



MEMOIRS - FILHOS DE IMPÉRIO E PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS | MEMOIRS - CHILDREN OF EMPIRES AND EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES  
MAPS - PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS: UMA CARTOGRAFIA PÓS-COLONIAL | MAPS - EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES: A POSTCOLONIAL CARTOGRAPHY

Saturday, 30 October 2021



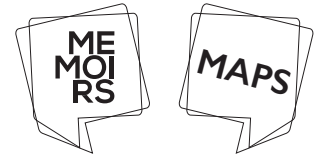
© Mauro Pinto, Untitled from the series *C'est pas facile* (courtesy of the artist)

## EUROPA, *je t'aime moi non plus*

Margarida Calafate Ribeiro

When my father returned to Portugal, he brought colonialism with him and was never able to leave it behind. My father was colonialism. Therefore, my father was also injustice and violence. I may not know very well, from a historical perspective, what colonialism was—a great deal probably escapes me; but I know very well what my father was, what he thought and said, and that is a practical knowledge of colonialism that no historian can possess, except through the same lived experience.

Isabela Figueiredo, *Notebook of Colonial Memories* [1]



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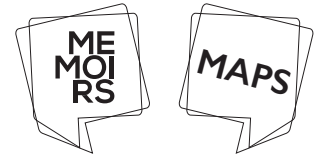
“Medaille” and “Patrice” are actually in the same line. For me, it’s more than logical to make music about this theme, because I grew up with it. These are things I inherited from my family, from my parents. So, it’s perfectly logical for me to be making this kind of music. There is so much mystery surrounding Patrice’s assassination that it is important, especially now, 60 years after his death, to say something about it, and to bring it to the fore again. As for colonialism, it still makes itself felt in our society today.

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In the contemporary discussions regarding post-colonial Europe, the concepts of memory and post-memory have taken on growing importance, giving prominence to an insight with great political relevance: colonialism never ends with those who enforced or suffered it. Traces of a colonial mindset impregnate generations to come and it has been passed down through the image of the former coloniser and the former colonised. These characters restage a complex phantasmagoria closely related to the most intimate ghost of the European subconscious: its colonial ghost which manifests itself *inter alia* in the form of a colonial “transfer of memory” – as racism, segregation, exclusion, subalternity – or in the form of “eruptions of memory”, and thereby questions the very essence of European multicultural societies, shaped by colonial heritage and fed by waves of migration.

Recently, questions about the silence, the unsaid, the ambiguities, the private and public histories about the various European colonial pasts and their reflections in the European present, have started to gain new political subjects and a concrete character in the political and decisional arena and with a great media repercussion, creating an unprecedented European movement. Debates on decolonisation and its multiple phases, the recognition of crimes during the colonial era and colonial wars, European museum collections, restitution, ways of teaching colonial history or, the questioning of the modes of North-South dialogue began to mark political agendas. These are signs of a complex Europe disentangling itself from the past, decolonising itself from its former colonies, to free itself from the images of the ex-coloniser and the ex-colonised, looking at the ghosts of their museological objects. These are signals of a Europe that, in reviewing its national narratives, dreams of another future. A future in which the stories, the objects, the images will survive in the hands of the children, when there is no longer the direct memory of the experience. This absence of the experience, and revindication of an inheritance is the post-memory.

*Memoirs Children of Empires and European Postmemories’s* is a project on the diversity of Europe and its main objective is to understand the challenges of living in post-colonial Europe. *Memoirs* focuses on



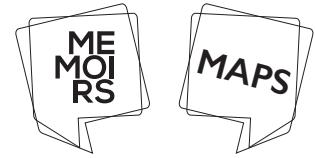
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the intergenerational memories of the children and grandchildren of those involved in and affected by the decolonization processes in African colonies of France, Portugal and Belgium – Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC), Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cap Vert and S.Tomé e Príncipe.

The innovative character of the project arises from its research questions, which have never before been asked on a European scale: How does the transferred intergenerational memory of the process of European colonialism and decolonisation manifest itself socially and culturally in France, Belgium and Portugal? What is the impact of that latent memory on modern-day Europe?

*Memoirs* has been building up a comprehensive answer to its questions through a series of coordinated interviews with second- and third-generation descendants of former colonizers, former colonized and colonial war veterans living in France, Belgium and Portugal, through a review and analysis of their cultural production and their artistic representations in five areas - visual arts, literature, performing arts, cinema and music - by reading multiple critical works and by following political events and participating in the debates of the last years, with academic communities, activists, artists and other cultural agents. It was this long path of co-produced knowledge between several actors, with its own academic and cultural programming, the publication of more than 40 scientific articles, 50 chapters, 6 books and a newsletter that already adds up to 140 issues, that made possible a solid knowledge and allowed to move towards an international partnership built around a theme as new and as urgent as the one conveyed by the international exhibition *Europa Oxalá* [2] and that required a multiple commitment - from institutions, to curators and artists, from academics to cultural agents, from scenographers to translators, editors and journalists in several countries.

