

REVISTA
DE
**CULTURA
VISUAL**

e-ISSN 2184-1284

No. 13 | 2024

A Tendency to Forget: Repairing (the) Past to Resist Forgetting. Interview With Artist Ângela Ferreira
A Tendency to Forget: Reparar (n)o Passado Para Resistir ao Esquecimento. Entrevista com a Artista Ângela Ferreira

<https://doi.org/10.21814/vista.5524>

e024007

Viviane Almeida 

Conceptualisation, investigation, methodology, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing

Lurdes Macedo 

Conceptualisation, investigation, methodology, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing

Renata Flaiban Zanete 

Conceptualisation, investigation, methodology, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing



© Authors

A Tendency to Forget: Repairing (the) Past to Resist Forgetting. Interview With Artist Ângela Ferreira

<https://doi.org/10.21814/vista.5524>

Vista No. 13 | January – June 2024 | e024007

Submitted: 19/12/2023 | Reviewed: 08/01/2024 | Accepted: 10/01/2024 |

Published: 29/05/2024

Viviane Ferreira de Almeida

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3779-4890>

Centro de Estudos Humanísticos, Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas,
Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

Conceptualisation, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing –
review and editing

Lurdes Macedo

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1577-1313>

Centro de Investigação em Comunicação Aplicada, Cultura e Novas Tecnologias,
Universidade Lusófona, Porto, Portugal

Conceptualisation, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing –
review and editing

Renata Flaiban Zanete

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5241-7823>

Centro de Estudos Humanísticos, Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas,
Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

Conceptualisation, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing –
review and editing

Introduction: Reinterpreting Portuguese Colonial Archives as a Form of Reparation

During the "Summer School in Communication and Culture for Development"¹, held at the University of Minho in 2020, the researchers who conducted this interview were engaged in the project *Cultures, Past & Present* (2018–2022). Specifically, their focus was on understanding the history, memory, and narratives surrounding ethnology museums in Portugal and Mozambique. Margot Dias' groundbreaking contributions in integrating ethnographic film into studies with the Makonde people of Mozambique naturally emerged as a central aspect of the research, connected with Jorge Dias' major role in establishing the Museum of Ethnology in Lisbon. As the research progressed, two researchers and artists emerged who had significant engagement with the Dias couple's ethnographic missions, particularly focusing on Margot's role, albeit with very different approaches: anthropologist and filmmaker Catarina Alves Costa², a professor at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at Nova University of Lisbon, and artist Ângela Ferreira, a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Lisbon. The exploratory study into Ângela Ferreira's artistic career soon highlighted the importance of engaging with this creator. It was within this context that the interview presented here was conducted, spanning two sessions on November 12 and 19, 2020, yet retaining the relevance of the themes and issues discussed. In fact, these topics and concerns are very much on the agenda, especially considering the recent momentum given to the debate on historical reparations in Portugal after the President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, expressed his endorsement for such reparations to the former colonies during a meeting with foreign journalists on April 23, 2024.

After embarking on a journey that some authors (e.g., Marmeleira, 2015; Ribeiro, 2020) have characterised as solitary and misunderstood for over two decades, Ângela Ferreira exhibited the installation *A Tendency to Forget* in 2015 (Figure 1). It was the culmination of an extensive research project that would form the basis of her doctoral thesis³, defended the following year. *A Tendency to Forget* is an *in situ* installation featuring a large-scale sculptural structure whose architecture evokes the imposing building of the former Ministry of Overseas Territories, flanked by seven photographs depicting that same building or the neighbouring building of the National Museum of Ethnology. A spiral staircase invites the public to climb up from the floor to the interior of the sculptural structure, where a mini-auditorium awaits them and where they can watch the

¹Undertaken at the Communication and Society Research Centre of the University of Minho, with funding provided by the "Summer With Science" programme of the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

²Refer to "Autoria em Margot Dias Pela Lente Revivesciente da Pós-Memória" (Authorship in Margot Dias Through the Reviving Lens of Post-Memory; Almeida et al., 2023).

³*O Discurso Artístico Como Dispositivo de Inovação na Discussão do Após Pós-Colonialismo* (The Artistic Discourse as a Device for Innovation in the Discussion of Postcolonialism; Ferreira, 2016), presented to the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon, includes *A Tendency to Forget* as an artistic component of the project.

film *Adventures in Mozambique and the Portuguese Tendency to Forget*⁴(2015, 00:19:00).

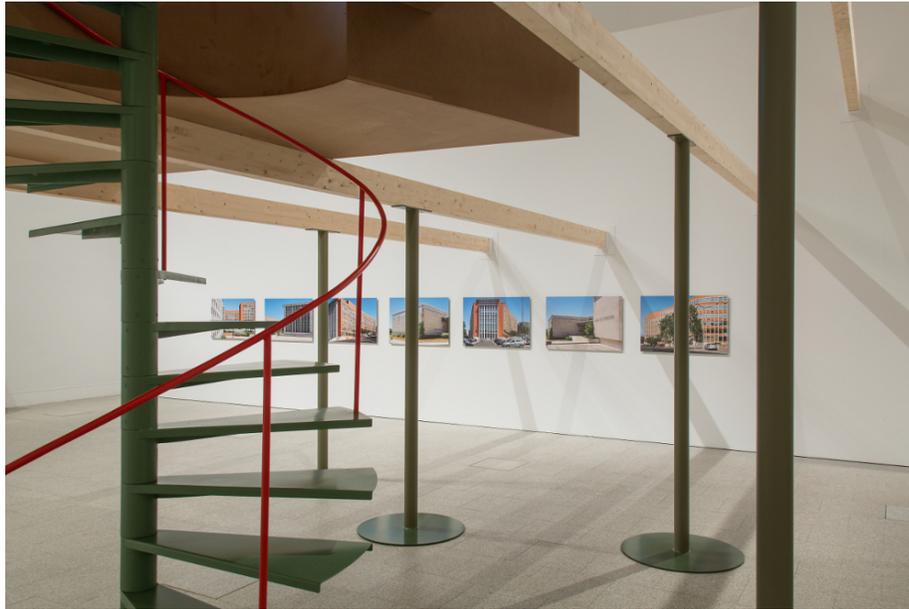


Figure 1: *Detail view of the photos*

Source. From “A Tendency to Forget”, by Ângela Ferreira, 2015. (<https://angelaferreira.info/?p=249>). *Credits.* Jorge Silva

While on the one hand, the viewer is symbolically guided into "the belly of the beast"⁵, on the other, they are given the role of observer, witnessing a collection of images and discourses. These elements artfully articulated after extensive research in various colonial archives, unveil the dark side of the ethnographic missions undertaken by Jorge and Margot Dias between 1957 and 1961⁶ with the Makonde of Mozambique. To achieve this, the artist juxtaposes images that document two contrasting realities in the then-Portuguese colony during the 1950s and 1960s: the lifestyle of the settlers, who enjoyed a hedonistic existence while upholding the empire, and that of the Makonde, who strove to preserve their traditional way of life and became involved in the starting movements that would become the armed struggle against colonialism. It is worth noting that the archive images used by Ângela Ferreira were re-filmed from the small-screen

⁴Henceforth, *Adventures in Mozambique*.

