

RECONFIGURATIONS OF LUSOTROPICALISM IN MONUMENTAL LUSOPHONE MUSEUMS

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss current monumental museum discourses of national identity in the Lusophone world, particularly in Brazil and Portugal. It proposes (re)formulating modes of classifying museums by focusing on their institutional characteristics and long-term exhibitions. The museum model proposed is neither definitive nor fixed, but rather a hermeneutical exercise that aims to disentangle the changes and accommodations in national identity discourses in museum exhibitions. Thus, this article puts forward the idea that while museums are ever-evolving institutions capable of adapting to the times, reinventing themselves and contributing to the (re)creation of societies, they also maintain performances and discourses that reinforce power relations in national representation. Ultimately, museums are always negotiating with hegemonic representations and national discourses. The continuously changing nature of museums in question has been studied from a diverse range of perspectives and has led to different modes of interpretation of their intricate characteristics. However, in both countries, the critical review of Lusotropicalism culturally, socially and politically has, as an analysis of the colonial legacies of museums and their exhibitions, not been explored in depth. Therefore, this article endeavors to propose monumentality types in three Lusophone museums by firstly articulating the literature review of Lusotropicalism and Museum Studies, and then reporting part of the ethnographic research conducted in 2015.

KEYWORDS

museum classification; monumental museum; Lusotropicalism; critical museum studies; ethnography

RECONFIGURAÇÕES DO LUSOTROPICALISMO EM MUSEUS MONUMENTAIS DE PAÍSES DE LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir os discursos da identidade nacional dos museus monumentais contemporâneos em países de língua portuguesa, mais precisamente no Brasil e em Portugal. Para tanto, propõe-se a (re)formular os modos de classificação dos museus com enfoque nas características institucionais dos museus e das exposições de longa duração. Adverte-se que a classificação de museus proposta neste artigo não é definitiva nem fixa. Trata-se, antes, de um exercício hermenêutico que visa deslindar as mudanças e acomodações nos discursos de identidade nacional presentes em diversas esferas das instituições museológicas. Assim, sustenta-se a ideia de que apesar de os museus serem instituições em constante evolução, capazes de se adaptar aos novos tempos, reinventar, e contribuir para a (re)criação das sociedades, eles também mantêm performances e discursos que reforçam as relações de poder nas representações nacionais. Fundamentalmente, os museus estão sempre negociando com representações e discursos nacionais hegemônicos. A natureza em constante transformação

dos museus foi estudada a partir de uma ampla gama de perspectivas resultando em diferentes modos de interpretação e interrelação das suas complexas características. No entanto, em ambos os países, a revisão crítica dos aspectos culturais, sociais e políticos do lusotropicalismo não tem sido explorada em profundidade como um recorte de análise dos legados coloniais dos museus e suas exposições. Assim, propõem-se tipos de monumentalidade em três museus de língua portuguesa, primeiro articulando a revisão da literatura sobre lusotropicalismo e Museologia Crítica, para depois relatar parte da investigação etnográfica realizada em 2015.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

classificação de museus; museus monumentais; lusotropicalismo; museologia crítica; etnografia

INTRODUCTION

This article emanates from critical museum studies discussions, notably, the question of how we can position Lusophone museums in terms of the demands for inclusive representations that have emerged in the 21st century. It aims to examine the networks of meaning that have developed in long-term exhibitions in Brazilian and Portuguese museums, comparing and contrasting them with the national identity discourse while simultaneously rethinking their role amid the complexity of relations in respect of the colonial past. Employing an ethnographic approach, this examination is conducted more specifically through the observation of the exhibitions¹, analysis of museum documents, websites and blogs, as well as through interviews with museum staff.

Two points deserve further clarification: first, museums are diverse institutions constituted in many forms regarding internal and external administration, discipline, funding and functioning. In this sense, this article refers to museums that are mainly connected to national identity discourses either being nationally funded or “nationally styled”², understood here as institutions marketed in connection with national symbols. Second, despite the use of the word Lusophone in the article’s title, it does not encompass the entirety of the Portuguese-speaking world or all museums in the selected Lusophone countries. Instead of an extensive approach to Lusophone world museums, we propose a critical-descriptive and exploratory study of three museums that represent the nation through historical narratives or anthropological artefacts: the Museu Histórico Nacional (National Historical Museum, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil); the Museu Nacional de Etnologia (National Museum of Ethnology, Lisbon, Portugal); and the Museu Afro Brasil (Afro Brazil Museum, Sao Paulo, Brazil).

The main criterion for selecting these three museums was the museums’ mission statements and their relationship with disciplines such as History and Anthropology, which both deal with questions of identity. Other criteria include their location within the city, the relevance of their collection and their architectural envelope. In addition, they

¹ Each exhibition was the object of observation for nearly eight weeks from March to September 2015 (Abadia, 2019).

