The Past and the Present (re)Visited: War Veterans' Representations of the Portuguese Colonial War

Ana Figueiredo, Joaquim Pires Valentim,
Laurent Licata & Bertjan Doosje

[1, 2] *University of Coimbra, Portugal*
[3] *Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium*
[4] *University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands*
figueiredo.anacm@gmail.com

Abstract

The Portuguese colonial war, which took place between 1961 and 1974, has marked the life of many individuals who were recruited by the Portuguese Armed Forces to fight in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. In the present study, through a classical content analysis of five semi-structured interviews conducted with Portuguese war veterans (non-professional and involved in direct armed conflict in Angola between 1965 and 1972), we investigate their representations of the colonial war. More precisely, we analyze their emotional processing of the colonial war, as well as the perceptions these veterans held (at the time of the war) and presently hold about Africans from the former colonies. Furthermore, we also analyze their representations of the process of decolonization of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, as a function of their past experiences in the war. Finally, we analyze the personal consequences that individuals attribute to their experience of the war in the present day. This study represents a first step in our analysis of war veterans' representations of the colonial war and our discussion of results also reflects new lines of research for the future.

Key words

Portuguese colonial war; War veterans; Social Representations

The Portuguese colonial war occurred at a time when Portugal was under the New State dictatorship. This authoritarian regime was effective in Portugal between 1926 and 1974, and on April 25th 1974 there was a peaceful military coup, led by the Armed Forces Movement, that overthrew the regime and gave way to democracy in the country. One of the main reasons for the military to overthrow the New State Regime was the desire to stop the colonial war, which had started in 1961. At this time, colonization was already condemned worldwide and most colonial powers had acknowledged the right to self-determination and independence of their colonies. However, Portugal refused to grant independence and self-determination in a peaceful way. Already in 1951, there was a revision of the Portuguese Constitution by the New State regime, changing the status of the colonized territories from "colonies" to "overseas territories", thus defining Portugal as an intercontinental and

multiracial nation (Ramos, Vasconcelos e Sousa, & Monteiro, 2010). Despite the international pressure, Portugal did not concede its colonies the right to self-determination and, in 1961, what would be known as the Portuguese colonial war began, following a massacre of local populations in the North of Angola (Ramos *et al.*, 2010). This war soon spread over the other Portuguese colonies, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, and lasted until the peaceful Carnation Revolution in 1974[1]. This war damaged the countries of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau and caused many casualties on both sides. In 1975, all the former African colonies were recognized as independent states by Portugal.

In Portugal, many young men were recruited by the Portuguese Army to fight in the colonial war. Until 1973, it is estimated that around 87.274 Portuguese individuals were recruited and around 8000 Portuguese men died in the conflict (Guerra Colonial, 2009).

Although the colonial war lasted for 13 years and had a very strong impact on people's lives and the political arena in Portugal, so far, little attempts have been made to address this period of Portuguese history and analyze the social representations that individuals hold of the colonial war. Especially, we argue that investigating the social representations of the colonial war held by individuals who actively participated in it, as soldiers of the Portuguese Armed Forces, and how this experience affects their lives is of major importance.

Therefore, the present study consists of an introduction to a research project in which we aim to analyze the social representations of the colonial war among Portuguese war veterans. This first study is, then, a preliminary analysis of five interviews (out of a total of thirty), which we have conducted and it represents an inductive step designed to prepare the next research steps and analyses of the results of such interviews. More concretely, in the present paper, we analyze the representations of five Portuguese war veterans who served in Angola between 1965 and 1972. By choosing a rather homogeneous group of war veterans (i.e. our participants were in the colonial war more or less at the same timing, they were all in Angola and they were all first line combatants), we aim to understand the construal of social representations among these individuals. Therefore, we analyze the emotional processing of their experiences in the war as soldiers, their perceptions of Africans during the war and in the present day and the way they represent the process of decolonization. In addition, we investigate the personal consequences the war brought about for their lives in the present day.

To our knowledge, little research has tried to understand Portuguese war veterans' social representations of the colonial war. Sendas, Maia and Fernandes (2008), have conducted a study with 314 war veterans in which they asked the participants to answer the question "What is the meaning you attribute for your experience in the war?". Their analyses led them to distinguish two main categories of responses: the first category refers to the war as "life experience" and the second category refers to being in the war as "inheritance". For some participants, the war as a "life experience" is characterized by a period of life in which some individuals portray it as a "torment" (i.e. horrible, unjust, etc.), others as "the fulfillment of a service/duty" (i.e. defend the country's interests, duty served, etc.) and for the rest as an

---

1 It is important to refer that, both in Angola and Mozambique, there were civil wars after the recognition of independence of both countries. Only in 2002, in Angola and, 1992, in Mozambique, were these conflicts resolved.