⁵Ângela Ferreira uses the expression "the belly of the beast" to describe the interior of the former Ministry of Overseas Territories building.

⁶The ethnographic missions to study the Makonde occurred between 1957 and 1961, but the use of film as a means of recording only began in 1958. That is why the DVD collection that brings these films together refers to the period 1958–1961.

presentation of the nostalgic documentary *Moçambique: No Outro Lado do Tempo* (Mozambique: On the Other Side of Time; 1997, 00:58:00), featuring readings from excerpts of Margot Dias' diaries during the missions. Additionally, the footage was sourced from the DVD collection *Margot Dias: Filmes Etnográficos 1958-1961* (Margot Dias: Ethnographic Films 1958-1961; Dias, 2016), which includes readings from excerpts of Jorge Dias' reports submitted to the Mission for the Study of Ethnic Minorities in Portuguese Overseas Territories.

When examining contemporary artistic practices that contribute critically to the decolonisation of knowledge through research in colonial archives, Oliveira (2016) outlines three essential characteristics: primarily relying on image archives while also incorporating other archival sources; imbuing the artwork with "archival quality" (p. 108), thereby integrating displaced archive content for appropriation and incorporation; and altering the aesthetic qualities of this archival content through the subversion introduced by artistic creation, resulting in significant ethical-political implications for the decolonisation of our interpretation of the colonial past. In fact, Ângela Ferreira employs both image and written archives, carefully selecting, displacing, and integrating certain contents into her work. This rearrangement reveals the duplicity and ambiguity of the intentions underlying Jorge and Margot Dias' scientific missions. In doing so, the artist materialises her radical critique of Portugal's colonial past. She clarifies that, through the proposal of "an 'expanded' sculptural language" (Ferreira, 2016, p. 79), she intends to analyse the conceptual intersections that can enable an understanding of "the shortcomings of the postcolonial critical discourse in the national context" (p. 113), rather than merely denouncing them.

On the other hand, we should emphasise Ângela Ferreira's use of images and writings predominantly produced by the Dias couple in *Adventures in Mozambique*, validating the notion defended by Derrida (1996) that "the archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself" (pp. 11–12). It is through the meticulous juxtaposition of images and selected testimonies that showcases the artist's narrative imprint (Benjamin, 1936/1987), and a version of events surfaces that counters that of Jorge and Margot Dias. That is the purpose of Ângela Ferreira (2016) when she says: "using them in a work of art would do nothing more than unveil them and circulate them again, running the risk of repeating the disregard and ethical lapses committed by the authors of the ethnographic campaigns" (p. 171). Thus, the artist presents her critique of Jorge and Margot Dias's work and the persistence of the Portuguese colonial presence in Mozambique at the time of African nations' independence not through the simple use of the ethnologist couple's archives but rather through the transformation brought about by the artistic creation of these materials, as mentioned above based on Oliveira's (2016) proposal. Along the lines of Derrida (1996), albeit with a contrasting and complementary perspective, it will be interesting to explore how the archival materials bequeathed by the Dias couple retrospectively undermine their authors and the colonial system in which they were produced within the narrative of *Adventures in Mozambique*. As a conjecture, it is suggested that Ângela Ferreira's creative choices, through which these materials are critically

rearranged, constitute an act of reparation in *A Tendency to Forget*.

In this manner, through this installation, Ângela amplifies the debate on the erasure of colonial memory and the reluctance to make historical reparations in Portugal within the realm of contemporary art, which gained considerable traction following the artwork's recognition with the 11th edition of the Novo Banco Photo⁷ award in 2015. Subsequently, *A Tendency to Forget* garnered increasing attention from the media and the public, both domestically and internationally. In 2016, *Adventures in Mozambique* was acquired by Tate Modern and received the Loop Fair Acquisition Award⁸, reinforcing international recognition of the intrinsic value of this filmic object in particular and the innovation of the device materialised in the installation overall. Prior to this, the artist had already produced other works addressing colonial memory and historical reparations, including the installation *Amnesia*⁹. Nonetheless, it is within *A Tendency to Forget* that, according to the artist herself, the approach to this theme becomes more assertive. Ângela Ferreira's juxtaposition of the two works allows us to understand that the semantic interplay between the words that title them is inextricably linked to the dialectics of memory and forgetting. Even so, while *Amnesia* provides viewers with ample room for manoeuvre, potentially diverging from the artist's intent, *A Tendency to Forget* leaves no room for ambiguity regarding her critical stance.

Reflecting on the reception and evolution of postcolonialism in Portugal, Ribeiro (2020) observed that Ângela Ferreira emerged as a trailblazer in initiating this discourse in the late 1990s, presenting provocative works addressing Portugal's colonial legacy, which remained "still 'unclassifiable' (...) [in] a time between mourning and trauma, silence and narrative crisis, a time as tentative as all beginnings" (p. 132). For this reason, the significance of the artist's work lies in its capacity to incite "critical reflection on the Portuguese colonial past and its end, in a comparative and cosmopolitan dimension" (p. 132).

Born in what was then Lourenço Marques in 1958, Ângela Ferreira grew up in the city's late-colonial environment and travelled to South Africa during her teenage years. Spending the early years of her adult life there, she earned a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Cape Town. The artist signals her "hybrid identity, a simultaneous condition of 'outsider' and 'insider' that combines the

⁷The photography award was established in 2004 by Banco Espírito Santo (now extinct) in partnership with the (then) Berardo Collection Museum in Lisbon to recognise Portuguese creators or those living in Portugal. In its seventh edition in 2011, participation was expanded to include artists from Brazil and Portuguese-speaking African countries.

