

SEARCHING FOR MOZAMBIQUE AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY, PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT

The Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar (Museum of Overseas Ethnology) – now called Museu Nacional de Etnologia (National Museum of Ethnology) – was inaugurated in 1965, in Lisbon. Its creation was mainly due to the action of the anthropologist Jorge Dias and his team of collaborators, more specifically a campaign to Mozambique, developed within the Mission for the Study of Ethnic Minorities (1958-1961). This paper aims at understanding the relationship between the presence and the invisibility of Mozambique in the Museu Nacional de Etnologia, through the current collections of the museum, temporary exhibitions related to Mozambique held over time, and the current permanent exhibition. The emergence of the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar and the conditions in which it was established are put into context; a review of its evolution through a panoramic analysis of the several exhibitions that included objects from Mozambique and that were organised throughout over 50 years of existence is conducted; a study of the permanent exhibition “O Museu, muitas coisas”, held since 2013 is done. It is concluded that Mozambique plays a significant role in the Museu Nacional de Etnologia, either due to its collections and material documents, and the many exhibitions organised by the museum throughout its history. Nevertheless, Mozambique is almost absent from its permanent exhibition, and the interpretation of the few items in exhibition needs to be revised, as it is anchored to the aesthetics of the objects, and does not promote any kind of critical thinking.

KEYWORDS

National Museum of Ethnology; Mozambique; colonial; post-colonial

À PROCURA DE MOÇAMBIQUE NO MUSEU NACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA, PORTUGAL

RESUMO

Em 1965, o Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar – hoje Museu Nacional de Etnologia – foi inaugurado em Lisboa. A sua criação resultou em muito da atividade do antropólogo Jorge Dias e da sua equipa de colaboradores, mais concretamente de uma campanha a Moçambique, desenvolvida no seio da Missão de Estudos das Minorias Étnicas do Ultramar (1958-1961). Este artigo procura entender a relação entre a presença e a invisibilidade de Moçambique no Museu Nacional de Etnologia, através do espólio atual do museu, das exposições temporárias relacionadas com Moçambique que foram realizadas ao longo do tempo, e da exposição permanente atual. Contextualiza-se o aparecimento do Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar e os moldes em que foi criado; analisa-se a sua evolução, através de uma análise panorâmica do conjunto de exposições que incluíram objetos de Moçambique e que foram sendo organizadas nos mais de 50 anos

da sua existência; e estuda-se a exposição permanente “O Museu, muitas coisas”, em exibição desde 2013. Conclui-se que Moçambique ocupa um lugar de destaque no Museu Nacional de Etnologia, quer pelas suas coleções e materiais documentais, quer pelas diversas exposições organizadas pelo museu ao longo da sua história. No entanto, está praticamente ausente da sua exposição permanente, sendo que a interpretação dos poucos objetos de Moçambique em exposição, necessita de uma revisão, pois está ancorada na estética dos seus objetos e não estimula qualquer tipo de pensamento crítico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Museu Nacional de Etnologia; Moçambique; colonial; pós-colonial

INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on a very simple question and aims at understanding the connection between Mozambique’s presence and invisibility in the Museu Nacional de Etnologia (National Museum of Ethnology) (MNE), in Lisbon, Portugal. This search is made through the museum’s collection, its temporary exhibitions over the years and its permanent exhibition. Obviously, it is not only concerned with the fact that the creation of the former Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar (Museum of Overseas Ethnology) (MEU) was strongly connected to the work and initiative of anthropologist Jorge Dias and his collaborators who, at the time, conducted researches in Mozambique, but also as a result of the countless initiatives of the museum over time. It also falls under a more specific issue related to the project “Memories, cultures and identities: how the past weights on the present-day intercultural relations in Mozambique and Portugal?” developed by the Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade (Communication and Society Research Centre) (2018-2021) and funded by FCT/Aga Khan Foundation. This project aims at reviewing the level of knowledge on culture, history, economy, and social representations in Mozambique and Portugal, one of the dimensions being the gathering and study of narratives passed on through museum collections. More specifically, the project intends to reinterpret colonial and post-colonial identities both from Portugal and Mozambique, using the representations and narratives in the collections of the national museums of ethnology of both countries. Naturally, we should bear in mind that the museum was created in colonial Portugal, Mozambique therefore being a province which was part of the national territory, and also that the Museu Nacional de Etnologia went through the transition to a democratic regime.

This paper intends to contribute to the study of the role of the Museu Nacional de Etnologia in the construction of narratives on Mozambique. We start with a contextualisation of the origin of the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar, as well as the conditions in which it was created. Afterwards, we review its evolution through a panoramic analysis of the several exhibitions that included items from Mozambique and were held over more than fifty years of existence. We should also mention that due to space limitations the analysis of the exhibitions is mainly carried out through the corresponding catalogues,

which means that we have left out pamphlets, news in the press or photos that might support the reconstitutions of these events, audiences, reactions at the time, and a plethora of significant information. Finally, we analyse the permanent exhibition “O Museu, muitas coisas” (The Museum, many things) held since 2013, and particularly “the life” of eight Mozambican objects. The interpretative analysis on this exhibition, departs from the gaze of a visitor who moves through it freely, and who wonders about those items, taking only into consideration the information provided and the interaction with this exhibition place.

ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUMS AND OTHER CULTURES

In recent years, various social movements, actions and narratives in different parts of the world have contested European colonial heritage, and have contributed, even if tenuously, to the decolonisation of institutions, public spaces, ideas and ways of knowledge. It is essential to understand decolonisation as an ongoing process, slow but necessary, which raises questions, challenges and destabilises a set of colonial cultural and epistemic legacies and their effects throughout time. Theoretically speaking, we find context and contributions for the decolonisation of culture and history in authors such as Enrique Dussel (1974/2011), Walter Dignolo (2000), Ramon Grosfoguel (2007) and Anibal Quijano (2007), who rebuild the relationships between the global North and South and who have developed a decolonial thinking and practice. The work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1981) on decolonising the mind is particularly relevant because it highlights the need to find other ways to position ourselves in the world, by weakening the construction of truth and the production of knowledge based on western patterns.

Museums, as cultural institutions, are obvious places for us to think and debate the decolonising of the mind, and have somewhat been on the radar when it comes to post-colonialism. The museums that deal more directly with the colonial past, through their themes, collections and items, have an even more important role to play. One of the pivotal dimensions of the debate on the decolonisation of museums, which shall not be addressed here, is the restitution of objects. This is a relevant and divisive issue which becomes rather significant when it comes to Anthropology and Ethnology museums. Amongst other actions, it involves a detailed knowledge of the methods and pathways of the acquisition of collections, a scientific, diplomatic, and political dialogue between parties, and both studying and considering new reception and safekeeping conditions. On this matter, it is worth mentioning the study by Sarr and Savoy (2018), which recommends the permanent restitution of all the items collected in Africa and moved to France without the consent of the country of origin, every time it is solicited by them and always as part of a collaborative process of data gathering, research and training activities. The dimension we shall try to explore concerns exhibitions and how various objects are presented to the public.

THE MUSEU NACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA'S BACKGROUND

If we were to consider the trajectory of a country that has once administered vast territories inhabited by people with such a cultural diversity, the creation of the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar in 1965¹ may be seen as quite late. By that time there was no colonial museum although several institutions were involved in the “circulation and accumulation of objects, ideas and knowledge that referred to a certain vision over the empire” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 189). Several authors have already discussed the backgrounds of the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar (Carvalho, 2015; Leal, 2011; Oliveira, 1971; Pereira, 1989), and that is why we shall address the matter very briefly. Naturally, to turn items from *cabinets*, treasures, Renaissance *kunstammer*, natural history museums, spaces of curios and delight in the 17th and 18th centuries, into study spaces, which were ordered, classified and systematised collections, mostly from the 19th century on, was a major milestone in this process. University museums played a major role. Among the ones that stand out are the Museu Antropológico da Universidade de Coimbra (Museum of Anthropology of the University of Coimbra), which started its ethnographical collections with the Museu de História Natural da Universidade de Coimbra (Natural History Museum of the University of Coimbra), founded in 1772, and the Museu da Universidade do Porto (Museum of the University of Porto), mainly due to the role played by the anthropologist Mendes Correia and the creation of the Instituto de Antropologia (Institute of Anthropology), in the 20th century. The Academia de Ciências (Academy of Sciences), founded in 1779, had several colonial collections, even though they did not play a central role in the institution. The Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa (Lisbon Geographical Society), created in 1875, organised an ethnography museum, which benefitted from the annexation, in 1892, of the collections of the Museu Colonial de Lisboa (Lisbon's Colonial Museum), created a few years before, in 1870, and whose collection was then in disarray. This was when the Museu Colonial Etnográfico (Ethnographical Colonial Museum) was created, later the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar, known as the Museu da Sociedade de Geografia (Museum of the Geographical Society), which comprised the materials of the colonial museum and donations from associates, heirs of the 19th century's explorers, mainly items coming from the Portuguese imperial space. Even though it had faced a decline in the 1930s, in the 1950s it was the “only public institution recognised by the State responsible for the connection with the colonies, as well as representing it officially in colonial and universal exhibitions” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 189). The Museu Etnográfico Português (Portuguese Ethnographic Museum) was inaugurated in 1893, and was run by José Leite de Vasconcelos; four years later it was renamed Museu Etnológico Português (Portuguese Ethnology Museum). It included two dimensions, the archaeological past and the ethnographical present, despite having always been more inclined to the former (Leal, 2011). Finally, we ought to mention the establishment of the Museu de Arte Popular (Popular Art Museum), thanks to António Ferro (idealised in 1935 and materialised in 1948, after the “Exposição do Mundo Português” [Portuguese World Exhibition]), a

¹ Formal date of its creation by Decree-Law No. 46254 of March 19.

museum of an eminently rural country, highly decorative and shaped around the folklorist idea of national identity.

