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“Os retornados” with Antunes: Luanda, Angola and Lisbon

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Abstract

António Lobo Antunes explores a forced encounter of a Portuguese diaspora with Africa for some settlers. He examines the nature of the bi-directional diaspora for “os retornados”, who, having returned to Portugal after independence of the colonies, found they were invisible in the eyes of Portugal, as portrayed in ‘O esplendor de Portugal’ and in ‘A história do hidroavião’. Luanda, Angola and Lisbon are depicted as spaces where each individual represents the reverse of the Portuguese colonial past. Antunes turns to historical facts as a source for a critical fiction. The prominence given to the experience of Africa and Portugal makes these books a valuable sociological document, illustrating that there was not much room left for any of these voices, neither in Angola, nor in Lisbon. Portuguese Language remains as their only space, which allows António Lobo Antunes the claim of a cultural dimension of these “retornados”.

Keywords: ‘Os retornados’; Diaspora; Migration; Angola and Portugal; Literature

[...] Ainda bem
que há un fado qualquer
que diz o que a vida
não diz [...]
Ainda bem
que há um beco qualquer
que dá eco a
quem nunca tem voz [...]¹

In the oeuvre of António Lobo Antunes² (1942) fiction, imagination and memory merge to articulate Portugal’s past and present and allow Antunes to reflect on the failure of that time.

A component of his narratives are the Portuguese colonial experience and encounter with

¹ “[...] Glad that there is any fado song / telling what life does not tell [...] / Glad that there is any alleyway / giving an echo to whom never has a voice [...]” Deolinda: “Lisboa não é a cidade perfeita”. In: *Canção de ao lado* [CD] (2008). Unless stated otherwise, translations are mine.

² The Portuguese Colonial War (1961-1974) was fought between the pro-independence forces in the former Portuguese African Colonies and mainland Portugal. During the Colonial Wars, the psychiatrist Antonio Lobo Antunes was sent to Angola to fight. He lived there between 1971 and 1973. His experience of war, of Angola and its people is central to the understanding of his literary work.

others and the expression of collective and combined identities with the ‘Other’. This constitutes a significant element as it articulates a set of key issues regarding the range of ‘Others’ and their experiences both in the colonies and in the metropolis, yet all in Portuguese. These ‘Others’ are certainly present in *O esplendor de Portugal* (*Esplendor*, henceforth), the 1997 novel by António Lobo Antunes. In *Esplendor* he explores Portuguese colonial and post-colonial Angola through the life of a family of settlers and their descendants who returned to Portugal as part of the diaspora, which established itself after 1975. Antunes also demystifies the Salazarist notion of family and Portugal.³ In addition, in *A história do hidroavião* (*Hidroavião*, henceforth), his 1994 children’s book illustrated by Vitorino (1942), Lobo Antunes presents the story of some Portuguese who find themselves arriving in Lisbon from the colonies. In the work of Antunes, facts and fiction melt in his narrative where his “fictional writing emphasizes the specific fiction of particular events experienced by individuals.”⁴ Here the expression of both mood and voice of all the individuals involved in that colonial and ulterior postcolonial experience of diaspora is reflected. It is in this space that the Portuguese language constitutes a shared reflection/expression of the experience of home. This was experienced by those who found themselves displaced in the diaspora that followed 1974, when they left the former Portuguese colonies in Africa and in East Timor. In *Hidroavião*, Artur is presented arriving in Lisbon and in *Esplendor* the arrivals are Carlos, Rui and Clarisse, who left behind their mother Isilda at the plantation in Angola, where her husband and parents passed away. Isilda remains in Angola, aware that “Angola acabou para mim”.⁵ Assuming her condition of “não retornada” or where only the past is left for her, she accepts her hybrid condition⁶, which forced her descendants to leave Angola that became independent and go to Portugal.

In Portuguese history, the dispersion of its people, language and culture that took place since the 16th century constitutes a key event. Portugal was the first European country that faced the colonial encounter and confrontation. The Portuguese were among the first Europeans

³ Daniel de Zubía Fernandez: *Señas del esplendor ausente. Itinerarios familiares en Señas de identidad y en O esplendor de Portugal*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2014.

⁴ Maria Alzira Seixo: Still Facts and Living Fictions: The Literary Work of António Lobo Antunes, An Introduction. In: *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* 19/20 (2011), p. 19-43, p. 20.

⁵ António Lobo Antunes: *O esplendor de Portugal* [1997], 4th ed. ne varietur. Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote, 2007, p. 209. [“Angola was over for me when they killed the people that lived two farms to the north”], (Trans. Rhett McNeill): *The Splendor of Portugal*. Champaign/Dublin/London: Dalkey Archive, 2011, p. 265.

