Research narrative (abridged)

My research has been guided by a long-standing interest in the issue of literary representation as both a political necessity and a philosophical problem, with aesthetic and ethical implications. Informed by historical, comparative and post-structuralist, including feminist and postcolonial, perspectives, I have made pioneering critical incursions in three main areas of cultural production.

My first articles and book, *Alves Redol e o Neo-Realismo Portuêns* (Alves Redol and Portuguese Neo-Realism), published in 1992 under the highly regarded Academic Series of Editorial Caminho, in Lisbon, argue against the then still reductive ideological readings of neo-realism (“neo-realism” referred to social realism in Salazar’s Portugal). Fredric Jameson’s model of the “political unconscious” lends focus to a broad range of literary and theoretical intertexts that I identify in neo-realist discourse, thereby linking historical-materialism and literariness.

In the mid-1990s, I began an ample recovery project that unearthed an extensive number of Portuguese women writers who were prolific between the late nineteenth century and the end of the 1950s. I have shown how, throughout that period, women were interpellated by (in the Althusserian sense) and responded to various feminist and literary impulses coming from abroad (mostly France and England), in view of the political contingency of empire and colonialism in name of a would-be “European” Portugal. Aside from numerous articles, book chapters, and talks presented, I published in 2001 the book, *A Urgência de Contar: Contos de Mulheres, Anos Quarenta* (The Urgency to Tell: Women’s Stories of the Forties), also with Editorial Caminho, in Lisbon. I have just completed another monograph that is part of but develops that project much further. Tentatively titled, *Women Writing the African Empire in Twentieth Century Portugal*, it traces the emergence, development and subsequent naturalization of the cultural phenomenon called “woman writer” in connection to the onset, the late consolidation of and the aftermath of Portuguese colonialism in Africa. Throughout the book, I make connections with the histories of women and late empire of other European countries (particularly France) in order to bring to light the structural similarities between metropolitan women’s contributions to colonial as well as to anti-colonial discourses but, also, to ascertain how four generations of Portuguese women respond to different,
historically-specific conjunctures of empire and the cultural preeminence of its woman-centered inscription.

The thematics of ‘race’ and the languages of colonial racisms at different points in time, from the late nineteenth century, through the mid-twentieth century, to the late twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries is the focus of my current research project. It calls into question the accepted simplistic interpretation of the ideas of Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre used by Salazar’s regime to continue holding on to colonies in Africa during the period of decolonization and after Unesco’s Declaration on Race. Those ideas ailed the supposed special aptitude of the Portuguese to mix in with other cultures and races and bring about an ecumenical, multi-racial society, as supposedly happened in Brazil. I argue for a broad, contextual and comparative reading of those ideas, which not incidentally resonate in many progressive anti-colonial writers, activists and intellectuals across and beyond Portuguese-speaking locales of enunciation.

I have dedicated the last five years or so to research for this project, while teaching, publishing and presenting papers and keynotes on topics related to ‘race’ and its expression in at different points in time and in highly symptomatic texts published in Brazil, Portugal, and in Angola and Mozambique. In addition, I look at the publication and circulation in the late 1970s and early 1980s of translations into Portuguese of postcolonial francophone and anglophone texts to analyze how the choices of the language of ‘race’ in point to particular “lusó” ideologies (and fantasies) of empire. This project has involved three graduate students from my department and one from Geography (who is now on a Fulbright in Mozambique); and it has also attracted the attention of graduate students from the Universities of Utrecht; London, Cambridge, Oxford; Sorbonne Nouvelle; Universidade de São Paulo; and Universidade de Braga). My study will be tentatively titled, *Heretically Speaking: ‘Race’ and the Postcolonial in Portuguese*; I hope to complete it during my next research or sabbatical leave.