

Language As Art Object

*Africa in the Museums of the Portuguese Language—
Brazil and Portugal*¹

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A língua portuguesa é um patrimônio contencioso. Este ensaio apresenta o resultado de um trabalho de investigação comparada entre o Museu da Língua Portuguesa, em São Paulo, e os projetos de museus homólogos em Lisboa. O foco da investigação é a representação da África na meta-narrativa da língua portuguesa, em uma nova e potencialmente inovadora esfera, a das Artes. O ensaio procurará identificar as instâncias de continuidade e reconfiguração do império na imaginação da África no âmbito destas iniciativas de musealização do patrimônio imaterial (trans)nacional.

This essay sets out to analyze the vectors of continuity and reconfiguration of the Portuguese empire in the narratives of the Portuguese language in its two hegemonic spaces, and within a new sphere, that of the Arts. It will explore the language narratives as they materialized in the Museu da Língua Portuguesa in São Paulo, and in the convoluted trajectory of its homologous museum's projects in Lisbon. The main focus of this comparative analysis is how Africa—the one that belongs to the contemporary Portuguese and Brazilian imaginaries—has been represented in these museums. The object of analysis is therefore the imagination of Africa in Brazil and Portugal.

Introductory Note

On December 21st, 2015 the Museum of the Portuguese Language in São Paulo was partially destroyed by a tragic fire, which cost the life of a firefighter. Since then it has remained closed.

The Museu da Língua Portuguesa was not only a prestige object, as I argue in the essay. It also carried great significance, for it gave materiality to the narrative of the Portuguese language associated with the (Brazilian) nation and with an alleged (Lusophone) transnationality. Therefore the Museu was an object lesson in *Lusofonia* and a privileged space for studies and practices of Portuguese postcoloniality in the realm of the contemporary Arts. Moreover, the Museu was an innovative endeavor, associated with current initiatives of museumization of intangible cultural heritage. Such initiatives have been mushrooming across the globe and are transforming our ways of conceiving public culture and institutions in their interface with local/postcolonial communities. This context ties in with yet another novel and fundamental effort, namely that of *decolonizing museums*.

The essay problematizes the narrative of the Museu in São Paulo and the narrative of the homologous museum projects in Lisbon, with particular focus on the representations of Africa, and invites a rethinking of such projects. Right after the fire that destroyed São Paulo's Museu da Língua Portuguesa, public statements were made in Brazil about the intention to swiftly rebuild it and recover the collection, which was not damaged by the fire as it is digital.² This process of reconstruction and (re)collection offers an opportunity to reconceptualize the Museu.

In light of the recent fire, the essay has become an exercise in tracing echoes of Africa in museums that either were or would be. It articulates both a critique and an aspiration for *encountering* Africa outside of the realm of *phantasmagoria*.³

For museums, and the museumizing imagination are profoundly political.
(Anderson 178)

The Portuguese language is a contentious patrimony. Since the creation of the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP: Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries) in 1996, a range of representations of the Portuguese language has entered the public space and the political discourse in Portugal. In 2006, the Brazilian government and private initiatives launched the multimillion Museu da Língua Portuguesa project. In the same year the Portuguese government announced the project of the Museu Mar da Língua Portuguesa (Museum Sea of the Portuguese Language). This initiative remained dormant until 2009. From then until mid-2010, a Portuguese language museum was the object of successive projects, when the subject faded away from the public sphere.

I have traced the trajectory of the museum projects in Lisbon, visited its envisioned structures and interviewed some of those involved in conceiving the projects' infrastructures and contents. In São Paulo I visited the Museum and also interviewed those who conceived the project: the architects who renovated the building that would host the museum, the anthropologist in charge of the contents of the project, and the director of the museum. This material, only used partially here, has supported my critical analysis.⁴

This essay sets out to analyze the vectors of continuity and reconfiguration of the Portuguese empire in the narratives of the Portuguese language in its two hegemonic spaces, and within a new sphere, that of the Arts. It will explore the language narratives as they materialized in the Museu da Língua Portuguesa in São Paulo, and in the convoluted trajectory of its homologous museum's projects in Lisbon. The main focus of this comparative analysis is how *Africa*—that belongs to the contemporary Portuguese and Brazilian imaginary—has been the one represented in these museums. The object of analysis is therefore the imagination of Africa in Brazil and Portugal.

Museums—Politics of Representation

Viewing language as an artistic object offers new possibilities for processes of restatement, negotiation and subversion of hegemonic national narratives linked to empire. Mary Louise Pratt's problematization of colonial contact is of particular relevance for my purposes:

Contact zone [is the term] I use to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples, geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. (Pratt 8)

Borrowing from Pratt, James Clifford (408) defines museums as contact zones.⁵ His aim is to avoid reproducing the erasure of subaltern practices that marks sociological and cultural analyses, and to foreground the perspectives of "others." However, his analysis does not hold when applied to "mainstream or central museums," which are those erected with the main purpose of staging the hegemonic national narrative.⁶ Nuno Porto has already questioned the perversity of this perspective:

O exercício falha (a) porque deixa de fora a questão essencial que é a produção de novas formas culturais de "contacto," e (b) porque, na medida em que o Museu é uma instância de controle e regulação instituída e necessariamente posterior à conquista e dominação, pretender torná-lo uma "zona de contacto" é, seguindo os termos de Pratt, uma estratégia de "anticonquista," ou seja, uma "estratégia de representação pela qual o sujeito europeu burguês

procura assegurar a sua inocência no mesmo movimento em que reivindica a hegemonia europeia” (Pratt, 1992, p. 8). (Porto 137)

Porto conceives the museum as a *mechanism of cultural contact*. He contends that this perspective brings to the fore the aspect of cultural confrontation enacted in the museum:

Percebê-lo [o museu] como um mecanismo, precisa a delimitação de condições prévias que normalizem o carácter forçado da co-presença e a unilateralidade da sua activação, bem como dos protocolos e propósitos com que é realizada. . . . Esta é toda a diferença entre zona e mecanismo, porque o contacto cultural é nem mais nem menos que *brigar* pela ordem das coisas. (Porto 137)

The textual operations of the “anti-conquest” support thinking through what I term the *spectacle of the contact zone* displayed at postcolonial museums. The anti-conquest, Pratt argues, is shaped in relation and opposition to territorial conquest and economic exploitation. Against the guilt of invasion, an innocent and sentimental language of remorse emerges. She reveals the hierarchies along lines of race and gender present in this imagination, whereby the white male subject takes hold of indigenous subjects not through forceful domination but erotic desire.⁷

As Clifford rightfully indicates, there are other strategies of engaging with such representations on the side of those subalternized by them (197).⁸ These dynamics are existent even in central museums where the Empire is hegemonic. However, given the sheer dimension of this imbalance in central museums, such dynamics should remain as reminders of the possibilities that emerge out of the utopia or the desire of a *fair encounter*.

The *anti-conquest* is then a particular *grammar* (Anderson 163–185) or *archive* (Porto 125–142) embedded in Western supremacy, which legitimizes the imperial enterprise. The representation of others is at the core of this fantasy. For Benedict Anderson, museums have a critical role in the construction of the “imagined community,” that is the nation. Borrowing from Ivan Karp, Porto argues that the museum provides a “*declaração artefactual*” about the relative position of elements in such narrative and their worth.⁹ This *artifactual statement* shapes the identity of the viewer vis-à-vis the nation (Porto 133).

The projects of colonization, nation building and construction of a transnational community converge around the Portuguese language. The Brazilian Museum and the Portuguese Museum projects had a variety of African others to negotiate with while displaying their language narratives.¹⁰ They connected this past with the present in order to shape collective memories. Analysis of these narratives suggests the manner in which Portuguese and Brazilian societies deal with a racialized history.

Africa in the Portuguese Contemporary Imaginary

Africans have been in the Iberian Peninsula since the 10th century. This presence has been narrated since the 13th century, when *the black* African was associated with violence and animality (Henriques 240). Africa has a distinctive and sustained place in Portuguese colonialism and in Portuguese metropolitan territory from the 15th century on.¹¹ Consequently, the imaginary of the Portuguese empire is present in the most important reflections on the Portuguese national identity (Leal, João 63–79).

