

Part II: Space, Imaginaries and Memoryscapes

5 Monuments to the colonial war in Portugal

A 60-year portrait

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Introduction

Given its duration, scale, dynamics and the set of representations which it projects in public areas, the process of monumentalising the colonial war is a case study that provides a unique opportunity for reflecting on contemporary processes for memorialising and commemorating imperial pasts and colonial wars in public space. In the Portuguese context, as discussed in the introduction to this volume, the commemoration and official remembrance of the war have come under pressure since the conflict came to an end. Over the past 60 years, around 450 monuments commemorating the war and the soldiers of the FAP (Portuguese Armed Forces) who fought in it have been constructed throughout Portuguese territory. This monumentalisation shapes a material *memory landscape* that has established itself as the heritage of the communities of Portuguese veterans.

Through a diachronic analysis of the evolution of this process, my aim is to discuss the way in which these monuments are established as *memory markers* and intersect with the public memory of war. As Bodnar affirms, public memory “emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions”¹ and is the result of a process of political discussion and negotiation.² From this basis, I aim to determine which aspects of the public memory of war are reflected in the monuments, as mnemonic products. I will also explore the way in which the motives, memory(ies) of war, personal military experiences, perspectives on the conflict, and ideologies of the subjects who organise the construction of these memory markers influence the representations which are projected.

The evolution of the monumentalisation process

The task of creating inventory points to the existence of almost 450 monuments in Portugal by the end of 2022.³ The majority, amounting to roughly 389, were constructed from the year 2000 onwards (see [Table 5.1](#)).⁴ In the interest of providing a better understanding of this phenomenon, I have identified three different phases⁵ that are related to the social dynamics of the process, changes in the pace of construction of the monuments, and the diversity of the iconographic and sculptural options they present. I will attempt to demonstrate the relationship that is established between

Table 5.1 Monuments inaugurated, by period.

<i>Date of inauguration</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Monuments/year</i>
Unknown	10	n.a.
1963–1974	20	1.7
1975–1999	29	1.2
2000–2022	389	16.9
	448	

Source: see Note 4.

these dynamics and other public processes for memorialising the war, arguing that these changes are, to a large extent, influenced by changes in the ways and types of memorialising and evoking the war that have taken place in Portuguese society.

The monuments built in the first two phases defined in this study are characterised by more simple, classical and formal sculptural and iconographic choices. In many cases, they replicate international models and are inspired by the monuments to the fallen of the First World War constructed in Portugal in the decades after this conflict ended.⁶ From the early years of the new century in particular, the aesthetic and architectural options featured in these monuments have multiplied, influenced by the dynamics and porosity of the processes for re-elaborating individual memories and testimonies and the emergence of the authority of self-recognised lived experience.

First phase: 1963–1974

During this period, while the war was still ongoing, the monuments were mainly small and characterised by their sculptural simplicity, invariably featuring a column, obelisk, pillory or memorial plaque. However, some were significantly larger and others featured the figure of the “soldier-hero,” which would become a common style for monuments constructed in later decades (Figure 5.1). Certain dynamics typical of the entire monumentalisation process can already be identified in this first phase, namely the decentralised nature of the process and the fact that it does not result from a politics of commemoration and remembrance directly implemented by the government, but instead included military regiments, veterans’ associations and local public administrations among its organisers.

Second phase: 1975–1999

This phase covers the 25 years immediately after the end of the war, in which around 30 monuments were built, in styles varying from the classic representation of the soldier to the usual memorial plaque bearing the names of soldiers, or the traditional column or obelisk. Despite the fact that the memory of the war was receding in public space during the 1970s and 1980s, within the Armed Forces and veterans’ communities’ efforts and resources were mobilised to consolidate the history and memory of the war and pay tribute to the fallen and to the soldiers



Figure 5.1 Monument to the Fallen, Paratroopers Regiment Establishment – Tancos.

