

## BOOK REVIEW

# “GEOMETRIAS DA MEMÓRIA: CONFIGURAÇÕES PÓS-COLONIAIS”

by António Sousa Ribeiro, Margarida Calafate  
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The book “*Geometrias da Memória: configurações pós-coloniais*” is the first volume of the series “Memoirs – Filhos de Império”, from the research group also called “*MEMOIRS – Filhos de Império e Pós-memórias Europeias*” (<http://memoirs.ces.uc.pt>) funded by the European Research Council (ERC). Organized by António Sousa Ribeiro and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, the book examines the place of memory and post-colonial memory in the narrative of European history.

The preface to the book evokes the creation of the European Community and arrives at the current debates to question the discourses on unity and peace in Europe. In these discourses, however, the Other is always omitted, the one that comes from the extraterritorial history of Europe and that was decisive for its construction.

The organizers of the book call for an exercise of memory, where articulation with a postcolonial reflection would allow justice and eventually reconstruct the narrative of the relationship of Europe with its various Others. The project encompasses Portugal, France and Belgium in their articulation with the colonial memory, and the process of decolonization of the next generation (the post-memory holders).

As an extension of the preface, the article by Margarida Calafate

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<sup>1</sup> António Sousa Ribeiro e Margarida Calafate Ribeiro (org.). 2016. *Geometrias da Memória: configurações pós-coloniais*. Publisher Afrontamento: Portugal, 348p

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Ribeiro puts forward very interesting historical data on the Great Wars and on the reconstruction of Europe. She explains the utopia of a united Europe due the existence of a hardly understandable diversity. With the support of present-day texts from various countries' scholars, she first addresses the issue of Islam to explain the fear of this Other about whom we talk nonstop and to whom we have never given a chance to express itself. In a second moment, Ribeiro touches on the subject of the literature of the returnees, which were Portuguese forced to leave Africa (sometimes their homeland) and to return to a hostile, foreign territory. In this aspect, the testimony literature is used as a pact of responsibility with history: the next generation seeks answers to the questions of their parents, a synthesis work due to the excess of personal memory and to the lack of a divided public memory. At last, the author seeks the common point of these stories, which would be located in what she calls a "colonial fracture" and which can only be repaired by the exercise of memory. The author concludes that only in this way it will be possible to negotiate European multiculturalism through a plural history, of a community the size of the world.

Antônio Sousa Ribeiro addresses the question of the reverse of modernity, which is absolute violence itself: the holocaust – directly communicated with colonial violence. The author elaborates a course of analysis where he shows how the creation of the concept of race and the inferiorization of the other, colonialism, are intrinsically linked to the anti-Semitic ideology. Antônio Ribeiro quotes the pacifist writer Romain Rolland to explain that the experience of the violence of the colonial wars is at the root of the process of dehumanization that generated the dramas of World War II. Following Paul Gilroy's studies, Ribeiro proposes a comparative study between Jean Améry, a specialist in the post-Holocaust esobrevivant, and Franz Fanon, a key author of postcolonial thought. Thus Colonization and Holocaust would be superimposed and not separated in history. Redemptive violence is revolutionary violence, where the human being affirms himself despite all negative discourse that withdraws his humanity - a transforming utopia.

The article by Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo revisits the unfinished mourners of the Empire. Alike Antônio Ribeiro, he questions the links amongst the various genocides, from the racial politics of the colonial period to the barbarism of the Holocaust. He criticizes the laws and celebrations that want to regulate and govern the collective memory in order to justify the past. He points out several past histories to interpret various present-day events: he takes up the German case in Namibia - and the creation of an abstract code of evil - which will also appear in the Holocaust. The author also addresses the situation in the Netherlands and the reconstruction

of a memory linked to the crimes committed in Indonesia by individual narratives and specific groups. Italy faces its past when it offers reparation to Libya, after thirty years of colonial violence, and to Ethiopia for the use of chemical weapons. The idea that the colony was a laboratory in connection with fascism is increasingly explored. The Belgian Congo and the role of Belgium in the racial politics that engendered the Rwandan genocide, or the blame of the United Kingdom in what happened in Kenya, as well as the war of memories that France is living for the establishment of its historiography, especially in the case of Algeria. These are some examples given by the author, who ends by saying that Portugal still faces many obstacles to demystify its colonial history.

In the continuation, António Pinto Ribeiro provokes saying that decolonizing the museums is the only option for their survival. As an European institution, the museum is born to materialize colonial occupation and neutralize culture. Thus, if the appreciation of a work of art changes over time – once, the frontal nude of Olympia in Manet’s frame shocked –, what is surprising today is the black woman in the background in situation of slavery. The birth of some museums in America are evoked as symbols of resistance by minorities to impart knowledge and fight for rights. A battle so that the Other does not have to be just a commodity, as it happens even to African art. Countries that were colonized and had dictatorial regimes, such as Brazil, Chile and Argentina, created museums with archives of ex-colonized. In this way, he proposes a decolonization of museums, with the voices of who makes the object and the history.

Helder Macedo inaugurates the second Book Threshold, dedicated to alterity. With ingenious text and full of humor and wisdom, he discusses how we could “recognize the unknown.” An exercise that the old explorers had to do to be able to understand and stand before the new world discovered. The author cites several letters, epics and historical facts that illustrate the problems of intercultural communication - and how we can recognize difference today and conceive it as part of our singularities.

In the same vein, Isabel Castro Henriques explains the construction of negative otherness: the way in which the Self consolidates at the same time as it excludes the Other from history. With the help of historiography and science, the author analyzes the evolution of concepts and notions used to disqualify the other (primitive or civilized). It pays particular attention to the word resistance and its evolution in African societies, to finally attack the concept of postcolonial. The author reckons this would be an ideological trap that guarantees the consolidation of hierarchies of globalization - once the past is constructed by the present, which, by its turn, selects what will go down in history or not.

