(Post)-conflict Memories and Identity Narratives in the Documentary Series I Am Africa[1]

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Abstract
During the last century, film and video have become important inspiring documents of collective memory; in this century, they have become an increasingly important source of evidence and historical reflection. This paper aims to analyse the documentary series *I Am Africa*. Consisting of ten episodes, *I Am Africa* gives voice to ten citizens – two from each of the Portuguese-speaking African countries: Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Sao Tome and Principe – with significant civic involvement in the development of the nations where they were born and currently live. Through thematic analysis of the ten stories, which make up the documentary series, were located the predominant themes in the narratives of those involved. The results of this research show the narrative organization of the ten interviewees in three central themes: the meanings of independence, which involve the representations of the people who have participated in the process of (de)colonization; the perceptions about the cultural and linguistic diversity in their countries; and, finally, the discourses associated with the (re)making of national identities.

Keywords: autobiographical documentary, memory, identity, (de)colonization, linguistic diversity

Introduction

We currently live "at the border of the `present'" (Bhabha, 1994). With this statement, Bhabha points out that there seems to be no specific name for classifying the moment in which we live except for the controversial 'post': (post)modernism, (post)feminism, (post)colonialism. According to this perspective, we find ourselves in a moment of transit where space and time intersect and produce complex configurations of similarity and difference, inclusion and exclusion. In this context, the media become privileged representation systems. Through the media, individual and collective perceptions reach a greater audience, legitimizing or challenging the dominant discourses (Georgiou, 2006).

In Portugal, only recently the dominant discourses of the (post)colonial period started to be deconstructed through the media and particularly through audiovisual documentary films. Hence, the experiences and perceptions of people about this historical period are, currently, recurring themes at the level of audiovisual

production, where proliferations of films and documentaries that privilege this type of narrative have emerged. Autobiographical memories, presented in documentary films, allow lesser-known versions of history to be spread, contributing to the construction of a more plural collective memory. These testimonies of history, when analyzed and articulated, enable a better understanding of past events and their meanings for the different sociocultural groups involved. Apart from the dominant European version, other versions of history should be taken into account. This work is intended as an exercise to give voice to different African perspectives about the events of the Portuguese colonial past as well as the post-independence period.

The analysis of the ten discourses that make up the *I Am Africa* documentary series is based on the assumption that the way "national groups represent their own history is of paramount importance in the definition of their identity. The rebuilding of history in each nation is always a comparative process since the history of every national group embraces relationships with other groups" (Cabecinhas, 2010; p. 258). The way each group builds its narrative and interprets its past is crucial to understanding its positioning in the present and its strategies for the future. While recalling the past the groups are not simply reproducing facts, but selectively building a narrative, taking a position on the events of recent history.

The analysis of the ten autobiographical narratives that make up the documentary series *I Am Africa* enabled the organization of the participants' reflections into three main analytical categories: their perceptions about the meanings of independence, linking them with past events and their consequences; their views on the cultural and linguistic diversity that characterizes their countries of origin; and finally, their positions on the (re)making of national identities.

Identity and (Post)-conflict Memory

Most authors agree that identity is a complex and multidimensional concept and should not be understood as 'transparent'. Hall (1994) considers that we must understand the concept of identity as 'production', as an always incomplete process in which our representations of the other and our experiences are of significant importance. Clary-Lemon (2010) states that research on identity carried out by Ricoeur (1992), Martin (1995), and Hall (1994) can be summarized in three dimensions: 1) Identity is a discursive construction often revealed in the stories people tell about themselves or others as well as recounted memories of the past; 2) Identities are always temporary; they are constantly changing and must be understood in relation with the other; and 3) the cultural and national identities are fragmented internally and externally, resulting from the process of negotiation of different perspectives about the similarity and difference.

