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**Documenting a Personal and National History: Echoes of the Urban-Rural Divide in the  
Works of Helga Gamboa**

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A thesis submitted to the University Honors Program  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Honors Certificate with Thesis

Approved by  
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December 6, 2020

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my Honors thesis advisor Dr. Laurel Fredrickson for her support and guidance both in the process of completing this work and during my time at SIUC. I would also like to thank my Honors mentor Dr. Melinda Yeomans for her support and guidance.

This work was supported by a Windgate Charitable Foundation Scholarship and the Tony Fehm Memorial Art History Scholastic Achievement Award awarded by the School of Art and Design, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

## Introduction

A series of ceramic vessels (2003-2008) by the UK-based Angolan artist Helga Gamboa draw attention to the suffering and challenges of rural women and children during and after the Angolan Civil War, a Cold War proxy war fought intermittently from 1975-2002. *Euridice* (2008), one of her better known works, represents the artist's approach, fusing historical and contemporary artistic techniques to tell the story of a war victim.<sup>1</sup> The lip of the pot is tin-glazed, its opaque, white color contrasting with the warm brown of the burnished body. Each side of the pot bears a small mound resembling a makeshift handle. The rim of the pot is covered in gold luster with and its white glazed lip is coated in blue transfers of faded photographs that are overlaid with Portuguese and English text that describe how up to 70,000 Angolans were victims of land-mines. The interior of the small pot is coated in tin-glaze and a photographic decal. The photograph depicts three children, all amputees. The youngest hunches over, supporting herself on forearm crutches. The blue and white transfer prints and handwritten overlay suggest Portuguese faience, or tin-glazed earthenware. Considering the role Portuguese porcelain and faience had in influencing social life in the Early Modern Empire—these blue and white ceramics disseminated broad ideas throughout the empire (e.g., morality, femininity, senses, and tastes)—Gamboa uses these modern methods to represent the Portuguese influence over their colonial subjects, including her own experience growing up in Luanda. This paper will analyze several vessels created by Helga Gamboa from 2003 to 2008, and examine how her works, through their syncretism, reflect a personal and national history. Gamboa's vessels possess a

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<sup>1</sup> Moira Vincentelli, "Curator's Choice," *Ceramic Review*, no. 302 (March 2020): 82. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ofs&AN=141951684&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

narrative power that recount the experience of rural Angolan women during the wartime and her own experience as a colonial subject in Luanda. Her work underscores an urban-rural divide that persists in post-colonial Africa to this day.

### **Syncretism and Symbolism**

Angola's history regarding its colonial period, liberation movements, and civil war shaped Gamboa's approach to art and her identity as a transnational contemporary artist. Gamboa grew up in Luanda, the capital city of Angola, during the Angolan War of Independence (1961-1974). Gamboa eventually immigrated to the UK in the 1990s and studied at the University of the West in Bristol, England, where she received a BA and MA in ceramics. A collection of Kwanyama pottery from Southwest Angola at the Powell-Cotton Museum in Kent inspired her to study indigenous ceramic traditions at Aberystwyth University in Wales. Many of these traditions have disappeared due to migration. Gamboa's education as an artist in the United Kingdom coupled with her ethnographic studies of the Kwanyama and Nhaneca-Humbe communities in her native Angola give her art a personal, restorative function, allowing the artist to reconnect with surviving indigenous traditions:

My urban upbringing in a Portuguese colonial environment meant that I did not come into contact with indigenous pottery and its everyday or ceremonial functions. I studied and developed as an artist in the UK and it is ironic that it is an outside culture that was instrumental in leading me to a greater understanding of my own native culture... My own identity as an artist and researcher is complicated. In some ways it contains elements

of the victim... In a sense I am recovering, or excavating elements of Angolan culture previously hidden from me.<sup>2</sup>

