

Decolonizing the narrative of Portuguese empire¹

Life stories of African presence, heritage and memory

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Silences and invisibilities in the public narrative of Portuguese empire

Portugal was founded in the first half of the twelfth century; it is among the oldest states in Europe and was the pioneer of colonial expansion in the fifteenth century. It became a world empire that formally lasted until 1999 (when Macau's sovereignty transferred to China), but was largely dismantled soon after the Carnation Revolution on 25 April 1974, which ended over 40 years of fascist dictatorship. The regime forged by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar reinvigorated the co-construction of imperialistic and nation-state-building narratives that are intertwined in a way that endures to this day (Pinto and Jerónimo 2015). It determined the production of a selective and politically targeted version of colonial history that entails 'amnesic consequences' (Cardina 2016).

The decolonization of most of the African colonies in 1974 and 1975 definitively left the country in a 'semi-peripheral position' in the world system (Santos 2006), an ambivalent status that is central to understanding the debate on colonial heritage. On the one hand, Portugal is a relatively small state at the periphery of Europe that has lost the global leadership role it played in early colonial times, turning this loss into an 'empire of memory in which the past continues to live', or what Eduardo Lourenço (1999) calls a *mitologia da saudade* (mythology of longing). On the other hand, its public memory glorifies the vestiges of Portuguese empire, narrated with a paternalistic twentieth-century script, reinvigorated by the Salazarist deployment of the term 'lusotropicalism' (Castelo 1998; Rossa and Ribeiro 2015). This viewpoint elevates the genius of Portuguese navigators, the benevolence of its colonial administration, their socially inclusive and cordial regime and the moderate domination methods (*brando*) of the empire based on miscegenation (Da Silva 2002). The dictatorship used lusotropicalism as an argument to justify the persistence of a colonial empire at a time when European empires were being dismantled (Jerónimo and Pinto 2015). These characteristics outline what is understood as an 'imperial narrative', a public memory anchored in the glorification of an imperial past and the alleged

multicultural and benevolent character of Portuguese colonialism that excludes colliding and dissonant narratives (Meneses and Gomes 2013) and deeply marks the character of Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD, Smith 2006). In almost half a century since the installation of democracy, Portugal was unable to fully engage in a critical assessment of its imperial past. However, critical voices were always present and, in the last few years, the debate has been reinvigorated by a growing number of African and Afro-descendant scholars, activists and practitioners.

Slavery and its main oppressive contemporary social consequence—racism—is a key point of the revived debate. Nevertheless, lusotropical narrators refuse to engage with it and tend to historicize facts, insisting on the innovation brought by Portuguese colonial modalities. In this imperial narrative, the role of Portugal in slavery is an issue to be removed (Kølvraa 2018a), repressed (Kølvraa 2018b), or at best, re-framed (Knudsen 2020a), while counter-narrative building starts from the decolonial re-emergence (Knudsen 2020b) of this topic.

The discourse of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, the President of the Republic, at Gorée island, during his visit to Senegal in April 2017, inaugurated a new polemical season of debate as he defended Portugal's colonial legacy, claiming that by starting to abolish the importation of enslaved people to their mainland territory in 1761, Portugal was also pioneering human rights and humanist approaches. Similarly, debates flared up that same year around the project of the Mayor of Lisbon to build the Discovery Museum and the unveiling of the statue of Jesuit missionary Father Antonio Vieira (Raggi and Gianolla 2020).

The 'mythscape' is the discursive realm 'in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly' (Bell 2003, 75). In Lisbon, it is strongly shaped by a heritage landscape that prominently displays colonial symbols and thus narrates the 'governing mythology' (Bell 2003) of the (imperial) nation. A widely known example is the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos* (Discovery Pavilion), located at *Praça do Império* (Empire Square) in Lisbon's Belém area, a celebratory mausoleum that was constructed in 1940 for the Exhibition of the Portuguese World to honour Portuguese navigators. Despite its monumental imperial narrative, its interior has been the location of initiatives that engage with the troubled past of Portuguese colonialism. Among the most recent contributions, *Racism and Citizenship* (Bethencourt 2017) explores the tension between racism and its resistance in the framing of critical, insurgent and inclusive citizenship; *Atlântico Vermelho* (Red Atlantic, Paulino 2017) disputes the scientific rationality of racism and expounds on the silenced pasts of people enslaved; and *Contar Áfricas* (About Africa, Camões Gouveia 2019) elaborates on the pluralism of views on the relationship between Portugal and the African continent.

While these initiatives have challenged the imperial narrative—not without controversies—there are a range of other actors and contexts through which counter-narratives are emerging. From the perspective of Participatory

Action Research (Gabarrón and Landa 2006), this study focuses on biographical methods (Lechner 2011), using semi-structured interviews to analyse trajectories that enable the critical assessment of the social, political, cultural and historical dimensions of life stories (Delory-Momberger 2004). While such counter-narratives remain largely ‘unread’ (not ‘unwritten’ as a growing body of scholarship demonstrates) by those who defend AHD, we believe that they pluralize understandings of colonial memory. Moreover, our methodology echoes the approach developed by social anthropologists in opposition to the positivist understanding of memory (Pujadas 2000). It allows for an exploration of the formative and transformative power of biographical research, entailing a wider interpretation that can enhance the value of narrative identities (Ricoeur 1983) existing in a determined socio-political context.

