

Spaces of Memory: The Construction of Colonial and Post-colonial Spaces in the Memories of Former Portuguese Colonizers

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This paper focuses on the memories built by former Portuguese colonizers, in their relation to the imaginary construction of colonial and post-colonial spaces, disclosing particular representations of Portugal, Angola and Mozambique as sites for identity-building and emotional investment.

The question of the intricate relation between memory and history has become even more problematic in the post-colonial condition. The role of memory in the shaping of history, understood as a strategic reading of the past, is now a deeply contested one, for we are confronted with plural, conflictive and politicized narratives, which erupted from the identities that co-existed in the tensional field of colonial power relations. My paper addresses a segment of this new landscape, focusing on the memories built by former Portuguese colonizers who occupied different positions in the structure of colonial power. I question the strategies of nostalgia and resentment and the work of mourning that are ingrained in those memories. They will also be considered in their close relation to the imaginary construction of colonial and post-colonial spaces, since they disclose particular representations of Portugal, Angola and Mozambique as sites for identity-building, which symbolically extend the motherly body and the family relationships (Mother-Father/Child). Cleavages between “good” and “bad” spaces, but also the ambivalent swaying between the two, are pervasive in the memories analyzed in this paper.

It is my contention that the memories and narratives produced by those who integrated the formerly dominant side, defeated in the process of colonial wars, must be conceived as part and parcel of post-coloniality. By thinking the present through a reconstruction of the colonial past, they are a different way of articulating the prefix of post-colonialism, even when they strive to keep themselves out of it.