Gamboa's engages with African hand-building techniques and Portuguese-tin glaze in the artmaking process. She builds her vessels from coils of earthenware clay which she then fires to 1832°F. She then proceeds to apply tin glaze to the pot. The glaze, made white and opaque through the addition of tin oxide, creates an ideal, smooth decorative surface. Once it is applied to the vessel it is fired to 1940 °F, fusing the pigments and glaze together.<sup>3</sup> At this point in the process, Gamboa transfers print images to her vessels and applies gold and silver lusters to the vessels' rims. The pots are then fired again, this time at 1202°F to 1382°F.<sup>4</sup>

Gamboa has stated that growing up in Luanda during the war of liberation (1961-1974), and the subsequent civil wars (1975-2002) have profoundly affected her, compelling her to draw attention to rural women's plight in her works.<sup>5</sup> Gamboa's ceramic transfers include images of street children, rural women, amputees and famine victims. War photography and images from newspapers reference the media reporting and documentation of the war underscoring her experiencing the conflict from afar. The inclusion of war photography on works such as *Servitude II*, *Aftermath*, and *Euridice*, depict rural women who had to engage in alternative

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<sup>2</sup> Gamboa, "An Angolan Heritage."

<sup>3</sup> "Tin-Glazed Earthenware," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., July 20, 1998), <https://www.britannica.com/art/tin-glazed-earthenware>.

<sup>4</sup> Gamboa, "An Angolan Heritage."

<sup>5</sup> Teresa Matos Pereira, "A Condição Da Mulher Em Angola Na Cerâmica De Helga Gamboa," *Revista: Estúdio*, vol. 3, no. 5, (June 2012): 112–118., [www.scielo.mec.pt/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1647-61582012000100020&lng=en&tlng=pt](http://www.scielo.mec.pt/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1647-61582012000100020&lng=en&tlng=pt).

approaches to peacebuilding. Their actions during and after the war facilitated a discussion on how to address rural women's concerns.

The white tin glaze--usually applied on the vessel's lip or interior-- represents the Portuguese Empire's domination and influence. The gold and silver luster she applies to many of her vessels envisage a better future, either for those who suffered or those, like Euridice, who hoped for prosperity, a more literal reference to the elements not fully exploited in Angola's mining reserves.<sup>6</sup> The majority of photographs that Gamboa transfers onto her tin-glazed surfaces are of landmine victims. Anti-personnel landmines were widely used in both inter and intra-state Cold War conflicts. Angola is a unique case due to the large amount of landmines still deployed.

Ducados summarizes the crisis and its impact on the country:

There are an estimated 10 million landmines planted in the Angolan soil. The dimension of the landmine crisis is immense as landmines exact a relentless and cruel toll upon the civilian population. There are an estimated 70,000 amputees in Angola (UNDP, 1998). Women and children have been the major victims of landmine accidents. Landmines make agricultural production, commerce, and travel between urban and rural areas hazardous: essential processes of economic survival are now potentially fatal.<sup>7</sup>

The thin coat of luster on the tin-glazed transferware addresses the landmine crisis' hindrance of any potential for prosperity in the war-torn country. In many cases, anti-personnel landmines were deployed in the context of civil war, planted on or near infrastructure, with most

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<sup>6</sup> Vincentelli. "Curator's Choice," 82.

<sup>7</sup> Henda Ducados, "An All Men's Show? Angolan Women's Survival in the 30-Year war," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 43 (2000): 11-22. Accessed October 4, 2020. doi:10.2307/4066105.

found near villages.<sup>8</sup> Gamboa's use of industrial wares symbolizes the mass production of landmines and other weapons. The weapons used by the different factions in the Angolan civil war depleted the nation's resources and made survival incredibly difficult for rural women and children. Cheap to produce but costly to diffuse, remaining landmines continue to plague civilians and have proven to be obstacles to peace and prosperity.<sup>9</sup>

