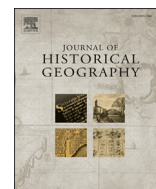




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# Contesting monuments, challenging narratives: Divergent approaches to dealing with the colonial past and its legacies in Lisbon, Portugal

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## ABSTRACT

Portugal was the longest modern European imperial power, yet the dominant historical narrative is characterised by a celebration of the 'Discoveries' and a denial of colonial violence. This is visible in Lisbon's public space, dotted with monuments and statues glorifying the imperial past, while occluding less convenient histories. Especially since 2017, more attention has been given to Portugal's colonial past in public debates. Various initiatives have stimulated discussions about this past, while highlighting socio-cultural issues connected to these histories that continue to affect Portuguese society today. These have contested certain monuments and the narratives they embody, as well as created alternative narratives regarding the public space and cultural memory. This article compares a selection of recent interventions that contest monuments and dominant narratives about Portugal's colonial past. We look at the ways in which certain spaces and monuments become zones of contestation, and how such contestation not only contributes to changing dominant narratives, but also to resignify such spaces and structures. Our goal is to shed light on the variety of agents working towards a change of narrative regarding Lisbon's public space and memory, while reflecting on the socio-political meanings surrounding the presence and absence of monuments related to the colonial past.

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Portugal was the longest modern European imperial power, with a history spanning more than 500 years, starting in the fifteenth century, and formally ending in 1999 (when Macau's sovereignty was transferred to China). Today, dominant narratives about Portugal's past and national identity and culture are characterised by a celebration of the 'Age of Discoveries', an increasingly contested term that refers to the Portuguese maritime explorations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This is particularly visible in Lisbon: the country's capital is dotted with monuments and statues dated to different times that have gradually cemented this narrative in the public space. As in other imperial cities, Lisbon's importance derived not only from being the capital of the empire, but also an important harbour city through which colonial commodities transited and where enterprises were based. As such, its architecture is shaped by the country's colonial history in ways that continue to be significant to Portuguese public imaginary.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, and especially since 2017, more attention has been given to Portugal's colonial past in public debates. State-funded and other initiatives – and backlashes against them – have been fostering public discussions about this topic, while highlighting current socio-cultural issues connected to these histories – such as racism and discrimination – that continue to affect Portuguese society. These developments should be seen in the context of recent debates about monuments and statues related to European colonialism, which have been the subject of highly mediated controversies around the world.<sup>2</sup> Of particular importance is the inception of the *Black Lives Matter* movement in 2013, which was reignited in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd by the Massachusetts police.<sup>3</sup> This violent event sparked anti-racism protests in cities around the world, including Lisbon, leading for instance to the dramatic toppling of the statue of British slave-trader Colston

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<sup>1</sup> Felix Driver and David Gilbert, 'Imperial cities: overlapping territories, intertwined histories', in *Imperial Cities*, ed. by Felix Driver & David Gilbert, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp.1–17.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Rigney, 'Toxic Monuments and Mnemonic Regime Change', *Studies on National Movements* 9 (2022) 7–41.

<sup>3</sup> For an example of how the murder of Floyd impacted monuments, see Noah Randolph, 'Rumors of War: Towards the unsettling of the Confederate monumental landscape', *Journal of Historical Geography* 81 (2023) 43–50.

into the Bristol harbour.<sup>4</sup> Also important is the *Rhodes Must Fall* movement initiated in South Africa in 2015, originally directed at a statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town, which later led to wider debates about decolonising education.<sup>5</sup>

Part of a longer historic tradition of iconoclasm, reactions to the memorialisation of colonialism in public space (taking place at least since the 1990s) seem to be aimed primarily at bringing about change in the collective historical narrative and at addressing unequal social relations in the present.<sup>6</sup> The interventions of the past two decades differ from earlier ones due to the way they reached (international) public debates in unprecedented ways, propelled by the rise of social media.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, they should be seen within a broader process taking place in Western Europe and elsewhere, wherein the violence that took place during colonialism and its afterlives in the present are increasingly being addressed. This process also manifests itself in public apologies, forms of reparation, moves towards the restitution of objects located in Western museums that were taken – often in violent circumstances – in colonial times (following decades of demands from the countries of origin), amongst other developments.<sup>8</sup>

This article brings together and examines a selection of recent initiatives and interventions that contest certain monuments and spaces in Lisbon and the narratives they embody about Portugal's colonial history and postcolonial views on national identity and culture. More specifically, it focuses on recent developments in and around the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos* (Monument to the Discoveries) and the statue of Priest António Vieira, as well as the work of the association Batoto Yetu Portugal (BYP). While the first case examines interventions in a monument that exemplifies the greatest performative representation of empire in a crucial location of the urban landscape, the second constitutes an anachronic memorialisation of a benevolent idea of empire.<sup>9</sup> In a context of increased contestation against statues of colonial figures, Lisbon's authorities decided to commemorate the city's heritage by re-asserting a particular vision of the past.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the last intervention can be considered a form of counter-territorialisation, in the sense that BYP seeks to create an alternative view of the power relations, social order, and identities produced by imperial territorialities.<sup>11</sup>

The goal of this article is twofold: to shed light on the variety of agents currently working towards a narrative change regarding Lisbon's public space, cultural memory and present-day society (and Portugal more broadly), while reflecting on the socio-cultural meanings and politics surrounding the presence and absence of monuments related to the colonial past. We look at the different, and at times surprising, ways in which certain spaces and monuments become zones of contestation, and how the various forms of contestation – either material or

discursive – may not only contribute to changing dominant narratives, but also resignify these spaces. Drawing on similar exercises, – such as the project *ReMapping Memories* and the exhibition *Ecos Coloniais* – this article examines how discussions around contested spaces and monuments make visible and amplify the ongoing impact of the colonial past in and on the present and the social role that monuments and the public space play in the process of addressing these histories and their afterlives.<sup>12</sup> By focusing on the lesser-known case of Portugal, this article aims also to contribute to the broader debate on the topic of contested monuments.