⁶ Daniel Zubía Fernandez: ‘La “não retornada” Isilda, el resplendor que desvaneció’. In: *Actas del Congreso AL LÍMITE*. Cáceres: Editorial Avuelapluma, 2010, p. 211-232, p. 229.

who, as a monolingual community at the end of the medieval period, departed and migrated from that corner of Europe into Northern Africa and further afield. Therefore, the people incorporated that experience of conquest, culture and migration into their own culture, as happened in the Christian Iberian Peninsula, a culture based on the assimilation of both Muslim and Jewish cultures. Furthermore, the Portuguese were among the first Europeans who looked upon the Southern corner of Western Europe from overseas, and incorporated this angle of perception from abroad into their cultural experience of migration and diaspora. Moreover, these encounters constitute a steady literary source and ingredient since this wide period determined the historical evolution of Portugal up to the 1974 Carnation Revolution,⁷ when after 560 year the Portuguese Empire came to an end.⁸ Such a source is already present in the Portuguese classic *Os Lusíadas* (1572) by Luís de Camões, where this encounter comprised and represented the vivid literary topos in which Africa, Asia and Europe come together. This allowed Luís de Camões to develop this epopee in which resonated the events of the 15th and 16th centuries, and in which he offered an interpretation of the Portuguese discoveries and the Camões journey along Africa and the Orient.

In contemporary Portuguese literature, these combined identities embody a distinct colonial and ulterior experience of a (post)colonial era to an extent that it also involves migration. Given that a colonial Africa is not a present space anymore, the absence of colonial Africa allows the “retornados” to understand their present circumstances through a reflection upon that colonial past. Portugal therefore continues to try to redefine herself through her European boundaries. As a result, the issues of ‘place, belonging and displacement in the formation of national and cultural boundaries’ are essential in comprehending the process Portugal underwent in redefining its national boundaries by the current European limits of this country.⁹ Portugal was that land at the West of the Iberian Peninsula along with the Island of Madeira and the Archipelago of the Azores. This affected the lives of those beings that left

⁷ The 25 April coup became known as the *Revolução dos Cravos* or Carnation Revolution. This ended the longest dictatorship in Europe, the *Estado Novo* or New State (1933-1974), which was established by António de Oliveira Salazar after the 28 May 1926 coup. The new regime after 25 April pushed through a rapid and hasty program of decolonisation. Over the next few years Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Angola all became independent. East Timor was under Indonesia’s control until 1999. After the *Revolução dos Cravos* and the revolutionary process, a period of social and political turmoil, the *Junta de Salvação Nacional* ruled the country. After the 1976 legislative election won by the socialist Mario Soares, the first constitutional government ruled the country.

⁸ *De facto*, it was in 1999 when China assumed full control over Macao, first and last European territory in Asia.

⁹ Isabel Moutinho: Images of Africa in contemporary narrative in Portuguese. In: Maria Alzira Seixo et al. (eds.): *The Paths of Multiculturalism: Travel Writing and Postcolonialism*. Lisbon: Cosmos, 2000, p. 326-334, p. 325.

the colonies and returned to or arrived in Portugal. This diaspora assimilated with difficulty into a society that was facing major political, economic and territorial changes, as presented in the two novels. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to explore how some isolated people, as portrayed in *Esplendor* and *Hidroavião*, experience the diaspora. Antunes illustrates how the consequences of being part of a diaspora as a subject that sickly haunt these people, because for these people ‘the traumatic events and legacies of partition acquire an imaginative truth’ in the margins of contemporary Lisbon.¹⁰ Nevertheless, that reality in their lives is the reality that brings them back to Luanda, to the plantation in Baixa do Cassanje and Angola as spaces that now exist only in their minds. Africa is that space ‘anterior à construção romanesca’.¹¹ These African spaces are where these people were raised and is the one space that is absent in their lives in the metropolis, not only as the space they had abandoned and left behind, but as a linguistic space in which to confront the present. Furthermore, as Vieira points out, a core element of Antunes’ narrative is memory, which serves as a structuring device that allows Antunes both to create and to establish an “imaginistic” portrayal of Angola.¹² In the core of his narrative there emerges a voice of ambivalence that the “retornados” experienced back in the metropolis. Here was the place they believed they belonged to, but where Portuguese society from a different angle and subsequently the “retornados” had to establish themselves at the periphery of that society.

Post 1974 Diaspora: Returned/arrived in Portugal.

The *Estado Novo*¹³ made of the colonies in Africa, Asia and Oceania a further reason to justify this dictatorship given that for Portuguese nationalism the Portuguese presence in Africa was essential, in view of the fact that Portugal’s destiny since the time of Prince Henry the Navigator (1344-1460) was to civilize these countries. Furthermore, the *Estado Novo* was

¹⁰ Joe Cleary: *Literature, Partition and the Nation State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 2.