² See the concept in the Arts Council England website. Retrieved from: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/support-and-advice#section-6>

should be operating regularly, being open to the public at least five days a week. Finally, we consider other operational aspects such as the accessibility of information in the selected case studies, i.e. public availability of data and adequate communication in their media channels, e.g. official websites or blogs.

The three museums selected meet the abovementioned criteria and, simultaneously, provide a diverse range of experiences in terms of exhibition size, architectural dimensions, urban experience, identity discourse in their mission statements, extension of the curatorial team, and curation methods. This diversity provides a fertile model for classifying national and nationally styled museums in the Lusophone world.

In designing this classifying model proposal, this article has been organized into two sections. The first section consists of a literature review, which supports the ethnographic analysis, containing two subsections: one presenting discussions on national identity in Brazil and Portugal, and another synthesizing the modes of museum classifications. In the second section of the article, we propose the three types of monumentality identified in the analyzed museums. Finally, in the final remarks, we reflect on the main points addressed in the article and discuss the limits of this new museum classification model.

BRIEF LITERATURE OVERVIEW

In order to disentangle questions about museums and the performance of national identity, we need to clarify that in every national museum there are supranational, regional and transversal relationships that are specific and unique to each museum and its context (Bennett, 2018). As Bennett explains, the “process in which museums have thus been caught up are always specific to particular constellations of national, sub-national, becoming national, and supra-national, imperial/colonial formations” (Bennett, 2018, p. 80). Aiming later to show each museum demonstrating their confluences and divergence with the proposed idea of a monumental museum, this section starts by clarifying some of the constellations of national and supranational discourses intended for examination in the selected museums, before moving on to the modes of museum classification, culminating in the metaphor of the monumental museum.

LUSOTROPICALISM AND ITS HEGEMONY IN BRAZILIAN AND PORTUGUESE NATIONAL IDENTITIES

Alongside the intersection of their colonial history, Brazil and Portugal share a theory, or a quasi-theory, that explains their singularity in the modern world. This (quasi-) theory is entitled “Lusotropicalism”, and many scholars have examined how both countries have mobilized it, to varying degrees, in their political and social spheres from the 1930s onwards. Evidently, the pervasiveness of the ideas contained in Lusotropicalism do not erase other myths and symbols of national formation as applied specifically, but they at times concur, complement and clash with each other.

As part of the constellation of people, institutions, national governments and supranational networks, Lusotropicalism is generally traced back to the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre³ (1933/1956), who proclaimed “miscegenation as a statement of Brazilian racial authenticity, a symbol of the making of a modern democracy” (Collins, 2010, p. 2). This means that Lusotropicalism praised racial miscegenation, based on a non-hegemonic scientific paradigm at the beginning of the 20th century, assuming it to be a sign of Brazilian identity, a mark that differentiated Brazil from other nations and helped position the country in international political networks. This was particularly important as a political framework for a new nation, one with a unique colonial and post-colonial history. The distinctiveness mark of the Brazil’s formation was triggered by the transfer of the Portuguese royal family and court, fleeing the Napoleonic invasions, from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro in 1808, which resulted in many political and cultural developments, including its elevation to United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves in 1815 (Schwarcs & Starling, 2015). Ultimately, these developments culminated in Brazil’s independence in 1822, only recognized by Portugal in 1825 (Schwarcs & Starling, 2015). Nevertheless, it was only with the declaration of the First Republic in 1889 that the intellectual elite immersed itself in defining the nation, its heroes and deeds (Oliveira, 1990).

The first proposal for national representation followed the trends of the period, which involved consolidating a glorified past in order to project a future (Anderson, 1991). It was later, first during the Getúlio Vargas dictatorship (1937-1945) and then during the Brazilian Military Dictatorship (1964-1985) that Freyre’s ideas provided a *corpus* for many intellectuals and political efforts to consolidate a national image. It was over the course of these two 20th century authoritarian regimes that the idea of Brazil as a racial democracy, emerging from so-called “mild” colonization, was consolidated socially and culturally either by the official regimes or social movements (Guimarães, 2004; Pallares-Burke, 2012; Sansone, 2003). Thus, in the official sphere, Brazil was both promoted and presented as an example of an egalitarian society in terms of race relations, and one that was often offered as a contrast to the racially segregated U.S. model. The so-called proof of a racially democratic society consisted of the statistical and empirical observation of a large number of mixed-race Brazilians (Guimarães, 2004, 2006).

