agree with Lorenzo Bosi and Herbert Reiter that “interactive interviews with open questionnaires can produce excellent material on both the history of social movements and their memory” (Bosi and Reiter 2015: 130).

The activists were randomly selected from a database I created of all 488 students arrested by the political police between 1967 and 1974.⁵ I tried to contact all these former students through internet, being successful in 26 cases (22 questionnaires and 4 interviews). In the context of this specific article, I decided to use the narration of only 13 of these activists, which appeared to be more significant for the analysis of memory.⁶

⁵ On the eve of the revolution students were the social group most affected by repression, accounting for almost half of all political prisoners in 1973 and in the first four months of 1974. In 1973, the year with the highest number of student political arrests, they represented 43.5% of all political prisoners (Data collected by the author from the Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais, Torre do Tombo de Lisboa-IAN/TT, archives of the PIDE/DGS-IAN/TT – PIDE/ DGS, records on political prisoners. The PIDE/DGS archive was declassified in 1995. More information here <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=4280051>).

⁶ For this reason, it is clear that they are all former activists of the student movement and all experienced prison. The focus on these social actors was partially determined by the specific method I used to gather the information and to the specific source. The collection of data (such as name, age, origin, time of prison, residence, university course, etc., information that I also used in other works, see Accornero 2019) on all

Nonetheless, all the information collected, including interviews and answers not directly quoted here, was extremely helpful in understanding the dynamics I am dealing with. In the process of selection and contact of the activists, I avoided any “snow ball” method. In this way, I was able to interview people that had never been interviewed before (as it happens, for instance, in the case of public figures) and prevent contacts between activists before the interview (which is common in a “snow ball” method), and thus strength the element of “surprise” in my approach. The aim was to focus on the “subjectivity” of the experience and prevent, as much as possible, the reproduction of consolidated narratives about the past which are common, for instance, in repeated interviews, autobiographies and public statements. I would not say that these activists were living in an “aseptic” word, free from any influence of social memory, but that, in a certain way, their “withdrawing” into private life contributed to make the interview a unique and crucial moment of reopening the past.

In the process of collecting information about these former activists in Portuguese archives and in carrying out the interviews, I benefited from my training as a historian, incentivised by the consideration that “Methodological reflections on historical approaches in social movement research are rare” (Bosi and Reiter, 2014: 117). In particular, social movement studies partially miss an adequate consideration of the potential contribution – theoretical and methodological – of oral history, especially in carrying out interviews to activists, and especially in interviewing people on situations occurred in a quite distant past. Indeed, such a reflection could help to link collective and individual memory, if we agree with Luisa Passerini’s definition of subjectivity as “derived from the interaction between socialization and the “capacity for self-reflection” and critique” (Passerini 1979: 104).

Nevertheless, even if the interaction interviewer-interviewee is a generative process of meaning, and not a mere window on the ‘true past’, what this interaction creates is

these 488 students was a demanding and time-consuming task, as was the process of searching for these former students activists through internet and entering into contact with them. Nevertheless, this methodological choice was, in my view, completely worthy, for the reason I explained previously (possibility of interviewing people that had never been interrogated before, avoiding snow-ball effect, e.g.). On the other hand, this method has its limitations, especially in that it clearly cannot provide absolutely generalizable results. The only way to arrive to more generalizable findings would have been creating a similar data-base for all the other social actors arrested by the PIDE in the same period (such as workers or professionals), and even in this case there would still have been a significant bias, again connected with the source, i.e. that all endured prison. Nevertheless, I think that a similar research represents a particularly relevant challenge for the future, and I hope that my work could stimulate new analysis in that direction.

based on motivations, feelings and emotions that really exists in the history of the interviewee. Reflecting on this is a relevant part of the use of oral history, if we agree with Alessandro Portelli that: ‘Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what now they think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know, for instance, of the material cost of a strike to the workers involved; but they tell us a good deal about its psychological costs’ (Portelli 1991: 50).⁷

If social movement studies and oral history have not entered in a deep dialogue so far, the same can be affirmed, and even more surprisingly, in respect to oral history and memory studies. As underlined by Keightley and Pickering, the adjacency of the two fields ‘might suggest the potential for fruitful collaboration, yet a peculiar impasse has grown up between them’. This situation is peculiar ‘because of the ostensible closeness of their key concerns: the one with the remembered past, the other with processes of remembering’ (Keightley and Pickering: 4). In this paper, I will thus connect social movement and memory studies through the bridge of oral history and a focus on subjectivity of former activists.