THE MUSEU NACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA THROUGH SIX EXHIBITIONS

Jorge Dias (1907-1973), key-figure of the establishment of the Museu Nacional de Etnologia, idealised the institution as a space where overseas and metropole, as well as other places over the world, should be represented. There would be a compromise between the inclusion of Portuguese ethnography (mainland and islands) and a geographical coverage which surpassed the restricted view of overseas territories under Portuguese administration (Brito, 2000). Departing from a survey of all the exhibitions held by the Museu Nacional de Etnologia, it was possible to identify six with references to Mozambique, that are crucial for the museum's identity. It is important to mention that, on the one hand, the exhibitions are older than the museum's formal constitution, the first being held in 1959, and that, on the other hand, many of them took place in other venues rather than the Museu Nacional de Etnologia. What follows is a description of a few of the characteristics of these six specific exhibitions.

“VIDA E ARTE DO POVO MACONDE” (LIFE AND ART OF THE MAKONDE PEOPLE), 1959

The origin of the Museu Nacional de Etnologia is strongly connected to the Makonde culture in Mozambique. The 1959 exhibition, inaugurated on the February 02, was held at Palácio Foz (Exhibition Room of the National Secretariat of Information), and was called “Vida e arte do povo maconde”. It exhibited dozens of items and hundreds of photographs, and, according to Pereira (1989, p. 570), it was the “cornerstone of a true ethnological museology in Portugal” and “opening moment of a new perception of African art in Portugal” (Pereira, 2010, p. 22). The exhibition was made with items used or manufactured by the Makonde people of Northern Mozambique, a plateau that stretches to both north and south banks of the Rovuma. Those items were gathered during the 1958 campaign of the Missão de Estudos das Minorias Étnicas do Ultramar Português (Mission for the Study of Ethnic Minorities) (MEMEUP), a mission created by the Junta de Investigação do Ultramar (Overseas Research Board) (JIU), in 1957, and extended to 1961. The mission was led by Jorge Dias, and his assistants, Manuel Viegas Guerreiro, and Margot Schmidt Dias. The gathering of items was considered a “modest contribution to the future museum of the Portuguese people here and overseas” (MEMEUP, 1959, n. p.). The brochure of the exhibition “Vida e arte do povo maconde” refers the fact that it served mainly to “draw attention of the Portuguese living in the Metropole” towards what is being done and needs to be done (MEMEUP, 1959, n. p.). Even if Oliveira (1989, p. 57) mentioned that the exhibition was already related to “the idea of creating a museum lacking in the country's museological context”, and this was also what Jorge Dias stood for, what the supervising organism intended was an updated version of a colonial museum, which could be somewhat open to the outside world, but little or none to do with the rural metropole. The pieces shown at the 1959 exhibition would be, before

the museum even existed, the first ones in the institution established later, and which got the very first inventory numbers.

The international context also influenced the commitment of the governing ministry in the creation of a museum focused on the overseas and that sought to glorify the narrative of the Portuguese expansion in the world and of the Portuguese people itself. The museum or school museum was first located at a basement of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos (Higher Institute for Overseas Studies) (an institution chaired by Adriano Moreira), at Praça do Príncipe Real, on July 01, 1960. In this regard, it is interesting to analyse the proposal to the scientific board of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, made by the geographer Orlando Ribeiro and by Jorge Dias, in 1961 (Ribeiro, 2013, pp. 263-268), and that points out to another direction. In the proposal, the authors provide context to the proposal for an Instituto da Terra e do Homem (Institute for the Earth and Mankind), through the existence of two experienced research centres: the Centro de Estudos de Etnologia Peninsular (Centre for Peninsular Ethnology Studies), led by Jorge Dias, and the Centro de Estudos Geográficos (Centre for Geographical Studies), led by Orlando Ribeiro. This institute would serve as a research cluster dedicated to studying Geography and Ethnography, would have a journal also called *A Terra e o Homem*, and Museu da Terra e do Homem (Museum of Earth and Mankind). Even if the institute were to dedicate most of its activity to studying issues related to Portuguese civilisation, including the archipelagos, the overseas, Brazil, and other territories under Portuguese influence, it would not limit its territorial action to these areas. But the museum, proposed as being outdoors, would be organised around the Portuguese rural and maritime civilisation of Portugal. There, “different kinds of rural houses, farm implements, household items, home industries, mills, norias, diverse agricultural facilities, fisheries, boats, fishing systems, etc.” would be gathered (Ribeiro, 2013, p. 265). These ideas ended up not materialising. Jorge Dias dedicated himself to studying the Portuguese culture (traditional technologies of the Portuguese rural world) since the end of the 1940s.