¹¹ Maria Alzira Seixo: *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes: análise, interpretação, resumos e guiões de leitura*. Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote, 2002, p. 320 [“previous to the novel construction”].

¹² Agripina Carriço Vieira: ‘Com Angola no Pensamento’. In: Eunice Cabral et al. (eds.): *A Escrita em António Lobo Antunes, Actas do Colóquio Internacional António Lobo Antunes*. Lisbon/Évora: Publicações Dom Quixote/Universidade de Évora, 2004, p. 215-227, p. 215.

¹³ Or “The New State”, as outlined and led by Professor António de Oliveira Salazar, was a dictatorial corporatist regime that aimed to overcome the national and economic crisis Portugal was experiencing since the 1920s, but rooted in the 19th century when her colonial role was not a minor one. After World War II and when the decolonization process started in Africa, the *Estado Novo* validated her presence in Africa since Portugal’s economy depended on the colonies. This presence was justified from a nationalist perspective and adapted to Salazarist taste along Gilberto Freyre’s *Lusotropicalism* theory. For Salazar Portugal had been a multicultural, multiracial and pluricontinental nation since the 15th century and the independence of the colonies would imply the end of Portugal. Salazar also claimed that the Portuguese were better colonisers since their driving force had been a civilising mission.

aware of the economic significance of the African colonies for the metropolis and the Portuguese government encouraged white migration to Portuguese African colonies. After World War II the white population of Angola increased from 50,000 in 1950 to 150,000 in 1960 and up to 330,000 in 1974. This transformation was due to both the regime's promotion of the agricultural plantations in Angola in order to boost the farming production there, but also to modify the long-term population demographic that would show the increased presence of a white population.¹⁴ The final aim was also to ensure the Portuguese presence in the African colonies. As a consequence of the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe were granted independence by Portugal, who had foreseen an end to the Colonial Wars (1960-1974) that were devastating both to the colonies and Portugal. This revolution also brought to an end the longest dictatorship in Western Europe, the pre-modern Portugal of the *Estado Novo*. Among other factors, the end of the colonial presence, mainly in Angola and Mozambique, forced some of the Portuguese settlers and their descendants to leave behind their colonial space and the newly created states. In many cases they merely left with whatever they could manage to carry, as described in *Esplendor*. Returnees or new arrivals to Portugal were called "os retornados" or the returned ones to the fatherland. Between late 1974 and early 1976 around 505.000 people settled back in Portugal. The "retornados" constituted around 5% of Portugal's nine million population at the time. Around 61% of those "retornados" came back from Angola and 33% from Mozambique.¹⁵ As Lubkemann points out,¹⁶ even if many of these had settled in the colonies from the fifties onward, most of them shared one reason for leaving their fatherland, and as Isilda remembers her father Eduardo's reflections:

O meu pai costumava explicar que aquilo que tínhamos vindo procurar em África não era dinheiro nem poder mas pretos sem dinheiro e sem poder sem algum que nos dessem a ilusão do dinheiro e do poder que de facto ainda que o tivéssemos não tínhamos por não sermos mais que tolerados, aceites com desprezo em Portugal [...] éramos os pretos dos outros da mesma forma que os pretos possuíam os seus pretos e estes os seus pretos ainda em degraus sucessivos descendo ao fundo da miséria [...] tínhamos vindo procurar em África era transformar a vingança de mandar, morando em casas que macaqueavam casas europeias e qualquer europeu desprezaria [...].¹⁷ (*Esplendor*, 262)

¹⁴ David Alcoy: Los portugueses de Angola durante los siglos XIX y XX. In: *Nova África* 20 (January 2007), p. 59-72, p.66-68.

¹⁵ Rui Pena Pires et al.: *Os Retornados*. Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento, 1984.

¹⁶ Stephen C. Lubkemann: The Moral Economy of Portuguese Postcolonial Return. In: *Diaspora* 11:2 (2002), p. 189-213, p. 190.

¹⁷ "My father used to say that the thing we came in search of in Africa wasn't the wealth but black people with no wealth or power to speak of who could give us the illusion of wealth and power, and that even if we actually had those two things we wouldn't really have them because we were merely tolerated, begrudgingly accepted in Portugal [...] we were blacks to them the same way that blacks owned other blacks and those blacks and those

Eduardo had left Portugal and moved to Angola induced both by that illusion of progress there (identifying this with a notion of wealth and power) and by his sense of rejection in Portugal, in his fatherland. As Eduardo's words echoed in Isilda's memory, they illustrate how the return trip for those "retornados" would be a journey to experience different forms of rejection, as previously experienced by Eduardo in Portugal. His is the first migration presented in *Esplendor*. After WWII, the regime of Salazar endorsed the promotion of migration from Portugal, perceiving this as a way to increase agricultural production. That awareness forced Isilda to become a "não retornada" and remain in Angola, and in addition, force her descendants to move back to the metropolis, to Lisbon. In Angola, as "não retornada", the Portuguese language remained as a bond with her past and the way to communicate with her descendants.¹⁸