Photograph by André Caiado.

who had taken part in it. In 1978, the first sizeable monument to be inaugurated after the revolution paid homage to the commandos⁷ and had been organised by the Association of Commandos (*Associação de Comandos*). These efforts continued throughout the 1980s, when a further 10 monuments were erected in military establishments and work began on the national monument dedicated to veterans. After an initial impasse, the Executive Committee for the Monument to the Overseas Combatants, which included various veterans' and soldiers' associations, organisations from the Armed Forces, and academic societies, was founded in 1987 (see [Figure 1.1](#) in [chapter 1](#) of this book). The process of building the monument, which began in 1985 and ended with its inauguration on 15 January 1994, was the subject of various controversies, ranging from the reason for building it, the differing opinions of the various veterans' associations and the fund-raising for its construction, to the choice of site, the model that was selected, and even the refusal of the President of the Republic and ex-officio Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces – at the time, Mário Soares – to preside over the Committee of Honour for the Installation of the Monument which consequently was never officially constituted, and the booing which greeted him during the official inauguration of the monument. Despite receiving institutional support from the Portuguese state in the form of donations from various entities, it was the various veterans' associations that were responsible for the initiative and all the work leading to the construction of the monument. Installed in the Belém *memory*

complex,⁸ a monumental space which celebrates the imperial past of the country, the monument is a *memory marker* which also records the end of the Portuguese imperial cycle within the same space.

A large memorial plaque not included in the initial project but completed a few years after the monument had been inaugurated (5 February 2000), at the request of some veterans, stands behind the structure, adjacent to the walls of the Bom Sucesso Fort, and bears the names of “all the soldiers who died in the service of Portugal” while on duty overseas. Further plaques were added later, as new names and numbers for those who died in service came to light, together with the names of some black soldiers in the FAP who had not initially been included. The sacralisation of this space was extended in 2015 following the construction of a Catholic chapel and memorial to the combatant containing a tomb of the unknown soldier, in which the mortal remains of a soldier from Guinea-Bissau were laid to rest. Over time, the dynamics of the appropriation of space extended beyond the memorialisation of the “overseas combatants.” Through the inscription of names on plaques and the construction of smaller monuments nearby, other soldiers or agents of the security forces who had perished in military campaigns or in peacekeeping and humanitarian aid operations abroad were also honoured. The space was thus converted into a pantheon of the military community and a *site of memory*, the stage for military parades and ceremonies that were not exclusively associated with the colonial war.

Third phase: 2000 to the present

From the year 2000 onwards the number of monuments inaugurated each year began to increase, together with the range of architectural models, aesthetic options and visual communication tools chosen by their authors and designers. This third phase reflects a significant development in the different expressions of the memorialisation of war⁹ during this period, which extended to memoirs, autobiographies, academic projects and historiographical studies, films, television series and documentaries, debates in the press and other media, and interventions and testimonies shared by veterans in the blogosphere and via social networks,¹⁰ as well as veterans’ reunions¹¹ and remembrance ceremonies held in public areas.¹²

The organisers

With the exception of monuments constructed within military establishments up to the 1990s, the impetus to construct these memory markers essentially came from the efforts of veterans acting individually or in groups, veterans’ associations and local authorities (municipal and parish councils). In order to understand the growth in this process from the turn of the century onwards, it should be considered within the framework of the much broader phenomenon of the expansion of processes for the public and private remembrance of the war described above, many of which have gained access to public space and greater media attention. The phenomenon has been triggered by various factors, beginning with the *memory work* undertaken

by veterans' communities and associations. Among the latter, the role played by the oldest of these associations, the League of Combatants, stands out.¹³

The involvement of veterans in these memorial projects also seems to have been impelled by the fact that they are now ageing and have more time available, following retirement. In many cases the awareness that they are reaching the end of their lives has generated an urgent need for commemoration, a need to tell their stories and memories of war and to share and socialise – either in person or digitally – with other comrades.¹⁴ Added to this is the desire to pay public tribute to the fallen, as well as to the combatants who took part in the conflict. Thirdly, the activities of the associations and the commemorative events organised by these communities and associations have benefited from the support of the state, in particular through the local authorities. With regard to monumentalisation, it should be noted that municipal and parish councils are almost always co-promoters of the building projects. Their involvement takes the form of financial contributions and sometimes includes the initiative to build monuments or the appointment of a council architect to design the plans.

Nevertheless, the central public administration is less involved in this process. Although several constitutional governments have co-financed the building of monuments – namely the national monument and those constructed inside the premises of military regiments – over the years it has mainly provided indirect aid, specifically through the presence of members of the government at certain inauguration ceremonies and via the institutional and occasional financial support provided by the League of Combatants. As an official organisation overseen and funded by the Ministry of National Defence, this entity can be identified as the main driving force behind the official politics of commemoration for the conflict.