"epic experience" (i.e. getting to know Africa, pride/honor, etc.). Participants whose answers fall within the "inheritance category", mainly refer to the war experience as an "irreparable loss" (i.e. ruin of physical and psychological health, took their youth, etc.) or as an "acquisition" (i.e. contribution for self-improvement, maturity, more knowledge, etc.).

These authors (Sendas *et al.*, 2008) have made a significant contribution to the literature through their methodology, which was based on questionnaires. In the present study, we have conducted semi-structured interviews with our participants, because we believe this methodology allows us to tap into different dimensions of the war, such as the participants' representations of their own experience in the conflict, of the decolonization process, as well as their emotional copping and representations of the consequences of the war.

Furthermore, we argue that the theory of social representations is a valuable framework from which to analyze our results, especially when we further develop our results in the future. Our research proposition is that our participants have come to build specific representations of the war, which are related with their role in the conflict as combatants. Throughout the years, and by contacting and discussing with each other their experiences of the war, these men have created specific meanings and representations, which may not be entirely consistent with each other but that are somewhat consensual among them. In this line, we also propose that Portuguese war veterans hold specific social representations of this period of Portuguese history, which may be different from other Portuguese people, namely, men who were not first-line combatants. At present, we only present and discuss the contents of five interviews conducted with first-line combatants in the colonial war in order to highlight some of the main dimensions underlying war veterans' representations of the colonial war.

Social representations theory (Moscovici, 1976, 1984) proposes that processes of meaning making and information sharing are embedded within the context in which these social transactions occur. In other words, individual cognitive processes are guided and coordinated by a metasystem, which uses normative regulations for the purpose of creating sense of these same cognitive operations, which happen within social interactions (Doise, 1993). Through a process of objectification, abstract information is transformed into concrete knowledge that is communicated and, thus, becomes shared within a given social context (Clémence, 2001). Furthermore, through the process of anchoring, figures and meanings are framed in prior knowledge and beliefs thus leading to a particular social representation of a given topic. As members of a social category sharing the same life experiences, Portuguese war veterans have probably elaborated shared representations of their experience in the war, through the discussion and interpretation of these experiences within this social category, and through the objectification and anchoring of these experiences within the social context in which they live.

In this line, it is important to consider the social positioning of different individuals when analyzing social representations of the colonial war (Clémence, 2001). One must expect that war veterans' social representations may be different from the social representations held, for example, by veterans who fought on the side of the independentist movements or even of civilians who were not involved in the war, but also that these war veterans'

representations may also not be homogeneous among them. According to Clémence (2001),

> "Social positioning derives from the anchoring of the shared knowledge in different groups. These groups are not only different because they do not have access to the same information, but also because their members share specific beliefs and experiences." (p. 87)

Following this rationale, shared constructions of the social world and of the relations between individuals may influence the way individuals perceive this social world, how they relate to it, and, more specifically, contribute to the construction of meaning of specific experiences, such as the personal involvement in the colonial war. Therefore, in the present exploratory study, we propose to look closer at Portuguese war veterans' representations of the colonial war, by focusing on their involvement in the conflict, and how these representations are intertwined with other aspects and representations of their lives in the present day.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Five men who were recruited as soldiers for the Portuguese colonial war, on the side of the Portuguese Armed Forces, were contacted through the Center for Studies and Medical, Psychological and Social Support (CEAMPS) of the Veterans League (Liga dos Combatentes) to participate in the present study. Their ages ranged from 62 to 66 years old at the time of the interviews and all of the participants were involved in direct armed conflict in the colonial war, although none of them pursued a military career (i.e. they were soldiers but did not stay in the army after the war). Three of the men were shooters, one was a transmissions equipment repairman and the other one was a quartermaster. The five men were located in different zones of Angola, between 1965 and 1972. The time of service in the army for the five participants ranged from two years and one month to three years and one month.

PROCEDURE

The data for the present study were collected in 2009 through individual interviews conducted in the premises of the Veterans League headquarters, in Lisbon. All participants were subjected to previous psychological assessment and some of them were, at the time of the interviews, receiving psychological support through self-help groups, within the Center for Studies and Medical, Psychological and Social Support (CEAMPS) of the Veterans League. Before the interviews started, participants gave their consent for audio recording the interview. All the interviews were conducted by the same person (the first author of this article) and the minimum length of interview was around thirty-five minutes, while the maximum length was around one hour and twenty minutes. The interviews were semi-structured and allowed the interviewer and the participant to focus on aspects that were most relevant for the participant's experience in the colonial war. First, participants were asked a few

