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Decolonial Constellations: The Post-Museum as a Space for Interculturality and Resistance

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Abstract

Just as a constellation is made up of individual stars that, when together, create a meaningful representation, decolonial constellations suggests the interconnection of diverse decolonial images, practices and movements that together form a broader, more comprehensive picture of resistance. It suggests the inclusion of multiple perspectives, voices and experiences from different cultures. Similar to constellations, made up of multiple points of light, each image, thought, perspective contributes to mapping and navigating cultural and historical territories that are peripheral to or are suppressed by colonialism, recovering and valuing these spaces through a decolonial approach. In this research, we have adopted a decolonial perspective of interculturality (Martins, 2020; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), which understands it as a genuine dialogue between peoples and institutions, seeking to promote equal opportunities. The methodological approach is qualitative, based on bibliographical research that explores the concepts of interculturality, decoloniality and post-museality. Throughout this article, we analyse some museums that are transforming their exhibitions and narratives in favour of a decolonial perspective. We explore the African Museum, in Belgium; the Pitt Rivers Museum, in Great Britain; and the Virtual Museum of Lusophony, on Google Arts & Culture, physically based in Portugal. These museums will be presented as case studies that exemplify the approach to the post-museum paradigm.

Keywords

decolonial constellation, interculturality, cultural resistance, postcolonial studies, post-museum

Constelações Decoloniais: O Pós-Museu Como Espaço de Interculturalidade e Resistência

Resumo

Assim como uma constelação é formada por estrelas individuais que juntas criam uma representação significativa, a expressão constelações decoloniais sugere a interconexão de diversas imagens, práticas e movimentos decoloniais que, juntos, formam um quadro mais amplo e compreensivo de resistência. Sugere ainda a inclusão de múltiplas perspectivas, vozes e experiências de diferentes culturas. De modo semelhante às constelações, que são compostas por múltiplos pontos de luz, cada imagem, pensamento, perspectiva, contribui para mapear e navegar por territórios culturais e históricos periféricos ou suprimidos pelo colonialismo, recuperando e valorizando esses espaços através de uma abordagem decolonial. Neste estudo, adotamos

uma perspectiva decolonial da interculturalidade (Martins, 2020; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), entendida como um diálogo genuíno entre povos e instituições, procurando promover a igualdade de oportunidades. A abordagem da nossa investigação é qualitativa, fundamentada em pesquisa bibliográfica, explorando conceitos como interculturalidade, decolonialidade e pós-musealidade. Analisamos alguns museus que estão a transformar as suas exposições e narrativas, em prol de uma perspectiva decolonial. Exploramos algumas dinâmicas no African Museum, na Bélgica; no Pitt Rivers Museum, na Grã-Bretanha; e no Museu Virtual da Lusofonia, no Google Arts & Culture, com sede física em Portugal. Estes museus são apresentados como estudos de caso, que exemplificam a aproximação ao paradigma do pós-museu.

Palavras-chave

constelação decolonial, interculturalidade, resistência cultural, estudos pós-coloniais, pós-Museu

1. Introduction

In recent years, a growing movement has emerged around the world in search of a critical reassessment of the role of museums in contemporary society. This movement is driven by the need to confront the colonial structures that remain active in universal museums and to discuss ways of breaking with social paradigms based on colonialist, racist and patriarchal structures in favour of a more inclusive and equitable way of thinking (Vergès, 2018/2023). Within this context, the African Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Virtual Museum of Lusophony stand out as innovative initiatives that seek to challenge traditional museum narratives and promote interculturality from a decolonial perspective (Martins, 2018; Mignolo, 2008; Quijano, 2007; Walsh, 2019) in an era in which "post-museum" thinking is emerging (Enwezor, 2003; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Vergès, 2018/2023).

The concept of the museum as a cultural institution has evolved over time, reflecting changes in society and in perceptions of heritage and cultural identity. However, most museums are still rooted in colonial structures, which perpetuate Eurocentric views of history and culture, marginalizing non-Western voices and perspectives (Vergès, 2018/2023). Faced with this scenario, questions arise about the role of museums in contemporary times and how they can become more representative and confrontational spaces.

In this context of decolonization museums such as the African Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Virtual Museum of Lusophony, among others (Martins et al., 2020; Sarmento & Martins, 2020), are positioning themselves as a space of resistance and struggle against the current symbolic ordering of the world. It can be inferred that interculturality and decoloniality are key concepts in the analysis of these museums, which can be thought of as post-museum institutions (Enwezor, 2003; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Vergès, 2018/2023). According to Martins (2015a, 2015b, 2018), interculturality is only effective when there is a joint effort to understand both oneself and the other. The author (2015b) argues that interculturality does not refer to a single imaginary, but to multiple imaginaries. Inspired by the decolonial perspective of interculturality, the museums

mentioned above aim to promote interaction between different cultures and communities, recognizing historical inequalities and seeking to promote equal opportunities.

2. Interculturality: A Decolonial Perspective

The concept of interculturality has been widely disseminated in society, especially by governments and multilateral organizations. However, this popularization often results in confusion and the emptying of the true meaning of interculturality, distorting its essence. This misappropriation not only obscures the understanding of the concept, but tends to perpetuate social structures rooted in coloniality (Walsh, 2019, p. 24).