Nevertheless, this allegedly empirical/statistic “proof” established a false correlation between the miscegenation process and the harmonious conviviality and equality between races. The correlation failed to account for violence in the miscegenation process and the new forms of racialization and hierarchies established by a still racist social paradigm. The idea of a non-racist Brazilian society was contested by Roger Bastide (1957), Florestan Fernandes (1964) and Abdias Nascimento (1978), who influenced several studies in the social sciences. Since then, much work has continued to be published by scholars and black activists (i.e. Gonzalez, 1985; Guimarães, 2006; Hanchard, 1994; Moura, 1988; Telles, 2004; Sansone, 2003; Skidmore, 1993). Despite the prolific number of studies demonstrating that veiled racial prejudice is still a barrier that confines black

³ Freyre did not create Lusotropicalism out of nothing. For a thorough review on Freyre’s influences see Pallares-Burke (2005).

people to the lowest socioeconomic strata and erases the specificities of African and Afro-Brazilian contributions to Brazil's formation, Lusotropicalism is still hegemonic in political and social discourses.

Freyre has also profoundly influenced Portuguese Historiography and Sociology, mainly through the idea of mild colonization, which he explained as the plasticity and natural ability of the Portuguese to create interracial and multi-ethnic societies (Freyre, 1940, 1958). During the 1950s, when international policies regarding colonialism were changing, the ideas developed by Freyre were selectively appropriated by the Portuguese Military Dictatorship and *Estado Novo* (1926-1974) in order to legitimize Portuguese colonialism (Medina, 2000), consolidating the imaginary of the absence of racism in Portuguese colonies as well as Portuguese empathy towards other people, specifically black people. Freyre's Lusotropicalism coexisted at the time with other images and discourses of the nation that postulate the historical right of colonization, religious and cultural national cohesion, and the antiquity of Portugal (Monteiro & Pinto, 2000).

As well as in Brazilian academia, some important theoretical research has been conducted in Portugal in order to deconstruct these ideas, and similar ones, which have also influenced race relations in Portugal. Many scholars have produced an important body of work aimed at understanding the shift in social sciences in Portugal and have questioned some of the rigid social representations of race and/or nationality⁴ which are rooted in colonial thought (Cabecinhas, 2007; Castelo, 1998; Martins, 2004; Matos, 2006; Santos, 2002; Sobral, 2006; Vala, 1999; Vale de Almeida, 2008). Despite this, Lusotropicalist theory still heavily influences political discourse both in Portugal and abroad.

It is therefore necessary to revise institutional discourses as well as practices, particularly those of institutions connected to the nation-state apparatus. Specifically, understanding how museums that deal with grand narratives of national identity mobilize the hegemony of Lusotropicalism.

MODES OF CLASSIFYING MUSEUMS

According to Latham and Simmons (2014), museums are generally defined in terms of their function, type, legal organization and historical progression. In terms of historical progression, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) offers a significant metaphor for understanding the reformulation of museum objectives over time. She states that the burgeoning of museums in the 19th century resulted in the "modernist museum"⁵ (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). This type of museum was based on encyclopedic knowledge and, more importantly, on an authoritative model of knowledge transmission as well as the "domestication" of visitor behavior, who were understood as masses (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Later, towards the end of the 20th century, there was a critical turn

⁴ Many of them were influenced by Eduardo Lourenço's (1972/2005) philosophical inquiry into the Portuguese longing for a glorious past.

⁵ The term "modernist" is related to the public museum of the Modern period, often located in the 19th century, and not to the artistic movement of the early 20th century (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

in museum practices, specifically concerning the critiquing of these institutions' colonial legacy and their "inclusivity turn"⁶ (Barringer & Flynn 1998; Brulon, 2020; Henning, 2005; Mirzoeff, 2017; Sandell, 2007). This has, undoubtedly, influenced the museology and museum practice of several national institutions in Brazil, Portugal and various parts of the globe. This critical turn, according to Hooper-Greenhill (2000), has resulted in the "post-museum", which instead focuses on the visitor experience, understanding visitors as a result of their cultural entanglements and promoted participatory practices, as well as opened the institution to sharing knowledge instead of transmitting it or, at least, unveiling the hierarchical practices in its construction.

The unequivocal turn towards the visitor experience in many national and nationally-style museums is a result of the professionalization of museum and the discipline's transnational trends (Edson & Dean, 1994; Knell, 2011). Despite this, there is a pertinent concern as to whether national and nationally styled museums can be decolonized, since even with the critical turn of the last few decades, national museums still mobilize their collections to project a cohesive identity either negotiated in local or transnational networks (Barringer & Flynn 1998; Brulon, 2020; Knell, 2011; Macdonald 2003).