Ana Paula Ferreira makes a reading of the work of Boaventura Sousa Santos to defend the articulation of a post-colonialism of the south. The Lusophony space must participate in the debate of Hispanophony, Francophony and Anglophony in order to decolonize thought. Ferreira uses the relationship between Prospero and Caliban to mobilize anti-colonial solidarities and mobilizes the concept of "intertranslatability" to reach a mutual understanding of subaltern movements. A text full of energy that paves the way to the analysis of poets made by Laura Cavalcante Padilha. The author relates the influences between Africa and the Americas by the written voice of writers little known by Portuguese-speaking readers on the way to the Black Atlantic.

In this line of thought, we have Roberto Vecchi's article, which presents the subalternities of the South Atlantic. From an analysis of the slave trade (which could hardly resist and emit murmurs to tell non-hegemonic counter-histories), it retraces the history of Brazil and critically explains how Brazilian society failed to make the transition from colony to nation and give full citizenship to all its inhabitants. An article engaged and necessary to discuss contemporary Brazil.

Paulo de Medeiros discusses the relations of Lusophone literatures and world literature systems. It begins with a critical reading of what he calls three fetishes of postcolonial critique: the periphery, national identity, and language. Using Immanuel Wallerstein's "semi-periphery" concept, he discusses Lusophony and talks about the importance of African literature in promoting the Portuguese language in the world. In this way, the author thinks that the intraphysical comparability and extra lusophony may be one of the keys to inscribe the literatures written in Portuguese in the various global systems of literature.

Francisco Noa, by its turn, analyzes a particular case of Lusophone and describes the relationship between literature and power in Mozambique. It begins by showing how racism and repression against authors existed in a clear manner in the colonial period. In independence the paradigm changes, and utopia and nationalism are highlighted: literature becomes a territory of individual and collective affirmation: a territory of resistance. Currently, the author assesses, in Mozambique, literature is transnational and continues to act as a counter-power.

The third part of the book begins with an article by Fabrice Schurmans. The author problematizes the discourses of coloniality. The North is the producer of the "Text", the great simplifying narrative, accessible and widely diffused. The "Text" contaminates not only specialized texts, such as those analyzed by the author (Albert Memmi, HéléBéji and Stephen Smith), but also the media (he explains the symmetries that the media can

make in portraying the earthquake drama in Haiti with the representations we have of Africa - they are locus interchangeable). According to the author, the writings of these three authors would make it possible to transform a single discourse into a reality and to reinforce “the Text” by the systematic repetition and resumption of an always available device. Thus, combating these easy ideas and arguing against “the Text”, deconstructing and fabricating new narratives, is still a challenge: we have, as Schaurmans says, intellectuals who do this (Mabeko-Tali, Mamdani, M’Bokolo, Ki-Zerbo), but the complexity of their texts does not allow them to confront them directly with “the Text”.

Catarina Martins examines feminisms between the North and Africa. She criticizes the imperialist feminism of the West and analyzes the work of three African feminists and their contributions to the current debate. Amina Mama, IfiAmadiume and OyèrónkéOyewùmides contradict the concepts of feminism from the north to combat the process of culturalization of the “Women of Others”. The author also criticizes the Women in Development (WID) program, which practices “state and imperialist feminism,” erasing the places of legitimate struggles of African women. She also criticizes ethnographic feminism, which can idealize a pre-colonial period and extinguish important issues. Finally, Martins presents a feminism made in Africa and of transnational dimension: critical, political and activist, producer of knowledge that the countries of the North should pay more attention.

Júlia Garraio addresses an exhibition of photographs that took place in Lisbon in late 2015 and early 2016: *Return: Traces of memory*. She analyzes the goal of presenting photos without recourse to the text: in this way, we are forced to construct a meaning, a narrative to understand what happened in the colonial period, we cannot take an uncritical approach to the exhibition. The black woman’s body exists as a place of remembrance of colonialism, it is one of the places of colonial penetration and violation (beyond geographical and cultural space). The purpose of the exhibition was to question the “non-history” of the returnees and offer a critical view of Portuguese colonialism among the suffering of the returnees, but without forgetting the violence that gave support to colonial domination.

In the following article, Bruno Sena Martins tries to reestablish the memories of the colonial wars, a “public secret”, from the testimony of several Deficients of the Armed Forces. The silence that weighs on the colonial wars leaves the witnesses in a solitude from where it becomes impossible to communicate the past. Nor is there the public’s empathy to listen to their stories. In this article, Martins seeks to make the body a place of memory.

João Paulo Borges Coelho, renowned Mozambican writer and historian, reworked the memories of the Mozambican wars. He explains how it was not yet possible to tell the experience of the two wars that lasted from 1964-1992, the first for independence, ending in 1975. And the second by power, which ends in a UN peace agreement in 1992. The author begins by discussing what is a memory: a socialization of memories. He then explains the political use of memory - a simple, non-contradictory management that eliminates all competing discourse. He criticizes the narrative goal created by Frelimo to elaborate the history of independence and questions the limits of silence over civil war. This silence, in search of consolidating the bonds of peace, is according to the author a "reversible silence" (Paul Ricoeur). The task of telling these stories falls today into two ongoing projects (Mbita et Aluka). The author ends by wondering if these projects exist to retrieve a narrative goal and legitimize the power of those who control the country.

In the course of the reading we are forced to rethink everything we know or thought we knew about memory and colonization. Anchored in the present and informed by the past, each article contributes in a particular way to deconstructing the story and shows us how it is possible to tell another story from different points of view. A book necessary not only for Portugal, but for all countries that should confront their colonial past fairly and honestly.

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