Surrounded by a team of collaborators in the Centro de Estudos de Etnologia Peninsulares (Centre for Peninsular Ethnology Studies), among whom we should point out Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira (1910-1990), Fernando Galhano (1904-1995), and Benjamim Enes Pereira (1928-2020), the anthropologist was the major figure in the creation of the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar, a museum that should represent all cultures of all people on Earth (Oliveira, 1971). By the end of 1962, and under the scope of the Junta de Investigação do Ultramar, the Missão Organizadora do Museu do Ultramar (Organising Committee of the Overseas Museum) was created, and worked along with the Centro de Estudos de Antropologia Cultural (Centre for Cultural Anthropology Studies), created in that same year, in the gathering, study, and cataloguing of all the material and documentation needed for the future museum (MEU, 1972).

It is important to make a pause in order to highlight the itinerant nature of the museum in its initial phase, in the sense that it moved substantially around the city of Lisbon, and all over the country, if we are to consider the exhibitions held. In short, the moving museum could be summed up as follows. After having gathered a small group of Makonde items at the Praça do Príncipe Real, which resulted from the campaigns in

Africa, in 1962, these items were to be found in the former Palácio Burnay, in Junqueira street. The space became quite tight and, in April 1963, there was another move, now to the Museu Agrícola do Ultramar (Overseas Agricultural Museum), in Belém. It was thought at the time that there was a chance to make a building in the museum's garden, but with the collection enlargement, by acquisition and donation, one-off and more systematic collecting, it had to move once again, this time to a building in Rodrigo da Fonseca street. By the end of 1965, the museum was already officially created and was transferred to a section of Palácio Vale-Flor. Finally, in 1976, it found its place in Ilha da Madeira avenue, in Belém, symptomatically situated opposite the Overseas Ministry (today Ministry of Defence), where it still remains (see Ferreira, 2016, for a discussion about the connections between these buildings and institutions).

“POVOS E CULTURAS” (PEOPLES AND CULTURES), 1972

Following the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar publication in 1968 of the book *Escultura africana no Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar* (African sculpture in the Overseas Ethnology Museum), and an exhibition on the subject, which took place at the Museu José Malhoa (José Malhoa Museum), in Caldas da Rainha, a second big exhibition with Mozambican items was held in 1972, at the Galeria Nacional de Arte Moderna (National Gallery of Modern Art). The related publication is an extensive catalogue and the initial texts reveal an intense activity of collecting from a huge diversity of peoples and cultures, mostly during the 1960s. At this point, the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar had around 20 thousand items, mostly from the Portuguese overseas territories, but also from the metropole and other parts of the world. This publication identifies the origin of these items, from its collecting during field work in missions organised by Junta de Investigação do Ultramar, to purchase from collectors, and donations. The exhibition showed the public a total of 609 items, mostly African (451), but also from South America (77), Afghanistan (seven), India (five), Macao (eight), Indonesia (seven) and Timor (54) (MEU, 1972). Approximately 10% of the items were from Mozambique (58)², and the catalogue included photos from 18 of them. If it is true that the museum originated from a Makonde collection, the acquisition of 995 items in 1963, from sculptures, masks to other African art objects (Western Sudan, Gulf of Guinea, Ivory Coast and Nigeria), which resulted from a private expedition by Françoise and Vítor Bandeira in 1961, marked the breaking of the space limits of the Portuguese empire. This was the first large collection of the museum, which corresponds to a space outside the Portuguese overseas.

“MODERNISMO E ARTE NEGRO-AFRICANA” (MODERNISM AND BLACK AFRICAN ART), 1976

Signalling the tension between the “within and beyond the sea” worlds, was the refusal, in 1973, by the government, that is, the Junta de Investigação do Ultramar, to inaugurate the museum with the exhibition called “Vida Pastoril em Portugal” (Pastoral life

² Items 470 to 528.

in Portugal) (Gouveia, 1997). Later on, with the end of the dictatorship, it was possible to organise in Lisbon, in September 1976, the 28th General Assembly of the International Association of Art Critics, based on the subject “Modern art and black African art: reciprocal relationships. In the context of its activities”, there were several exhibitions, one of them being “Modernismo e arte negro-africana”, which was held at the new building that housed the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar, a building yet to inaugurate. The section concerning black African art was composed of a selection of the museum’s sculptures. According to Oliveira (1976, p. 15), the exhibition of around 200 pieces of African art allowed to get in touch with artists “who were totally unknown – to us – and who had never left their corner in the bush”³. These 220 pieces, predominantly from Guinea Bissau (65), Angola (53), and Ivory Coast (38), also included five items from Mozambique (four Makonde – mask, pot, stick, and spatula; and one *tsonga* – headrest). In 1968, a catalogue named *Escultura africana no Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar* (African sculpture at the Museum of Overseas Ethnology) was published, which included 210 pieces, nine of them from Mozambique. The introductory text anticipated the 1976 discussions:

in Africa there is an extremely powerful art, which is not really primitive, it is a perfectly elaborated art in full possession of its means and which expresses the complex mental world of its authors, going from the most excessive realism to the most severe abstraction. (MEU, 1968, n. p.)

