

FRAMER FRAMED in *A TENDENCY TO FORGET**Patrícia Leal¹***ABSTRACT:**

Intrigued by the absence of a critical discourse about Portugal's colonial history whilst recognising the need to question representations of the past in order to get a different understanding of the present, the artist Ângela Ferreira has consistently engaged with episodes of Portuguese colonial history to point to its lacunae or inconsistencies. Evoking, Trinh T. Minh-ha's book title, this paper focuses on how, in the artwork *A Tendency to Forget*, Ângela Ferreira subverts and reverses the ethnographer's gaze taking the ethnographic work of Jorge and Margot Dias into her research subject.

Not completely acritical to anthropology and its primitivisms, modern ethnography and its methodologies (as seen by James Clifford), after the 1960s, seemed an increasingly suitable area for artists to work with in order to respond to a fragmented world. Participant observation, fieldwork and the archive were thus adopted as methodological tools to experience, interpret and represent different cultures.

Since the 1980s the 'archival impulse' has become central to many contemporary art practices. The retrieval of lost historical information and the will to establish links between different events are some of the strands of this practice as defined by art the critic Hal Foster in his seminal essay. For the curator Mark Godfrey, working with ruins and fragments of the past and appropriations of the archive are important tools for the 'artists as historians' who through their work propose an 'alternative' knowledge of history.

The work *A Tendency to Forget* is part of Ferreira's practice-based PhD research, in which, by focusing on the ethnographic work of Jorge and Margot Dias, the artist points to the hidden political agenda of their fieldwork in Mozambique. The work is an invitation to think about the past, to establish connections between events, characters and objects and to assemble these into an 'alternative' narrative of the colonial past and memory, different from the version disseminated in the wider cultural field.

KEYWORDS: art - ethnography – colonial – archival – memory

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As a Zen saying goes, “Never take the finger pointing to the moon for the moon itself.” While rendering Difference visible and audible in my films (as well as in my books and poems), I also have to move on, repeating what is shown or said earlier in different contexts, so as to remind the viewer that the not-quite-not-yet-it is always present.²

In his seminal essay *An Archival Impulse*, Hal Foster identifies some of the lines that define the archival turn in contemporary art. According to the art critic, this kind of art practice restores historical memories that might be lost, by making them physically present and by placing the information in new contexts to be interpreted by viewers. It also evinces the will to establish connections and to relate different events and meanings to art work (Foster, 2004). Such an approach to the historical archive produces new narratives and creates new fictions participating and transforming the visible, the ‘sayable’ and the thinkable in what has been defined by Jacques Rancière as ‘political art’ (Rancière, 2008).

The archive is intimately linked to the idea of transmission and memory and several authors warn us against the instability and fragmentary nature of the archive. Michel Foucault has defined the archive as being ‘the law of what can be said’ that governs what is said, transformed, used and conserved (Foucault, 2006, p. 28). That is, a set of statements that structure a discourse in relation to a given period and culture. Thus, emerges the tendentious feature of the archive which compels us to question the ideological impulse that presides over the apparently innocent activity of selecting the ‘truth’ documents which will be integrated in the archive. According to Derrida the ‘economy of memory’ directs us to the place where the memory of society is deposited, becoming an important zone of interaction insofar as contents of archives provide a means through which people can question history and position themselves in relation to it (Derrida, 2006). The intensification of the interest in archives becomes quite evident if one considers the art practices and research projects, exhibitions and publications of recent decades.

Indeed, the practice of ‘unarchiving’ imposed itself on contemporary art practice from the 1980’s onwards, inaugurating an approach between art and anthropology. In truth, artists had already started adopting ethnography’s theoretical and methodological tools in the 1960’s. At that stage modern ethnography, according to James Clifford, was taken-up by contemporary artists because it was particularly suitable to address the fragmentary and chaotic world. ‘Participant observation’ and field work became