The act of remembering also takes a leading role in the (re)making of identities. As Cabecinhas (2006, p. 187) notes, the 'process of remembering is social, as recalling memories is done through context cues; the reference points that each individual uses to encode, store and retrieve information are socially defined'. Individual memory can not work without concepts, ideas, images, and representations which are socially construct and shared. From this viewpoint, the historical memories are in continuous reconfiguration according to present experiences. In this sense, there are always several versions of history; therefore, it is important to listen to the different voices and interpretations of past events.

With regard to memory, Cunha (2006) considers that there are moments that are markers in community life, setting as examples tragic events or those that represent discontinuities in the existing social order. In the author's perspective, 'these shared dimensions transport memory, through speech, beyond the temporality of the individual subject, thus building up into something else that is no longer the record of personal experience' (2006, p. 57). Herein, speech assumes a central role in the sharing of memories. In the author's opinion, language has an intrinsic value in the construction of collective memory, 'in the definition of the memorable'. Fivush (2008) corroborates this idea when he says that language shapes the autobiographical memory. It enables sharing the past with others and therefore creating new interpretations and evaluations of that same past; it also enables organization and structuring of our autobiographical memories, thereby producing a narrative.

Relations between receiving societies and immigrants is influenced by the representations that receiving societies build regarding their own history, namely their colonial past (Vala et al., 2008). On this matter, Cabecinhas and Feijó (2010, p. 42) note that only recently has there been more openness about these issues, ensuring that 'formally, we live in a post-colonial period, but colonialism persists in people's minds, shaping personal trajectories and intergroup relations'. For instance, African descendents, born in Portugal, are often seen as strangers. Amin (2013, p. 1) corroborates this thought, arguing that the politics of intolerance towards minorities and migrants in Europe, are "tapping into an ingrained vernacular of phenotypical racism".

Based on the assumption that identity is formed and at the same time is expressed through relations of power (Dolby, 2006), it is important to consider the asymmetric relationship between Portugal and the Portuguese-speaking African countries. On the one hand, there is the impression of a certain supremacy of the former colonizer towards the ex-colonized countries, supposedly given by the national version of the history. On the other hand, there is the memory of the long colonial war, a conflict strongly present in the formation of national identities (Paez & Liu, 2011).

Crossing the potential of the autobiographical narrative as a document with the need to clarify other versions of history, the audiovisual production, specifically a documentary series, has provided the necessary elements for our analysis of identity and postcolonial memory.

The Autobiographical Memory Documentaries

Among the several media types, the audiovisual media, while integrating word and image, configure interesting documents about the representations of a given society at a particular time. Waterson (2007, p. 51) emphasises the role of film in preserving memories as historical evidence. The author believes that this type of document sets a performative act that generates its own meanings and that requires a connection with an audience. He adds that memory films can be a part of the struggle against forgetting past injustices, while contributing to the clarification of our interpretation on the past. In this context, the autobiographical narratives have a key role, working as 'political vehicles which convey the voices that are excluded or neglected from the dominant structures and political processes' (Miranda, 2008, p. 63). The stories provide to those who listen and see them the opportunity to self-understand fragmented parts of themselves, evoking memories, concerns, and expectations. The documentary can take as its starting point the register of stories about recent past realities, but these records of reality can also be the point of arrival, or they can be an instrument of transformation of that reality, changing the way the audience relates to it.

The exposure of several materials such as audiovisual documentaries allows us to deepen our understanding and awareness about the different cultures. Thus, the production and dissemination of documentaries based on autobiographical memories tell other versions of history, in first person, which, when integrated into our knowledge of the past, will allow a better understanding of historical events and their meaning to different socio-cultural groups.

Methodology

Looking at the importance given to autobiographical memory documentaries as instruments that enable reflection and (de)construction of pre-formed ideas about past events, we examined the documentary series *I Am Africa*, consisting of ten episodes, two from each of the Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP): Angola, Cape Verde (CV), Guinea-Bissau (GB), Mozambique, and Sao Tome and Principe (STP). From the methodological point of view, we chose the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the ten stories, which make up the documentary series. Thematic analysis allows us to locate the predominant themes in the narratives of those involved in the series, i.e., the themes that are capable of representing

the entire data set, forming a sort of thematic map of the ten analyzed autobiographical narratives. Although this is a flexible method, it was necessary to follow a set of procedures to synthesize the central themes discussed in the documentary series: familiarization with the data and transcription of verbal information; definition of initial encodings according to the main topics discussed; constant encoding review; and reflection on the central themes.

