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Nationalized Mourning, Nostalgic Irony: The Portuguese Decolonization in Film

Introduction: Lost in Aesthetics, Drowned in Applause

Since its acclaimed premiere at the Berlin Film Festival in 2012, the film *Tabu* by Portuguese director Miguel Gomes has received praise and awards in a number of countries.¹ International critics have qualified Gomes' film – the plot of which is set partly in an unnamed Portuguese colony in Africa – as »gentle, eccentric, possessed of a distinctive sort of innocence – and also charming and funny.«² Though the Portuguese press has also covered *Tabu* in a broad manner, few critics have contextualized the film within the history of representations of Portuguese colonialism. In fact, Portuguese commentators often appear more concerned with how the work was received abroad than with its actual content.³ Against the backdrop of a tiny film industry with very limited visibility outside Portugal and an economic and political crisis that since 2011 has heavily affected Portuguese self-conceptions, the applause Gomes received abroad soothed the wounded souls of Portuguese journalists. Gomes' artistically ambitious film had thus been transformed into a matter of national pride – without, however, stimulating any real discussion of its subject matter.

The film undoubtedly has strong aesthetic qualities worthy of the praise received. Nevertheless, the lack of a critical examination of the film's representation of Portuguese colonialism is problematic. International critics have said much about *Tabu's* references to the history of cinema, but intriguingly, the film's most obvious historical dimension – i. e. its depiction of a white settler culture in the last years of the Portuguese African Empire – has received limited attention. Critics have been lost in aesthetics, resulting in the film's disturbing content being drowned in praise.⁴ *Tabu's* reception has thus been marked by a neglect of its historical and political dimensions that is unfortunate in present-day Portugal, a society that still struggles with the legacy of its colonial empire in Africa.

- 1 The authors would like to thank Márcia Gonçalves, Lisbon, and Robert Stock, Konstanz, for their careful readings and Matt Steffens, Berlin, for his help in proofreading this article in its earlier phases.
- 2 Peter Bradshaw, *Tabu – Review. An Elegant, Africa-Set Drama Isn't Just for Cinephiles*, *The Guardian*, 6.9.2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/sep/06/tabu-review> (last access 17.9.2014).
- 3 See for example the articles on *Tabu* in *Público*, a center-left publication and one of the two leading daily newspapers in Portugal, published on 15.2.2012; 21.11.2012; 3. and 4.12.2012; 2.1.2013; 13. and 28.2.2013, and 16.1.2014, all accessible online. It is important to point to some exceptions outside the mainstream media, e.g. the highly inspiring reading of *Tabu* offered by Nuno Domingues, *O Tabu da História*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Portuguese Edition, May 2012.
- 4 See for example A.O. Scott, *Remembrance of Passions (and Follies) Lost. Miguel Gomes's Tabu*, *New York Times*, 25.12.2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/26/movies/miguel-gomes-tabu.html?_r=1& (last access 17.9.2014); Daniel Kehlmann, *Krokodil und Kruzifix*, *Die Zeit*, 21.12.2012, <http://www.zeit.de/2012/52/Film-Tabu-Miguel-Gomes> (last access 17.9.2014); Jacques Mandelbaum, »Tabou«. Miguel Gomes et la splendeur perdue de l'Occident, *Le Monde*, 4.12.2012. http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2012/12/04/tabou-miguel-gomes-et-la-splendeur-perdue-de-l-occident_1799705_3246.html (last access 17.9.2014).

In order to draw attention to some overlooked dimensions of Gomes' work, we will juxtapose a critical analysis of *Tabu* with the first feature film to address Portugal's end of empire, João Botelho's 1986 film *A Portuguese Farewell*. Both films tackle Portuguese colonialism in different ways: Whereas Botelho narrates the colonial wars as a story of national mourning, Gomes uses adventure, nostalgia, and irony as his most prominent narrative devices. After a short interpretation of both films, we will argue that, their differences notwithstanding, they share one crucial similarity: As representations of the past, both films lend voice only to the white Portuguese actors of colonialism. By contrast, the experiences of the colonized are only marginally accounted for. Discarding the potential that film as a medium holds for a multi-perspective narrative, both directors let their voices go unheard. In this respect, both films point to a general lack of critical engagement with colonialism since the Carnation Revolution of 1974, as will be shown in the following section, providing an overview of public discourse on colonialism in Portugal. Nevertheless, a (cinematic) turn to a more fully postcolonial discourse in Portugal is already underway. This trend is represented for instance by João Viana's *The Battle of Tabatô* (2013) discussed in the final section of this article. Both in terms of its production and its narrative, Viana's film presents an alternative approach to the Portuguese experience in Africa – one that does not use a merely white perspective, but one that also takes the memories of Guinea-Bissauans into account.

A National Story of Loss and Mourning: João Botelho's *A Portuguese Farewell* (1986)

Today a highly renowned director with a rich and diverse filmography, in 1985 João Botelho, a graduate of the Escola Superior de Cinema, had just finished his second feature film, *Um Adeus Português* (*A Portuguese Farewell*). First shown in festivals in London, Rio de Janeiro, and Berlin, in 1986 Portuguese viewers finally had the opportunity to see the film in a handful of cinemas in Lisbon and in Porto. Amidst the countless Hollywood productions and films of sexploitation that became popular in Portugal after the 1974 Carnation Revolution, *A Portuguese Farewell* was far from being a box office success. The state-funded art-house production however, is an eminent example of the so-called Portuguese school of filmmaking. Its adherents proposed an understanding of film as art that opposed the entertainment model presented by Hollywood and showed a strong interest in questions of national identity.⁵

A Portuguese Farewell is considered to be »the first Portuguese film to directly address the colonial war.«⁶ It also counts among only five feature films that to this day have put the Portuguese colonial wars (1961–1974) at their center.⁷ This dearth of cinematic representations may surprise, given the dramatic impact these wars had on Portugal. By 1945, the Portuguese had long lost

5 On the »Portuguese school« and national art cinema, cf. Tiago Baptista, Nationally Correct: The Invention of Portuguese Cinema, in: Portuguese Cultural Studies 3 (2010) 1, p. 3–18, and Jacques Lemièrre/Carla Araújo, »Um centro na margem«: o caso do cinema português, in: Análise Social 41 (2006) 180, p. 731–765, here p. 736–747. On the history of Portuguese filmmaking cf. Tiago Baptista, A Invenção do Cinema Português, Lisbon 2008, and Alcides Murtinheira/Igor Metzeltin, Geschichte des portugiesischen Kinos, Vienna 2010.

6 Baptista, Invenção, p. 158. Botelho himself stressed this idea shortly after the film's release, cf. João Botelho, Si la mémoire existe. Entretien avec João Botelho, in: Cahiers du Cinéma (1987) 393, March, n. pag.