The new day clean and whole

In this section, I will analyse former activists’ perception of the past and the emotions they associate to it. The section is structured along three interlinked axes: the experience of prison, the way in which they lived the 25th of April, and their perception of their pre-revolutionary activism and its legacy in their life.⁸ In dealing with each of these aspects,

⁷ For a reflection on the way in which the issue was dealt with in the field of cognitive psychology see Barnier and Sutton (2008) and Bernstein (2008). For a reflection from the point of view of the historian and the way in which his own memory, experience and subjectivity influences the process of writing see Liakos (2002).

⁸ As previously stressed, this analysis focuses on former anti-fascist activists who are no longer mobilized or have any involvement in the current social movements’ arena. Their memory was directly shaped by the events of the revolution, in which they took part. Thus, for them, the revolution was a constituting part of their biography and this is the lens through which I studied their memory and built my analysis. It would be interesting to investigate if this double legacy also has an effect on the way current movements and activists – who did not experience the revolution – act or if its transmission passes through the mass media as a repository of memory or through movement culture. Such analysis – which would need a different set of sources and a different focus – would be extremely enriching for the study of collective memory in Portugal and would complement previous works which have dealt with the role of the revolution as a resource of mobilization during austerity and, in general, in contexts of crisis (Accornero forthcoming, Baumgarten 2017; Accornero 2015).

I will try to show how the experience of the revolution refracts, in the memory of these activists, the previous experience of the fight against the regime, creating a double legacy that has influenced their trajectories of activism and biographies.⁹

The experience of prison

It is in the memory of the experience of the prison that, in my view, the process of reshaping of the memory of the dictatorship through the lens of the revolution is more evident. I thus decided to start with this aspect, and from it to draw, in the following sections, the events and the associated feelings, emotions and cognitive elaborations through which the double legacy was printed in the view of the past.

An element that especially attracted my attention, during the interviews (both written and oral), is the fact that, contrary to my expectation, prison experience was never remembered with bitterness, but always with a sense of “pride” and “triumph”. What emerges from this is a reinterpretation of that experience in the light of the subsequent revolution, which refracted the memory of the feelings experienced during the prison as if it was “finalistic”. The first point emerging with respect to this is the strengthening or even radicalization of political convictions: “That period made my political conviction stronger, and my involvement in the student anti-fascist movement more intense”¹⁰; “It was enough to print inside me the revolt I felt against any regime and especially against the colonial war”¹¹; “my radicalism grew up”¹². Equally important is the sense of “pride” and “triumph” for having been able to “resist” in such conditions. An especially interesting description of this feeling is expressed by Joana, whose interrogation was particularly tough, having been subject to sleep deprivation torture for over 5 days at the end of which she started to hallucinate. She could have put an end to this situation just when she started ‘fainting’, but this experience is not remembered as traumatic, as she stressed: “I had a feeling of strength and satisfaction for having resisted”¹³.

⁹ Even if all the interviewed expressed consent to use their original names, I decided to use pseudonyms in order to protect their private identity, and since their real names are not relevant for the purpose of this study.

¹⁰ Written interview with Francisco, 3 June 2015.

¹¹ Written interview with Filipe, 11 June 2015.

¹² Written interview with Gustavo, 1 July 2015.

¹³ Oral interview with Joana, 17 June 2015.

The excerpt below, from another interview, is also particularly relevant at this respect:

I was assaulted, insulted, threatened, humiliated, cruelly interrogated, attacked by insects [...] I resisted. Naturally, after this horrible experience, which confirmed to me, if I still had some doubts, the real totalitarian and brutally repressive face of the regime, my adhesion to revolutionary principles and the degree of my militancy augmented exponentially.¹⁴

In this memory, ‘revolutionary principles’ are expressly mentioned, even if, at the time of the fight against the regime, the “revolution” was not a common element in the vocabulary of the activists. In this, it is evident how the following episodes, the fact that a “revolution” really happened, are superimposed on the previous experience, compenetrating its memory. Another reference to this process is mentioned by Sandra, a former activist who declared that, during her militancy against the dictatorship, what she wanted was “carrying out the revolution”¹⁵.