One of the great conceptual embarrassments about the term interculturality is the use of the word multiculturalism as if the two were synonymous, which is not the case. Multiculturalism, an American invention applied to the understanding of "culture", is epistemologically wrapped in a "modern/colonial" logic, as Mignolo points out in an interview with Catherine Walsh (2003):

> firstly, the important distinction between "interculturality" and "multiculturality". You'll no doubt remember that at the last Lasa meeting, John Beverley asked in public for an explanation of the difference. Other similar statements I have heard in private are the well-known argument that there is nothing outside the market and that interculturality is a new market "gadget" used by the State. (p. 8)

For Walsh (2003), when the State takes on the discourse of interculturality as a synonym for multiculturalism, the power structures want to show themselves to be inclusive, reformist, while in fact what they are doing is maintaining the neoliberal ideology, which always prioritizes the market. Interculturality would be the opposite of this, and "must be understood in the context of decolonial thinking and projects" (Mignolo, 2008, p. 316).

Generally understood as a relationship of exchange between cultures, the decolonial context broadens and dynamizes the concept, since thinking of interculturality only as a dialogue between parties, from a perspective of equality, would be naive and simplistic thinking, which leaves aside the entire history of colonization and imperialism, a reality that produces subalternity. Cabecinhas and Cunha (2008) evoke this naivety and warn that the thought of interculturality, as an exchange between cultures, is full of inequalities between the participants involved in the development of this relationship, in addition to the emergence of "imperial imaginaries" (p. 7), which end up determining unequal degrees of freedom.

In this article, we will address the concept of interculturality from a decolonial perspective, defended by authors such as Mignolo (2008, 2018), Quijano (2007), Sarmento and Martins (2020), and Walsh (2003, 2019). Although Walsh, Mignolo and Quijano are authors who use the Latin American indigenous movement to conceptualize interculturality as an epistemological "other", this concept is very useful for analysing interculturality in the African Museum in Belgium, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Great Britain and the

Virtual Museum of Lusophony on Google Arts & Culture, since it is close to the decolonial context, which is relevant to the post-museum project.

In this *modus pensandi*, the concept of interculturality is wrapped up in questions about the "coloniality of power" proposed by Aníbal Quijano (2007). For this Peruvian sociologist, the power structures and social hierarchies that stemmed from colonialism still persist in today's society, even after the end of the colonial period. Quijano (2007) argues that the power relations established during colonization privileged certain ethnic, racial and cultural groups to the detriment of others and continue to shape us socially. These subalternizing relations are not limited to politics, but permeate all spheres of social life such as the economy, culture, language and even identity formation, in which the "coloniality of power" promotes a "coloniality of being and knowledge" (Quijano, 2007, p. 129). In order to break with this structure of coloniality, "epistemic interculturality" positions itself as a political practice that aims to act as a counter-response to this geopolitical hegemony of knowledge (Walsh, 2019, p. 10).

According to Walsh (2019), the intercultural project "derives from a responsibility to the other" (p. 14). It focuses on disruption, on difference, on transforming existing social structures and practices in order to develop environments that are more inclusive and conducive to dialog, mutual respect and equal opportunities. This implies recognizing and challenging governments and hierarchies of power and knowledge in favour of real democratic participation in social construction. It demands that the State recognize difference (ethnic, political and epistemic). It calls for "equal intervention capable of recognizing the current difference in power; that is, the colonial difference and the coloniality of indigenous people's power - that still exists - in the transformation of the state and, of course, of education, the economy and the law" (Walsh, 2003, p. 9).

In this sense, Mignolo and Walsh (2018), as well as Martins (2015a) and Sarmento and Martins (2020), propose the use of interculturality as a tool to reorganize diverse cultures and identities. They advocate a policy that includes the knowledge and culture of native peoples, thus challenging socio-cultural, economic, political and structural hegemony. Interculturality, for them, goes beyond simple dialogue between cultures; it is a form of decolonization that requires a radical change in the dominant order, which is modern and capitalist, and has its roots in colonial power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). In other words, interculturality would offer the opportunity to give visibility to the legacy of native peoples and to recover their cultural memory through social institutions belonging to the State. This possibility of rupture must implement a "different" "democracy, which is naturally anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-segregationist" (CONAIE, 1997, mentioned by Walsh, 2019, p. 13), in order to guarantee the participation of all people, of all nationalities, in decision-making. "Interculturality offers a way to think from the perspective of difference and through decolonization and the construction and establishment of a radically distinct society" (Walsh, 2019, p. 27).

It may seem that such a vision is somewhat utopian, but it is from the recognition of a structure based on inequality, from a desire for rupture, that an "other" epistemology begins to be developed where new perspectives can generate other knowledge that

guides a movement of decolonization of dominant structures. With regard to the attempt to construct an "other" narrative, to turn what was once just a utopia into reality, and still is to some extent, we can cite the initiative of the African Museum in Tervuren, Belgium, which has embarked on a major project to decolonize its structures. In seeking a model other than repatriating objects belonging to the former colonized countries, the museum organized a project to decolonize its collections. For five years (2013-2018) the institution closed its doors to the public and, together with the Comité de Concertation Museé Royal de L'Afrique Centrale, thought of a way to decolonize the Royal Museum of Central Africa, a museum of natural history and ethnography founded in 1897, whose collection sought to praise the colonial conquests of King Leopold II in the Congo.

