

# April Revolution: 'Freedom' and 'Openness' in Portugal

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## ABSTRACT

On April 25, 1974 Portugal has embarked in the so called "Carnation Revolution", considered a peaceful popular uprising led by the armed forces. Since then, in popular imaginary mainly among leftist intellectuals and activists, Portugal has become the "April's country" remembered by its Revolution and not a mere Coup d'Etat. The word Revolution is used as synonym and a metaphor for freedom and openness on many occasions, in political and intellectual writings, and in all sorts of cultural representations including pedagogic children's books. I argue that the idea of Revolution created two kinds of national collective representation. On the one hand, combining the domestic and even intimate and poetic perspectives with the sense of engaging in a new international atmosphere and politics, the "April's freedom" (the revolutionary freedom) is often interpreted as a moral freedom opposed and against an authoritarian regime and an old fashion society. The metaphor of Freedom used to talk about 25th of April is expressed as a sign of no return to the past: "fascism no more". On the other hand, the openness of the country is conceived as "not turning one's back to the world" which concretely means going further in one specific direction, the new Europe (European Union) while maintaining a virtuous post colonialism in the relationship with the so called "Lusophone world".

## KEYWORDS

Portuguese Revolution; April 25, 1974; Carnation Revolution; Freedom; Cultural Representation; Popular Imagination; Metaphors

## Revolução de Abril: 'Liberdade' e 'Abertura' em Portugal

**RESUMO** No dia 25 de Abril de 1974 Portugal embarcou na chamada "Revolução dos Cravos", uma revolta popular considerada pacífica e liderada pelas forças armadas. Desde então, Portugal tornou-se, no imaginário popular, principalmente entre intelectuais e ativistas de esquerda, o "país de Abril", lembrado pela sua Revolução e não por um mero Golpe de Estado. A palavra revolução é usada como sinônimo de liberdade e abertura política em muitas ocasiões, em escritos políticos, intelectuais, em todos os tipos de representações culturais e em livros infantis pedagógicos. Defendo que a ideia de Revolução criou dois tipos de representação coletiva nacional. Por um lado, combinando as perspectivas domésticas e mesmo íntimas e poéticas com o sentido de envolvimento numa nova atmosfera e política internacionais, a "liberdade de Abril" (a liberdade revolucionária) é frequentemente interpretada como uma liberdade moral oposta e contra um regime autoritário e uma sociedade ultrapassada. A metáfora da Liberdade usada para falar do 25 de Abril é expressa como um sinal de não retorno ao passado: "fascismo não mais". Por outro lado, a abertura do país é concebida como "não virar as costas ao mundo", o que significa concretamente ir mais longe numa direção específica, a nova Europa (União Europeia), mantendo ao mesmo tempo um virtuoso pós-colonialismo na relação com o chamado "mundo lusófono".

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Revolução Portuguesa; 25 de Abril de 1974; Revolução dos Cravos; Liberdade; Representação Cultural; Imaginação Popular; Metáforas

“On April 25, 1974, at the break of dawn and duly coordinated, the military coup took the streets. It did not fail. However, the regime fell in a few hours, with practically no one coming to its defense. Even PIDE/DGS [the political police] barricaded themselves in their headquarters in Lisbon; agents shoot and kill, but they do so more to save their own skin than that of the regime or its leaders” (Rosas, 1998: 26-27; Rosas, 2002). Everybody was taken by surprise, including the international analysts. A regime that had lasted over half a century and seemed well adapted to a rural and Catholic country disappeared as if it had never existed (cf. Ramos et al., 2009).

The coup began in the early hours, more precisely twenty minutes after midnight, through the potent transmitters of Rádio Renascença, from which the first refrain from the song “Grândola, Vila Morena” by José Afonso could be heard.

*“Grândola, vila morena (Grândola, brunette town)  
Terra da Fraternidade (Land of Fraternity)  
O povo é quem mais ordena (That is the people who order)  
Dentro de ti, ó cidade”(Inside of you, oh city)*

This was the signal confirming the launch of operations against the Regime (Santos et al., 1997). The song became one of the poetic rallying calls of the revolution.

As the early hours of the day approached, lots of people, especially the young ones, began to gather in the street to show support to a movement unleashed by the middle rank of the Portuguese armed forces. People began to distribute carnations in flower in spring. One of the soldiers placed a carnation in the barrel of his rifle, a gesture which others soon began repeating. Thus, the carnation became the symbol of the revolution hereafter entitled the “Carnation Revolution.”

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**Fig. 1** | People manifesting joy and manifesting: “It was 48 years of terror”



Fig. 2 | 1974, celebrating April's revolution on the 1st of May, the word freedom is everywhere.