In this sense, we use the metaphor of monumental museums, understanding that monuments celebrate the past to project a shared future (Le Goff, 1992). This is not to say that museums and monuments carry the same specificities in the way they represent the past. What this metaphor provides is the understanding that national museums, like monuments, are commemorative devices, "vehicles for negotiating the relationship between experience and expectation" (Aronsson, 2012, p. 122). Thus, some monumental characteristics can be sketched, drawing on Pevsner's (1976) and Giebelhausen's (2011) definition of museum-monuments. The first one would be that a monumental museum has an institutional mission to celebrate the past and display power; the second, that it would have an imposing presence in the museum as a material symbol, more precisely its architecture (Giebelhausen, 2011; Pevsner, 1976). As with Hooper-Greenhill's Modernist museum metaphor (2000), Pevsner (1976) and Giebelhausen (2011) depict the monumental museum as an archetype of the museum of the 19th and early 20th century. This model does not vanish in the 21st century; instead, it has changed by incorporating demands for social justice brought about by new theoretical and disciplinary developments in Museology, such as Critical Museology, New Museology, Sociomuseology and Cultural Studies, Post-colonialism and decolonial theory. As the models and metaphors here presented do not exclude one another, we propose using the monumental framework to establish the modulations in which these characteristics are present in Lusophone national and nationally styled museums.

Moreover, a certain caution is necessary when considering monumental museums in the Lusophone world. The extent of the grandiosity and celebratory nature of Lusophone national museums cannot be measured against their English, Italian, French, Russian or German equivalents. Admittedly, both Brazil and Portugal were caught up

⁶ We mean by "inclusivity turn" the consensus, at least at a rhetoric level, on the idea that museums should be oriented towards their visitors and not only to their collections (Edson & Dean, 1994; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

in the commemorative spirit that spread rapidly throughout Europe in the 19th century (Schwarcz, 1993). However, as we will see below, each national and institutional context forms its own constellations of materiality and meaning.

THREE TYPES OF MONUMENTAL MUSEUMS: RESIGNIFYING MUSEUM MODELS FOR THE LUSOPHONE CONTEXT

In this section, we propose three metaphors for understanding the possibilities for Lusophone monumental museums by interweaving two theoretical lenses – one relating to Lusotropicalism, the other concerning the monumental museums' features. In the following pages, I emphasize the main characteristics that were examined in the whole exhibition while simultaneously presenting the museum to the unfamiliar reader, providing specific examples when needed. However, the ethnography contained in this section is only a partial report of the 2015 fieldwork's findings, further developed elsewhere (Abadia, 2019).

TRADITIONALLY-INSPIRED MONUMENTALITY

The Museu Histórico Nacional (MHN) was founded in 1922 in Rio de Janeiro, then Brazil's capital, during the Brazilian First Republic, fulfilling a long-held dream of its founder, the influential intellectual and politician, Gustavo Barroso. Barroso managed to implement a museum project not entirely in keeping with the ruling regime's principles, instead creating an institution celebrating the Brazil's monarchical past (1822-1889)⁷ and military conquests. This is not to say that the First Republic did not intend to create a national museum to narrate the great deeds of the past, celebrate national heroes and symbolize the nation for both internal cohesion and external image (Abreu, 1996; Oliveira, 1990; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). Nevertheless, it is somewhat curious that the project advanced in the NHM was one that celebrated the monarchy (Chagas, 2003; Gomes, 2014)⁸.

The building complex the museum carries a palimpsest of vestiges and symbols of past times, dating back to the 17th century (MHN, 2013). The architectural complex underwent many refurbishments, the last (until our fieldwork in 2015) being the designed "Modernization project", which encompassed an extensive infrastructural and architectural refurbishment (phase I) and conceptual and museographic reframing (phase II) (MHN, 2008; Tostes 2013).

The institutional minutes about the curatorial process, as well as the museum's staff, report that the museum's long-term exhibition was redesigned in the "Modernization project" in a collective and horizontal process that sought to dialogue the expertise of the museum's diverse team. Notably, MHN staff comprise public servants, and the museum's institutional structure is well defined and specialized – departments

⁷ The First Republic, notably instituted following a coup d'état by the monarchical regime, did not enjoy expressly popular support and was driven by tensions (Oliveira, 1990; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

⁸ See also Abadia (2019) for more on this discussion.

within the museum include, among others, directorship and curation, architecture and museography, conservation, research, education, and social work.

Pressure for a swift inauguration due to the “Modernization Project” led to the segmentation of curatorial work in the exhibition sections, thus each section of the exhibition was inaugurated in different stages. It is divided into four main sections: “Oreretama”, which is a Tupi language term meaning “our home”; “Portuguese in the world”; “The construction of the nation”; and “Citizenship under construction”.

The first section to be inaugurated presents the contribution of indigenous people to the formation of the country – “Oreretama”. However, this section was curated in a different fashion, instead coordinated by an external consultant, Raquel Prat, a specialist in indigenous culture. The last to be inaugurated was “Citizen under construction”, dedicated to the 20th and 21st centuries, a section lacking in development.

As for the exhibition’s general characteristics, the long-term exhibition does not contravene exhibition-hosting standards; on the contrary, the MHN is a bastion of professionalizing standards in Brazil. Its reputation stems from helping to create the national department of heritage preservation (Chagas, 2003; Julião, 2014; Santos, 2006) and complying with the trends and guidelines for national and international standards, for instance, those provided by the National Institute of Museums and International Council of Museums.

