40 Years Later: Discourses of the Revolution and the Construction of Identity in the Portuguese Diaspora

Sandi Michele de Oliveira
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Portuguese Revolution, the military coup carried out on the 25th of April, 1974 ending 48 years of an authoritarian dictatorship. This event was a defining moment in Portuguese history. For the several years that followed, people would speak of "antes" (before) and "depois" (after) without needing to clarify the point of reference, and their comments served to identify likely social class and political affiliations. The policies of the dictatorial Estado Novo brought about the country’s stagnation, which in turn led to massive emigration beginning in the 1950s and continuing until the early 1980s. According to Portugal’s National Statistics Institute, 79,517 Portuguese citizens left the country as emigrants in 1973. By comparison, and as a result of the current economic crisis, in 2012 the combined numbers of temporary and permanent emigrants reached 121,000. The dimension of the Portuguese diaspora and its ongoing renewal through cycles of emigration help create the conditions for dynamic identity construction mechanisms.

This study examines emigrant discourses on the Revolution with a particular focus on identifying identity construction mechanisms which involve the commemoration of the Revolution’s anniversary (or of the Revolution itself). Paralleling the referential perspective of "antes" and "depois" mentioned above, the informants are categorized into two age groups: those who experienced the Revolution first-hand (informants aged 45 and above) and those who did not. Based on questionnaire and interview data from a multinational sample of informants (principally from Denmark, Sweden and the United States), the study analyzes the memories and experiences of the informants during and after the Revolution. The study also questions/explores the extent to which the informants feel that the geographic and/or generational distance from the Revolution affects the role this historical moment plays in the construction and performance of their identity.

Keywords: identity, memory, performance.