⁸Established in 2003, LOOP is a platform dedicated to the study and promotion of the moving image within contemporary art discourses: <http://loop-barcelona.com/awards/#acquisition-award>.

⁹*Amnesia* (1997) proposes a scenario that recreates the atmosphere of a living room with colonial furniture, where the viewer is invited to watch *Moçambique: No Outro Lado do Tempo* (Mozambique: On the Other Side of Time), in its entirety, on a loop. This film nostalgically portrays the bourgeois lifestyle of Portuguese settlers in Mozambique. Segments from this film are also incorporated into *A Tendency to Forget*, showcasing thematic continuity across both works.

voice of the 'I' and the voice of the Other, European and African, thus enabling a critical and incisive approach to the contexts addressed - Portugal, Mozambique, South Africa" (Ferreira, 2016, p. 81). This identity of the artist had previously inspired the comment by Sandqvist (2007): "[Ángela Ferreira] uses her art like a wide-angle lens" (p. 21), suggesting a broad perspective that intersects her aesthetic creation with her political experience. This wide-angle lens of Ángela Ferreira's art embodies her "sensibility of the world", a concept proposed by Mignolo (2017) to unblock the sensory fields not allowed by the "vision of the world", which he considers restrictive and rooted in Western epistemologies. In essence, through her work, the artist uses various sources and multiple languages to translate her identity as an African of European descent who navigated through colonialism in Mozambique and apartheid in South Africa. As a witness to the impacts caused by both regimes, Ángela Ferreira sheds light on what she views as disrespectful actions committed by the Dias couple against the Makonde people in *A Tendency to Forget*. These actions include the ethnologists' mindset and behaviour, which were in many ways ethnocentric, the unauthorised capture of intimate images of the community members, and the dual intention of studying while also observing and spying, as evidenced in the testimonies presented in *Adventures in Mozambique*. By questioning these practices and, in the artist's own words, the association between conceptual pertinence and political-social pertinence (Ferreira, 2016), *A Tendency to Forget* forcefully challenges the colonial past while simultaneously seeking to repair its wrongs.

Historical reparations have sparked heated controversy in societies currently grappling with the enduring legacies of European colonialism. Rooted in post-colonial thought, notable for the contributions of intellectuals like Edward Said (1993/2011), Homi Bhabha (1994/1998), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999), the debate around reparations seeks to deepen critical awareness of the atrocities committed in the past inflicted against those who were not allowed to tell their side of the story. At the very dawn of postcolonialism, Said (1993/2011) emphasised the perpetuation of dominant narratives through the obliteration of other narratives describing the experience of oppression. Bhabha (1994/1998) noted that this obliteration was embodied by a discursive strategy based on stereotypes and discrimination inherited from colonial discourse to the ideological construction of otherness. Meanwhile, Spivak (1999) advocated for the adoption of subtler strategies to recode the margin as the place of the subaltern subject. According to her perspective, establishing a line of communication between this subject and the citizenship circuit should mobilise the subaltern towards hegemony. Thus, their integration into the electoral system, or the inclusion of elements of their culture in curricula, strategically excluded them from organised resistance. The author contends that only constructive complicity between master narratives and the narratives of the subaltern could configure the possibility of an ethical relationship between the former coloniser and the former colonised. However, Marc Ferro (1981/2004) challenged this notion. The French historian stated that the study of the past inherently acknowledges a fundamental assumption: the idea that there is no historical truth valid for everyone. On the other hand, Eric

Hobsbawm (2012/2014) argued that historical memory is not merely the study of the past but rather a reflection of the present's interpretation of that same past. In a synthesis of these perspectives, Sanches (2011) proposed that "the postcolonial condition lives from a fresh perspective on both the past and the present, encouraging an alternative and an uncomfortable revisitation" (p. 8).

In a framework where artistic discourse endeavours to engage in the discourse of "post-postcolonialism", Ângela Ferreira seeks to create, in *A Tendency to Forget*, an innovative device that presents the artist's distinct critical narrative, which overtly challenges the dominance of the White European to the subjugation of the Black African. By shedding light on the ethical-political implications of this injustice committed in the colonial past, the work ultimately embodies the reparation that is possible in the present. Thus, it is not surprising that Helena Pereira (2023), curator of the Zet Gallery in Braga, referred to Ângela Ferreira's work as "a kind of reparation of history" (para. 1).

Critical reflection on historical reparations is evident across the scientific, artistic, political and media spheres. It is a controversial subject, with different actors presenting diverse, sometimes even contradictory, perspectives. Yet to reach full maturity, this debate marked by an uncertain outcome has been a motto for international political meetings, such as the "Reparations Conference", held from November 13 to 17, 2023, in Accra, Ghana, aimed at drawing up an agenda regarding reparations for the injustices inflicted upon Africa and Africans. Moreover, it has garnered significant media attention, featuring in numerous reports, interviews, and opinion pieces. As an example, the latest episode of the podcast series *Pretérito Imperfeito* (Past Imperfect; <https://expresso.pt/podcasts/preterito-imperfeito/>), produced by *Expresso* and SIC in the summer of 2023, is titled "Reparações Históricas" (Historical Reparations; August 28, 2023). Following the controversial statements by the Portuguese President mentioned above, the debate on this issue has recently reignited in both the media and the public sphere, exposing the divisions and disparities it evokes within Portuguese society. Actively engaged in this discourse, Ângela Ferreira conveyed to the media on April 28, 2024: "the crux of the problem lies in our failure to address the decolonisation of our minds and our society" (*Colonialismo Português Foi Projeto de Opressão e Submissão de Muitos Povos*, 2024).

Assuming that the archival materials on the Makonde people produced by Jorge and Margot Dias are part of the "colonial library" referred by Mbembe (2013/2014, p. 166)¹⁰, Ângela Ferreira (2016) envisioned them as fertile ground for critical exploration through *A Tendency to Forget*. The artist's reinterpretation of these materials, achieved through the creative process, entails a critical and contrapuntal examination of both the materials themselves and the colonial past as explored in the work under analysis. To further explore these and other previously discussed topics, we will now give the floor to Ângela Ferreira.