Today, there is an unprecedented literary production about the revolution in Portugal. All kinds of materials have been in circulation since April 25, 1974, in an inexhaustible celebratory tone surviving interpretive polemics, divisions and accusations of mythologizing of history (Rezola, 2007). Academic and literary publications, interviews with great personalities (Avillez, 1994), illustrated publications and fanzines (Lameiras et al., 1999), photographic editions (Cunha and Gomes, 1999) have never ceased to build memories and celebrations of a revolution that did not want to show itself as a mere coup d'état. There is almost no citizen with a literary vein, and having gone through the experience, who did not write about the Portuguese revolution. Today I return to writing about this time/place of the *sui generis* revolution that in 2024 will celebrate half a century.<sup>1</sup>

### REVOLUTION AS A MOBILIZING METAPHOR

We begin by stating that it took about two decades after the day of the coup for the revolution and the democratic transition to become one of the core themes of Portuguese intellectual and popular thinking. My argument here stems from the fact that only from this point onwards the word revolution was activated as a powerful mobilizing metaphor in Portugal. The word revolution has *per se* a revolutionary expansive power (Koselleck, 2004). Metaphors are not just a matter of words, but also of thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 3), namely political action since they are pervasive and inhabit our everyday life. I call revolution a “mobilizing metaphor” in the sense conceived by two political anthropologists, Cris Shore and Susan Wright, as a linguistic device, the center of a cluster of keywords whose meaning

<sup>1</sup> | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-uzf6nJroo50x2>: The mark of Freedom and Democracy. Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the Commemorative Commission for the 50th anniversary of the 25th of April (RTP support) (Last seen in 2023, April the 4th).

extend and shift while previous associations with other words are dropped. According to the authors the mobilizing effect of political words, such as this one, lies in its capacity to connect with, and appropriate the positive meanings and legitimacy derived from other key symbols of government (Shore & Wright, 1997: 15). Mobilizing metaphors have the capacity to establish a moral consensus about what a good ordinary life is, in the terms of Michael Lambek, (2010).

In that sense, Portuguese April’s 1974 Revolution has been recaptured in the present, and used as a dominant metaphor to establish a relationship between citizens, the state, and among each other. More than a fetishized word, revolution is a mobilizing term, a powerful symbol born to be remembered as an unsurpassed landmark (cf. Koselleck, 2004). The human conceptual system is largely metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 3). When someone calls for the importance of the April’s Revolution in Portugal, they are saying they live by that metaphor (*Idem*), at least at that very moment when they name it.

As Hannah Arendt wrote in 1963, the modern idea of revolution evokes visions of historical ruptures and novel futures (Arendt, 2006). In the Portuguese case, revolution, and specifically *the* day of the revolution, is built symbolically as a ground for pacified anti-authoritarian futures. Revolution is often used to express what it means to be free and a national individual in Portugal. Already far from the turbulent times of the post-revolutionary period, revolution is today a category of practice (as Gonçalves defends, 2017), a synonym for “freedom” and Portuguese transnational “openness”. Accordingly, such category anchors public debates around the *portugalidade* (Portugality), calling for a political and moral individual responsibility inscribed, even if sometimes with humor and sarcasm, in April’s children pedagogy.

Various authors have demonstrated how emotions do act politically, not only the reverse, with politics acting as passion as we are more used to thinking about (cf. Goodwin et al, 2001). Emotions make things happen in the public sphere (Victoria, Coelho, 2019). In the Portuguese case, the emotions in relation to the Carnation Revolution were increasingly located in a place that identified the word with the freedom to access freedom of expression. Furthermore, as we may read further on in this text, this freedom of expression goes on to accommodate other semantics over the course of time.

### **IT’S A REVOLUTION, NOT A COUP**

The Carnation Revolution was largely a military movement – known as the armed forces movement (AFM) – but went around the world with the image of flowers. Several authors, including the ones in this dossier, show the uncertain boundary between revolution and coup d’état. At least in Latin America, “Revolution” was of-

ten a euphemism used for coup d'état. Even in the Russian Revolution these ideas are mistaken. Today in Russia, October 1917 is spoken of as a Bolshevik coup d'état. Since then, the revolution with the so-called “April captains” in Portugal, those who did not belong to the highest ranks of the military (neither marshals, generals, nor colonels, majors), has been entirely associated with the idea of the liberation of a People. In the song *Grândola Vila Morena*, Zeca sings “the people order the most” (*o povo é quem mais ordena*), to the sound of boots hitting the ground on marching. The chilling emotional tension of the Alentejo singing choir is placed precisely in that song part where the People in command is celebrated, this national ethnic community arriving to the land of fraternity.