For more than 100 years, the museum housed one of the largest collections of material culture and art from the former Belgian colony (DeBlock, 2019, p. 272). The decolonial process, however, has not been easy and the project has received numerous criticisms. On the eve of the reopening of the current African Museum, the Comité de Concertation Museé Royal de L'Afrique Centrale, an institution whose purpose, in the museum's decolonial process, was to listen and give decision-making power to African communities, inside and outside Africa, suspended negotiations, although it reconciled with the museum's management some time after the reopening (DeBlock, 2019, p. 272).

The main changes made at the museum are mainly in the multimedia narratives used and the contemporary works of art, which criticize some of those previously exhibited. Sound interviews, videos, texts, sculptures and paintings by contemporary artists take a critical look at Belgium's colonial past and try to look to the future with a new perspective without hiding the history of domination, in order to generate an anti-colonialist and anti-racist historical consciousness.

> the visitor is attracted to this narrow passageway that reveals glimpses of, for example, the infamous "Leopard Man", also known as "Les Aniota". Such representations exemplify racist imagery and representation—of Congo as a place of aggression, murder, witchcraft and irrational behavior—a place, clearly, that needed to be civilized. This is also how these sculptures are contextualized: with text, film, and also, in the case of the 'Leopard Man', with a painting by contemporary Congolese artist Chéri Samba, "Musée de l'Afrique Centrale, Réorganisation". Created in 2002, the painting openly criticizes the statue. (DeBlock, 2019, pp. 274-275)

Despite the attempt to decolonize the Royal Museum of Central Africa (actual African Museum), some aspects that exalt Belgian colonization could not be removed because they are part of the museum's architectural structure, such as the 45 engravings of the initials of King Leopold's name in the marble of the building. Two golden statues carved into pillars had to remain in place bearing colonial inscriptions to the effect that Belgium had brought civilization to the Congo or that Belgium had done justice to the Congo as well as the engraving of 1,600 names of pioneer settlers who died in the Congo during the occupation process, carved into the museum's marble. These are legacies

that indicate the difficulty faced by the team during the process. Without being able to exclude the past, some solutions had to be developed, such as the placement of frames putting past and present into perspective. "The problem of the 1600 colonial Belgian names engraved on the marble wall, for example, has been creatively 'solved' by a work of art by Freddy Tshimba. In a window opposite the engraved names, the names of deceased Congolese men and women are now inscribed" (DeBlock, 2019, pp. 275–276). However, according to the guides, the names of the Congolese are inscribed on transparent glass and can easily go unnoticed by the general public, because depending on the weather conditions, the names may or may not appear. When it's sunny, the names are reflected on the wall, but not when it's not sunny. That's why it's important to be accompanied by guides who are able to talk about colonial issues during the visit. Vergès (2018/2023) mentions this aspect and states that in many cases there is a "lack of preparation on the part of the guides to talk about looting, confiscation, restitution, racism, colonial and imperialist history" (p. 17). For the author, this lack of preparation is often an institutional choice.

In order to enhance the visitor experience and stimulate post-colonial critical thinking, the African Museum has guides trained by the Afropean Project, which is an online platform co-founded by Johny Pitts, dedicated to exploring and documenting the experiences of African diasporas in Europe. The platform offers a wide range of content, including articles, essays, videos, interviews and personal stories by people from Afro-European communities. The Afropean Project actively collaborates with the African Museum to promote a decolonial and inclusive narrative, in order to promote a broader and more representative vision of history and culture. As well as guides, the association participates in curating exhibitions, organizes events, lectures and workshops at the museum, contributing with digital content used in social networks and interactive museum exhibitions, and actively involves local communities in order to ensure that diverse voices are heard. The partnership between the Afropean Project and the African Museum has had a significant impact as a cultural resistance movement.

Without a doubt, the work done by the African Museum is pioneering in Europe and heralds a change in mentality and a break with the colonialist structures still sustained by today's capitalist, imperialist and segregationist society. However, there is still a lot to do and to decolonize. Many discourses are still not present and important figures in the history of Central Africa remain invisible, such as the Congolese doctor Denis Mükwege, who in 2018 won the Nobel Peace Prize for his humanitarian work as a gynaecologist in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The doctor specializes in the treatment of raped women and has become one of the world's leading experts in the physical repair and treatment of rape injuries, having treated more than 20,000 women in the country (Chibelushi, 2023). According to DeBlock (2019), Mükwege's story, among others of overcoming and hope, could be part of this new structure, whose proposal is decolonization. However, between stuffed animals and a collection still based on the material culture of a people, the decolonial project seems to be just a smokescreen perpetuating colonialist attitudes.