Even if the presence of the urban spaces of Lisbon and Luanda appears to be a secondary theme in these books, Antunes' depiction of the urban spaces mirrors what these "retornados" undergo in both books. These depictions reveal an interesting angle, where the portrayal of the diaspora back in the collective metropolis of Lisbon, and of those citizens from the "overseas provinces", as named by the *Estado Novo*, constitute a clear sign of how António Lobo Antunes brings into play the alleyways and back streets of contemporary Portuguese society. As echoed in *Esplendor* and in *Hidroavião*, the ambivalence of Portuguese Colonialism is understood through the diaspora, whereby the voice of the characters that arrived/settled in Portugal helps to illustrate their manifest displacement in the metropolis. In addition, Santos' reading of Portugal as a semi-peripheral power reveals how in Portuguese (Post)Colonialism 'there is not one single other. There are two others that neither conjoin nor disjoin. They merely interfere in the impact'¹⁹, as is witnessed in the life of Artur in *Hidroavião* and in Carlos, Rui and Clarisse in *Esplendor*. Furthermore, it also displays how the level of reciprocity and ambivalence between the coloniser and the colonised is present,

blacks owned other blacks still in descending steps that led all the way down to the depths of misery [...] we came in search of in Africa was to transform the revenge of ordering other people around, living in houses that aped European houses and which any European would despise." *Esplendor/Splendor*, p. 338-339.

¹⁸ Isilda tries to keep in touch with her descendants by writing letters to Carlos, since he is the eldest son. He never opened nor replied to any of those letters, which remained sealed in drawer in the flat in Ajuda. The mulatto Carlos, son of Amadeu and a black woman that worked in the family farm, moved to the family house in his childhood, after his biological mother received a cheque. Carlos always felt rejected by his family and also by Isilda, which led him to break up with Isilda. Carlos felt rejected and it was only Maria da Boa Morte, the black woman and cook in the farmhouse, who revealed to him his nature, "Tu és preto [...] Tu és preto [...] Tu és preto", *Esplendor*, p. 111; ["You are black [...] You are black [...] You are black"]. *Esplendor/Splendor*, p. 135.

¹⁹ Boaventura de Sousa Santos: Between Prospero and Caliban, Postcolonialism, and Inter-identity. In: *Luso-Brazilian Review* XXXIX/II (2002), p. 9-43, p. 18.

since, as Isilda's father admits in *Esplendor*, what brought them to Angola was not wealth but 'explicitava o meu pai [...] o degredo em África a fim de cumprir menos humilhação e menos vergonha, penitências, castigos, condenações obscuras na esperança de que morresemos das pestes dor sertão ou nos matássemos entre nós' (*Esplendor*, 271).²⁰ This is just what the settlers in Angola were denied in the fatherland and, therefore, a reason for them to move from it. In fact, they were regarded as outcast people in Portugal, as a type of 'Other' who had established themselves in the "overseas provinces" and set out to live next to the Africans. They were abandoned despite the official Salazarist Luso-tropicalist²¹ propaganda that depicted the Portuguese as adapting and integrating themselves into the tropics with a multiracial union of the provinces and mainland. Thus, Santos underlines the importance of focusing 'on the critique of ambivalence', of the actual policies implemented by colonialism and by colonizers, and also of the consequences of these policies for those descendants who settled back in Portugal.²² As a result, in *Esplendor* and in *Hidroavião*, Lobo Antunes articulates the voice of the people back in Portugal, where the Portuguese language is the fundamental ingredient that allows them to express themselves and reflect upon their position within Portuguese society.

Depicted Lisbon

martelar cabanas num baldio de
ervas frente aos vapores do Tejo
(*Hidroavião*, 3)²³

In *Esplendor* and in *Hidroavião*, the characters find themselves in the capital of Portugal, which also used to be the capital of the colonies. This is the city where they were left behind, a new and unfamiliar space to them where somehow they felt alien. A first revealing point is

²⁰ (Original in italics) "my father used to explain [...] since we'd accepted exile in Africa in order to suffer through our obscure penances, punishments, and condemnations feeling less humiliation and less shame than if we were in Portugal, the Portuguese in power in Lisbon hoping that we'd die of a plague in the black lands or that we'd all kill each other like animals". *Esplendor/Splendor*, p. 350.

²¹ The Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre developed Luso-tropicalism describing the Brazilian ethnic mixed society. However, the Luso-tropicalism adopted by the *Estado Novo* stated how Portuguese colonisation was based on egalitarian premises since racism historically had never taken root among the Portuguese. They also claimed that this egalitarian approach was the essence of the Portuguese people since the 15th century. This natural lack of prejudice towards African peoples meant that the Portuguese were those who should bring civilization and Christianity to those peoples. This was also the destiny of Portugal as a nation. This was a way to justify the presence of Portugal in Africa when in the 1950s some African countries started to gain independence from the colonial powers.