Africa is not only inscribed in the narrative of Portuguese nationality, but, as argued by Manuela Mourão (90–124), the very emergence of the concept of race (cultural hierarchy attached to skin color) was facilitated by the 15th–16th century early *encounters* between the Portuguese and those non-Western peoples who *became* their colonial subjects. The modern imagination of Africa is therefore a racialized construct shaped in the context of imperial conquest. *The black uncivilized*—later legally classified “*indígenas*” (indigenous peoples)—were represented as uncouth and inferior, apt for hard labor, and exposed as exotic, in need of civilizing (mainly through evangelization).¹² This representation supported and accompanied the enslavement and commercialization of Africans by the Portuguese from the 15th to the 19th centuries. In Portugal, up until the mid-20th century, blood purity remained the hegemonic national model (Matos 287). It was only in the post-war period that the Estado Novo (New State) embraced *Lusotropicalismo*’s positive outlook on miscegenation (Castelo 166). The genealogy of *Africa* in Portugal therefore comprises colonialism and the building of a national community inclusive of the empire, which is dependent on the subjugation of the racialised subject from *overseas*. *The black colonial other* became a defining element of Portuguese nationality and remains so in the *postempire*.¹³

With the socialist Revolução dos Cravos (Carnation Revolution) of 1974 and the demise of the Portuguese Terceiro Império (Third Empire) in Africa, there has been an explicit rupture with the colonial narrative, though colonial continuities were also carried into the national imagination (Ribeiro 132–214).¹⁴ The influential writings of sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos both problematized the association empire/nation and reinforced some of the important tropes of this imagination. Santos characterized Portuguese culture as a (hybrid) borderzone (Santos 135–157) and defined Portuguese colonialism as subaltern (Santos 23–85). Fernando Arenas pointed out an important resonance with *Lusotropicalismo* here, which was the trajectory from a valorization of *the black* towards a validation of Portuguese colonization (Arenas).^{15,16}

This kind of self-narrated imperial benevolence persists in Portuguese culture in apparent contrast to, but actually in consonance with, the subalternity of the Afro-Portuguese. Recent ethnographic research reveals the low status

of groups of “African origin” in Portugal (Cabecinhas 69–91). It shows that the hegemonic culture does not translate the discourse of welcoming hybridism into a practice of interaction with *other* subjects and cultures (Khan 1–26). Effectively, this discourse is itself constitutive of the continuous working of Empire. Manuela Ribeiro Sanches indicates the recurrence of cultural tropes wherein Portugal is portrayed as a: “Lusotropical paradise, . . . identified with postcolonial hybridity, implicitly evoking the disavowal of the colonial past, present in less confrontational, though no less aggressive, forms of racism that make it all the more difficult for blacks to frame their claims against discriminatory racial practices” (Sanches, “Reading the Postcolonial” 141).¹⁷

Moreover, hiding behind the narrative of hybridity is a normative white male national citizen.¹⁸ Manuela Mourão (94) posits that the Portuguese have constructed their national identity around their imperial role in the world as having “created mulattoes.” However, they have built their racial identity as white; an imagination which they continue to hold on to. Lisbon is paradigmatic of this dynamic. According to Paulo de Medeiros (“Nevoeiro branco” 31–39), the city, despite a visible “African presence,” is covered by a “*nevoeiro branco*” (white fog) that reveals the very whitening and blind aspects of its imperial memory.

In the Portuguese Arts, the colonial heritage inscribed itself from the World Exhibitions through the birth of the Portuguese ethnographic museum in the late 19th century, and still lingers on. In the context of Portugal, the imagination of the non-Western (the non-white), fashioned against the metropolitan self, has been insufficiently analyzed (Cantinho 203–212). Particularly in the Visual Arts, the non-Western is silenced and rendered invisible, and efforts to rethink Portuguese colonial history and its postcolonialism are incipient (Dias, José António B. Fernandes 330). Nevertheless, there have been curatorial experiences that counter this trend. Inês Costa Dias has analyzed recent art exhibits in Portugal that undo the invisibility of subaltern histories, thus critiquing the mainstream narrative that celebrates the Empire, fashioning it as a fraternal encounter. This postcolonial *encounter* is often performed around the Portuguese language. Identifying the possibilities and limitations of such experiences, Dias defines “lusophonie as an identity conundrum—a conceptual context of contested discourses” (Dias, Inês Costa 8). However, according to the author, these efforts have faltered in a context of postcolonial amnesia and neo-colonial conservative reception. The postempire is thus actively maintained as a narrative space of harmonious conviviality and common history. Elsa Peralta correctly indicates that artistic expression acting as a public confrontation between different versions of the national past is rare and exceptional, because it would destabilize the national narrative. She poses that “conspiracies of silence” about the violent

episodes of national history shape this memory: “a wide-ranging and trivial remembrance scheme” (Peralta).

This memory is haunted by the colonial ghost of *Africa* as a token of female racialised alterity, of *Africa* as mirror image to an aspired Portuguese masculine whiteness. And it has a strong presence within the imagination of the Portuguese language, an actual stand-in for the *Great Portugal* that is *not a small country*, the reimaged transnational empire.¹⁹

Africa in the Brazilian Contemporary Imaginary

In Brazil, *Africa* is branded with the history of three centuries of enslavement and transatlantic forced transport to the new Portuguese colony from the 16th to the 19th centuries, and the stigma of a sizeable population perceived as in need of social disciplining and state control. *Africa* is therefore a substantial and fundamental part of nationality, albeit a subaltern part.

As indicated by Miguel Vale de Almeida, while Brazilian independence in 1822 was achieved by and for local elites of European origin, the presence of Afro-descendants and the abolition of slavery were central themes in the construction of national identity. However, the appreciation of this presence changed along the decades. Until the 1930s, the predominant perspective pointed to national degeneration as a consequence of African influences. In the second half of the 20th century, this was substituted by a positive perspective towards miscegenation, which however never ceased to be considered simultaneous to a desirable whitening of Brazilian society (Almeida, *O Atlântico pardo* 27–43).²⁰ Analyzing the trajectory of representations of Africa in the Brazilian national imaginary, Antonio Motta and Luiz Oliveira defined these two moments as “*etnopessimismo*” (ethno-pessimism) and “*etnoufanismo culturalista*” (culturalist ethno-patriotism) respectively (223). According to the authors, an inward-looking Brazilian Social Science tradition sought to conceptualize the racially mixed nation upon images of “*África em casa*” (Africa at home) as one of its main representations of internal alterity (214). As in Portugal, Africa in Brazil stands for the nation’s racialized other—the *black*.

Gilberto Freyre’s widely influential *Lusotropicalismo* had a paramount role in shaping Brazilian miscegenated national identity as a product of the Portuguese colonial enterprise qua civilizational process.²¹ Despite sustained critique, *Lusotropicalismo* endures as the common-sense *explanation* of Brazil. Nowadays, affirms Kelly Cristiane da Silva (141–160), the official narrative of the nation upholds Brazil as a racial democracy of Portuguese making, in which the unequal power relations between subjects and groups that constitute the Brazilian nation are absent.

Miscegenation is now entering its third century as the defining aspect of the national uniqueness of Brazil. Lilia Moritz Schwarcz argues that, from the first ethnographic museums associated with scientific racism until the ascendance of *Lusotropicalismo*, the problem of nationality remained a question of nature, which consequently emptied the debate on citizenship. Accordingly, Brazil strongly promoted its *mestiça* self-image, which assumed a mark of exoticism commodified as spectacle (Schwarcz 239–250). The association between the *exotic other* and gender, as part of the colonial matrix, is a fundamental aspect in grasping the ideology of *mestiçagem* (racial mixture) in its insidious continuities.