> The emphasis is unmistakably on material culture and art. Housing one of the biggest collections worldwide of Central African Arts, it is not hard to stuff the museum once more with ritual objects from the region. But this strategy takes the focus away from what should really matter: providing a more nuanced image of the history of Africa, removing the museum's racist image, the discriminatory pedagogic project that it helped instill for over a century. (DeBlock, 2019, p. 276)

Although it still reiterates some colonialist positions, or seems to have lost its way in the midst of the initial decolonization proposal, we understand that it doesn't make sense to think that the African Museum project was a missed opportunity. Contrary to what DeBolck (2019) thinks, when he says that the museum's promise to decolonize its structures was "a missed opportunity for the museum to re-position itself and truly tackle its problematic history" (p. 276), the project is at the forefront of decoloniality and the fruits of this attitude will only be seen over time. After all, it is not possible to decolonize museums without decolonizing the society in which they are located (Vergès, 2018/2023).

3. Is It Possible to Decolonize the Museum Space?

To this question, political scientist Françoise Vergès (2018/2023) replies that it is not possible to decolonize museums today and explains why. It is remarkable that today there is a strong current advocating that artistic artefacts belonging to colonized peoples, especially in Africa, should be returned to their countries of origin, as a way of decolonizing European and North American museums and doing justice to the former colonies that had part of their culture violently plundered during the colonization process.

Dan Hicks (2020), a professor at Oxford University and curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England, is one of the theorists who has defended this restitution of heritage. The Pitt Rivers Museum has undergone several decolonial transformations in recent years. Traditionally known for its vast collection of ethnographic artifacts, many of which were acquired during the colonial era, the museum is re-evaluating its practices and narratives to critically address its colonial legacy. The museum is re-evaluating how the artifacts are displayed and interpreted, seeking to provide context about the origins and cultural meanings of the pieces, as well as the circumstances in which they were acquired. Efforts are being made to include the voices and perspectives of the communities from which the artifacts come, often through direct collaborations and consultations, such as the participation of the indigenous community (Pitt Rivers Museum, 2017). This includes collaborative research projects and co-curated exhibitions. Artists and academics from the cultures represented are invited to the museum for residencies, giving them the opportunity to reinterpret and interact with the collections.

On heritage devolution, Dan Hicks (2020) in *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* seeks to give visibility to the violence with which artefacts were obtained during colonization, as well as to raise awareness in

countries and institutions for the return of works of art and human remains that are part of museum collections around the world. Hicks (2020) argues that "brutish museums" (p. 15), as the author refers to them, have perpetuated a colonialist narrative by displaying these artifacts without taking into account their origins or the voices of the communities from which they were taken. Above all, it proposes an approach to decolonization that involves the repatriation of artefacts, collaboration with communities of origin, and also a critical reassessment of colonial history and its representations in museums. The decolonization of "brutish museums" (Hicks, 2020, p. 15) is essential to promote a more equitable and inclusive understanding of history and culture.

Despite playing a central role in discussions about decolonization, the issue of restitution of artefacts to their people of origin is far from peaceful and can be interpreted as a *mea culpa* on the part of governments and institutions about colonization. For Françoise Vergès (2018/2023), the restitution process carried out by museums cannot simply serve as a means of absolving themselves of the historical responsibility they bear. These institutions, conceived as universal spaces, are sites of intense ideological battles in which class, gender, racial and cultural struggles echo, among others. For the author, the true decolonization of museums will not be achieved as long as unequal pay and opportunities persist between black and white artists, men and women. And also as long as museums continue to be reflections of a society based on coloniality. And until society changes this colonialist mentality. In short, decolonization will remain an illusion as long as the major institutions reflect and perpetuate deep structural inequalities.

For Vergès (2018/2023), quoting Frantz Fanon (1961/1968), it is necessary to establish a "program of absolute disorder" (p. 8), which would have nothing to do with chaos, but with a profound social rupture with the colonialist, capitalist, racist and patriarchal bases that continue to dominate discourse in all areas of society today.

> Disorder here means breaking with an order that has only brought and continues to bring chaos, destruction, extraction, exploitation and a racialized division of lives that matter and lives that don't matter. Racial capitalism and imperialism, with the complicity of states, have created a world that is unbreathable and uninhabitable for billions of human and non-human beings. (Vergès, 2018/2023, p. 31)

Based on the ideas of Frantz Fanon (1961/1968), in order for effective decolonization to take place, the author adds that it is necessary to change the symbolic social order, a change that implies an always violent process, as it tends to replace the order of one world with another. Françoise Vergès (2018/2023) reiterates that thinking about decolonization means we have to answer several questions. On the one hand, it means thinking about the structural inequalities experienced in institutions, as well as giving visibility to the issue of the plundering of goods during colonization. But it's also to think of spoliation during wars and conflicts, as in the case of Nazism, which appropriated the property of Jewish families, just as Jews later came to appropriate the territory of the Palestinians. Finally, still in the words of Vergès (2018/2023), to think about decolonization today is

to look at the COVID-19 pandemic and who was socially protected at the expense of the lives that could not remain in isolation. For this author, the extinction of colonialism is "neither immediate, nor spontaneous, nor automatic" (Vergès, 2018/2023, p. 32), and it is therefore necessary to confront the system of racial capitalism, as well as the effects of colonialism, which have lingered for centuries in the collective social memory. "This process involves unlearning in order to learn" (Vergès, 2018/2023, p. 35).