In each episode of the documentary series *I Am Africa,* the interviewees, five African women and five African men, involved in the history and development of their countries, build a narrative about their personal journey. Among those interviewed, nine are between 47 and 62 years old, with only one interviewee being over 70 years old. The career paths are varied, enhancing, however, that the majority of the respondents are involved in the field of social action or in cultural and artistic activities. Seven of these individuals have emigrated to other countries, four of them having lived in Portugal.

'I Am Africa' Documentary Series

The results of this research showed the narrative organization of the ten interviewees in three central themes: the perception about the meanings of independence, which involve the representation of actors participating in the process of (de)colonization and how they experienced it, the perceptions about the cultural and linguistic diversity and the (re)making of national identities.

Perceptions about the Meanings of Independence

Building a post-conflict memory requires us to go backwards, looking at the past and the path traveled by each individual in this process. In this regard, the interpretation, argument, and experience analysis seem essential for the two sides of the conflict. Thus, for Licata, Klein, and Gely (2007), the reconstruction of the past is part of the reconciliation process and the narratives of those involved are central in this journey.

The involvement of some interviewees in the anti-colonial struggle was due to the influence of relatives who somehow defended their country's independence, having raised in their children the feeling that it was important to contribute to their liberation, challenging an order that, in their opinion, subjugated its people.

> I was involved in this anti-colonial struggle, first influenced by my father because he was a lawyer here in Guinea-Bissau and defended all nationalists who ended up in court. He ends up being arrested in Lisbon and, then, all the involvement I had in the colonial struggle became stronger, and then, there is the student struggle, the association fight in Portugal that also had as common denominator the refusal of young Portuguese students to participate in the colonial war. (Pepito, GB)

> My father was imprisoned in 1953, the year of the Batepá massacre, passing on the awareness
> that the order that existed at the time was questionable and unfair, an order based on the
> subjugation of the identity of a people by a system that was by nature an authoritarian system,
> the colonial system. (Conceição Deus Lima, STP)

Angolan Luzia Sebastião was also involved in the colonial struggle. She was in sixth grade when she left
school and joined the liberation fight. Her father was arrested by the PIDE[2] when Luzia was five years old.
When her father was released, seven years later, she was 12. Luzia Sebastião believes that this is what
created in her 'the need for liberation, the country's independence was something that was important and
that each one of us had to make our own contribution'.

Respondents reported that when independence came, their countries needed everything, getting them
involved in its development and, in some cases, feeling that they took part in its reconstruction process.

> The first government after independence was at hand with a country that needed everything from
> marketing structures, educating people, the illiteracy rate was high, so young people, the older ones
> who were already completing high school assisted in the literacy field, helped in sowing and then we
> had an incredible bad luck, soon after independence there was a drought that lasted nearly eight
> years, without rain, so everything was left undone, we lacked all resources (...) Then there was this
> beautiful side which was the work of building a country from scratch and so I think this marked my
> generation a lot, we feel this Cape Verde that there is now as something in which we participated in
> and saw being built. (Mami Estrela, CV)

The Guinean citizen, Pepito, also lived this time with emotion, having been present with his wife in front of
the Carmo Headquarters on April 25, 1974[3]. He says, 'It is a moment I will never forget, because I lived it,
I lived that moment'.

While believing in the importance of the independence of their countries, they consider that there is still
much to be done so that there is equal development, noting that political power could take a more active
role in this process.