² Minh-Ha, Trinh T (1992). *Framer Framed*. New York: Routledge, p. 186

methodological tools for artists to experience, interpret and represent different cultures. Adopting and extending both aesthetical and topographical concerns of the site-specific, artists began dealing with issues such as absence, loss, memory and marginality, adding the social and political dimension of history and human memory (Dias, 2002). These overlaps are also associated with the topics and agenda of contemporary anthropology namely globalisation, emigration, identity, popular culture, post-colonialism, gender and power (de Almeida, 2013). While cautious with some of the proposals of the ethnographic turn in art, Hal Foster asserted that within the framework of the 'artist as ethnographer' the Other would cease to be defined according to the economical position in society and could begin to be defined according to his/her cultural identity (Foster, 1996). The homeless, migrants, subaltern and others living at the margins of society would occupy the place of the proletariat in the author-producer model predicted by Walter Benjamin in 1934.

When analysing contemporary art practice in Portugal, much attention has been given to the practice of 'unarchiving' that denounces an overlap between anthropology's field of studies and that of the visual arts. But instead of casting their gaze towards distant realities, artists do their fieldwork at home, repatriating that same gaze (Dias, 2002). As the anthropologist Sónia Vespeira de Almeida reminds us, convoking 'culture' as their object³ in a 'return of the real' (Foster, 1996, de Almeida 2013).

The work of the Portuguese-South African visual artist Ângela Ferreira (born in Mozambique) crosses narratives of colonialism, post-colonialism and decolonisation with moments of art history, such as modernism and minimalism, through installations which combine photography, film and sculpture that denote her manifested interest in architecture and design (Marmeleira, 2015). Her large-scale sculptures function as an overlay and transposition of her references and departure points in terms of archival documents and objects which are cited in the work. Many of Ferreira's artworks demonstrate the will to establish connections and offer 'alternative readings' (Foster, 2004) of issues and episodes of Portugal's colonial past and memory drawn from her own experiences⁴.

Despite the international pressure to decolonise, especially by the ONU, Portugal kept its colonies until 1974, after all other major European colonial empires had been dismantled. To repress the liberation movements that the former colonies began showing, Portugal embarked on a war Portugal that lasted 13 years. The end of the colonial war and the independence of the former colonies were the main reasons that lead to the revolution in April 1974. The Portuguese retreat from its former African colonies might have been forgotten amidst the social and political upheaval that the country underwent in the aftermath of the revolution up to the first elections in 1976, and the restructuring of the State from dictatorship to democracy. The social and

³ The anthropologist refers to the argument expressed by Marcus and Myers (1995) in *The Traffic in Culture. Refiguring Art and Anthropology*.

⁴ Since earlier artworks such as *Emigração* (1994), *Amnesia* (1997) to the latest *Messy Colonialism; Wild Decolonization* (2015) and *A Tendency to Forget* (2015).

historical process of decolonisation was controversial and is generally considered to have been poorly managed, mainly due to its political and social outcomes for the countries and its residents. Memories of colonialism, Salazarism, the colonial war and the revolution are still very present in Portugal's contemporary society. It is still a recent past, many of the protagonists are still alive and the consequences are still being felt. However, there is an overall absence of analysis of this historical period and of the relations between Portugal and the African countries. The lack of a theoretical debate over the past is common to many former colonising countries, a fact identified by Homi Bhabha as a 'conspiracy of silence' (Bhabha, 2004). The long absence of a discourse with regard to the past is equally matched with the absence of thought and analysis of the country's post-colonial condition.

The historical review of the past is often rejected because its histories, events and processes are considered difficult, uncomfortable and perhaps even unspeakable. According to Elisabeth Edwards and Matt Mead this results in a tendency to elide negative histories and towards deliberate politics of structured collective amnesia (Edwards and Mead, 2013). In effect, upon entering into the European Union, Portugal had to delete, silence or transform its colonial memory in order to create a coherence between the past and the narrative of the present. Colonial experiences and memories thus became a hidden social memory (Almeida, 2002).