From this perspective, museums are "battlefields" and, despite appearing to be neutral, purely cultural and independent entities, they are, as they always have been, actively involved in the processes of domination and State representation. The museum is capable of transforming social representations and forming strong national symbols. An example of this are the initials of King Leopold of Belgium, engraved in the marble of the African Museum, validating and praising the colonial campaign in the Congo. It is important to understand that the museum requires an aura of civility, superiority and discipline (Vergès, 2018/2023). Artists whose works are exhibited on the museum circuit are considered successful, and those who frequent such institutions are people with refined cultural tastes, who are intelligent. Therefore, as long as society has a mentality based on colonialism, a real decolonization of museums will not be possible (Vergès, 2018/2023). Given the current challenge of decolonizing museums, a viable alternative would be to create what the author calls a "post-museum" (p. 15).

> Imagining what an anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist post-museum would look like requires imagining transformations that are not mere adjustments, redesignations or more diverse and inclusive programs. It would require courage to let your imagination fly, to free yourself from mental ties, from the desire to "belong" and be respectable. (Vergès, 2018/2023, p. 50)

This concept refers to an innovative museum space that not only preserves the narratives, objects, sounds, images and memories of social minorities, such as Blacks, Indigenous people and Palestinians, but also serves as a living archive of resistance against cultural erasure. The "post-museum" would be one that does not submit to Western logics, but stands out as a space of resistance and symbolic struggles.

4. The Post-Museum as a Space of Cultural Resistance and Transformation

The concept of the post-museum emerged at the end of the 20th century as a response to the social, cultural and technological changes that began to affect the way people interacted with cultural institutions such as museums. This is a contemporary approach to museum institutions, which transcends traditional museum paradigms. While traditional museums are usually seen as static spaces where works of art or artifacts are displayed in a specific physical setting, the concept of "post-museum" suggests reimagining these institutions, as the boundaries between art, culture and the public become increasingly fluid. Rather than focusing solely on the preservation and display of physical

objects, the "post-museum" can explore the immateriality of art, incorporating digital technologies to offer interactive and participatory experiences, to the point of challenging traditional hierarchies of knowledge and authority. Some authors, such as Hans Belting (2006) and Andreas Huyssen (1987), have pushed the idea of the "post-museum" when thinking about the relationship between works of art in contemporary times, as well as artistic practices and hybrid formats, which are increasingly present in museums to ensure, in an era marked by the digital and the virtual, greater interactivity and immersiveness, as well as to enhance the user's aesthetic experience. With all the current social and technological changes, another museum was needed, in short a "new museum" or a "post-museum", a concept adopted by Hooper-Greenhill (2000) to designate this new way of making a museum, a new reality centred on the community and incorporating diverse voices and perspectives, generating more dynamic and critical exhibitions in a kind of "renegotiation of the museum's relationship with the public" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 142). The "post-museums" are self-conscious and raise questions about identities and subjectivities.

> In the modernist museum, knowledge was understood to be disciplinary or subject-based. Museums were natural history textbooks (...). In the post-museum, specialist knowledge remains important, but it is integrated with knowledge based on the everyday human experience of visitors and non-specialists. Where the modernist museum transmitted factual information, the post-museum also tries to involve the emotions and imagination of visitors. (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, pp. 142–143)

Exhibitions should have several voices and be drawn from different sources, which doesn't always follow the narrative of the winners. Indeed, "in the post-museum, stories that have been hidden are being brought to light" (Hooper-Greenhil, 2000, p. 145). This is the case with the mapping of enslaved people coming from Africa and the survey of some interconnections between 18th century London society and the trade in enslaved Africans. The survey was initiated by the National Portrait Gallery in London in 1997. The mapping began with an exhibition on Ignatius Sancho I, a man who was born on a slave ship, given away as a gift and, years later, became an important London composer, actor and writer (Hooper-Greenhil, 2000). In 2021, the museum publicly announced that investigations carried out by the institution had revealed direct and indirect links to slavery by its founders and some of its works of art. The scope of the investigation of London society and the slave trade covered the period between 1824 and 1880 and there was the intent to, in a next phase, analyse the periods between 1880 and 1920, as well as 1640 to 1824 (Faria, 2021).

According to Hooper-Greenhil (2000), both the curation of objects and the way they are arranged, as well as the narratives they present, have a political dimension, which is not in the object itself, but in the use that is made of it. "By making marginal cultures visible, and by legitimating difference, museum pedagogy can become a critical

pedagogy" (Hooper-Greenhil, 2000, p. 148). The exhibition of Sancho I is an example of this, when it groups objects in a distinctive way: in the foreground is a harpsichord, a musical instrument that the artist played; and next to a set of handcuffs is a whip and a necklace that was put on those who were enslaved. This would have been a way for the museum to maintain a critical stance and for the public to reflect on the cruelty of slavery and Britain's colonial past.