Past and present imaginaries

From the year 2000 onwards, maps of the three territories in which the war had been fought frequently began to appear on monuments, and sometimes a map of mainland Portugal and its islands. Moreover, although they were less common, when the homage was extended to combatants who had served in other parts of what was known as Overseas Portugal, maps of these territories were also included, together with the names of the soldiers who had served there.¹⁵ However, it does not seem that the inclusion of maps in around 60 of the monuments can be explained only as tools designed to help passers-by/visitors identify the territories in which the war took place: in monuments that feature world maps in which the overseas territories are identified, this may be understood as a valorisation mechanism which aims to underline the territorial dimensions and geographical spread of the “overseas” component of the country at the time of the conflict, as suggested by the monument and square recently constructed in Calendário (20 October 2018) (Figure 5.2).

The Santa Comba Dão monument (13 May 2010) (Figure 5.3) consists of an illuminated fountain flanked by seven vertical elements on which the names and maps of the seven Portuguese colonies established during the final phase of Portuguese colonialism are engraved, together with the dates when they were under Portuguese



Figure 5.2 Calendário Monument/Square.

Photograph kindly provided by JOPH – Engenharia e Construção, Lda.



Figure 5.3 Monument to the Overseas Heroes, Santa Comba Dão.

Photograph by André Caiado.

administration. As noted in the architectural plans, the presence of water is intended to refer to the imaginary of the maritime conquests. The author, Manuel Gamito, a council architect, stated that he was given artistic freedom to design the proposal and opted to develop a project based on the concept of Overseas Portugal. As he explained to me, he understood it as a mechanism for valorising the history of the country.

Another related dynamic characteristic of this monumentalisation process is the continuation – and reinforcement, from 2010 onwards – of messages and visual narratives in various monuments which project a certain imperial imaginary. This epiphenomenon, which I have analysed in greater detail in a previous study,¹⁶ can be observed on two levels: on the one hand, in the continuing presence of symbols and figurative elements from national heraldry associated with the imperial past, specifically the armillary sphere and the cross of the Order of Christ; on the other hand, in the extent to which the imaginary of the process of Portuguese maritime expansion during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has been used as a source of inspiration. There are some monuments which display caravels, while others are designed in the form of the stone pillar (*padrão*) used by Portuguese navigators to establish Portuguese sovereignty over the territories they had reached, and some whose inscriptions include excerpts from works from the canon of Portuguese literature that are associated with this set of ideas, namely *Os Lusíadas*, by Luís de Camões, and *Mensagem*, by Fernando Pessoa.

The Tondela monument (30 June 2002), which at first sight appears to be a celebration of the epic maritime endeavours of the Portuguese, is a typical example of this in terms of the way in which it seeks to honour the combatants of the region over the centuries. This is achieved by means of a visual representation supported by a narrative line that begins with the founding of the nation, spans the entire imperial cycle and ends with the colonial war. The sides of the monument display reproductions of maritime navigation charts of the African coast dating from the time of the “Maritime Expansion” and excerpts from *Os Lusíadas* and *Mensagem* associated with this imaginary. The monument serves the purpose of paying tribute to the local combatants killed in action during the colonial war, who are symbolically represented by 49 metallic “crossbows” encircling the central structure of the monument, which have their names engraved on their bases.¹⁷ As António Ferraz¹⁸ informed me, the idea of including references to the fifteenth-century “Discoveries” was intended to highlight the fact that the empire for which it was the combatants’ duty to fight had come into being with the “Discoveries.”¹⁹ This conceptual proposal aimed to create a link between the inhabitants of the municipality who had fought in the colonial war in Africa, and those of the Middle Ages who had contributed to the founding of the nation, thus forging a historical continuum that emphasises the efforts of the men of the region in the construction and defence of the country.

In the entangled web that interlinks the memory of the colonial war and the end of the Portuguese imperial cycle, reclaiming the ideas of the “Discoveries” and the empire appears to function as a compensation mechanism. Faced with the responsibility and difficulty of evoking the memory of a “lost” war, “waged against the

tide of history” and therefore lacking political legitimacy, the national-imperialist imaginary²⁰ is summoned, as a nationalist myth. These and other cases previously explored²¹ reveal how one way of valorising the history of Portugal and projecting the grandeur of the nation and the Portuguese people is naturalised by drawing on a certain idea of the longevity and vast reach of the Portuguese colonial empire. They appear to express a form of *vernacular remembering*²² of the *imperialisation of the nation state*,²³ whose legacy pervades a certain common sense and fuels public and private narratives of the colonial past of the country, even today. They reproduce historical and semantic reconfigurations in which the “unique nature of Lusitanian expansion(ism)” is not interpreted as colonial and the consequences of this political project are omitted.²⁴

Contestation and appropriation

The materiality of monuments and their installation in public space means that their life cycles are subject to interference from the different dynamics of discussion, contestation and appropriation. This begins in the design and planning phase and moves on to include the opinions generated by their aesthetics, the message they convey, and even the specific ways in which they may be appropriated by particular communities and political groups with political and identitarian objectives.