The main narrative of the museum’s long-term exhibition is organized in a linear chronology, conceived to enable accessibility for the lay visitor, i.e. non-historians. The narrative follows the changes in political power in Brazil, emphasizing some socio-economic consequences in the background. The exhibition’s aura of authority comes from the stress on the exhibition narrative’s didactic nature (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000), which stresses the linear account of political, economic and social events as well as the linear use of space. There are other performances, which are not a consequence of curatorial decisions, such as the architecture itself and the overbearing presence of monitors and security personnel, who mostly have an unfriendly and abrupt attitude.

Having said that, it is also worth emphasizing how counter-hegemonic narratives emerge, purposely and otherwise, from the exhibition design. One of the main resources of counter-hegemony is the *metarepresentations* of those commemorative objects replacing the originals, for instance in the exhibition section about the Portuguese arrival in Brazil. Instead of artifacts made in 1500, there are commemorative porcelain, medals and coins produced centuries later. To understand this, we have a twofold explanation: on the one hand, it was a planned strategy to add complexity to and even critique the authoritative narrative of the “authenticity” expected in a museum (Magalhães & Bezerra, personal interview, June 18, 2015); on the other hand, it was the result of both colonial plundering and a lack of political protection of “national” heritage.

Then there are layers of discourses connected to the foundational plan: the limits and also the possibilities the museum collection imposes, the historical theory and research that inform the curator’s view of the exhibition, not to mention the other conditions that support the visitors’ understanding of the exhibition.

Contrary to the museum's foundational plan, its current scope demands an inclusivity turn, either in regard to the narration of history or in terms of accessibility, in its broadest sense. The inclusion of groups of people who were previously disregarded in the narration of history is evident in the "Oreretama" section, which portrays indigenous contributions but circumscribes them in a different narrative form, secluded in their own space yet not directly involved in the chronology established in the other exhibition sections.

Regarding the exhibition discourse established in the section "Portuguese in the world" onwards, there are shades of a Lusotropicalist discourse in the way that some rooms and niches within the exhibition celebrate the black contribution to the creation of the nation. For instance, in this exhibition's section, there is a room that starts with the following quotation from Gilberto Freyre, played in a loop, in Maria Bethânia's⁹ voice. The excerpt from *Casa-grande & senzala* (Freyre, 1933/1956) states the following:

in our tenderness, in our excessive mimicry, in the Catholicism in which our senses delight, in our music, in the way we walk and talk, in our lullabies for children, in everything that is a sincere expression of life, we almost all bear the mark of African influence. (Freyre, 1933/1956, cited in the wall panel)

This room showcases the cultural contribution Africans and their descendants brought to then Portuguese America. There are references to Afro-Brazilian religions being vessels for the transmission of culture, despite oppressive laws against African traditions. As Freyre's quotation indicates, the gallery celebrates African knowledge and heritage as engines of what makes the Brazilian people energetic, warm, and playful. This "celebration" also seems to confirm the division between western culture as a "civilizing" force whereas Africa adds value in folklore, music, religion and behavior. There is a critical note in one explanatory panel about the duress of slavery, but the overall tone is one of conciliation, channeling the pain, exclusion, and suffering of slavery to the positive aspects that make today's nation unique.

It is in the section "The construction of the nation" that the MHN's long-term exhibition reaches its peak. The narrative focuses on the country's military and imperial past, in line with the museum's original mission. Social issues, such as the participation of black and indigenous people, are dealt with using museographic resources like panels and staged scenography. The dimension and "aura" of the space, the brusqueness of the monitors and security, the commemoration of military figures and the nation's "achievements" render the exhibition authoritative. There is, of course, powerful criticism in this exhibition section as well, which is discussed elsewhere (Abadia, 2019). Nevertheless, the curatorial interpretative comments in the exhibition, more than engaging in a critical review of Lusotropicalism, are seemingly used to acquiesce to the current museum's guidelines, based on the aforementioned inclusivity turn.

⁹ Maria Bethânia is a renowned Brazilian singer and artist.

CONCEALED MONUMENTALITY

The Museu Nacional de Etnologia (MNE), initially known officially as the Museum of Overseas Ethnology, opened in Lisbon in 1965 (Carvalho, 2015; Gouveia, 1997) under the authoritarian regime of the *Estado Novo*. This regime maintained a two-pronged position in respect to Portuguese national identity: on one hand it aimed to maintain its colonial power and glorify Portuguese imperialism, while on the other it fostered academic and artistic research into rural traditions through an internal policy promoting the ideal of the new man (and woman) (Rosas, 2001) who should abide by “traditionalist and Catholic values” (Carvalho & Pinto, 2018, p. 132).