background and demographic questions about themselves. Second, participants were all asked about the following topics: 1) Description of a relevant event that participants felt strongly about during their experience as combatants; 2) Emotions and feelings regarding the aforementioned event at the time; 3) Description of another event/story about their experience as a military; 4) Emotions and feelings regarding this event at the time; 5) Information given to them officially, at the time of recruitment; 6) Opinion about the war: - Before they went there; - When they were there; - When they returned to Portugal.; 7) What were/are their perceptions of the Africans from the former colonies: - At the time of the war; - Nowadays. 8) - What were the perceptions of the Africans from the former colonies in relation to the Portuguese: - At the time of the war; - Nowadays.; 9) Consequences of the war: - For themselves; - For Portugal; - For the former colonies.; 10) Representations about the end of the war and the decolonization process; 11) The emotions they experience when describing their experience during the war and why. These topics were not always addressed in the same order, depending on the way the interview was flowing. Participants were also told that they could refuse to answer any of the questions and to interrupt or even stop the interview at any time if they wished so. For the present study, we focus mainly on the topics addressed through questions 1 to 4, 7, 9 (only the part regarding personal consequences of the war), 10 and 11.

By collecting data regarding the aforementioned topics, our main goal was to understand the social representations of the veterans of the Portuguese colonial war, and the meanings they attach to this life experience by focusing on four different topics: 1) the emotional experience of the colonial war; 2) the perceptions the war veterans have regarding Africans from the former colonies at the time of the conflict and in the present day; 3) their perceptions of the decolonization process of the former Portuguese colonies; and 4) the personal consequences the war had in their lives.

Results and Discussion

After closely analyzing the content of the interviews, we focused on four different aspects of our participants answers: 1) The emotional processing of the war; 2) Perceptions of Africans from the former colonies; 3) Representations of the decolonization process; and 4) Personal consequences of the war.

The first category refers to the emotional processing of the war and within this major category, we were also able to identify two different clusters of answers: "the experience of the war" and the "Angola experience". This first cluster of answers is characterized by individuals' feelings and thoughts associated with the war itself and their role in the war:

> "The person was always in *fear*[2]. But where would I escape to? (...) *I don't know what we thought*. Still today I say *I'd rather not go*, although, thank God, nothing happened to me." (01)[3]

---

2 The authors chose to italicize some aspects of the quotes in order to highlight certain aspects to which they refer to in the discussion of the results.

3 The numbers in brakets after each quote represent the participants' code number.

"*Of course I would've (avoided the war)*. Because I even had a stable life… the war, in the end, *it was more the trauma*. (…) There were many stories. Always very *sad stories*. For example, when we went in the woods, *we would try to conceal*, with each other, what happened during the days we were there, because in the woods we found *very sad things*. Things *difficult to explain*, like bodies hooked on trees." (29)

"When I got there I was *demoralized*, right? (…) *We have that anxiety*, we were going through the risk area. We went there *oppressed*. (…) When we were there, we would *have good and bad moments*. I had *many sad moments*. But I also had good moments. And personally, *it's hard to explain*. Living it, we were young, right? (…) The colleagues were the ones who supported us. I am convinced *we had a lot of strength, otherwise we would have all died out of sadness*. Or there was someone who gave us strength. *I liked going to Africa, I liked that country. But I didn't like going into the war.*" (23)

"*We needed some courage too*, right? Still today, if I had to get a gun to defend my country's interests, I would have no problems. If I am Portuguese obviously *I have my share in the defense of the heritage*, right? And who doesn't do it, in my opinion, is wrong. (…) There were *complicated moments*. But *that happens in every war*. But *there were also positive moments*." (18)

"We did good and bad things. But I liked going. I was proud of serving the Portuguese army and I liked going overseas, going to Angola, that is. I was proud of being part of the Portuguese army. (…) When we went to Angola we were taught that from Minho to Algarve and the overseas territories were all ours. And we went there with a patriotic spirit to defend Portugal. (…) We had a certain respect for the war. No one likes going into war. Everyone was afraid. (25)

As it is visible from the quotes above, our participants report having experienced fear of being involved in the war. Furthermore, they also mention to have felt or perceived many situations as sad when they were in the war. However, their experiences of the war seem rather contrasted. For example, the first two quotes refer only to the fear of the war, the trauma and the sad moments the participants experienced. Yet, the other three participants also mention some good aspects of the war, such as the strength of going to war, the need to defend the Portuguese heritage, the positive moments and the feeling of pride derived from the idea of serving the country. Importantly, we have noticed a general absence of labeling of negative self-focused emotions (such as anger, guilt, shame words) within our analysis. It thus seems that, although individuals are able to remember their experience in the war, the emotional labeling is rather vague, being put mostly in terms of "positive" and "negative" aspects of the war.

It is also visible that two of our participants perceive the war as something they had to do to "defend the heritage", as a service they had to fulfill as Portuguese citizens. For these, the war was experienced more positively than for the other three participants.

