

## Photos from the Field. Thinking immigrants' therapeutic itineraries through ethnography-based art<sup>1</sup>

Chiara Pussetti and Vitor Barros

### *Abstract*

Ethnography-based art practices are opening up alternative possibilities for doing fieldwork, by involving different senses and deploying assorted strategies and media through practices in which is used in both the acquisition and the transmission of ethnographic knowledge. In this photo essay we present "Woundscapes. Suffering, creativity and bare life", an ethnography-based art exhibition collaboratively produced by 11 anthropologists and artists from different countries. Woundscapes reflects the viewpoints of the EBANOCollective setting out to claim the place of 'art' with fragments of ethnography, and the place of ethnography with 'artistic' objects, producing an interference in the established circuits of academia, and at the same time in those of contemporary art. The use of collaborative and participatory methods and art practices in the acquisition and diffusion of ethnographic knowledge reflects the dialogical and processual nature of ethnographic mutual understanding, and at the same time creates a dynamic interchange between memories, dreams, visions, emotions and anxieties, revealing aspects of social reality which remain invisible – if observed only through the lens of the social sciences – and mute – if recounted only in the pages of academic monographs.

### *Keywords*

Ethnography-based art, exhibition, knowledge, collaborative, biomedicine, creativity, representation

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### *Chiara Pussetti*

(PhD in Cultural Anthropology, University of Turin, Italy, 2003) has lectured at graduate and post-graduate levels in Italy, Portugal, and Brazil and has published extensively in the subjects of Anthropology of Body and Emotions, Medical Anthropology, Visual Anthropology and Migration Studies. She has conducted extensive fieldwork on body and emotions; public health policy; representations of race and racism; social vulnerability, exclusion and discrimination in Guinea Bissau, Portugal and Brazil. She is presently Post-doc Researcher of the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon (Professor Aníbal de Bettencourt 9, 1600-189 Lisboa, Portugal. FCT Scholarship SFRH/BPD/95998/2013) and member of Board of Directors of the EBANO Collective (Ethnography-based Art Nomad Organization). From 2007, as anthropologist, artist and curator, she has coordinated 10 national and 6 international projects. Currently, she coordinates as PI for ICS-ULisboa the project ROCK ([www.rockproject.eu](http://www.rockproject.eu) Funding: Horizon 2020 Innovative Action SC5-21 Cultural Heritage as a Driver for Sustainable Growth, 2017-2019; Lead Applicant: Comune di Bologna).

### *Vitor Barros*

has conducted research, published and managed projects in the fields of Migration, Health, Cultural Heritage and Public Art. Photographer and cinematographer, Vitor is also a founding member of EBANOCollective, designing and producing ethnography-based cultural events, projects and installations. He currently holds a Science and Technology Management fellowship in the H2020 project ROCK at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon. He currently holds a Science and Technology Management fellowship in the H2020 project ROCK at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon (Professor Aníbal de Bettencourt 9, 1600-189 Lisboa, Portugal)

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<sup>1</sup> This text has been partially published in *Critical Arts* by Chiara Pussetti (2013). Photos by Vitor Barros.

Ethnography-based art practices are opening up alternative possibilities for doing fieldwork, by involving different senses and deploying assorted strategies and media. These practices, in which art is used in both the acquisition and the transmission of ethnographic knowledge and as a form to communicate the results to the general public through public exhibits, can be considered an attempt to destabilize rigid disciplinary categories by advocating creativity as a strategy to convey to the public *a taste of ethnographic things* (Stoller 1989).

In this photo essay we present “*Woundscapes. Suffering, creativity and bare life*”, an ethnography-based art exhibition curated by Chiara Pussetti and Vitor Barros collaboratively produced by 11 anthropologists and artists from different countries, whose work focuses on the reproduction of particular gazes, stereotypes and individual memories that are all connected to their respective diasporic dynamics.