¹⁰The concept of the "colonial library" is where the author challenges the notion of African existence primarily based on European documents.

Assuming the Freedom to Turn "the Camera and the Spotlight Against Them"

Interviewers (I): *A Tendency to Forget* (Figure 2) was arguably the most widely recognised work of your artistic career. What was it like to conceive and develop this project?



Figure 2: *Exterior perspective of A Tendency to Forget*
Source. From “A Tendency to Forget”, by Ângela Ferreira, 2015. (<https://angelaferreira.info/?p=249>). *Credits.* Jorge Silva

Ângela Ferreira (AF): I must say that this was an extremely emotional and convulsive work for me. I worked on this project for five years. It was very costly, but it was also very meticulous: step by step... It also involved some discomfort because it was the first time I had made a political-critical incursion into a Portuguese scholar [Jorge Dias]. I am also a scholar and a career professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Lisbon for many years. So, I am committed to Portuguese academia, which needs to be revisited and criticised from many points of view. It was also an incursion with anthropologists and ethnographers who felt very affected by my work and who literally tried to discredit it. When the work was complete, I was so attacked and vilified that I was quite traumatised. Then, I won the award, and time went by. People from abroad started coming to see the artwork. The film [*Adventures in Mozambique and the Portuguese Tendency to Forget*, which is part of the installation] also won an award in Barcelona at the "LOOP Art Fair", and, at that point, the

work began to settle in my spirit. Looking back, I feel it was hard, I feel it was complex, but I still think it was well worth taking that step.

I: In an interview you gave to Laboratório de Curadoria (2017), you were asked about how you revisit your works. You replied: "many of my projects continue because I think the person wants to say the thing again, but to say it in a different manner, to say it better". Is that the case with *A Tendency to Forget*?

AF: Not in the case of *A Tendency [to Forget]*. It's a work that I have absolutely no intention of changing. If you ask me, "what do you think you did wrong?", there's probably a lot I did wrong, but it's very unlikely that I'll revisit this work. Now, if you ask me if I think about Margot and Jorge Dias, and that system, and what they represented... Ah! I think about that, and I think about that a lot...

I: And in what terms do you think of the Dias couple?

AF: Their story is very complex. They were closely linked to the history of the country and the history of the National Museum of Ethnology. My thesis is hard on Jorge Dias and Margot Dias. Particularly towards her, for different reasons, but I do not regret it at all. Margot was enigmatic... A fascinating and interesting figure. None of us are simple people: good people aren't simple people, and bad people aren't simple people. We are all complex and multifaceted, and Margot is an example of that. She studied music in Germany and apparently had some quality as a performer. When she came to Portugal with Jorge, before they got involved in the Mozambique campaigns, she had already pursued studies in musicology. As for Jorge Dias... To all intents and purposes, within the context of his time, Jorge Dias was a progressive person. For example, a friend of mine who is also an ethnographer, Zé Tó Fernandes Dias¹¹, was a student of his. Jorge [Dias] supervised Zé Tó's master's thesis, which was about gay bars in Lisbon. From his viewpoint, Jorge was the only person in the entire faculty who could have supported him. He died just as he was about to hand in his thesis and supported him to the end. We're talking about the early 1970s. Then, as Jorge Dias was no longer here, Zé Tó got a bad grade. To this day, he argues that if Jorge hadn't died, he would have gotten a good grade for his master's degree. So, we mustn't forget that he wasn't a colonial fascist at heart within the context of Portugal, which was a uncoloured and fascist country... A country under a dictatorship and with a very strong colonial system at that time. Colonial doubts only began to set in during the Colonial War. Until then, the vast majority of the Portuguese population was either unconcerned or adhered to the colonial project. When I started studying them, I was very interested in the time they spent in Germany, as Margot claimed that was she who fell in love with ethnography. In a way, you get the idea that she was who got Jorge Dias interested [in this area of study].

¹¹José António Fernandes Dias (1947) is an anthropologist and former professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon. He specialises in anthropology, art theory, museology, and postcolonial studies and has established himself as a curator of various exhibitions and a cultural program producer.

I: Through reading *Atlantis* journal¹²...

AF: And, obviously, reading the *Atlantis* journal would have developed her interest in photography and cinematography. One of the arguments I put forth in my thesis, and I have no doubt about this, is that she was thinking about...

I: Leni Riefenstahl¹³ ...

AF: Yes. For me, there's no doubt about it. I've been studying and discussing Leni Riefenstahl since I was 20. It would not be possible, both being in Germany during World War II, Margot reading that journal, being interested in cinema and not watching the films of Leni Riefenstahl, who was a star. No one can convince me that Margot didn't have a role model. This idea, in my thesis, is conjecture. I'm the one who constructs it. Imagine that you were in Germany, in Munich, until 1944. The city was completely devastated. It was being bombed every day. Your Jewish university classmates had already gone to the concentration camps. And you leave and pretend that there was no war?!?! It's not possible. They were two intelligent individuals... The fact that they never mentioned the war could only have been a mutual agreement between them. There's something suspicious about that silence, to say the least. I've lived through the Colonial War, I've lived through apartheid. What I'm saying is that this omission is strange. So Jorge and Margot Dias left me this room for manoeuvre, and I used it. I think that anyone, as a scholar, is free to make these associations. We like to have concrete evidence, but we also know that people's lives are complex and intertwined at many points. The position they took, supposedly neutral, was completely lunatic. Only in Portugal, ruled by a Salazar who also swept everything under the carpet, was this possible. How could nobody have asked them: "so, you... What were you doing there in Munich in 1944?".

I: They could not be apolitical, in the sense that they positioned themselves...

AF: For me, it was completely impossible. Even though they constantly claimed that their project wasn't political, they were sufficiently aware of the political significance of what they were doing... Which was being spies! They weren't the only ones. The entire field of ethnography during colonial times did this. At that time, that's all ethnography was good for. Colonial governments poured money into ethnographic projects, and not just here. The British did it. It happened in Brazil, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Anyway, the French did it too. In Jorge Dias' reports, which are available for consultation at the Torre do Tombo [National Archive], you can see that in almost all of them, he begins by saying: "well, I know I shouldn't be meddling in politics, but it's hard to separate our ethnographic study from the social and political problems that are unfolding in the region". You can tell that Jorge Dias is constantly defending himself so as not to get into trouble. But he couldn't fully defend himself because he was

¹²*Atlantis* was an illustrated journal published in Germany. It focused on geography, anthropology, and ethnography and featured articles on various regions worldwide.