The main outcomes of this research provide a wider understanding of the relevance of African and Afro-descendant people and cultures in Portugal, past and present, confronting the ongoing impact of the imperial narrative on their socio-political marginalization. Life stories amplify the dynamic and inclusive knowledge of colonial memory in two ways: firstly, they help grasp the lived realities of imperial-excluding mechanisms; secondly, they aim at echoing decolonial and affirmative counter-narrative trajectories, experiences and initiatives.

The semi-structured interview script was prepared after almost two years of multidisciplinary and multilayered fieldwork in Lisbon, based on focus groups, interviews and participatory observation. Each interview was filmed by a team of three researchers and two technicians. They were transcribed, translated and analysed using critical discourse analysis, focusing on the two most relevant decolonial categories present in each interview, which are highlighted in italics in subsequent sections, as follows: Dias: counter-narratives; political role of memory; Henriques: teaching of the History of Africa, invisibilized African places; Mata: decolonization of sight, musealization of people and cultures; Severo: intercultural education, democratize museum narratives; Kally: mapped the quarter in the city, being seen and being heard.

The heritage interventions analysed are characterized by a bottom-up appropriation of cultural heritage of symbolic places, objects and literature, contributing to the decolonization of mind (Andersen 2018; Thiong’o 1986) and sight (see Inocência Mata below) and to the creation of participatory spheres of debate and cultural resonances (Greenblatt 1991) based on what we define as ‘decolonization of hearing’. These areas of analysis fall in line with the challenge of enlarging linear and pacified views of history and the imperial narrative at their core.

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the biographic data collected from five influential persons linked to the African presence in Lisbon heritage discourse. In order to fit the chosen methodology, the chapter dedicates a separate section to each life story in the following order: Beatriz Gomes Dias,

Isabel Castro Henriques, Inocência Mata, Rosário Severo and Kally Meru.² While these are just some of the people who play an influential role in the construction of counter-narratives, they were selected by the following criteria: (1) their personal and professional vocation developed in academia, curatorial work or activism initiatives (or a combination of these); (2) the power and originality of the life stories they had to tell; (3) the impact of their work on the controversial debate on heritage, reinforced in the last few years in Lisbon; and (4) the complementarity of perspectives of their individual life stories in relation to the imperial narrative.

The chapter structure was defined to allow each life story section to report the thoughts of the interviewee according to the analytical categories that emerged, which was aimed at articulating a categorized—but not systemic—understanding of current counter-narratives. After this brief introduction, the chapter includes five respective sections. The first focuses on how the public argument is reinforced by a very actual and debated heritage intervention carried out by Africans and Afro-descendants to dispute the imperial narrative in Lisbon (Dias). Then, in the following section, we investigate the roots and unfolding of academic knowledge on the African presence and history in Portugal and their impact on how that African presence is displayed in the heritage landscape of Lisbon (Henriques). Subsequently, another section explores two theoretical categories that substantiate connections between the historical roots and political visions in counter-narratives in heritage contact zones (Mata). The last two sections before the concluding part analyse two examples of heritage contact zones related to the African presence: (1) where intercultural education in a museum is strongly linked with colonialism (Severo) and (2) where a political struggle relates to the emancipatory potential of street art in a social housing quarter (Kally). The final section of the chapter is dedicated to a comparative analysis of the interviews with the aim of identifying empirical and conceptual entanglements among them.

The main findings of the resulting conceptual matrix of the five life stories stress the political role of memory (see Beatriz Gomes Dias below) in the diverse heritages related and outline strategies to face the different aspects of constructing counter-narratives to challenge the enduring imperial narrative of post-revolutionary Portugal. It becomes clear that heritagization processes of an informal nature (not directly linked to formal institutional processes) emerging from the bottom-up (Abreu 2015), reaffirm the importance of the specific knowledge, voice and decision-making power of civil society to complement top-down heritagization processes (i.e., those frequently characterized by their official rhetoric), which are often translated in a reducing dynamic that highlights the essentialisms of culture (Peixoto 2017). The evidence is that the social resignification of Africans and Afro-descendants implies the full recognition of their presence and political subjectivity—deconstructing the idea that they are in transition—and their relevant contribution to Portuguese history, culture, society and politics.

Building memory counter-narratives

The mythscape preserved in the Portuguese public space, educational system and academic research has silenced a number of issues related to the country's imperial past (Araújo 2013). The recent initiatives of African and Afro-descendant communities and organizations are playing an affirmative role in questioning the narrative of Portuguese empire, rooted in colonialism and slavery and reflected in the heritage landscape of Lisbon. Djass—Afro-descendant Association, founded on Africa day (25 May) in 2016, is the exemplar case to elaborate on this process. Beatriz Gomes Dias,³ former Djass president and current Portuguese MP notes that:

The existing monuments that occupy public space are all centred on celebrating the discoveries and reifying myths of national identity, and this ... is something that needs to be disputed the way to do this would be to present a counter-narrative that could oppose, that could dispute, this hegemonic national narrative ... through a monument erected in the public space where we could tell our stories, or tell the reverse side of this glorified history.