The section of the 1976 exhibition connected to modernism included a set of works by Picasso, Nolde, and Modigliani, which originated from several European museums and which attracted many visitors⁴. At a first glance, all the works were presented under the same “conditions and terms”, detracted from their ethnographic contexts, with the public being held responsible for the aesthetic and plastic evaluation intrinsic to them. It was an attempt to fight preconceptions about African sculptures, as well as those relating to other material elements, as curious testimonies of primitive and wild peoples. This was the standpoint of expressionists, fauvists, and cubists who, in the early 20th century, began to understand “black art” as new and superior, as being disconnected from what was fleeting and imitative (Oliveira, 1985). Anyway, if the works by Western modernist artists had an indication of their individual authorship, the African works were anonymous with an indication of being created by an African people or ethnicity.

The edition of the exhibition’s catalogue only mentioned the Museu Nacional de Etnologia. Under the scope of this international meeting, there were different topics being addressed, among which modern art and the discovery of black African art; nature and art’s role in Europe and Africa – changing the concept of art; European art from an

³ Take notice of the description made, which refers to the corner as a remote and enclosed periphery, a space in the bush, wild and primal. As a brief counterpoint to this perspective, it is mentioned that already in 1959, in Dar-es-Salaam, the Makonde people were behind the creation of a nationalist organisation (MANU) which was later part of the Mozambique Liberation Front. With a strong participation in the fight for liberation, the Makonde sculptors, organised themselves into cooperatives, contributing financially, by selling their art, to the war front’s expenses (Carvalho, 1989). To generically place the Makonde artists in isolation, in the corner and in the bush, is a Western paternalist fiction.

⁴ See the list of borrowed works, drawn up by Luís Porfírio, in 1976 (Barão, 2015).

African perspective; a changing Ethnology; going towards an anthropological openness (Nogueira, 2013). The following year, this same exhibition was held in Porto, in a shorter version (Oliveira, 1985). The meeting of art critics and the exhibition were used to debate the fate and future of the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar (Sousa, 1976), but the following year, due to the lack of material and human resources, the museum was closed. Its team, however, continued organising and holding exhibitions outside the museum space.

“ESCULTURA AFRICANA EM PORTUGAL” (AFRICAN SCULPTURE IN PORTUGAL), 1985

More than eight years later, the museum reopened (December 03, 1985), having organised three exhibitions for this occasion: “Têxteis, tecnologia e simbolismo” (Textiles, technology and symbolism); “Desenho etnográfico de Fernando Galhano” (Fernando Galhano’s ethnographic drawing); “Escultura africana em Portugal” (African sculpture in Portugal). Catalogues to all exhibitions were made. The second volume of the work *Desenho etnográfico de Fernando Galhano* (Fernando Galhano’s ethnographic drawing) (Galhano, 1985) is dedicated to Africa and takes up the Makonde theme with 37 drawings, from the typical village, the houses, numerous rituals, different items (witchcraft, agricultural implements, musical instruments), ornamental, and tattoo patterns. The catalogue of the exhibition “Escultura africana em Portugal” (African sculpture in Portugal) shows the great diversity of African sculptures from public and private Portuguese collections, and includes 153 works, eight of which from Mozambique (MNE, 1985). From these eight, seven refer to the Makonde, five coming from the Museu da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa (Museum of the Lisbon Geographical Society), and the rest from the own museum.

“NA PRESENÇA DOS ESPÍRITOS: ARTE AFRICANA DO MUSEU NACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA” (IN THE PRESENCE OF SPIRITS: AFRICAN ART OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY), 2002

This exhibition, curated by Frank Herreman, composed of about 140 pieces from the Museu Nacional de Etnologia, was organised by the Museum for African Art in New York, and was held from September to December 2000. It then toured around the US for about one year (Flint Institute of Arts, Michigan, February-March, 2001; Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C., June-September, 2001; Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama, October-December, 2001). It travelled then to Portugal and was held at the renovated areas of the Museu Nacional de Etnologia, between February 2002 and March 2003. The pieces chosen were mainly from the Angolan collections (among which a set of dolls from the Southwest of Angola, which later resulted in one of the modules of the permanent exhibition)⁵ and Guinea-Bissau (mostly from the Bijagos archipelago)⁶. The exhibition, however, started with a set of masks from Western Africa

⁵ Two exhibitions had already been held in Lisbon: “Angola, Povos e Culturas” (Angola, Peoples and Cultures) (1987) and “Escultura Angolana, Memorial de Culturas” (Angolan Sculpture, Memorial of Cultures) (1994).