¹³Helene Bertha Amalie (1902–2003), known as "Leni" Riefenstahl, was the German filmmaker who directed propaganda films for the German Nazi Party.

being paid by Adriano Moreira, who was the minister of Overseas Territories, and he had to present work.

I: How did you come across Margot Dias' ethnographic films?

AF: I came across Margot's ethnographic films through Jean Rouch¹⁴. I only realised what they represented later, as my research progressed and, above all, when I started watching the films. At first, I did not even know that the field diaries [of Jorge and Margot Dias]¹⁵ existed, but I already suspected that there was something hidden. In the meantime, Harry West¹⁶ brought me the piles of photographs he had, and we looked through them together. That's when Harry mentioned something that [Margot] had kept in a drawer... Which [she] did not want to open because she had already been warned that it would politicise the issue.

I: We realise that there is an obvious repercussion of the work done under Margot Dias's name in *A Tendency to Forget*. How is it possible, hypothetically, to verify this authorship?

AF: That's an interesting and complex question. It certainly wasn't the first question I asked myself when I started *A Tendency to Forget*, but it was very present in my analysis of her work. There you have the story of a woman who comes from Munich, from Nazi Germany. She leaves Lisbon and goes to the Makonde plateau, crossing colonial Lourenço Marques, Johannesburg and onward to Tanzania. It's an incredible story that begins before World War II and lasts until the 1960s when the [Colonial] War broke out. Margot was never regarded by her peers or by Jorge Dias as an equal. There is a hierarchical difference there. She, for example, gives her name to the films, but the films have never had any public repercussions until today. The truth is that Jorge Dias didn't dare to include her. The work she did as a cinematographer (Figure 3)... He couldn't find a way to include it in his books¹⁷, which are his crowning glory. That has a lot to do with your question of authorship. To what extent does she allow and accept that or not? I don't know.

¹⁴Jean Rouch (1917–2004) was a French ethnologist and documentary and docufiction director who created the subgenre ethnofiction. He produced over 140 films, mostly shot in West Africa. He was the inspiration for several works by Ângela Ferreira, such as *For Mozambique* (2008) and *Study for Monument to Jean Rouch's* (2011–2012).

¹⁵Diaries of the Mission for the Study of Ethnic Minorities in Portuguese Overseas Territories.

¹⁶Harry West (1966) is a lecturer at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom. He is a sociocultural anthropologist and spent over a decade conducting research on the Mueda plateau in Mozambique and on the relationship between the Dias couple, the interpreter Rafael Mwakala and the Makonde people.

¹⁷Ângela Ferreira refers to the four volumes of *Os Macondes de Moçambique* (The Makonde From Mozambique; Dias, 1964/1998; Dias & Dias, 1970), which, at the time, won international scientific recognition and several awards. The Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses and the Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical reissued the work in 1998.



Figure 3: *Margot Dias filming a kanyembe player in the village of Miteda (1958)*
Credits. Jorge Dias (1958). Archives of the National Museum of Ethnology

I: Why didn't she ever return to Mozambique after 1973?

AF: Yes, that complete withdrawal is very strange. Not only did she never go back to Mozambique, she never filmed those subjects again, and she wasn't even very willing to talk about them. Margot was defending herself against something that she obviously knew was wrong. She knew that what she had in her drawer was politically explosive, and when you know that you also understand why it's explosive. For me, there are a lot of unknowns... For example, it's not clear whether she needed the money when she sold the diaries to the Portuguese State.

I: The last time she went to the plateau, in 1961, Margot Dias went alone...

AF: It was after the Mueda massacre¹⁸, and there was nothing left to do. Although I always say that [Margot] was a very controversial figure, my assessment of the character Margot Dias is negative. I think she did many things wrong, and her complexity doesn't erase my condemnation of some of the projects she was involved in. She didn't ask permission to do what she did. Jorge and Margot Dias' team didn't have the reflexive sense we have today. They didn't have the modesty of voyeurism that the researchers who worked after them have since acquired.

¹⁸The Mueda massacre, which occurred on June 16, 1960, "is regarded as the pinnacle of Mozambican nationalist awareness (...) harshly repressed by the Portuguese colonial authority" (Oliveira, 2019, p. 6).

I: The words "voyeur" and "voyeurism" are also related to *A Tendency to Forget*. The Dias couple somehow didn't want to see the reality of their time. Conversely, you choose the voyeur as the driver of her work. Is this to allow the return of the gaze¹⁹?

AF: Absolutely. As I see it, they looked shamelessly, without asking permission, and I exercise my freedom to do the same: I turn the camera and the spotlight on them. That's all I did, and, of course, I did it because I had tools: I lived in South Africa, where I had to grapple with the idea of making political art, selling art to politicians, being engaged with politics and allowing myself, to a certain extent, to be appropriated by the system. These discourses are part of my artistic DNA. If there is a political comment being made in *A Tendency to Forget*, and if there is an authorial comment about reflexivity or lack of it, from Margot and Jorge Dias' point of view, this is very much articulated in the film [*Adventures in Mozambique*].

I: Is that why you juxtaposed images from *Moçambique: No Outro Lado do Tempo* with footage from Margot Dias' ethnographic films in this film?

AF: I knew I was going to use segments of her footage, but I wanted to find something that was... As if the camera had turned against them. I spent a lot of time watching the films very closely. I watched the films of male and female initiations very carefully.

I: Which are quite controversial...

AF: Very controversial... I had already brought, from South Africa, very complex critical tools for this. I am African, but when I travel to Niger to take photographs or to Brazzaville, I don't go alone. Besides being dangerous, there are complexities in these countries. It's not like going to Berlin, Paris or London with a camera and taking some pictures. So I knew Margot wasn't filming those things alone.

I: So you assume that men were also present during the footage of the women's initiation rites?

AF: They were accompanied by the Chief of Post, who represented the Portuguese Colonial Administration, by the Black Mozambicans who sold themselves to the colonial Government — who, of course, played the role of policemen, received a salary, and were hated by the rest of the population — and by her husband, Jorge Dias. In fact, if you watch the films very carefully, Jorge appears in the image now and then.