In the Arts, the museumization of the heritage of the African and Afro-descendant cultures in Brazil comprised the same two phases delineated above. Initially portrayed as an exotic fetish or as a manifestation of a naïve culture, it gained a positive connotation, whereby the manifest African heritage became secondary to the recognition of a docile and harmonious “*abrasileiramento*” (process of becoming Brazilian) (Lody 256). Currently, museums that work with the African cultural heritage in Brazil share a motivation to recover a concealed part of its national history. Yet, as Marta Heloísa Salum of the Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia da Universidade de São Paulo (Museum of Archeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo) points out in general, museums generally still classify African objects according to “European categories,” which is a trend that perpetuates the colonial bias.

Overall, the visibility of Africa in Brazilian Arts and the wider culture does not incur thinking through and reworking colonialism. From the early 1980s, “more than ever before, black culture is prominent in the images and discourses of official and commercial Brazilianness” (Sansone, “From Africa to Afro” 10).²² However, even several of the emancipatory movements and intellectual attempts to recover the African contribution to Brazilian identity have relied on mythical images of Africa (Oliva).

Nor does this presence signify the transformation of relations indebted to colonialism. Racism is still endemic in Brazil, and quite perverse, the invisibility of black people amidst a public space saturated with *black culture*. According to Haroldo Costa, racial prejudice is exercised in Brazil in a dissimulated manner, being denied while it affirms itself (Costa 17). In staggering contrast to the myth of racial equality and harmony, socio-economic positions in Brazil are markedly distributed along racial lines, and the black population is *disproportionally* targeted by violence.

Since 1995, governments have been responsive to claims forwarded by the Afro-Brazilian anti-racism movements. Policy initiatives such as affirmative action have been met with fierce criticism but are being put in place nonetheless.²³ Increasingly, Afro-descendants are entering the realm of citizenship,

and instances where African heritage has been silenced are being brought to light. Emanuel Araújo, the director of the Museu Afro Brasil in São Paulo, indicates nevertheless the lasting subaltern position of Africa in Brazil, inside and beyond the museum:

[O] Museu Afro [Brasil . . .] incomoda, porque aquilo está na garganta dessa sociedade que acha que lugar de negro é na África. Que o lugar do negro é numa África imaginária, porque eles não sabem nem o que é a África. (qtd. in Leal, Cláudio)

The same association of race and gender with the nation, inherited from the colonial matrix, shape the imaginary of the Portuguese landscape in Brazil as they do in Portugal, and these imaginaries share important cultural tropes. However, a marked difference in Brazil is that *Africa* belongs to the inward sense of a bounded, though majestic, national self.

As other spheres of culture, the language imaginary reproduces mechanisms of subalternization, but can—or could—also offer a narrative for transformation. How have the Portuguese language museum in Brazil and homologous projects in Portugal worked with these imaginings on language and nation, and what *artifactual statement* have they displayed? The following analysis will focus on the location of the museums, that is, the *framing* of the narrative, and on its interior, that is, its canvas. This articulation positions the African other within the language narrative.

Museu da Língua Portuguesa—São Paulo

The Museu da Língua Portuguesa in São Paulo²⁴ was a mainly publicly-funded initiative of the São Paulo government, with the powerful media conglomerate Fundação Roberto Marinho guiding its conception and implementation.²⁵ A team of more than thirty professionals was involved in these phases, under the leadership of anthropologist and producer Isa Grinspun Ferraz. The protocol for the creation of the museum was signed in 2002 and the museum opened its doors in 2006, to shut them down in the aftermath of the fire, in December 2015.

The train station Estação da Luz (Station of Light) framed the museum. This station is part of a historical heritage of the 19th century, built by the (British-run) São Paulo Railway for the coffee trade, which fostered Brazil's economic development. The station served as the main port of entrance for goods and people to the booming city. Architects Paulo Mendes da Rocha and his son Pedro restored Luz in order to host the Museum. Paulo is one of the most renowned Brazilian architects, having been awarded the prestigious Pritzker Prize. Pedro is a well-known architect in his own right.



Figure 1. By Lais Braga Figueiredo

Este projeto incidia sobre as duas instâncias do patrimônio: o patrimônio material, que é a revitalização do edifício; e com o patrimônio imaterial, que é a língua. Fundamentalmente nos preocupamos com as ideias de resgate, de permanência e de lançamento para o futuro. (Pedro Mendes da Rocha)²⁶

The station was then paradigmatic of the concept behind the project, and the city provided the larger context for the narrative: São Paulo becoming the dynamic economic center of Brazil through the contribution of Western immigrants and Northeastern migrants.

Eu queria que se mostrasse o valor do lugar: da urgência em que se fala, a estação, o trem, as viagens, a comunicação. (Paulo Mendes da Rocha)²⁷

The language narrative conveyed in the entrails of Luz departed from this metaphorical vocabulary to populate it with further references that are recurrent in Brazilian culture. They are both indebted to colonialism and the recent project of redemocratization.

Os quatro eixos principais do projeto eram: a antiguidade da língua, que é o fruto da mistura de três povos, três mundos que se juntaram neste mundo; a mestiçagem da língua—essa é uma língua mestiça como o nosso povo é mestiço; a universalidade da língua que é falada por muitos falantes em vários continentes; e o movimento da língua se recriando a cada dia, em cada esquina, tanto pelos poetas quanto pelo povo. (Isa Grinspum Ferraz)²⁸



Figure 2. By Cleber Quadros

The Museum occupied four thousand square meters, distributed over three floors.²⁹ I will describe and analyze some of the exhibit spaces in the sequence that they were offered to the visitor. In the museum, the spatial disposition is a fundamental aspect of the organization of the narrative. It guides the gaze by suggesting an *order*. Like a book, the visitor would read a particular *story* of the Portuguese language while traversing the museum.

The Grande Galeria immersed the visitor in the meta-narrative of a Brazilian culture that is both contemporary and popular staged in the Museum. The Galeria was a majestic screen of one hundred and six square meters—a composition of simultaneous video and audio—celebrating the Portuguese language in its *richness, diversity* and *movement*. It posited that the language of Portuguese roots derives its originality from the popular character it gained in Brazil. It is the everyday language of 180 million Brazilians,³⁰ who are its authors inhabiting a *vast and varied* territory; the language of soccer deemed by Pelé as the reinvention of *our* street kids; the language of food fashioned by the hands of a *black slave*, of *our typically mixed feijoada*; the language of *our* music, a *sweeter* Portuguese, becoming *more Brazilian* the more *mixed* it gets; the language of dance *jointly performed* by the Portuguese and indigenous peoples upon the *Discovery*, and played by *African slaves* to sharpen and hide their fighting skills; and the language of *our nature* and



Figure 3. By Claudio Zeiger

culture changing along with them, since the Portuguese language of Brazil is *alive!*

The museum used contemporary resources to de-construct the canonical language, which was posited as a malleable object of daily change. Concurrently, whenever possible, the literary canon was revealed as popular as well. This powerful operation was given analytical density by Gilberto Freyre.³¹ The anthropologist instituted a fundamental shift in the thinking about Brazil. He dethroned the previous national icons, placing *the Brazilian people* at the core of nationality. Simultaneously, he defended the high values of Portuguese culture inherited from the imperial language.

In the Grande Galeria, Portuguese scholars emphasized the mixed composition of Europe itself, and of Portugal in particular, highlighting the five hundred years of Arab occupation. From this history of encounter framed as *convivial exchange*, Portuguese colonization was conveyed as a benevolent endeavor. The linguist Ivo Castro stated in the video-fragment *Raíz Lusa* (Lusitanian Roots): “Quando o português chega ao Brasil, já leva uma longa experiência de se misturar, inclusivamente na cama, com outras raças e outras religiões e outras línguas.” The Galeria recovered Gilberto Freyre’s utopia of imperial inspiration.

Overall the museum's permanent and temporary exhibits primarily targeted school children, sparking their interest and curiosity in literature and language. The recurrent point of departure was a conceptualization of Brazilian culture as *plural*, as argued above by Freyre. Regionalism was highly valued, as well as language *reinvention*, exploring the *frontiers* between languages and exposing the *transit* of linguistic forms, literary modes and oral expressions.

Among these strategies there were outstanding trends regarding the representation of Africa, namely recovery, selective absence and incorporation, the imperial gaze and othering.