7 Carolin Overhoff Ferreira, Identity and Difference. Postcoloniality and Transnationality in Lusophone Films, Zürich 2012, p. 58. The names of the other films are given later in the main text just before footnote 66.

their empires in Brazil and, except for some smaller territories, in Asia, yet they continued to hold on to their African colonies in Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Angola, and Mozambique. The authoritarian dictator António de Salazar stubbornly resisted the pressure for a transition of power that the international community as well as the liberation movements in the colonies exerted.⁸ Portugal's wars in Africa were fought with an army of conscripts that suffered severe losses. At least 820,000 Portuguese men served in Africa between 1961 and 1974 – a huge percentage in a total population of nine million. While the wars thus affected practically every family, by the early 1970s they were also devouring approximately forty percent of the Portuguese state budget.⁹ The combats ended after the Movimento das Forças Armadas (MFA), a group of junior officers disillusioned with warfare in the African colonies, overthrew the dictatorship in the Carnation Revolution in 1974.¹⁰ Within little more than a year of the coup, all colonies in Africa had negotiated their independence from Portugal.¹¹

These acquisitions of independence ended a 500-year-long history of Portuguese expansion that had begun when Portugal became Europe's first colonial power following the so-called voyages of discovery in the fifteenth century. After 1974, the country, which for decades had centered its education system, political propaganda, and cultural production on a strong imperial mystique, was thus abruptly reduced to a tiny strip of land at the southwestern corner of Europe. By this time, many Portuguese felt that they lived on the margins of the continent – geographically, politically, economically, and symbolically – while until then, many had continued to imagine their country as the center of a pluricontinental empire.¹²

It is the farewell to these self-perceptions of imperial grandeur that Botelho's 1985 feature metaphorically depicts. *A Portuguese Farewell* alternates between two narrative levels that are sharply set apart. The first is set in Portuguese Africa in 1973 and portrays a Portuguese combat unit erring in a thick wood. Before the soldiers are flown out to their quarters, a black civilian is beaten, a black Portuguese soldier is wounded, and a white soldier is killed by a sniper. While this plot is shot in high contrast black and white images, the second level set in 1985 uses skillfully composed, luminous color images. It narrates the difficult encounter of a peasant couple from Portugal's Northern Minho region with their stepdaughter and their younger son in Lisbon, portraying their (non-)communication. The suffocating silence that stifles most of the family re-

8 On the international context cf. the special issue of Portuguese Studies 29 (2013) 2. On the liberation movements cf. Éric Morier-Genoud (ed.), *Sure Road? Nationalisms in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique*, Leiden/Boston 2012.

9 For these figures see Angela Campos, »We Are Still Ashamed of our Own History.« Interviewing Ex-Combatants of the Portuguese Colonial War (1961–1974), in: *Lusotopie* 15 (2008) 2, p. 107–126, here p. 110.

10 A strong account of the coup and the revolution that followed is Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, Cambridge 1995.

11 Stewart Lloyd-Jones/António Costa Pinto (eds.), *The Last Empire. Thirty Years of Portuguese Decolonization*, Bristol et al. 2003.

12 On the evolution of Portuguese imperial self-images in the twentieth century cf. José Manuel Sobral, *O Norte, o Sul, a raça, a nação. Representações da identidade nacional portuguesa (séculos XIX–XX)*, in: *Análise Social* 39 (2004) 171, p. 255–284; Elsa Peralta, *Fictions of a Creole Nation: (Re)Presenting Portugal's Imperial Past*, in: Helen Vella Bonavita (ed.), *Negotiating Identities: Constructed Selves and Others*, Amsterdam/New York 2011, p. 193–217; Norrie MacQueen, *Re-defining the »African Vocation«: Portugal's Post-Colonial Identity Crisis*, in: *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 11 (2003) 2, p. 181–199. On Portugal's semi-peripheral imperialism cf. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-identity*, in: *Luso-Brazilian Review* 39 (2002) 2, p. 9–43.

union seems to stem from the loss of the couple's older son, who was shot while serving as second lieutenant in the colonial wars in 1973. His fatally ill mother visits his grave frequently, while her husband does not and seems to remain locked in silent suffering. The younger son conceals from his parents that he makes a living writing pornographic novels, and later confesses to his girlfriend that he regularly tells people his brother died in an accident, not wanting to make anyone feel uncomfortable by saying he died in Africa. The widowed stepdaughter is in a new relationship, but keeps it hidden from her in-laws. Although the four of them do not converse openly about their shared past, their present feelings, or their hopes for the future, their encounters change them as the storyline progresses: There is confession and absolution between stepmother and stepdaughter; there is growing intimacy between father and son; there is talk about the older son's death. After the visit, the mother is able to die in peace, the father is able to visit his son's grave, and the younger son, Alexandre, and the stepdaughter, Laura, live more independently. After the family meeting, Laura admits: »it was difficult for all of us, but it had to be.«¹³

This statement by the protagonist on her family encounter can be viewed as Botelho's central message on the broader situation in Portugal: Although it is no small challenge, there is no alternative to coming to terms with the past. As Carolin Overhoff Ferreira has indicated in her insightful analysis of the film, Botelho uses several strategies to turn a seemingly private and individual story into a representation of collective national history.¹⁴ The most obvious strategy is the title of the film, borrowed from a poem with the same title by the poet Alexandre O'Neill, which suggests a ›national‹ reading of the ›farewell‹ that the film depicts. A quotation from this poem also opens the film and evokes a long tradition of national self-conceptions, according to which Portugal is ›a country of mild manners‹ where obedient individuals never openly articulate societal conflicts, preferring instead to suffer in silence.

As Botelho himself has stated repeatedly, in his film »there are no individual characters; they are all collective, they are the desire to identify groups, attitudes, ideas.«¹⁵ This collectivizing effect is reinforced by Botelho's staging of public spaces: Whereas the bucolic, though also depressingly time-frozen countryside of northern Portugal provides a stark contrast to the modern capital Lisbon, the inclusion of both settings puts forward a full picture of the Portuguese nation and its disparities in a time of deep structural change. In a key scene of *A Portuguese Farewell*, Laura and her in-laws openly discuss the death of their husband and son, with the mother stating that he »died in Africa – and then for nothing.« While this private conversation takes place in the public space of the Lisbon Zoo, in another sequence, conversely, national symbols penetrate the private space. Late at night, the father's unwavering and petrified gaze is set on the TV screen, which shows the state television's sign-off: a close-up shot of a Portuguese flag waving in the wind.

We find Botelho's most notable strategy to address the colonial wars as a national experience in the black and white sequences representing the war in 1973. In relation to the 1985-narrative, these sequences at first appear to be flashbacks – a cinematic device that simultaneously allows for the expression of the subjective memory of a protagonist *and* the depiction of the remembered past as objective history.¹⁶ But for the majority of the 1973-sequences, it remains unclear to the viewer which of the soldiers is heard in the voice-over – it could be any of the combat unit's men,

13 »Foi difícil para todos, mas tinha que ser«, are her words.

14 Ferreira, *Identity*, p. 68f.

15 João Botelho, in: Rui de Azevedo Teixeira (ed.), *A Guerra Colonial. Realidade e Ficção*. Livro de Actas do I Congresso Nacional, Lisbon 2001, p. 493–495, here p. 494. He already said so earlier, cf. Botelho, *Mémoire*, p. 3.