The selection of a site that might be considered appropriate and suitably distinguished for a national monument lay behind some of the discussions and tensions surrounding the construction of the Monument to the Overseas Combatants in Lisbon, in addition to the choice of architectural plans and the aesthetics of the monument. Moreover, the construction of the Santa Comba Dão Monument to the Combatants in 2010, on the same site where, decades earlier, a statue of Salazar had been erected and later destroyed, did not escape controversy. While the choice of site was an attempt by the mayor of the time to put an end to putative plans, which had not disappeared in the intervening period, to re-erect a statue of the dictator on the original site, this decision still fuels dissent among the local population today. Parallel to this, the lack of consensus on the choice of a site appears to have been one of the main obstacles to proceeding with plans to build a memorial for the victims of the colonial war in Lisbon, a category which included the war disabled of the armed forces.²⁵ The proposal, which emerged from within the ADFA (the Association for the Disabled of the Armed Forces), was initially intended for the Cais da Rocha do Conde de Óbidos (the property of the Lisbon Port Authority), due to the symbolism associated with its location as a place where soldiers set off and returned from the war.

The Valado dos Frades monument (19 January 2020), which includes the coats of arms of the eight overseas provinces, was also the subject of negative comments and criticism, mainly via social networks, after it was inaugurated. Some claimed that it drew on imperialist representations, while in the opinion of certain critics, it represented a form of neocolonialism.

More recently, the construction of the Porto Memorial to the Overseas Combatants was the target of some protest. Among other initiatives, an online public

petition,²⁶ which gathered 178 signatures, called for the construction work to be halted and, together with other measures, demanded that all instances of the use of the title “Overseas War” should be removed from public space and new constructions should be forbidden to use this terminology. It also demanded that the process of constructing the said monument should be transparent and subject to public discussion. At the same time, a motion presented by the CDU²⁷ to the Municipal Assembly in Porto, calling for a halt to the building work or, at least, a change in the name of the monument so that it would pay tribute to “the victims of the colonial war” rather than just the combatants, was rejected.²⁸ The Coimbra monument, discussed in the following section, is particularly illustrative of these dynamics.

The public life of a monument

The Coimbra monument was commissioned by the city council to honour the soldiers who fought in Africa and was inaugurated in 1971 on National Day (10 June). This sizeable monument incorporated, for the first time, the figure of the “soldier-saviour protecting the African child,” comprising the figure of a soldier in motion, holding a weapon in his right hand and carrying the racialised figure of a naked African child on his back (see [Figure 5.4](#)). The grouping, intended to convey an image of the protection granted by Portuguese soldiers to African populations, served as propaganda to gain public support for the war effort. However, more than two decades after the war had ended, this paternalistic vision was reprised in three other monuments.²⁹

Dedicated to the “Overseas Heroes,” the monument was erected in the centre of a square that had been given the same name and resisted the toponymic changes introduced after 25 April, when some nearby streets that had names associated with the New State (*Estado Novo*) were renamed. After the revolution, on National Day the monument continued to serve as a place for paying tribute to soldiers who had lost their lives in the war. At the start of the new millennium, due to building work for the new municipal stadium which opened in 2004, the monument was moved a few metres and the square in which it stood was reconstructed, losing some of its former visibility. Nevertheless, during the course of this urban redevelopment project, the structure of the statue, the inscription and the name of the square were preserved and they have remained unchanged to the present day.

Recently the monument became a target for protests and appropriations that highlighted the potential for mobilising such monuments for current political, identitarian and memorial disputes. The graffiti which appeared on the monument on the night of 26–27 September 2020 triggered certain reactions in the days and months which followed.³⁰ Although no one claimed responsibility for the act, it should be noted that an anti-fascist demonstration had taken place in the city a few hours earlier, in response to a dinner and rally for the CHEGA party that was to be held in Coimbra that night.³¹ On 5 October, graffiti once again appeared on the monument, with the word “CHEGA” having been painted in green on one of the sides. These acts were condemned by many veterans and veterans’ associations, who described them as vandalism. The episode even saw the President of the Portuguese Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, take a stand during a visit to



Figure 5.4 Monument to the Overseas Heroes, Coimbra.