## **A National History**

To fully understand how the history of Angola has informed the content of Gamboa's vessels, this paper will provide a brief historical context on the anti-colonial war (1961-1974), the Carnation Revolution of 1974, and the subsequent Civil War (1975-2002). Angolan independence was a direct result of the 1974 collapse of the Salazar-Caetano regime, also known as the Estado Novo or Second Empire. The Carnation Revolution, which resulted in the Estado Novo's downfall, would spell the end of Portuguese colonialism.<sup>10</sup> On April 25, 1974, the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), a group of dissident soldiers, staged a military coup to overthrow the authoritarian regime. Internal pressures had been rising. The dissent within the Portuguese military stemmed from the costly and lengthy measures of combating liberation movements in the African colonies of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, strengthened by civil resistance in the metropole.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Isebill V Gruhn, "Land Mines: An African Tragedy," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1996, pp. 692. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/161595](http://www.jstor.org/stable/161595). Accessed 2 Dec. 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Gruhn, 688-9.

<sup>10</sup> Fernando Arenas, "Lusophone Africa within the Global and the Postcolonial," In *Lusophone Africa: Beyond Independence* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxix-xxx.

<sup>11</sup> Al J. Venter, *Angolan War of Liberation: Colonial-Communist Clash, 1961-1974* (South Yorkshire, England: Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 2018), 15-6.



This was followed by the immediate withdrawal of Portuguese armed forces and a mass exodus of Portuguese citizens from the colonies. After Portugal's withdrawal, Angolan liberation movements Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), who had united against the Portuguese in the liberation struggle, turned on each other in a struggle for power. Fernando Arenas attributes the ensuing civil wars (1975-2002) to a set of internal and external circumstances, including the internal conflicts between nationalist movements such as MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA and the Cold War, which "absorbed, reinforced, and inflected" the conflict, using it as a proxy war. The MPLA was backed by Cuba and the Soviet Union, while China, the United States, and, most significantly, South Africa supported UNITA. This paper will limit the references to MPLA and UNITA. They were the main forces fighting during the civil war. There is also more evidence of women working both within and independent of these two warring groups in search of peace. Portuguese imperialism in Angola resulted in the construction of ethnic identities through displacement, land dispossession, and artificial borders. Neither MPLA nor UNITA wanted to relinquish, much less share power over such a divided territory. These internal and external factors have attributed the intermittent wars of 1975-2002 to longstanding tribal or ethnic conflict.<sup>12</sup>

### **Gender and the Angolan Civil War**

Historiography of the Angolan civil war provides a narrow account of women's roles during this time, remembered in written historical records as directly supporting the soldiers or

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<sup>12</sup> Horace Campbell, "Angolan Women in Search of Peace." *African Journal of Political Science / Revue Africaine De Science Politique* 3, no. 1 (1998): 78. Accessed December 3, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23489915>.

as victims. This dichotomous view went hand in hand with simplistic notions of liberation and peace. Peace concerning the Angolan war involved joining the two armies and creating a unified national government.<sup>13</sup> As many women took on new roles to ensure their families' survival, it became evident that peace would have to mean more than the mere "silencing of guns."<sup>14</sup> There are several reasons that those living in rural areas were especially vulnerable. Ducados and Campbell discuss how the war significantly impacted rural Angolan women. The war upended established family structures and values and led to an overall decline in the quality of life. The situation was exacerbated by population displacement, which ascribed to millions of Angolans the new status of "internally displaced person" (IDP) or refugee. Mass rural-urban population displacement also negatively impacted women. In addition to the problems that plague overpopulated regions such as lack of access to clean water and other public health concerns, a high infant mortality rate and a risk of sexual assault in the IDP refugee camps were other hardships Angolan women had to endure. These factors, along with the fact that many resorted to prostitution, led to increased sexually transmitted diseases, namely HIV.<sup>15</sup>

Women who were merely trying to survive and provide for their children were caught in the crossfire. Gamboa's 2005 piece, *Mother and Child*, represents this desperation. A fiercely protective mother is depicted in *Madonna and Child*. Decals of the mother and her sick child line the interior of the small earthenware bowl (12 ½ by 5 ½ inches).<sup>16</sup> Representing the womb or the

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<sup>13</sup> Campbell, "In Search of Peace," 75.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, "In Search of Peace," 71.

<sup>15</sup> Henda Ducados, "An All Men's Show," 13-4.