¹⁹A concept rooted in the panopticon, as posited by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), defines the dyad as "seeing without being seen/being seen without seeing". Later, Foucault suggested the "pure reciprocity" of gazes, offering us the possibility to acknowledge the bi-directionality of the dyad suggested by the panopticon. According to Ângela Ferreira (2018): "this reflexivity in fact allowed, perhaps for the first time, the realisation that when you observe someone, that someone also observes back, thus opening up the possibility of what has been called 'the return of the gaze'" (p. 242).

I: He appears dressed as an explorer...

AF: Always clad in those khaki-coloured clothes. And you see what he's doing... He and the local administrator are directing the people: "now everyone gather there", "now everyone get out of there", "now get over there", "now get out of the picture". From time to time, Margot picks up on these details. I searched a lot for those images in which you could glimpse Jorge Dias and the administrator entering the scene. She shouldn't have wanted to; she shouldn't have caught them, but she did. That's what she unintentionally filmed, and that said much more about her than the entire process.

I: It's the hidden camera...

AF: They were a whole team: one woman, seven men, two jeeps, two guns and a film camera. They didn't walk around without guns. It wasn't like the neighbour around the corner was going to buy milk. It was an event in the village, even quite intimidating. To what extent did she impose herself? That's how I use the word "voyeur". So, that was the kind of thing I was keen on understanding.

I: There are some extracts in which Margot says: "speak once more". She somehow directs the filming itself.

AF: And you can also see that she went to the same places several times. Rafael Mwakala²⁰ was with her.

I: Rafael Mwakala, the interpreter with Jorge Dias' team, was affiliated with Frelimo [Mozambique Liberation Front]...

AF: Yes, Rafael Mwakala was affiliated with Frelimo... Margot eventually gets to know the women, and you realise that they already have a relationship. It wasn't a military imposition. It wasn't a war thing. There was a soft approach because, after all, they are ethnographers. So, the idea was to get to know how other people live. But when you take seven men and two jeeps, it's difficult to get to know how the others live because the others are very aware that you're looking at them.

I: You use a very interesting expression, which is "the belly of the beast". Was the installation *A Tendency to Forget* designed to allow people to enter "the belly of the beast"?

AF: And see again as if they were voyeurs... The observer is involved in the same action (Figure 4). Margot was a settler. That's what she was.

²⁰The local interpreter, Rafael Mwakala, stayed in touch with Margot through letters after the trips had ended and accompanied the Dias couple in their fieldwork. West (2006) recounts her life and story during the field research she conducted in Mozambique in 1992.



Figure 4: *Detailed view of the interior of the installation (and a visitor watching the film)*

Source. From “A Tendency to Forget”, by Ângela Ferreira, 2015. (<https://angelaferreira.info/?p=249>). *Credits.* Jorge Silva

I: How do you rate the visitors' experience as voyeurs?

AF: I think the film included in *A Tendency to Forget* is very challenging. The viewer watches the departure from Lisbon, the flight over Seville... And then is caught up in a very colonial and even offensive discourse: "ah! We've arrived in Kano. Let me see if the Blacks have a different head shape to the Whites". Later on, they tell stories of the colonial doctor who didn't want to help the woman give birth, and the child died in the mother's belly. It's pretty disturbing stuff. Even though it's an unpleasant film to watch, people still say to me today: "wow. Very impactful". And if you don't see the film, you'll never realise how penetrating it is. You have that very sculptural vision of an object. The architecture is very modernist, with a clean look. The photographs are very minimalist. And the idea of entering this object is kind of fun. Then the film starts, and slowly, it builds in terms of emotion, and people are surprised.

I: Perhaps you wanted to emphasise how intrusive it was for the Makonde to be filmed.

AF: It was very much that. But it was also the fact that we, as Portuguese, find it so difficult to see ourselves and criticise ourselves objectively. With this project, I felt a great desire to emphasise this so that people would finally understand. In the *Amnesia* project, which I did 20 years ago, some extracts from *Moçambique: No Outro Lado do Tempo* appear for the first time. My intention was that of a less experienced and perhaps less courageous artist. There was a nostalgia for tropicalism in those images. Usually, when *Amnesia* is exhibited — and it is still exhibited today — museum directors say to me: "look, Ângela, I don't know what you've done, but not a day goes by without me having to escort someone out of there after closing the museum, sitting watching the films". What

I realised in that piece was that people went to see it for one of two reasons: some to see the exotic, almost neo-colonial; other people turned up because they had lived in Africa... They were returnees and had experienced a trauma that they hadn't resolved, so they went there and cried. That really upset me. I always felt that I hadn't been clear in my work. In *Amnesia*, there's a flexibility that I'm not comfortable with. People would say to me: "there must be room for manoeuvre. You cannot prevent someone from going there and crying". But, in a way, I felt some discomfort because what I wanted to say in *Amnesia* was precisely: "you're forgetting what you did in Africa. You must sort this out, and then we'll move on". When I got to *A Tendency to Forget*, 20 years later, I thought: "no, this time there won't be the same room for manoeuvre. This time, I have to say what I want to say". More than 20 years have passed, and so *A Tendency to Forget* carries a sharper edge than *Amnesia*. But of course, the more assertive a work is, the more aggressive the reception.

I: Despite this, do you believe that your intention to be more assertive was well received by a section of society and, therefore, validated by the award?

AF: At the time I was invited to participate in the award, the focus was very much on themes of colonialism and Africa. *A Tendency to Forget* was probably the most piercing work I did on this subject. I would say that there is an institution, Novo Banco, that has embraced a theme of artistic research that would never have endorsed it 10 or 15 years earlier, and in this sense, yes. We have a society much more prepared to accept these issues in the mainstream.

Decolonising Museums or "Giving Back What's Not Ours"

I: How do you assess the possibility of starting the process of decolonising museums in Portugal?

AF: I think the decolonisation of museums is a very interesting issue. António Pinto Ribeiro²¹ helped us a lot a few years ago when he clearly said to someone who asked him in a newspaper interview: "which museums should be decolonised?". And he answered with a single expression: "all of them". Since then, there has been a kind of current discourse on the decolonisation of these institutions. I think that some museums are already embracing this idea and have started to make some changes in order to try to decolonise themselves. The point is that decolonising museums, like decolonising whatever else, has to involve contemporary thinking, new and from decolonised people. Decolonising museums means closing them down; it means engaging with African peoples; it means restitution, in other words, giving back what is not ours.