Photograph by André Caiado.

the city two weeks later, when he accompanied the mayor to the monument to lay a wreath of flowers and, through this symbolic gesture, pay tribute to the veterans and condemn the act. Months later, at the end of May 2021, the monument was once again appropriated when it served as the venue for a political demonstration

by CHEGA involving a march through the streets of Coimbra to mark the opening of the party's III National Congress, ending next to the monument where its leader, André Ventura, gave a speech.

The work of recontextualisation

Monumentalisation is one of the vectors in the *historical remembrance* of the conflict, together with other acts and practises developed by communities of veterans. The representations and messages projected by the monuments help construct an image of the soldier as a hero and, simultaneously, the victim of war, whether through their imagery or the inscriptions engraved on them. In monuments which include statues of soldiers, the figurative representation conveys their strength, courage, determination and physical stamina: there are no images of dead, wounded and physically or mentally frail soldiers. The inscriptions on the monuments, which help to establish the meaning of the tribute, sometimes reinforce this quite powerfully. The way in which these invocations are formulated helps sacralise the figure of the combatant: "TO THE OVERSEAS HEROES" is one common example. Others reinforce the apologia of love of the fatherland and confer an eschatological meaning on the act of dying for one's country, paying tribute to "THOSE WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF THE FATHERLAND."

In a number of testimonies and private narratives,³² many veterans denounce the coercive nature of the mobilisation for war and try to distance themselves from the responsibility of having been active agents in a war which, decades later, many consider to have been anachronistic and unjust. In some cases, however, the testimonies of veterans are at odds with the prevailing discourse, given that they accept their role as the authors of violent acts. This becomes clear in the narratives of many disabled members of the armed forces, whom Martins defines as "paradoxical victims," given that "they are very often, concomitantly, victims, perpetrators and witnesses to the violence of others."³³ However, narratives such as these, which have the potential to destabilise the hegemonic narrative, are purged from the public memorialisation project. No monument features representations that establish any condemnation of war or denial of this military experience, nor do they reveal "a desire to atone for their sins" expressed in the stories of many combatants.³⁴ The use of monumentalisation as part of the wider *politics of regret*,³⁵ which could have been promoted by the Portuguese state, has also been excluded from the process.

The work of recontextualisation practised as part of this process of monumentalisation reconfigures conscription as a service to the nation and exempts the combatants from any responsibility. It draws on the semiotic resources used by the developers and designers of monuments which are crucial to the recontextualisation of the social practise of war, building up discourses "that are largely celebratory and which distract from the actual meaning, causes and nature of warfare."³⁶ This process is also characterised by the absence of any markedly warlike imagery and representations of the "enemy" or the civilian victims of the conflict, the lack

of expression on the faces of most of the statues – which show no emotion – and the lack of inscriptions which directly justify the war or defend the political reasons for which it was fought. These mechanisms are designed to avoid any questioning of the political and historical legitimacy of the conflicts and any implication that the soldiers were directly responsible for the (political) conduct of the war or morally responsible for any excesses that may have been committed. In focussing the representation on a simplistic and unifying narrative of a war fought for the sake of the fatherland, the intention is to honour the soldiers' involvement in the conflict and dismiss the notion that they have any responsibility as the agents carrying out the war, perpetrators of violence or authors of alleged war crimes.

The message of a “war fought for the fatherland” is a common laudatory inscription in the language corpus of war monuments. This standard message is still reproduced in recent monuments, without establishing any critical reflection on the territory or symbolic community of identity and belonging which they epitomise. The uncritical reproduction of existential assumptions such as “THEY SERVED AND DIED FOR THE FATHERLAND” or “TO THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THE FATHERLAND” – a common device in war monuments – tends to disregard the fact that in this particular case the “fatherland” for which the soldiers “gave their lives” was not their homeland. They were not fighting for mainland Portugal and its islands, but to defend the imperial concept of “Overseas Portugal.” This type of inscription was widely used in the intensive monumentalisation processes developed in various European countries in the decades after the First World War³⁷ and had a dual purpose. For bereaved families, it provided an eschatological meaning for the death of their loved ones, cut down in the prime of life, while for political leaders it eased the discontent and social revolt which could result from protests against the mass deaths of millions of young people in a meaningless war that was considered useless. This practise was converted into a script that was frequently used in processes for the memorialisation of conflicts and the fallen, which can also be observed here.

