

**NOVO BANCO Photo 2015: Ângela Ferreira, Ayrson Heráclito, Edson Chagas**  
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**Languages: English/Portuguese**  
**Pages: 144**  
**2015**

### **Interview with Angela Ferreira**

**Elvira Dyangani Ose:** Not long ago, we discussed Stuart Hall's understanding of the notion of 'post-'. Hall does not refer to the term as 'after' in a chronological sense, or as the consequence of a set of practices that has come to an end, opening up to an absolutely new beginning. On the contrary, for him, 'post-' "always refers to the aftermath or the after-flow of a particular configuration. The impetus which constituted one particular historical or aesthetic moment disintegrates in the form in which we know it."<sup>1</sup>

Your work is concerned with ideas around post-colonialism, using 'post-' in a way that resonates vividly with Hall. Furthermore, your practice engages to some extend with the exploration of a possible 'after post-colonialism' as established by Achille Mbembe in his presentation at the conference, *After Post-Colonialism: Transnationalism or Essentialism?* In which Mbembe interrogates the meaning of the term, 'after post-colonialism'.<sup>2</sup> Mbembe explores – and I am paraphrasing – some of the reasons behind the current rush to declare the end of post-colonialism, and its possible aftermaths, if we are to assume that indeed post-colonialism has passed. If so, he points out, one has to be aware of the heritage it is leaving behind, and to what extend this heritage still dictates how we should think about our lives, how we should act and how we should envision our future, since the work of culture has to do somewhat with the capacity to imagine the future, with futurity.<sup>3</sup> It seems to me that your work is rooted in the paradigm proposed by this set of questions, not necessarily to declare the end of post-colonialism, but to explore the condition of the possibility of that end, while remaining vigilant of the need for a continuous looking to the past, in order to decipher the present and to understand the circumstances of radical contingency that are constitutive of our experience, as Mbembe would put it.

**Ângela Ferreira:** Very broadly speaking, my doctoral research – which includes a written and a sculptural component – is concerned with the exploration of the relationship between my practice and the traces of various theoretical areas that it draws upon. It comes naturally as a continuation of what I have been doing for years. That is to say, simultaneously celebrating and questioning the modern Western art paradigm, as well as crossing this with post-colonial theories that have informed my practice and occupied my readings ever since I started making art. For example, in the sculptural component of a work such as *Maison Tropicale* (2007) there was a conscious and critical use of a minimalist formal language. In this case, pointing towards Minimalism was a useful tool for me as – the same that for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western art narrative represented the epitome of the process of emptying the artwork of content. Almost concurrently, I have always been drawn to and repelled by artists like Donald Judd, who are exemplary in producing amazing sculptural objects, whilst battling for the removal of their content. See for instance, *Double Sided* (1996-97). I do not believe in

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Museums of Modern Art and the End of History' in Campbell, Sarah and Gilane Tawadros, *Annotations 6: Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj: Modernity and Difference*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2001, pp. 8-23.

[http://www.iniva.org/library/archive/people/h/hall\\_stuart/museums\\_of\\_modern\\_art\\_and\\_the\\_end\\_of\\_history](http://www.iniva.org/library/archive/people/h/hall_stuart/museums_of_modern_art_and_the_end_of_history) (accessed, 27/03/15)

<sup>2</sup>Achille Mbembe's presentation as part of the panel, *After Post-Colonialism: Transnationalism or Essentialism?* Convened by Gabriela Salgado and Paul Goodwin, including the contributions of Kader Attia, Ângela Ferreira, Kiluanji Kia Henda and Zac Ové, at Tate Modern, 8 May 2010, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/after-post-colonialism-transnationalism-or-essentialism-video-recordings> (accessed, 27/03/15)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

objects without content. And so the whole premise of *Maison Tropicale*, despite its minimalist sculptural rendition, is pregnant with intentional post-colonial meaning. It traces colonial and neo-colonial relationships between Africa and the West: historically, politically and economically.

To answer your question, I must also confess that it was only at that point in my practice – around 2008 – that I noticed changes within the post-colonial discourse and became curious about its shifting focus and more fluid approaches – I am not sure I can agree with the so-called end of post-colonialism, in any case, because in places like Portugal, its theory is still relevant and necessary. In my research I am simply trying to explore current positions and understand the sense of the ‘now’ contained within the discourse in relation to my practice. The new artwork I present in the show entitled, *A tendency to forget* (2015), which constitutes the practical component of my dissertation, is a very conscious reflection of this exploration. Going back to your question and thinking on how in my own practice, over the years, each work has added something towards defining an operative area of knowledge and content, demanding to be activated or criticised within that very area, then I do think its possible to see praxis and every artwork as an episteme. But I should also add that having no training in philosophy, I would be too shy to use such ‘philosophic’ terminology!

