

Local FEATURE



Can you briefly talk about your academic background?

I have a PhD in Contemporary Art History and a researcher and member of CHAM (Centre for the Humanities) at FCSH-UNL (Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the NOVA University of Lisbon). I also have a Masters in Contemporary Art History, a post-graduate diploma in International Relations/ Foreign Affairs and a degree in Tourism. I am an invited lecturer at FCSH-UNL where I supervised Masters and PhD theses. I have published articles in journals and indexed websites and I am the author/coordinator of several books. I have been a member of scientific committees and organised or taken part in activities held in Portugal, Spain, France, Scotland, Italy, Romania, Dubai, Brazil and New Zealand. My field of specialisation focuses on Art History and Contemporary Culture, particularly the connection between Art and Power, in relation to Travel and (Post) Colonial Studies and Dance. I am currently a postdoc researcher holding an FCT scholarship for the project "ArTravel. Travel and Colonial Art in Contemporary Culture."

What is the background to the project that led you to write your book: Zanzibar: the Art of a (Re) Encounter?

The project ArTravel, Travel and Colonial Art in Contemporary Culture is a research project which is supported by FCT Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (Postdoctoral Grant SFRH/BPD/107783/2015).

It is based on the idea that it is necessary to reflect on how the journeys between the former Portuguese colonies and the metropole inspired the creation of an art that took root not only in Portugal but which was also structured by the former overseas provinces. Taking as its starting point the growing visibility of the theme at an international level, and with the project incorporated within a framework encapsulated within Contemporary Art History that takes into account the specificities of the national culture. We propose to reflect on the triangle of 'Travel – Colonial Artistic Creation

Exploring centuries history of Zanzibar

The East African Indian Ocean Islands of Zanzibar have had centuries long historical contacts with various old nations in Europe, Middle East, the US and Asia. In this exclusive interview granted to the Zanzibar Mail Correspondent Burhani Muhunzi, the Lisbon based NOVA University researcher, Dr. Maria Joao Castro talks on a wide range of issues on the book, Zanzibar: The Art of a (Re) Encounter which she wrote after three years of research. The book was recently launched at the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA), Vuga campus in the Zanzibar Old Town.



Dr. Maria Joao Castro (left) presents her book in the conference room of the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) at Vuga.

– Contemporary Culture' not only from the viewpoint of the European geo-political context but also from perspectives of an authoritative world view that allows a change in the paradigm.

Why did you choose Zanzibar to write about it?

I chose Zanzibar because I thought it was one of the important research areas to work on and debate inside the post-colonial studies.

Who were the main sources of information and contacts that helped you in your research?

In Zanzibar, among my key contacts included Professor Abdul Sheriff. I also did deep research in the National Archives and Records of Zanzibar, Zanzibar Library, Beit al-Ajaib Library and the Aga Khan Foundation. In Portugal I did research in the Library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Library and the Overseas Historical Archives of Lisbon.

To what extent will the people

in Portugal and Zanzibar benefit from your book, Zanzibar: The Art of a (Re) Encounter?

The people in Portugal will know better part of their own history and help to know themselves better while the people in Zanzibar will know better one part of their own history to help them to draw a more complete chronology of the last centuries.

What do you think is the main legacy of the Portuguese rule in Zanzibar?

I think the main legacy of Portuguese rule in Zanzibar is the increasing visibility that the Zanzibar islands achieved in the geo-political scenario of the Indian Ocean.

What do you think were the historical similarities shared by Zanzibar and Portugal

As Professor Abdul Sheriff pointed out during the book launching, both Portugal and Zanzibar are similar in several senses. I 'd point out the fact

that both were small countries that spread their kingdoms through vast areas of the world influencing and modifying the cultures with which they interacted.

How do you think will the book contribute in the academic field?

With this research, I tried to put the subject in the Academic agenda on the hope that from my research others will develop and proliferate in the academic world.

What problems did you encounter during your research?

I did not find many problems. However, there were difficulties to understand some documents in the Zanzibar and Portugal Archives which were written in Arabic which made it difficult to go deep into them. For example the writings of the Sultan of Zanzibar to the King of Portugal during the 19th century.

To what extent do the Zanzibar historical documents feature in the Portuguese archives?

There are some historical documents about Zanzibar in the Portuguese archives which have never been studied. So I hope that students can develop more researches in a way that these files can be known in the academic world and the non-scientific community.

As a historian what are your general views on Zanzibar?

As an art historian I would say that Zanzibar people have a rich patrimony and heritage that must be revealed and known. So the new generation, the university students and community have a responsibility to protect and divulgate such a rich history. I hope my book can contribute to achieve this goal.