Concluding remarks

This monumentalisation process reveals a recontextualisation that reflects a form of *dominant memory*³⁸ of the war and the war veterans. It is anchored in the heroisation of the figure of the combatant and the glorification of the idea of serving the fatherland, reproducing many of the ideas and discourses of *banal nationalism*.³⁹ Through this operation, soldiers are not presented as young men (most of whom were depoliticised and badly informed) forced to fight in a colonial war waged by a dictatorship, but as heroes who served and gave their lives for the nation. The colonial nature of the war and the violence associated with the conflict are suppressed in the selection of visual narratives and discourses that are projected, while the historical process which triggered it is depoliticised. These narrative lines constitute the main *narratives of articulation*⁴⁰ on which the *agents of remembrance* base their memorial project. They represent a partial reconstruction of the past and

an *apolitics of memory*⁴¹ which, in erasing all that is unspeakable and all the uncomfortable images of war, make public commemoration possible and enable the recipients of this homage to identify and connect with these markers, as the *official carriers of memory*.⁴²

Expressions of the monumentalisation of the colonial war reproduce some of the classic paradigms of other similar processes, resulting in a certain normalisation of war and militaristic discourses. The dynamics of this process have, so far, managed to ward off the construction of counter-monuments or monuments that present counter-narratives establishing condemnation of the war, a critique of the colonial nature of the conflict or any explicit portrayal of its consequences, namely the civilian victims of the conflict and the thousands of soldiers who are left disabled⁴³ or suffer from post-traumatic stress⁴⁴ and bear the scars and traumas of war for life, very often bringing this burden into their home and family life. Even the impact of the inclusion of black troops within the FAP during the conflict, a phenomenon known as the *Africanisation of the war*, is not reflected in the chosen forms of monumentalisation.⁴⁵ Moreover, women rarely merit tribute; very few monuments pay homage to mothers, wives and war godmothers.

This process constitutes a tribute that is almost always initiated or (co)developed by veterans' groups or associations. It is shaped by the *agencies of articulation* through which these social actors aim to promote and ensure recognition of their memories of war.⁴⁶ It appears to emerge primarily in response to their need for public recognition, to overcome the social indifference and alienation they feel they are subjected to by Portuguese society with regard to their needs, and which is identified in testimonies and interviews,⁴⁷ in speeches given at inauguration ceremonies, the actual inscriptions on the monuments and the interviews I held with some veterans for this study. The messages emanating from the monuments aspire to be *public representations* which acquire a central focus in the public domain.⁴⁸ The most visible objective is to honour the fallen and dignify the memory of the combatants. Nevertheless, the increasing number of monuments, together with other memorialisation processes unfolding during the same period, may be viewed as *arenas of articulation*⁴⁹ used by communities of veterans to gain visibility for their psychological and medical needs, including medication, and public backing for the claims they present to the state authorities for improvements to social support and social security benefits.

In the eyes of the organisers, the aims are to develop a sense of public recognition for the generation of Portuguese soldiers who took part in the war, and to transmit the "history" of the period and the memory of these men to younger and future generations. However, the monuments tend to fail in terms of the relationship they aim to establish with passers-by in public space and often remain unnoticed in the urban landscape of which they are a part. Paradoxically, their potential tends to be realised when they become the subject of protest, appropriation or reinterpretation and are mobilised for political debates and present-day disputes over remembrance that galvanise society at such times.⁵⁰ With the exception of the aforementioned cases, monumentalisation has expanded without any significant protest targeting the process and the representations which feature in certain monuments, even

though this has not been the case recently with other monuments and symbols associated with the colonial past.

In focussing on the combatant as the subject of the tribute – whose figure is sacralised by means of the communication and semiotic tools used – rather than the war itself, a formula has been found that allows for remembrance, while taking into account the various tensions and disputes which the memory of war continues to provoke in Portuguese society. The monuments tend to blur the distinction between *historical knowledge* and *historical memory*. Moreover, it is a truism that monuments say much more about those who evoke than those who are evoked; in fact, they provide information about the motives and desires of the former and their visions of history and the conflict that is memorialised. The cases discussed here show how the authors' individual military experience, ideologies and interpretative frameworks for the war, the history of Portugal and the Portuguese colonial past are all channelled into the representations in the monuments which they create. However, one of the main objectives behind the construction of many recent monuments does appear to have been realised, namely that of contributing to the public (self)-valorisation and (self)-recognition which many veterans claim to feel. The monuments are also potential *sites of memory* where remembrance ceremonies are held for deceased comrades and for war service, in which the identity of a former combatant is revived. In paying tribute to comrades who lost their lives in the conflict and, in many cases simultaneously, to all combatants who served in the war, those who evoke, aware that their own lives are coming to an end, are expressing a “desire for eternity” for their comrades and for themselves. The *work of remembrance* and *anamnese* in which they are engaged demonstrates their agency and reveals how, while they are still alive, they are striving to establish the paradigms and narrative framework for the way in which they would like to be remembered in the future.