Alongside the ambiguity of the hegemonic representation of Portugal in the *Estado Novo*, the literature examining the creation of the MNE postulates two main projects for the institution: one based on the political desire to exhibit the grandeur of the Portuguese empire – a desire that was mainly defended by government agents – and another strictly focused on scientific and academic development, the goal of the museum’s founder, António Jorge Dias, and his team (Areia, 1986; Leal, 2006; Pereira, 2006). Interestingly, the latter frequently appears in the literature on the history of the museum as a neutral project, which had virtually no connection to the colonialist agenda of the Portuguese *Estado Novo*. For example, Areia claims that the museum’s founder, António Jorge Dias, and his team were motivated by “a project of implicit theoretical opposition to political power and relative practical conciliation” (Areia 1986, p. 142). There are other critical analyses that recognize the ambiguity and power games that the museum team had to engage with in order to survive (Macagno, 2002; Moutinho, 1982; Thomaz, 1996).

In fact, these power tensions resulted in difficulty for the museum in establishing itself¹⁰: it only came to occupy its current building in 1975, a period in which the museum was not promoting regular exhibitions, instead being opened only to conduct research (Carvalho, 2015; Gouveia, 1997). This museum research activity was essential for the professionalization of Anthropology in Portugal, as well as the role of its founding team in the institutionalization of higher education courses in Portuguese universities (Leal, 2006, 2016).

It was only in 2013 that the museum inaugurated its first long-term exhibition. As explained by the exhibition curator and then museum director, Joaquim Pais de Brito¹¹, a long-term exhibition was not in the original plan of the museum’s founding team; instead, they envisioned recurrent shifts between temporary exhibitions along the model of Le Musée de l’Homme (Pais de Brito personal interview, March 10, 2015). According to many museum staff the long-term exhibition was planned with a top-down approach, following three sound academic criteria for selecting and organizing the exhibition sections. First, the permanent exhibition consists of a reworking of the museum’s past temporary exhibitions (Abad García, 2018). Second, the exhibition displays the most recent studies of the museum collection (Pais de Brito, personal interview, March 10, 2015).

¹⁰ After Portugal’s return to democracy in 1974, the museum and museum team were stigmatized due to their connection with the New State regime (Pais de Brito, personal interview, March 10, 2015).

¹¹ Joaquim Pais de Brito retired when I was still doing field research in 2015.

Third, the exhibition taps into questions concerning museum studies as a discipline and as a practice, namely, what to do with an unknown, heterogeneous, and diachronically gathered museum collection (Pais de Brito, personal interview, March 10, 2015).

The result of these organizing principles was an exhibition both theatrically and aesthetically pleasing and full of metaphors for current themes in anthropological academic discussion: writing and sounds, emotions, the role of individual versus the collective in Anthropology, the changes anthropologists make in the field. Consequently, there is critical narrative of contemporary museums that is not always interpreted as such. Abad García (2018), for example, characterizes it as a “mise-en-abyme”.

The MNE long-term exhibition can be divided into eight sections, as demonstrated in the museum’s official blog. Accordingly, the exhibition’s sections are spatially organized in rows, as suggested in the list below:

1. Shadows. Wayang Kulit theatre from Bali
2. Franklim Vilas Boas. Through the eyes of Ernesto de Sousa
3. Playing and already for real. Dolls of the Southwest of Angola
4. The music and the days. Portuguese folk musical instruments
5. Matter of speech. Pot lids with proverbs
6. The tally of Rio de Onor. A writing system and its records
7. Animals as people. Masks and puppets from Mali
8. Exhibition chronology.¹²

At first glance, the spatial division emphasizes the apparent lack of connection between topics, reinforcing the universal framework that the museum purposes to cover, which is expressed on the museum’s blog as follows: “in 1965 the museum was created with the ambitious program of representing the cultures of the peoples of the globe, not being restricted to Portugal or to the overseas dominions under its administration”¹³.

As the staff admits, the aim of representing all of the world’s cultures is extremely ambitious and can only be accomplished fragmentarily. Consequently, the long-term exhibition presents small fragments of cultures made possible through the museum’s collection while indicating the topics and issues entailed in Anthropology museums and reflecting on its own work.

The MNE’s long-term exhibition is small and despite the importance of the museum collection and being a “national museum”, the museum does not receive many visitors. For instance, the number of visitors in 2015 was only 15.397¹⁴. Nevertheless, the MNE is integrated into the cultural complex of Belém-Restelo, two upmarket neighborhoods of great imperial symbology (Elias, 2004; Peralta, 2017). Walking in the area, it is not unusual to see logotypes and representations of Portuguese caravels in local cafés or shops, nor remnants of the Portuguese *Estado Novo* power apparatus. These are

¹² Retrieved from <https://mnetnologia.wordpress.com/>

¹³ Retrieved from <https://mnetnologia.wordpress.com/about/>

¹⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/pt/museus-e-monumentos/dgpc/estatisticas-dgpc/>

curatorial issues, but when added to the failure to account for the colonial and historical past, they are also important for Anthropology, as it constitutes a discourse and performance. One argument for the museum team not tackling the legacies of colonialism is that it should focus on the scope of Anthropology as a discipline and not mix the specificities of History and Anthropology. Nevertheless, we argue that museums, especially those of a national type, should engage in these difficult conversations in the telling of past connected to their institutional history.