### History and memory of Portuguese colonialism: A brief contextualisation

Portugal's presence in Africa started in the fifteenth century, with the taking of Ceuta in present-day Morocco in 1415.<sup>13</sup> In the following two centuries Portugal became the main supplier of enslaved people to Europe and the Americas.<sup>14</sup> According to the data available on the Slave Voyages website, almost half of the estimated 12.5 million enslaved Africans forcibly taken to the Americas (mainly Brazil) were carried by Portuguese and later Brazilian ships between 1501 and 1875.<sup>15</sup> Slavery was abolished in the Portuguese dominions in 1869, ending more than 400 years of this inhumane practice. The independence of Brazil in 1822 led to the beginning of the 'third Portuguese empire', focused on a renewed occupation and exploitation of the African continent. Except for Macau, the empire was only dismantled in 1975, following 13 years of colonial-liberation wars in Africa and the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 in Portugal. The revolution ended over 40 years of a fascist dictatorship and led to the independence of the present-day southern African countries of Mozambique and Angola, the western African country of Guinea Bissau, and the archipelagos of Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe, located off the western coast of Africa.

The Portuguese colonial project was by no means a comparatively benevolent one, as the lusotropicalist representation of Portuguese colonisation contends.<sup>16</sup> One but needs to think of the country's role in the transatlantic slave trade; of the violent 'campaigns of pacification' to effectively occupy parts of Africa at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries; and of

<sup>12</sup> See *ReMapping Memories Lisboa – Hamburg: Lugares de Memória (Pós)Coloniais* of the Goethe-Institut Lisbon, <https://www.re-mapping.eu/pt/o-projeto> last accessed 19 June 2023; and the exhibition catalogue *Ecos Coloniais. Histórias, Patrimónios e Memórias*, ed. by Ana Guardião, Miguel B. Jerónimo, and Paulo Peixoto (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> This section is adapted from the introductory section of the MA thesis of Sofia Lovegrove, titled *Narrating the Past/Perpetuating Violence: The Afterlives of Colonialism in Two Heritage Sites in Cape Verde and Portugal*, (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2020), 15–17.

<sup>14</sup> Cardina, *O Atrito*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates> last accessed 23 June 2023.

<sup>16</sup> 'Lusotropicalism' refers to an ideology which described a specifically Portuguese predisposition to colour-blindness and 'miscegenation' in the 'tropics'. This ideology was developed by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre to interpret Portuguese colonialism and to justify slavery in Brazil. It was strongly embraced by the regime and Portuguese elites in the 1950s, and had a visible expression in popular culture in the last decades of the dictatorship. Furthermore, it was used internationally by the Portuguese authorities to legitimise colonialism and to resist international pressure to grant independence to the colonies. See Miguel Cardina and Bruno S. Martins, 'Memórias cruzadas de la guerra colonial portuguesa y las luchas de liberación africanas: Del imperio a los estados poscoloniales/Crossed memories of the Portuguese Colonial War and the African liberation fights: From the empire to the postcolonial states', *Êndoxa: Séries Filosóficas* 44 (2019) 113–134 (p. 119–120).

<sup>4</sup> Lara Choksey, 'Colston falling', *Journal of Historical Geography* 74 (2021) 77–83.

<sup>5</sup> See *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonize the Racist Heart of Empire*, ed. by Roseanne Chantiluke, Brian Kwoba & Athinangamso Nkopo (London: Zed Books, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> See Ana Lucia Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory. Engaging the Past* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Rigney, *Toxic Monuments*, 8–11.

<sup>7</sup> Araujo, *Slavery*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Miguel Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória. Colonialismo, Guerra e Descolonização no Portugal Contemporâneo* (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Driver and Gilbert, *Imperial cities*, 6–8.

<sup>10</sup> For a distinct example of contemporary heritage commemoration see Anthony Gristwood, 'Commemorating empire in twentieth-century Seville', in *Imperial Cities*, ed. by Driver and Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp.155–170.

<sup>11</sup> Julio Decker, 'Lines in the sand: Railways and the archipelago of colonial territorialisation in German Southwest Africa, 1897–1914', *Journal of Historical Geography* 70 (2020) 74–87.

the use of forced labour in the colonies after the abolition of slavery.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the dominant narrative about the country's history and national identity has for long been characterised by a denial of violence and the exaltation of the 'Discoveries'.<sup>18</sup> Political decolonisation in 1974 did not lead to the end of a deeply inscribed centrality, developed over centuries, of the history of the Portuguese empire to national identity and pride. Rather, and as Peralta and other scholars have shown, cultural memory production (and especially state-funded memory production) continues to rely on a discourse that connects nation and empire, however adapted and reinterpreted to fit present-day narratives of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.<sup>19</sup> In this context, Lisbon can be seen as the centre stage of this memory production, both historically and in the present.

According to Cardina and Martins, there are several factors related to the specificities of Portuguese colonialism and the way it ended that help understand how it is remembered today.<sup>20</sup> First, the enduring centrality of the narrative of the 'Discoveries'. This version of Portugal's imperial and colonial history has since at least the nineteenth century been at the core of collective identity and culture, and was further ingrained in collective imagination in the twentieth century, during the Salazar and Caetano dictatorships known as the *Estado Novo*.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, the institutionalisation of the aforementioned ideology of 'lusotropicalism'. Thirdly, the regime received relatively limited and late opposition to colonialism in Portugal and it was mostly a reaction to the colonial-liberation wars.<sup>22</sup> The Portuguese Communist Party, for instance, although founded in 1921, only argued for the colonies' self-determination and independence in 1957. Prior to that date, the party considered the colonial territories as an inviolable part of the nation.<sup>23</sup> Fourth, the arrival of dead and wounded soldiers from the colonial-liberation wars was concealed by the regime, contributing to a lack of public awareness and/or interest even after 1974.<sup>24</sup> Fifth, the process that established democracy was entangled with the wars, since the group of military men known as the MFA or Armed Forces Movement who led the Carnation Revolution were former soldiers who fought in the colonies, leading to little will to condemn the violent events of the conflict after 1974.<sup>25</sup> Sixth, thousands of Portuguese living in Angola and Mozambique (and, to a lesser extent, in the other colonies) were forced to return to Portugal and the way the government prioritised their re-integration and dealt with the trauma of their return, contributed to an unwillingness to critically address the war. If, on the one hand, these Portuguese brought with them a nostalgic perspective of the lost

empire that contributed to a public memory of a benevolent colonialism, on the other hand, their perceived otherness fuelled resentments that prevented critical discussions about Portuguese colonialism.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, the distant geography of the wars helped keep the reality of their violence far from public discussion in Portugal.<sup>27</sup>