Perhaps the exceptionality of this revolution resides in the affirmation that the regime transition is based on an action orchestrated by the action that immediately gives way to the popular occupation of public and political spaces. In the Portuguese common sense, the revolution day is seen as a liberating insurgency considered as legitimate as a fundamental right, which automatically dispenses the force of weapons even if legitimized by the transition movement, annulling such weapons definitively with the symbolism of flowers. This is no ordinary coup d'état (Maxwell, 1995: 92). From Christ's love, passion, courage and sacrifice, red carnations in the revolutionary process become a symbol of freedom, democracy, and peace, representing the struggle of the Portuguese People for a just and free society.

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**Fig. 3** | One of the most symbolic pictures of the 1974 April 25: a Carnation in the hand of a child pacifying the army rifles and exchanging the word Coup by the longstanding term revolution.



By associating the revolution with the liberation of a People, taking power by force and confrontation becomes irrelevant, contrary to what happened in so many other coups d'état globally. Concerning the Portuguese Revolution of 1974, it is commonly believed that there is a consensual idea that the armed forces movement paved the way for the People itself to take power, without spilling blood, symbolized in the fearless occupation of the streets, a movement that contradicted the timid seclusion, fear and gag maintained for decades.

To that extent, the celebrated words have always been Revolution of the People and not coup d'état or even peaceful insurrection. In this sense, revolution became a term remembered as a popular, existential achievement, and totally impregnated in everyday cultural life, ceasing to be just a descriptive political concept of facts that occurred sequentially. The April Revolution is mistaken for an experiential way of life, particularly in terms of access to voice and the spoken word. As such, the idea of revolution, as the revolution itself, had a profound impact on Portuguese history and culture. It is commonly said that it paved the way for democracy, freedom of expression, cultural diversity, and the modernization of the country. Many of the rights and benefits that the Portuguese enjoy today, such as education provided by the state, public health, and social protection, are considered achievements of the revolution.

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Fig. 4 | The “people” feasting with the soldiers of the revolution.



Fig. 5 | MFA and the people:  
Power takes the streets.



Fig. 6 | Sentinel of the People  
(Sentinela do Povo), the Armed  
Forces Movement immortalized  
in the drawings of Abel Manta.



## AFTER THE REVOLUTION

In the 1980s, Portugal was undergoing an ambivalent period. There was experimentation with decompression and the ambitions over a late modernization as well as a postponed decolonization process. The 1980s would see the emergence of the gay pop figure through the hairdresser and stylist António Variações, who was later remembered as one of the first public figures to die of AIDS in Portugal. From north to south, through the intermediation of new intellectuals and idols, the country began transiting from its rural heritage to new styles of urban life influenced, either through Amsterdam, London, or New York. Nevertheless, the country re-

mained visibly poor. The rural exodus of the 1960s and, subsequently, the migratory flows of poor Africans from the colonies (mainly from Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau) to the metropolitan areas led to the construction of “shanty towns” in the cities. In 1983, there was an IMF bailout and the wish to become membership of the European Economic Community and its structural funds only happened in 1986. This was the time to “catch the European train,” as it was then termed, to overcome the singular economic and social backwardness of the country. Since early in the decade, everybody had been singing the refrain “I want to see Portugal in the EEC” (1981) by the cosmopolitan rock band GNR. “I have the need to live, I want to feel the arrival, the desire to leave for another place,” António Variações sang. This was the urgency “to stop having our backs turned on the world.”

Throughout 1990, discussions over the economic crisis and standards of living occupied the intellectuals’ minds, and the revolution returned to the public scene. This fact triggered questions surrounding its chronology. When did the Regime finally come to an end? There is the hypothesis that the regime began to collapse after the student academic protest movements of the late 1960s. In 1970s there was an international crisis and, particularly in Portugal, the long colonial war was now perceived as an exhausting conflict. Families hoped for the return of their men and sons from overseas. In 1990, the dispute over the most “legitimate” explanation of the revolution broke out. This was very much situated on the day of the coup, April 25, the date that went down in history. Everybody then wanted to explain the coup and with their various respectively versions. In the version of the April military scenario (the Armed Forces Movement), the coup was militarily prepared with spontaneous popular adhesion and participation, (Cruzeiro, 2018; Cruzeiro, Santos, 2005). According to Álvaro Cunhal, giving voice to the communist intellectuals and militants, the military coup was overtaken on the very same day. According to this author, the “national uprising” was undertaken by left-wing political forces and trade unions that were responsible for organizing the movement (Cunhal, 1976, 1999). April in its revolutionary and emancipatory impulse is seen as part of national memory politics and policies (Loff, Piedade, Soutelo, 2015).