The second cluster of answers that our participants spontaneously gave, regarding their emotional processing of the colonial war, refers to the experience of going to and being in Angola:

"I mean, on the one side, the *longing* (saudade)… *Angola is beautiful*. I mean, I was touched inside, in the heart, the landscape. Those environments were forever marked in my heart. Angola is beautiful." (29)

"Well, I liked being there, I liked going there. I didn't want to say this. What I wanted to say was that *I liked Angola*. (...) There was never anyone who liked to go to war. But at the end of my commission, *I liked going to Africa, I liked that country. But I didn't like going into the war*. (...) I liked getting to know Angola." (23)

"If I had to settle now in Angola I would have no problem. I would like to visit *Luanda*, which *is a beautiful city*. Nice beaches, all good." (18)

"*I liked Angola very much, very much*." (25)

As it can be seen from the above quotes, our participants seem to make a spontaneous distinction between the "experience of the war" and what we have labeled as the "Angola experience". For four out of our five participants, being in Angola was a positive experience and the memories they have of the country are all related with the landscape and the beauty of the country and of Luanda (the capital). Given the distinction between the more negative content of the quotes within the first category "experience of the war" and the more positive content of the second category "Angola experience", it is important to address the multidimensionality of the emotional experiences of war veterans during the colonial war. Additionally, we must also assume the possibility that our participants may feel, at the same time, both negative and positive emotions regarding this period of their lives. Therefore, we argue that understanding from which concrete experiences the positive and the negative feelings come from is of utmost importance when addressing the social representations of the colonial war among war veterans.

When analyzing our participants' responses to our second category of interest, regarding the perceptions they have of the Africans from the former colonies, we have made a distinction between the perceptions of Africans in the past, during the time the veterans served in the colonial war, and the perceptions they have of Africans from the former colonies in the present day.

Perceptions of Africans then:

"While we were there, we were in it, we didn't see them with good eyes, that's it. But we couldn' say it because of our captain." (01)

"I *always saw them positively*. The ones that didn't harm me, right? (...) There were moments *they even helped us. I was never a racist* because I never saw a reason for it. In the first place I always saw the human being." (23)

"I always *had a good relationship* with the native people there." (18)

Perceptions of Africans now:

"I don't know if you can call me a racist or if it isn't racist but I have something of *not seeing them with good eyes*. But only when I see certain injustices, things they do. (...) If I pass by them I try not to look. I try not to get involved because I get outraged with certain things (...) *it's not that I hate blacks or anything like that. I get outraged when I see them doing things or talking in a certain way that is not respectful*. If it's a white, I don't know but I don't get as outraged. I don't know if that's called racism or not but I'm not a racist" (01)

"*There are many people who have it (hatred). But I'm not racist, no.*" (23)

"The Africans are more racist than the white. And even more corrupt and rich. (…) I think we need human workforce for construction work. So I agree that Africans come. I am not racist, I mean, they're welcome. But there are some… (…) I think they like living here more than in Angola. It's a misery there." (25)

Our results show that it is difficult to find a common valence regarding the perceptions of Africans then and now for our participants. While, for example, the first participant answers that he has never been very positive about Africans, neither in the past, nor in the present, the other participants seem quite defensive in their answers about their perceptions of Africans. The other two participants clearly state that they always had positive perceptions of Africans. It is also clear that our participants generally refer to themselves as not being racist, although their perceptions are somewhat diffuse and inconsistent. Especially, our participants' perceptions of Africans in the present day appear to be positive in nature, although there is also a particularization of some characteristics of Africans and some implicit negative perceptions of Africans. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that in the above quotes our participants refer to African immigrants living in Portugal and not to Africans living in the former colonies.

Furthermore, it is important to note that, generally, we can identify traces of what may be called "new" or subtle racism (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Vala, Brito, & Lopes, 1999; Vala, Lopes, & Lima, 2008) in the quotes of the war veterans. Given that, by nowadays standards, racism is widely condemned and people know that they should not express it, many times, individuals seem to adhere to beliefs that do not directly reflect racist views. Instead, they use more covert and indirect ways of expressing their prejudice against other groups, thus allowing participants to feel they have not transgressed the anti-racist norm (Deschamps, Vala, Marinho, Lopes, & Cabecinhas, 2005; Vala *et al.*, 2008). One example of such use of more subtle racist views lies in the sentence "I am not racist, I mean, they're welcome. But there are some…" (Participant 01) or even "it's not that I hate blacks or anything like that. I get outraged when I see them doing things or talking in a certain way that is not respectful" (Participant 23). These interviewees do seem to be prejudiced against Africans from the former colonies. However, they try to defend themselves as not being racist, by particularizing some members of this social category and by focusing on their counter-normative actions.

Finally, one important aspect seems to be that our participants hold quite consistent ideas about Africans from the former colonies and that their past and present perceptions are coherent with each other. For example, participant 23 always refers to himself as not being racist and as holding positive views of Africans in the past, but also in the present day. As for participant 1, the negative perceptions of Africans are visible, both in the past and in the present day. Nevertheless, one must also bear in mind that the perceptions of Africans in the past were expressed by our participants in the present day and, thus, they may be more coherent due to a need for consistency. However, it is worth noticing that they do not tend to contrast their representations of the Africans from Angola with those of African immigrants currently living in today's Portugal.