Despite a generalised silence, since the 1990s, and especially since the 2000s, activists, artists, writers, scholars, and others have been engaging with these histories – and particularly those of the colonial-liberation wars – in critical ways.<sup>28</sup> According to Santos, this is particularly the case regarding the post-1974 generation.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, several associations of people of colour, such as Djass – Association of Afrodescendants created in 2016 and INMUNE (Institute of the Black Woman in Portugal) created in 2018, have been claiming space within the dominantly white public sphere and demanding that society critically engages with its narratives about the past and national identity and culture.<sup>30</sup> As Barreiros et al. point out, however, racialised subjects who intervene in Portuguese society have always existed, yet 'without the recognition afforded by the gatekeeping circles capable of legitimising novel cultural actors and historiographical narratives'.<sup>31</sup>

## 2017 as a watershed moment

The year 2017 can be seen as a watershed moment regarding public discussions about Portugal's colonial past. Lisbon was elected then the Ibero-American Capital of Culture and during that year several events and initiatives critically addressed colonialism and the history of slavery.<sup>32</sup> Most importantly, a series of controversies as well as important projects gave new impetus to the debate. In April, during a visit to the island of Gorée in Senegal – where enslaved Africans were forcefully boarded onto ships – the President of the Portuguese Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, rather than apologising for Portugal's role in the transatlantic slave trade, highlighted the allegedly pioneering role of the country in abolishing slavery in 1761, a date that marks not abolition but the end of this traffic to the metropolis to increase it towards Brazil. These statements triggered an open letter that criticised this idealistic and selective view of Portuguese history.<sup>33</sup>

A second controversy followed the placement in Lisbon of a statue representing the priest António Vieira, addressed in more detail below. Yet perhaps the most significant controversy that year was the proposal of the former mayor of Lisbon, Fernando Medina, as part of his electoral campaign, to create a 'Museum of Discoveries', which sparked criticism amongst sectors of academia and

<sup>17</sup> Miguel B. Jerónimo, 'As marcas de Portugal: Ensaios sobre o esquecimento', in *Este País não Existe*, ed. by Bruno Monteiro and Nuno Domingos (Porto: Deriva Editores, 2015), pp. 33–39.

<sup>18</sup> See Fernando Rosas, *História a História. África* (Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2018), p. 9–12; Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe After Empire. Decolonisation, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 190–191.

<sup>19</sup> See Elsa Peralta, *Lisboa e a Memória do Império: Património, Museus e Espaço Público* (Odivelas: Outro Modo, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Cardina and Martins, *Memórias cruzadas*, 120.

<sup>21</sup> Cardina and Martins, *Memórias cruzadas*, 118–119; Ellen Sapega, 'Remembering empire/forgetting the colonies: Accretions of memory in and the limits of commemoration in a Lisbon neighbourhood', *History and Memory* 20 (2008) 18–38.

<sup>22</sup> Cardina and Martins, *Memórias cruzadas*, 120.

<sup>23</sup> Besides the Communist Party, another member of the opposition to the dictatorship, the Republican Resistance, also considered the colonies part of Portugal, only contesting colonial policies in 1963. Fernando Rosas, 'O anti-colonialismo tardio do antifascismo português', in *O Adeus ao Império: 40 Anos de Descolonização Portuguesa*, ed. by Fernando Rosas, Mário Machaqueiro & Pedro A. Oliveira (Lisboa: Vega, 2015), pp.13–24 (p.17, 20).

<sup>24</sup> Cardina and Martins, *Memórias cruzadas*, 121.

<sup>25</sup> Cardina and Martins, *Memórias cruzadas*, 122.

<sup>26</sup> The biographic novel *O Retorno*, by Maria Dulce Cardoso, provides a very detailed description of this trauma, as well as the nostalgic views and otherness that characterised these returnees and that fuelled resentment against them.

<sup>27</sup> Cardina and Martins, *Memórias cruzadas*, 122–123.

<sup>28</sup> Sharon L. Allen, 'New navigators of Portuguese cultural memory', *Memoirs Newsletter*, 70 (2019); Cardina and Martins, *Memórias cruzadas*, 124.

<sup>29</sup> Irène Dos Santos, 'Portugal-Angola: Returns and detours for plural memories in Portuguese society', *Memoirs newsletter* 62 (2019).

<sup>30</sup> Hélia Santos, *Invisible Portuguese. Memoirs Newsletter* 48 (2019).

<sup>31</sup> Inês B. Barreiros, Rui G. Coelho, Pedro S. Pereira and Patrícia M. Marcos, 'The unbearable lightness of anachronism: Practices of monument-making and the guardians of historical consensus', *GSG Magazine* 3 (2022), <https://www.artseverywhere.ca/gsg3-othering-periphery/#marcos> last accessed 25 July 2023.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Lusa, 'Projecto Testemunhos da Escravatura. Memória africana apresentado em Lisboa', *Público* 2017, <https://www.publico.pt/2017/04/22/culturaipsilon/noticia/projeto-testemunhos-da-escravatura-memoria-africana-e- hoje-apresentado-em-lisboa-1769684> last accessed 30 May 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Miguel Cardina, 'The living ashes of Portuguese colonialism', *transform! Europe* 2020 [https://estudogeral.uc.pt/bitstream/10316/95706/1/Cardina%202020\\_The%20living%20ashes%20of%20Portuguese%20colonialism.pdf](https://estudogeral.uc.pt/bitstream/10316/95706/1/Cardina%202020_The%20living%20ashes%20of%20Portuguese%20colonialism.pdf) last accessed 13 August 2023.

civil society.<sup>34</sup> A few months after the announcement, a group of over 100 intellectuals (from Portugal, Brazil, England, France, USA and Spain) wrote a public letter in the weekly newspaper *Expresso* arguing against the future museum, accusing it of being obsolete, for its Eurocentric narrative, and for reproducing an imperialist ideology that is incompatible with a democratic regime.<sup>35</sup> This letter opened an intense public debate about Portugal's role in the slave trade, and the myths surrounding Portuguese colonialism. Another important reaction came from a group of activists (self-identified as 'a group of 100 Black people') who rejected the museum altogether. Titled 'No to a museum against us!', the authors of this piece argued that the museum was evidence of the continuous invisibility of African people in Portuguese society.<sup>36</sup> More to the point, they argued, the museum would be a form of reinforcing a history that supports the structural and historic racism, police violence, and the segregation of which Black communities continue to be victims.