Dias strongly believes that the future *Memorial to Enslaved People* (Figure 4.1) should contribute to the construction of emerging *counter-narratives* and to the decolonization of the imperial narrative by creating a space of dispute centred on the perspectives of Africans and Afro-descendants. The Memorial project created by the Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda (who won the contest organized by Djass⁴) is expected to be installed in 2021. It aims to remember the lives and dignity of enslaved Africans, contrasting it with the objectification to which they were exposed during their lifetimes and then crystallized within the imperial narrative. The counter-narrative is a celebration of resistance and homage to the dignity of these people who have contributed to the social, cultural and economic history of the country.

Dias maintains that the imperial narrative defines an unnecessary anachronism in the debate about slavery, as it considers that this issue belongs to a resolved past with no impact in the present. The main challenge to the construction of counter-narratives is the negation of racism and the argument that we live in a post-racial society. Counter-narratives struggle against these assumptions, challenging and deconstructing racist arguments, starting with the one that denies racism exists. Dias finds that the decolonization of colonial heritage has attained some, although still limited, results. The approval of the project of the Memorial and the slowdown of support for the construction of the Discovery Museum are important achievements. They emerge from the collaboration between academia, practitioners and activists aimed at pluralizing the narratives on memory and its meanings in today's society.

The *political role of memory* is made clear, for Dias, by the objectives of the Memorial: recognizing the subjectivity of the people enslaved, acknowledging



Figure 4.1 *Memorial to Enslaved People*, 3D model pictures: general view, detailed view, memorial future uses.

Courtesy of Kiluanji Kia Henda, 2019.

the role of Portugal in the trade of black human beings in order to question its impact in the present and struggling against racial discrimination concealed in the imperial narrative. These are necessary steps to foresee policies of equality and equal involvement of Africans and Afro-descendants in public life, thus enhancing social justice. Dias states:

This is crucial. We have to look to the past to be able to understand the present, to be able to project the future and we cannot understand contemporary racism and racial discrimination if we do not understand the roots, their roots, where they were forged, where it is that they were built.

Dias underlines that the slavery-related subjugation of African people in the past forges the general idea that Africans and Afro-descendants are second-class people, not permanent inhabitants, but transitory migrants. This kind of idea is reflected in the social and economic conditions of many of those that, partially due to the gentrification processes of Lisbon, live on the outskirts of the city, because they cannot afford to live in the centre. They frequently work as unskilled and low-paid domestic or civil construction workers. While touristic branding appropriates their presence to convey the image of a miscegenated and multicultural Lisbon, Africans and Afro-descendants feel discriminated against and misrepresented in the memory debates, politics and culture of the country.

In order to decolonize the strength of the symbols and myths of the imperial narrative, counter-narratives need to be constructed through a strong collective symbolism. As a result of the firm negotiation of Djass with authorities, the Memorial obtained a central position in the port area of Lisbon (Campo das Cebolas). Moreover, a nearby building was assigned as an interpretative centre, which will also become a participatory laboratory for the construction of the (en)counter-narratives, to include the organization of events to take place in the periphery where Africans and Afro-descendants' communities live.

Rethinking African history and places

The political role of memory, the activism by Africans and Afro-descendants and the process of decolonizing the imperial narrative, sensitivities and minds within Portuguese society, all emerge from a different approach to the *teaching of the History of Africa* (Henriques 2007). After the Carnation Revolution of 1974, the first academic course on this topic was introduced into the Portuguese university system by Isabel Castro Henriques,⁵ retired professor of the University of Lisbon (UL) and the subject of our second life story. As she explains:

I studied in Paris at the French university [Sorbonne], and that's when I started to discover that Africa had history. Which in reality, in Portugal before the 25th of April [1974] was somewhat unknown, as Africa was made up of a whole set of populations fundamentally interpreted as peoples with no history, wild, backward, inferior, within the logic of Portuguese colonial thought.

The rising contrast between the course on African History and the academic tradition, based on the History of Portuguese Discoveries, was particularly stark because it began to deconstruct the relationship between the colonial past and the image of Africa, as produced in the imperial narrative. Henriques maintains that at the beginning, the historiographical change interested mainly students from former Portuguese colonies, especially Angola, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. Then, other foreign students from Europe and Brazil enrolled, and currently it is a consolidated course within MA and PhD programmes. The Eurocentric perspective taught in the course on the History of Portuguese Discoveries was criticized in depth and the new approach of teaching allowed students to focus on Africa not as one, but as multiple and plural Africas, with different and millenary cultures, civilizations and peoples. The academic knowledge changed progressively, but it was, and still is, a long-term process that needs to be implemented alongside an intense interaction with Portuguese society.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, exhibitions and public debates on African topics are increasing, and the joint progress in critical academic research is breaking a set of prejudices and discriminatory ways. An important achievement in building counter-narratives lies in the historiographic valorization of the *invisibilized African places* in Lisbon (Henriques 2011). Identifying the places and life stories of Africans in town contributes to restating their historical and current subjectivities and presence.