Another issue raised by Hooper-Greenhil (2000) is the adoption of the digital format and the virtualization of museums. Of course, a post-museum is not characterized by its physical or virtual format, but by its attitude towards objects, as well as the narrative it presents in its context. And it's a fact that the internet brings new possibilities of connection to human communities. Because transmediatic narratives allow for the "technological circumnavigation" (Martins, 2018, p. 87) of new landscapes, new environments, new atmospheres, new territories, new experiences and new knowledge, which constitute new paths of community (Martins, 2020). And this new narrative is as much the reality of the arts and cultures today as it is the new reality of museums. "Museums are also using the World Wide Web to link communities, cultures and collections across the world" (Hooper-Greenhil, 2000, p. 148). In this way, more voices can be heard and more people can be impacted by the stories told by museum collections.

However, rather than the possibility of new connections, and also rather than a new response to the hybrid communication of *techno* and *bios* in the public space and in cultural institutions, in relation to the social, cultural and artistic changes in which "post--museums" began to be thought of, the current concept of "post-museum" has moved closer to decolonial issues. For the simple reason that we need to envision a more dignified and equal future for the human community, we need to think about the structures of modern museums, many of which were built on colonial violence and brutality. It is from this perspective that the Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor (2003) proposes the concept of a "postcolonial constellation" (p. 57) and that Françoise Vergès (2018/2023) discusses a "museum without objects" (p. 27). This is about freeing knowledge from Eurocentric epistemology.

It is imperative that contemporary art frees itself from the supposed universality of Western historical and cultural thought, whose foundations were forged by colonialism. In the current geopolitical and economic system, as well as in production systems, social relations are linked to an imperialist system. In counterpoint to this hegemonic system is the idea of a "post-colonial constellation" (Enwezor, 2003, p. 58), which wants to change the hegemonic modes of governance and institutionality. According to Enwezor (2003), the aftermath of the post-World War II unrest has demanded a political and cultural restructuring, and the concept of the "post-colonial constellation" is fertile ground for challenging established narratives and forging new connections between past, present and future. It is a space that transcends conventional boundaries in order to explore and expand the understanding of historical, social, economic and artistic complexities. Narratives are not just questioned; they are reconstructed in a movement

that challenges historical linearity and hierarchy. This is an opportunity to rewrite history, giving voice and visibility to vast experiences and perspectives that were previously marginalized. It's about telling stories from other stories (Enwezor, 2003).

Vergès (2018/2023) is also committed to breaking away from and fighting colonialist hegemony. For this author, we are at the right moment to imagine a "post-museum", a "museum of the present time" (p. 133), whose approach is innovative and critical, an approach that challenges the traditional forms of musealization and historical representation. It is a dynamic moment, interactive and actively involved in contemporary issues, especially those related to post-colonial experiences and histories. The "museum of the present time" connects with current issues of social justice, inequality and decolonization, and is relevant to contemporary populations, as it addresses issues such as racism, migration, globalization and human rights. The "museum of the present time" is an institution committed to resisting slavery, racism, colonialist status and departmentalization (Vergès, 2018/2023).

Vergès, who conceived a "post-museum" called Maison des Civilisations et de l'Unité Réunionnaise (MCUR) on La Réunion Island (French colony), recounts the failure of this ambitious cultural project. MCUR aimed to be an innovative museum and cultural centre dedicated to celebrating and preserving the island's cultural, historical and social diversity. Its main objective was to highlight La Réunion Island's multicultural heritage, promoting unity and understanding between the different communities that make up the island's population, including descendants of Africans, Europeans, Indians and Chinese. Through exhibitions, events and educational programs, the MCUR planned to explore themes such as colonization, slavery, migration and the construction of Réunion's cultural identity.

Furthermore, the MCUR would be a museum without objects, since most of the colonial remains had been destroyed. It would, however, be a museum of the present, using interviews, current images and stories of struggles in the present that refer back to the colonial past. However, neither artists nor politicians supported the project, and it was ultimately scrapped. The press reports suggested that this was an expensive and unnecessary project, when what people really needed was housing and schools. The MCUR was, in fact, a missed opportunity to retell the island's history from a decolonial perspective, giving visibility to previously obscure facts.

How do you make a museum without objects? According to Vergès (2018/2023), every museological narrative develops around an object, be it a painting, a sculpture or art piece. But the proposed project questioned this narrative. How can we address slavery if the objects have been removed? How could the museum deal with the missing objects? In Vergès's opinion, it would be necessary to develop other ways of telling stories in a museum. The MCUR would be a museum without objects, but it would not use digital or virtual media.

> We would have started from fragments and traces of the lives of women and men who had brought dreams, myths, narratives, knowledge and an unbreakable desire for freedom to this island of exile, deportation and immigration. We would have evoked his itineraries with polyphonic montages, with installations that mixed theatrical, cinematographic and sound forms with drawings (including children's drawings), comics and objects. (Vergès, 2018/2023, pp. 144–145)

Without physical objects, without images from the period, the museum would only be left with critical thoughts and current narratives about the past. The analysis of historical documents and records, the process of reconstructing the lives that were there, the voice of the people narrating their stories, the music, the contemporary paintings, the theatrical performances. Thus, they would be the "objects of nothing" (Vergès, 2018/2023, p. 145).