Public debates about the museum were, for the most part, polarised between those who claimed that Portugal should be proud of its history (and thus discussions focused on slavery constitute a futile form of self-mortification), and others who argued (for different reasons) that the country needs to engage in a conversation about it.<sup>37</sup> While some consider that this should lead to some sort of formal apology and financial reparations, others deem it a necessary element of a broader process that also entails the recognition that Portuguese colonialism was violent and based on a racial ideology, that the colonial-liberation wars were a historical mistake, and that there is structural racism in the country.<sup>38</sup> Significantly, this polarisation followed along political lines of right versus left, and this Manichaeism only contributed to reducing the terms and content of an important debate, still waiting to take place. Given all the controversies, the Lisbon Municipality decided to set aside the project and maintain discretion about any future plans. Currently, it is not clear whether the museum will be built.

Ironically enough, this controversy took place around the same time that Djass's proposal to build a memorial to the victims of slavery 'to pay tribute to the millions of African people who were enslaved by Portugal throughout its history' won the Municipality of Lisbon's Participative Budget competition.<sup>39</sup> Although still waiting to be erected, the memorial has gained significant attention nationally and internationally.<sup>40</sup> Since 2017, the discussions around

Portugal's colonial past have only expanded. As in many other countries, these became even more widespread in 2020, following the murder of George Floyd.

Since 2017, a gradual change also seems to be taking place regarding the political discourse about this topic. The following three instances constitute important examples of that. In 2018, the President of the Republic assumed responsibility for the massacre of Batepá (when four hundred people were killed in 1953 by the colonial administration and Portuguese landowners) during a visit to São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>41</sup> In 2022, the Portuguese Prime-Minister, António Costa, publicly acknowledged and apologised for a massacre committed by Portuguese military forces in Mozambique in 1972, known as the Wiriyamu massacre, during an official visit to that country.<sup>42</sup> Finally, in his speech during the annual commemoration of the Carnation Revolution on 25 April 2023, the president stated that Portugal should assume responsibility for its role in the 'good and bad' of colonialism. In this contradictory statement, the President referred to 'the language, the culture, the unity of the Brazilian territory' as positive factors of colonialism, and to the exploitation of Indigenous Peoples and slavery, as the 'bad'. This speech came after the Brazilian president, Lula da Silva, addressed the Portuguese parliament on his first visit to Europe since assuming office.<sup>43</sup> Despite lacking any concrete measures or commitments, this statement was symbolically relevant for bringing this topic into the political discourse.

### Monuments as contestation zones

This article focuses both on tangible monuments and on intangible discursive processes, that is, the initiatives regarding the presences and absences of colonial histories and memories in Lisbon, and more importantly, the social meanings that these engender. Physical space and its elements are seen here as the materialisation of selective views of these histories and as an important stimulus for discussions and the development of alternative narratives. In line with Smith, we argue that both discourse and materiality are important for the examination of the social relations articulated through heritage and memory work.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, heritage and memory are 'deeply enmeshed with materiality', since tangible places and objects constitute important media for the mobilisation of (changing) memorialisation, identifications and significations.<sup>45</sup> If counter-narratives reveal the problems of the dominant narrative in Portugal regarding its colonial past and postcolonial present, they also represent significant changes in society.

The materialised selection of histories in public space analysed here are viewed as contestation zones, a concept that derives yet differs from Pratt's 'contact zones'. Pratt uses this concept to describe 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical

<sup>34</sup> See Jenny Barchfield, 'Lisbon museum plan stirs debate over Portugal's colonial past', *The Guardian* 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/17/lisbon-museum-plan-stirs-debate-over-portugals-colonial-past> last accessed 6 May 2023.

<sup>35</sup> See Cristina Margato, 'A controvérsia sobre um Museu que ainda não existe. Descobertas ou Expansão?', *Expresso* 2018 <https://expresso.pt/cultura/2018-04-12-A-controversia-sobre-um-Museu-que-ainda-nao-existe.-Descobertas-ou-Expansao-#gs.VCXOdCg> last accessed 10 May 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Ípsilon, 'Não an um museu contra nós!', *Público* 2018, <https://www.publico.pt/2018/06/22/culturaipsilon/opiniaao/nao-a-um-museu-contra-nos-1835227> last accessed 10 May 2023.

<sup>37</sup> See João P. Marques, 'Quantas vezes terá Portugal de pedir desculpa?', *Público* 2017, <https://www.publico.pt/2017/09/27/sociedade/opiniaao/quantas-vezes-tera-portugal-de-pedir-desculpa-1785929> last accessed 10 May 2023; Gonçalo Carvalho Amaro, 'Os Descobrimentos num museu: o "nevoeiro" do passado face às inseguranças do presente', *Público* 2019, <https://www.publico.pt/2019/09/15/culturaipsilon/opiniaao/descobrimentos-museu-nevoeiro-passado-face-inseguranças-presente-1886615> last accessed 10 May 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Joana G. Henriques, 'Portugal deve pagar indemnizações pela escravatura?', *Público* 2014, <https://www.publico.pt/2014/11/09/ciencia/noticia/portugal-deve-pagar-indemnizacoes-pela-escravatura-1675470> last accessed 20 May 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Djass – Associação de Afrodescendentes, *Memorial de Homenagem às Pessoas Escravizadas – Lisboa* 2019 <https://www.memorialescravatura.com/english> last accessed 7 June 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Ames, 'Portugal confronts its slave trade past', *Politico* 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/portugal-slave-trade-confronts-its-past/> last accessed 10 August 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Leonete Botelho, 'Portugal "assume a responsabilidade" pelo massacre de Batepá', *Público* 2018, <https://www.publico.pt/2018/02/21/politica/noticia/portugal-assume-a-responsabilidade-pelo-massacre-de-batepa-1803953> last accessed 29 May 2023.

<sup>42</sup> See Lusa, 'António Costa pede desculpa por massacre de Wiriyamu: "Acto indesculpável que desonra a nossa História"', *Público* 2022, <https://www.publico.pt/2022/09/02/politica/noticia/primeiro-ministro-portugues-pede-desculpa-mocambique-massacre-wiriyamu-2019244> last accessed 24 July 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Reuters, 'Portugal should apologise for role in slave trade, says its president', *Reuters* 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/25/portugal-should-apologise-for-role-in-slave-trade-says-its-president> last accessed 29 May 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> Lynn Meskell, 'Introduction', in *Global Heritage: A Reader*, ed. by Lynn Meskell (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 1–21 (p. 1).

relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their after-maths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today'.<sup>46</sup> A contestation zone is seen here as a concrete or material location from which discussions and divergent perspectives emerging from different points in society converge and are negotiated, challenged and/or simply coexist, often in uncomfortable and confronting ways.