Alongside the silence over the country's colonial past, there are ways of describing the objects that, inadvertently or not, reinforce the option of not entering this disputed territory. The main example in which this silence¹⁵ speaks volumes was in the technical language used to describe the late colonial era musical instruments. For instance, a scraper that was identified as being from Santa Maria de Barcelos, Minho Portugal (no date), has an inscription "Angola belongs to Portugal" (*Angola é de Portugal*); however, the object's caption states, "Angola is Portugal" (*Angola é Portugal*). Thus, the difference between the inscription, which implies possession, and the caption can be attributed to the omission of a preposition in the Portuguese language (*de*). When one ponders the context of the national liberation wars in Africa, this inscription becomes visibly connected to colonial tension and the subjacent objectification of Africa and its people. The phrase in the caption distinctively emphasizes the idea of integration or even a mirror: one *is* another, an idea heavily propagated in the 1960s as rhetoric to minimize decolonial efforts (Castelo, 1998). The aforementioned omission gives a different tone to the exhibition that once more avoids the deep trauma of decolonization that resulted in the loss of Portugal's empire, its soldiers, geopolitical prestige, and in turn an increase in internal social tensions.

In the void of critical commentary in the exhibition lies the hegemonic representation of a harmonious past, one that was created through the false sense of Freyre's arguments about the plasticity and exceptionality of Portuguese colonization.

ANTI-MODERN MUSEUM MONUMENTALITY

The last model of a nationally styled museum is closer to Hooper-Greenhill's notion of a post-museum, which is a metaphor for the museum educational style based on a "culture as pedagogy" (2000, p. 125). The Museu Afro Brasil (MAB) was inaugurated in 2004 with funding from Petrobras; it was originally administratively independent of the public sector but now answers to the Sao Paulo State Department of Culture (MAB, 2016). The museum initially showcased the private collection of the museum's creator, Emanuel Araujo¹⁶, a renewed artist and prolific collector of Afro-Brazilian cultural and historical objects.

The museum is situated in one of the city's most upscale areas – Ibirapuera Park – the most important natural park in the city and one of the most expensive areas per

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Abadia (2019).

¹⁶ In order to change the museum's status Araujo had to donate part of his private collection to the state (MAB, 2016).

square meter, surrounded by equally affluent neighborhoods. Ibirapuera Park is also a cultural complex founded in the 1950s. The architectonic project of the park's buildings was designed by Oscar Niemeyer, who was by then already a renowned modernist architect (Barone, 2007; Marins, 1999). Upon its construction, the building in which the MAB is situated today was called the Palace of Nations Pavilion. It was built without any material reference to the past, in a suggestive projection of the identity of the city, which at that time was becoming the largest and most economically prominent megalopolis in the country (Barone, 2007; Marins, 1999).

Despite the importance of its founding figure, many other actors and previous circumstances favored the institution's creation, such as the growth of black social movements, the country's return to democracy (in the 1980's), affirmative action, and the Federal Law No. 10.639/03, which established as mandatory the history of Africa(ns) and Afro-Brazilians in the school curriculum. The MAB mission reflects these social demands as a counter-hegemonic statement of the traditional narrative of the nation's history. The museum proposes rewriting Brazilian history from an Afro-Brazilian perspective in order to promote a more egalitarian society (MAB, 2016). This is, in fact, the first characteristic of an anti-modern museum: the repudiation of a non-spoken consensus regarding national construction. The museum proposes reviewing national history not only based on historiography but also on memory, culture and contemporary events. The museum's other two aims which stem from its central objective are: (i) rebuilding positive self-esteem for black people, and (ii) providing a means for the inclusion of the black population in Brazilian society due to historical evidence of African and Afro-Brazilian involvement in the nation's construction. In other words, rewriting history would recalibrate authority over the past to include black people in all phases of knowledge production, thus expanding black people's social spaces.

The institutional plan was designed by an interdisciplinary specialist team who, according to museum staff, "unpacked" Araujo's vision for the institution. Of the three museums analyzed, the MAB's curatorial approach is the one most centered on its creator's aura and influence¹⁷. Significantly, Araujo takes both an anti-academic and anti-museum standards stance in his approach, yet still maintains his reputation as a genuine connoisseur of African and Afro-Brazilian art and history in the truest sense (Silva, 2013; Souza, 2009).

