



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

Saturday, 2 October 2021



Rita and family (courtesy of the interviewee)

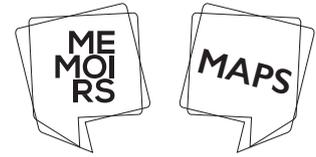
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RITA JOANA MAIA

Fátima da Cruz Rodrigues

Interview carried out by Bruno Sena Martins on June 1st 2017 and edited by Fátima da Cruz Rodrigues.

I was born in Coimbra in 1980. When I was four, five years old, I used to spend a lot of time with war-disabled people because of my father's profession working for the Armed Forces Disabled Association (ADFA) [1]. I heard their conversations. They were so used to my presence that everything came



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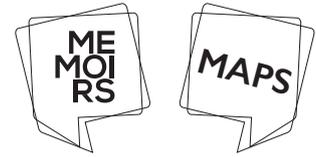
naturally to them. I remember a funny situation where I, Zé Arruda [2] and Lucas were in the elevator. I was about six, seven years old and the elevator stopped. Zé Arruda said “tough luck, Joaquina, even the elevator is disabled”.

The first war story I remember was not even about what was done with the enemy, with the Turras [3]. It was about a friend of my father’s who, in an ambush, lost a foot and continued to run without realizing that he had lost it. I was about five years old when my father told me this, laughing. At these ages we do not have the notion of the impacts and meanings of these reports. But since I was a little girl, I realized that there was a lot of suffering from both those who went there and those who stayed in Portugal. There were families who were destitute because one of their members had been wounded and could not prove that it had happened in an operation in the War; there were families who had been robbed of their own, but there was no body, there were no witnesses, there was nothing. However, there was money to make statues with a soldier with the G3 and with a black boy on his lap and the caption underneath “to the war heroes”. So there are things that intuitively have always confused me.

At home, my parents also did not have much opportunity to protect me from what had happened in the war. In Guinea, my father was presumed dead, he was in the morgue, that’s where he was found breathing, and they had to remove some of his brain matter. When I was five my father had a meningitis resulting from that injury. So my mother told me that, many years ago, my father had been wounded, had been shot in the War, that he was in the hospital and was going to die, so I had to go say goodbye. And my father survived.

So when I was little, I felt that in my family there was something different from my classmates and friends who didn’t talk about war and whose parents didn’t either. The only thing we had was that silly game of “my father’s is worse than yours”: “ah, because my father has little money”; “ah, because my father has an illness”; “ah! My father does not have a part of his brain”. I always won. This was the only contact that we children had with the limitations of our fathers. Fathers at this age would do anything to hide it, and so I thought mine was probably the only one who’d been in the war. I came to a point where I thought everything that was going on at ADFA, and everything my father told me, was a lie.

I belong to a generation that talked about the 25th of April only in passing. In fact, it was on the last pages of the history books. It was mainly about Mário Soares - the one who appeared with some relief in those pages. I knew Álvaro Cunhal’s face, a little more hidden. And then, when the talk was about the colonies, it was a page. So, the feeling I had was that all had happened in a week and that we had been kicked out of there and that was it.



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But I grew up amid war reports and became more attentive. To get to know the suffering that people as good as those I know have caused is terrible. And not having been there to protect those people is just as terrible. That feeling that you're past the age of 20, 21, which corresponds to the age our parents had when they were there, and to understand the sufferings inherent in that phase of growth and not being able to protect your family, your father, your mother, your grandmother, from all that suffering, all that anguish that they lived through, it's frustrating.

My mother was a teacher of Higher Education in Nursing and she devalued the war. My mother started dating very early with my father. When my father went off to war, they weren't married yet, they had no children, and after what happened to my father in Guinea, my mother ended up studying to become a nurse so she could give him the help he needed. My father has recovered and walks normally. When you talk to him, you don't notice anything, but he has respiratory problems, and the disease has worsened. The effort my mother made was of such order that it ended up hurting her in terms of health. I can't make a direct connection between the Colonial War and what I'm saying, but I know there's a connection. My mother was the pillar of the house for a long time. The wear and tear of those who are next to someone with post-traumatic stress is very great, it has very hard consequences. Very little is said about it. She's got kids, she's got a husband, she's got a kind of anvil over her head because she never knows what her husband can take or can't take. This is the reality of things. I too have been conditioned by all this. I left home several times and returned many times to support what was happening. And what my mother has ensured throughout her life has been passed on to me. There is a price to be paid. Now it's her turn to, as much as she wants to, not be able to cope. The pillar has collapsed in some way. My parents live with me. Of course, you can look at it like a lot of people do and find other solutions. I made a different choice. I'm committed up to my neck.

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[1] ADFA was founded on May 14th 1974. More information [here](#).

[2] José Arruda was the long-time president of the national board of ADFA. He passed away in January 2017. More information [here](#).

[3] Turras was the pejorative designation used by the Portuguese military in the Colonial War to refer to the guerilla-fighters of the African nationalist movements.

Interview edited by **Fátima da Cruz Rodrigues**

Translated by **António Sousa Ribeiro**

Fátima da Cruz Rodrigues is a researcher on the project *MEMOIRS: Children of Empire and European Post-Memories* (ERC Consolidator Grant, nº 648624) and *MAPS - European Postmemories: a postcolonial cartography* (FCT - PTDC/LLT-OUT/7036/2020).

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