<sup>16</sup> Helga Gamboa, "An Angolan Heritage: the Ceramics of Helga Gamboa," *Interpreting Ceramics* : issue 10, 2008, <http://interpretingceramics.com/issue010/articles/06.htm>.

safe cradle of a mother's arms, both are surrounded by death, the black slip, which creeps up from the rounded base towards the vessel's mouth. Several mounds, coated in silver luster, encircle the bowl's lip. The rim is also covered in silver luster, symbolizing resilience and hope for the future. Covering the white-glazed interior is the blue transfer photographic image of an Angolan woman carrying her young child and an overlay of floral motifs.

The role of women in the war and peacebuilding process was more complicated than what much of the historiography suggests. Many rural women had to draw on what they had previously used during the anti-colonial war to survive.<sup>17</sup> Campbell provides examples of these "alternative modes," most memorably the story of women from the Kuito barrio of Kanonge, who "demonstrated exemplary courage in breaking the siege by going out at night to forage for food, transiting land mines, and using different techniques of dress language and trading patterns to bypass the soldiers of the government and UNITA".<sup>18</sup> Gamboa's decals depicting survivors on traditionally formed vessels, seen in works such as *Aftermath*, *Servitude II*, and *Blasted I* reference the alternative modes of peacebuilding rural women had to undertake by capturing the suffering that they endured.

According to Campbell, "the spirit of resistance has been manifest in numerous ways but nowhere as evident as in the forthright emergence of Angolan women on the center stage of the economic life of their society".<sup>19</sup> Gamboa's 2003 work, *Aftermath*, captures this emergence, displaying images of war-torn women on the tin-glazed interior and two-thirds of the pot's

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<sup>17</sup> Campbell, "In Search of Peace," 70.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, "In Search of Peace," 73.

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, "In Search of Peace," 72.

exterior. Transferred onto the lip near the silver rim is a photograph of a large group of women, all landmine victims (we can see their crutches peeking out from beneath their skirts). Between the two tiers is the photograph of a young amputee. The picture captures her in motion among the ruins of a building.

The lowest tier of images is a repeated pattern of a landmine victim. The woman appears to be heading home or out to the market. She supports herself with two forearm crutches while carrying a sack on her head. The quotidian image does not foreground the fact that death surrounds this woman. Not only did this woman likely lose someone to the war, she, as a survivor, bears the scars. This is further underscored by the black slip applied to the rounded base of the vessel. The round mounds are situated near the base and are also covered in the black slip. The impact of *Aftermath* is two-fold: the images included do not belie the realities of war, but these women seem to be carrying on, resembling fortitudinous soldiers.

Conversely, *Servitude II* seems to reflect the narrow view of rural women as victims of war. In *Servitude II* (2008), a burnished earthenware vessel, rural women's images bleed into diagrams of tightly packed slave ships.<sup>20</sup> The *Brookes* slave ship diagram is particularly significant because it refers to Angola's history of forced labor and slavery, which spans the fifteenth to nineteenth century. It also calls attention to how an outsider's perspective shapes Gamboa's approach to art-making. The diagram, an inaccurate portrayal of the ship's slaveholding capacities, was arguably "the most widely copied and powerful image" used by eighteenth-century abolitionists to champion their cause.<sup>21</sup> The *Brookes* image's impact through

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<sup>20</sup> Laurel Bradley, "Art Collection," Voice (Carleton College, 2016), [https://apps.carleton.edu/voice/?story\\_id=1488964](https://apps.carleton.edu/voice/?story_id=1488964).