16 Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film. Memory & History*, New York 1989, p. 1–20.

thus stressing the idea of their shared experience.¹⁷ Only when a faceless enemy finally shoots the second lieutenant and thus silences him forever does the viewer know for sure which of the soldiers was giving voice to their collective – and that this man actually is the older son of the peasant couple of the 1985-narrative. And yet surprisingly, the black and white sequences continue after the narrator's death. It thus becomes clear that these ›flashback‹ scenes are neither the memory of an individual protagonist nor a historical document. Instead, they evoke the newsreel images of the wars many Portuguese saw on their television screens both before and after 1974.¹⁸ In Portugal's post-war society these false ›flashbacks‹ function as collective mnemonic images. They represent a national past that Botelho feels the Portuguese have silenced, yet one that he wants them to finally acknowledge collectively.

All in all, the farewell evoked by the film's title is representative of two things: not only the difficult goodbye of a family to its deceased, but also that of the Portuguese to their own imperial self-images, images that had long served as compensation for Portugal's marginal position in Europe. In the final scene of the 1973-narrative, the protagonists anticipate this goodbye: Late at night in the quarters – filmed in a patently staged, unrealistic, Brechtian theatrical setting –, a soldier is asked by his comrade in arms how many centuries he has been sitting there. In response, he raises five fingers – an obvious reference for all Portuguese viewers to the five centuries of maritime expansion, which now draw to a close. The soldier rises and goes to bed. An unoccupied chair, empty beer bottles, and African chants are all that remain.

An Adventure Story of Loss and Irony: Miguel Gomes' *Tabu* (2011)

An ›intrepid‹ but melancholic explorer makes his way through the ›jungle‹, mourning for his dead wife, while he discovers the ›heart of the black continent‹ in the service of the King of Portugal.¹⁹ He is followed by a group of black servants who witness his suicide when he throws himself to a crocodile. *Tabu's* prologue, shown as a film within a film, is being watched by Pilar, a middle-aged woman. Sitting alone in a cinema in Lisbon, crying about the explorer's tragic story, Pilar opens the film's first chapter, entitled ›Paradise Lost.‹ Pilar is a do-gooder, very religious, and always concerned about the well-being of the world, especially that of her neighbor Aurora, an old, bossy woman who lives next door with Santa, her maid from Cape Verde. The ›lost paradise‹ they live in is a grim image of Portugal's capital, not only because of Gomes' use of black and white, but also due to the unpleasant weather and the atmosphere of miscommunication, where religion is replaced by marijuana and family is a broken construct. The characters seem to be driven by *something* – but it is only during the second part of the film, ›Paradise,‹ that the viewer comes to understand that this *something* is their past.

Gomes' chapter titles are taken from Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's 1931 film, also titled *Tabu*.²⁰ But Murnau is only one of the references Gomes uses. ›She had a farm in Africa‹²¹ is the first

17 This is a conscious move by Botelho, cf. Botelho, *Mémoire*, p. 2. Cf. also Ferreira, *Identity*, p. 68.

18 Botelho viewed thousands of hours of documentary footage in the archives in preparation for the film, cf. Botelho, in: Teixeira (ed.), *Guerra*, p. 494.

19 Miguel Gomes (Dir.), *Tabu [Tabu]* 2012, DVD. Original quotes: ›Intrépido‹, ›selvas‹, and ›coração do continente negro‹.

20 Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau (Dir.), *Tabu [Tabu: A Story of the South Seas]* 1931. Murnau intended to show the South Sea inhabitants in order to criticize Western materialism. He tells the story of a young couple that engages in a taboo relationship since the girl is promised to the spirits/gods. They fly from the island, which has been entitled ›paradise,‹ to a colonized island, the ›lost paradise‹.

21 Citation from Karen Blixen's popular novel (1937) and Sydney Pollack's film (1985) *Out of Africa*.

sentence of *Tabu*'s second part, spoken by Gian Luca, Aurora's ex-lover. Santa and Pilar take him to visit the dying Aurora, but ultimately he does not arrive in time to say his farewell. The three sit down together after Aurora's funeral in a café in a shopping mall. A fake parrot and the café's décor evoke the tropics and thus ironically set the tone, as Gian Luca starts to tell the story of their secret love. The film is now narrated by voice-over and the spectator is suddenly confronted with a pretty, young Aurora living a happy-go-lucky life in an unnamed Portuguese colony on the African continent. She is married and soon becomes pregnant and bored. The time of her pregnancy, displayed as a monthly countdown in the film, also defines the secret and highly passionate love affair she has with Gian Luca. Her husband's friend Mario discovers their affair, and is shot by Aurora when he tries to prevent her from eloping with Gian Luca. After the homicide, which is reclaimed by an anticolonial movement and thus ironically moved from the realm of private passion to public politics, Aurora gives birth to her daughter, and is then brought home by her husband. The farewell between her and Gian Luca occurs via letter correspondence when the countdown concludes.

The unique aspects of the film – such as the countdown, the enigmatic crocodile, the witty imagery, the bizarre dialogues, as well as the playful nod to the silent film era in the second part – are certainly impressive. These creative sparks explain why *Tabu* received the Alfred-Bauer-Prize for its artwork at the Berlin Film Festival in 2012. But a closer look beyond these qualities reveals pressing questions of representation and responsibility for history. »I don't have any biographical connection to that time,« Gomes stated in an interview with the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard*.²² Born in 1972, a mere two years before the Carnation Revolution, Gomes is certainly right when he claims he has no direct memory of the colonial period. And yet, the director, whose mother was born in Angola, is what Ribeiro, Vecchi, and Ribeiro call a »child of the war,« someone who, without firsthand knowledge of it, is its »symbolic inheritor.«²³ The ability to distance oneself from the colonial biographies and the wish to complete the fragmentary narratives of the parents' generation is characteristic of this second generation.²⁴ Having grown up in a society dealing with the effects of decolonization, Gomes chooses Aurora and Gian Luca to personalize its consequences in *Tabu*. Aurora is not just haunted by a blurred feeling of guilt but also by dreams that revolve around her past. She longs for the days of her youth because, in the present Portugal, she is surrounded by loss. She lost her lover, farm, husband, daughter, money, and partly, even her mind.

As living remnants of the bygone empire, Aurora and Gian Luca point to a sensitive subject that still »either evokes a sense of shame or nostalgia,« as Gomes admitted in an interview.²⁵ It was due to such sensitivities that the director tried to avoid any concrete historical or sociological aspects in his film.²⁶ The question of history in *Tabu* is nonetheless pressing because its depiction of colonialism as memory can be read in different ways. In a key scene of the film, Aurora has an emotional breakdown and begs Pilar to pray for her, since she is a sinner and St. Antonio, the patron of Lisbon and lost people, will not listen to her. Interestingly, while Christianity and missionaries played an important role in Portugal's colonial history, in *Tabu* religious practices figure prominently in decolonized Portugal. They function as a means of handling guilt and can

22 Dominik Kamalzadeh, »Der Film hat etwas von einer Geisterbeschwörung«, *Der Standard*, 2.11.2012, <http://derstandard.at/1350260076990/Der-Film-hat-etwas-von-einer-Geisterbeschwörung> (last access 30.8.2014).