In terms of the third category of analysis, regarding our participants' representations of the process of decolonization, it is clear that they all share common beliefs regarding this topic.

"Portugal had *more costs than benefits*. So many lives lost, traumatized for life. I don't know if the benefits... *Because, in the end, we had to let go* (of Africa). (...) *I don't know if the war was worth it*, but I don't think so, because in those 13 years how many millions of escudos were spent there and went there to keep the war that, in the end, had to finish?" (01)

"I think the 25th of April should've served another system. *I think we shouldn't have given them sovereignty right away*. There should've been negotiations with the political parties there. Because those parties were also at war with each other. And then, *make things differently, not give it to them for free. It should've become provinces, but in communion with us*, in order to get something from there. From there (the colonies) to here (Portugal) and from here to there! (...) *I think they should have had independence, yes, but under our orientation/guidance because, in the end, they needed it*. I mean, after we left they went to war with each other for several years." (29)

"Maybe it was *badly done, too much in a rush*. (...) I think *they should be independent*. But there should be a preparation. When they started the war, they should have prepared it with anticipation so when the moment came, they should have given it more time. *It should have been prepared with anticipation, but they didn't prepare it*. (...) *It would've been better without the war. I think it only brought about disadvantages*." (23)

"I think the politicians back then *could've found a more balanced solution*, that not only would impend the civil war. There were other solutions. It's obvious that to safeguard the interests of both sides *the power had to, in a first phase, be shared to give way to independence. It would've been positive for all sides*." (18)

"I am a man of the 25th of April, *I agreed with the independence*, especially to avoid losing more Portuguese soldiers. *But I think the decolonization wasn't made right*. (...) So Africa, the biggest share had to be for Africans. If it was possible - maybe in the time of Norton de Matos[4] – but when the terrorism started it was unthinkable to do something like Madeira or Azores. *So they would have the negro population and a Portuguese representative, there would be a certain autonomy if it was possible*. But I don't think it was positive. *They are worse off then when the Portuguese were there*. But I agree with the independence." (25)

All of our participants agree that the former Portuguese colonies had the right to self-determination and independence. Furthermore, our participants also agree with each other that the war was unnecessary, especially, given that in the end "Portugal had to let go of the colonies". In this line, it is also visible from the quotes above that the war veterans we interviewed feel that their efforts in the war were useless and that the war was unnecessary because of the way the decolonization process occurred. Moreover, and following the same reasoning for their condemnation of the decolonization process, our participants argue that there should have been a period of transition between the colonial war and the recognition

---

4 José Maria Mendes Ribeiro Norton de Matos was the General Governor of Angola between 1912 and 1915 and was the minister for the Portuguese colonies between May 18th 1915 and June 19th 1915.

of independence of the former colonies. Interestingly, and in line with the later results, Licata and Klein (2010) have also shown that, in the context of Belgium's decolonization of Congo, older Belgian participants' levels of group-based guilt are associated with the belief that Belgians did not prepare the Congolese for independence.

Summarizing, our participants agree that the war was mostly negative and that there should have been a process of transition when the colonies gained independence. Given that this transition period did not occur, for them the decolonization process was made in the wrong way and brought about negative consequences for the colonies and, at the same time, augmented their perceptions that their efforts in the war and all of their suffering was vain and unrecognized.

Indeed, the feelings of uselessness and of wasting their efforts, as war veterans, are also visible in the answers of the fourth category of analysis, regarding our participants' representations of the personal consequences the war had in their lives.

> "It was *negative*… I had to be there 25 months… I forget a lot. Sometimes the memory vanishes. (…) The consequences for my life is only this thing that, I think, if I hadn't gone there, if I wasn't there, I wouldn't have these problems that I'm having now. And it's all night. It's not *dreaming about it, it's insomnia, nightmares*, not sleeping. (…) *I have to forget*. (…) After I came back I didn't have this. It has been getting worse in the last years. It feels like I'm there. (…) Benefits, I didn't see any. Because, to be truthful, I still say to myself that I'd rather not go. (…) But thank god, nothing happened to me. **(…)** *It was the loss of two years of my youth that I could've had*. (…) To be truthful, I believe *I didn't have any benefits, on the contrary, on the contrary*." (01)

> "When I came back… *My brain was ruined*… I went through a lot… I wasn't capable of understanding my father, my mother, my brothers, it's very hard. (…) I wasn't capable. If there was a party, fireworks, I would throw myself to the ground. (…) The war, overall, *it was more the trauma*… something weird in our brain, in our idea, in our thoughts. (…) *Sometimes I still dream of it* (the war). It's something that seems impossible. Impressive. And when I wake up I realize 'I'm not in the war'… and in the beginning I had horrific dreams. I would get up and run away from home. But with the years, it got more stable – a bit better but not so much. (…) *It's a pity that today we (war veterans) don't have more strength and support*." (29)