Henriques confirms that there is a deep relationship between the African and Afro-descendant communities who currently live in Lisbon and the African presence in the country since the fifteenth century when the first enslaved Africans were carried to Portugal. Racism and the social prejudice against Africans are historically based on the stigma created by slavery, which remains associated with skin colour (Bethencourt and Pearce 2012). The imperial narrative continues to deny that Portuguese history and culture is intrinsically entangled with past and present African cultures, identities, traditions and values. As Henriques explains: 'These enslaved Africans were fundamental elements in the very construction of Portuguese society. They worked in all, in all wealth producing sectors. All of them'.

The academic research led by Isabel Castro Henriques in the last 20 years has contributed to amplifying the visibility of African people who lived in Lisbon in the early-modern and modern eras. The results of her research programme were shared with civil society organizations to help write

counter-narratives on the ‘mythscape’ of Lisbon heritage landscape. A recent project coordinated by the cultural association Batoto Yetu forged commemorative stone plaques and busts of Africans, Afro-descendants and *mestizos* people to install in 20 locations in Lisbon, to narrate their historical presence in the city. While the aim of installing stone plaques is to make visible the places of African Heritage in Lisbon, the busts also revive African subjects, including African women. A few examples serve to highlight the impact of this initiative: the Mocambo was the early-modern African neighbourhood, whose vanished memory resurfaced from oblivion and reacquired visibility. The Rossio Square, one of the main places in Lisbon, revealed its history as the secular meeting point of Africans and Afro-descendants, highlighting the persisting presence and concentration of people from different African countries. In this place, the bust of Paulino José da Conceição, also known as Pai Paulino (1798–1869) will be installed. He was an influential and highly respected nineteenth-century mediator between African and Portuguese authorities, African whitewasher (*caiaador*) and musician. Other busts that will be installed across the city in locations related to the African presence include those of Cape Verdean Andressa do Nascimento (1859–1927), also known as Fernanda do Vale or, pejoratively, *Preta Fernanda* (black Fernanda), who was a protagonist of Lisbon nightlife and established a meeting place for artists, writers and politicians, and Virgínia Quaresma (1882–1973), who was one of the first women to graduate from the University of Lisbon, a journalist and a women’s rights activist.

This initiative has contributed to the creation of organized tours through these African places and provided further recognition of the memories of African protagonists in Lisbon’s history. This demonstrates the impact of academic knowledge counter-narrative in society.

Decolonizing sight

A renovated approach to the history of Africa has impacted epistemological and semiotic methodologies in other areas, especially the humanities, soliciting a change in the viewer rather than in the object. Inocência Mata,⁶ professor at UL, maintains that everything can be projected as an aesthetic object and given a specific cultural value with subsequent political implications. Mata is a critical and postcolonial comparative literature scholar, who argues that the *decolonization of sight* is a fundamental step to decolonizing the imperial mythscape and relates to the way we look at objects and subjects: ‘The question is not the decolonization of art, nor the decolonization of literature, nor the decolonization of heritage. The question that arises is the decolonization of sight ... the decolonization of one’s view of art’. Mata affirms that the process to decolonize sight requires a decolonization of the way we build the images we see. Museums are designed to welcome a specific narrative; in Portugal, they represent an imperial and Eurocentric perspective.

Mata maintains that colonial sight does not overlap purely with colour and race. Africans and Afro-descendants can also internalize colonial sight and may need to undergo the same decolonial process, as this is a social rather than an individual issue. Likewise, white people can have decolonial sight. Sight in this sense is socially produced and is not innate in people, 'the question of racism is not a question of blacks; it is a question of society!' Mata insists that Afro-descendants must ally with those who struggle in the same vein, regardless of skin colour.

When applied to the study of literature, for Mata the decolonization of sight implies that there are no fixed meaningful facts, but rather, facts are produced to be seen as meaningful. Comparing postcolonial literature therefore implies reading European and African decolonial authors together, as opposed to focusing only on African writers. The key is in the critical approach to colonialism, not the place from where they write, because colonialism is not an issue restricted to the Global South. Mata goes on:

I would study both Pepetela and Lobo Antunes. I am going to study both Paulina [Chiziane] and Dulce Maria Cardoso. Because they are writings that precisely come out ... from that tension between the colonized and colonizers. So, I think we cannot change the heritage. The name says it, it is there. We have to change the way we look, how we look, how we receive this heritage and ... who says literature, say the plastic arts ... say the dance, say the form, say the clothing. So, I am convinced that it is mainly the sight, because the productions are there. And that's what I learned when I moved from structuralism to semiotics, it is no longer a product, it is production, because the product is there. Production is always in constant dynamics, like say an upgrade.

What for Mata, as an African person, is an object of everyday use, can be aesthetically produced as a cultural artefact deserving to be exhibited in a museum in Europe. This approach illustrates the *musealization of people and cultures*. Although the presence of African and Afro-descendants is long lasting, impacting and ostensible, especially in metropolitan areas, Mata contests assumptions that continually consider their presence as migratory and transitory, not occupying visible and stable places in the Portuguese nation. That is why the absence of Africans and Afro-descendants is normalized in public debate, and is musealized in ways that perpetuate racial discrimination. This musealization considers Africans and Afro-descendants, as well as their cultural productions, as part of a lost inheritance, part of the past. To deconstruct this mindset, memory, intercultural dynamics and identity politics are extremely relevant in Portugal.