23 Margarida Calafate Ribeiro/Roberto Vecchi/António Sousa Ribeiro, *The Children of the Colonial War: Post-Memory and Representations*, in: Isabel Capelo Gil/Adriana Martins (eds.), *Plots of War: Modern Narratives of Conflict*, Berlin 2012, p. 11–23, here p. 16.

24 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 15f.

25 Kamalzadeh, *Film*.

26 Cf. *ibid.*

be read as both a relic of and a connection to colonialism. But it is up to the viewer to decide what exactly Aurora feels guilty about – her illicit love affair, the murder she committed, or the colonial lifestyle – because the dialogue remains ambiguous. »Horrors I am ashamed to confess. I know I am paying for them. [...] I have blood on my hands.«²⁷

Throughout the film, Gomes leaves room for interpretation: The violence and exploitation, as well as the anticolonial struggle in the colonies or the reintegration of returning settler populations to Portugal after 1974 are all hinted at but never directly addressed. Gomes himself is aware that viewers of *Tabu* have come up with interpretations of the film that differ both from each other and from his own expectations.²⁸ The audience fills in the gaps left by the director; how viewers actually use this freedom can be reasonably supposed by examining how the critics have used it in their discussion of irony as a cinematic device.

Many press reviews highlight the irony in Gomes' dialogues as well as in his depictions of white settlers throwing parties alongside black servants.²⁹ Despite these assumptions of irony, Daniel Kehlmann concludes in the German weekly *Die Zeit*, widely read by the upper-middle class and by bourgeois intellectuals alike, that »Gomes' new film *Tabu* is about everything: great love, abysmal passion, chance, destiny, age and death.«³⁰ It would seem that the film is in fact about everything but colonization. To be sure, it has been argued that Gomes intended to depict the decadence of the colonial settlers, ironically showing how ignorant these »islands of white«³¹ were of the anticolonial »winds of change« and of their own eurocentrism.³² But this depiction could also be interpreted entirely without irony. After all, what is shown is not far from the reality of colonial lifestyle. This is why *Tabu* may also be taken at face value: It tells a love story that is nostalgic for an affair and an empire gone by. This reading is supported by the order of the film's chapters: After a portrayal of somber, decolonized Portugal comes the forbidden passion of a golden youth shot in the colonial setting that makes the viewer forget the grey depiction of Lisbon or at least helps it to fade into the background.

Gomes has stated that he never intended to shoot a historical film.³³ Instead, he sought to develop a creative, emotional film, and use his imagination as a replacement for the missing memories.³⁴ This choice leads to the core problem of mediating art and the representation of

27 Original quote: »Horrores que eu terei vergonha de confessar. Eu sei que estou a pagar por isso. [...] Eu tenho sangue nas mãos.«

28 Cf. Dennis Lim, Past is Present Yet Irretrievable, *The New York Times*, 21.12.2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/movies/tabu-newest-genre-breaker-from-miguel-gomes.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (last access 15.9.2014).

29 Cf. Trevor Johnston, Film of the Week: *Tabu*, Sight & Sound, 11.11.2013, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news/film-week-tabu> (last access 15.9.2014). That these pictures convey an ironic notion of »paradise« has been put forward by Gomes himself, cf. Kamalzadeh, Film.

30 Cf. Daniel Kehlmann, *Krokodil und Kruzifix*.

31 The microcosms of British settler societies in Africa have been analyzed by Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White. Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1939*, Durham, NC 1987. For a history of Portuguese settler populations in Angola and Mozambique, cf. Cláudia Castelo, *Passagens para África. O Povoamento de Angola e Moçambique com Naturais da Metrópole (1920–1974)*, Porto 2007, for Angola cf. Fernando Tavares Pimenta, *Angola, os Brancos e a Independência*, Porto 2008.

32 This is the interpretation given by Filipe Furtado, <http://www.revistacinetica.com.br/tabu.htm> (last access 31.10.2014).

33 Cf. New York Film Festival, Press Conference, 19.10.2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3z-JGHoP8IM> (last access 15.9.2014).

34 Cf. Kamalzadeh, Film.

history. Most certainly, *Tabu* is not what one would call a historical film, and yet Gomes does use the history of colonialism to create his story – a story that is heavily dependent on colonial clichés such as the sexualization of black women and ›Africa‹ as a space of unconventional freedom for white settlers and of emancipation for white women.³⁵ In this sense, one could contradict Gomes and assert that *Tabu* is even doubly historical – through both its artistry and its colonial setting. To be sure, some may claim that art, even when depicting history, is free from *a priori* political restrictions. Still, we argue that in order to create a critical consciousness of the past and to start the necessary decolonization of the mind, it is unfitting to merely fill in the blanks with the director's or the viewer's imagination when the latter is most likely to be led by the colonial clichés Gomes offers in his film.³⁶ His stereotypical representation of the colonial ›Others‹ continues to deny them voice and agency. As A. O. Scott stated in the *New York Times*: »*Tabu* views colonialism as an aesthetic opportunity rather than a political or moral problem.«³⁷ By using the colony as a side scene without problematizing colonization, Gomes makes the colonizers' losses the focal point of his film and thus leaves space for viewers to create a nostalgic interpretation of Portuguese colonialism in Africa.

Whose Story Is It? The Marginalization of Black Voices

Together with similar themes, stylistic similarities such as the use of voice-over and black and white images invite comparison between *A Portuguese Farewell* and *Tabu*. The opening shots provide a clear example: Both films show white men making their way through a thick vegetation that for European viewers evokes the mental image of a ›jungle.‹ Within this similarity, there is, however, difference: Whereas the »intrepid« explorer in Gomes' prologue has his black servants pave the way for him with their machetes – evoking high colonialism's arrogance *and* dependency on native intermediaries –, the late colonial combat unit in Botelho's film are left to their own insufficient devices and seem fundamentally lost, vulnerable as they are to the bullets of the anti-colonial fighters.

The strongest motive for comparing the two films, however, lies in their similar use of narrative levels. In juxtaposing past and present, both films are intrinsically about the relationship between history and memory, between colonialism and its afterlife. Instead of drawing a self-contained portrait of the past, they depict how people in the present relate to the past. In short, both films are postcolonial films in two senses of the word: They temporally come after colonialism, and they are shaped by colonialism's lingering, ghostly presence.³⁸ It is with regard to this commonality that we wish to address a striking parallel between them: In linking history and memory, both Gomes and Botelho focus solely on the perspective of white Portuguese. The experiences and memories of black actors of Portuguese colonialism are silenced. Both films therefore fail to be postcolonial in a third – and the most important – sense of the word: They refrain from challenging eurocentrism.

35 Cf. Anette Dietrich, *Weißer Weiblichkeit. Konstruktionen von »Rasse« und Geschlecht im deutschen Kolonialismus*, Bielefeld 2007, p. 8.; Daniela Neuser, *Ein Platz an der Sonne – der neue Heimatfilm: Afrika, Mon Amour und Momella*, in: Astrid Erll/Stephanie Wodjanka (eds.), *Film und kulturelle Erinnerung. Plurimediale Konstellationen*, Berlin 2008, p. 107–138.