These considerations are even more significant, in my view, if we reflect that in these interviews, I did not ask what was the effect of the prison on their engagement, but tried to be as neutral as possible in my question, which was ‘can you describe your prison experience?’. The fact that almost all the interviewees referred an intensification of their engagement after the prison, and remember feeling “pride” for the way they had dealt with that experience thus shows the relevance of this aspect in their remembering process. As affirmed by James Jasper: “Emotions are present in every phase and every aspect of protest” (Jasper 2011: 286) and it is necessary to consider, in social movement study, the role of “emotional causal mechanisms” (Jasper 2011: 286) and on the “felt experience”, which is fundamental in engagement and disengagement processes.

This perception of pride is particularly connected to the following experience after the 25th of April, which helped to frame the previous period of fights under the dictatorship, with all its risks and sufferance, as having a clear direction and consequence: the revolution. A different “culmination” of that fight – for instance, a different or later form of transition – could have given rise to a different memory, and to different emotions and feelings associated to it. But this feeling is not just a passive result of the political

¹⁴ Written interview with André, 16 July 2015.

¹⁵ Oral interview with Sandra, 5 June 2015.

processes: these activists have the perception, and it mostly corresponds to the truth, that they were active part of that. In fact, the revolution did not emerge “from the blue”, but it was also a consequence of the previous cycle of protest (Accornero 2013, Accornero 2016a) and of the increased engagement of the activists after the coup-d’état. That pride sustained and strengthened their participation during the PREC, which, in turn, contributed to increasing the revolutionary aspects of that period. Actors co-create opportunities for mobilization; opportunities that then influence actors’ attitude; and in all this process, feelings are crucial: it is mostly how opportunities are perceived that shapes the way people react to them. Memory, finally, is a result of all these dynamics.

Another aspect of the memory of prison experience also goes into this direction. The sense of learning which emerges from many interviews must also be associated to a finalistic perception of those moments, as if they were a training and “forming” passage in view of the revolutionary future: “I grew up a little bit”¹⁶; “It was an experience that strongly enriched me. Traumatic, on the one side, but I understood that police did not have all the power, even in a context of strong deprivation of freedom”.¹⁷

As these excerpts show, these former activists do not see themselves as “victims” of the previous regime, but rather as “resistant” actors. In this sense, their narrative is completely different from other discourses on the authoritarian past. One of these narratives, for instance, insists in the image of “victims” related to former activists that suffered the regime’s repression (see, at this respect, Maderia, Pimentel and Farinha 2007; Pimentel 2007). Similarly, in the description of the recently created “Museum of Aljube – Resistance and Freedom”, we read that “It aims to give voice to the victims and show how long and difficult the path of their rehabilitation is, promulgating the truth and example over the silence and hoax”¹⁸. This image does not emerge from my interviews, even if all the former activists interviewed suffered prisons and other forms of repression (such as expulsion from university, life in hiding, exile).

The experience of the revolution

¹⁶ Written interview with Manuel, 4 June 2015.

¹⁷ Written interview with Mario, 3 June 2015.

¹⁸ <https://www.museudoaljube.pt/en/about-the-museum>

In my view, it is difficult to read these narratives on prison experience and the feelings and memory associated to it without seeing in them the reflection of the subsequent events. This appears clear from the accounts of the way in which the 25th of April was experienced, as the natural result of the fight, the “clean day” for which these activists had fought and suffered during the fascism. This first impression on the very day of the coup is consolidated and even amplified during the following months of the revolution, described with words reminiscent of a “party” or “festival”, such as: “joy”, “rejoice”, “happiness”, “dawn”, “freedom”, “friend”, “guys”, “passion”, “intense”, “emotions” and “euphoria”. These feelings are expressed as follows:¹⁹ “I was highly committed on the very day and in the following years”²⁰; “it was the happiest day of my life”²¹; “Rejoicing, in Paris. I was back on the 2nd of May”;²² “I lived ‘the 25th of April’ in a passionate way [...] Nevertheless, in that period, I didn’t study...”²³ “with joy and high expectations”²⁴.