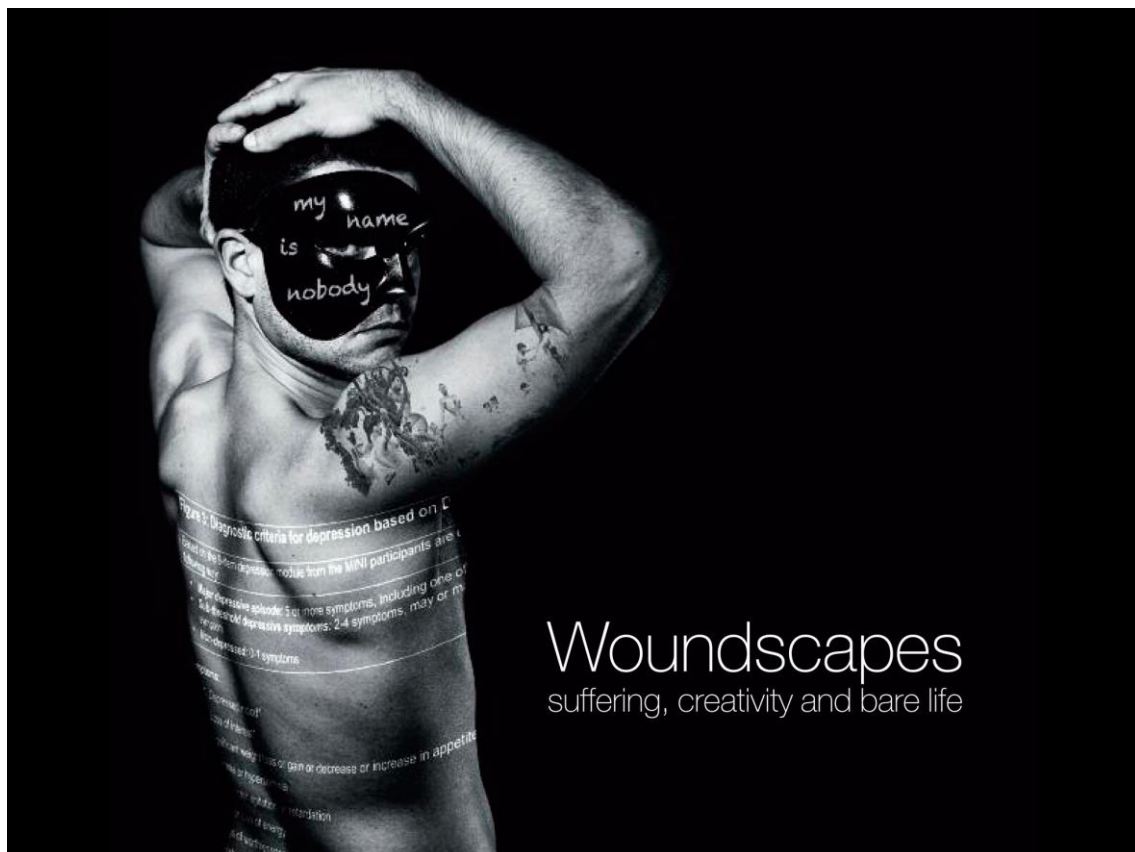


Photo 1. Exhibition; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 2. Exhibition; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 3. Exhibition; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 4. Exhibition; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 5. Exhibition; Photo by Vitor Barros.

As immigrants they are immersed in continuous flows of messages on a daily basis, messages that underline their alterity, both positively and negatively; as artists, they are not limited to appropriating this flow, but create original mediated landscapes, becoming the protagonists. *Woundscapes* exhibition results from the life stories collected by anthropologists working at the Network Centre for Research in Anthropology (CRIA) within the scope of two projects, coordinated by Chiara Pussetti, dealing with the suffering of immigrants and, generally, of the populations defined as marginal and/or vulnerable<sup>2</sup>. By the concept of suffering, we indicate not just the dimension of illness, but the broader aspect of ill-being that brings together the individual aspects and the historical, economic and political processes, with particular attention to the progressive institutionalisation of the interventions intended to relieve suffering. The common aim of the projects was to examine the social causes and individual experiences of suffering in different contexts, particularly focusing on issues such as: the social and political nature of illness and disease; the interfaces between the meanings of people's identity and social belonging and the knowledge and practices of the institutional agenda aimed at the policies of healing and hosting; the subjective narratives of pain; the local forms of individual or collective agency for dealing with the experience of suffering in order to try to attend the processual aspects of social life.



Photo 6. Project *Ghetto Six*: Lorenzo Bordonaro; Photo by Vitor Barros.

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<sup>2</sup> The two projects - *Health Policies and Therapeutic Practices: Suffering and Cure Strategies in Migrants in the Greater Lisbon Area* and *Immigrants and Social Support Services: Technologies of Citizenship in Portugal* - were coordinated by Chiara Pussetti and financed by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology FCT. The curators are founders and directors of the Ethnography-based Art Nomad Organization EBANOC collective [www.ebanocollective.org](http://www.ebanocollective.org).