36 In a similar vein, cf. the critical reflection on *Tabu* by Domingos, *Tabu*.

37 Scott, *Remembrance*.

38 Cf. also Paulo de Medeiros, *Spectral Postcoloniality. Lusophone Postcolonial Film and the Imaginary of the Nation*, in: Sandra Ponzanesi/Marguerite Waller (eds.), *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, London et al. 2012, p. 129–142.

Instead of working through Portugal's colonial legacy and deconstructing it in a critical manner, they ultimately perpetuate some of its basic power structures.³⁹

As we have already shown, though the irony Gomes uses to depict colonial life could be meant to impart a critical view of colonialism, it ultimately fails to do so. Various sequences of the film – such as the farcical pool party with a lunatic French boxing performance or the settlers combining firing practice with five-o'clock tea and a romantic rendezvous – clearly portray a decadent settler society oblivious to their surroundings and the sign of the times.⁴⁰ But since Gomes never shows his viewers anything substantial about how the colonized experienced the final stages of Portuguese colonialism or the beginning of the war for national liberation,⁴¹ his film nevertheless provides no space for acknowledging an anticolonial position.⁴² By the same token, since his focus is on the sentimental adventures of the white protagonists, the director indirectly downplays the structural violence that formed the backbone of colonial rule.

In order to highlight which characters are important in his film and which are not, Gomes uses an interesting instrument: He names the relevant figures while denying others this privilege. For example, the husband of Aurora remains unnamed throughout the film. The same applies to the colony and its population: It remains a nameless, undefined spot on a large continent with inhabitants who only serve as a backdrop for an exotic love story.⁴³ Although the procedure of leaving unnamed is the same in both cases, it nevertheless produces divergent outcomes, since viewers will interpret namelessness according to colonial traditions: We thus understand that Aurora's husband has no name because he does not matter to her story, but that the Africans have no name because they do not matter to the history of colonialism.

Tabu denies subjectivity to black individuals, not only in the colonial »paradise,« but also in the film's decolonized »paradise lost« where Santa, Aurora's maid, mainly functions as a reminder of the colonial past. Her representation oscillates between the depictions of an intellectually modest domestic worker – serving without thinking and without heart, stubbornly following instructions from Aurora's daughter – and an enigmatic, callous woman whom Aurora accuses of using witchcraft against her. Either way, aside from the fact that she is an illiterate immigrant from Cape Verde, viewers never receive any additional personal information about her character.

As for *A Portuguese Farewell*, its depictions of black individuals on both narrative levels are more ambivalent, but ultimately similarly problematic. In the film's opening sequence, Botelho portrays the black soldier of the Portuguese platoon as an integral part of the group, exchanging looks of solidarity and even tenderness with his brothers in arms while they are resting to share

39 On the meanings and genealogies of postcolonialism: Stuart Hall, 'When Was ›the Post-Colonial?‹ Thinking at the Limit', in: Iain Chambers/Lidia Curti (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Question. Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, London/New York 1996, p. 242–260; Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, London 1998; Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*, Malden, MA et al. 2001.

40 Gomes himself has insinuated this interpretation, cf. Zachary Wigon, 'The Pact: Miguel Gomes on Cinema and *Tabu*', in: *Filmmaker*, 26.12.2012, <http://filmmakermagazine.com/61331-the-pact-miguel-gomes-on-cinema-and-tabu/> (last access 3.4.2014).

41 When a Portuguese soldier confirms rumors about the armed insurrection of anticolonial forces, the indigenous population, attending church service, is shown to be incredulous, passive, and uncomfortable with the news.

42 Ferreira, *Identity*, p. 75, concludes the same regarding *A Portuguese Farewell* and Manuel de Oliveiras *NO, or the Vain Glory of Command*.

43 Although it must be admitted that most Portuguese viewers will likely identify it as Mozambique, since the film shows tea plantations, which were absent from all other Portuguese colonies.

a modest meal. While Ferreira interprets this as a depiction of lusotropicalist harmony⁴⁴ proving »that the [Portuguese] belief [in having accomplished] a ›better‹ kind of colonization survived the end of colonialism,« it is important to point out that Botelho does later emphasize racial divisions that fracture comradeship: The black soldier is the only one carrying merely a machete instead of a gun. He has to walk in the first line, and as a result, is the one who steps on a mine. Heavily injured, he is carried by his comrades, but is not flown out; the helicopter is only called in to evacuate the men after the white lieutenant is shot.

One of the last scenes in *A Portuguese Farewell* shows white soldiers teaching black children how to read by having them repeat the names of Portuguese rivers from a geography book. Another soldier watching the scene states that the Portuguese would one day look back on their accomplishments in Africa with pride. Taken at face value, this could be read as a continuation of Salazarist discourses on Portugal's civilizing power and its allegedly assimilationist policies.⁴⁵ But it is more likely that viewers should interpret this scene as a critique of the banal, virtually naïve eurocentrism of the Portuguese soldiers.⁴⁶ Botelho thus subtly points to the racist mentality of colonial rule; still, he portrays the soldiers as friendly, fearful, disoriented victims of a war they do not fully understand, unable to cope with a conflict they have been thrown into by an illegitimate regime. While this may be an accurate description of many of Portugal's conscripts, few aspects of Botelho's film indicate that Portuguese soldiers have also been perpetrators, inflicting violence on countless colonized civilians by forcefully resettling them, killing them as ›collateral damage‹ of their warfare, or in massacres.⁴⁷

In the narrative of 1985-Lisbon Botelho also portrays black individuals. Again, their depiction is ambivalent: While, similar to Aurora's maid Santa in *Tabu*, as Cape Verdeans they serve as reminders of Portugal's colonial past,⁴⁸ they also stand for the thriving present of a ›cosmopolitan‹ night life in postdictatorial Lisbon. Thus, a scene in a nightclub on the one hand uses the most generally known clichés, such as the sexualization of black women dancing and black men having rhythm in their blood as musicians. On the other hand, this scene points to a specific time and place: The years after the 1974 Carnation Revolution with their increase of black immigrant communities in Portugal have been hailed by many Portuguese bohemians as a long-awaited cultural opening of an authoritarian, catholic society. In these circles, the smartly dressed black protagonist who appears in two scenes of Botelho's film is easily identified as being played by Zé da Guiné, an immigrant who acted as a key figure in Lisbon's cultural life and an embodiment of 1980s' fashion and style.⁴⁹

44 On lusotropicalism, cf. Cláudia Castelo, »O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo«. O Luso-Tropicalismo e a Ideologia Colonial Portuguesa (1933–1961), Porto 1999.

45 Cf. Ferreira, *Identity*, p. 70.

46 Cf. Botelho, *Mémoire*, p. 2.

47 Portugal's ›counter-insurgency‹ warfare included large-scale forced resettlement of civilian populations, cf. Gerald J. Bender, *Angola under the Portuguese. The Myth and the Reality*, Berkeley 1978, p. 156–196. With regard to massacres, the killing of several hundred civilians in Wiriyamu, Mozambique, in 1973 has become infamous, cf. Pedro Aires Oliveira/Bruno C. Reis, *Cutting Heads or Winning Hearts. Late Colonial Portuguese Counterinsurgency and the Wiriyamu Massacre of 1972*, in: *Civil Wars* 14 (2012) 1, p. 80–103, and Mustafah Dhada, *The Wiriyamu Massacre of 1972: Its Context, Genesis, and Revelation*, in: *History in Africa* 40 (2013) 1, p. 45–75.