⁶ One exhibition had already been held in Lisbon: “Esculturas e Objectos Decorados da Guiné Portuguesa no Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar” (Sculptures and Decorated Objects from Portuguese Guinea at the Museum of Overseas Ethnology)

and headrests from Southern Africa, among which two from Mozambique (*tsonga* and *shona*). The reason why one of the museum's most systematic collections was not included – the Makonde sculptures – was the fact that at the time, a preparatory study for an exhibition with these objects was being made (Brito, 2000). The exhibition “Viagem aos Maconde” (Travel to the Maconde) was already mentioned in the 2005 activities report (Carvalho, 2015), has not been held yet.

“NA PONTA DOS DEDOS: LAMELOFONES DO MUSEU NACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA” (AT THE FINGERTIPS: LAMELOPHONES IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY), 2002

This exhibition, whose catalogue is named *Lamelofones do Museu Nacional de Etnologia* (Lamellophones of the National Museum of Ethnology) (Kubik, 2002), was held between October 09, 2002, and September 28, 2003. It resulted from the work of the anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik on the existing instruments at the Museu Nacional de Etnologia. Gerhard Kubik studied these musical instruments at the Sub-Saharan Africa for several decades, starting in 1965, when Jorge Dias invited him to take part of a study project in Angola. The exhibition included 136 lamellophones from the Museu Nacional de Etnologia collection, mostly from Angola (124) and Mozambique (11), and just one from Guinea-Bissau.

MOZAMBIQUE IN THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION OF THE MUSEU NACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA

According to a research mentioned in the catalogue of the Direção Geral do Património Cultural (General Directorate of Cultural Heritage) (DGPC), of a total of 40.000 items in the Museu Nacional de Etnologia, 337 are from Mozambique⁷. Naturally, since the museum has got a vast collection and a permanent exhibition area of 1894 m² (Neves, Lima, Santos & Lopes, 2019), there are obvious display limits. There are two restricted areas that can be visited, which are occupied by themed galleries, which were already foreseen in the museum's founding project: the Rural Life Galleries (784 m²), inaugurated in the end of 2000, and the Amazon Galleries (529 m²), inaugurated in 2006. Without considering these galleries, the open visit exhibition area has got 581 m². The permanent exhibition “O Museu, muitas coisas” is housed in this space open to the public since January 31, 2013. Having a permanent exhibition helps solving any problems concerning financial and human resources created by the dynamics and periodic rotation of temporary exhibitions, but nonetheless ties up the space to great fixation and rigidity. Even so, the exhibition is built around seven modules, in module format, that can change over time. None of these modules is connected to Mozambique. Three are connected to the Portuguese culture, two to Angola, one to another African country, Mali, and a last one to Bali, Indonesia, , as can be seen from the list below:

(1971); and another one in Porto: “Cultura e Tradição na Guiné-Bissau” (Culture and Tradition in Guinea-Bissau) (1984).

⁷ See <http://www.matriznet.dgpc.pt>

Please take notice that 346 items from Mozambique were mentioned in 1976, brought within the Mission for the Study of Ethnic Minorities (MEU, 1972).

1. O teatro de sombras wayang kulit de Bali (Wayang Kulit Shadow puppet theatre from Bali);
2. Animais como gente. Máscaras e marionetas do Mali (Animals as people. Masks and puppets from Mali);
3. Matéria da Fala. Tampas de Panelas com provérbios de Cabinda (Matter of speech. Pot lids with sayings from Cabinda);
4. A Música e os dias. Instrumentos musicais populares portugueses (Music and days. Popular Portuguese musical instruments);
5. Franklim Vilas Boas. Com o olhar de Ernesto de Sousa (Franklim Vilas Boas. According to Ernesto de Sousa);
6. A Brincar e já a sério. Bonecas do sudoeste de Angola (Playing but already seriously. Dolls from Southwest Angola);
7. Talas de Rio de Onor (Rio de Onor splints).

At the entrance of the permanent exhibition room there is a multimedia station where one can look for information about past exhibitions. When this research was carried out the device was not working. Apart from these seven modules, there is a large display case of over 30 metres that extends along the wall opposite the entrance, which shows various items, videos, and photos. It is chronologically organised, and it highlights significant moments of the museum's existence and its main characters, and exhibits several collection pieces. It is among these items that we come across Mozambique (Figure 1 to 6). The following considerations bear in mind the connection between what is on display and what the public sees during a regular unguided visit. We have not taken into account the role of the educational service and its pedagogical and interpretative actions and practices, or other initiatives that can put items into context and create relational spaces. In this regard, the educational service of the Museu Nacional de Etnologia is active in deconstructing collective truths related to the colonial greatness of the past, and the ways of appropriation of cultural heritage (Sancho Querol, Gianolla, Raggi & Chuva, 2020).