These zones are significant for rendering visible and amplifying existing tensions in society. Contestation zones reveal the dissonant and contested character of cultural memory practices and their monumental and toponymic materialisation, as well as 'broader power-plays in and through space'.<sup>47</sup> According to Turnbridge and Ashworth, who coined the term 'heritage dissonance', the condition of dissonance refers to the lack of agreement and consistency regarding the meaning of heritage.<sup>48</sup> Following the authors, all heritage is intrinsically dissonant given that 'all heritage is someone's heritage and therefore logically not someone else's'.<sup>49</sup> In other words, 'the creation of any heritage actively or potentially disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are embraced within, the terms of meaning defining that heritage'.<sup>50</sup>

Crucial to this understanding of heritage are the issues of selection and representation: what becomes memorialised and defined as 'heritage', by whom and for whom? Decisions regarding which histories and narratives are to be materialised as heritage, be made to last and be part of the fabric of a city like Lisbon are intrinsically associated to power. In the words of Hall, heritage 'is always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter'.<sup>51</sup> The narrative of the 'Discoveries' and its widespread materialisation as (national) heritage in Lisbon are an example of such a process. For Hall, the problem with narratives about 'national heritage' such as that of the 'Discoveries' is that their discursive articulation is aimed at a perceived homogenous society and hence those who do not feel represented by them become automatically excluded.<sup>52</sup> In other words, in selecting *what* to tell about the past, one implicitly chooses *who* is represented and therefore *who* is seen to belong (or not) to Portuguese society. As the cases examined below show, with changing societies comes a need to review narratives about the past and about what should be materialised as 'heritage'.

### In and about the Monument to the Discoveries

This section focuses on a selection of interventions in and about the Monument to the Discoveries located in Belém, a riverside neighbourhood in Lisbon significant for being both the launching ground for the Portuguese voyages and conquests, and the cornerstone of Lisbon's imperial landscape and national identity.<sup>53</sup> According to Peralta, this neighbourhood can be seen as a 'memory complex' that 'represents the most paradigmatic case of the inscription and condensation of the [state-funded] memory

allusive to the Portuguese colonial empire within the public space'.<sup>54</sup> This can be seen in Belém's different monuments and toponymics, dated to different periods. Two of the most emblematic structures – the Tower of Belém and the Jerónimos Monastery – date from the early sixteenth century and their construction is indicative of the economic circumstances of the time: King Manuel I supported the construction of both structures in this location through the revenues from Africa, Asia and Brazil which were then entering the kingdom of Portugal.<sup>55</sup>

Belém maintained its symbolic meaning across time and different political regimes. This can be seen particularly well in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the context of the proliferation of nationalist sentiment across Europe, and during the Salazar dictatorship in the twentieth century. An example of that is the fact that in the context of the commemorations of the 300th anniversary of the death of the sixteenth-century poet Camões (who wrote what is considered Portugal's foundational epic, *The Lusads*) in 1880, his alleged remains were sought out and transferred to the Jerónimos Monastery. This marked the first of many non-royal figures to rest in what used to be the exclusive burial site for royals. Since the late nineteenth century, the Monastery has come to function as one of the best known and widely recognised memory sites in Portugal.<sup>56</sup>

Given its memorial symbolism, it is no surprise that Belém was chosen by state authorities to host the Exhibition of the Portuguese World in 1940, probably the largest event organised during the dictatorship. Aimed at commemorating the nation's 'Double Centenary of National Independence' (recalling 1140, when Afonso Henriques proclaimed himself first king of Portugal, and 1640, when King John IV launched the war of independence from Spain), this represented one of the many propagandistic efforts of the regime to use Portuguese history and, more specifically, the 'Discoveries', as the foundation and legitimisation for its nationalist ideology.<sup>57</sup>

The Exhibition included several sections that were created to show different aspects of the nation and its empire, situated around a central square – the *Praça do Império* or Empire Square, which still exists today with the same name (see Fig. 1 below). It was in this context that the Monument to the Discoveries was created. Initially built of wood, it was made to resemble a ship, with its top part shaped in the form of three sails that bear bas-relief reproductions of the flag of King John I. Under the flags, two lines rise towards the stylised prow, on top of which sixteen figures are standing on each side. These include Prince Henry the Navigator (at the head of the prow), Vasco da Gama, Bartolomeu Dias and Afonso de Albuquerque, all figures tied to the 'Discoveries'.<sup>58</sup>

After the end of the Exhibition in 1940, many of its structures were dismantled, including the Monument.<sup>59</sup> However, this structure was rebuilt in stone in 1960 (Figs. 2 and 3) to mark five hundred years of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator.<sup>60</sup> A new commemorative cycle related to the Discoveries, which included public ceremonies, conferences and performances of public

<sup>46</sup> Mary L. Pratt, 'Arts of the contact zone', *Profession*, (1991) 33–40 (p. 34).

<sup>47</sup> See Tim Cole, 'After the fall, where?: Relocating the Colston statue in Bristol, from 2020 to imaginary futures', *Journal of Historical Geography* 92 (2023) 156–168 (p. 157).

<sup>48</sup> John E. Tunbridge and Gregory J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage. The Management of the past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: Belhaven Press, 1996), p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Brian Graham, Gregory J. Ashworth and John E. Tunbridge, *The Geography of Heritage. Power, Culture and Economy* (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'the heritage', re-imagining the post-nation', *Third Text* 13 (1999) 3–13 (p. 6).

<sup>52</sup> Hall, *Whose Heritage?*, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Driver and Gilbert, 'Imperial Cities', p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Elsa Peralta, 'A composição de um complexo de memória: o caso de Belém, Lisboa', in *Cidade e Império: Dinâmicas Coloniais e Reconfigurações Pós-Coloniais*, ed. by Nuno Domingos and Elsa Peralta (Lisbon: Edições 70, 2013), p. 361 (authors' translation).

<sup>55</sup> Sapega, 'Remembering Empire', p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Sapega, 'Remembering Empire', p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> Sapega, 'Remembering Empire', pp. 22–23.

<sup>58</sup> Sapega, 'Remembering Empire', pp. 25–26.

<sup>59</sup> Sapega, 'Remembering Empire', p. 25.

<sup>60</sup> Pedro A. Oliveira, 'O ciclo africano', in *História da Expansão e do Império Português*, ed. by João P.O. e Costa, José D. Rodrigues and Pedro A. Oliveira (Lisboa: Esfera dos Livros, 2014), p. 495.