<sup>21</sup> "Diagram of the 'Brookes' Slave Ship," The British Library (The British Library, 27 June 2014), [www.bl.uk/collection-items/diagram-of-the-brookes-slave-ship](http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/diagram-of-the-brookes-slave-ship).

its duplication and dissemination in the United Kingdom and the fact that Gamboa applied it using transfer printing, a popular technique developed in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is a reflection of her time in the United Kingdom and underscores the way outsiders received news of the civil war and perceived these women only as victims.<sup>22</sup> In wanting to bring light to the suffering rural women endured, Gamboa relies on images of the war widely circulated in the media. The interior base branded features a center transfer print of a land mine warning sign. The sign's cracked skull and crossbones reach the base's edges with a faded, blue image of an anti-personnel land mine superimposed over the sign's decal. The detailed and saturated blue flower motifs resemble patterns used on Portuguese tin-glazed earthenware. These motifs, shown blooming near the silver rim, provide a glimmer of hope and life amid the dark and devastating imagery transferred onto the base and interior.

*Blasted I* (2003) uses the form to comment on the “masculine/militaristic appeals” made by MPLA and UNITA to their supporters. Both Ducados and Campbell describe the civil war, in which rural women and children disproportionately suffered the devastation brought by total and guerilla warfare, as being reliant on such values. Ducados is blunt in her criticism, blaming “the inability of men to find common ground to end the conflict at the expense of the population”. *Blasted I* embodies this association of militarism with masculinity: the elongated, phallic form of the vessel is burnished, then distressed with sawdust and marks over its brown slip. Even the title, *Blasted*, connotes that one is gazing upon a cannon or some other destructive tool. From the exterior, *Blasted I* appears less syncretic and more traditional than others. This burnished vessel's form is much taller and narrower than many of her other works, standing at about 17

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<sup>22</sup> “Transfer Printing,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., July 20, 1998), <https://www.britannica.com/art/transfer-printing>.

inches. The earthenware is covered in a brown slip with a flaky surface, while the interior and lip are coated in tin-glaze upon which black and white photographs are transferred. There are three pairs of mounds, which function as handles on either side of the vessel. Only when the object is cradled and looked into through its gold rim are the images of women and children fully visible on the interior walls.

Suppose *Blasted* is a symbol of militarism and destruction. In that case, *Breakfast Thoughts* makes a direct reference to the contributing factors to the war, such as the support the warring factions received from outside forces, namely in the form of mass-produced weapons. *Breakfast Thoughts*, a "ceramic construction" completed by the artist in 2006, is an example of the artist departing from her usual approach of hand-building and burnishing coiled pots. Gamboa transfers blue and white photographs and text onto a ceramic plate, around the bowl's interior, and in a teacup and saucer. The faces of rural women create a circle around the plate's lip and suggest an unrelenting cycle of suffering continuing well after the war.<sup>23</sup> The use of industrial ware references the mass production of cheaply manufactured landmines during wartime. At the same time, transferred images of maimed women on crutches on the surfaces or interior show the aftermath of such landmines, millions of which are still buried beneath the soil.<sup>24</sup> The overlaying images of destruction, aftermath, and survival on tin-glazed vessels to address the impact of Portuguese rule and contribution to the civil war. While all of her works address Angola's history as a Portuguese colony, some of Gamboa's art objects display a more significant Portuguese influence than others. Considering the role Portuguese faience had in influencing social life in the Early Modern Empire (which will be addressed later on) , Gamboa

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<sup>23</sup> Gamboa, "An Angolan Heritage."

<sup>24</sup> Ducados, "An All Men's Show," 13.

incorporates these elements into her work in order to represent the Portuguese influence over their colonial subjects.

### **The Urban-Rural Divide**

Gamboa was raised in the city during the liberation struggle and was subject to Salazarian colonial policy. This system required “the suppression of cultural identity” in order to adopt Portuguese values and successfully assimilate. As a result, many from urban areas including Gamboa have “confused identities”. This sense of disconnect is present throughout her work.<sup>25</sup> Colonial policy under the Estado Novo involved a civilizing mission culminating in the establishment of an education and assimilation system in Angola. The *ensino de adaptação*, mainly implemented in urban areas such as Luanda, produced a small and elite class, the *assimilados*. This policy, despite being widely considered a failure, contributed to the urban-rural class divide in colonial Angola that the ensuing civil war only intensified. This is a commonality among the nation-states formed after World War II and the Third World's subsequent decolonization.<sup>26</sup>

Even within the urban setting of Luanda, there existed a divide between these women and working women. Historians attribute this gap to “their socialization and education,” which has “demobilized” them to the point where they did not see the point in “[building] concrete political links” with women of a lower class.<sup>27</sup> MPLA prided itself in its “progressive” stance when it

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<sup>25</sup> Gamboa, “An Angolan Heritage.”