Such trends were present unevenly at different locations around the museum. The Grande Galeria, which was the main and most impressive area of the museum, serving as its opening chapter or introduction, staged a *Luso-tropical* narrative that mainly incorporated and othered Africa and (descendants of) Africans. Elsewhere, in the less prominent and seductive spaces, the Museum recovered to some extent the painstaking history of Africans and Afro-descendants in Brazil.

After crossing the Galeria, the visitor arrived at the more sober Linha do Tempo, which was described as a tripartite chronology narrating the history of the Portuguese language in Brazil, through: the history of the Portuguese language in Europe; some history of the indigenous cultures in Brazil and moments of the history of some African cultures—mainly of the speakers of the Niger-Congo languages brought to Brazil. In the 16th century, these three strands were melded together into the timeline of the Brazilian Portuguese language, a variant of the Portuguese language born out of those *encounters*, which was coined “*mestiça* language.”

A Linha do Tempo pretende mostrar como estes povos têm histórias riquíssimas e antiquíssimas, que se somaram e se mesclaram no Brasil. Queríamos desmistificar o quanto possível naquele pequeno espaço, todos os preconceitos que existem no Brasil sobre os povos africanos, essa herança escravista terrível que nós carregamos. (Isa Grinspum Ferraz)

The European timeline gazed at Portugal through the national imagery of the *Discoveries* (the sea, the castle, and the lighthouse), underscoring the humanistic discourse that shapes the national historical canon: “Aos portugueses cabe a glória de haverem sido os principais animadores desse primeiro esforço de unificação da humanidade (Jaime Cortesão).” In the African timeline, the *immense continent* was characterized as *pluri-ethnic*, *multicultural* and *multilingual*. Even though there was reference to the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa has vibrant urban cultures, the images shown focused almost exclusively on rural Africa. This imagery resonates with the mythical Africa inscribed in Brazilian common lore.



Figure 4. By Daniel Macêdo Batista

The Brazilian timeline revealed the growing scope of a revisionist discourse. With regard to the history of language in Brazil, linguist Yeda Pessoa de Castro was featured in a video countering the impression that the Africans brought to Brazil did not speak languages or could not speak at all. Instead, she told the history of bi- and multilingualism of (formerly) enslaved Africans in Brazil. The Timeline called attention to the process of forcefully establishing the hegemony of the Portuguese language in Brazil. Finally, Castro affirmed that African languages are the main factors in the process of distancing Brazilian Portuguese from Lusitanian Portuguese, rescuing the Portuguese language from an authoritative white domain.

The room of the *Linha do Tempo* was cut by playful pillars equipped with touch screens named *Palavras Cruzadas*. These showcased the main influences on the Brazilian Portuguese, as well as other Brazilian (minority) languages.

Two such Crosswords thematized African languages, namely Yoruba and Ewe-*fon* and Kikongo, Kimbundu and Umbundu, stating:

Entre os séculos XVI e XIX foram trazidos para o Brasil entre quatro e cinco milhões de africanos escravizados . . . [Eles] foram povoando a língua portuguesa de palavras novas e sonoras . . . [E]ra impossível não imitá-las, era irresistível não repeti-las—as palavras ficaram sendo profundamente nossas.



Figure 5. By Marilane Borges

Here a *Lusotropical* motivation rescued African history for the national narrative. Simultaneously, the trademark of miscegenation was replicated, in which seduction and musicality are associated with the African other, and the *Brazilian trait of assimilation* is foregrounded.

Also highly problematic was the representation of the Portuguese language *community*. The crossword titled *O Português no Mundo* (Portuguese in the World) was composed of Brazilian or Luso-Brazilian filmic material. In reference to information on African countries, historical data was inaccurate, namely regarding independence dates. Furthermore, there was a recurrent affirmation of *mestiçagem* as the national particularity associated with the Portuguese language. Altogether, the material was markedly full of praise and Portuguese colonial reminiscences, framed in narratives that practically erased any conflict from the history of Portuguese colonization.³²

There has been one temporary exhibit dealing explicitly and critically with the imagination of Africa in Brazilian culture, where writer Machado de Assis's own conflicted relation to race was thematized.³³ This exhibit revealed the sensibilities about race and gender, and the desired whitening of Brazilian elites in the 19th century. It also showed the writer's awareness of racial prejudice and his criticism of slavery and the pretence of high culture of the Brazilian bourgeoisie.³⁴



Figure 6. By André Stolarski

However, as a whole, the Museum imported a narrative from Portugal that gazes at the African continent through the Portuguese colonial frame. The visitor was confronted with an inflated perspective of Portuguese culture and language in Africa, which mentioned but underplayed other cultural and linguistic traits. In this way, *Lusofonia* (the Lusophone world) gained life in discourse.

Com os demais países de língua portuguesa, o nosso interlocutor preferencial tem sido a CPLP. Eu acho que quatro anos depois da inauguração, o museu está engatinhando muito na questão das suas relações com os demais países de língua portuguesa. (Antonio Carlos Sartini, Director MLP-SP)³⁵

The museum visit ended at the Praça da Língua, its closing chapter or conclusion, where a selection of the canon of Brazilian and Portuguese literature was shown in the context of Brazil's cultural movements. It was an apotheosis that reinforced a settled notion of Brazilian national culture associated with a language that incorporated several influences, appealing to the visitors' nationalist sentiments.

Os meninos brasileiros têm que ter orgulho de serem brasileiros, que não é um orgulho nacionalista trivial, mas é saber que somos frutos de povos ancestrais e cheios de uma cultura única singular no mundo que tem uma mensagem planetária. É isso que o Museu quer dizer. (Isa Grinspum Ferraz)

Museum Projects—Lisbon

In Portugal, the idea of a language museum changed according to different perspectives on Portuguese national culture in an evolving political context and deteriorating economic situation. Yet an element that has remained constant in the concept of the museum has been its location in the capital city, which foregrounds an association with the Portuguese empire and its others—at times the colonial subject and at other times the postcolonial subaltern—namely the African (descendant) who settles in Lisbon.

Museu Mar da Língua Portuguesa— Explorações Oceânicas e Expansão do Português³⁶

The first project, of 2006/2007, looked at the Portuguese language from the perspective of Portuguese imperial history. The location chosen was the building of the inactive Museu de Arte Popular (Folk Art Museum), which was to be renovated. This Museum was built in the 1940s during the right-wing Estado Novo regime, which cherished the image of the Portuguese rural worker as the epitome of national identity. That space was one of the temporary sites to host the *Exposição do Mundo Português* (The Portuguese World Exhibition), a propaganda stunt of the fascist-colonialist regime.

The Museu de Arte Popular's main theme was popular festivities, and its main objects were handicrafts and utensils exhibited in rooms decorated with murals of Modernist aesthetics. Upon the announcement of the language museum, a petition was initiated against hosting it in the premises of the Museu de Arte Popular.



Figure 7. By Museu de Arte Popular



Figure 8. By José Pessoa

A intenção do Ministro de colocar o Museu da Língua no espaço do Museu de Arte Popular—que estava desativado—gerou um grande movimento na sociedade civil no sentido de dizer não mexam no Museu, porque ele tem um património que é preciso reconquistar, reinventar, modernizar mas não pôr no lixo. (Maria João Rocha, PR Frente Tejo—support for the redevelopment of the Museu de Arte Popular)³⁷

Aquela petição foi assinada por uma meia dúzia de pessoas. Eu considero a decisão de se manter o Museu de Arte Popular um erro absoluto. Qual é a prioridade do ministro da Cultura? Um museu do artesanato do Estado Novo ou um museu da língua portuguesa? (Nuno Artur Silva, contents project of the Museu da Língua Portuguesa–Lisboa)³⁸



Figure 9. By Cleber Quadros

Despite the debatable historical value of the building and its heritage, its location by the riverside area of Belém parish has an undoubtedly consensual historical importance. It hosts a series of prestigious museums and other icons of national identity associated with empire.