Mata argues that the decolonization of sight involves a deconstruction of terms that are also used by anti-racist discourses that would lead to a broader awareness of social diversity. She goes on:

Decolonization ... has to start with language. In language, in manuals, in the media and obviously in the awareness of diversity, I think that is what the Portuguese do not yet have, the awareness that Portugal is a diverse country ... And as a diverse country, the different segments of this society must have, must be represented.

One of the terms to be decolonized is ‘racialized people’, which is used to refer to social groups identified with an oppressed race, such as Africans and Afro-descendants. However, each ‘race’ implies the same process of differentiation and assuming that black people are racialized serves to ‘normalize’ the postulation that white people are not racialized and to restate that the white race is the standard.

In order to create a counter-narrative of this imperial normalization, social structures have to be tackled. However, Mata points out that in practice this proves to be challenging, as demonstrated by the process of meritocracy. Meritocracy is a perverse instrument of discrimination; it is used to hide the existence of race while reaffirming it. It does so by taking exceptionality as the norm and hiding the discriminatory normality. It restates, for instance, that if women are underrepresented in relevant social positions it is because they are inept, so if black people do not occupy prestigious and powerful places in society, it is because they are incapable. The first step to decolonize is to acknowledge that racial discrimination is the norm and that is not undone by the exceptionalism of a few examples.

Mata insists that while the African presence is part of the Portuguese culture, society and economy, it still needs to be recognized and seen as part of the national identity. It is contradictory that while Portugal is proud of its Atlantic past, it endures an imperial narrative that excludes the diversity of which it is constituted and what that implies.

Educating interculturally through museums

A decolonization of sight leads to a critical approach to museum studies. The concept of cultural mediation of tangible and intangible cultural goods has evolved to a new field, the field of museum mediation (Museum Mediators 2014), which encompasses the promotion of greater citizen participation and gives shape to processes of building connections between the cultural and social realms, allowing for work in political, cultural and public spheres. From this perspective, it covers a broad spectrum of practices, ranging from audience development activities to participatory museology—such as citizen’s curatorship—with the goal of empowering every person to be an active museological actor.

Museums are privileged spaces to build cultural democracy within societies. As they deal with cultural heritage originating from diverse historical periods, they must assume their social responsibility as spaces of critical thinking and

education. It is essential to build a critical museology (Shelton 2013), to uncover unknown dimensions of history and to strip away homogeneous, singular and pacified stories.

Since the Carnation Revolution, the process of deconstructing the colonial image of a Salazarist nature has been slow and superficial in Portuguese museology. Museums whose educational services follow mediation processes in line with the values of decolonial theory and methods are still rare. Rosário Severo⁷ is a museum mediator and head of the Educational Department at the National Museum of Ethnology (NME). When she arrived at the NME in 2016 and wanted to develop a mediation focused on combating social discrimination and racism, based on *intercultural education*, she faced some difficulties due to perceptions that the theme was considered irrelevant. Rosário Severo has worked in museums since 1985, where her profession, and also her passion, has been museum mediation. She says:

I began to realize this very early on in the late [1980s] and early [1990s], ... this very subtle racism, extremely dangerous coming from racist teachers and other educators of children. I am in contact with them every day.

There are various collections from the former Portuguese colonies that are located at the NME, in the Restelo area—a geographical reference from the colonial era in Lisbon and the place where the caravels left for the overseas conquest. Even to this day, their collection criteria and musealization frequently await in-depth investigation (Chuva 2020). These museums often exhibit an object-centred and historically linear museography, also characterized by a musealizing absence, which tends to perpetuate racial discrimination (Figure 4.2). Consequently, museum narratives frequently feed prejudices of different kinds, still deeply ingrained in Portuguese society, in the national education system and in the urban landscape, among other places. Severo highlights that this decolonial debate does not reach museum authorities:

this debate only exists for us ... for a certain section of the academy ... in museums, no way. There was never anything said, no meeting to discuss it ... just read the articles from most museum directors, just read their opinion texts.

That is why Severo believes that the NME Educational Service team has had, since 2016, a dual mission: to democratize Portuguese society's access to the museum and to *democratize museum narratives* about the social history of the country. The first challenge is to embrace society as a whole and to respect subjectivities in the way we build and share narratives about exhibited realities. The second challenge is to give voice to silenced stories, so that society realizes that history should be built from as many perspectives and



Figure 4.2 General view of African exhibition at National Museum of Ethnology. Courtesy of Fernando Guerra | FG+SG, 2014.

places of speech as possible, reflecting the diversity of protagonists it has had and that truth is neither singular nor unique. As Severo puts it:

In all museums, there should be intercultural training! We have to speak to all the children, all the young people, all the people who come to visit us! ... Nobody can be left out! ... Integration, inclusion, but what is it? Include, integrate who? We simply have to respect individualities ... We have to open things up, museums have to be for everyone, they have to be decolonised, they mainly have to be democratic.