**EDO:** Indeed, I appreciate that the scope of your practice is not to establish itself as an episteme, but the truth is that in preventing things of the past to fall into oblivion, it questions, as you have just mentioned, the so-called end of a post-colonial era, as well as providing us with specific knowledge about the past that is absolutely determinant for our present time. Here the connection with both Hall and Mbembe, but particularly to Mbembe’s critique of the possible end of the post-colonial, his persistence on remembering the aftermaths of the colonial era and his claim to a certain awareness of the violence that those aftermaths continue to inflict on our lives, is palpable. Episteme is achieved in your reflection on the Portuguese systems of power that persist over and over again in forgetting certain historical moments transcendental to the understanding and interpretation of what being Portuguese means, of what is inherent to that cultural identity.

Your most recent works, *A tendency to forget* (2015) and *Messy colonialism; Wild decolonization* (2015) return to some aspects of Portuguese colonial history, in these particular cases, exploring anecdotes of the colonisers, exposing their weakness, their humanness, which do not prevent them – at least in the case of *A tendency to forget* (2015) – to hold a double standard or hidden agenda. Your work has managed to do what other artists in this country – with the exception of African artists living and working between Portugal and some of its former colonies, like Angola and Mozambique, such as, Nástio Mosquito, Kiluanji Kia Henda, among others – seem to be constantly avoiding: confronting their colonial past. How would you explain that abiding resistance?

**AF:** I have asked myself that question again and again during the making of this new work. You may recall that in preparation for the film component of the new sculpture I made a teaser with the following title: *Jorge and Margot Dias; Adventures in Mozambique and the Portuguese tendency to forget* (2013). In fact, this has been a recurring question for me over the past twenty years. When I first arrived in Portugal in the early 1990s, I was surprised to encounter an art milieu that was mostly adverse to thinking politically. At the time, I related that fact to a delayed counter reaction or backlash to the period after the revolution called PREC, *Processo Revolucionário em Curso* [Ongoing Revolutionary Process] – which stands for the period of experimentation in which the extreme left governed, following the 1974 *Coup d'État* which put an end to the dictatorship and paved the way to the so-called process of decolonisation. What was really strange to me, however, was the fact that everything that has to do with Africa was completely out of the cultural debate.

Generally, artists were – as the majority of people in the country were – turned towards Europe, towards the West, in the hope of gaining a place in the international art scene. The

favoured content of artworks was situated in the area of philosophy and poetry; none of which I could really identify with. Issues around Portugal's colonial history or the so-called decolonising process were almost taboo. The *retornados* – the expression used by the Portuguese to identify citizens that have “returned” from the ex-colonies upon the hasty and messy independence processes – were in the process of completing difficult and traumatic adaptations and were very hesitant to voice any issues regarding the euphemistically dubbed ‘process of decolonisation’. Most artists, critics and thinkers had no interest in the post-colonial debate as it was strengthening internationally – of course, there were a few incredible exceptions, which were vital to my survival, such as Manuela Ribeiro Sanches and José Antonio Fernandes Dias. The post-colonial discourse was almost treated as an unfashionable concern. This was shocking for someone like myself who had just arrived from an intense political milieu like South Africa. Carving out an area of a new discourse, it felt very lonely at times. However this is precisely the time when I produced a work called *Amnesia* (1997), which displayed images and artifacts pertaining to that unquestioned colonial history. Probing the almost intentional forgetfulness or omission. At the time these images of colonial cities were presented as items for an acceptable public nostalgia! These images reappear, with a different emphasis, in this new work. Thinking about it now, I realise how crucial that time was.

I have always found it difficult to reconcile the fact that those revolutionaries that overthrew the dictatorship were mostly the same people who engineered the wild decolonisation process that followed. It always amuses me to think that, if there would have not been a war in Africa – the so-called Overseas War – there would not have been a *Coup d'État* as we know it. The Portuguese attempt to erase colonial history and sweep some of its darkest episodes under the carpet was a deliberate political omission – there was no commission for truth and reconciliation, for instance. This omission occurred at a time in which some of its fundamental players – politically conservative ex-colonial masters – reinvented themselves in the local political context. They aimed to put forward theories about the ‘softness’ of Portuguese colonial methods, opening up the country, its memory and its future to a neo-liberalist and neo-colonialist agenda that installed itself as an almost redeemed history.

However, I do have to point out that slowly and belatedly this situation has changed. As you well know, some of the artists mentioned above and local artists and thinkers have done a great deal of questioning and revealing of this history. To some extend, we are experiencing Stuart Hall’s notion of ‘aftermaths’ of the post-colonial, as you mentioned above. In an ironic twist of history, countries like Angola and their economic buoyancy have became desirable again to Portugal. Those countries represent nowadays the growing market, increasing employing fields and, finally, they are new investors coming to invest in the former colonial metropolis. The politics of economic power has changed. As society changes, so the first generation of Portuguese citizens of African descent become more vocal. The combination is a remarkable *tour de force*. Portugal is finally getting on with the business of digesting its colonial past in a more critical manner. However, a more nuanced reflection on the process of decolonisation is yet to be established. This is where the work you just mentioned, *Messy colonialism; Wild decolonization* (2015) comes in. The period remains mostly an un-reviewed issue in history. Although too much time has elapsed, I dare to say that the day in which this will change will soon come.