> Today, in fact, I feel that I fought for this country, but ... I still fight for it, I've never stopped
> fighting for Mozambique, never, never, but I realize that it is not this political power that I hoped
> that one day we would have, the poor are getting poorer, the rich getting richer. (Camilo de Sousa,
> Mozambique)

> Independence, yes, but an independence that grants freedom, development and not just a
> replacement of shirts, a substitution of persons. (Pepito, GB)

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[2] PIDE (International and State Defence Police) was the main tool of repression used by the authoritarian regime of António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal during the Estado Novo (New State) (1932–1974).
[3] Day of the Carnation Revolution, ending nearly 50 years of dictatorship in Portugal and initiating the process of independence of African colonies. The Carmo Headquarters, Lisbon, was the epicenter of this revolution.

Some disappointment can be felt in the interviewees' reports. For Luzia Sebastião, not all the independence projects were fulfilled. However, she states that she fought hard for freedom and wants her children and grandchildren to continue her fight, 'to keep that independence which cost us so much to get and for which we still fight today' (Luzia Sebastião, Angola).

Several interviewees mentioned that the colonial period had impacts on the mentality and autonomy of people who, after a long period of domination, were not prepared to rebuild their paths. It is in this sense that João Carlos Silva reports that being a citizen in STP is something that needs to be taught:

> (…) no colonial power prepares the population they rule or colonize to take the future into their own hands, to be decision makers, to be masters of their own destiny. (…) [We need to] teach to be a citizen and appreciate Sao Tome and Principe and slightly raise self esteem and pride because being proud of being Santomean is the key to achieving these goals. (João Carlos Silva, STP)

> Being a democrat is very difficult because we do not have a history of democracy, we have a history of domination, we have a history of very strong authorities, very well defined hierarchies and our head is shaped that way, so 35 years ago this had to change. (...) all the people who are taking key positions, who are working in this field, are people who have a history of socialization, of experiences in their daily routine, in their childhood, in their youth, where there was always a history of domination, in which they were dominated by a master, therefore, to clear this from our heads will take at least another generation. (Mami Estrela, CV)

These extracts reinforce what several recent studies indicate about the persistence of the effects of the colonial processes in the formation of mentalities of those who lived them (Cabecinhas *et al.,* 2011; Volpato & Licata, 2010). That is, the experiences in the colonial period shaped the representations, the ways of thinking, and the behavior of those involved. As can be seen from the excerpts shown, even after the decolonization process, this influence continues to permeate people's social and cultural identities, affecting their daily lives.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Some interviewees bring up the Portuguese language as heritage as well as its importance to the development of their countries through the possibility of communicating with millions of people who also speak Portuguese. The Portuguese language seems to work as an important vehicle of trade, cultural, and political development (Martins, 2010). Conceição Deus Lima notes that literature was a tool in the anti-colonial struggle, which, having been written in Portuguese, claimed the identity of a country struggling for independence.

[The Portuguese language] is a legacy that is part of our history, which may not be a very beautiful one, it had slavery, colonialism, domination, repression, it had many sad things, but it is a legacy and a heritage that is ours, it is undeniable and the issue that the Portuguese language is the lingua franca of education is also important for us because it is an asset, it allows us to communicate with other people, it allows us access to millions of people who speak Portuguese as well. (Mami Estrela, CV)

The Portuguese language was a feature and a construction element of the nationalities of the Portuguese-speaking African countries. It was in Portuguese that Agostinho Neto, José Craveirinha, Alda Lara (…), designed and anticipated the political home and did it literally, and did so in Portuguese. Through poetry they declared an identity that said: this is a world that has a people who have a history, who have a past, and should in the future be entitled to their own voice and be entitled to take their destiny into their own hands. (Conceição Deus Lima, STP)

The analysis of the episodes allowed us to see that the mother tongue is used by most interviewees when talking to family, friends, and the community to which they relate, and is therefore considered the 'language of affections'. Indeed, this may be due to the difficulty of some population groups expressing themselves in Portuguese, but also to the increase in recognition of a language that was despised during the colonial period.