The following accounts are particularly interesting at this respect. The first one directly relates this happiness to bad feelings of the past, with both being strengthened by this contrast:

I lived the years of revolution intensively, with the same joy and thoughtlessness of the guys, in general; that was..., without doubt, the “day clean and whole”. Even today I get emotional about this... Living under the dictatorship was more than just suffering. It was a daily and painful chronic illness. It was an ideological, political, generational and... provincial violence that affected me deeply in my soul.²⁵

And, in respect to the following engagement during the PREC:

It was something as natural as a little bit impulsive. It was the result of the “enthusiasm of the liberation” that, since it had looked unreachable during a lot of time, now seemed to make all the impossibilities and fantasies possible... In this sense, it was the enjoyment of freedom, without any concern for international circumstances, and for the political and ideological conditions of the country. And, let me say, for mine own even...²⁶

¹⁹ These associations connected to the Portuguese revolution resemble those of similar periods in history and how they were perceived, such as, for instance the 1871 Paris Commune. Following accounts evidenced that the event was “festive and that the most appropriate way to remember it was through a party” (Rigney 2018: 375), others speak of “The sensual detail of a transformed everyday” (Ross 2015: 114)

²⁰ Written interview with Manuel, 4 June 2015.

²¹ Written interview with Cristina, 3 June 2015

²² Written interview with Nuno (colonial war and deserter exiled activist in Paris), 13 June 2015.

²³ Written interview with Francisco, 3 June 2015.

²⁴ Written interview with Filipe, 11 June 2015.

²⁵ Written interview with Pedro, 9 June 2016.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

On the other side, this other interview's excerpt shows the close interlink between the political process' dynamics during the very day of the coup and the emotional experience of the activist:

On the dawn of 25 April 1974, I happened to be at the home of a great childhood friend of mine and by chance we turned the radio on, around 4 'clock in the morning. We almost didn't believe what we were hearing: the first broadcast by the MFA! At the beginning, we had doubts about the authors of the message [...] slowly, our doubts dissolved [...] we followed the announcements eagerly and anxiously. It was really true: the dictatorship was being taken down! And that day of 25th of April became the happiest day of my life! [...] Later that day, I personally watched, close to the Carmo headquarter, in a general euphoria, in the midst of the large "unit of people" gathered there, the rendition of Marcelo Caetano²⁷. And rejoiced!²⁸

The joy and even euphoria expressed in these words are the main emotions these activists seem to associate to the memory of the revolution, and they are strictly connected with a deep sense of freedom and of the potentiality of their own action. Moreover, they were protagonists of that process: their previous fight really contributed to the way in which the regime ended; the feeling provoked by that end (through a left-wing pacific coup d'état) strengthened their involvement and, as a consequence, their participation during the PREC corroborated the rupture dimension of the transition. In this, the close interconnection and the continuous interaction between actors and fields, between contentious dynamics and political process, and, finally, between the micro level of activists and the macro level of institutional change is evident.

These interconnections and interactions are particularly deep in revolutionary moments. Revolutions, as radical fluid conjunctures (Dobry 1983; Dobry 1995; Dobry 2009), are moments when the crisis of the state is accompanied by a general "collapse" of the legitimacy of state institutions. Michel Dobry considers this legitimacy a horizontal element, based on mutual recognition between the institutions. Actually, he prefers to use the definition "sectors", blurring the division between state actors, civil society and individuals.²⁹ In certain moments, such as during radical state crisis and even more during revolutions, this mutual recognition can collapse and this, along with high feelings of uncertainty, can supply a deep sense of "openness", as if history may take any possible direction. He calls this process "desectorization of the social space" (Dobry 2009: 7) and

²⁷ Marcelo Caetano had substituted Salazar as Prime Minister in 1969.

²⁸ Written interview with André, 16 July 2015.

²⁹ This concept is similar to the concept of "players" adopted by Jasper and Duyvendak (Jasper 2015)

underlines that “these conjunctural transformations of the social space could affect even the identities of actors that are much less ‘stable’ than we usually think”.

Due to the strong interconnection (“collusion”) between “sectors”, e.g. family, different state institutions, work environment and networks, political groups, and the role of individuals in all of them, this openness is not just political, rather it works more like a kind of “cognitive shock” (Bergstrand 2013; Accornero 2016), in which the room for people giving new possible significances to social reality radically expands. Indeed, in this room of possibilities, activists experienced their actions as exceptionally effective and highly creative (“freely inhabit the substance of time”). During these periods, there is a restructuring of the interpretative framework, and of the “representations, cognitions and perceptions of actors”, which contributes to “shaping also their participation – or non-participation” (Dobry 1995: 4).