Notes

- 1 John Bodnar, *Remaking America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 13.
- 2 Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 13–14.
- 3 Using criteria defined by the author, only monuments built in Portugal and located in public areas or military establishments were counted.
- 4 The monuments were counted and the inventory of the inauguration dates produced by cross-referencing data available from the following sources: Liga dos Combatentes, 2022; UTW – Portal dos Veteranos da Guerra do Ultramar, 1954 a 1975, 2022; António Porteira and Jorge Martins, eds., *Monumentos Aos Combatentes Da Grande Guerra e Do Ultramar*, 2nd ed. (Lisboa: Liga dos Combatentes, 2018); reports available from the media, local authorities and veterans' associations via their websites. Several municipal councils, parish councils and military regiments were also contacted by email or telephone to request missing data and, in some cases, visits were made to gather information.
- 5 Cf. [Table 5.1](#).
- 6 Sílvia Correia, *Entre a Morte e o Mito* (Lisboa: Temas e Debates, Círculo de Leitores, 2015).
- 7 The Commandos were an elite force of the Portuguese Army created in 1962. They were a counterguerrilla unit created to carry out particularly demanding missions in Angola, and later in Guinea and Mozambique.

- 8 Elsa Peralta, *Lisboa e a Memória do Império* (Lisboa: Deriva/Le Monde Diplomatique, 2017).
- 9 On the so-called “memory boom” associated with the colonial war, see Ângela Campos, *An Oral History of the Portuguese Colonial War* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 249–50, 265; Miguel Cardina, “O Passado Colonial: Do Trajeto Histórico Às Configurações Da Memória,” in *O Século XX Português*, eds. Fernando Rosas, Francisco Louçã, João Teixeira Lopes, Andrea Peniche, Luís Trindade and Miguel Cardina. (Lisboa: Tinta-da-China, 2020), 384–6, and António Sousa Ribeiro and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, “A Past That Will Not Go Away. The Colonial War in Portuguese Postmemory,” *Lusotopie* 17, no. 2 (2018): 277–300.
- 10 Verónica Ferreira, “‘Rebuilding the Jigsaw of Memory’: The Discourse of Portuguese Colonial War Veterans’ Blogs,” in *Mass Violence and Memory in the Digital Age*, eds. Eve M. Zucker and David J. Simon (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020).
- 11 Maria José Lobo Antunes, *Regressos Quase Perfeitos. Memórias da Guerra em Angola* (Lisboa: Tinta-da-China, 2015).
- 12 Fátima da Cruz Rodrigues, *Antigos Combatentes Africanos Das Forças Armadas Portuguesas* (Lisboa: Instituto Camões, 2017).
- 13 According to its own data, the League of Combatants experienced a growth phase between 2004 and 2017, both in terms of the number of local branches, which rose from 63 to 114, and the number of (registered) members, which increased from 149,000 to 181,000. Joaquim Chito Rodrigues, “A participação do soldado português na Grande Guerra,” *Liga dos Combatentes*, May 6, 2017, http://www.ligacombatentes.org.pt/upload/discursos_presidente/114.pdf.
- 14 On the need felt by veterans to provide and share testimonies and narrativisation processes, see the studies by Antunes, *Regressos Quase Perfeitos*; Campos, *An Oral History of the Portuguese Colonial War*; Ferreira, “Rebuilding the Jigsaw of Memory”; Rodrigues, *Antigos Combatentes Africanos Das Forças Armadas Portuguesas*, Bruno Sena Martins, “Corpos-Memórias Da Guerra Colonial: Os Deficientes Das Forças Armadas o ‘restolhar de Asas No Telhado’,” in *Geometrias Da Memória*, eds. António Sousa Ribeiro and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro (Porto: Afrontamento, 2016), and Luís Quintais, *As Guerras Coloniais Portuguesas e a Invenção Da História* (Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais – Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, 2000).
- 15 Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Timor, the Portuguese State of India and, more rarely, Macao.
- 16 André Caiado, “The Monumentalisation of the Portuguese Colonial War: Commemorating the Soldier’s Efforts amid the Persistence of Imperial Imaginaries,” *Memory Studies* 14, no. 6 (2021): 1208–25.
- 17 A medieval weapon used in Europe which, due to its historical connotations, features in the coat of arms of the municipality.
- 18 President of the Board of the National Association of Overseas Combatants. The association is based in Tondela, whose municipality organised the construction of the monument.
- 19 Statements sent by email, 26 July 2021.
- 20 Elsa Peralta, “Fictions of a Creole Nation: (Re)Presenting Portugal’s Imperial Past,” in *Negotiating Identities*, ed. Helen Vella Bonavita (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011).
- 21 Caiado, “The Monumentalisation.”
- 22 Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, “Vernacular Memory,” in *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, eds. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
- 23 On this subject, see, among others: Maria Isabel João, *Memória e império: comemorações em Portugal (1889–1960)* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Ministério da Ciência e do Ensino Superior, 2002); Miguel