The long-felt gap in the debate over Portugal's colonial past has been filled by a growing academic and artistic interest in the topics of colonisation, decolonisation and the related historical, economic, political and social aspects both in Portugal and its former colonies. Within the humanities, Literature took upon the subject of the colonial war already during the conflict itself and after the revolution of 1974. But this was not the case for the Visual Arts. According to Miguel Amado, the modernist myth of autonomy of the cultural object in the 1970's and 1980's discouraged the engagement with politically charged topics (Amado, 2012). The missing engagement with this troublesome and difficult recent past may be interpreted as shame or taboo, as suggested by the title of Miguel Gomes's film *Tabu* (2012).

Ângela Ferreira lived between Europe and Africa, first Mozambique then South Africa where she witnessed the Apartheid at its height. Having received her formal artistic education in South Africa where she also witnessed the transition to a post-Apartheid society, Ferreira was thus exposed early-on to the post-colonial discourse. Upon arriving in Portugal in the early 1990's, it soon became clear to the artist that postcolonial critique was still very much absent from the wider Portuguese cultural sphere. Aware that her 'hybrid' identity, acquired through her family's geographical dislocations between Mozambique, South-Africa and Portugal, would enable her a double-sided position and critical insider / outsider perspective, the artist consciously decided to position her artistic practice in this context, contributing to the development

of the post-colonial debate in Portugal and paving the way for a younger generation of Artists.⁵

Ferreira's installation *Amnesia* (1997) addresses two contradicting tendencies in Portuguese society of the time; one that tried to relive personal colonial memories and another that attempted to whitewash the image of António de Oliveira Salazar and his dictatorship by simply trying to forget the unresolved relationship the country maintained with its colonial past. The work's starting point was a documentary film entitled *Mozambique - On the Other Side of Time* which shows Mozambique during the late 1960's and the early 1970's. The images appeal to a sense of Portuguese nostalgia and present the Mozambique as a peaceful, cosmopolitan and radiant El Dorado, quiescently cohabited by various cultures; even though the footage was filmed during the country's war for independence from Portugal. Ferreira's installation shows a space divided in two, which can be seen as evoking a self-reflective stance and the double sidedness of any given reality including her own. In one side of the installation space, three wood trunks point to the colonial enterprise of timber extraction and consequently to the exploitation of Mozambique's resources and labour force by the colonial powers. On the opposite side of the space, a shelf displays three enamel figures by the 19th century ceramist Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro.⁶ The figures represent Ngungunhane, the last African leader to be captured by the Portuguese in an episode that would be used publicly to exemplify Portugal's capacity to guarantee its dominance over the indigenous population. The leader is thus represented in this process of subjugation and the figures are ironically titled *Ngungunhane Before*, *Ngungunhane After* and *Hurrah Portugal*. In front of the shelf, several chairs made of African wood but clearly replicating a Western rustic style constitute a reference to her own family environment and are placed around a TV set, inviting viewers to sit and watch the documentary film. *Amnesia* thus addresses Portugal's presence in Africa and the related social, cultural, political and economic aspects of its colonialism. This installation in which the artist uses the personal and autobiographical to reflect, without any complacency, on the colonial past, hints at the critical lacunae in Portuguese society still incapable of critically reflecting on its relationship with the Other and trying to forget this contested past.

⁵ Homi Bhabha, a leading figure of the postcolonial discourse, notably put forward concepts such as 'hybridity', 'double-sidedness' and 'in-between spaces', which together with self-reflection became fundamental corner-stones of the post-colonial discourse.

⁶ Bordalo Pinheiro used his figures as socio-political commentary and satire and is renowned for his caricature 'Zé Povinho', the personification of Portugal's people that emphasises their virtues and flaws.



Fig. 1 – Ângela Ferreira, *Amnesia*, 1997

Installation view, *Da solidão do lugar a um horizonte de fugas*, Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, 2012/13 | Photo: David Rato | Courtesy of the artist

In the 1990's, the post-colonial debate, from a theoretical or even artistic point of view, was rather incipient in Portugal, contrary to what was happening in other former colonial countries. It was mainly thanks to scholars like José António Dias and Manuela Ribeiro Sanches that the critical debate around the country's colonial past was initiated. In fact, it was an article published in Ribeiro Sanches's 2006 book *Portugal não é um país pequeno*,⁷ by Harry G. West, an American anthropologist and academic, that was the starting point of the research that led to one of Ferreira's most recent installations titled *A tendency to forget* (2015), upon which we shall focus below.⁸