From Severo's perspective, 'cultural decolonization' begins with a slow process of changing mentalities, of discovering the self and the other, in an unceasing search for respective biographical narratives. Institutions such as museums, and mediation tools such as intercultural education, constitute an effective way to decolonize the mind, narratives and also language (Sancho Querol, Gianolla et al. 2020a). As of today, there is still no regulation of the museum mediation professionals in Portugal, they often encounter diverse difficulties related to their recognition and working conditions. Severo

explains that mediators seek to understand and acknowledge the perspectives and experiences of the societies represented in their collections, trying to connect the musealized realities with current societies and social challenges, in order to value the culture of every child, youth or adult who visits the museum, creating a targeted experience. This approach contributes to the deep and conscious decoding of structural racism, characteristic of white privilege (Pascual 2020), which is, often unknowingly, absorbed and accepted on a daily basis.

Severo's life story and experience makes especially clear that, according to the principles of critical museology, particularly from an activist perspective (Janes and Sandell 2019), museums like the NME are advantaged places for decolonizing the imperial narrative and deconstructing the colonial historical and scientific paradigm.

Visibilizing the African presence through graffiti

The process of decolonizing sight entails institutional involvement in museums and emerges from social initiatives in specific contexts, where the impact of the imperial narrative produces marginalization and exclusion. The *Quinta do Mocho* is located in the Municipality of Loures, a region on the outskirts of Lisbon that is an African and Afro-descendant social housing quarter once marked by violence and criminality (Raposo 2018) and therefore classified as a dangerous and inaccessible place by the imperial narrative. In 2014, the Municipality organized an intercultural festival which inaugurated the creation of what has now become the biggest public art gallery (Gáleria de Arte Pública—GAP) in Europe (Figure 4.3), with social housing buildings painted with 139 graffiti images (as of 28 February 2020). After a few months, the Municipality organized guided GAP tours, an initiative that *mapped the quarter in the city* and was appropriated by the residents to introduce visitors to their cultures, to reinvigorate the quarter's economy and to articulate their counter-narrative.

Kally Meru⁸ is the name chosen by José Carlos Ribeiro—one of the 'Mocho's guides'—who interprets the Afro-Portuguese nature of the quarter:

I am Angolan. I have never completed the process for my Portuguese nationality, but I have four children and they are all Portuguese. The other kids are Portuguese. ... But yes, people associate this neighbourhood with being African because of parents, grandparents and because of our skin colour.

In the 1980s, the Quinta was an unfinished urban project occupied by African immigrants mainly employed in precarious civil construction and housework (Carmo 2017), as a result of the immigration flow that followed the formal dismantling of the empire (Machado 2009). The festival and the GAP aimed to integrate the quarter, but with the growth of the amount of graffiti, the



Figure 4.3 Composition of three photos with different works of art and perspectives of the Public Art Gallery at Quinta do Mocho. Picture 1: *Reflex of an African Beauty* (*reflexo da uma beleza africana*) by Huarriu (Portuguese artist); Picture 2: *Worker Ghetto Box* by MTO (French artist) and, on the right, *Pop Art* by Jo Di Bona (French artist); Picture 3: *Untitled*, inspired by the creativity of single child, by Utopia (Brazilian artist). Image by authors, 2020.

national and international range of artists, artistic prestige and visitors, the process exceeded its initial aims. Kally underlines the emancipatory force of these achievements: ‘Less with less gives more. And we have a public housing project, which is a negative thing, we have graffiti that is considered a negative thing and together they have brought this success’.

Since 2015, and thanks to the commitment of Mocho’s residents and authorities, the GAP fostered mutual recognition between society and the Quinta. Kally maintains that society has changed its perspective on the Quinta and visitors were welcomed. However, the community had to resist invasive attitudes that objectified them: ‘decolonization was done through those who came to see the zoo or who came to the savannah. Because the first visit, yes. We felt like we were animals on display at a zoo’. Guides and dwellers required respect for peoples and places by prohibiting taking pictures of kids and demanding previous consent in the case of adults. Women used to wear African clothes, but changed to wearing more European style clothing to avoid being the unauthorized ‘objects’ of invasive photos. This resilience is expressed also through the rejection of exceptionalism: ‘people approach us on the street because they recognize us as the Mocho’s guides and they say that Africans are one thing, but Africans at Quinta do Mocho are something else. Calm down, no, it’s not like that’.

On the community perspective described by Kally, Quinta’s residents used to hide their provenance in order to reduce discrimination and social judgement, for instance, when applying for jobs. It was as if they

lack certain things, because they did not know how to fit into society or society did not know how to accept them and this [GAP] is a door for society to come to accept us and for us to also find our own place in society.

The GAP developed residents’ sense of belonging and social identity that make them enjoy some recognition, placed ‘on the map of society. And of course, as we have visitors, we realize that we have value after all’.