Fig. 1. The Empire Square with the Jerónimos Monastery in the background, Belém, 2018. Source: Sofia Lovegrove.

memory, began.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, 'Portuguese national culture as endorsed by the Estado Novo had long placed the 'Discoveries' at the core of the nation's identity, but never more than in the early 1960s'.<sup>62</sup> This occurred simultaneously as the regime was downplaying the narrative regarding its colonial agenda, at a moment when the country was increasingly pressured by the international community to grant independence to its colonies.<sup>63</sup> The year 1961 also marked the beginning of the colonial-liberation wars, prompted by an uprising in Angola, which spread to Portugal's other colonies in Africa.

Even after the end of dictatorship and colonialism, the Monument to the Discoveries has retained its significance. In 1985, its interior was redesigned, providing the building with an exhibition space and auditorium.<sup>64</sup> Later it came under the administration of EGEAC-Empresa de Equipamentos e Gestão Cultural, a public company of the Lisbon Municipality which manages some of the city's cultural spaces. Today, it is one of the most visited monuments in Lisbon and students visit it frequently on school trips.

In recent years, however, and in the context of the developments addressed earlier, this monument and the colonial and dictatorial legacies that it symbolises have been increasingly contested. For instance, in 2007 it became the subject of a critical intervention by the artist Kiluanji Kia Henda, titled *A*

*Descoberta* or *The Discovery* (Fig. 4). In his photographic work, Kia Henda depicted a group of mostly black youngsters from marginalised Lisbon neighbourhoods — most of whom had never visited Belém before — standing on the monument in front of the sculpted historical figures. This work addressed the link between selective historical narratives and feelings of belonging (or not belonging) to the city and the country more generally.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, it reveals that heritage spaces that are supposed to symbolise imperial power, can also become sites of resistance.<sup>66</sup>

More recently, at the beginning of 2021, a deputy of the Socialist Party, Ascenso Simões, published an article in *Público* in which he mentioned that the Monument should have already been demolished, given its connections to the dictatorship's views.<sup>67</sup> Simões wrote this article following two important events. One was the condolences offered by the President of the Republic and the Government (of the deputy's party) for the death of Lieutenant Colonel Marcelino da Mata, from Guinea-Bissau, a soldier who fought on the Portuguese side of the colonial-liberation wars, one of the most decorated military men and also a war criminal.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Alice news, 'Kiluanji Kia Henda: "Eu crio arte para provocar emoções"', 2021, <https://alicenews.ces.uc.pt/?lang=1&id=32458> last accessed 7 May 2023.

<sup>66</sup> Driver and Gilbert, 'Imperial Cities', p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Ascenso Simões, 'O salazarismo não morreu', *Público* 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2021/02/19/opiniao/opiniao/salazarismo-nao-morreu-1951297> last accessed 21 July 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Mariana P. dos Santos, 'As Estátuas e a História da Arte: o debate sobre vandalização de monumentos em Portugal', in *Arte e monumentos: entre o esquecimento e a memória*, ed. by Paulo H. Duarte-Feitoza and Rubens P. da Silva Sá (Goiania: Cegraf UFG, 2022), p. 192, <https://repositorio.bc.ufg.br/handle/ri/20170> last accessed 10 June 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Elsa Peralta and Nuno Domingos, 'Lisbon: Reading the (post-)colonial city from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century', *Urban History*, (2018), p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Buettner, *Europe after Empire*, p. 195.

<sup>63</sup> Buettner, *Europe after Empire*, pp. 194–196.

<sup>64</sup> 'Monument to the Discoveries', website of the Monument to the Discoveries, n.d. <https://padraodosdescobrimentos.pt/en/monument-to-the-discoveries/> accessed 7 May 2023.



**Fig. 2.** The Monument to the Discoveries seen from the Empire Square, Belém, 2018. Source: Sofia Lovegrove.



**Fig. 3.** The Monument to the Discoveries seen from the west side, Belém, 2018. Source: Sofia Lovegrove.



**Fig. 4.** 'A Descoberta (Taking over the monument celebrating the infamous period of the so called "Discovery")', 2006/2007. Source: Kiluanji Kia Henda.

The second event was the controversy about the floral coats of arms around the fountain of the Empire Square, some of which represented those of the former colonies. These coats of arms were added to the square in 1961, at the start of the colonial-liberation wars.<sup>69</sup> In 2016, a public tender for the requalification of the garden opened and the selected project foresaw taking away the floral coats of arms and replacing them with a lawn.<sup>70</sup> This choice was publicly criticised by members of the Municipality and led to two public petitions in favour of preserving the coats of arms.<sup>71</sup> In 2021, *Nova Portugalidade* initiated another petition that was signed by more than fifteen thousand people, which was later rejected by the Assembly of the Municipality.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Márcia Chuva, 'Praça do Império', in *Ecos Coloniais. Histórias, Patrimónios e Memórias*, ed. by Ana Guardião, Miguel B. Jerónimo and Paulo Peixoto, (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2022), p. 194.

<sup>70</sup> Susete Francisco, 'Brasões da Praça do Império substituídos por relva', *Diário de Notícias* 2016, <https://www.dn.pt/sociedade/brasoes-da-praca-do-imperio-substituidos-por-relva-5292571.html> last accessed 21 July 2023.

<sup>71</sup> Inês Boaventura, 'Fim dos brasões no jardim da Praça do Império recebido com críticas', *Público* 2016, <https://www.publico.pt/2016/07/19/local/noticia/fim-dos-brasoes-no-jardim-da-praca-do-imperio-recebido-com-criticas-1738752> last accessed 21 July 2023; 'Pela reabilitação dos brasões florais do Jardim da Praça do Império', *Petição Pública* n.d., <https://peticaopublica.com/pview.aspx?pi=BrasoesPracalImperio> last accessed 21 June 2023; 'Preservar a Praça do Império é defender a Portugalidade', *Petição Pública* n.d., <https://peticaopublica.com/pview.aspx?pi=pt82251> last accessed 21 June 2023.

<sup>72</sup> 'Contra o apagamento dos brasões da Praça do Império', *Petição Pública* n.d., <https://peticaopublica.com/?pi=PT105983> last accessed 21 June 2023.