48 On Cape Verdeans in Portugal, cf. Luís Batalha, *The Cape Verdean Diaspora in Portugal. Colonial Subjects in a Postcolonial World*, Lanham, MD 2004.

49 Vítor Belanciano, *Morreu Zé da Guiné, ícone da boémia e da cultura dos anos 1980*, Público, 11.1.2013.

These ambivalences notwithstanding, the black protagonists in *A Portuguese Farewell* do not have a voice; except for a handful of words they utter, they literally remain silent. This makes Botelho's film rather problematic: On the one hand, it was a pioneering attempt to show Portugal as a postcolonial society and to further a public engagement with the history of the colonial wars. On the other hand, Botelho limits colonialism as a meaningful experience to the metropolitan space and to the Portuguese who are traumatized by the war's violence. As in *Tabu*, only the white characters and their city are named; the name of the colony the soldiers in the flashbacks are wandering through is never mentioned, and while Lisbon stands in for Portugal, but is also depicted as a concrete place, the ›jungle‹ in the flashbacks conveys a placeless notion of ›Africa.‹ As in *Tabu*, this ›Africa‹ only serves as a backdrop for a drama of national mourning, with the African memory of these events left unaccounted for. Just like the face of the sniper who shoots the Portuguese lieutenant in an ambush, the perspective of the colonized before and after independence thus remains without contours. Instead of questioning colonial perceptions, Botelho's film contributes to a narcissistic monologue of a nation blessed by the end of its colonial empire.⁵⁰

In sum, Ferreira's conclusion for *A Portuguese Farewell* is also fitting for *Tabu*: ›Given the ambiguities in relation to colonialist/imperialist discourses and the representation of the Other [...], it is not possible to speak of a decolonization of the mind.‹⁵¹ Rather, the colonial order is transferred into the decolonized metropole, and ›while the *white* subject restages the past, the Black subject is forbidden the present.‹⁵² In both films, viewers only have the opportunity to identify with white characters, because the films depict black people as being marginal to the last years of Portuguese colonial rule, its demise, and its afterlives. Given the fact that Gomes shot *Tabu* nearly three decades after *A Portuguese Farewell*, his failure to provide a multi-perspectival view on decolonization should be viewed even more critically.

How Does It Fit? Broader Trends in the Representation of Colonialism in Portugal

Public discussion on colonialism in Portugal today still follows a double standard: On the one hand, the ›golden age‹ of Portugal's medieval and early modern ›discoveries‹ is highly visible and carries positive connotations in the public sphere. Officials like to present the feats of Portugal's navigators and colonizers as a yardstick of Portuguese virtues, as a philanthropic adventure of cross-cultural contact, and as the decisive initial step towards today's ›globalization.‹⁵³ On the other hand, the last decades of colonial rule in Africa and the colonial wars are much less visible. Where they are addressed, mainstream discourse either ties them to some variant of the ›lusotropicalist vulgate‹ or to notions of a difficult, ›traumatic‹ past that remain fuzzy and tend to position the Portuguese (exclusively) as victims. With respect to this lack of critical discussion, some observers have evoked an ›official amnesia,‹ a ›blocked memory,‹ or ›conspiracies of silence‹

50 A similar assessment is put forward by Ferreira, *Identity*, p. 71.

51 Ferreira, *Identity*, p. 75.

52 Grada Kilomba, *Plantation Memories. Episodes of Everyday Racism*, Münster 2010, p. 138.

53 The Commission for the Commemoration of Portuguese Discoveries created in 1986 and the rhetoric dominating the Expo '98 in Lisbon are often cited examples; a more recent example is given by Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho, who on May 2, 2014 inaugurated a museum in Porto dedicated to the ›discoveries‹ by pointing out that the ›cosmopolitan spirit‹ of the early modern navigators could help the Portuguese supersede the economic crisis they suffer since 2009, cf. <http://www.publico.pt/politica/noticia/passos-evoca-a-epopeia-maritima-para-dizer-que-portugal-vai-ultrapassar-a-crise-sem-uma-tutela-exterior-1634911> (last access 25.10.2014).

regarding decolonization:⁵⁴ »Portuguese society seems to have simply put aside admitting, let alone discussing, the fact of the colonial war.«⁵⁵

To be sure, silence in the public sphere was never all-encompassing. In the realm of the fine arts, as Francisco Bethencourt has pointed out, some Portuguese critically engaged with colonial myths and the wars as early as the 1970s,⁵⁶ and artists like Vasco Araújo continue this endeavor today, most recently in an impressive installation entitled *Botânica* in Lisbon's Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea in 2014.

With the novels of António Lobo Antunes (*The Land at the End of the World*, 1979 and *The Return of the Caravels*, 1988), Lídia Jorge (*The Murmuring Coast*, 1988), and others, literature is an intellectual field in which critical engagement with the last years of Portuguese colonialism came to thrive early on.⁵⁷ Recently, two fascinating books, Isabela Figueiredo's essay *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* (2009) and Dulce Maria Cardoso's coming-of-age novel *O Retorno* (2011), have provided a complex picture of Portuguese settler colonialism and some of its legacies. These works notwithstanding, on the whole, few authors have addressed these issues, and when they do, their works only appeal to a numerically small, literary-minded public.

Disturbingly little historical research has been carried out on Portuguese decolonization, and although this is slowly beginning to change, there is still a lack of historiography on nearly every aspect of it.⁵⁸ At the same time, however, colonialism and its legacy are being addressed more consistently in academic disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and literary studies, which have produced conscious adaptations of the Anglo-Saxon »postcolonial studies« for the lusophone world.⁵⁹ In 2004, an interdisciplinary research program was launched at the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra where different postgraduate research projects on (post-)colonialism are hosted.⁶⁰