²² Santos: *Between Prospero and Caliban*, p. 17.

²³ ["hammering huts in a wasteland opposite to the Tagus River fumes"].

how they describe that event or action: getting to Portugal, to Europe. As shown by Carlos in ‘desde que chegamos de África’ (*Esplendor*, 13),²⁴ or Clarisse, when her first words are ‘Quando voltei a Portugal’ (*Esplendor*, 277),²⁵ and also how the narrator describes the main character in *Hidroavião* as ‘que tinha chegado de África’ (*Hidroavião*, 3).²⁶ Therefore, with either Africa or Portugal as their individual reference points, they perceived themselves as either having arrived, or returned to Portugal, and yet their experiences of Portugal are fairly similar. As Eduardo Lourenço asserts, the narrative of Antunes unmasks the official and egregious portrayal of Portuguese history, both in the past and today. This only serves to present to the Portuguese people a false account of that history, however it is one that the people in the metropolis really wanted to believe.²⁷ Thus, both in *Esplendor* and in *Hidroavião* the characters exemplify how the reality faced by those “retornados” does not correspond with the glorious past portrayed by the metropolis and how the experience of diaspora is perceived in a different way by these “retornados”. In that experience the portrayed space is not “splendid” and the rumbles of the Portuguese Empire, not as egregious as depicted by Salazarism, become clear in the eyes of the reader. As a result, in *Hidroavião*, Lisbon is the place where the plane lands carrying peoples who were forced to leave their Angola and who had escaped from the war. This is the space where they escaped to and where they found some form of shelter. Hence, the day after they land, these “retornados” find themselves building their homes in an urban shanty space by the Tagus River, with little more than the leftovers of former buildings and building sites. Lisbon is presented as the space where these “retornados” face that reality on their own, and where all they can afford are the leftovers from Portuguese society in which nobody seems to notice their presence. Thus, the space where these anonymous beings survive in *Hidroavião* is not far from the space where the characters in *Esplendor* are placed. Carlos, Rui and Clarisse find themselves on the margins of Lisbon, the three of them placed on the periphery of the lively capital of the metropolis.

In *Hidroavião*, Antunes introduces a blind man who is sitting by the house, and waiting for an answer to something. The blind character presents us with an intertextual connection

²⁴ “[...] we arrived here from Africa”. *Esplendor/Splendor*, p. 10.

²⁵ “When I returned to Portugal”. *Esplendor/Splendor*, p. 357.

²⁶ “That had arrived from Africa”.

²⁷ Eduardo Lourenço: ‘Divisão em torno de Lobo Antunes’. In: Eunice Cabral et al. (eds.): *A Escrita em António Lobo Antunes, Actas do Colóquio Internacional António Lobo Antunes*. Lisbon/Évora: Publicações Dom Quixote/Universidade de Évora, 2003, p. 347-355, p. 351.

between Camões in *Os Lusíadas*²⁸ in which in Lisbon a blind man guides the hero through the city, and in *Hidroavião*, in which a blind man is a person for whom listening is essential. Furthermore, as Antunes states, 'atento com os ouvidos que é como os cegos vêem'²⁹ as reflected by the main character in the novel. In this novel we also encounter Artur, a man who lived in Africa during the 47 years of his life working as a lorry driver for Dutch diamond dealers. Artur is constantly being asked by the blind old man for a description of the capital of Portugal, it is worth remembering his question: 'Como é Lisboa, Artur?' (*Hidroavião*, 8).³⁰ In asking this he requests a description of the appearance of the city. Incredibly, the blind man asks Artur this question six times and some of the images that are offered each time expose the depiction that emerges from Artur's mind as one that illustrates the Lisbon of these "retornados". The first time Artur is asked, he holds his breath and, after a firm silence during which he stares at the other side of Lisbon Bay trying to be patient, with his hands open, he is only able to respond with another meditative question: 'Lisboa?' (*Hidroavião*, 8).³¹ Then, Artur tries to gather a few thoughts that would adequately describe this city to a blind person, and this is followed by a description of the reduced living conditions for any person that came from Angola. The blind man asked the same question six times and through the resulting descriptions of the city, it is presented as a marginalised space. The second time Artur is asked he stares around him and lists seemingly useless objects and an industrial landscape with a smoky factory, for example. Then, the conclusion he reaches is revealing of the nature of this "retornado": 'Nada, em resumo, que se comparasse às noites de Angola, entre Malanje e Luanda' (*Hidroavião*, 11), thereby implying that those are nights where the light of the stars is sufficient to stare around you.³² This leads Artur to continue to think that he still remains there, where Artur feels at home given that he can decipher whatever he sees and feels; the space where things are understandable and clearer for some "retornados". The blind man, in an intertextual reference to the blind man in *Os Lusíadas*, leads the returned ones heroes of 'os retornados' through the streets of Lisbon, and asks Artur a further four times about Lisbon. This results in Artur having to indicate, between the fifth and sixth questions, how the blind man 'talvez fosse o único, dos que chegaram de África, capaz de caminhar na cidade' (*Hidroavião*, 16), whilst holding his