Some historians stepped in to reject the populism and restore the role of the military leadership, pointing to General Spínola, for example. They defend how everything had started out with the generals. “This was a regime in an impasse awaiting a savior general” (Ramos, 2009: 55). The authors maintain that it was the decrease in the standard of living of the military and their lack of interest in the war that opened the way for the coup. And they criticize it by stating that “to consolidate the so-called ‘people-MFA’ alliance, the history of April 25 got rewritten as the “Revolution of the Captains” and was immediately transformed into a popular revolution with its destination containing one outcome, which is ‘socialism’, above all else, nevertheless, the withdrawal from Africa might continue” (*idem*). In this recent and very

wide-reaching version of the History of Portugal, the historians dared to dispute the version of the political and popular movements that had, meanwhile, gained a high level of sophistication. Political scientists highlighted how between 1974 and 1975 the greatest fear of the former incumbent, Marcelo Caetano, did come about with power taking the street (Palacios Ceresales, 2003).

There is nothing new in history getting transformed into a political manifesto of complaints. This is a common feature of national historiographies, and in particular a foundation of explanations for nationalisms. However, it seemed of interest that at a particular point revolution had been restored as political “liberty” in general and “freedom of expression”. Except for the right-wing supporters and those disillusioned with the process of African decolonization, the use of the word revolution to talk about liberty today holds a species of semiotic consensus in Portugal.

“Where were you on the 25th of April?” The question became famous in the voice of the journalist and writer Baptista Bastos when, late in 1990s, he held a series of TV interviews in which he posed this question precisely to the guests. The question was caricatured in a popular humorous TV program, Herman Encyclopedia. The revolution was no longer merely a serious matter, but a pretext for placing national symbols under what, in this case, the metaphor was mobilizing: freedom of speech itself. Anecdotal revolution become part of cultural life.

The humorous spirit associated with the revolutionary period (known as PREC) is well represented in the work of comedians *Homens da Luta* (Men who Fight). The band caricatures the era and the characters associated with April 25, 1974, the intervention singers, and the left-wing slogans. They acted on TV and even won the Eurovision final in 2011 with the theme *A Luta é Alegria* (Fight is Joy). On stage they wore various social types of the revolution costumes, including a worker and a captain from April. The band images are the megaphone, the red berets, the mustaches, and the open shirts.<sup>2</sup>

In 2008, the band Deolinda released an album with the song *Movimento Perpétuo Associativo* (Associative Perpetual Movement) where it parodies the postponement of political mobilization, evoking a resistance that inevitably recalls the exceptionality of April 1974. The refrain “You go ahead [to the revolution] and I catch you up later” confirms the everyday excuses for not participating in a political movement. By the end of the song a choir of voices is reminiscent of the revolutionary movement that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is constantly procrastinated.

2 | [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEPCC3\\_COLs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEPCC3_COLs) (last seen 2023, April the 7th).

### REVOLUTION ONCE AGAIN TAKES THE STREETS

In Portugal it is common to use the word “Revolution” – or simply “April 25” or even “April” – to talk about 1974 coup d’état.

In the 1990s, the semantic of revolution definitively moved beyond the scope of academics and historians and then returned to them but already endowed with a series of uses. “April” has never fallen from usage in either daily or institutional language. A similar process is found in relation to recent massive street demonstrations in Brazil, and because they happened in June 2013, the events are now known as *Jornadas de Junho*, or simply *June*. Another example is the collective protests called the *Arab Spring* that took place in several countries in North Africa and Middle East from 2010 onwards. These ways of naming the episodes render the respective times – April, June, and spring – a dimension of unavoidable collective historical memory, making them milestones or turning points in national politics in contexts of popular dissatisfaction or repression. Because using a metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another, as Lakoff and Johnson say (1980: 5), talking about April or Spring as a metaphor for the revolutionary event is not just a matter of date. The metaphor floods the political event with visual and emotional characteristics such as the blossoming of a new season or era.

To bring one example, between 2001 and 2013, in my own research on the Portuguese forces of public law and order, I heard frequent allusions and parallels between the lives of police officers and April 25. When complaining about the excess of hierarchy and the intransigence of their superiors, the officers at the station would commonly tell me that “April 25 has not yet arrived at the police force” (Durão, 2008: 308).

However, on April 21, 1989, an event took place that rendered the reform of the PSP police force and the revolution very visible. In protest, various police officers took the streets to demand freedom to form a union, get one day-off weekly, transparency in police disciplinary procedures with the right to defense, better wages and working conditions. The demonstration ended in clashes when the PSP riot police moved in and used water cannon and batons to disperse the police protests in Lisbon’s Praça do Comércio. A delegation of six officers, then inside the Ministry for Internal Affairs, delivering a list of protests, ended up getting arrested. The confrontation became known as “the Dry and the Wet” and left an open wound in the police force (Colaço et al, 2001).