Memory and legacies of a successful fight

This section introduces the final element of the analysis: the perception of the pre-revolutionary activism and its legacy in the life of the former activists. As mentioned above, it is arguable that a different turn of the events – for instance, a later or different form of transition – could have brought about a completely different perception of the past. The fact that the revolution was experienced as the natural outcome of the previous fight – what was largely true – deeply shaped the view of that fight and its legacies in the biography of the former activists.³⁰

Thus, interviewees attribute a special meaning to that past in view of the subsequent revolution, which, in certain way, lent a finalistic significance to their past. The accounts mostly refer to elements such as, once again, learning and “character-forming”, righteousness, political values, friendship, capacity of facing risky situations, tenacity and a finality: “It gave me a critical spirit, respect for different opinions, a strong sense of freedom and democracy”³¹; “It was an incipient learning of the role of the group and individual, of the value of the truth and ‘doing the right thing’ even if this meant facing

³⁰ Both Nikolaos Papadogiannis (2015) and Kostis Kornetis (2015) refer to the disillusionment experienced by Greek former activists with respect to the way the Military Junta ended. Similarly, Kornetis describes the even stronger frustration and sense of grievance in the former Franco opposition milieu in the face of the Spanish ‘transición pactada’ (Kornetis 2014).

³¹ Written interview with Mario, 3 June 2015.

conflicts, facing risk”³²; “only those who lived through those times can understand the ties that were created among people: sharing, friendship, complicity. Ties that, regardless of the downshift after the 25th of April, have withstood a whole life”³³; “in decisive years, it trained me, as many of my generation”³⁴; “It was a school of political training, and this permanently influences our lives”³⁵. “Obligated me to be aware of the role of the individual and of his conscience in the resolution of collective problems”³⁶; “We wanted a better country and a better world. And without doubts, some of those who participated in the student movements helped to build it”³⁷. “The future was politics, not the studies”³⁸. “That experience contributed to moulding in a permanent way my character, my ideals, my way to think and act [...] it made me a better citizen, a better father, a better teacher, a better musician”.³⁹ In all the interviews, only in one case a former activist answered that the fight against the dictatorship was not relevant for his future life, and that, in fact, he considers having ‘waisted time, whit a country and a people that are not worth it’.⁴⁰

Notwithstanding the constraints, risks and suffering of that period, similarly to the case of prison experience, the struggle is remembered as highly positive. This can also be interpreted as being of “*a posteriori*” significance, due to the following turn of history. Many insights suggest a vision of that period as “preparation” (training) for something that would later happen. This is particularly true in this suggestive expression: “everything was possible, now this has been lost”,⁴¹ which clearly sums up an a-posteriori interpretation of the feeling of that time, perceived as a moment when any conceivable outcome of the fight was possible, even a revolution.

Conclusion: the “double legacy” of the past in former activists’ memory

³² Written interview with Manuel, 4 June 2015.

³³ Written interview with Cristina, 3 June 2015.

³⁴ Written interview with Nuno, 13 June 2015.

³⁵ Written interview with Alberto, 12 June 2015.

³⁶ Written interview with Filipe, 11 June 2015.

³⁷ Written interview with Cristina, 3 June 2015.

³⁸ Written interview with Ruben, 3 June 2015.

³⁹ Written interview with André, 16 July 2015.

⁴⁰ Written interview with Ruben, 3 June 2015.

⁴¹ Oral interview with Joana, 17 June 2015.

In this last part of the article, I will explain how my analysis can contribute to strengthening the dialogue between social movement and memory studies, and, consequently, to each of these areas, by increasing our understanding of the role of past activism and of political process in the activists' process of remembering. Drawing on the empirical analysis, I argue that the double legacy referred to by Costa Pinto in terms of collective memory firmly underlying the Portuguese democratic consolidation is also present at the level of activists, and that actually the two levels are closely interconnected. On the other hand, for the activists, this double legacy has, partially, a different meaning. The revolutionary moment following the fall of the regime is perceived, by many of them, as a direct consequence of their previous fight against the dictatorship. This contributed to "redefine" the way in which they look at that fight, giving it a special meaning in which even the harshest and riskiest experiences (such as prison and the abuses suffered during incarceration, expulsion from university, their life in hiding) are remembered in the light of what happened afterwards: "the new day clean and whole". This fight before the revolution is thus perceived as a moment when "everything was possible", even a revolution. But this perception is deeply mediated by the experience of the revolution itself, it has an "*a posteriori*" meaning. The authoritarian past is thus refracted through the lens of the revolution and seen as a teleological experience.