Havia evidentemente um problema com a herança do Estado Novo no edifício do Museu de Arte Popular. Seria necessário reenquadrar as ex-colônias no conceito do novo museu. A vantagem, no entanto, de se fazer o museu da língua no Museu de Arte Popular, é sua localização. Belém tem uma clara associação com as Descobertas. (Júlio de Matos, architect for the Sea Museum project)³⁹

The museum project approached the Portuguese language as “the most visible lasting result of the oceanic explorations undertaken by the Portuguese in the 15th and 16th centuries.” The language was to highlight the past and present forms of “the problematic assertion of Portugal in the World” (Morna et al. 5, 9).

The main thread of the museum would have been to *clarify* Portugal’s historical role of *bringing together* worlds and cultures: from the early maritime explorations (the *Discoveries*) until today, through its “contribution to consolidating the worldwide importance of the Portuguese language” (Morna et al. 5). The museum planned to stage this perspective along different exhibit spaces, namely: Pontos Cardeais, Novos Mundos, Espaço das Descobertas,

Aventura da Navegação, Universo da Língua, Laboratório dos Sentidos, Consultório, Os Nomes das Coisas, Labirinto da Palavra, and Pátio de Sabores.⁴⁰

Making use of multimedia technologies, the visitors would have been exposed to “a total experience of both a fun and educational nature.” This experience enabled “the (re)discovery of the Portuguese language” (Morna et al. 5, 7).

Africa was to be present or implicit in some of the themes. Under the section entitled the Aventura da Navegação (Adventure of Navigation), within the theme Encontro de Culturas (Encounter of Cultures), Portugal was going to figure as the first country to abolish slavery. In the section named Universo da Língua (Language Universe), language variation would be dealt with and the value of Creoles would be recovered. The intention was “to deconstruct assumptions and commonplaces” about language (Morna et al. 33, 39).

Throughout the visit, Africa was to be conveyed as a collection of languages and cultures which received the influences of Portuguese culture and language spread throughout the world, in oral and written language, music and gastronomy.

The project had several similarities with the Museum in São Paulo in terms of the technological resources used. However, the meta-narrative was distinct in its exclusive association with Portuguese maritime explorations, and the celebration of this history. The extension of this narrative to the contemporary world showed the contradictions of this particular project:

A ausência do Brasil e da África na parte de Literatura contemporânea do projeto foi sempre algo muito confuso. Fui incumbida pela Ministra a dar uma dimensão literária—literatura e poesia portuguesas—ao projeto, para juntar com a dimensão histórica e linguística. Eu achei que este projeto era uma oportunidade de retirar-se a questão da língua do circuito ideológico do império. Quando eu apresentei o material que havia escolhido para o museu, a Ministra disse que havia falta de textos da fase pesada do império. Houve uma grande discussão porque eu tinha entendido que o museu da língua não era propriamente o museu das Descobertas. (Fátima Morna, Sea Museum project)⁴¹

The project died a quiet death when the Ministry of Culture changed hands before the end of the political mandate.

Museu da Língua Portuguesa

The second project, of 2008/2009, intended to explore the urban and cosmopolitan facets of the language. The first location chosen to host the museum was the Rossio train station in downtown Lisbon.

A língua portuguesa era uma prioridade para o novo Ministro da Cultura. A nova perspectiva era a de não misturar a história dos Descobrimentos com a história da língua. Era um projeto enfocando as formas contemporâneas da



Figure 10. By Ingolf Berger

língua, embora também incluísse a ideia do curso histórico da língua. (Nuno Artur Silva, director of Produções Fictícias—contents of the project Museu da Língua Portuguesa–Lisboa)⁴²

The train would serve as metaphor to guide the project. Africa should have figured here as part of the contemporary manifestations of the Portuguese language. Rossio is notably an area of downtown Lisbon where (descendants of) (West) Africans are known to gather, thus becoming a visible presence.

O projeto seria desenvolvido principalmente em parceria e em contato com o Museu da Língua Portuguesa no Brasil. Haveria alguma atenção aos países africanos. Era um projeto muito estimulante sob a liderança da YDreams, que é pioneira mundial em tecnologias interativas. (Nuno Artur Silva)

As the project evolved, a second structure emerged as another possible host to the museum, the inactive Pavilhão de Portugal (Pavillion of Portugal). This building hosted the Portuguese national representation at the 1998 World Expo. The project of the Pavilhão was developed by the renowned Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza Vieira, and garnered him a Pritzker Prize.

The Pavilhão is located in the hyper-modern site of the Parque das Nações (Park of the Nations), which was built from scratch to host the Expo '98. The



Figure 11. By Alvaro Marçal



Figure 12. By Luisa Fecchio

theme of the fair was *Os Oceanos: Um Património para o Futuro* (Oceans: A Heritage for the Future), chosen as part of the 500 years' *Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses* (Commemorations of the Portuguese Discoveries).

According to Francisco Bethencourt, the Expo '98 marked a rupture with the historical imaginary of the *Estado Novo*. The history [of the *Discoveries*] turned into a Portuguese trademark associated with technological achievement (Bethencourt 442–480). The colonial (dis)encounter seems to be erased from this apparently neutral site. It offers a space associated with an imagination of the future.

However, the contemporary approach to the language museum, whether located at Rossio or at the Pavillion was not too welcome.

Nos bastidores corria a ideia de que havia um projeto [do Museu da Língua Portuguesa] muito moderno. Havia a idéia de que o projeto não teria a consistência ao nível de conteúdos que Portugal, que as elites portuguesas exigem quando se trata da língua. Anonymous (involved in one of the projects in Lisbon)⁴³

The Minister of Culture reached the end of his mandate and the project was dropped.

Museu da Viagem—Museu dos Descobrimentos⁴⁴

There is no absolute certainty in the construction of genealogical trees, and this particular one is no different. Since 2009 a project explicitly thematizing the Portuguese language has been absent from the public sphere in Portugal. It seems plausible to infer, however, that it has survived through incorporation into another museum narrative: the Voyages of Discovery.

Like the previous phases of this project, this one was also marked by public debate, ignited by the announcement that the new museum would occupy the space of the current Museu Nacional de Arqueologia (National Archeology Museum), located at the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos (Jeronimos Monastery).⁴⁵ Later on, the disputed announcement of the transfer of the collection of the prestigious Museu de Marinha (Maritime Museum) to a new Museu da Viagem, which would fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, triggered an even stronger reaction.⁴⁶ This adversity, revealing a conflict about who is the rightful patron of national heritage, led to the restatement of plans and responsibilities.

In July 2010, the Ministries of Culture and of National Defense signed a protocol stating their interest in launching a study of the creation of a common museum space dedicated to “the expansion of the Portuguese culture around the world” through “navigation and the Maritime Discoveries” in the majestic Mosteiro dos Jerónimos. A commission was created for this purpose.



Figure 13. By Hugo Miguel Carriço

The Mosteiro dos Jerónimos is located at the Praça do Império (Empire Square), in the Belém area. The Monastery was built in the 16th century to commemorate Vasco da Gama's successful return from India. The church and the monastery, together with the nearby Torre de Belém (Belém Tower) and the Padrão dos Descobrimentos (Monument to the Discoveries), symbolize the *Portuguese Age of Discovery* and are among Lisbon's main tourist attractions.

According to the Minister of Culture, the new museum would host “the right narrative in the right place” (quoted in Reis). For the Minister of Defense this narrative was geared towards the celebration of national identity:

Tentar projectar uma interpretação da nossa própria história; tentar projectar um olhar sobre o que nós somos e a nossa identidade, valorizando aspectos de abertura, encontro, diálogo, descoberta e cosmopolitismo. E as Descobertas podem e devem ser lidas assim: num certo sentido, formam o primeiro grande processo de globalização que a Europa viveu e em que, nessa medida, Portugal esteve na linha de frente. (Silva)

No project has been published, but the document made available by the former director of the Museu de Marinha, head of the joint commission, offers an insight into the then envisioned future of this museum, including the new



Figure 14. By Bernt Rostad

theme of the Portuguese voyages.⁴⁷ The project foresaw a general reorganization of exhibit spaces, and an expansion of annex areas. The *epic of the Discoveries*, which was already at the core of the museum, would remain central. It would, however, be expanded to highlight its *cultural dimension*:

Será possível desenvolver a exposição para além dos actuais quatro pilares—homens, navios, ciência náutica e cartografia—introduzindo temas como o comércio marítimo, o encontro de civilizações (a 1ª globalização) e a miscigenação de culturas. (Pereira 18–19)

Africa emerges in this plan under the rubric of Portuguese territorial occupation. Africa would be presented as a receptor of Portuguese culture, but also an active vector of influences into Portuguese language and culture, which have been spread to the rest of the world through the *Portuguese imperial adventure*.