5. Network Battles: Bridging the Gap Between the Lusophone Virtual Museum and the Concept of the Post-Museum

It is in this context of interculturality, decoloniality and post-museality that the Virtual Museum of Lusophony is inserted, as a symbolic territory of resistance and counter-hegemonic struggle. Developed under the direction of Moisés de Lemos Martins at the Communication and Society Research Centre at the University of Minho, the museum was envisioned as a symbolic territory in cyberspace and is dedicated to preserving and disseminate the cultural and artistic diversity of the Portuguese-speaking countries (Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor) and their diasporas, also extending to regions such as Galicia, Spain, and Macau, China (Carvalho, 2019; Martins, 2015a; Martins, 2018). Rather than focusing on physical artifacts and material collections, the Virtual Museum of Lusophony adopts a broader and more inclusive approach that values the narratives, memories and experiences of Lusophone communities around the world. The information is available in five areas: gallery, phonotheque, film library, library and glossary.

The idea of the Virtual Museum of Lusophony is framed by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (1982/1989), and specifically by the concept of "symbolic power" (p. 7), which sees a fundamental division in the relationship between peoples, communities and cultures. Among peoples, communities and cultures, there are those who are dominant and those who are subaltern. Of course, this relationship of domination and subalternity is produced in history by the political practices of States, wars and physical violence. But in addition to this historical process, there is a symbolic historical process. In this case, it is an invisible structured process over time, exercised mainly through art, religion and language. They are not transcendental symbolic forms, but socially constructed and used as instruments of power and domination. Bourdieu (1982/1989) points out

that symbolic systems, that is, cultures, arts and religions, not only tell us the reality of social di/visions, but also contribute to their actual existence. Symbolic systems thus have structuring power, influencing the perception of reality and establishing an order of knowledge. This symbolic ordering serves the interests of the dominant class by silencing and subordinating other voices. The resistance to this homogenization of social reality lies in interculturality, through decolonial studies (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). In order to bring the Virtual Museum of Lusophony closer to the concept of "post-museum" (Enwezor, 2003; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Vergès, 2018/2023), in this article we analyse the exhibitions available on the platform: "Capulana: Tradição e Arte das Mulheres Moçambicanas" (Capulana: Tradition and Art of Mozambican Women), by Mozambican artist Yassmin Forte, which is part of the Gallery section, and the radio program *Agora... Acontece!*, issue Number 250[1], by journalist Carlos Pinto Coelho, which is part of the Phonotheque section.

All the exhibitions, programs shown in the phonotheque, videos in the film library, items in the library and the glossary are created by curators who are part of the museum's cultural network. It is a way of giving a voice to social actors who have the most diverse identities within Portuguese-Speaking countries. An example of this is the "Capulana" exhibition by Mozambican photographer Yassmin Forte. Winner of the CAP Prize for "This Is a Story About My Family" (Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2023), Yassmin Forte projects in the two collections made available to the Museum a vision that addresses the effects of colonialism and migration, using photographic archives of Mozambican families. Born in Quelimane, Zambezia, she arrived in Maputo at the age of six and developed an interest in photography from an early age, influenced by the rich cultural diversity and vibrant landscapes of her country.

Yassmin Forte's work focuses on social, cultural and environmental themes, telling trivial stories that nevertheless highlight the beauty, resilience and dignity of people in their natural environment. The artist has participated in several exhibitions, both in Mozambique and internationally. In addition to her career as a photographer, she is an activist for cultural preservation and gender equality, using her art to raise awareness and inspire social change. At the Virtual Museum of Lusophony, Yassmin has two exhibitions on Mozambican women: "Capulana: Tradição e Arte das Mulheres Moçambicanas" and "As Mulheres da Minha Terra" (The Women of My Land).

In "Capulana: Tradição e Arte das Mulheres Moçambicanas", Yassmin Forte uses the capulana as a symbol of Mozambican cultural identity and resistance to the cultural hegemony imposed by European colonialism, which tried to minimize and even eradicate elements of Mozambican cultural expression. In the post-colonial period, the capulana transcended its traditional use as a garment and became a means of artistic and intellectual expression. Fashion designers, artists and intellectuals use the capulana

[1] The 250th edition of the program *Agora... Acontece!* is also available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzUFo1mzolo.

in their creations, exploring aesthetic and symbolic possibilities, as a way of affirming African creativity and innovation, thus challenging stereotypes and promoting a decolonial narrative[2].

Yassmin Forte's exhibition includes 13 photographs of Mozambican women in everyday activities, using the capulana as a garment and a tool to help them work and look after their children. The exhibition is narrated by means of captions that address the use of the capulana as an element of the Mozambican population's identity. It's interesting that in addition to the history of the fabric and its cultural resistance, there is a step-by-step guide that includes photographs and captions that teach how to wear a capulana, so that a Mozambican tradition can be adopted by any woman who is interested in the garment, which is, after all, a gesture of cultural sharing[3].