(…) we spent many years hearing that this was not a language, that it had no value, that it wasn't proper to communicate and it was also a form of domination, because we could not express ourselves as well in the Portuguese language (…) but this has to be overcome in our minds, because politically it no longer exists. And then the Creole, the Cape Verdean language is the language of affection, we do not talk of love, we do not speak about feelings with our children, we do not love in Portuguese, we do not; Creole is the language of intimacy (…). (Mami Estrela, CV)

I always dreamed of the school holiday period when I came to spend some time with grandmother, it was grandmother's sweetness, it was grandma's special care, it was grandma's special food and it was a very important thing, it was a familiarization with the Forro that wasn't present at home (…) because there was the idea that it collide with learning Portuguese. (Conceição Deus Lima, STP)

The linguistic and cultural diversity is mentioned numerous times by the interviewees as a quality that should be improved and valued:

The fact that Guinea-Bissau has 32 ethnic groups means 32 different ways of thinking, dancing, doing culture, different life perspectives, life philosophies; they are an extraordinary wealth when considered elements which enhance union. (...) Here, in the south, where we see all these races,

the lesson we learn is that cohabitation exists, the familiarity and the pleasure that each one has of showing their culture and recognizing beautiful aspects in other people's culture and saying that it now becomes my culture too, because I like it, I dance it, I adopt it. (Pepito, GB)

I am interested in following and enforcing the editorial line, the only editorial line in which I believe, (…) which seeks pluralism, which seeks to reflect a society which, being small, about 150 000 inhabitants, is quite plural, where 5 different languages coexist, it is a small Babel, therefore it is important to shatter the crystallized idea of a false homogeneity, and through that television give the country its plural look back. (Conceição Deus Lima, STP)

The excerpts indicate a continuous negotiation between cultures that coexist in countries that are plural, making that coexistence between different ethnic groups' ways of thinking, talking, and feeling essential. Observed in the interviewees' speech is an effort to preserve what they consider to be their own cultural identity. Here, the mother tongue and the Portuguese language seem to play an important role in shaping this cultural identity.

The (Re)making of National Identities

National cultures, while producing meanings about the 'nation' – meanings with which we can be identified – build identities (Hall, 1992/2011). These meanings are held in the stories told about the nation and in the memories that connect its present with its past. The ten interviewees, while recalling aspects of their past and country of origin, create discourses, which enable the analysis of their representations of history. Most interviewees, even those who lived migratory experiences, note that living in their birthplace had always been in their plans, showing a sense of responsibility and involvement in the future of these countries.

At no time did the thought that my future was not in Guinea-Bissau cross my mind, ever, despite having lived many years in Portugal. It was always clear that I was receiving education to come to Guinea-Bissau. (Augusta Henriques, GB)

We have a duty, an ability to build another Guinea-Bissau, the Guinea-Bissau which we love, our Guinea-Bissau, the Guinea-Bissau of dignity, respect, history, culture, this is our Guinea-Bissau and we have to put it in contrast with the Guinea-Bissau of a half a dozen people, which is the Guinea-Bissau of fraudulent business, weapon, and drug trafficking. (Pepito, Guinea-Bissau)

My world is here. (Mário Lúcio Sousa, CV)

Some of the interviewees also mentioned the culture of their countries as an intrinsic part of their identity, considering that it should be valued and that a better future depends on this value from the local communities.

> Africa is a continent with future. (...) It still has a culture with connection to the land, the case of Guinea-Bissau, and this culture is our identity card, it is our identity in the world and we must go back to it (Augusta Henriques, GB).

> When the people of Mozambique fail to value their culture, then it's not a people, because they will always live in adaptations and there will be no roots, it is a tree without roots, anything will fall. (Catarina Paulo, Mozambique)

Culture, taken as the identity card of a people, the root, and the pillar for development, are aspects constantly referenced by the interviewees. Mário Kajibanga (Angola) also considers that culture can be the means for the reunion of the 'cultural mosaic' that makes up his country.

The affective side of the meanings that the places of origin cause in some interviewees is central to realizing their connection to space, memories, and even smells associated with their childhood.