This point opens two more reflections. Firstly, due to the strength of the revolutionary events, the personal experience of activists was determinant in shaping their memories. Second, the role of these activists' fight in creating the conditions for the "new day clean and whole" was not just their own perception, but it is also, significantly, what really happened: the cycle of protest started at the end of the regime contributed in fact to its fall, and especially to the specific path taken by the Portuguese transition (Accornero 2013, 2016a, 2019). Moreover, the strong social mobilization during the period pushed for a much more radical cut with the past: "The mobilization of diverse anti-dictatorial forces was crucial in the first days after the coup of 1974. It was especially important in the immediate dissolution of the most notorious institutions of the New State, as well as in the occupation of various unions, corporatist organizations and municipalities" (Costa Pinto 2006: 177). Activists involved in these mobilizations were thus contributing to build the future collective memory embodied in the Portuguese democracy, while, at the same time, their own personal memory was reshaped by this experience. This appears clearer if we look at transitions, and especially at revolutions, as fluid conjunctures, when

political and social structures became more “plastic” (Dobry 2009: 6), and actors’ room for action larger.

An interactionist perspective in the study of social movements, paying ‘equal and symmetric weight to protestors and to the other players whom they engage, and by focusing equally on players and the arenas in which they interact’ (Jasper, 2015, p. 9), can help to better understand these processes. In doing this, my article also demonstrates that the continuous interaction between these levels, and the close interconnection between macro dynamics (such as institutional change) and micro aspects (such as the individual level of ‘the activist’) not only are at the basis of engagement and disengagement dynamics, but also give form to the specific interpretations and emotions associated to activism, its perceptions and memory.

Finally, along and articulated with the two previous underlying points – double legacy in the memory of activists and their contribution in co-building collective memory – my article would like to bring in a third element to this reflection. As some author have stressed: “the field of cultural memory studies has unquestionably gravitated towards violence and its collective legacies. It has been dominated by a traumatic paradigm [as if] history is where it hurts” (Rigney 2018: 369). In contrast, in this article, I analysed a positive memory of the past. It is not a memory of a trauma, rather it is the memory of something that cures the traumatic aspects of the recent past: the suffering experienced during the anti-fascist fight. A such a “happy” experience that even changes the memory of previous bad experiences. This actually overtook the simple restoring of an “emotional justice” or “balance” as the application of transitional justice measures, aimed at satisfying the need of “retributive emotions”, does (Barahona de Brito 2010).

In this article I focused on the subjective remembering process of former anti-fascist activists, and on its concrete role in co-building the collective memory and what was called the “double legacy” of the authoritarian Portuguese past. In doing this, I aimed to contribute to the dialogue between memory and social movement studies from a micro perspective. I think it is important to reopen the analysis of memory, and of memory in social movements, to consider the reflections developed by oral history scholars, on the one side, and to transition studies, on the other. This means giving relevance to historical personal experiences, and to the unicity of the events in which they are entrenched, which create and/or shape future perceptions of the past.

Thanks to these instruments, this article can contribute to the understanding of the role of revolutionary moments in the process of memory building from a relational perspective that focuses on the continuous interaction between different actors and fields, on the perception and emotions associated to it, and on the way in which this interaction changes both the activists and the context in which they act. In this, the paper aims to go beyond the classical rigid distinction between agency and structure, and between contentious and institutional players, thanks to the instruments of the ‘sociology of political crisis’ and to the ‘players and arenas’ approach, which both stress the fluidity, plasticity and interdependence of all these levels (Dobry 1983; Jasper 2015). This article can thus be relevant both for social movement and memory studies, and for connecting the two areas. In respect of social movement studies, it partially put into discussion a static and unidirectional view of the opportunities for mobilization and stresses the relevance of the individual and collective perceptions in assessing these opportunities, and the role of players and their interactions in creating them. In respect of memory studies, by stressing the creative role of individual players in moulding history and its memory, the articles pay tribute to an interactionist perspective in the understanding of the process of memory (co)building.

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