> "*I marked the good things better than the bad ones*. Tried to forget the bad ones and keep the good ones. It is the best way to pass time. (…) *I don't think they do much for the veterans*. There's no one who has been overseas that doesn't have scars and they would all need more medical support. (…) There are worst cases than mine. Maybe I can cope with my disease. I can't write sometimes because of the tremors. Yes, *in the beginning I dreamt more*. (…) *It's not easy to tell*. It's not easy, at least for me, to tell what happened in the war to anyone here. I never thought of it as censorship. It was *my thoughts* that *didn't allow me to tell what happened there. We can't express what happens, we can't*." (23)

> "Let's say that *from a psychological perspective the war always leaves marks*. It creates *difficult situations* to people. Still today *I can't stand in front of a showcase*. I always think there's someone on my back to kill me or rob me. I'm always alert. And if I am in big crowds I don't feel well. *I think someone will attack me. I can't sleep well*. (…) And *I try to forget*. That is, with the problems I face in my daily life, *I try to overcome it*." (18)

"After the 25th of April the soldiers were badly treated. As if we were murderers. The soldiers who were forced to go to the war were very badly treated and forgotten. (…) Looking back I would say that the African people are worse off then when the Portuguese were there. (…) There were some positive and negative consequences. Positive because I got to know Angola, it gave me a certain knowledge of Angola; the economic and social situation, gave me maturity. Negative, it was four years of my life… (…) It was very stressful. I suffered. I came with a little bit of stress. All the living, the military component, the pressure, responsibility, anxiety, the stress we were submitted to. I am hurt, hurt. (…) I think my stay in Angola was positive. Positive in the human, technical sense. But the negative part were the four years of my life and the result. We lost Africa. I feel confused. I came very confused." (25)

From the quotes above one may infer that mostly, the war brought about negative consequences for our participants. The participants refer to symptoms characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as insomnias and negative psychological consequences that still affect their lives today. Furthermore, they also feel they lost their years of youth in the war and that all of their suffering was in vain. Nowadays, it is also clear that these war veterans do not feel recognized for their role in the war and feel left out by the representatives of the governments that ruled Portugal after the colonial war ended. All in all, although these war veterans also refer to some positive consequences of the war, such as "maturity", the fact that they could visit Angola, and a gain in technical abilities ("Positive in the human, technical sense"), mostly all of our participants mention more negative consequences for their lives deriving from their participation in the war.

The analysis of the interviews conducted with five war veterans of the Portuguese colonial war have shown us that the representations of the colonial war must be considered within a multidimensional framework, from which we can draw several meanings, associated with different aspects of the veterans experience of the war.

For example, when analyzing the emotional content of the interviews, it becomes clear that, still today, our participants have some difficulty to articulate and integrate the war experience into a coherent representation. Regarding this category of analysis, on the one side, the participants report the negative aspects and feelings associated with the experience of the war, fear being the most expressed emotion by all of our participants. More specifically, three of our participants focused mainly on the negative aspects of the war: the fear, the trauma and the anxiety the war provoked in them, while at the same time they also mentioned the difficulty they have to explain and discuss their feelings and experiences. On the other side, two of the war veterans seem to evoke mostly the feeling of duty accomplished by serving in the war. However, these two participants also expressed their fear.

Importantly, none of the war veterans was able to clearly label their emotional experience (given that emotional words are not usually apparent in their discourse), except for the labeling of fear of the war and pride for being part of the Portuguese army. They do not report any negative self-centered moral emotion such as guilt or shame.

Moreover, our participants make a clear distinction between their experience in the war and its associated negative representations and of the experience of being in Angola. Three participants clearly make a distinction between being in the war and being in Angola and, for them, the "Angola experience" is positive in nature. These veterans describe the

beauty of the country and the fact they liked to visit the country. One of them goes even further, by stating he would like to live there because of the natural beauty of the country. Angola, as a territory, tends to elicit nostalgia.

These results lead us to make a distinction between the content of the social representations related with the involvement in the war and of being in Angola, given that they are quite distinctive in valence and, most importantly, in the feelings and emotions they elicit. Further research should address the fact that our participants seem to have a rather diffuse emotional processing of the experience of the war and researchers should also try to understand the meaning that a lack of emotional labeling may carry within it. For example, clinical psychologists could address this incapacity to label their emotions. If the next steps of our research confirm it, their psychological counselors should certainly take this feature of the war veterans into account.

Interestingly, our analyses have also highlighted that, many times, our participants refer to their experience in the war in "we" terms, rather than "I" terms. This seems to reflect self-categorization with other war veterans, who went through the same experiences as our participants. Further research should analyze how self-categorization processes influence the construction of social representations for war veterans. This, in turn, may shed light into our understanding of different positions regarding the social representations of the war that may arise within different groups who were part of the Portuguese Armed Forces. For example, it is possible that veterans who were never involved in direct-armed conflict (unlike our participants) may hold different representations of their experience of the war and display a different emotional processing of such experience.