> Santana is my first motherland, Santana is my maternal grandparents, Santana is the meeting between my father and mother. He taught primary school here in Santana. My older brother and I were born here. (Conceição Deus Lima, STP)

> The Roça de São João means a reunion with my parents, then with the territorial space of the countryside, which has a very special fragrance, a territory inhabited with memories. (João Carlos Silva, STP)

João Carlos Silva, having lived twenty years out of Sao Tome and Principe, states that the return awakened in him a set of memories that constitute his identity as a Santomean person. Mário Lúcio Sousa also tells us that he continues to live in Cape Verde, mainly because he cannot imagine living in a place without reference to childhood spaces or places.

Despite living in different cultural and geographical places, all of the interviewees reveal a discourse of identification with their place of origin. Hall (1992/2011, p. 62) states that instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we must think of them as 'a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity'. Thus, national identities are represented as unified as an expression of the culture of 'one people'. The discourse of the interviewees actually reflects this tension – on the one hand, struggling with the need for evidencing their countries in the international context, through 'their own culture', the 'identity card of a people', while on the other hand, also struggling with the need for an ongoing negotiation, in societies composed of multiple cultures, and, consequently, with different ways of speaking, feeling, and seeing the world. They live, therefore, amongst a constant tension/negotiation between the 'global' and 'local' in the very process of identity (re)making in this so-called post-colonial period.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the program *I Am Africa* allowed for a brief reflection on three themes that have proven to be extremely important in the recent history of African countries whose official language is Portuguese. Through this documentary series analysis, was clear that training and learning obtained by the interviewees outside their country of origin would mean to provide a contribution to the development of their country, to which they all returned. For learning purposes, professional reasons, or involvement in the anti-colonial struggle, seven of the interviewees lived migratory experiences on which they sought to capitalize when they returned to their countries. For most interviewees, the culture should be the pillar, the identity card that must be disclosed in order to strengthen their countries and to promote the meeting between cultures and socio-cultural groups.

In relation to the meanings of independence, the majority of the interviewees were involved in the anti-colonial struggle, mainly influenced by events that affected their families. The desire for freedom was present in their daily lives and when independence was obtained, they believed that 'anything was possible'. However, their speech shows that the path followed in the post-independence period was not what they expected – that many goals are yet to be accomplished and that they were not prepared to 'be masters of their own destiny', given the history of domination they had lived, which is considered to be a long process that requires a change of mindset.

The linguistic and cultural diversity is mentioned by interviewees throughout their narrative. They note that different ethnicities, languages, and ways of thinking coexist in the same country; they make up a 'plural face', which is necessary to enhance and strengthen. The Portuguese language is seen as a legacy and an asset that allows people to communicate with millions of others. While assuming the importance of the Portuguese language, they note that they highly value their native languages, linking them to childhood affections and experiences.

We consider it important to emphasize that this work was based on the idea that it is necessary to retrieve different versions of history, analyzing the different narratives about the (post)colonial period, in contrast with the dominant speeches that have prevailed in the recent past. If we assume identity as a discursive construction, which can be disclosed by the stories people tell about themselves and others and in recounted memories of the past, autobiographical memory documentaries can be places revealing identities in (re)construction that can deepen our awareness about the (post)colonial period.

The autobiographical documentaries that focus on recent events of the (post)colonial period are tools that help analyze and understand the experiences that Bhabha (1994) calls 'in-between'. These experiences of those who live/lived 'within and between cultures' – due to the processes of colonization, decolonization and migration processes – provide the development of strategies for negotiating cultural differences,

individual and/or community values, intersubjectivities, and nationality collective experiences, which contribute to a permanent identity (re)making. This idea of an 'in-between' space seems to be present in the narratives analyzed. The fact that the majority of the interviewees have lived migratory experiences enabled a cultural crossing that contributed to their identity (national, ethnic, linguistic, etc.) (re)construction, with real consequences on their work and with an impact on the society in which they live today.

Finally, this paper is an attempt to listen the narratives of African citizens, from different countries, and their perceptions on the (post)colonial period, through the analysis of audiovisual contents, which we intend to further explore in the future investigations.

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