²¹António Pinto Ribeiro (1956), a researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, where he was the cultural programmer of the project *Memoirs: Children of Empire and European Postmemories*.

I: What would it mean, in your opinion and specifically, to decolonise the National Museum of Ethnology?

AF: We would have to reconsider the entire African collection housed there. Who collected it? How did it get there? What is it doing there? When we want our children to visit the museum to see its collections, put together by Jorge Dias and his collaborators, what do we want them to learn? The Museum of Ethnology is an extremely complicated museum to decolonise because the colonial system established ethnology itself and is deeply rooted in the concept of colonialism. Interestingly, it was in the 1960s that ethnology itself became a pioneer in terms of reflexivity. It is the first discipline that literally questions itself in terms of validity. What is true is that many of the museums and many of the disciplinary areas remain attached to an outdated model of ethnology. In English, the problem of decolonising ethnology museums is called a *hotbed*. Of course, here in Portugal, art museums also have this problem. However, the focus of this discussion is the Museum of Ethnology. For example, we will not be able to decolonise this museum if we have the same workers working there for 30 years. It's not possible because these people are not decolonised. You have to ask: "what does it mean to decolonise a museum?". Perhaps the answers to this question are so dramatic that it's very difficult for museums to envision their survival from that point on.

I: However, we are already witnessing some signs of this decolonisation...

AF: At Tate Modern in 2019, it was possible to exhibit a work like *Fons Americanus*²² by Kara Walker²³. Will this project endure? Let's see how it will continue. And one more thing, coming back to the people who work in museums. You cannot have a Museum of Ethnology these days that doesn't have a single African staff member. It does not make sense.

I: As a supposition, perhaps investigating Margot Dias' authorial responsibility would also help to take things off a superficial level.

AF: I hope so, for various reasons. Not only because the problem is huge, vast, complex and plentiful but also because it's a woman who, in a way, was disallowed by her own husband. And so it was a dual opportunity for the museum to update its management methods because Portuguese ethnography is not only racist, it's also ultra-sexist! There was a moment in my thesis when I had to ask myself: "so, there was no progressive, left-wing ethnographer or anthropologist in Portugal?". There had to be someone else, and indeed there was. Gulbenkian gave grants that promoted this area. There was an eminent

²²*Fons Americanus* (2019–2020) is a large-scale sculpture in the form of a four-tiered fountain inspired by the Victory Memorial located in front of Buckingham Palace in London. Its central theme is water, symbolising the transatlantic slave trade. It challenges the power narratives by juxtaposing them with a narrative about the origins of the African diaspora.

²³Kara Walker (1969) is an American artist whose work explores issues of race, identity, violence, and sexuality. She works with various media "to expose the ongoing psychological injury caused by the tragic legacy of slavery (...) while also proposing an examination of contemporary racial and gender stereotypes" (Walker, n.d., para. 3).

anthropologist, Alfredo Margarido²⁴. There was an alternative, as there was in every political system. If you didn't like it, you had to leave. Collaboration with the colonial political system was not an obligation. Thus, Margot, who was eccentric and very much a part of the upheavals and complexities of Portuguese colonial essence, would be a marvellous subject for the museum to explore in a new light.

I: Interestingly, the image symbolising our research hypothesis is Margot's own shadow operating the camera (Figure 5). Margot Dias, a shadow among the Makonde people, a shadow in her political relationship with the Portuguese Estado Novo... And the shadow also has to do with the erasure of her authorship...



Figure 5: *The shadow of Margot Dias filming among the Makonde*
Source. Margot Dias – Filmes etnográficos (Ethnographic films; 1958-1961)-
DVD 01– 00:02:39. *Credits.* Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema e da
Direção-Geral do Património Cultural/Museu Nacional de Etnologia

AF: This image is beautiful, this concept of the shadow... Working on this idea of the shadow... Because you have several shadows, she is her husband's shadow. And she creates shadows.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

²⁴Alfredo Margarido (1928–2010) was a professor, essayist, literary critic, fiction writer, poet, journalist, translator, artist, historian, anthropologist, sociologist, political scientist, scholar of African issues and a staunch anti-colonialist. His work established a significant opposition to the Portuguese dictatorial regime.

Acknowledgements

Ângela Ferreira, for the interview and for authorising the use of the images; the National Museum of Ethnology, in the person of its director, Paulo Ferreira da Costa, for allowing the use of the images, and the head of its library, Alexandra Oliveira, for her collaboration during the research.

This interview was funded under the "Knowledge for Development Initiative" by the Aga Khan Development Network and FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, IP (nº 333162622), under the project "Memories, cultures and identities: how the past weights on the present-day intercultural relations in Mozambique and Portugal?". Programa Verão com Ciência (Summer with Science Programme), funded by FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, IP and DGES - Direção Geral do Ensino Superior, at the Summer School in Communication and Culture for Development, organised by CECS - Communication and Society Research Centre at the University of Minho. PhD grant from the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) awarded to Viviane Ferreira de Almeida under reference number 2023.03741.BD.

Biographical Notes

Viviane Almeida has a master's degree in Social Education and Community Intervention from the Lisbon School of Education and is a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at the University of Minho. She is a researcher at the Research Team on Transcultural Studies of the Centre for Humanistic Studies of the University of Minho and a doctoral fellow of the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (reference 2023.03741.BD). Her research focuses on places of traumatic memory in blogs and travel books in the context of contemporary Portuguese travel narratives. She works as a cultural mediator and writing trainer, collaborating with different audiences and institutions in Portugal. She has already co-organised a collection of short literary formats (poetry and microtales). Her research interests span cultural studies, travel literature, authorship and self-writing.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3779-4890>

Email: v_de_almeida@hotmail.com

Address: Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas, Universidade do Minho - Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057, Braga, Portugal

Lurdes Macedo has a PhD in Communication Sciences with a specialisation in Intercultural Communication from the University of Minho and a post-doctorate in Communication for Development from the same institution. She is currently a researcher at the Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture and New Technologies at Universidade Lusófona while also holding the position of assistant professor at Universidade Lusófona — Centro Universitário do Porto, where she has been teaching since 2008. She has also taught at the Escola Superior de