Photo 6. Project *Ghetto Six*: Lorenzo Bordonaro; Photo by Vitor Barros.

We thus firstly intended to set out the different forms of understanding, expressing and dealing with suffering, examining individual and collective courses of the signification of pain, cure strategies in the wider therapeutic and care market of Greater Lisbon, and different forms and tactics of legitimization, resistance or reconceptualization of social position itself. Secondly, we have tried to identify the physical dimension of these itineraries, which become ways of living the city: of creative appropriation of the space, of tension with the new geographies of curing and suffering, of innovative re-creation of old urban maps.



Photo 8. Project *Healing Market*: Chiara Pussetti; Project Umbanda and Candomblé: Clara Saraiva; Photo by Vitor Barros.

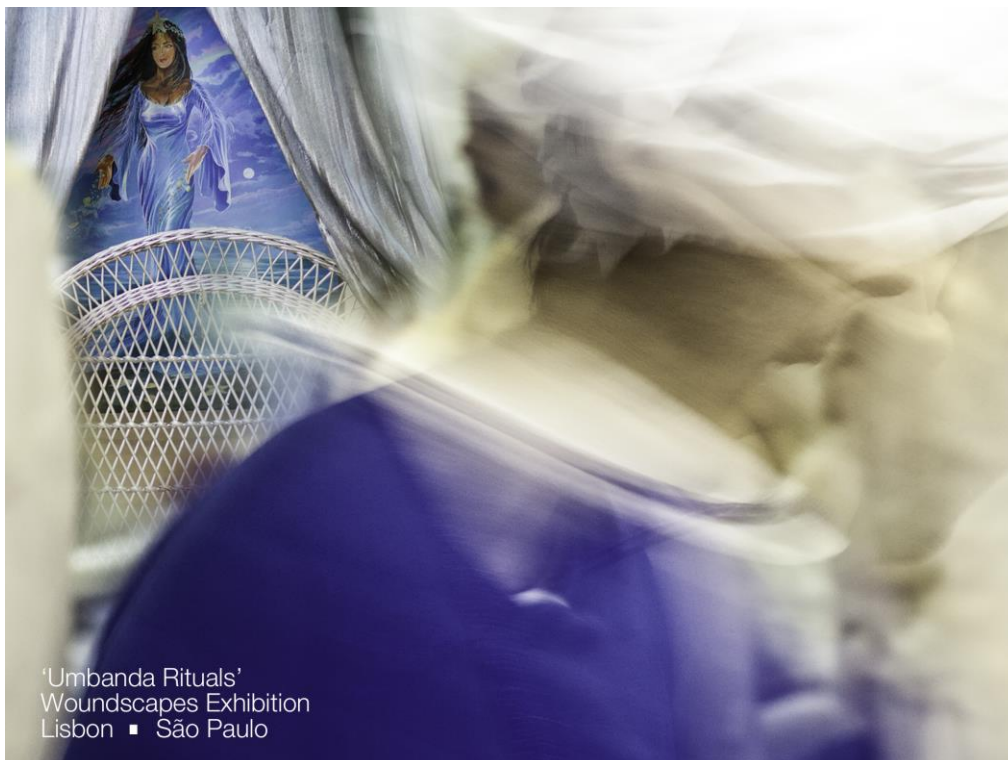


Photo 9. Project *Healing Market*: Chiara Pussetti; Project Umbanda and Candomblé: Clara Saraiva; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 10. Project *Healing Market*: Chiara Pussetti; Project *Umbanda and Candomblé*: Clara Saraiva; Photo by Vitor Barros.

The possibility of representing the different routes at play through images, drawings, maps, videos, sounds and photographs allows a wider disclosing of the results of the academic reflection, and gives rise to the creation of impressions and images that are unexpected by visitors. Within a restricted territory (that of the museum) and in the static time of the exhibition, the public may travel along itineraries that represent stories of suffering and paths of curing, processes of migration, urban maps and symbolic geographies. At the same time, they can explore the research paths carried out by the academic researchers and create interpretations in a constant dialogue with the images produced by the ethnographic members, thus achieving multiple and original readings of the social phenomena represented. Even if each point of observation is particular and subjective, it is also true that the observers move in an original manner and that the same path may be travelled (and interpreted) differently by each observer.