- Bandeira Jerónimo and António Costa Pinto, “Ideologies of Exceptionality and the Legacies of Empire in Portugal,” in *Memories of Post-Imperial Nations*, ed. Rothermund Dietmar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Cardina, “O Passado Colonial” and Peralta, “Fictions of a Creole Nation.”
- 24 Cardina, “O Passado Colonial,” 406.
- 25 The proposal signed by the then councillor Ruben de Carvalho, from the Portuguese Communist Party, was approved on 26 May 2010 at a meeting of the Lisbon City Council, with 16 votes in favour and only one abstention, from the CDS-PP, a right-wing conservative party.
- 26 “Apelo à paralisação da construção do “Memorial do Porto aos Combatentes do Ultramar,” *Petição Pública*, 2021, accessed July 15, 2022, <https://peticaopublica.com/?pi=PT107354>.
- 27 The CDU - United Democratic Coalition is a left-wing coalition formed by the Portuguese Communist Party, the Ecology Party “Os Verdes,” and the ID – Democratic Intervention Association.
- 28 “Polémica no Porto. Rui Moreira diz que monumento de homenagem do Ultramar é herança de Rio,” *TSF – Rádio Notícias*, 2021, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://www.tsf.pt/portugal/politica/polemica-no-porto-rui-moreira-diz-que-monumento-de-homenagem-do-ultramar-e-heranca-de-rio-13535394.html>.
- 29 Oeiras (21 June 1997), Vila Real (1 December 2000) and Leomil (25 April 2009).
- 30 On the pedestal, the dedication “To the Overseas Heroes” had been partly erased by red paint and the word “murderers” added so that the inscription on the statue now read “To the Overseas murderers.” The phrase “Fascist shits” was also painted on one of the sides.
- 31 CHEGA is a far-right political party which was created in 2019 and has a nationalist, conservative and populist agenda.
- 32 Antunes, *Regressos Quase Perfeitos*, and Campos, *An Oral History*.
- 33 Martins, “Corpos-Memórias Da Guerra Colonial,” 313.
- 34 Martins, “Corpos-Memórias Da Guerra Colonial,” 315.
- 35 Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).
- 36 Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin, *The Language of War Monuments* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 7.
- 37 Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments*; Correia, *Entre a Morte e o Mito*; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- 38 Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- 39 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1999).
- 40 Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, “The Politics of War and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures and Dynamics,” in *Commemorating War. The Politics of Memory*, eds. Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009).
- 41 Leith Passmore, “The Apolitics of Memory: Remembering Military Service under Pinochet through and alongside Transitional Justice, Truth, and Reconciliation,” *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (2016): 173–86.
- 42 Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 219–20.
- 43 Martins, “Corpos-Memórias Da Guerra Colonial.”
- 44 Quintais, *As Guerras Coloniais Portuguesas*.
- 45 Caiado, “The Monumentalisation,” 1216–7.
- 46 Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, “The Politics of War and Commemoration,” 17.
- 47 Antunes, *Regressos Quase Perfeitos*; Campos, *An Oral History*, and Rodrigues, *Antigos Combatentes Africanos*.
- 48 Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method,” in *Making Histories: Studies in History-writing and Politics*, eds. Richard Johnson, et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 210.

- 49 Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, “The Politics of War and Commemoration.”
 50 Caiado, “The Monumentalisation.”

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