When, over a decade later, the police won the scope for legally organizing a trade union, many celebrated and said that “What we are witnessing is the arrival of April into the police force”. What was at stake was the mobilization of the revolution to talk about labor laws, the creation of police unions, and to a certain extent the possibility for rank and file to participate in work conditions and salary negotiations, and in transforming police organizations from the within. As such, in this case the revolution was not only evoked as a synonym of liberty, but as a metaphor of institutional democracy. The police and all the politicians that backed the trade union movement conveyed similar signals to society. Three decades on from April,

the revolution remained a mobilizing metaphor. Henceforth, the police force was no longer a traditional and restricted institution, and a fundamental piece in the former regime. It was as if the rank and the file officers were making its own internal and peacefully revolution (as the original one).

### THE WORD IS REVOLUTION!

In the 2000s, it was still difficult to go back. The Revolution Day is one of the most central events in Portugal’s collective memory. One episode made this clear. In 2004, for the commemorations of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of April 25, 1974, a conservative government going through an economic revelation nevertheless prepared a major exhibition into which a semantic variation was introduced, which was called *April is Evolution*. The commissioner was António Costa Pinto, a historian specializing in the theme of political transitions to democracy in the South of Europe. He had already led the commemorations of the revolution in 1999 but then under a Socialist Party government. Costa Pinto explained that the idea of evolution leveraged the potential of April as a historical lesson to future generations. The concerns focused on the consolidation of the democratic construction.

Nevertheless, the commemorations were caught up in the political and media reactions in defense of the word revolution. The complaints alleged that revolution was the word representing a specifically Portuguese model of building democracy. António Barreto, a moderator and opinion maker, took the position that “The right wing seems to act as if they are engaged in smuggling (...) They [the right-wing supporters] don’t want you to understand how little they did for liberty; not so bothered about living without the liberty confiscated by the Salazar dictatorship (Loff, Piedade, Soutelo, 2015)”. According to most opinions, the word Evolution was already polluted. It recalled Marcelism and the political thesis of the evolution of Portugal through continuity, which may eventually have happened if the revolution had failed to happen (cf. Rui Cunha Martins). As such, the “politics of memory” of the revolution has its own controversies and debates. However, this is one dimension of a sometimes broader and more fluid movement that was already underway, i.e., semantically settling the word revolution to daily practices. Denying the word “evolution” to April did not mean denying the historical thesis it had engendered. There was widespread agreement with Costa Pinto that the time was for pedagogy, that is, historically teaching the centrality of April to the democratic unfurling of the country. The problem was the lack of determination around this notion. The word could indeed be “Revolution”, probably because the term seems to evoke a historical rupture, even though without the armed violence frequently associated with revolutions – a peaceful Revolution. Thus, this proved how this freedom of expres-

sion brought by the word revolution enabled, and all in one go, the conception of a European Portugal and the Portugal of the Era of Discoveries (situated between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) with its glorious imperial past. And this was Portugal, that one of the peaceful coup d’état, which needed to be conveyed to the younger generations.

### THE REVOLUTION AS TOLD TO CHILDREN... AND TO OTHERS

Children were always involved in the liberty imaginary of the revolution. The best evidence comes from the famous poster of a child standing on his toes to slot a carnation into the barrel of a rifle, mimicking the gesture of the captains of April (known as the “clove boy”, see Fig. 3). The peaceful revolution was one of the most potent symbols of the coup. This thus led to an association with the innocence of children, the children of April. In one of the most popular songs of the post-revolutionary period, *Gaivota* (Seagull), an excerpt sang:

“A child would say and say, (Uma criança, dizia, dizia)

When I’m big, I’m not going to fight; (Quando for grande, não vou combater)

Like her, we are free, we are free to live” [refrain]” (Como ela, somos livres, somos livres de dizer) (see also fig. 3).

We might say that in the 1970s and 1980s, the term “intervention music”, as coined, took up the space left by the hermeneutic academics of the revolution. Artists such as Zeca Afonso, Sergio Godinho, José Mario Branco, Luís Cília, Fausto and many others occupied an unparalleled space within the cultural imaginary of the country. The time had come for speaking quite loudly, crying everything out, attacking, blaspheming, and saying *porra* (dammit)! This was a reaction to an overly long period of censorship and a position against the rectitude and moralist stance that the nationalist song allowed under the decades of the Estado Novo dictatorship (1926-1974).