Figure 1: Three samples of natural products, Makonde plateau, 1957-1961

Credits: Sarmento & Martins



Figure 2: Tattoo knife (*chipopo*), Nangonga, Makonde plateau, 1958

Credits: Sarmento & Martins

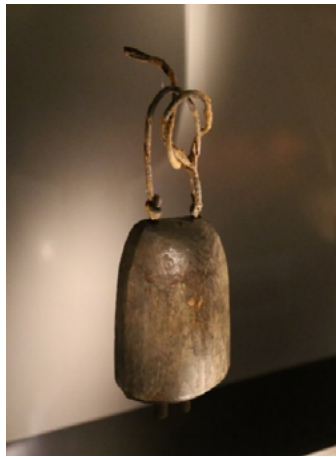


Figure 3: Bell, Makonde plateau, 1958
Credits: Sarmento & Martins



Figure 4: Basket made by Gungunhana
Credits: Sarmento & Martins



Figure 5: Sculpture, Quelimane, n. d.
Credits: Sarmento & Martins



Figure 6: Sculpture *A serena expressividade da mãe Ronga* (the serene expression of a Ronga mother)
Credits: Sarmento & Martins

It is worth stopping for a while and think about these items. Five of them refer to the Makonde plateau and they date back to the end of the 1950s. In the small label in display it is possible to read that the three samples of natural products were gathered by Margot Dias, someone the unsuspected visitor could not possibly know. Observing the collection's catalogue made available online by the Direção Geral do Património Cultural, we realise that these items are part of a larger collection. We find a sample in a slides box, which also contains sheets used as sandpaper by Makonde sculptors (AA-051); the other two samples, stored in matchboxes, contain, in one case, a dye made from clay and used by women to paint clay items (AA-218), and in the other case, a dye made from wood charcoal (AA-217). These three simple items, in their boxes and with their labels, point out the level of detail and technique of the field work developed by the Missão de Estudos das Minorias Étnicas do Ultramar Português, and how important these materials are,

but all of this is sent back to the visitor's unreferenced imagination. Polishing and patina are key elements of African statues and the techniques related to the use of leaves, dried skins, stones, seeds, and other preparations containing clays, palm oils, among many others, explain polychromies, in a slow and emotional work process. The exhibition offers us just three short sentences about the mission: "1957-1961, Jorge Dias, head of the Missão de Estudos das Minorias Étnicas do Ultramar Português. Study campaigns in the Makonde plateau with Margot Dias and Manuel Viegas Guerreiro. Margot Dias starts the registers with a film camera". It actually makes us wonder where this plateau is located, who are the Makonde, and why did these anthropologists and ethnologists decided to go to these places and study these people.

One of the other items chosen for this exhibition is a tattoo knife, one of the four in the museum's collection (according to the information made available at the online catalogue). Once again we can wonder about this tool and the meaning of the tattoos as a practice and a ritual, and how much we could learn at a national museum of ethnology about the relationship between the Makonde culture and the body. An informed visitor might establish a connection with rituals such as tooth mutilation, initiation rituals (male and female), *mapico* dances, scarification, tattoos, and other identity features, but this would require a more complex and complete presentation given the simplicity, immobility, and tranquillity of the tattoo knife.

The fifth item is a bell, and its label lets us know it has got "two clappers, for a hunting dog". Even further, we learn that the sound it produces is similar to a note Margot Dias indicated. We can see a musical score with that same note. Although this reference may seem interesting and may prompt curiosity about the sound likely produced by the bell, we are not able to listen to it. About the hunting, supposedly carried out with a dog, we do not learn much more. Going back to the catalogue of the 1959 exhibition, we see that wooden bells were on display and we could read: "used by hunting dogs during runs, as to scare away the animals and make them run towards the nets".

Even though there are no Makonde sculptures at the exhibition, we can still appreciate two non Makonde pieces. We could not find them in the catalogue made available by the DGPC. They are catalogued, but internally by the museum. As far as one of the two sculptures is concerned, the museum provides a somewhat enigmatic piece of information: "this little sculpture that insinuates itself through the gaze is an example of the ignorance with which we deal and defy museums". This sentence may undoubtedly make the visitor reflect upon museum practices and the interpretation of artefacts, the difficulty of knowing the acquisition and gathering contexts of items, and all of this may seem fascinating. But it may also not contribute, in any way, for the experience or learning of the object. The second sculpture is a mother holding her son, and the label says "the serene expression of a Ronga mother". Once again we might ask, what is it, who are, or where is "Ronga"?