²⁸ Luís de Camões: *Os Lusíadas* [1572], ed. Frank Pierce. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

²⁹ António Lobo Antunes: *A História do Hidroavião*, 2nd ed. Lisbon: Ulmeiro, 1998, p. 8: "attentive with his ears, this is how blind people see." *Hidroavião*, p. 8.

³⁰ ["How does Lisbon look like?"].

³¹ ["Lisbon?"].

³² ["Nothing that compares to the nights in Angola, in Malanje and Luanda."].

metallic walking stick in his hands.³³ Here Antunes illustrates the rejection experienced back in the metropolis by depicting the blind man being able to walk through a familiar Lisbon unaware of the presence of local people (Lisboetas) around him and unaware that with their attitude toward the “retornados”, these were being ignored. In addition, in *Hidroavião* we encounter an Indian man who owns a small café and whose clients cannot always pay for their drinks but whose business still remains open. Finally, the answer to the repeated question comes from the Indian man, ‘Lisboa é esta infelicidade, amigo’ (*Hidroavião*, 19).³⁴ This misfortune is the one they are witnessing in their lives in Lisbon. The narrator clearly indicates that this answer is not just related to his customers but to the entire shantytown, to poor clothing, the dogs looking for any leftovers and to himself, and to all the other “retornados” living in that situation.

In *Esplendor* the three siblings live on the margins of Portuguese society and by placing each of them in the margins of Lisbon, Antunes shows how they were left and placed in peripheral positions within the metropolis, thus illustrating the rupture of the family connections. Carlos, the eldest, lives in Ajuda, in the suburbs of Lisbon, with just a view over the Tagus River. This neighbourhood of Ajuda used to be home to the Portuguese royals until the early 20th century.³⁵ Now is the place where Carlos lived with Rui and Clarisse when they arrived in Lisbon. Carlos expelled Rui and Clarisse from the Ajuda apartment. Rui, the second brother who suffers from epilepsy, lives in the outskirts, in a nursing home in working class Damaia where he is isolated from society and surrounded by “campos cinzentos de oliveiras, balsas, muros derruídos, rolas bravas de que se distinguia melhor o rastro na erva que os corpos” (*Esplendor*, 156).³⁶ Clarisse lives in a tiny flat in a dark alleyway in the outskirts of Estoril, where she established herself after Carlos expelled her from the Ajuda flat. The isolated ‘apartamento da Clarisse era a seguir ao casino num beco inacabado, sem alcatrão nem luz,

³³ “Maybe, he was the only one, of those that arrived from Africa, able to walk in the city.”

³⁴ “Lisbon is this infelicity, my friend.”

³⁵ After an unstable parliamentary system of governmental rotation, the growth of republicanism and the consequences of the semi-peripheral position of Portugal in Africa (failure to unite Portuguese West and East Africa since the British opposed this in 1890), King Carlos I imposed a dictatorship-like government, in the person of João Franco. The regicide of King Manuel II and his heir in 1908 in Lisbon and the revolution of 1910 saw the end to the Portuguese monarchy (1139-1910), sending King Manuel to exile and giving way to the First Portuguese Republic. Ajuda, which means “help” or “aid” in Portuguese, remained as an empty space.

³⁶ “[...] ash-coloured fields full of olive trees, balsa trees, crumbling walls, wild doves that you can spot more easily by watching grass that shakes when they walk through it than by actually seeing their bodies”, *Esplendor/Splendor*, p.196.

onde me aleijava em tijolos, tábuas, cones de areia, pedaços de andaime' (*Esplendor*, 262).³⁷ As described and remembered by Rui, this flat, despite being in the apparently posh outskirts, is located in a marginalized area of it, where the sad Clarisse lives out her affair with a married politician on the margins. Clarisse's unhappy affair with an MP 'exemplifies the discontented dependency on Luís Filipe and a neo-colonial relation.'³⁸ She finds herself on the margins of society where Luís Filipe does not want to be seen with her outside of the flat. Thus, the three siblings are placed physically away from each other and also in the margins of Portuguese society. The eldest remains with only a view over the Tagus River and a metaphorical view over the past that takes him back to Angola. The second sibling survives in Damaia where he spots the sadness of that society and dedicates his life to passive activities like watching television on his own. Clarisse lives alone and even though she appears to be fond of Lisbon like her brothers, the three of them observe the metropolis in Angolan terms, through the eyes of Africa, by drawing parallels to African nature and life that they experienced in their childhood. In the case of the three siblings it is revealing how, since they were brought up on a farm, for these "retornados" Lisbon is the space where they experience and feel isolation. The mood of their present lives is affected by actions in their life that share and are exemplified by loneliness, both in Lisbon and in Angola.