Regarding our category of answers about the perceptions of Africans from the former colonies, the results show that our participants declare quite consistent perceptions of Africans when thinking of them in the colonial past and nowadays. Two of our participants appear to hold a positive view of the people from the former colonies, while the remaining veterans seem to have more negative views of Africans and endorse what we may call subtle racism (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Vala *et al.*, 1999, 2008). More explicitly, although these war veterans state that they are not racist, they do seem to hold negative views of the Africans from the former colonies. This suggests that the experience of the war, still today, influences their perceptions, thus allowing for consistency between their views of Africans during the war and the present day. However, we must also keep in mind that the consistency found between the war veterans' perceptions of Africans in the past and in the present may be related with the fact that they reported these in the present and within a small temporal distance, thus potentially leading to a consistency effect. Nevertheless, we argue that understanding how the negative experiences in the war might inspire negative attitudes towards contemporary Africans is of utmost importance and further research should tap into these dynamics.

When analyzing the social representations of the decolonization process, we found that all of our participants agree with the right to independence for the former Portuguese colonies and they affirm that the war was negative and should not have happened. However, our participants also defend that there should have been a transition period before the

colonies fully gained their independence. In this line, they feel that the war efforts and their role in the conflict were useless. It is understandable that these war veterans, who spent years fighting in Africa, feel that something else should have been done before the colonies gained their independence. Also, the fact that Angola went through a civil war right after the colonial conflict ended, must add to this feeling of uselessness and waste of their youth years.

Finally, all of our participants mentioned several personal consequences of their participation in the war. All in all, the war veterans claim that the war brought more negative than positive consequences for their lives. All of the participants reported suffering from physical and psychological symptoms, such as confusion, insomnia, fear of harsh and unexpected sounds, trauma and stress, and these all seem to reflect symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, it is also clear that our participants feel they lost their youth in a useless effort and that no one has ever recognized their role and their losses in the war. Finally, these individuals state that they feel forgotten by their government's representatives and that they wish they would make more efforts to help the veterans in general.

Further research should continue to analyze the social representations of the colonial war, from the perspective of Portuguese war veterans, but also from the perspective of other individuals who were not directly involved in the armed conflict or who were involved, but on the side of the independentist movements. To our knowledge, the literature about the colonial war is somewhat expanding. For example, there are some studies about the social representations of the Portuguese colonial period (Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010), the emotions elicited by the colonial war (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2010; Figueiredo, Valentim, & Doosje, 2011) and of the relations between the Portuguese and the Africans from the former colonies (e.g. Vala *et al.*, 2008; Valentim, 2003, 2005, 2011b). Nevertheless, more research needs to be done, until we get a more comprehensive picture of how the colonial war has affected the social representations of Portuguese in present day society and of the ways this conflict may still affect the relations between the former colonizer and colonized groups.

Conclusion

Given the results described in the previous section, we argue that the social representations approach is a fruitful tool for the analyses of our interviews. In our view, one important characteristic of social representations refers to the possibility of holding different meanings, images and associations, which do not reflect the logic and internal consistency of thought but do, in fact, allow for the combination of aspects of the representation that may, at first, seem contradictory. Consequently, the social representations approach provides us with an analysis framework from which to investigate the war veterans' discourse about their war experience, by bringing together its different meanings and associations, which may not necessarily be coherent with each other (Moscovici, 1989; Valentim, 2011a).

This argument is also in line with the concept of cognitive polyphasia (Moscovici, 1984, 2001), which refers to the coexistence of incompatible representations of the same reality or situation within one individual. For example, Friling (2012) has shown that Israeli Jewish parents whose sons were doing the mandatory military service held different and

inconsistent representations of their sons and the author concludes that cognitive polyphasia can be understood as a common sense's tool that allows them to cope with the complex reality in which they live.

Regarding our participants, we find some preliminary evidence for the phenomenon of cognitive polyphasia when they try to make sense of their experience and their role as soldiers in the Portuguese colonial war. As stated above, it seems that the participants have difficulties integrating their emotional experiences into a coherent representation, without inconsistent aspects. Furthermore, it is also clear that these war veterans have created different meanings and associations regarding their time in the war, an assertion that is also highlighted by their distinct representations of the war experience *versus* being in Africa.

Further research should aim to understand the means by which cognitive polyphasia allows for the construal of social representations associated with different meanings about the colonial war. Therefore, the next step in our work is to include the remaining 25 interviews in our analysis and investigate the processes of objectification and anchoring that allow our participants to make sense of their experiences and create shared representations of this period of Portuguese history.