This politicization of songs and words was also seen in children’s versions, for example *Os Operários do Natal* (The Workers’ Christmas) from 1978 with contributions from popular artists such as Fernando Tordo, Paulo de Carvalho and Carlos Mendes duly celebrating the Christmas season from the perspective of the seamstress, the woodcutter, the clowns, and others. And they called on the parents for a new anti-Salazarism educational stance – the truth – confronting the truth and accepting the words “Do not lie to us ever again; lying is a disgrace; we were made by the country, and we do not live in blindness”.

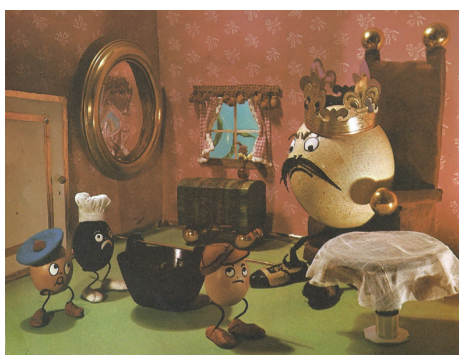
Two books arrived early in the houses of all children of those who believed in April and the post-revolutionary period. As far as I am concerned, in 1979, many children were reading a small and idyllic book of artisan origins. Called *O Principal* (The main thing), this work pronounced the greatest liberty by saying “One day (...) the wars will be over because men made peace a reality for all” (Kira, 1979).

Fig. 7 | Illustration from the book *The main thing* (1978).



Towards the end of 1970, a book of great success published in France, received its publication in Portugal, that is *The ABC of little eggs*. Three egg-children manage to successfully resist the powerful Augusto, the emperor egg. They conspire together and end the story by feeding him with a kind of soup that diminishes him before converting him to common and collective life, shaving off his moustache and changing his name to Zé (Joe Doe) so that he never again remembered that he was once a dictator. In one of the sentences, we read “He shall never again call us his vassals” (Zadora, Rio, 1973).

Fig. 8 | Augusto, The Big converted into Joe Doe, smaller than us, the people! From the book *ABC dos Ovinhos* (1973)



In the early 1990s, intellectuals, politicians, analysts, and journalists noticed that there was an entire generation that had been born and grown up in the wake of April 1974. However, they neither knew about the revolution nor the meaning of the conquest of liberty. It was as if the country had woken up again to the relationship and at the time the question “What are the meanings of the revolution to younger citizens?” was posed. Thus, this brought the idea that it was necessary to convey the “spirit” of revolution to this population segment. “The day of Liberty happened while thinking about you even if you were not yet born. The day is also yours [anonymous child]”, wrote Letria in her book *April 25 as told to children... and to others* (Letria, 1999).

In 2000, the April narratives for children and youngsters became more daring. Such books proved particularly evocative of some metaphoric association between the revolution and the biography of the country. These commonly narratives identified the country as a child that had to learn how to behave, i.e., “Portugal had gone for half a century without democracy and was like a child learning how to walk. It stumbled on various occasions, there were times when it went too far and had to turn back and thought things that it shouldn’t have but regretted taking such a path. However, this really is the actual experience of liberty” (Letria, 1999: 30).

In the infant-children’s book *An April 25 Romance (Romance with poems)* written by João Pedro Mésseder and illustrated by Alex Gozblau (2007), Portugal is a little boy exploited by Salazar. Instead of studying, he is soon sent off to work and remains poor but dreams of liberty by saying “Why are the birds free, the clouds that cross the sky, the fish that swim the waters and all the others but not me?” (Mésseder and Gozblau, 2007:10). The little, practically ignorant, boy is already capable of reflecting poetically about his condition; the condition of a people, the Portuguese.

Little boy Portugal met a man on a bike (allusion to a political activist in hiding) who gave him books and papers. “But in this land extending out along the coast there was great fear, a lot of fear of talking” (*idem*:13). Portugal gets arrested and emerges from prison almost as a man, “willing to change the world, struggling for a better life, the liberty to meet, the freedom to vote” (p. 16). Portugal went off to Africa to fight but was already aware and conscious. “I’m not going to die without knowing the color of liberty (p. 20) [line from a verse by Jorge de Sena of 1978]. Until the day finally arrived, “Liberty has already arrived” (*idem*: 23) and he immersed himself in the massed crowds screaming: “Long live liberty! Long live April 25!” This unprecedented day was April 25, on which the people rose up, with their voices armed and having a reason for its revolution in order to, without deaths or injuries, restore to the country the stolen liberty and to sow on the land the seeds of clear and noble origin” (*idem*: 27). “*See Portugal now working to maintain the red carnation, showing its children and grandchildren the roots of the democracy that April promised*” (*idem*: 27, our italics).