Luanda, Angola ... in their mind, in their memory

o mar de Estoril lá fora,
as palmeiras do Casino,
as palmeiras de Angola
(*Esplendor*, 305)³⁹

Luanda and Angola are echoed in these two books as those spaces, which they had only physically left, but had not completely abandoned. As pointed out by Cammaert, in the work of Antunes 'memory plays a fundamental role when creating a fictional universe'.⁴⁰

Throughout *Hidroavião*, Artur and the "retornados" friends of him refer to Luanda and

³⁷ "Clarisse's apartment was just past the casino along the unfinished dead-end street, unpaved and with no streetlights, where I almost maimed myself tripping over bricks, boards, piles of sand, pieces of scaffolding", *Esplendor/Splendor*, p. 336.

³⁸ Daniel Zubia Fernández: 'Dispersed Splendour: Rejection and Ambivalence in O esplendor de Portugal'. In: Antony Soares (ed.): *Towards a Portuguese Postcolonialism*. Bristol: Seagull/Faoiléan, Dept. of Hispanic, Portuguese & Latin American Studies, University of Bristol, 2006, p. 197-215, p 214.

³⁹ "[...] the sea off the coast of Estoril outside, the palm trees in front of the casino, the palm trees in Angola". *Esplendor/Splendor*, p. 22.

⁴⁰ Felipe Cammaert: "You Don't Invent Anything": Memory and the Patterns of Fiction in Lobo Antunes Works. In: *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* 19/20 (2011), p. 267-89, p. 269.

Angola as that space that lives in their mind and remains settled there, in their memory. The narrator underlines, how, for Artur, it is irrelevant what he could see on the other side of the Tagus River Bay, be it Alcochete, New York or Paris, and that what was more significant for him, was what he saw in his mind. For in his mind were the visions of Luanda. Therefore, the Tagus River⁴¹ was not the stream he was seeing through his eyes, but a further stream that took him to an island of palm trees, birds flying away, fishermen on their boats, the sound of the engines and of the ‘batacada’ (*Hidroavião*, 8), and not that of the silence he notices in Lisbon.⁴² As a result, Luanda is not just associated with what they left behind and their memories, but with the idea of displacement that is to be found in the urban margins of Lisbon. Thus, in the book the narrator incorporates how, in his dreams and even when he closes his eyes, Artur asserts that what he “remembered best was not so much his adult life there ... but just the opposite”⁴³, that very period in which he was brought up: the time spent during his childhood, learning from his elders, surrounded by Angolan nature. Those physical references that now are absent. Therefore, Artur evokes shopping, food, eating and the taste in his mouth. The taste and the connection with his early days in Angola, his roots and his first experiences are over there. This allows Antunes to underline how for these “retornados” the absence of Angola is exemplified by the existence in a space where they have no roots. These are roots of childhood and are of significance later in adult life when they do not find a space to physically root themselves. This is interrupted by the question of the blind man of when he keeps asking what does Lisbon look like, Artur; describe that image, place, the metropolis to me. This leads him to state that nothing compares to the nights in Angola, where in the dark the level of visibility is greater than in Lisbon since these “retornados” knew how to find their way in that particular light. In Lisbon only the blind man is able to find his way around aided by his walking stick. Whereas, in the darkness of the African night things are more familiar to them, as the sky gives them familiar shelter, as opposed to the artificial and unfamiliar city light they experience in the metropolis. As Clarisse remembers:

Quando voltei a Portugal do que mais gostei na Ajuda foi dos carros eléctricos e dos homens gordos que saltavam das plataformas em movimento da mesma maneira que os abutres poisam: desciam a planar dos estribos de tronco para trás equilibrando-se nos braços abertos. Davam uma corridita de passinhos curtos e juntavam-se a baloiçar

⁴¹ In Portuguese history and collective memory, this was the estuary that witnessed the arrival of the boats from the colonies. So, it is associated with all the positive side of colonization, as glorified by the ‘Estado Novo’. Now these ‘retornados’ sit by the Tagus River to witness little action.

⁴² “The sound of beating drums”.