The present study has focused on five aspects of Portuguese war veterans' social representations of the colonial war: 1) the emotional experience of the war; 2) the perceptions the war veterans have regarding Africans from the former colonies at the time of the conflict and in the present day; 3) their perceptions of the decolonization process of the former Portuguese colonies; and 4) the personal consequences the war had in their lives.

We were able to show that, in general, the veterans' social representations of the colonial war were composed of multiple aspects and meanings, which may, at times, seem inconsistent or incoherent. Nevertheless, the social representations approach allows us to understand the meanings and associations they have created of the war experience, by allowing the integration of those distinct components, which are associated with different aspects of the veterans experience in the war.

Future research might fruitfully expand the social representations perspective regarding the experience of war veterans and the implications of our findings for the ways in which the Portuguese colonial war is portrayed and dealt with in the present day. Furthermore, this line of research may be of importance to understand the intergroup dynamics between the groups involved in the colonial war in the present day.

References

Cabecinhas, R., & Feijó, J. (2010). Collective memories of Portuguese colonial action in Africa: Representations of the colonial past among Mozambicans and Portuguese youths. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, *4*(1), 28-44. doi:0070-ijcv-010111

Clémence, A. (2001). Social positioning and social representations. In K. Deaux & G. Philogène (Eds.), *Representations of the social* (pp. 83-95). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc.

Deschamps, J. C., Vala, J., Marinho, C., Lopes, R. C., & Cabecinhas, R. (2005). Intergroup relations, racism and attribution of natural and cultural traits. *Psicologia Política*, *30*, 27-39.

Doise, W. (1993). Debating social representations. In G. M. Breakwell & D. V. Canter (Eds.), *Empirical approaches to social representations* (pp. 157-170). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Figueiredo, A. M., Doosje, B., Valentim, J. P., & Zebel, S. (2010). Dealing with past colonial conflicts: How perceived characteristics of the victimized outgroup can influence the experience of group-based guilt. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4(1), 89-105. doi:0070-ijcv-2010196

Figueiredo, A. M., Valentim, J. P., & Doosje, B. (2011). A shared past and a common future: The Portuguese colonial war and the dynamics of group-based guilt. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology,* 14(1), 163-172. doi:10.5209/rev_SJOP.2011.v14.n1.14

Friling, D. (2012). "Having it all": Cognitive polyphasia as preserving complex reality: The Israeli Case. *Papers on Social Representations*, 21, 2.1-2.24.

Guerra Colonial. (2009). *Guerra Colonial, 1971-1974, Estatísticas*. Retrieved from http://www.guerraco-lonial.org/graphics

Licata, L., & Klein, O. (2010). Holocaust or benevolente paternalismo? Intergenerational comparisons on collective memories and emotions about Belgium's colonial past. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4(1), 45-57. doi:0070-ijcv-2010163

Moscovici, S. (1976). *La psychnalyse son image et son public* (2nd Ed.). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social Representations* (pp. 3–69). London: Academic Press.

Moscovici, S. (1989). Préface. In D. Jodelet (Ed.), *Folies et Representations Sociales* (pp. 9-30). Paris: PUF.

Moscovici, S. (2001). *Social representations. Explorations in social psychology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Pettigrew, T. F., & Meertens, R. W. (1995). Subtle and blatant prejudice in Western Europe. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 25, 57–75.

Ramos, R., Vasconcelos e Sousa, B., & Monteiro, N. G. (2010). *História de Portugal [History of Portugal]*. Lisboa: A Esfera dos Livros.

Sendas, S., Maia, A. C., & Fernandes, E. (2008). Entre o horror, a missão e a epopeia. Modalidades de atribuição de significado à participação na Guerra Colonial Portuguese pelos seus ex-combatentes. *Análise Psicológica,* 4 (XXVI), 601-613.

Vala, J., Brito, R., & Lopes, D. (1999). Expressões do racismo em Portugal [Expressions of racism in Portugal]. Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.

Vala, J., Lopes, D., & Lima, M. (2008). Black immigrants in Portugal: Luso-tropicalism and prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(2), 287-302. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00562.x

Valentim, J. P. (2003). *Identidade e lusofonia nas representações sociais de portugueses e de africanos [Identity and lusophony in the social representations of Portuguese and Africans]* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra.

Valentim, J. P. (2005). Luso-tropicalismo e lusofonia: uma perspectiva psicossocial [Luso-tropicalism and lusophony: a psychosocial perspective]. *Via Latina, 6*(2), 67-73.

Valentim, J. P. (2011a). Representações sociais do luso-tropicalismo e olhares cruzados entre portugueses e africanos [Social representations of luso-tropicalism and crossed looks at Portuguese and Africans]. In M. J. Simões (Ed.), *Imagotipos literários: Processos de (des) configuração na imagologia literária*. Coimbra: Centro de Literatura Portuguesa.

Valentim, J. P. (2011b). Social psychology and colonialism. In J. P. Valentim (Ed.), *Societal approaches in social psychology* (pp.179-194). Berne: Peter Lang.