The artists/anthropologists/immigrants stage their own bodies as a magic mirror that at the same time reflects the dramas and the social transformations, and in their fragmentations they question the different aspects and the multiple facets, granting life to original forms of critically redefining the real. Just like magic mirrors, they do not reflect reality in a one-directional and true manner, but instead operate a creative hybridisation, deforming their properties – the works by the *Woundscape*s artists thus re-shape the legitimate socio-cultural forms, turning



them into forms of free experimentation. Stamps and seals, symbols of the bureaucracy of Fortress Europe, obsessively reproduce one artist's passport photo, reminding him of his irregular, clandestine and criminal position. Like wounds, the stages of migration mark the body; like tattoos, the memories of the migratory path and of its struggles affect the flesh, a lived embodiment of the stories of the protagonists.



Photo 11. Project *Embodied histories*: Vitor Barros and Chiara Pussetti; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 12. Project *Embodied histories*: Vitor Barros and Chiara Pussetti; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 13. Project *The stranger inside*: Leticia Barreto; Photo by Leticia Barret.



Photo 14. Project *The stranger inside*: Leticia Barreto; Photo by Leticia Barret.



Photos 15. Project *Biocartography*. *The body as a canvas*: Angela Alegria; Photo by Angela Alegria.



Photo 16. Project *Biocartography*. *The body as a canvas*: Angela Alegria; Photo by Angela Alegria.

By the concept of embodiment we mean here the intersection of the biological and the social within the scope of lived experience, as well as the inscription and codifying of memory in a somatic form. The embodiment of suffering, of alterity and of memory in the individual bodies has at least two aspects that are worth considering here. The first aspect is objective: the physical mark left by the story in terms of tiredness, violence, deterioration, weariness and privations. The bodies – sick, mutilated, marked – and the symptoms – multiple, obstinate, severe – of the protagonists of this exhibition, do not only constitute an immediate consequence of poverty or social exclusion, but rather reflect the lasting effect of historical oppressions, of the cultures of terror and of the violent events of daily life. The second aspect is subjective. It is the trace left by memory in the collective imaginary in terms of interpretation of the social world and of the creative construction of metaphors and narrative strategies. The marginal condition, the institutional or police oppression, the discrimination, the separations, losses and farewells, are represented here not as concepts to be described and verbalised, but as emotional experiences acted out and felt (remembered) on the flesh. In a lived metaphor the individual anatomy is linked to the social body: the network of muscles, bones, nerves and blood reflects the network of social relationships. Inspired by the debate about the ‘ethnographic turn’ in contemporary art (Foster 1995), and by a view of art as a form of research and of ethnography as a possible ground for art production and inspiration, *Woundscapes* proposed a creative site of encounter, negotiation, conflict and engagement with art and anthropology that has the potential to undermine discursive, disciplinary and methodological boundaries. *Woundscapes* was conceived as a creative physical and conceptual space where anthropology and art conflated and combined to explore alternative forms of communicating the social, political and aesthetic aspects of ethnographic research.

Anthropologists, immigrants, patients, healers and artists interacted in a complex process involving reciprocal gazes and the production of new meanings and dialogues. The observer was at the same time the observed, in a situation of extreme vulnerability, facing eroding distinctions, renegotiating cultural authority, breaking down established barriers, and attacking traditional canons. As an ethnography-based exhibition, *Woundscapes* offered a forum for immigrants, artists and anthropologists to create dialogues about diaspora and migration, social suffering and creativity at the margins, and to present reflections on the complex relationships that are constructed within spaces of exclusion, unveiling the acquisition of ethnographic knowledge as collaborative and creative process. The *Woundscapes* exhibition intended to give the public the opportunity to experience different paths that reveal space-times of exclusion and integration, of distancing and participation, of denouncing and critique, of abandonment and freedom, of isolation and friendships.



Photo 17. Project *My body is my history*: Cristina Santinho and Sara Serrão; Photo by Vitor Barros.