Thirty years on from the revolution, the national biography was indelibly

marked by a single day in its history. However, this extended still further; there was the need to convey this message to the nation young generation, the *new Portuguese*. This pedagogy strove to maintain an inter-generational semantic association between the revolution and the meaning of the word. “In the same way that you associate the names of Figo or Eusébio with the word football, it is paramount that you associate April 25 with Liberty. This was the day on which the Portuguese gave up on fear of pronouncing this word and lived with it and through it with all the same naturalness that we draw our breath” (Letria, 1999: 7). April became a Labor Day for each day; a dedication, “April 25 is the synonym of liberty, but liberty, as with all flowers, ends up wilting if not watered frequently” (*idem*: 39).

This book for children and young people by Jorge Letria, with caricatures by Abel Manta, the greatest cartoonist of the post-revolutionary period, affirms another fact emerging out of the semantic association of revolution with liberty in a singular and direct fashion.

## REVOLUTION’S BIFURCATION

How does the Carnation Revolution relate to its double directions, the Atlantic and Europe? On the one hand, the revolution and the consequent access to democracy are seen in retrospect as a pivotal point of access to a “true” European identity and later to the political and Economic European Community. The third wave of democratization in Southern Europe, and, in particular the Portuguese case, caused surprise due to its enormous potential for failure (Huntington, 1993; Linz, Juan and Alfred Stepan, 1996). In the opinion of political scientists and historians, these transitions initiated a new democratic wave with repercussions across the globe. Perhaps the ability to quickly create political parties between 1974 and 1976, the initial promise of holding elections, reconstituting the armed forces, drafting a constitution text and the great involvement of international actors prevented the reorganization of anti-revolutionary conservative forces (Bruneau, 1995).

On the other hand, the revolution accelerated the decolonization process, which was one of the latest in Europe involving a colonial war between 1961 and 1974 and four centuries of territorial occupation and exploitation. The war had an enormous human and economic cost for Portugal and the African colonies involved. It is estimated that over a million people died during the conflict, most of them African civilians. Furthermore, the war was a major factor in the fall of Salazar’s and Caetano’s authoritarian regime in Portugal and the subsequent independence of the African colonies. The war was characterized by strong resistance from African national liberation movements, which fought with guerrilla tactics against Portuguese military forces. The Portuguese forces were composed mainly of conscripts, many

of whom were sent to fight in a war they did not believe in (Rosas, Machaqueiro, Oliveira, 2015).

The very decolonization process (between 1960 and 1970) was controversial, and divided the opinions of the Portuguese people, unlike April’s Revolution. Many accused the Portuguese government of lack of planning as for the transition to independence resulting in chaotic situations and violent conflicts between the various political factions in many African countries. Others lamented the fall of the empire and the unfair treatment of Portuguese citizens in Africa. Mário Soares and Almeida Santos were responsible for handing over the colonies to the liberation movements, a decision that haunted them all their lives, in spite of their merits in the democratic Portuguese transition (Pinto, Costa, 2001). Portugal’s decolonization process in Africa was marked by conflicts, resulting in negative consequences for African populations and African countries in general. Many continue to wonder why this process took so long, why it involved so much violence, forced displacement and destruction of infrastructure in African countries, and why it was not planned more carefully by Portuguese government.

After 1974, families in Portugal received the “returnees”, people who lived part or all their lives in the former colonies. Decolonization thus remained an open wound and a critical Portuguese “problem” in the late post-revolutionary society. Colonization kept a sense of nostalgia in some parts of the population that still defend an imperialist nationalism and that continue to uncritically celebrate the symbols of western imperial superiority – such as the images of the “Discoveries” or the Portuguese language spoken in Portugal by Portuguese native-speakers (Durão, 2023). That may be one of the reasons for maintaining cooperation agreements and other forms of state bilateral negotiations, mainly to support the mobility of higher education students from the countries now called Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP) to Portugal (Costa and Faria, 2012).

#### **APRIL AND THE RETURN TO LUSOPHONIA: LUSO-IMPERIALISM REVISITED?**

The freedom of access to the word that has identified with revolution expanded the national themes, including a very particular way and means of the post-colonialism affirmation of Portugal. The revolution condenses the past and utopian future of some little-big country. This is “lusotopia,” as Pina Cabral (2010) wrote, with ecumenical pretensions and affective cultural bonds. Let us return now to the book that embraces the pedagogy of liberty, which teaches April 25 to the children and those who educate them. By the end of the book, the author underlines how April 25 will only remain alive “if it becomes yours and for those who come after you. *April 25 is a way, and perhaps the most beautiful way, of saying Liberty in Portuguese and those*

*who speak our language in Africa or in East Timor know what this is*” (Letria, 1999: 38, my italics).