- 54 Citations are from Campos, *History*, p. 109; Isabel dos Santos Lourenço/Alexander Keese, *Die blockierte Erinnerung. Portugals koloniale Gedächtnis und das Ausbleiben kritischer Diskurse 1974–2010*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37 (2011) 2, p. 220–243; Elsa Peralta, *Conspirações de silêncio: Portugal e o fim do império colonial*, in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Portuguese Edition, February 2011.
- 55 Paulo de Medeiros, *War Pics: Photographic Representations of the Colonial War*, in: *Luso-Brazilian Review* 39 (2002) 2, p. 91–106, here p. 93.
- 56 Francisco Bethencourt, *Deconstrução da memória imperial: literatura, arte e historiografia*, in: Margarida Calafate Ribeiro/Ana Paula Ferreira (eds.), *Fantasma e Fantasias Imperiais no Imaginário Português Contemporâneo*, Porto 2003, p. 69–81.
- 57 Isabel Moutinho, *The Colonial Wars in Contemporary Portuguese Fiction*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK et al. 2008; Bethencourt, *Deconstrução*; Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, *O fim da história de regressos e o retorno a África. Leituras da literatura portuguesa contemporânea*, in: Elena Brugioni/Joana Passos/Andreia Sarabando/Marie-Manuelle Silva (eds.), *Itinerâncias: Percursos e Representações da Pós-Colonialidade*, Vila Nova de Famalicão 2012, p. 89–99.
- 58 The 2011 assessment of the historiographical situation in Lourenço/Keese, *Erinnerung*, p. 220–221, 239–240, is grosso modo still valid. An important new publication is Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo/António Costa Pinto (eds.), *Portugal e o fim do colonialismo. Dimensões internacionais*, Lisbon 2014.
- 59 Some important texts are: Sousa Santos, *Prospero*; Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, *Uma História de Regressos. Império, Guerra Colonial e Pós-Colonialismo*, Porto 2004; Miguel Vale de Almeida, *An Earth-Colored Sea. »Race,« Culture, and the Politics of Identity in the Postcolonial Portuguese-Speaking World*, New York et al. 2004.
- 60 Cf. <http://www.ces.uc.pt> (last access 30.10.2014) and Nikolai Brandes/Stella Lu Lorenz, *Und wenn es mehr Welt gäbe ... In Portugal beginnt langsam eine kritische Debatte über das koloniale Erbe*, in: *iz3w* (2007) 300, p. 16–21, here p. 21.

Outside academia, there has been an upsurge of publicly voiced memories of the colonial wars since the mid-1990s. Predominantly white veterans have lobbied for a recognition of their ›sacrifice,‹ resulting in a competition between different associations and the building of a memorial for those who died in the so called ›ultramarine provinces,‹ the *Monumento aos Combatentes do Ultramar*. Additionally, various exhibitions to commemorate the colonial wars have been established.⁶¹ These efforts have been accompanied by popular novels, autobiographies, and blogs written by veterans, but increasingly also by Portuguese who lived in the colonies before migrating to Portugal with the coming of independence.⁶² These so-called *retornados* have also been at the center of a prime-time series released on public television and of several journalistic works.⁶³ Unfortunately, however, their history remains narrated predominantly according to a script of Portuguese victimhood.

As for the medium of film, after the breakdown of the authoritarian *Estado Novo* in 1974, a handful of documentary filmmakers took advantage of the new freedom of expression and tackled the colonial wars of the fallen regime.⁶⁴ But they were exceptions in the immediate postwar period, at which time representations of the conflicts were otherwise ›very scarce, if not at all nonexistent.‹⁶⁵ Aside from these documentaries, it took filmmakers a relatively long time to deal with the colonial wars in their work. As the first feature film, Botelho's *A Portuguese Farewell* (1985) was followed by Manoel de Oliveira's mystifying, somewhat ahistorical *NO, or the Vain Glory of Command* (1990). Ferreira considers José Carlos de Oliveira's *Preto e branco* (2003), Margarida Cardoso's *A costa dos murmúrios* (2004), and Joaquim Leitão's *Purgatório* (2006) to be the only other three feature films on the colonial war that have been produced since 1974.⁶⁶ Documentary films, on the other hand, have increasingly addressed these conflicts since the mid-1990s. Amongst them, Joaquim Furtado's series *A Guerra. Colonial/Do Ultramar/De Libertação* (2007–2010) on

61 The memorial was inaugurated in Lisbon in 1994, cf. Robert Stock, *Urbane Erinnerungspolitik und Dekolonisierung. Das Denkmal der Übersee-Kombattanten in Lissabon*, in: *Berliner Debatte Initial* 24 (2013) 2, p. 48–58, and Ellen W. Sapega, *Remembering Empire/Forgetting the Colonies. Accretions of Memory and the Limits of Commemoration in a Lisbon Neighborhood*, in: *History & Memory* 20 (2008) 2, p. 18–38. On the veterans' museums on the colonial wars cf. Robert Stock, *Waffen und Prothesen. Veteranen, Geschichtspolitik und die museale Deutung des portugiesischen Kolonialkriegs (1961–1974)*, in: Henry Thorau/Tobias Brandenberger (eds.), *Corpo a Corpo. Körper, Geschlecht, Sexualität in der Lusophonie*, Berlin 2011, p. 235–264.

62 Raquel Ribeiro, *Os retornados estão a abrir o baú*, in: *Ípsilon*, 8.12.2010.

63 On the series broadcast by RTP in 2013, cf., Teresa Pinheiro, *O retorno dos retornados. A construção de memória do passado recente na série televisiva *Depois do Adeus**, in: *Veredas. Revista da Associação Internacional de Lusitanistas* (2015), 22, n. pag. Recent journalistic works on *retornados* are Ana Sofia Fonseca, *Angola terra prometida. A vida que os portugueses deixaram*, Lisbon 2009; Sarah Adamopoulos, *Voltar. Memória do Colonialismo e da Descolonização*, Lisbon 2011; Rita Garcia, *Os que Vieram de África. O Drama da Nova Vida das Famílias Chegadas do Ultramar*, Alfragide 2012. As for the academic research on *retornados*, several master's theses have been written and a handful of PhDs and Post-Doc-projects are being conducted, but none of these have yet been published. The most useful Portuguese book on *retornados* to this day is Rui Pena Pires, *Migrações e Integração. Teoria e Aplicações à Sociedade Portuguesa*, Oeiras 2003.

64 Cf. Carolin Overhoff Ferreira, *Decolonizing the Mind? The Representation of the African Colonial War in Portuguese Cinema*, in: *Studies in European Cinema* 2 (2005), 3, p. 227–239, here p. 228f., e.g. *Deus Pátria Autoridade* (1976) by Rui Simões, *Os Demónios de Alcácer Quibir* (1976) by José Fonseca, *Actos dos Feitos da Guiné* (1980) by Fernando Matos Silva et al.

65 Campos, *History*, p. 114.

66 Cf. Ferreira, *Identity*, p. 58–59.

the public channel RTP is likely to have had the strongest impact.⁶⁷ Furtado includes testimonies from different sides on the wars in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. This multi-perspective approach to the past is taken up by Diana Andringa's *As Duas Faces da Guerra* (2007) and *Dundo, Memória Colonial* (2009), which investigate the intersection of personal experiences and the ›bigger‹ history, and in doing so, also give voice to the formerly colonized.⁶⁸

Although there has thus been a growing engagement with decolonization in Portugal's public sphere over the last two decades, the ways in which Africans and Afro-Portuguese have experienced and remember late-colonialism, the colonial wars, and life in postcolonial societies, clearly remain little-discussed themes in contemporary Portugal.⁶⁹ Complex and multi-layered representations of (post-)colonial situations that do not try to keep ›the ugliness of history out of the picture‹⁷⁰ and are sensitive to the continuing effects of colonial power relations are still too rare.⁷¹ In this respect, *A Portuguese Farewell* and *Tabu* are no exception, but rather confirm the rule. Nevertheless, within the field of cinematic representations, in *The battle of Tabatô* (2013), director João Viana has begun to include what was selectively forgotten.