Despite being dedicated to an anti-racist narrative of the nation's construction, the exhibition and museum in general exude tension and ambiguity in their discourse and performance. Regarding the exhibition, we emphasize two of these ambiguities: first, the idea that avoiding an emphasis on violence and slavery would refute the marginalization and stereotyping of black people as inferior. This is not to say that slavery and oppression are not contemplated in the museum's long-term exhibition, as one secluded, emotional installation comprising the exhibition's only enclosed space demonstrates (Abadia, 2019). The rationale behind this curatorial option is that by connecting the entirety of black people's memory to slavery and pain, it would reinforce the already stigmatized

¹⁷ Despite this, we need to stress the importance of Roberto K. Okinaka to the long-term-exhibition museography.

black population to the fate of slavery and create compassion/empathy fatigue (Cubitt, 2011). Contrarily, downplaying the role of systemic oppression could lead to an acritical celebration that legitimizes the status quo, depoliticizing the struggle of African and Afro-Brazilian people, as is commonly invoked in Lusotropicalist discourses.

Araujo seems aware that the miscegenation process is misunderstood by part of Brazilian society. He even affirms that

one cannot forget that the *mestiço* culture that was formed among the diaspora involves relationships between unequals, where there are slave owners and slaves. From a black person's perspective, this is a story of much and painful work, of uncertainties, misunderstandings and of unconsciousness, which remains the mentality of part of the Brazilian elite. (Araujo, 2010, p. 127)

Thus, discursively, it seems that the museum proposes tackling Lusotropicalism from a critical perspective.

Another important characteristic of an anti-modern museum is the rejection of the notion of a fixed long-term exhibition. The changes in the long-term exhibition are made explicit by the institution's high degree of dynamism, which was confirmed in discursive terms in the employees' statements themselves. Renato Silva, then head of the internal research team, commented in detail on all the changes that took place in the exhibition from 2004 to mid-2015. He reported physical changes in the exhibition space in terms of the museum collection and museographic arrangements, for example, the gradual fusion of color codes and signs of some nuclei and even the exhibition's concept, from a design with a slightly more chronological inclination to a more rhizomatic one (Silva, personal interview, August 04, 2015).

At the time of fieldwork, the MAB's long-term exhibition had around 6.000 objects on display, occupying an area of 6.500 square meters in a large wide-open gallery. There is a sense of overload and a lack of empty spaces, despite the building's wide-open shape, with a large number of objects, lack of systematic labeling, long descriptive texts and lack of clear path for visitors. Souza (2009, p. 99) refers to this curatorial strategy as the "poetics of excess", in which Araujo proposes subverting the ideas of black people's incapacity and inferiority by showcasing a great volume of intellectual, cultural and artistic work which contributed to Brazil's construction. Yet one could ask if this excess could also render objects less visible or less valued since they enjoy less focus, and whether this aesthetic could erase epistemological barriers to racial performativity in Brazil. In other words, instead of making them visible, is this aesthetic reinforcing some understanding through the lack of direction for the less-informed visitor?

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Both in Brazil and Portugal, the concept of national identity has changed significantly following the establishment of Lusotropicalist ideas in the academic and public

sphere. While Lusotropicalism proved a watershed in relation to blatantly racist eugenic ideologies, it also established a more subtle way of maintaining power relationships between the diverse racial groups in the Lusophone world. In order to reflect on the transformation of Lusophone museums, which entails accommodation, confrontation and subversion of historically constructed national and transnational discourses and networks, we traced some layers of the discursivity and performances that (re)create images of the nation, focusing on the selected museums' ubicacion, architecture, curatorial processes, use of space, and standards and guidelines for museum praxis.

We proposed three types of monumentality which articulate Lusotropicalist discourses with different intensities and use distinct performativity strategies. Thus, the "traditionally-monumentality", represented by the Museu Histórico Nacional (Rio de Janeiro), represents the direct heir to the modernist-museum (or the Modern museum), invoking the established characteristics of museums that engender the grand narratives of national identity. In turn, the "concealed monumentality", supported by the example of the Museu Nacional de Etnologia (Lisbon), expresses the denial of an imperialist origin and the epistemic violence present in scientific representations. The performativity of the concealed monumentality is based on silence, which operates through reinforcing hegemonic paradigms. Finally, the "anti-modern monumentality", illustrated by the Afro Brasil Museum (Sao Paulo), repudiates standardized conventional and aesthetic museum practices seeking to create a counter-hegemonic discourse, which, in turn, cannot be detached from hegemony.

As for the limits of this classification model, we highlight its contextual relativism, that is, its circumscription to time-space, the socio-political environment, urban planning, and the institutional context – elements that are forever changing. A hermeneutic analysis of all the characteristics mentioned above cannot accompany, for example, the transformations that museums implement in their organizational structures and practices. Furthermore, this classification is only supported by its relationship with the respective images of the nation. Despite these limits, the proposed model constitutes an analysis of how each museum strives for the hegemonization of culture and identity, being, therefore, essential for the exercising of political responsibility, both for institutions and visitors.

Translation: Lilia Abadia

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