The work is the result of a long investigative project within the framework of a doctoral thesis concerned with the question of how research-based art practice can contribute to rethinking the post-colonial condition. The installation presents features familiar to Ferreira's work: a sculpture that begins from a reflection on architecture, because as the artist states, 'buildings can be read as political texts' (Ferreira, 2014), the sculpture serving also as a screening surface only this time the structure is raised from

⁷ Literally meaning 'Portugal is not a small country', which refers to a famous propagandistic slogan of the political regime of Estado Novo led by the dictator António de Oliveira Salazar between 1933 and 1974. The sentence used to appear alongside an image that superimposed the territories of the Portuguese Colonies - Angola, Mozambique, S.Tomé, Guinea-Bissau, Timor and Goa - to the map of Europe, comparing the scale of the Portuguese Territories overseas with Europe.

⁸ The work was developed within the framework of the doctoral theses and was shown at 'Museu Coleção Berardo' in Lisbon (June/October 2015) having been nominated for and finally receiving the 'Novo Banco Photo Award' 2015.

the ground.⁹ A staircase invites viewers to ascend into a small-scale auditorium in which a short video is shown, to which we will return later. In the photographic documentation that accompanies the installation and complements the conceptual reading we see what inspired the sculpture, the façade of the building that housed the former Overseas Ministry (Ministério do Ultramar). The building, which currently houses the Defence Ministry, is located in the Lisbon borough of Restelo directly opposite the Museum of Ethnology which is also shown in the photographs. The Museum of Ethnology was founded in 1965 and was in the initial years run by the renowned Portuguese anthropologist António Jorge Dias. Through the assemblage of different elements, namely sculpture, photography and video, the artist points to the relationship between the anthropologist and the political regime of Estado Novo. This link was first established by Harry West in his article *Inverting the Camel's Hump. Jorge Dias, His Wife, Their Interpreter and I*.

Margot Dias, Jorge Dias's wife, was a German ethnomusicologist turned ethnographic filmmaker. The couple met in Germany where Jorge Dias had studied between 1938 and 1944. Sometime after his return to Portugal Jorge Dias was invited to lead the Mission for the Study of Ethnic Minorities, also known as MEMEUP¹⁰. This mission was part of the Social and Political Study Centre of the Overseas Research Committee¹¹ integrated into the Higher Institute for Overseas Studies¹² which in turn functioned under the Overseas Ministry. It was in this context that the Dias team, composed of Jorge Dias, his wife Margot and Manuel Viegas Guerreiro, performed fieldwork in Northern Mozambique between 1956 and 1961 with the purpose of studying the Makonde people.

The study was published in four volumes under the title *Os Maconde de Moçambique* between 1964 and 1970 and became a classic in Portuguese anthropology which brought the team widespread recognition from academia and peers (West, 2006). During his own research in Mozambique on the Makonde and having encountered the same translator that the Dias team had worked with, Harry West found that their presence and work was continuously and inevitably evoked by the people he encountered. Subsequently West decided to make the two Portuguese ethnographers his own subject and researched extensively on Jorge Dias and his team. What emerged by the end of West's investigation was that following each field trip to Mozambique for the Mission, the Jorge Dias team prepared a 'confidential' report which was submitted to the Overseas Ministry. It is the contents of these reports (in some ways considered 'explosive') that, according to West, gained Dias the critique of betraying the trust of his ethnographic informants and of collaborating with the Portuguese colonialist regime.

⁹ See other works by the artist such as *Collapsing Structures/Talking Buildings* (2012), *Messy Colonialism, Wild Decolonization* (2015), *Revolutionary Traces* (2014), *Independence Cha Cha* (2014), *Mount Mabú* (2013).