⁴³ “[...] o que recordava melhor não eram coisas de adulto [...] pelo contrario’ (*Hidroavião*, 13).

na barriga, muito dignos, a os colegas na esplanada do café atropelando-se torno do cadáver de uma mesa, antílope de patas de metal e corpo de formica de que disputavam aos guinchos os pedaços de carne do domino. Sempre que passava na avenida, de manhã e à tarde encontrava-os instalados em ramos de cadeiras, de cabeça metida nos enchumaços dos ombros, pacientes e calvos, fitando-me com as pálpebras brancas à espera que eu morresse.⁴⁴ (*Esplendor*, 277)

In *Esplendor*, in the current lives of the three siblings, Angola is present as the space to which they belonged and the one that is alive and kicking in their memory: the unique space in which Angola is present. The colonial Angola clashes with the postcolonial reality of Lisbon. In *Esplendor* Lobo Antunes questions the image of Portugal as model coloniser, by incorporating the “retornados”, a decolonisation process since these “retonardos” faced a unique type of diaspora. Antunes himself returned to Lisbon after being impressed by the nature of Angola during his time there during the colonial wars. In the memory of the writer there still remains the beauty of the landscape of Angola, as evoked in many of his chronicles.⁴⁵ This constitutes a constant image, one that lives in the memory of Carlos, Rui and Clarisse. Here the thread of their hybrid essence is the constant presence of nature and elements of it. These topos inhabit the memory of the characters. Thus, in their memory Antunes alternates between different spaces, from Lisbon to Angola, where in the narration the thoughts of the character are presented and where an element of nature emerges. This element allows the character to interpret and understand the metropolis. Furthermore, the questioning of the historical evolution is presented by the voice of their memory since the lives of the protagonists are notably marked by history, by the collapsing colonial order and by diaspora, where that collapse is exemplified.

As Vieira notes, in *Esplendor*, as is also the case in *Hidroavião*, the colonial space is ‘espaço da sua dimensão cultural’, the one that shapes them in their upbringing in Africa and the only one that allows them to breathe in the metropolis.⁴⁶ This space is keeping them alive in the

⁴⁴ “When I returned to Portugal the thing I liked best in Ajuda were the electric streetcars and the fat men who leap from the platform their movements identical to vultures when they land: they’d jump down, gliding along the running board with their torso leaning back, balancing with their outstretched arms, take a few quick, short steps, and then gather together with friends, bellies bouncing, very dignified, on the sidewalk outside the café, crowding together around the corpse of a table, an antelope with metal paws and a Formica body around which they quarrelled amid shrieks over the scraps of meat that were dominoes. Every time I walked down the avenue, in the morning and the afternoon, I’d find them perched on branches, chairs, with their heads sunk down between their bulky shoulders, patient and bald, staring at me from under their white eyelids, waiting for me to die.” *Esplendor/Splendor*, p. 357.

⁴⁵ Antunes regularly publishes journalistic chronicles in some Portuguese newspapers and magazines. Published in four books, Africa is a constant theme.

⁴⁶ [“space of their cultural dimension”], Vieira, ‘Com Angola’, p. 225.

metropolis, the place where, according to Portuguese Colonialism, they belonged. Therefore, each experience of these “retornados” exemplifies the division of the artificial colonial unity and how diaspora made this evident in contemporary Portugal. The perceived past splendour was not regained due to the ambivalence of Portuguese colonisation, as witnessed and experienced by their grandfather who left Portugal. Displaced in the metropolis, his grandchildren are trying to communicate with their individual pasts in order to find an explanation for their present circumstances. In their diaspora, they find how in that past in Luanda, in Baixa do Cassanje and in Malanje, the Portuguese language is a component and brings a vivid cultural dimension to their lives, which returns them to the past and the space where they actually survive.

Conclusion

António Lobo Antunes’ narrative epitomizes a desacralization of Salazarist colonial overseas Portugal and contemporary Portugal by unveiling what engendered this bi-directional diaspora as described in *Esplendor* and *Hidroavião*. Antunes portrays and explores how Artur, Carlos, Rui and Clarisse, who despite being able to remain in Angola, chose to experience diaspora. The consequences of this migration when they arrived in the metropolis, is referenced by Antunes by demonstrating how the bi-directional diaspora reacted to it: first by Eduardo settling in Angola and then by his grandchildren back in Lisbon. Both faced a similar rejection such as Eduardo encountered and which forced him to leave Portugal. Thus, in these “retornados” their hybrid duality becomes apparent. One that coexists under the skin of the aforementioned characters, that stops them from seeing themselves at home in Lisbon, but also one that is invisible to the eyes of contemporary Portugal. Antunes shows how that duality is an ideological frame of mind in which both human and socio-mental components, past and present become palpable in their lives in Lisbon where the Portuguese language remains as their individual cultural space. Therefore, Luanda and Baixa do Cassanje are cultural reference points used by Lobo Antunes. In both narrations, by referencing urban space and nature, Antunes shows how the hybrid soul returns instinctively to its Angolan roots, to the Angolan space of their upbringing but at the hand of the Portuguese language. Portuguese language now gives voice to those ‘retornados’ that found themselves in Lisbon, in any alleyway.