The last Mozambican piece in the exhibition, and the most recent on display, is a small basket whose authorship is attributed to Gungunhana. That is what is written in the piece label, and also that it was produced during Gungunhana's exile in Portugal and

was offered by him to his doctor, being later donated to the museum by a relative, in 2017. We also learn that Gungunhana was the “last Nguni king to rule southern Mozambique until his capture by Joaquim Mouzinho de Albuquerque in 1895”. There is a feeling of absence – absence of reflexivity – and the information provided, along with the small basket, is manifestly scarce. There is no reference to the Gaza Empire; the participation in the discussion over the Portuguese empire, and the pacification campaigns, is non-existent. The silence on the violence present in this item, which refers back to the dispossession of the African territory, does not seem to open any doors to humility. Could there be a connection between this item and Gaza, and the Makonde or Ronga objects, or even Quelimane? Why then display this basket? For the aesthetisation of the item?

The exhibition “O Museu, muitas coisas”, makes no commitment with geographic spaces or specific topics, and is not tied to any representativeness triggered by the museum’s collections. It is not polyphonic, and let alone having any African voices. It is anchored in the aesthetics of its items. The exhibition is static, and both the information and the interactivity provided to the visitor are close to none. In this sense, it does not promote any kind of critical thinking, or any articulated dialogue about the past and the future. Ribeiro (2013) refers that the items in the exhibition “O Museu, muitas coisas” go beyond the divisions of time associated to post-colonial studies (pre-colonial; colonial; and post-colonial) and coexist without contaminating themselves with violence. In fact, this is, apparently, a benign museum, that deals with subjects, processes, and objects which are only benign if we do not put them into context in the past and the present. It would be rather interesting to align the Makonde collection, contextualise the studies and the mission of Jorge Dias in the aspirations of the colonial period, share more on the itinerary of these items (and others), the places of use for the museum, and open the doors to the geographic imagination of the Makonde plateau, in Cabo Delgado, thus inviting a reflection on the Northern Mozambique in contemporary times or, at least, to make visitors question these spaces, people, and cultures in time. A brief incursion into a study on the publics of the Museu Nacional de Etnologia, carried out in 2015 (Neves et al., 2019) could prove interesting. Even though the general assessment of the museum by its public reveals a high degree of satisfaction, some items evaluated as unsatisfactory or even very unsatisfactory refer to the supporting texts (leaflet, itinerary...) and to the texts available in the different rooms (labels in pieces and other information).

CONCLUSION

The Museu Nacional de Etnologia, initially called Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar, had its origin in a frail balance between three trends. The first, as the initial name of the museum suggested, was to be a museum that portrayed people and customs of the Portuguese empire. This was a trend supported by the Government through its overseas policies and the Junta de Investigação Científica that supervised the museum. The solid basis for its creation was the collection that Jorge Dias and his team gathered within the scope of the mission he carried out between 1957 and 1961 in Northern Mozambique. It

is undeniable that the Makonde are at the heart of the genesis of the museum and that is inescapable. The second trend was to be a museum that included items and narratives of the Portuguese rural world, at the time in the metropole, which preserved the culture of a people undergoing a huge transformation. Here too, Jorge Dias and several other researchers played a significant role due to the studies they carried out and the collection they gathered. Only after the democratisation of the country was this trend supported by the government. A third trend was the fact that the museum was universalist, encompassing spaces, cultures, and people that went beyond the Portuguese empire, including not only Brazil, a Lusophone country, but also people of the Andes or of Southeast Asia. This trend was grudgingly accepted by the Junta de Investigação Científica, whose focus was the overseas territories. This situation is fairly common in European museums of this kind, even if the blending with national ethnography collections is not that usual.

Mozambique played an important part in the establishment of the museum, and currently holds a key position because of its collections and documentary material, and in the countless exhibitions organised by the Museu Nacional de Etnologia throughout its history. Today, though, it is practically absent from its permanent exhibition and the almost 20.000 visitors in 2018 (DGPC, 2019) had minimum contact with the meaningful collections the museum holds from this African country. Even if the limited space may somehow justify this absence, the importance of the Makonde collection per se, and its relevance for the history of the museum, raises the question of the possibility of a module in the permanent exhibition. We do not mean a static exhibition moored in a fixed colonial time, but a presentation that problematizes the Makonde art in its origins and contemporary dynamics that articulates with the art movements of both the past and the present, and that positions the Makonde today, giving voice to multiple narratives and subordinate groups. Furthermore, in line with the arguments of Ângela Ferreira (Ferreira, 2018), made clear in the project “A Tendency to Forget” (2015), a post-colonial approach to the museum would not call into question the unmistakable fact that the Makonde collection is colonial, but would definitely question its numbness resulting from the lack of a reflexive review and the absence of a path that summons new relationships between Portugal and Africa. As we tried to demonstrate, the museum’s presentation of a scarce number of items from Mozambique at the permanent exhibition needs to be revised, ceasing to be innocuous, lacking reflexivity, and, on the contrary, becoming more critical.

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