Deverá haver uma linha de continuidade entre os Descobrimentos e a língua portuguesa, desde o fomento à mistura das raças até a língua, que torna evidente a importação e exportação de influências. (Cap. José António Rodrigues Pereira, former director of the Museu de Marinha)⁴⁸

In this project, language is subsumed under the notion of Portuguese culture shaped by imperial conquests. This collusion and submersion may have

serious consequences regarding the representation of *the African*. Yet even more problematic are the absence of conflict in the *encounter* and the lack of mention of huge power asymmetries in this process of *mutual influence*.

This project is yet to be implemented.⁴⁹

The above trajectories of the projects of a language museum in Lisbon bear witness to the fact that the ghosts and fantasies of the empire continue to haunt the Portuguese imagination.⁵⁰ As yet, Africa has not emerged as an autonomous agent shaping Portuguese culture and society, but rather as an inherent and fundamental aspect of this very haunting.

Concluding Remarks

O que seria patrimônio cultural é qualquer coisa que não atrapalhe o andamento ao futuro. É preciso não fazer com a cultura um horizonte de repressão.

(Paulo Mendes da Rocha)

Throughout history, the term hybridity, together with miscegenation and creolization, has constituted a common category in the processes of shaping national identities in the Portuguese postcolonial field (Almeida, *Crioulização e fantasmagoria* 9). This rhetoric populates Lusofonia, which has been constructed around the Portuguese language and colonial heritage. Omar Ribeiro Thomaz cautions against this supposed common identity, as it misrepresents and marginalizes postcolonial others. He reminds us that the language community establishes the principle that Portuguese is the language in which we all understand each other, although the majority of its African members does not even speak Portuguese (Thomaz 45–70).

Nowadays, while the language community has little expression outside of diplomatic circles, Brazil is affirming itself as an emergent global power, notwithstanding renewed economic instability and political turmoil. As Brazil looks beyond the Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOP: Official Portuguese Language African Countries), Africa has become a focal point in its international agenda. Since the demise of its Terceiro Império in Africa, Portugal is shaping its postimperial identity by incorporating the old imperial Atlantic project, while contextualizing the nation within Europe (Feldman-Bianco 411–443). The PALOP have a priority status as recipients of aid, while Africa has prominence in the Portuguese commercial agenda (Léonard 421–441). At the moment, Portugal is experiencing the political consequences of a profound economic crisis, which has, however, not changed the importance of its relations with Africa. At this point in history, both Portugal and Brazil are actively engaging the imagination of Africa in their processes of national reconfiguration. The language museum in Brazil and its homologous projects in Portugal materialize this engagement.

The Museu da Língua Portuguesa was a successful museum with national repute and high numbers of visitors, particularly school children, who have been consistently excluded from museum spaces in the past. The Museum reaffirmed the African presence in the history of Brazilian culture and society. Africa entered the canon of the Portuguese language while Afro-Brazilians, included in the wider category of *povo brasileiro* (the Brazilian people), were *given access* to a prestigious site of culture. However, there were important trends in the museum narrative that deserve critical attention. There was a strong *Lusotropical* bias in the museum. Africa became the raw material for an assimilationist Brazilian cultural force. Overall, the museum worked better in recovering a distant past of exclusion. The celebration of miscegenation, following Feldman-Bianco (43–56), disguised the bonds between race and nation, fetishizing gendered and racialized violence into the rhetoric—and the spectacle—of the encounter. The Museum hardly addressed linguistic discrimination, and underplayed the lack of schooling and related socio-economic dynamics that marginalize Afro-Brazilians. It did escape the common Brazilian images of Africa; unlike other public spaces, it did not portray the continent and its peoples as savage and tragic (Oliva). Yet it offered little of Africa in exchange. The disappearance of African contemporary manifestations in the Portuguese language was a noticeable gap. Together with the selective and faulty information on African countries where Portuguese is (one of) the national language(s), this gap reinforced an absence of African agency that is contemporary and is not part of the Brazilian nation. As such, it constituted an archive that reproduced the imperial gaze. Africa remained the present-day staging of our “other.”

The history of the projects for a language museum in Portugal attests to the contentious status of the Portuguese language in that country, and to the pivotal place that language occupies in the narrative of national identity. At the same time, convoluted and at times failed trajectories such as this are quite common in the realm of national museums worldwide.⁵¹ Apart from the particular domestic problems and power disputes they reveal, they are also manifestations of the exercise of citizenship. In the particular political and economic juncture in which Portugal found itself, this process did not result in the effective creation of the envisioned museum. The volatile political scenario caused shifting priorities in the culture sector. The history of the language museum projects reveals an oscillating movement between an explicit association of language with the imperial past (the Atlantic) and its apparent dissociation from it (Europe). Both possibilities carry marked continuities with the narrative of empire. The Portuguese *surplus value* in Europe is built upon the Atlantic project, namely, the special bonds of the *benevolent empire* with Africa, born out of the *colonial encounter*. According to Manuela Mourão, since the 16th century the encounters between the Portuguese

and non-Western peoples have been portrayed with “the elision of violence attendant to the conquests and an emphasis on the Portuguese capacity for cultural and social integration.” She argues that “the tendency continues to whitewash [the encounter] enough for it to remain, with as little discomfort as possible, not only the historical moment that defined the Portuguese as a people, but also that which continues to make them proud” (Mourão 92).

The Africa imagined in Portugal recovers the Terceiro Império and the fantasy of making it reflect a Brazilian ideal (or model) of racial harmony. It is *África no ultramar* (Africa overseas); an imagination of *the black* as a foreigner, which is projected onto the African Diaspora that occupies a subaltern position in Portuguese society and a hidden place in national culture.

The Africa imagined in Brazil recovers the history of slavery and reflects the relations among formerly enslaved Africans and other Brazilians and sectors of Brazilian society. It is an imagination colored by a phenotypic concept of race historically coupled with economic marginalization, and a desire for social whitening. And it goes hand in hand with a celebration of exoticism and sensuality associated with African aspects of national culture. It is *África em casa*.

There is therefore a dramatically uneven reciprocity in the production of the representations of Africa in both Brazil and Portugal. The same discrepancy manifests itself in the *artifactual statement* that emerges out of this *contact mechanism*. The museum and homologous projects staged a *spectacle of the contact zone*, furnished with the rhetoric of the encounter. This contact has been, at different levels, sanitized and embellished. The Portuguese language thus became the very *anti-conquest*.

The Museum in São Paulo and the homologous projects in Lisbon incorporated the limitations of central museums, whose main purpose is to celebrate the nation, while erasing, obfuscating, or trivializing elements that may disrupt the national self-image. In the cases in question, subalternization began at the curation stage. Following the Western museumizing tradition, *Africa* might be the object displayed but the displaying subject is not an African.

The sites and buildings chosen to host the language museums, and their renowned architects, composed the frame for the language narrative. The Portuguese language has become an object of national prestige. The museum canvas was shaped to reinforce the authority of a language associated with high culture in Portugal, or to enchant the actual addressees of Brazilian nationality: *o povo* (the people).

There is a limit to the possibilities of de-centralizing the narrative and the dynamics of its creation, collection, reproduction and circulation at such central museums. The realization of Clifford’s desire for contact requires strategies “not inscribed in the inclusive nation-state” (Clifford 214, 362).

Moreover, there are important limitations in the very framing of the language narrative. The Portuguese language has been chosen as the core of national identities with resilient imperial continuities. The language is posited as a primordial place of encounter that is often portrayed as harmonious. Furthermore, the notion that the Portuguese language is the window to the world, and that this passes through Portugal, has never been more equivocal than now. In the present context of globalization, the Empire lives on in new shapes, and through novel routes, and is also disrupted.