The arrival of the new millennium saw Portugal recover the notion of itself as *the great nation of the Era of Discoveries* that spread its language around the world. However, in embarking on this path, through the intermediation of revolutionary liberty, this began to get thematic mainly within a positive dimension to colonialism, which means the greater the distance with the past, the more vibrant such path became. Most texts about the revolution do not think about decolonization. The freedom celebrated was a Portuguese topic, part of the national history alone. The colonial liberation that was underway in African countries appears as a distant matter.

The semantic practice of revolution in Portugal does not deal with the relationship between the country and Africa. The liberty identified in the revolution seems to exclude the problem of decolonization. And this furthermore only approaches the end of the colonial wars as a meaning of national liberation. Thus, it does not prove paradoxical as the word revolution has recently begun to include allusions to the Portuguese colonial heritage. The revolution thus finally becomes a synonym for the national historical grandiosity, meaning the country that gave lessons on democracy to its former colonies, without displaying any concern over just how late the revolution and decolonization happened.

Through a language, a nation, and a state, now converted to Europe, Portugal has recovered an imagery that is self-referential in giving lessons of freedom to other countries considered part of the *Lusofonia*. Somehow, the revolution gave legitimacy to the old affirmation of Portugal as the birthplace of the Portuguese language. Portuguese grandiloquence might be based on a vague policy that is supposed to suppress huge geographical, structural, cultural, and historical distances (Thomaz and Nascimento, 2014: 283). Mystifying the Luso-heritage of the epic 16<sup>th</sup> century Camões and the country “that gave worlds to the world” is itself part of the politics of Lusophony, derived from what the philosopher Eduardo Lourenço calls a “cultivated euphoria” (1994: 21; Durão, 2023: 259-260).

During several years I studied and taught Portuguese and African police cadets who were taking their master’s degrees at the Higher Institute of Police Sciences and Internal Security (ISCPSI). As in many academic programs, those were laying the foundations for a type of international post-colonial cooperation based on connections with the so-called “Lusophone world”.

In the 1990s, the “Lusophone world” was recovered with Portugal’s cooperation agreements with former colonies. It was no longer to be a power, even in international cooperation, but “pedagogy”. Through teaching programs given to PALOP (Portuguese-speaking countries) students, Portugal could teach its own historical process – a country liberated by the revolution – converted into a virtuous lesson.

This is one of the consequences of the semantic drawbacks of revolution into freedom, combined with national liberation.

In semantic practice, the revolution liberated the country from the shackles of censorship and provided access to words and content, to freedom of expression. However, this also offered to Portuguese citizens (now members of the European Union) the national glorification of a language and the invention of Lusophony, or, in other words, the idea that this great sociological fiction might be able to perpetuate, a community made up of all the peoples and nations that share the Portuguese language and culture. To a certain extent, the revolution produced a symbol of cohesion and relative national consensus. It is possible to say that this one and other moments of Portuguese nationalism and its celebration – as the ones who involve the manifest proud in Lusophony – postponed the discussion on colonization, decolonization, and post-colonization in the country.

## CONCLUSION

“Without April 25, I would be a little fool”, writes a 42-year-old state employee in the 1990s, in one of the books that brings together personal testimonies of the revolutionary experience, entitled *The future was now, The popular movement of April 25* (Barradas, 1994). In the hundreds of oral testimonies, chronologies and citations in the book, the individual freedom of a People and the path to self-knowledge and voice are associated with the sensorial and intelligible experience of the revolution.

While in the 1980s Portugal celebrated the end of censorship and dreamed about Europe, by the mid-1990s its peripheral role as a southern European country, which was structurally unequal by monetary union, was made clear. In 2010, in the wake of the financial crisis, there could be no further doubting of the consequences of this positioning on the European margins with another intervention by the IMF and the Troika. However, the Portuguese language, Lusophony, and the Discoveries would always remain.

The identification of the revolution with liberty has generated a paradoxical effect in contemporary Portugal. It was the revolution that placed Portugal on the geopolitical map of semantic transactions once again. With the commemorations of the liberty of April, the peaceful image of the coup that took place on the 25<sup>th</sup>, the opening of the country to European and membership of what was then in the eighties the European Economic Community enabled the country to provide a point of self-reference.

Hence, Portugal was discursively oscillating between some small and beholden country and a great and free nation. It was both believed and poetically written that “April 25 led the Portuguese encounter their own selves” (Santos, 1994). And, as

a part of this encounter, through April’s Revolution, the country projected an exalted the “Portuguese world,” in which Portugal is both itself and the other, but always as an extension of *herself* – the Portuguese nation. The national and imperialist liberty enables, through language – the homeland – to maintain the idea of a Portuguese presence in the world beyond Europe. Thus, this is also the Portuguese response to a Europe, and a European Union, that does not cease to reduce the country to the symbolic smallness of its geography.

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