<sup>26</sup> Dane Keith Kennedy, *Decolonization: a Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell, “Angolan Women in Search of Peace”, 74-5.

came to women. The establishment of OMA in 1962 reflected the party's mission to fight for equality. They recruited women and trained them to become extensions of the war effort as "fighters, nurses, and political educators".<sup>28</sup> However, the organization did not deal with life outside city limits, choosing to stress the importance of helping the war effort. OMA members were either highly educated women or linked to the MPLA through marriage or family relations. Unlike these active members, the party's supporters constituted a lower class. Rural women eventually grew disillusioned with OMA, as urban women did not feel compelled to address the issues affecting those living in the countryside.<sup>29</sup> Both Campbell and Ducados attribute the urban-rural divide to the clash of traditional and Western values, a lingering effect of Portugal's colonialism and civilizing mission in its colonies. The juxtaposition of tin-glazing, transfer ware, Portuguese motifs and the traditional elements (hand building and burnishing) symbolize the adoption Western values and Portuguese influence on their colonial subjects, underscoring the urban-rural divide. Conversely, the ceramicist's burnished earthenware vessels reflect the artist's study of functional and ceremonial traditional Angolan pottery and how rural women drew on a "collective memory" in order to survive. Gamboa's work also parallels this socioeconomic rift that exists between herself, an educated urbanite, and her subjects, rural women living in traditional societies.

## **Material Culture**

In "An Empire of Clay," Coelho adopts a term from anthropologist Alfred Gell, "extended minds", to state that objects such as ceramic vessels are in fact "invested with values

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<sup>28</sup> Henda Ducados, "An All Men's Show? Angolan Women's Survival in the 30-Year war," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 43 (2000): 15. Accessed October 4, 2020. doi:10.2307/4066105.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell. "Angolan Women in Search of Peace", 75.



through which they participate and as a result influence social life. Objects can be considered enculturated beings animated by collective ideas and social relations that act upon people or other objects”.<sup>30</sup> Coelho argues that Portuguese ceramics (especially faience) functioned as extended minds throughout the Empire, particularly during its second phase (sixteenth to eighteenth century). Coelho discusses an “ideological shift” that took place in the middle of the sixteenth century, arguing that apart from trade with China, the increase in Portuguese faience consumption correlated with their desire to emulate "the only state in existence at the time which seemed to conform to their ideal of a uniform population".<sup>31</sup> Connecting their global empire by spreading ideas and ideal rules through everyday objects was now preferable to the concept of a Christian empire united under the Portuguese monarch.<sup>32</sup> Some of these concepts were quite modern (new olfactory and haptic preferences). Some of these concepts were specific to the burgeoning empire. For example, the association of the colors white, blue, and gold with morality and royal power were essential during this age of overseas discovery and expansion. Still, others seemed to reflect broader ideas, such as the age-old association of clay vessels with fragility, domesticity, and the female form.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, tin-glazed earthenware, which functioned as a conduit for social unification during the Early Modern period of the Empire, is used by Gamboa to symbolize another shift that took place under Salazar’s regime (1932-1968). For the duration of this authoritarian regime, Portugal began viewing their territories as "possessions" and an extension of the empire, rather than

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<sup>30</sup> Coelho, “An Empire of Clay,” 101.

<sup>31</sup> Coelho, “An Empire of Clay,” 111.

<sup>32</sup> Coelho, “An Empire of Clay,” 101.

<sup>33</sup> Coelho, “An Empire of Clay,” 107-110.

