

## Research Diary

Monday 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 2019

Today I woke up thinking I still lived in Rio, and that I could look out the window and see the ocean. When I lived there, I used to stand by the shore and imagine what people were doing on the “other side”. I would try to visualise a route through the waters until I could see another continent.

Because I was brought up back and forth between the UK and Brazil, whenever I was on the “other side” gazing over English waters I would imagine my family back in Brazil on some white sandy beach in Rio. I could see the year-round abundance of fruits, and green leaves, and remember what it was like to walk barefoot on grass and hot soil, at my Grandma’s house. In the same way when I was on Brazilian shores, I would imagine my friends in London sitting in a park near school somewhere, while the ducks bathed in ponds and squirrels climbed trees. I could smell the fresh rain on jasmines, feel the breeze of spring, and hear the terrifying sound of bumblebees. I still catch myself doing that every now and then, and writing about it. It is not just an exercise of absence, but of memory. Between these two countries the ocean is vast, and the distance is enormous. Yet, in my own history, there I am on both sides and present in these very different spaces and languages.

My current research has much to do with this bilingual sense of being. Writing about writing brings with it a violent truth, or as Helene Cisoux puts it, “truth is always violent”<sup>1</sup> We must delve into ourselves, and into other writers, to understand why we are interested in certain aspects of life, even if they are difficult themes such as shedding light on oppression and difference.

From my place, I don’t know how the world was before the Western World sailed to find the New World. I don’t know a world where women cannot vote. I don’t know a world where people of different races are legally prohibited to share the same spaces. But I do know a world filled with traces of these worlds. According to Paulo Freire, “a dialogical

encounter cannot take place between antagonists”<sup>2</sup>, so perhaps this is where we better understand there is no centre to culture, there is only difference.

This week was the European Elections, amidst a Brexit climate. I woke up to a text message from an Italian friend saying the far-right had won in Italy. Meanwhile, demonstrations are happening in Brazil, some of which were suggested by the president himself. Before I came back here to this screen I am typing on, I read articles, and watched videos on all these current affairs to try to make some sense of it. But I can't. All I can do is write about it. And as this process of writing unfolds, and I disappear, you become the owner my words. So, one might say we too are on opposite shores, but I think we are sharing an ocean. And if these shores, and borders, stereotypes and labels were supposed to bring any comfort to anyone, then why do they scar us just like the embroidering on Leticia Parente's foot?

**December 21<sup>st</sup> 2018, Porto**

I have just arrived in Porto, Portugal to spend Christmas with my family. I am weary of discussing any politics at the moment. The elected president continues to spread his misogynist and homophobic remarks throughout daily life, and that seems to only normalize an oppressive discourse towards women and minorities. This is terribly unfortunate, considering all the struggle Brazil goes through to integrate such a diverse and post-colonial society. The structure of the Brazilian society can be depicted in the common household where different rooms (belonging to masters and servants) still establish relationships of hierarchy today. It is a society where the middle-class has maids, which in turn have maids themselves because they sleep at their bosses' house. That is because daily life still bears the traces of slavery, and the hierarchical dichotomy of the "Casa Grande e Senzala" still persists in the widely patriarchal society that is Brazil. This is why this kind of verbal endorsement from a head of state is highly prejudicial, and a great setback towards colonial days.

As my thoughts revolved around how this related to my research, I headed to the library near my parent's house in the Palacio de Cristal park. I was looking forward to going into a huge library full of books in Portuguese, instead of English for a change. Upon my arrival, I realised the Porto Municipal Gallery was in the same building, and the current exhibition called Transantiquity, included many Moving Images artworks.

This is part of the exhibition's statement: "The exhibition focuses on the relationship between the cultural, political and philosophical paradigms of Antiquity and the work of a group of artists whose practice explores ideas of political, personal and natural identity-building in various territories. (...) Simultaneously, the exhibition questions these Western canons, and proposes to analyse Antiquity in a global context, in which it has become indispensable to consider other discourses, philosophies and beliefs." How Synchronic! I thought.

But to my disappointment, yet not my surprise, there were no Brazilian artists included. Ana Mendieta was the only woman representing American/Latin American Culture. But if

the exhibition is “looking at the past as a mean of considering the fragility of the political project that forges European identity” why is the country that colonized mine not showing any Brazilian Moving Image or pieces, or at least mentioning its biggest colony in any of the other artworks? I actually enjoyed the exhibition, but once again, I was not there. My voice, my culture, my history was not included in an exhibition questioning canon criteria in Portugal, the country that colonised Brazil, and laid the foundations for the current societal structure.