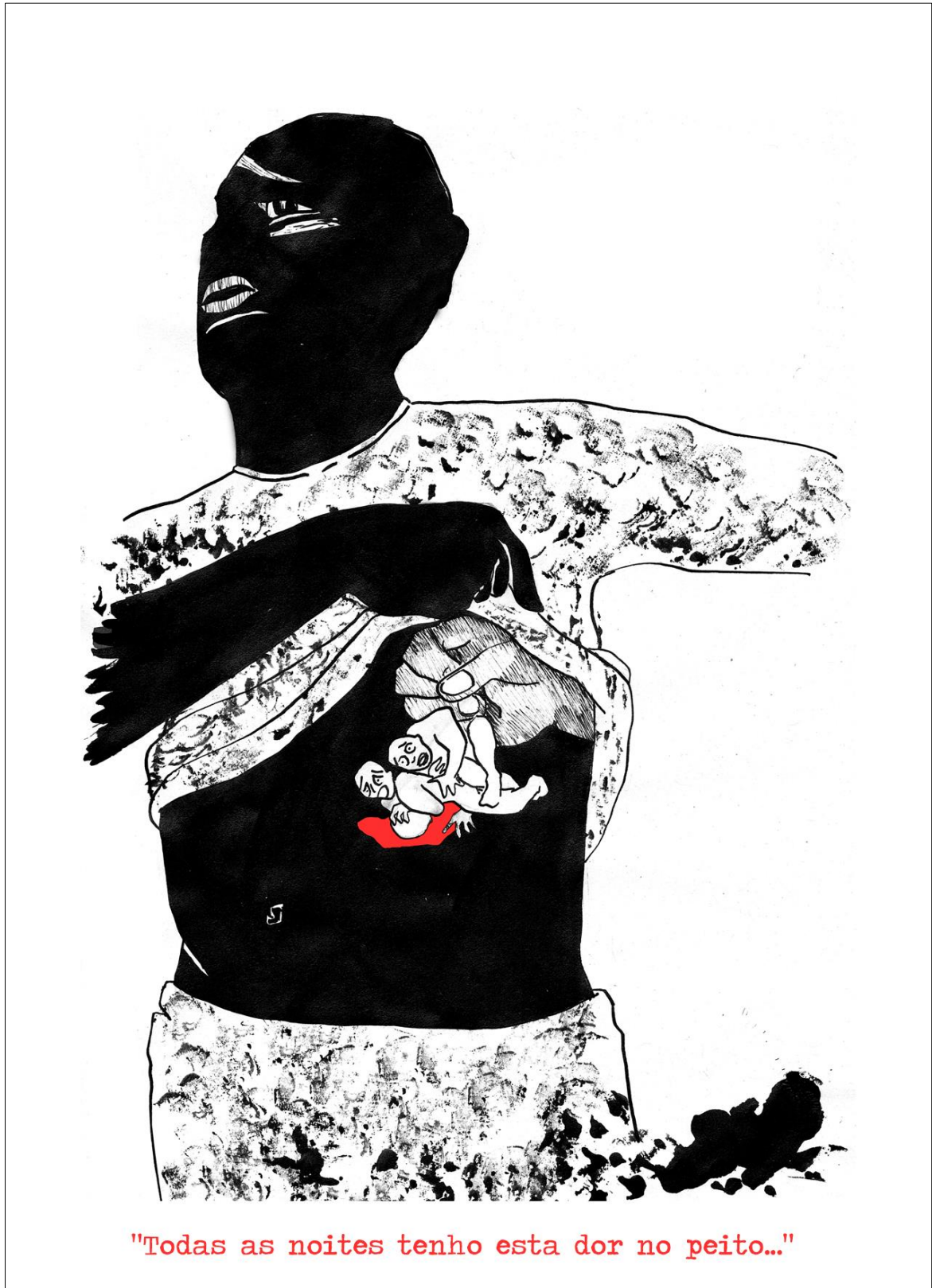


Photo 18. Project *My body is my history*: Cristina Santinho and Sara Serrão; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 19. Project *My body is my history*: Cristina Santinho and Sara Serrão; Photo by Vitor Barros.



Photo 20. Project *My body is my history*: Cristina Santinho and Sara Serrão; Photo by Vitor Barros.

The exhibition space was marked out by real or imaginary paths of experience in which street urchins, youths from the suburbs, immigrants and institutions, services, therapists and professionals from the social services industry come together and interact. *Woundscapes* allowed the public to interact with its contents, choosing from among different itineraries and possible readings of the relationship between individual experience of suffering and structural violence, leaving a wider analysis of the political and economic issues that define the experience of social vulnerability to an anthropological perspective. *Woundscapes* reflects the viewpoints of the EBANOC collective setting out to claim the place of 'art' with fragments of ethnography, and the place of ethnography with 'artistic' objects, producing an interference in the established circuits of academia, and at the same time in those of contemporary art. The use of collaborative and participatory methods and art practices in the acquisition and diffusion of ethnographic knowledge reflects the dialogical and processual nature of ethnographic mutual understanding, and at the same time creates a dynamic interchange between memories, dreams, visions, emotions and anxieties, revealing aspects of social reality which remain invisible – if observed only through the lens of the social sciences – and mute – if recounted only in the pages of academic monographs.

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