The language museums carry the potential for realizing the work of cultural criticism in the mold proposed by Stephen Small by forwarding an *antidote* to partial and distorted representations that act as an indispensable corrective to the meta-narrative that subalternizes Africa (Small 118). An actual realization of this sort of postcolonial operation may happen when, as in the cases that Clifford has examined, there is a “consistent policy of involving Africans as authorities and curators” and when a museum “operates in an awareness of Africa as not simply ‘out there’ (or ‘back then’)” (Clifford 202, 203). Such a *fair encounter* may possibly happen inside the language narrative, gazed at as an unsettling space of (dis)encounters. *Lusofonia*, if critically aware of its imperial trap, could be explored as an *identity conundrum* from its different loci of enunciation. A productive exploration of this narrative would entail unveiling its violent facets and constructing new meanings that do not fit into the pre-established frame. This enterprise would demand a sharp awareness of its limits: there is much more of Africa outside and beyond the Portuguese language.

Notes

1. This essay is the outcome of a research project made possible by a Prince Bernhard Scholarship, generously awarded by the eponymous Foundation, The Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Institute and Utrecht University. I wish to thank these institutions, and Paulo de Medeiros for the encouragement with my project. I am also thankful for the collaboration of those who granted interviews. The richness of their individual contributions could not be reflected in this essay due to limitations of space and the scope. I am also indebted to the generosity of the photographers and organizations that authorized the use of the images. The essay benefitted from conversations with Rita Chaves, Omar Ribeiro Thomaz, Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, Paula Jordão, Nuno Porto, Bela Feldman-Bianco, and Claire Williams. The peer-reviewers have helped to improve the essay as well. I am grateful to all. Finally, the analysis conveyed in this essay is not necessarily endorsed by any of the above mentioned persons or institutions. It is entirely my responsibility.

2. The Portuguese parliament also declared its support for the reconstruction. Such statements were followed by public response in the Brazilian press, where criticism was voiced about the Museum's collection and its spaces (see: Gragnani).

3. The term is borrowed from Miguel Vale de Almeida (*Crioulização e fantasmagoria* 1–13).

4. My criterion for choosing the interviewees was the power they held to shape the narrative of the museum. The research did not cover the reception, reworking or re-appropriation of these narratives on the part of the visitors. The material collected supported a critical cultural analysis which relied on interpretative tools provided by Postcolonial Studies of Portuguese colonialism. The research was carried out in 2010 and 2011.

5. "When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship*—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull. The organizing structure of the museum-as-collection functions like Pratt's frontier. A center and a periphery are assumed: the center a point of gathering, the periphery an area of discovery. The museum, usually located in a metropolitan city, is the historical destination for the cultural productions it lovingly and authoritatively salvages, cares for, and interprets." (Clifford 192–193).

6. Clifford is aware of both "uneven reciprocity," and of "the limits of the contact perspective" he is developing (193). Further his study centers on minorities museums that experienced interaction with indigenous agents/communities at the moments of production and collection.

7. Race and gender are social constructions and (ascribed) positions rather than fixed cultural identities. I will not analyze these categories in depth in this essay due to limitations of space and scope.

8. "It is important to keep the possibilities for subversion and reciprocity (or relatively benign mutual exploitation) in tension with the long history of "exotic" displays in the West. This history provides a context of enduring power imbalance within and against which the contact work of travel, exhibition and interpretation occurs" (Clifford 197).

9. "Museum collections and activities are . . . bound up with assertions about what is central and peripheral, valued or useless, known or to be discovered, essential to identity or marginal" (Karp 7).

10. There are more categories of "others" in the national narratives both in Brazil and in Portugal. However, as I will argue later on, *the African* remains the iconic other in these narratives. This research zeroes in on this icon.

11. Isabel Ferreira Gould contends that: "Africa and the colonial question constitute central themes in the history of modern Portugal." Borrowing from Luís de Sousa Rebelo, Gould posits that: "Key moments in the last hundred years of Portuguese history, such as the regicide in 1908, the First Republic, Portugal's participation in the First World War, the establishment of Salazar's dictatorial New State, the colonial wars of 1961–1974, and the Revolution of 1974, are all directly or indirectly associated with the presence of the Portuguese in the African colonies" (Gould 183).

12. The status of colonial subjects was regulated by the *Estatuto do Indigenato* (The Statute of Indigenous Populations) (1926–1961). This Estatuto was preceded by

Regulamentos (Regulations) dating back to the end of the 19th century (Meneses 68–93).

13. This is an allusion to Paulo de Medeiros' "postimperial condition" that is an aspiration for a locus, both historical and conceptual, where imperial colonialism has been worked through and dealt with. It expresses a hope for a European future other than regression or obsolescence (Medeiros, "Postimperial nostalgia"). At the same time I use the *postimperial* as an indication of the locus of enunciation of this (self-)critique and aspiration. For an elaboration of the "postimperial condition" as "a different imagination of Europe" after the "imperative" to confront Europe's imperial ghosts, see: Medeiros, "A Failure of the Imagination?" 91–101; and Medeiros, "Ghosts and Hosts" 201–214.

14. According to Isabel Ferreira Gould: "The question of national identity in Portuguese writing could not be disentangled from the tensions of empire and decolonization, especially with respect to Africa" (Gould 183).

15. Omar Ribeiro Thomaz contends that *Lusotropicalismo* carries representations already settled in the mythology of the Portuguese spirit of conquest and its civilising mission (Thomaz 45–70).

16. Elsewhere I have analyzed the resilience of *Lusotropicalismo* in the imagined *shared space* of the Portuguese language, relying on a novel by the Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa. My analysis here borrows from that essay (see: Schor 335–356).

17. Manuela Ribeiro Sanches is here pointing to Ângela Ferreira's critical gaze towards such tropes in her 2003 art exhibition at the Chiado museum *Em nenhum lugar, No place at all*. The Afro-Portuguese Ferreira is, according to Sanches, "one of the few examples of art practiced in Portugal from a postcolonial perspective" (Sanches, "Reading the Postcolonial" 139).

18. The white male subject is the heir to the empire conceived as an erotic endeavor in which the virile Portuguese settler penetrates African women, as a metaphor for exploitation of the feminised African colony (Vicente).

19. The slogan *Portugal não é um país pequeno* belongs to the Exposição Colonial do Porto (Colonial Exposition of Porto) in 1934. It was used as a title to an image showing *the surface of the Portuguese Colonial Empire* upon the map of Europe as a "symbolic cartography" of the Estado Novo's ambition to hold onto its colonial territories as a way out of the status of a peripheric nation (Sanches, "Introdução" 7–21).

20. Livio Sansone distinguishes three periods of race relations in modern Brazil, in terms of Brazil's economic development and levels of integration of the black population in the labor market, which inform the imagination of Africa, namely: between 1888 and the 1920s (after the abolition; no incursion in formal labor); between the 1930s and the late 1970s (with modernization from Getúlio Vargas' popular dictatorship to the right-wing military dictatorship, entrance to formal labor and passage from repression to slow acceptance of organization); and from the redemocratization onward (recession, loss of status in formal labor, democratization and rapid modernization, mass schooling, opening up of market, new disguised forms of discrimination) (Sansone, *From Africa to Afro* 7–19). I am here concentrating on Sansone's second and third periods, when there was a passage from "the purging of African traits from Brazilian culture as well as from the 'Brazilian race'" to "incorporation of

certain aspects of black culture into the national self-image as well as their commoditisation and commercialisation” (13).

21. *Lusotropicalismo* emerged in Brazil in the 1930's, with Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* proposing the valorization of the African and Amerindian contributions to the constitution of Brazilian society. It set forth the 19th century “myth of the three races,” according to which Amerindians, Africans and Portuguese intermixed to create a new Brazilian race, founding a harmonious society.