¹⁰ Missão de Estudos de Minorias Étnicas (MEMEUP)

¹¹ Centro de Estudos Políticos e Sociais da Junta de Investigação do Ultramar (CEPS)

¹² Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos

Along the path initiated by Harry West, in *A Tendency to Forget* Ângela Ferreira also reverses the ethnographic gaze, transforming the work of Jorge and Margot Dias into her research subject. The reversal strategies are multiple. To contradict the repeated and widely acknowledged statements by the Diasés themselves, who claimed that their work was apolitical, the artist introduces the hidden agenda of the field trips. Presenting the contents of the confidential political reports written by Jorge Dias and revealing parts of Margot Dias' field diaries which she kept during her five trips to Mozambique. In the video,¹³ the content of the two written sources are narrated respectively by a male and a female voice, the latter with a noticeable German accent. What is striking is the contradictory nature of the contents which reveal the complexities of 'resisting' and at the same time 'working with' and 'within' the constraints of the political regime with the 'natural' consequences. Indeed, while they provided information of a political nature, they didn't refrain from criticising the Portuguese colonists, who according to them were rude, brutal, uneducated and racist. They also criticised the colonial policies of forced labour, education and price control.¹⁴ Passages like the following are revealing of the duplicity, ambiguity and ambivalence of the Diasés project:

'Although we are not politicians, and we are reluctant to venture into domains unrelated to our professional interests, we are required to do so, given the close relationship between the political and the social.'¹⁵

António Jorge Dias, Manuel Viegas Guerreiro and Margot Schmidt Dias. Campaign Reports. 1959.

Visually, Ferreira interweaves Margot Dias' ethnographic films on the puberty rites of the Makonde people with images from the aforementioned documentary film *Mozambique - On the Other Side of Time*, the same documentary film the artist had used in her installation *Amnesia* (1997). Thus, the reading of Jorge Dias' secret reports is played over the footage filmed by Margot Dias, while the narration of the filmmaker's diary entries accompanies the footage of the commercially produced documentary portraying the life of the colonisers in Mozambique. The fact that footage in the documentary was shot more or less at the same time the team travelled to Mozambique means the two types of footage function together as a device that 'frames the framer'.

¹³ The video integrating the installation *A tendency to Forget* is separately named *Adventures in Mozambique and the Portuguese Tendency to Forget*

¹⁴ According to Harry West the content of the political reports in itself may have not been of great political relevance. In his own words "any fair judgement of the confidential reports of the MEMEUP must lead to the conclusion that the gathering of confidential information by Dias' team was little efficient, if not mediocre" (p. 167) (the author's translation)

¹⁵ Narration in the video *Adventures in Mozambique and the Portuguese Tendency to Forget*, 2015 by Ângela Ferreira referring to an excerpt of the 1959 Campaign Report by António Jorge Dias, Manuel Viegas Guerreiro and Margot Schmidt Dias for MEMEUP/CEPS



Fig. 2 Ângela Ferreira, *A Tendency to Forget*, 2015
Installation view, Novo Banco Photo 2015, Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon.
Photo: Jorge Silva | Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 3 Ângela Ferreira, *Adventures in Mozambique and the Portuguese Tendency to Forget*, 2015 | Video Still | Courtesy of the artist

Margot Dias' ethnographic films on the Makonde do not include anyone else's point of view other than the ethnographer's, who masked herself under the pretension of objectivity. Because the use of Margot Dias' archival imagery, withdrawn from the social context in which it was filmed and unaccompanied by any written 'expert' commentary would tend to a merely artistic or exotic appropriation, Ferreira resorts to the pixelization of the shown bodies and faces of the Makonde people.