Beyond Mourning and Irony: João Viana's *The Battle of Tabatô* (2013)

A batalha de Tabatô (*The Battle of Tabatô*) had its world premiere at the 2013 Berlin Film Festival, where it received an honorable mention in the category of ›Best Debut Film.‹ The film by director and producer João Viana, born in Angola in 1966, takes place in contemporary Guinea-Bissau. The plot focuses on a young woman named Fatu, who is about to marry in Tabatô, a village with a long musical tradition, and on her father Baio, who travels from Portugal to attend the wedding.

The viewer quickly notices something strange about Baio, who falls down at the sound of a minor car crash as if he was shot or cowers fearful on a former watchtower in the abandoned town of Bolama. In one of the stumbling conversations he has with Fatu, the viewer learns that Baio fought for Portugal in the colonial war in Guinea-Bissau and still is perceived as a traitor to the anticolonial struggle. When a group of children pretend to attack him with imaginary guns, causing him to pee his pants in fear, it becomes clear that Baio remains deeply traumatized by the violence of decolonization. In the last part of the film, the camera perspective switches to his point

67 Cf. Stock, Robert, Archival Images and Audiovisual Testimony – Negotiating the End of Empire in the Documentary Films *Guerra Colonial. Histórias de Campanha em Moçambique* (1998) and *Natal 71* (1999), in: International Journal of Iberian Studies 27 (2014) 2/3, p. 183–200.

68 For a detailed analysis of *Dundo* see Isabel Macedo/Rosa Cabecinhas/Lília Abadia, Audiovisual Post-colonial Narratives: Dealing with the Past in *Dundo*, Colonial Memory, in: Rosa Cabecinhas/Lília Abadia, (eds.), Narratives and Social Memory. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches, Braga 2013, p. 159–175.

69 Cf. Brandes/Lorenz, Welt, p. 16. Campos, History, for example, does not mention black soldiers in her article on ex-combatants of the Portuguese colonial war at all. *As Duas Faces da Guerra* does consciously include them, but maybe paints an overly harmonious picture of Portugal's relations to its former colonies today.

70 Scott, Remembrance. This ugliness, most notably the role of violence in (de)colonization, becomes very clear in the non-Portuguese film collage Göran Hugo Olsson (Dir.), *Concerning Violence*, 2014.

71 Director Pedro Costa's esthetically unique artworks between documentary and fiction depict postcolonial Portugal in a non-Eurocentric way, but they do not address colonialism or its demise directly, cf. Fernando Arenas, Cinematic and Literary Representations of Africans and Afro-descendants in Contemporary Portugal: Conviviality and Conflict on the Margins, in: Cadernos de Estudos Africanos 24 (2012) 1, p. 165–186.

of view and the sounds of war, e.g. explosion of mortars, can be heard in the film's soundtrack.⁷² In an otherwise black-and-white film, an intermittent switch to black-and-red visually intensifies the transmission of Baio's traumatic memories.

Along with the vivid life in Bissau, Fatu represents a modern, young generation and therefore an alternative to Baio and his ghosts of war.⁷³ She is interested in her cell phone and the radio, things which connect her to her fiancé, a musician named Idrissa. In one scene depicting her father driving recklessly with Fatu in the car, the song ›War‹ by Idrissa's band plays on the radio. At precisely this moment, Baio's unfinished inner battle results in another casualty: The car hits a tree, killing Fatu. Corresponding with the title, the film ends with the metaphorical battle of Tabatô, where the village musicians fight Baios' demons with their traditional Mandinka instruments.

Let us compare Viana's work with the two films discussed so far in order to arrive at some general conclusions: Similar to Gomes, João Viana also uses cinematic tools to tell a story of love and loss. Also using black-and-white pictures, the director incorporates long shots of landscape, abrupt stills of Fatu and Baio, and a very particular use of sound. Just as Botelho and Gomes, Viana cinematically stages the relationship between history and memory. But instead of using two narrative levels or flashbacks like Botelho and Gomes, Viana contrasts the evocation of a remote, pre-colonial past – a voice-over from a *Djioudjiou* or storyteller in the prologue tells us that the Mandinka, one of West Africa's largest ethnic groups, developed agriculture, justice, and music already thousands of years ago – with the contemporary Guinea-Bissau and the traumatic past of Baio.⁷⁴

Viana's high esteem for national and regional culture, history, and tradition is also expressed through the language of the film, which is not Portuguese, but Mandinka, and through the involvement of locals, who are essentially playing themselves and co-determine the plot.⁷⁵ The valorization of their history and their language can be read as both a statement against the supposed a-historicity of Africans (a well-known trope in European discourse from Hegel to Sarkozy), as well as a release from ideological conceptions of ›lusophony.‹⁷⁶ Viana's film thus not only offers a shift in focus from the colonizers to the formerly colonized, but through the character of Baio, includes the ›multi-faced encounters during colonialism‹ and the complex question of belonging that resulted from these encounters.⁷⁷ Although Portuguese colonialism retains a ghostly presence comparable to *A Portuguese Farewell* and *Tabu*, in *The Battle of Tabatô*, the people of Guinea-Bissau remain the only subjects of Viana's film.⁷⁸ This choice might challenge the viewing habits of white

72 Cf. João Viana, Review of the Berlinale Forum, 3: http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/fileadmin/user_upload/forum/pdf2013/forum_pdf/batalha-de_Tabato.pdf (last access 25.10.2014).

73 Ibid.

74 Cf. Bert Rebhandl, Gespräch, João Viana, 40 Sekunden Fiktion, in: CARGO Film/Medien/Kultur 19/2013, p. 24. Production note, Review of the Berlinale Forum, 3: http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/fileadmin/user_upload/forum/pdf2013/forum_pdf/batalha-de_Tabato.pdf (last access 25.10.2014). Cf. Ferreira, Identity, p. 71.

75 Cf. Rebhandl, Gespräch, p. 23; Viana explained this also in a talk after the screening at the Berlinale 2013.

76 On Lusophony, Margarido, Alfredo, A Lusofonia e os Lusófonos. Novos Mitos Portugueses, Lisbon 2000; Martins, Moisés/Sousa, Vitor de, Da ›Portugalidade: à lusofonia, in: Zara Pinto-Coelho/Joaquim Fidalgo (ed.), Comunicação e Cultura: I Jornadas de Doutorandos em Ciências da Comunicação e Estudos Culturais, Minho 2012, p. 159–177; Ferreira, Identity, p. 19.

77 Ferreira, Identity, p. 21.

78 In contrast to Botelho and Gomes, he refrains from recurring to a stereotypical (mirror) image of white Portuguese in order to frame his narrative.

European audiences because it offers no white identification figures at all, but Viana is far from offering a simple, Afrocentric counter-narrative to Eurocentrism.

In conclusion, *The Battle of Tabatô* is not a holistic approach that pits one perspective against another, but rather it offers an alternative to a Eurocentric (and Christian) perspective in filmmaking. By taking the memories of Guinea-Bissauans into account, the film completes the memory landscape of the colonial war and »re-configure[s] power relations and modes of representation.«⁷⁹ Going beyond the confines of nationalized mourning, nostalgic loss, and ironic trivialization, Viana takes a successful and hopeful step towards a more fully postcolonial discourse in the cinematic representations of Portuguese decolonization.