22. Sansone explores further the agency of young black people in creating their own perspective on Afro-Brazilian culture as drawing from both local and global sources (Sansone, *Negritude sem etnicidade*). The self-representation of black people and Blackness is an important dimension in the construction of *Africa*, both in Brazil and in Portugal, particularly in commercial fields. Due to restrictions of space, I cannot include this perspective in this essay, but concentrate instead on the hegemonic meta-narrative of making.

23. In 1988, one hundred years after the abolition of slavery in Brazil, the Brazilian Constitution was amended to include, amongst other changes, the recognition and protection of material and intangible instances of the legacy of descendants of enslaved Africans. Another important initiative was the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in the primary and secondary school curriculum in 2003 (Law 10.639). In the same year the Secretaria de Políticas de Promoção de Igualdade Racial (Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality) was created (Law 10.678) and the constitution of the Política Nacional de Promoção da Igualdade Racial (National Policy for the Promotion of Racial Equality) followed (Decree 4.886). Finally, in 2010 the Inventário Nacional da Diversidade Linguística (National Inventory of Linguistic Diversity) was instituted (Decree 7.387).

24. Hereafter MLP-SP.

25. Eighty percent of the project was funded through the Brazilian law on tax incentives to Culture. Other sponsors were the prestigious Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (Portugal) and several Brazilian private enterprises.

26. Interview held in São Paulo, July 22 2010.

27. Interview held in São Paulo, July 15 2010. Further citations of this author belong to this interview.

28. Interview held in São Paulo, July 16 2010. Further citations of this author belong to this interview.

29. The first floor included a space for temporary exhibits and a classroom and digital area. The second floor hosted the Grande Galeria, the Beco das Palavras, the Palavras Cruzadas, the História da Estação da Luz, the Linha do Tempo, and the Mapa dos Falares (Great Gallery, Words' Alley, Crosswords, History of Luz Train Station, Timeline, and Spoken Language Map). And the third floor held the Auditório and the Praça da Língua (Auditorium and Language Square).

30. The Grande Galeria presented figures of the early 2000s. Since 2013, according to the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), the Brazilian population exceeds 200 million.

31. It is fitting that Gilberto Freyre was thematized through a temporary exhibit in the MLP-SP (2007–2008): *Gilberto Freyre: Intérprete do Brasil* (Gilberto Freyre: Interpreter of Brazil).

32. I am not disputing the fact that racial mixture occurred under Portuguese imperial rule and after its demise, but questioning its (ideological) romanticization. As I concluded this essay, my attention was drawn to the announced exhibit of *Histórias Mestiças* (Mestiças Histories) in the Instituto Tomie Ohtake (São Paulo), August–October 2014. The intention of the curators, Adriano Pedrosa and Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, was to problematize this very *romance of mestiçagem*, positing important questions such as: “Quem mestiçou quem? Como se mistura inclusão com exclusão social? Como se combinam prazer e dominação? Quais são as diferentes histórias escondidas nesses processos de mestiçagem?” Still according to the Institute’s website: “Essas são perguntas que, segundo eles [curadores], ainda, nem sempre recebem ou alcançam respostas.” (“Histórias Mestiças”).

33. After the period that covered this research, other temporary exhibits touched upon related themes, in particular *Jorge Amado e Universal* (2012) (Beloved and Universal Jorge). I will not elaborate on its instances of continuity and/or rupture with the national meta-narrative, but highlight the importance of temporary exhibits that, at times, problematized the meta-narrative presented in the permanent space of the MLP-SP.

34. The exhibit *Machado de Assis, mas este capítulo não é sério* (Machado de Assis, but this chapter is not serious) took place in the period 2008/2009. Besides displaying extracts of Machado de Assis’ novels, the exhibit included pictures of the images they evoked, and of the author. Machado de Assis’s official portrait as President of the Academia Brasileira de Letras (Brazilian Academy of Letters) depicted him with a fair complexion. This picture was counterposed to previous (versions of) pictures of the author, where his actual non-white skin color was revealed. The exhibit also displayed Machado’s death certificate, according to which he was white. The curators have revealed the process of whitening of the author’s image as he gained renown and stature. Machado de Assis became, before the eyes of the visitor, a *mulato*. This process disturbed the insinuation of whiteness of canonic figures of Brazilian culture. Pictures of black enslaved women also decorated the area of the exhibit alongside images of archetypical white female sensuality which populated the 19th century Brazilian novel. These images were explicitly offered as mirrors of each other, as a way of problematizing the Brazilian gendered racial imagination and the selective choice of the normative white subject of the nation. This has been a critical displacement of Africa in thinking about Brazil.

35. Interview held in São Paulo, July 13 2010.

36. Sea of the Portuguese Language Museum—Oceanic Explorations and the Expansion of the Portuguese Language.

37. Interview held in Lisbon, August 17 2010. Frente Tejo was set up by the Portuguese government for the redevelopment of Lisbon’s waterfront (Baixa-Chiado or Baixa Pombalina, and Ajuda/Belém).

38. Phone interview, August 23 2010. Further citations of this author belong to this interview.

39. Phone interview, August 25 2010.

40. Cardinal Points, New Worlds, Space of the Discoveries, Adventure of Navigation, Language Universe, Laboratory of the Senses, Practice, The Names of Things, Labyrinth of the Word, and Patio of Flavors.

41. Interview held in Lisbon, August 26 2010.

42. Hereafter MLP-LIS.

43. Interview held in Lisbon, August 2010.

44. Voyage Museum—Museum of the Discoveries.

45. The Grupo de Amigos do Museu Nacional de Arqueologia (Group of Friends of the Archeological Museum) launched a petition in March 2010 against transferring the collection of the Archeological Museum to the Cordoaria Nacional (National Factory of Cables, Ropes, Sails and Flags), arguing that the Cordoaria did not have the technical conditions to host it.

46. In May 2010 the online petition *Salvem o Museu de Marinha* (Save the Maritime Museum) was launched, urging the government to maintain this collection in its place in order to avoid the envisioned risk of *burying* the museum. The petition was widely signed and included the support of influential reservist officers.

47. Throughout the research period, between 2010 and 2011, all my attempts to contact the Ministry of Culture and in particular the Institute for Museums and Conservation (IMC) on the museum were unsuccessful. Their perspective is therefore missing in this overview and analysis.

48. Interview held in Lisbon, February 11 2011. Cap. Rodrigues Pereira's opinions are of a personal nature, not necessarily reflecting the positions of the institution. Further citations of this author belong to this interview.

49. However, homologous projects on the theme of the *Discoveries* flourished outside Lisbon. In 2009, the interactive Museu das Descobertas/Centro de Interpretação À Descoberta do Novo Mundo (Museum of the Discoveries/Center for the Interpretation of the Discovery of the New World) was inaugurated in the city of Belmonte, birthplace of Pedro Álvares Cabral. A more ambitious project of an interactive museum and a theme park named World of Discoveries was developed in 2013 in the city of Miragaia, in the former warehouse of the Companhia Geral da Agricultura e Vinhos do Alto Douro (General Company of Agriculture and Wines of the Alto Douro) founded by Marquês de Pombal (“Museu dos Descobrimentos abre portas em Outubro”). The Museum opened its doors in April 2014.

50. Expression borrowed from Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Ana Paula Ferreira (Ribeiro and Ferreira).

51. The project of a museum for the national history canon of the Netherlands is one example of another prestige museum project from a different context at about the same period that a language museum was being projected and debated in Portugal. Between 2006 and 2011, the National History Museum (*Nationaal Historisch Museum*) was object of parliamentary debates and intense media inquiry in the Netherlands. Similar to the issues surrounding the language museum in Portugal, the debates and political decisions in the Netherlands concerned the museum location—city and place (guaranteed international allure or novelty vs closeness to the government or monarchy)—projected budget and contents (what should the historical canon cover, should it be *traditional* or *modern*). However, unlike in Portugal, the geographical location was at the core of the debate, whereas contents occupied a subsidiary place in the discussions and decisions. In 2010, the project was halted for budgetary reasons due to the economic crisis. It was finally dropped in 2011. For an overview of this trajectory, see the compilation made by the Dutch Public Broadcasting Service: “Nationaal Historisch Museum.”

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