Educação de Viseu and at the Universidade Politécnica de Maputo. Her primary research interests encompass intercultural communication, communication and culture for development, female participation in development processes, cultural identities and the Portuguese-speaking cultural space. She was a researcher on the Communication and Society Research Centre's projects *Memories, Cultures and Identities: The Past and Present of Intercultural Relations in Mozambique and Portugal* (2018-2022) and *Identity Narratives and Social Memory: The (Re) Making of Lusophony in Intercultural Contexts* (2009-2013).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1577-1313>

Email: lurdes.macedo@ulusofona.pt

Address: Rua Augusto Rosa, 24, 4000-098 Porto, Portugal

Renata Flaiban Zanete has a PhD in Comparative Modernities from — the University of Minho and a master's degree in Language and Education from — the Faculty of Education at — the University of São Paulo. She is an actress, producer, playwright and founder, with Fabiano Assis, of Companhia Rodamoinho de Teatro (2001), based in Braga since 2017. She is the artistic director and stage director of the theatre production *A Céu Aberto* (2022) with the Grupo de Teatro Comunitário do Campo (Associação Rural Vivo - Campo do Gerês). They are currently working on the second show, and they will continue to collaborate until 2025 in the *Partis & Art for Change initiative* (a project funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and "la Caixa"). She has worked as a trainer in the areas of creative writing, theatre and the art of storytelling in various projects and institutions in Portugal. Her current research involves gender issues, feminist and cultural studies, the performing arts and comparative literature.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5241-7823>

Email: renafai@gmail.com

Address: Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas, Universidade do Minho - Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057, Braga, Portugal

References

- Almeida, V., Zanete, R. F., & Macedo, L. (2023). Autoria em Margot Dias pela lente revivescente da pós-memória. *ex æquo*, (47), 117–136. <https://doi.org/10.22355/exaequo.2023.47.09>
- Bhabha, H. K. (1998). *O local da cultura* (M. Ávila, E. Reis, & G. Gonçalves, Trans.). Editora UFMG. (Original work published 1994)
- Benjamin, W. (1987). *Magia e técnica, arte e política* (S. P. Rouanet, Trans.). Brasiliense. (Original work published 1936)

- Colonialismo português foi projeto de opressão e submissão de muitos povos.* (2024, April 28). Lusa. <https://www.lusa.pt/article/2024-04-28/42762574/colonialismo-portugu%C3%AAs-foi-projeto-de-opress%C3%A3o-e-submiss%C3%A3o-de-muitos-povos>
- Derrida, J. (1996). *Archive fever: A Freudian impression*. University of Chicago Press.
- Dias, J. (1998). *Os macondes de Moçambique. Vol. I – Aspectos históricos e económicos*. Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses e Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical. (Original work published 1964)
- Dias, J., & Dias, M. (1970). *Os macondes de Moçambique. Vol. III – Vida social e ritual*. Junta de Investigações do Ultramar.
- Dias, M. (2016). *Margot Dias – Filmes etnográficos (1958-1961)* [Film]. Cinemateca, Museu Nacional de Etnologia.
- Ferreira, Â. (2016). *O discurso artístico como dispositivo de inovação na discussão do pós pós-colonialismo* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade de Lisboa]. Repositório da Universidade de Lisboa. <https://repositorio.ul.pt/handle/10451/25112>
- Ferreira, Â. (2018). A Tendency to Forget. In Coletivo Suspended Spaces (Ed.), *Suspended places* (Vol. 4, pp. 239–255). ACD Print.
- Ferro, M. (2004). *Comment on raconte l'histoire aux enfants à travers le monde* (nouvelle édition revue). Éditions Payot. (Original work published 1981)
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (2014). *Tempos de rutura: Cultura e sociedade no século XX* (M. Marques, Trans.). Divina Comédia. (Original work published 2012)
- Laboratório de Curadoria. (2017, June 5). *Entrevista Angela Ferreira Magical Land* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mguwfwiSTmM>
- Marmeleira, J. (2015, February 10). A descolonização continua. *Público*. <https://www.publico.pt/2015/10/02/culturaipsilon/noticia/a-descolonizacao-continua-1709488>
- Mbembe, A. (2014). *Crítica da razão negra* (M. Lança, Trans.). Antígona. (Original work published 2013)
- Mignolo, W. (2017). Desafios decoloniais hoje. *Revista Epistemologias do Sul*, 1(1), 12–32.
- Oliveira, A. B. de. (2016). Descolonização em, de e através das imagens de arquivo “em movimento” da prática artística. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 29, 107–129. [https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.29\(2016\).2412](https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.29(2016).2412)
- Oliveira, C. M. (2019). *O massacre de Mueda (1960) e a constituição das narrativas nacionais em Moçambique (1962–1986)* [Master's thesis, Universidade

Federal de Minas Gerais]. Repositório da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. <http://hdl.handle.net/1843/30020>

Pereira, H. M. (2023, May 5). *Miriam Makeba: A pós-memória da luta pela liberdade na obra de Ângela Ferreira*. Zet Gallery. <https://zet.gallery/blog/pt/miriam-makeba-pos-memoria-da-luta-pela-liberdade-na-obra-angela-ferreira/>

Ribeiro, M. C. (2020). Viagens no contemporâneo—pós-colonialismo, cosmopolitismo e programação. *Revista Mulemba*, 12(22), 127–147. <https://doi.org/10.35520/mulemba.2020.v12n22a39821>

Said, E. (2011). *Cultura e imperialismo* (D. Bottmann, Trans.). Companhia das Letras. (Original work published 1993)

Sanches, M. R. (Ed.). (2011). *Malhas que os impérios tecem. Textos anticoloniais, contextos pós-coloniais*. Edições 70.

Sandqvist, G. (2007). Sculpture revisited. In J. Bock (Ed.), *Maison tropicale, Ângela Ferreira* (pp. 20–34). Instituto das Artes/Ministério da Cultura.

Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A critique of postcolonial reason. Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard University Press.

Walker. (n.d.). *Kara Walker*. Retrieved November 6, 2023, from <https://walkerart.org/collections/artists/kara-walker>

West, H. G. (2006). Invertendo a bossa do camelo. Jorge Dias, a sua mulher, o seu intérprete e eu (T. R. Queiroz, Trans.). In M. R. Sanches (Ed.), *Portugal não é um país pequeno: Contar o império na pós-colonialidade* (pp. 141–190). Cotovia.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.