Of course, from our present standpoint we cannot look uncritically at the anthropological work and ethnographic films of the Dias. But in order to fully understand the approach to their field of study, whether in Portugal or Mozambique, we can and should comprehend the temporal and geo-political framework in which this work was produced to realise the imbrications between the ethnographic endeavour and the social and political context within which it was made and funded. It is this relation that Ângela Ferreira hints at in her installation. *A Tendency to Forget* is, as mentioned before, part of her doctoral dissertation and is therefore part of a larger research-based project accompanied by a written work that enables the artist to present her arguments and the problematisation of the issues she wanted to raise with her installation. First there was the invisible link between ethnography and politics and, in this specific case, between ethnography and colonialism. Ferreira thus devises a form to make these covert links visible by questioning the work of Margot and Jorge Dias. The fact that Jorge Dias's work occupies, within the Portuguese Academy, a high-regarded position becomes therefore problematic but reveals at the same time the persistent inability to review official versions of the past. Secondly is the fact that Margot Dias' films, shot during her field missions between 1956 and 1960, were never part of the much-acclaimed monograph published by her husband on the Makonde people and therefore do not reflect the most recent approaches to anthropological studies already in use at the time the films were produced. Margot Dias' films are today an object on its own, contradicting the notion defended within the field that ethnographic films – even in its purest forms – must be accompanied by texts.

The anthropologist Catarina Alves Costa reminds that it is important to consider that such films or footage are to be understood today as visual records of human activities, unmediated observation of the 'real' where the camera is seen as a tool to register and keep data on culture(s). The images are supposed to be complemented with other documents, drawings, photographs and objects.¹⁶ Alves Costa who has also researched extensively on the ethnographic legacies of the Dias team, asserts that Margot Dias' collaboration with the German Scientific Film Institute of Göttingen (IWF)¹⁷ in the creation of the *Encyclopaedia Cinematographica*, must also be mentioned in order to understand how the influences of German ethnographic filmmaking shaped Margot's own approach and way of filming. From a theoretical and methodological point of view, the German encyclopaedic ethnography operated on strict principles in close relation to the discipline of classic Ethnology. These sought high scientific quality, faithful reproduction of 'reality' and abolished any kind of staging or additions in the editing process or interference with the filmed subjects. (Costa, 2012). Had Margot Dias done the films today, she would have probably included her own commentaries and we would have been able to engage with her own subjectivity.

¹⁶ Alves Costa references Margaret Mead, one of the first anthropologists to include visual technologies in her work from the 1950's onwards, according to whom films served the purpose not of simply observing but rather to register and annotate for subsequent repetition and analysis to be delivered in the written form.

¹⁷ Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, based in Göttingen, Germany.

How can black people, who are really kind to children and sick people, have respect for whites? It really hurts.¹⁸

Margot Dias. Field Diaries. 1957-61

Far from revealing an empathic or self-reflexive approach, Margot Dias' films were made possible through funding by the dominant colonial regime. Watching the films today by themselves, only emphasizes a voyeuristic perspective and the double position of authority, that of the ethnographers and of the colonizers. In fact, at most, the filmed initiation rituals reveal, according to Ferreira, a certain Nostalgia for the lost 'primitive' innocence of the Makonde people and would have not been otherwise accessible to the white man, least woman. Thus a scientific endeavour possible only due to the unequal power relations at play in which ethnography is used to validate colonialism without which there would have been no ethnography (Ferreira, 2015). Ferreira resorts to another ethnographic filmmaker, namely Jean Rouch to base her arguments. Notably, the anthropologist worked extensively in several African countries, including Mozambique. Conscious of the shortcomings of the ethnographic film, the Frenchman who is known for revolutionising the methods of ethnographic filmmaking and introducing reverse anthropological methods, started to include interviews in his films, as replacement of an accompanying text.

On the other hand, the fact that Jorge Dias trained as an Ethnologist within the German academia, can therefore not be neglected, insofar as it may have shaped his understanding of popular culture as always under the threat of technological and social transformation and therefore in need of being documented as a means of preservation. This was in fact the attitude towards the Makonde, and according to today's academic criteria such attitude fails to acknowledge or identify the impact of the cultural dominance of the colonial project.

