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UMD conference explores how Portugal's revolution changed the diaspora and the world

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DARTMOUTH – The Carnation Revolution was an important milestone in Portuguese political history but also a springboard for the mobilization of the Portuguese diaspora, including in New England.

As Portugal marks the 50th anniversary of the April 25, 1974 military coup that put an end to nearly five decades of dictatorship, the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture at UMass Dartmouth brought together about 25 individuals from a variety of academic fields, hailing from four continents, to discuss the multifaceted aspects of this seminal event throughout the Lusophone world.

In coordination with UMass Dartmouth's Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives, the center hosted a three-day conference titled "The Carnation Revolution: Global Perspectives," splitting its program between UMass Dartmouth and the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

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"We are looking at the Carnation Revolution not just as a change, but at the many wriggles that this event initiated. The Carnation Revolution is important not just to Portugal; it also had an impact in the diaspora," said Dr. Paula Novera, the director for the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture, delivering her opening remarks on April 4.

"The world we have today is a world that was in part created by the Carnation Revolution," she added.

The conference's program was organized by Dr. Novera; Dr. Daniela Melo, a political scientist who teaches Social Sciences at Boston University; and Dr. Eric Morier-Genoud, a lecturer in African History at Queen's University in Belfast and former UMass Dartmouth's visiting Portuguese Studies professor.

In her presentation, Dr. Melo showed how the Carnation Revolution led to Portuguese diasporic activism in New England and in other parts of the United States, using information she collected from the Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives, Portuguese Times, the Joseph Fernandes Collection, and the National Archives.

"We saw the Portuguese community mobilizing very quickly," she said. "To me it was so incredible to find so much information of how the Portuguese themselves had acted in this manner because as far as I can tell there's little to no scholarship on this."

How did the local Portuguese mobilize after the Carnation Revolution?

Dr. Melo said the local Portuguese community mobilized in three different ways: as Portuguese citizens, Portuguese-Americans, and Azoreans.

As early as May 1974, they organized as Portuguese citizens to demand that Portugal's Ambassador to the United States João Themido and other Portuguese consular officials be removed because they were associated to and appointed by the old regime.

Dr. Melo showed a photo taken during a demonstration held in front of Venus de Milo restaurant in Swansea when a Portuguese event was taking place inside and protestors held signs written in Portuguese outside. One of the signs read:

“You ignored us. We shall ignore you as you ignored us. We are fearless.”

“Note how they used the word *destemidos* (fearless) because his name was Themido,” she quipped.

Dr. Melo said there were at least two other big demonstrations – one in New York and one in Washington – demanding representative removal and calling for action to ensure democracy in Portugal.

“One had 3,000 people the other had 5,000 people,” she said. “This demonstrated huge levels of engagement with this particular topic within the Portuguese community.”

The local Portuguese citizens also mobilized swiftly around electoral rights since there was a promise of elections for the Constituent Assembly.

“This was going to be pivotal because it would decide on the Constitution for the Portuguese government afterward,” Dr. Melo said. “The Portuguese diaspora wanted to have a saying in this.

They started mobilizing right away and trying to pressure the Portuguese government to make sure they could vote.”

The *Movimento Portugal Livre da Nova Inglaterra* (Free Portugal Movement of New England) was formed in May 1974. It then changed its name to *Os Amigos da Comunidade de Língua Portuguesa* (Friends of the Portuguese-Speaking Community) and later merged with the *Comité de Acção Democrática de Fall River* (Fall River Democratic Action Committee).

“This group really centers a lot of actions on trying to register the Portuguese who were eligible to vote in Portugal,” Dr. Melo said.

When the Portuguese provisional government passed a decree that only Portuguese citizens in the diaspora who had left Portugal within the last five years were going to be allowed to cast a ballot, a group started going from door to door in the local Portuguese community to check their eligibility and signing them up to vote.

National interests play a major role in the mobilization as Portuguese-Americans

When they mobilized as Portuguese-Americans, they framed their fight on topics in the national interest of Portugal and the United States.

“They were trying to make political elites in the United States understand that ensuring that Portugal pursuing the democratic non-communism path was in the interest of both countries... in the context of the Cold War and détente in the 1970s, the health of NATO and a number of other aspects,” Dr. Melo said.

She showed a photo and part of the transcript from a meeting between the late Joseph Fernandes – a supermarket magnate and fixture of the Portuguese-American community in Massachusetts –and President Ford in the Oval Office on Sept. 11, 1975, discussing the situation in Portugal at a time when it was feared that communists would gain full control of the country.

Arranged by Cong. Margaret Heckler, who represented Massachusetts' 10th congressional district in the House of Representatives, the local delegation also included Dr. Júlio de Oliveira, president of the Portuguese-American Federation, and Richard Aldrich, co-owner of the Portuguese Times and Portuguese Channel. Among other topics, they hoped to encourage the United States to support the moderate political parties in Lisbon and release the aid packages that were being held because Secretary of State Henry Kissinger thought Portugal was lost to the communists and would inoculate Europe with the virus of communism. They also hoped for financial assistance to be equitably distributed by the Portuguese to the Azoreans.

“Here you see the lobbying in action that is so traditional in the United States,” Dr. Melo said. “The Portuguese-American community leveraged itself through these leaders.”

She said the local Portuguese media also played a role in mobilizing the community, especially the Portuguese Times, the only Portuguese-language newspaper in this region at the time, which not only provided detailed coverage of what was happening, but also expressed its opinions in editorials and urged community members to write to their legislators and participate in demonstrations and events.