“provinces”.<sup>34</sup> This shift resulted in a civilizing mission in the colonies, requiring a clear distinction between the assimilated and indigenous populations. According to James Duffy, “there [was] no better illustration of Portuguese intent, or incapacity, in Africa than the education system in Angola and Mozambique.”<sup>35</sup> Portuguese assimilation policy likened the African citizen to a child and sought to “lead [them] to Portuguese adulthood”<sup>36</sup>, the culmination of which was Portuguese citizenship.<sup>37</sup> They hoped to create a “devout, semi-literate, hard-working and conservative African population” through an increasingly selective process: “For the mass a general policy of psychological assimilation, for the few, an intensive cultural assimilation. This is the purpose of the educational program in Portuguese Africa”.<sup>38</sup> Duffy considers Portuguese colonial policy to be a failure. This system only saw success in the cities, where the assimilated and civilized population would support the schools’ existence and practices.<sup>39</sup>

Gamboa, who studied traditional pottery techniques in the southern part of Angola, observed a distinction between functional and ceremonial pottery. Women in these societies used “functional pottery” daily within the domestic sphere where they played an essential role in “the community economy, helping to sustain the families of the makers.” At the same time,

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<sup>34</sup> Eduardo Moreira, “Portuguese Colonial Policy,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 17, no. 3 (1947): 182. Accessed December 6, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1156007>.

<sup>35</sup> James Duffy, “Portuguese Africa (Angola and Mozambique): Some Crucial Problems and the Role of Education in Their Resolution,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 30, no. 3 (1961): 295. Accessed November 17, 2020. doi:10.2307/2294318.

<sup>36</sup> Duffy, “Portuguese Africa”, 295.

<sup>37</sup> Moreira, “Portuguese Colonial Policy,” 182.

<sup>38</sup> Duffy, “Portuguese Africa,” 301.

<sup>39</sup> Duffy, “Portuguese Africa,” 296.

ceremonial vessels were involved in commemorating births, marriages, and deaths.<sup>40</sup> For Gell, “artistic production involves social consequences as an ultimate goal. Thus, the power of art objects is directly related to the technical processes they incarnate”.<sup>41</sup> The power of Gamboa's vessels lies in the artist's joining of traditional and modern processes, taking Portuguese and indigenous Angolan material culture and the meanings attached to earthenware vessels among both societies into account.

### **Conclusion**

It is apparent that Early Modern Portuguese ceramics and traditional Angolan pottery convey conventionalized associations with vessels including humanity, domesticity, comfort, sustenance, and the fragility of female form. By combining different processes Gamboa is able to subvert the notion of vulnerability in many of her works, presenting images of resilience and fortitude in its stead. Helga Gamboa's earthenware vessels and transferwares created from 2003 to 2008 display a juxtaposition of traditional southern Angolan pottery, Portuguese tin-glazing, and English techniques. This syncretism considers both Portuguese and indigenous Angolan material culture and relates historical context to recount Salazar-Caetano-era colonial policy, the liberation struggle, the civil war, the fragility of rural women and children, and the enduring urban-rural divide. Overall, Gamboa's works divert from the dichotomization of rural Angolan women simply by making them the subject and capturing the reality of what they endured during the many years of conflict. Despite the artist's aim, she is unable to escape the reality of the urban-rural divide in her work, as evident in her approach. Thus, echoes of the divide are found

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<sup>40</sup> Gamboa, “An Angolan Heritage.”

<sup>41</sup> Coelho, “An Empire of Clay,” 114.

in her vessels. These pots are not the functional or ceremonial utilitarian objects encountered in the villages of southern Angola, nor are they like the faience which rose to prominence in the Early Modern Portuguese Empire, though they do possess a similar narrative power. They are art pieces, housed in European art galleries located in Anglophone and lusophone countries that these women will never set foot in. Ultimately Gamboa's work, particularly the series of vessels created from 2003 to 2008, serves as a reading of post-colonial African artists working today: whether she creates her burnished earthenware by hand or transfers images onto mass-produced wares, the result is ultimately a reflection of both a personal and national history, representing the ever-existing clash between urban and rural, traditional and western, old and new.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> William J. Duiker. "Chapter 14: Emerging Africa." In *Contemporary World History* (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 302-3.

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