Expeditions with scientific and ethnographic purposes gave rise to different archives, which according to Manuel Ribeiro Sanches, must not be seen separately from their instrumental function of legitimising racialism in representations of 'underdeveloped' cultures that were subordinated and silenced by traditional historiography (Sanches, 2012). The viewer of ethnographic films was commonly subjected to the hegemonic Eurocentric perspective on the distant and 'exotic' Africa, which accentuated I/Other dichotomies. As James Clifford asserted 'ethnographic texts are orchestrations of multi-vocal exchanges occurring in politically charged situations. The subjectivities produced in these often-unequal exchanges are constructed domains of truth, serious fictions.' (Clifford, 1988, p. 10). New techniques of writing about culture have surfaced in anthropology, from extensive fieldwork, self-reflexivity, participant observation, to a dialogical or 'speaking nearby' system. These constitute some of the methods that have been explored in an attempt to minimise the power relations between the anthropologists and the people subjected to the authority of the anthropological discourse. The concept of 'speaking nearby', coined by Trinh Minh-Ha in her film

¹⁸ Narration in the video *Adventures in Mozambique and the Portuguese Tendency to Forget*, 2015 by Ângela Ferreira referring to an excerpt of Margot Dias field diaries between 1957-1961.

Reassemblage (1982), acknowledges the impossibility of speaking ‘about’ or ‘for’ the Other in ethnographic representations. Instead she calls for a bringing of the self into play, a self-reflexive model by which ‘the “core” of representation is the reflexive interval.’ (Minh-Ha, 1991, p.48). This reflexive interval touches on Homi Bhabha’s ‘in-between’ space or third space – a place where borders are hybrid thus facilitating the emergence of new identities (Bhabha, 2004).

Ferreira has repeatedly indicated Hal Foster’s 1996-text an essential reference to address cultural identity and relations of alterity between Africa and Europe. Indeed, in the postcolonial context, artists and critics have become increasingly aware of the impossibility of speaking of the Other or the flaws of taking the Other or their culture as the subject of analysis. Such an approach does tend to a voyeuristic attitude all the more emphasized by the evidence, as James Clifford put it, that the Westerners are not the only ones travelling across the world (Clifford, 1998).

The works by Ângela Ferreira analysed here cover a timespan of eighteen years and enable us to see how colonial matters in Portugal are still animated by amnesia and nostalgia. Indeed, one might identify different trends of modern postcolonial nostalgia as part of a generalised ‘structure of feelings’ (Williams 1977, Walder. 2011). How contemporary artists are using Nostalgia as a tool for critical reflection on the historical past is not the scope of this paper and will be addressed elsewhere. However, from a critical point of view, the occurrence of postcolonial nostalgias seem to be, according to Pamila Gupta, gaining some popularity in recent decades as the end of colonialisms become distant in time (Gupta, 2008). Paul Gilroy instead has asserted that, in the case of Britain, postcolonial melancholia reveals the impossibility of letting go of the imperial past and is at the origin of neo-imperialistic impulses (2006).

For the art critic Mark Godfrey, the appropriation of the archive and work around the ruins of the past is an important methodological research tool for the ‘artist-historian’ who proposes an alternative knowledge of history. Godfrey reminds us that knowledge is always a process of learning and unlearning which, for the artist-historian, is a continuous process of questioning not only what we know but also how we came to know what we know (Godfrey, 2007). Precisely because the unlearning of the past is still imperative; according to Ferreira it is still required in order to engage with post-colonial theory (Ose, 2015). Hence the act of looking at the past beyond the official and often not so transparent narrative, full of lacunae, is an imperative in order to gain a different understanding of the present. In *A Tendency to Forget*, Ângela Ferreira proposes an artistic enquiry through colonial knowledge, archives and the history of scientific museology. The artist doesn’t refrain from delivering a critical view on the regulating and fragmentary nature of the archive while, at the same time, reflecting on the complexity of its images whose aesthetic codes and operability the artist subverts and reverses. The installation draws a narrative thread across different stories, connections and images inviting viewers to reconstruct **what the story was or could be and** to assemble an ‘alternative’ history from the montage of the different elements. The work thus suggests new ways of looking at the past that can be absorbed in the present in order to imagine a memory for the future that can honestly tell the history of our colonial legacy, leaving aside any self-indulgencies. In a recent conversation with the

artist, she mentioned a passage in Margot Dias' diaries in which the ethnographer reflects on the mistakes they made in their fieldwork and how they could have improved them. Indeed, projects like *A Tendency to Forget* are essential, if only for what the trajectories of failure they reveal will open up.

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