“When you start having serious rumbles in the provisional government, with Spínola eventually being removed from that provisional government, you see the Portuguese Times changing stance as well as being very afraid that suddenly this is going too far to the left and there’s too much talk of communism in Lisbon,” she said.

Around that time, representatives from different political parties started coming from Portugal to this region to hold ‘Sessões de Esclarecimento,’ or information sessions, not only to promote their agendas but often to use them as a fundraising effort.

“Very quickly the Portuguese parties that formed immediately after the coup realize that the diaspora can be a gold mine and mobilizing the diaspora will naturally be in their own interest,” Dr. Melo said.

Local Azoreans and the independence movement in the Azores

As Azoreans, the local community mobilized around their Azorean identity and some local organizations collaborated with the independence movement that sprung up in the Azores after the Carnation Revolution.

“We had real transnational activism happening on the question of Azorean interests and Azorean self-determination,” Dr. Melo said.

In May 1974, correspondence between the U.S. Consulate in Ponta Delgada and the U.S. Secretary of State revealed how *Movimento para a Independência dos Açores* (Movement for the Independence of the Azores) officials intended to travel to the United States to obtain support and funds from Azorean-Americans in New England.

“Among others he [MIA official] will talk with Edmund Diniz, New Bedford politician. We believe that idea of independent Azores will be enthusiastically received among Azoreans in the US and that substantial contributions to cause are likely (sic),” according to the correspondence.

Another correspondence alerted to the fact that *Movimento para a Autodeterminação do Povo Açoriano* (Movement for the Self-Determination of the Azorean People) was attempting to persuade Azoreans residing in the United States to write to their congressmen and senators in support of MAPA’s position.

José Almeida, the leader of *Frente de Libertação dos Açores* (Azores Liberation Front), also came to this region to mobilize the diaspora around the question of Azorean independence.

His brother-in-law, Carlos Matos, who lived in Fall River, launched an independent organization called *Comité Açoriano 75*.

“CA 75 will end up operating as the mobilizing and fundraising branch for FLA,” Dr. Melo said.

Dr. Melo said some social clubs and churches were used for Azorean mobilization, giving as an example Reverend Reinaldo Cardoso, a Rhode Island priest who was born in Faial, Azores.

“He was mobilizing his parishioners to actually join the fight for Azorean independence and contribute to it,” she said.

In the summer of 1975, FLA held a demonstration in Washington and about 750 people showed up to demonstrate in front of Congress.

‘This conference is the start of a much longer conversation’

Over the three days, the conference explored the global cause and impact of the Carnation Revolution, while reflecting scholarship on the metropole, the empire and the diaspora.

“Carnation Revolution on April 25, 1974 and the resulting end of the Estado Novo dictatorship and triumph of the democracy can be considered one of the most significant events in the history of the second part of the 20th century,” stressed the Consul of Portugal in New Bedford Tiago Sousa. “In the words of Samuel Huntington, it was the pathway to the third wave of democratization in the world that involved almost 50 countries, spreading to Greece and Spain in Southern Europe and continuing in Brazil and Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia and more recently Africa and the Middle East.”

In addition to examining the impact April 25, 1974 had in the Lusophone diaspora as well as on Luso-American relations, the conference analyzed Africa's role in it and looked at the revolution through the prism of literature and women and gender rights and its global ideological impact.

Dr. Miguel Moniz, an anthropologist at the Social Sciences Institute (ICS) at the University of Lisbon, revealed he is currently researching the various facets how Estado Novo was trying to influence U.S. policy through cultural diplomacy and rebranding strategies.

He said he has been analyzing documents at the archives of the Patriarch of Lisbon and Portugal's Foreign Ministry and collecting local immigrants' oral histories.

“This paper explores how the Estado Novo branding efforts and persuasion operations over decades prior to the revolution shaped our community of immigrants,” said the Falmouth native. “Estado Novo established diplomacy efforts designed to influence U.S. governmental policy toward the regime, and its colonial militaristic ambitions are an overlooked, underexamined variable of the development of Portuguese communities.”

The conference culminated with the roundtable discussion titled “The Carnation Revolution: Community Voices,” featuring Prof. Onésimo Almeida of Brown University, former New Bedford Elections Commissioner Maria Tomásia, Atlantis Charter School FCRC Coordinator Donalda Silva and State Rep. António F. D. Cabral, who shared how they found out about the revolution and some of their memories associated with it.

“This conference is the start of a much longer conversation regarding the global impact of that historic day,” Dr. Novera said.

At the end of the conference, Dr. Moniz told O Jornal this was one of the most interesting conferences he has ever attended.

“It completely transformed the way I think about April 25, 1974,” he said. “Previously, I had thought of April 25 as a fixed moment in time. What this conference really demonstrated was that the actual date, the 25th of April 1974, is really arbitrary in terms of the changes that took place in Portugal. Something significant happened that day, but the reality is that what led up to that day was happening for a while and then it took a long time for things to resolve after that date. So, that wasn't the end of it.”

Another thing he realized was the vast international dimension of the Carnation Revolution.

“What this conference really amply demonstrated was that it is an international revolution,” he said. “First of all, it was within the context of the Cold War, but not only that. It was just not about the USSR, United States and Portugal. You had all these satellites. You had issues in Colonial Africa and interventions by China. But it was also international in terms of the women's rights movement and the gay rights movement. So, there's many dimensions that made it international.”

And finally, he was amazed with the huge role played by the Portuguese diaspora.

“It really made me understand how important the diaspora communities were with the outcomes that were happening in Portugal,” he said. “Obviously, around here it was major because of the whole issue with the Azores and the importance of the Azores to the U.S... This was just an incredible conference, and I learned a great deal.”