Besides a reinvigorated mutual recognition, Kally highlights the gap existing between *being seen and being heard*: ‘We are important, we are seen, but we are not heard.’ While communication with the municipality has improved over the years, residents still consider that their relationship is insufficient and unsuitable. For decades, residents felt ‘abandoned by the municipal government. From one day to the next, the Municipality entered the neighbourhood here with music, an art festival’. The GAP would follow, and while residents cannot select artists, they are being consulted by some of them on an informal basis concerning the portrayal of artistic subjects, which is something that has increased with the growing prestige of the gallery. While in some cases dwellers have disapproved artistic choices, they generally grew a sense of ownership for their building’s paintings. Kally suggests that community engagement and ownership could be strengthened if graffiti

could be maintained and an educational process would associate Quinta's children and youngsters with artists. However, the community's existing relationship with the municipality does not suggest that they would be formally supported with such an initiative, as indicated by the limited response dwellers normally receive on demands related to the infrastructure of the neighbourhood and housing.

The GAP labour relations reported by Kally further expand dwellers' counter-narratives. Guides worked as unpaid volunteers for three years, receiving tips and selling self-produced gadgets. After receiving an underpaid—less than half of national minimum salary—and flat consultant contract by the Municipality in response to their demand to professionalize their work, they initiated their own company, despite the Municipality's opposition. Kallema was funded in 2018 under the leadership of Ema (Emanuela Kalembe). Kally emphasizes: 'She is a woman, she is African, she lives in public housing, that is, everything that would not be advantageous in the first place we managed to transform into something very productive'.

The emerging voices and sight of entangled counter-narratives

The five life stories outlined above focus on vocational experiences and individual trajectories that elaborate a range of concepts, emerging from the different forms in which the decolonization of history, memory and heritage narratives are produced in Portugal. The main challenge of this work lies in the fact that these life stories are incomplete and not related by or to a general theory, but instead, they share the common goal of decolonizing the Portuguese imperial narrative by tackling heritage and cultural processes. They articulate epistemic trajectories that complement each other without levelling, thereby enunciating a comprehensive understanding of the political role of memory against the general idea that the African presence is transitional and part of a musealized past. A finer appreciation of the resulting theoretical, critical and decolonial matrix can be accomplished by analysing the existing complementarities that materialize between these counter-narratives.

The two concepts outlined by Inocência Mata—'decolonization of sight' and 'musealization of people and cultures'—crosscut all the life stories. The resilience of Mocho's dwellers against the invasive and commodifying attitudes of the visitors and institutions, served to empower Quinta's residents to resist their own 'musealization'. The struggle to have the project of the Memorial approved is carried on with activists' resilience, as expressed in their relevant achievements in the negotiations with the Municipality. As Mocho's community took ownership of the narrative about the Quinta, it enforced a political subjectivity that resonates with the political role of memory outlined by Beatriz Gomes Dias. The Memorial aims to decolonize the genealogical construction of race and undermine racism. The GAP has

an analogous scope by resignifying the relationship between the city and its African presence in one of its formerly marginalized zones. Both approaches focus on the political subjectivity of Africans and Afro-descendants, rejecting exceptionalism, and thus echoing a dismissal of the rhetoric of meritocracy, as elaborated by Mata.

The GAP counter-narrative shows that the decolonization of sight is a fundamental step—albeit insufficient in itself—to crossing the abyss of colonialism (Santos 2014). Besides becoming an ‘exceptional’ zone of selective African visibility, African quarters in Portugal are generally seen as peripheral zones of nonbeing (Fanon 2008), as demonstrated also by the enduring struggles for social recognition and justice by Quinta’s dwellers, to affirm their own, social, cultural, economic and political subjectivity. The life stories of Rosario Severo, Isabel Castro Henriques and Mata demonstrate that deconstructing the imperial narrative, predominant in the mythscape, should entail a participatory reconstruction. Arguing against the musealization of people, Mata’s activism echoes Mocho’s struggle for self-realization and allows us to indicate that the next step forward is what can be defined as ‘decolonization of hearing’ and is necessary for the African presence to assert itself fully in the public debate.

The participatory initiatives that are to be organized in the interpretative centre associated with the Memorial and the dialogue implemented in museum’s intercultural education activities have mirroring aims. The work of Henriques with the toponymy plaques of African places and the installation of busts of significant African people all contribute to a debate that is further stimulated, for instance, by African–Lisbon walking tours. These examples show that a general characteristic of counter-narratives is decolonizing the African invisibility as a first step, and to hear the African subjectivities as a second step. However, there is no chronological order among them, as sight and hearing are strictly entangled in the bottom-up perspective. This is a struggle against the idea that Africans and Afro-descendants are (permanently) in transition on Portuguese territory and that their cultures do not belong.

The political role of memory opposes the process of cultural commodification and gentrification that manipulates the ‘multicultural’ dynamics emerging from counter-narratives, turning them into marketable products and reinstating the lusotropical and miscegenated—however exclusionary—identity (Garrido Castellano and Raposo 2020). The different resilience strategies against this process highlight the complex interplay between the bottom-up and the top-down heritage processes. While these life stories are carriers of grassroots-based approaches in different forms, they also entail distinct approaches, such as those of social activists (Dias, Kally) and institutional professionals (Henriques, Mata and Severo). Institutional heritagization processes (public formal recognition) are envisaged by the Memorial and the GAP. It is a decolonization of sight and mind, a bottom-up process for institutional recognition. Opposite dynamics occur in the critical work carried on in academia and museums, as ‘authorized’ loci of enunciation

of the public narrative into society, which are attempts to decolonize the imperial narrative in the trajectory from institution to society (top-down process). These five life stories therefore complement bottom-up resilience against the objectification and musealization of people and cultures through top-down processes of decolonization. Top-down processes face very challenging negotiations to resist the imperial attempts to re-narrate the empire as a benevolent, humanist project or a historicized multicultural touristic product.