With the aim of promoting awareness among Portuguese-speaking countries of their countless forms of artistic and cultural expression**,** bringing them together, preserving them and disseminating them globally, the Virtual Museum of Lusophony has the rights to broadcast the radio program *Agora... Acontece!*[4], presented by Carlos Pinto Coelho, ending in 2010. The journalist, television presenter and emblematic figure of journalism in Portugal, stood out when he presented the program *Agora...Acontece!* on RTP2, dedicated to cultural and artistic promotion. In recognition of his cultural contribution, his family donated Pinto Coelho's personal collection to the Department of Communication Sciences and the Communication and Society Research Centre at the University of Minho, where the material is preserved and studied.

With an innovative and comprehensive approach to cultural, artistic and social themes, although not explicitly focused on postcoloniality, the program frequently raised issues relevant to this field of study. Through interviews, music and debates, the program reflects on Portugal's colonial heritage and its cultural impact. During the show, Carlos Pinto Coelho conducts interviews and promotes debates, which often include intellectuals, artists and activists from countries that were colonized by Portugal. These conversations enable the exploration of alternative narratives, as well as the deconstruction of Eurocentric discourses, both of which are fundamental to decolonial thinking.

In vignettes and background music, you can see the use of elements from various Portuguese-speaking countries. In program number 250, which we cover in this study, Carlos Pinto Coelho interviews Portuguese guitarist and composer Pedro Joia, about the release of the artist's album, entitled *Jacarandá*, in a partnership between Joia and Brazilian artists. In the interview, the musician explained why the album was called *Jacarandá* and explained that it was the name of a tropical tree that is very important in the making of guitars, including the Portuguese guitar, as well as explaining that, in

[2] Interview with Yassmin Forte available at: "Diálogos em Travessia" (https://open.spotify.com/episode/5yXINwtuodR48VO2yighom?si=7f7c726223e64b2d).

[3] The collection is available at: https://artsandculture.google.com/story/jgVRLU6QG2VRVA?hl=pt-PT

[4] *Agora... Acontece!* episodes are available at https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/MgFhZLbzyObYCg.

Brazil, the tree is also known as *pau-santo*. The name of the album, according to the artist, was a tribute to brazilwood and the importance of jacaranda to the music he makes. Regarding the choice of partnerships, with big names in Brazilian music, the choice was made for diversity.

> What I found curious about this record was that it featured Brazilian singers, Brazilian interpreters from the most varied generations, from Ney Matogrosso, a 60-year-old man, to the group Pedro Luís e a Parede, Zeca Baleiro, who is from the new generation, and Mônica Salmasso, who is a very young singer from São Paulo. The interesting thing was to get Brazilian interpreters to sing songs that aren't their own, that don't fit into their musical universe. (Pedro Joia, *Agora... Acontece!*, Número 250; Museu Virtual da Lusofonia, s.d. 00:07:24)

The program has several sessions focused on Portuguese-language culture, offering literary, cinematographic, musical and exhibition recommendations, as well as interviews with personalities linked to the Portuguese-speaking world.

In summary, we can say that the Virtual Museum of Lusophony is not limited to physical collections, but values the diversity of narratives and experiences in Lusophone communities. Exhibitions such as "Capulana: Tradição e Arte das Mulheres Moçambicanas", by Yassmin Forte, and the radio program *Agora... Acontece!*, by Carlos Pinto Coelho, which, although not developed for the Museum, has its episodes shared by it, exemplify how the Museum can contribute to deconstructing the division between dominant and subaltern cultures, offering a space for multiple perspectives and intercultural dialog. Thus, the Virtual Museum of Lusophony can be linked to a "post-museum" model, by transforming cultural preservation into an act of resistance and inclusion, reaffirming the importance of a decolonial and interactive approach to cultural representation.

6. Final Considerations

Decolonial constellations stand out as a vital concept for understanding and transforming contemporary museum practices. The study reveals how art and cultural spaces can become arenas of resistance against the imperialism and hegemony that stemmed from colonialism which are still perpetuated today. By promoting new narratives and valuing ancestral knowledge and traditions marginalized by colonialism, these constellations offer a powerful model for creating a more inclusive and representative cultural space. The interconnection of decolonial ideas and practices, reflected in institutions such as the African Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Virtual Museum of Lusophony, demonstrates the relevance and effectiveness of this approach in reinventing museums as a context of interculturality and resistance.

The African Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum have adopted practices that question and redefine colonial narratives, incorporating diverse perspectives and

voices. In turn, the Virtual Museum of Lusophony, with its innovative approach, exemplifies how cyberspace can be a symbolic territory for the preservation and celebration of Lusophone cultural diversity. Exhibitions such as "Capulana: Tradição e Arte das Mulheres Moçambicanas" and programs such as Agora... Acontece! can contribute, as long as they are contextualised and discussed critically and reflectively, to promote a more critical and inclusive engagement with cultural heritage. Finally, the decolonial approach proposed in this study reaffirms the importance of rethinking the role of museums in contemporary society. The practices and methodologies discussed offer a model for cultural institutions seeking to transcend colonial hegemony and adopt interculturality in its most dynamic forms. By valuing diverse perspectives and promoting a genuine dialog between cultures, museums can become real agents of social and cultural change. The post-museum paradigm, as exemplified by the institutions analysed, represents a crucial step in the creation of a cultural space that not only preserves, but also reimagines a diversity of histories and identities.

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