With this project with multiple initiatives and partnerships decisive for its success and extension to other areas and audiences we want to contribute to the debate on the very real identity crisis Europe is going through, because it has failed to come to terms with the trauma of colonial memory and its heritage in the following generations. The three case studies under comparative perspective help us to approach the domain of the postmemory generation's subjectivities, specifically those of the children and grandchildren of former colonizers and the former colonized who, paradoxically and in different ways feel both excluded from and integral to the European project today. This heritage is a puzzled question as the memories they receive from their parents and grandparents, who came from the ex-colonies, collide with the invisibility of a colonial heritage in the national narrative and official memory of the European countries where they born and live and of which they belong. Thus, decolonization is



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not a historical event. It is an ongoing process that doesn't affect only the decolonized countries but also affects profoundly the colonizer continent that was Europe.

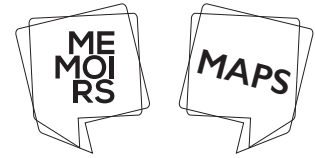
The interviews were more than exercises in data collection, they were a chance for the interviewees to see themselves as European social and political subjects. Sometimes for the first time, they saw how their transnational family histories are integrated into the history of Europe.

For some of the artists involved, these interviews were also an opportunity for critical reflection, sharing, and creativity. In several instances, new collaborative projects developed to shed light on the significance of colonial encounters in framing Europe's post-colonial self-awareness. The decolonization of Europe is exactly one of the themes that artists with whom we work are developing, integrating the colonial experience and the one we use to call "the other" into the different national narratives, as we can see in several art and literary works. Today's challenge is not only a struggle for narrative as Edward Said conceived it, but a struggle for history, for the writing of the blank pages of many stories yet to be told, which implies not only other languages, but also other "characters". Today, these stories (though normally silenced by the invisibility of their subjects) surface in anonymous speeches and artistic representations, showing postmemory as an active legacy and pointing at the possibility of a shared European project.

We see the need for radical epistemic shift in the way we conceive of European history, apparently a common history that generates very different memories. Our contention is that we can only get to grips with the tensions beneath the surface of European identity by recalibrating how we approach Europe as a historical, social and political dynamic concept and proceed to the decolonisation of the individual, both as the former colonised and the former coloniser, and build a *citizenship of memory* that can accommodate the spectra and be able to generate a democracy with memory.

Our aim is to keep the conversation going on a political, social and cultural level, and the final international *Memoirs* colloquium – [Constellations of post-memory in post-colonial Europe](#) – to be held at Culturgest in Lisbon on 4 November represents above all a new beginning of a conversation to be continued.

From 10am to 1pm we will be presenting the results of the project, a digital platform of artists and works of post-memory with more than 350 artists and over 1200 works by Fernando Cabral (Sistemas do Futuro) and two books: *A cena da pós-memória. O presente do passado na Europa pós-colonial*, edited by António Sousa Ribeiro, which constitutes a cartography of the project, with texts by António Pinto Ribeiro, António Sousa Ribeiro, Bruno Sena Martins, Ettore Finazzi-Agrò, Fátima da Cruz Rodrigues,



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Felipe Cammaert, Fernanda Vilar, Graça dos Santos, Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, Paulo de Medeiros and Roberto Vecchi; the book by António Pinto Ribeiro, *Novo Mundo - Arte Contemporânea no tempo da pós-memória*, both from Afrontamento Edições.

In the afternoon with academics, artists, museum directors, curators and journalists we will have 3 tables around the following questions:

– *Transmitting memory*, with António Sousa Ribeiro (Diretor do CES-UC), Fátima da Cruz Rodrigues (CES-UC), Graça dos Santos (Universidade de Paris-Nanterre), Hélia Santos (CES-UC), Margarida Calafate Ribeiro (CES-UC). Chair by Sandra Inês Cruz;

– *Representing memory*, with Katia Kameli (visual artist), Aimé Mpane (visual artist), Paulo Faria (writer), Zia Soares (actress and director), António Pinto Ribeiro (CES-UC and cultural programmer). Chair by Vitor Belanciano;

– *Exposing memory* with António Pinto Ribeiro, Katia Kameli, Aimé Mpane; Guido Gryssels (Director Royal Museum of Central Africa/ AfricaMuseum, Tervuren); Miguel Magalhães (Director, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon); Jean François Chougnat (President, MUCEM, Marseille). Chair by Liliana Coutinho.

The final lecture, titled “Citizenship of Memory: Controversial Legacies of Colonialism and Genocide”, is by **Michael Rothberg** (UCLA-University of California, Los Angeles), a leading expert in Memory Studies.

Away, but always with us, will be the members of the project team, Roberto Vecchi, Paulo de Medeiros, Fernanda Vilar, Felipe Cammaert and Helena Rebelo.

Translated by **Margarida Bonifácio**

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[1] Translated by Anna M. Klobucka and Phillip Rothwell.

[2] See António Pinto Ribeiro, “[The Exhibition Europa Oxalá](#)”, *MEMOIRS NEWSLETTER*, n.º 142, 16th October 2021. *Europa Oxalá* is an international exhibition taking place from October 2021 to March 2023, in three institutions in three countries - France (MUCEM- Marseille), Portugal (Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon), Belgium (Africa Museum, Tervuren, Brussels). The exhibition commissioners are António Pinto Ribeiro, Katia Kameli and Aimé Mpane.

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Margarida Calafate Ribeiro is senior researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra and PI of the project *Memoirs - Children of Empire and European Postmemories* (ERC Consolidator Grant, n° 648624) and *Maps: European Postmemories: a postcolonial cartography* (FCT - PTDC/LLT-OUT/7036/2020). She is responsible for the Eduardo Lourenço Chair, Camões / University of Bologna (with Roberto Vecchi).

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