Museums are especially affected by the systemic consequences of the fact that ‘every remembrance is subject to specific interests and functional uses’ (Huysen 2014, 181). African heritage is thus reproduced with uncritical and reductive selection, with research and exhibition of collections that convey the imperial perspective, as delineated by Mata. Alternatively, Severo’s counter-narratives outline that in order to overcome the ethnocentrism of a museology based on AHD, and predominantly organized around ethnocentric aesthetic criteria, the collection’s selection principles as well as their presentations, should focus on the symbolic, historical and cultural values that each piece possesses within their original contexts, together with the related knowledge of their creators, users and connoisseurs. This approach strongly resonates with the teaching of African history introduced by Henriques, which, in turn, paves the way for intercultural education, fundamental in the framework of a critical museology, and centred on decolonizing collection interpretations (Sancho Querol, García et al. 2020b). This is a structural contribution to a plural and inclusionary understanding of memory that can impact on the democratization of public discourse.

Dias, Henriques, Mata and Severo provide a fine-tuned counter-narrative of the relationship of cultural and heritage processes with history and memory in Portugal. Disputing the institutionalized imperial script about Africa, its presence and relevance in the public debate, they expose the imperial narrative with the need to reconsider education at various levels: school, university and in other public, open initiatives. Comparing these life stories with the one of Kally serves to stress the diachronic connection between the different counter-narratives and the political role of memory. While Dias and Severo stress the relevance of deconstructing the present (i.e., the invisibility of African heritage) starting from a decolonization of narratives on the past, Kally shows how creative processes can intervene in the opposite direction, deconstructing the past (i.e., the invisibility of the African marginalized community) by decolonizing the present (through the narrative of the GAP). Heritagization is a process in need of expanding, rather than contracting its relationship with memory, in inclusionary as opposed to exclusionary ways (Smith 2006). The academic debate goes in-between these empirical cases. The life story of Henriques details how a teaching approach to African history that is rooted in social memory and dissonance from the imperial narrative was established, as inscribed in the mainstream approach of the discipline.

From her almost half a century of experience with African history, Henriques outlines the latency needed for the change of narrative to occur. However, Portugal has also witnessed a recent reinstatement of the imperial narrative by mainstream political leaders and emerging extremist nationalist forces, which strongly reaffirms the negation of the genealogy and ontology of racism in the country. These attempts to buttress the imperial narrative reinforce the ‘musealization of the absence of Africa’ and further extend the latency of decolonization. Arguing against this, the chapter shows that the imperial narrative in Portugal is increasingly being challenged during times of confrontation marked by the unprecedented articulation of decolonial counter-narratives; it is an unparalleled—however challenging—occasion to deconstruct the colonial mind and racist politics at one time.

Notes

- 1 This work forms part of the ECHOES project which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 770248. The authors are listed alphabetically.
- 2 The life stories videos are available at <https://www.ces.uc.pt/echoes-wp4/lifestories>. The interviews were collected in Portuguese, transcribed by Ricardo Almeida and translated by Mark Carpenter. Any other translations were made by the authors.
- 3 Interview of Beatriz Gomes Dias by Cristiano Gianolla, Giuseppina Raggi and Márcia Chuva, Lisbon, 11 January 2020, see note 2 above for the link to the life story video.
- 4 More information about the contest is available at “Memorial de Homenagem às Pessoas Escravizadas—Lisboa.” *Djass-Associação de Afrodescendentes*. Accessed 25 February 2021. <https://www.memorialescravatura.com/>.
- 5 Interview of Isabel Castro Henriques by Cristiano Gianolla, Giuseppina Raggi and Márcia Chuva, Lisbon, 21 January 2020, see note 2 above for the link to the life story video.
- 6 Interview of Inocência Mata by Cristiano Gianolla, Giuseppina Raggi and Márcia Chuva, Lisbon, 14 January 2020, see note 2 above for the link to the life story video.
- 7 Interview of Rosário Severo by Cristiano Gianolla, Giuseppina Raggi and Márcia Chuva, Lisbon, 10 January 2020, see note 2 above for the link to the life story video.
- 8 Interview of Kally Meru by Cristiano Gianolla, Giuseppina Raggi and Márcia Chuva, Lisbon, 10 January 2020, see note 2 above for the link to the life story video. As explained by the interviewee, Kally Meru is a nickname inspired by the Italian cartoon *Calimero*. While we use the surname to refer to other interviewees in the text, in this case the first part of the nickname was preferred to the second part because it reflects the preference of the interviewee who affirmed: ‘I’m better known as Kally’, and it is the form used in published texts and in society.

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