Despite its rejection to preserve the floral coats of arms, the Municipality decided to set them in stone by transferring them to the sidewalk on the Empire Square, therefore allowing a colonial and romanticised narrative to be reasserted, while empowering a fascist movement such as *Nova Portugalidade*.<sup>73</sup> The new coats of arms were inaugurated at the beginning of 2023, during a ceremony that included the presence of several dignitaries including the President of the Republic.<sup>74</sup> Since then, criticism has only increased, including a protest and calls to change the very name of the square.<sup>75</sup>

That same year, someone left the following message graffitied on the side of the Monument to the Discoveries: 'Blindly sailing for money, humanity is drowning in a scarlet sea. Lia' [sic]. It is thought that this message, which seemingly establishes a connection between the 'Discoveries' and the many deaths brought about by capitalism and colonialism, was left by a French art student living in Paris and with a North-African background, who visited Lisbon as a tourist.<sup>76</sup> This example speaks to the transnational character of the discussions about the legacies of and narratives about the colonial past.<sup>77</sup>

Alongside these non-governmental initiatives – and ironically enough – this is the monument in Lisbon that has been the main focus of efforts led by the authorities to engage in more critical approaches to the narrative it symbolises and the histories it is connected to. EGEAC has been using the exhibition space inside to critically address topics such as colonialism and racism in ways that contrast with the history and symbolism of the structure. A good example of that is the 2017 exhibition 'Racism and Citizenship', curated by scholar Francisco Bethencourt, which represented 'one of the first efforts to counter the effect of Belém's ideological landscape', and included Kia Henda's photograph *The Discovery*.<sup>78</sup> Or the 2021 exhibition 'Visions of Empire', about the role of photography in colonial times, curated by Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and Joana Pontes. Furthermore, since the outside of the building remains untouched and there is no information (inside or outside) offering an explanation of the history and narrative that the monument represents, there are currently plans for a major intervention in 2024, which will critically address these issues for those who are not aware of the recent decolonial efforts taken by EGEAC.

Nonetheless, while EGEAC (a constitutive part of the Municipality) has been leading efforts to resignify this monument by transforming its function from a colonial token into a space for critical analyses of Portugal's history, the same municipality recently created a new monument that, given its colonialist tones, quickly became a contestation zone.

<sup>73</sup> The decision of setting the floral coats of arms in stone can also be understood as a colonial reterritorialization.

<sup>74</sup> Presidência, 'Reabertura do Jardim da Praça do Império', 2023, <https://www.presidencia.pt/atualidade/toda-a-atualidade/2023/02/reabertura-do-jardim-da-praca-do-imperio/> last accessed 30 May 2023.

<sup>75</sup> See CRIA, *Diálogo de Antropologia Pública - Patrimónios, artes e feridas coloniais*, 2023, <https://cria.org.pt/en/dap4-noticia> last accessed 30 May 2023; Ana S. Lopes, 'Era fundamental que a Praça do Império mudasse de nome', *Público* 2023, <https://www.publico.pt/2023/03/03/politica/entrevista/fundamental-praca-imperio-mudasse-nome-2041085?fbclid=IwAR2Edk2l2kMh2wnhtQLKDM6L9Ck4Y8foIzKINimJo3l8qnR17FttwnQGRk> last accessed 30 May 2023.

<sup>76</sup> Miguel Martins, 'Portugal: Relançado debate sobre símbolos coloniais após vandalização de monumento', *RFI* 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/pt/mundo/20210812-portugal-relançado-debate-sobre-símbolos-coloniais-apos-vandalização-de-monumento> last accessed 21 June 2023.

<sup>77</sup> Rigney, 'Toxic Monuments', p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> Peralta and Domingos, 'Lisbon: Reading the (post-)colonial city', p. 19.

## The anachronistic statue

On 22 June 2017, the mayor of Lisbon inaugurated a statue of the Priest António Vieira (1608–1697) in one of the main squares of the city (Fig. 5).<sup>79</sup> The initiative was promoted by a Catholic charity, the Holy House of Mercy, that dates to the fifteenth century, and was intended to celebrate the Jesuit priest who became known for his work as a diplomat, preacher, and missionary, as well as for his writings. The statue was part of the cultural revitalisation of a square where Vieira preached several times, which hosts the Saint Roque church, a museum, the archives and library of the Holy House of Mercy.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the apparent consensus regarding the historical and literary value of this figure, the role played by Vieira during the conquest and occupation of Brazil by the Portuguese is far more complex than the rhetoric around his supposed defence of Indigenous Peoples. Indeed, Vieira was against the enslavement of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil, but only so far as they submitted to a 'Christian life', which meant forfeiting their traditions and accepting the ecclesiastic tutelage (namely that of the Jesuits), including submitting to a regime of forced labour.<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, all Indigenous Peoples who resisted Portuguese domination were legitimately fought against and enslaved which, for Vieira, was still



Fig. 5. The statue of Padre António Vieira, Lisbon. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>79</sup> Lisboa, 'Estátua padre António Vieira: homenagem merecida an um grande homem', *Lisboa* 2017, <https://www.lisboa.pt/atualidade/noticias/detalhe/estatua-padre-antonio-vieira-homenagem-merecida-a-um-grande-homem> last accessed 20 June 2023.

<sup>80</sup> The church dates to the sixteenth century and was one of the first Jesuit churches in the world. The Jesuits were highly involved in the colonisation and missionisation of the 'New World'.

<sup>81</sup> Pedro Cardim, 'O Monumento ao Jesuíta António Vieira em Lisboa e o Debate sobre a Conquista e a Colonização Portuguesa das Terras Americanas', *Revista Lín-gua-Lugar* 3 (2021) 69–73.

better than living in a 'barbarian' state. Unlike other religious figures – such as the Dominicans Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566) or Father Fernando Oliveira (1507–1585) – Vieira did not question the slavery system, but only the circumstances of so-called illegitimate enslavement. Regarding the transatlantic slave trade, Vieira deplored the violence with which enslaved Africans were treated, but still considered the system a valuable way of saving souls.

If the erection of such a monument at a time when debates about Portugal's colonial past were becoming more prevalent was not contentious enough, the physical statue itself was no less problematic.<sup>82</sup> Even if accepting the premise that the historical importance of Vieira justified some form of memorialisation in the public space, the erection of such statue is anachronistic at best, while its configuration clearly reproduces colonial and racist tropes.<sup>83</sup>

The statue includes the figure of Vieira surrounded by three Indigenous children facing outwards, while he holds a cross in his left hand, in an almost threatening position, as if defending the otherwise vulnerable children against some sort of evil. At the bottom of the statue there is a plaque identifying the Priest as 'a Human Rights Defender'. Setting aside the blunt anachronism of associating a seventeenth-century figure with a legal concept only developed three centuries later, the three children reproduce the racist depictions of Indigenous Peoples as 'innocent', 'credulous', and child-like, and therefore, in need of 'civilisation' and 'tutelage'.<sup>84</sup> Faced with significant criticism, the artist, who was selected through a public tender, suggested that his aesthetic choices were intended to meet the expectations of the tender, not his own views, demonstrating that the city's intention was not to memorialise Vieira's literary and cultural significance, but the lusotropicalist rhetoric embodied by this figure.<sup>85</sup>

Months after the inauguration of the statue, a collective called *Descolonizando* (Decolonising) announced a peaceful protest against the glorification of colonialism, consisting of a poetic performance and the placing of flowers on the statue. However, the initiative never took place because an extreme-right group organised a vigil in order 'to protect the statue'. According to this group, named *Portugueses Primeiro* (Portuguese First), such protest was an 'attack on Portugal and the European culture' intended to 'denigrate the Catholic church and foster a guilty sentiment amongst the Portuguese', in a 'manifestation of anti-Portuguese hatred'; as such, the group could only 'watch over the glorious historical memory of Portugal'.<sup>86</sup> Members of *Descolonizando*, feeling threatened and unprotected by the police officers positioned at the square, decided to leave.

In June 2020, Lisbon's inhabitants woke up to a tainted statue: during the night, somebody painted the face and chest of Vieira red, drew a heart on the chest of each Indigenous child, and wrote in capitals, at the bottom of the statue, the inscription 'decolonize'. While the statue was quickly cleaned up by the municipal services

<sup>82</sup> Márcia Chuva and Paulo Peixoto, 'The Water that Washes the Past: New Urban Configurations in Post-Colonial Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro', *Heritage & Society* 13 (2020) 98–116 (p. 111).

<sup>83</sup> Barreiros et al., 'The Unbearable lightness. Such anachronism can be compared to the edification of confederate monuments in the United States, which served the purpose of containing the advances of the civil rights movement.

<sup>84</sup> Cardim, 'O monumento ao jesuíta', 76. As mentioned by Cardim, Portuguese school books also depict Vieira as a Human Rights defender; Manuela C. Cunha, *Índios no Brasil: História, Direitos e Cidadania*, (São Paulo: Claro Engima, 2012), p. 30, p. 45, p. 57, pp. 83–86.

<sup>85</sup> Santos, *As Estátuas e a História da Arte*.

<sup>86</sup> Ana Y. Ernesto, 'Extrema-direita impede manifestação contra estátua do padre António Vieira em Lisboa', *Diário de Notícias* 2017, <https://www.dn.pt/sociedade/extrema-direita-impede-manifestacao-contra-estatuado-padre-antonio-vieira-em-lisboa-8823551.html> last accessed 20 July 2023.

pre-empting its symbolic resignification in the public space through this new display, extreme-right political parties equated the tainting of the statue to the destruction of the Bamiyan buddhas and to 'cultural terrorism'.<sup>87</sup> Days before, several cities in Portugal had hosted anti-racism protests following the murder of George Floyd, which contributed to the framing of this intervention as part of the global movements *Black Lives Matter* and *Rhodes Must Fall*.

Although these associations are not exactly wrong, they tend to simplify the reasons why the erection of Vieira's statue had been contentious since the beginning by equating the tainting to a mere imitation of a broader movement. Importantly, they also foreclose a much-needed debate in Portuguese society about the legacies of its colonial empire, and its enduring racism. Indeed, while the media framed these events as a mimic of other international movements, scholarly and artistic publications developed the type of analysis that ought to be mainstreamed into the public.<sup>88</sup> Significantly, after the 2020 anti-racism protests, the leader of one of the main political parties declared in an interview that such protests are senseless, since 'there is no racism in Portuguese society'.<sup>89</sup> This myth – debunked in 2021 by the Council of Europe – that Portugal does not have a problem with structural racism continues to be reproduced, despite the increasing contestation against this idea and the lusotropicalist rhetoric underlining it.<sup>90</sup> If most forms of contestation to this idea tend to be reactions to certain events (such as the announcement of a museum of 'Discoveries' or the erection of a statue), the next example asserts – rather than reacts to – a novel approach that openly challenges the dominant narrative about Portugal's past.

### Rendering African heritage visible

While markers of the selective narrative of the 'Discoveries' are abundantly visible in Lisbon, the fact that this was perhaps the European city where more enslaved Africans could be found is invisibilised in the public space. Indeed, some estimates point to the existence of around ten thousand enslaved Africans in a population of close to two hundred thousand by the middle of the eighteenth century, to which a sizable freed Black and mixed-race population should be added, accounting altogether to around a fifth of the total population.<sup>91</sup> Such presence shaped the city in important ways, namely, in its urban geography – such as the Mocambo Quarter – the spatialisation of specific activities performed by enslaved people – as in the *Rua das Pretas* (the Street of the Black Women), where emancipated African women held their business dealings – or in the city's social, cultural and spiritual life, with African saints populating some of the local churches – as in

the Graça church, where four Black saints can still be seen on the altar.<sup>92</sup>

This important legacy is not recognised, however. The hegemonic presence of the 'Discoveries' rendered Lisbon an apparently 'white' city in the sense that while it had and continues to have a significant population of African descent, its past and present influence in shaping it in multiple dimensions (social, economic, geographic) is consistently erased. Since the majority of this Black population does not live in Lisbon – instead commuting from neighbouring municipalities, such as Amadora or Mem Martins – it is easier to ignore its presence and the various ways in which it shapes Lisbon's urban spaces and social life. Up until very recently, thus, these spaces of (past and present) African presence were not the focus of public discussions nor potential contestation zones given their overall invisibility. Rather, these are 'spaces of nonappearance' in the sense that people are not aware of them or are not interested in their significance.<sup>93</sup>

Considering the importance of this invisible heritage – not just for the city of Lisbon, but to the history of the country –, historian Henriques wrote in 2016 a guide identifying and contextualising the most significant spaces of African presence in the city. Subsequently, the association BYP – an organisation that uses dance and other artistic expressions to value and raise awareness for African heritage, especially amongst the African descendant youth – contacted Henriques expressing their wish to expand on her work. BYP was then already exploring this topic through the African origins of Fado – a musical genre connected to Portugal's national identity, and strongly associated with Lisbon's landscape – therefore, Henriques's research nicely dovetailed with BYP's work on Fado and its African ancestry.<sup>94</sup> This partnership led to the creation of a book and several urban itineraries across the city, during which BYP's guides take visitors (mostly tourists, but also Lisbon residents and school children) to several spaces that mark African presences in the city. Since 2016, BYP has taken more than 2500 people on these tours, highlighting the history, cultural legacies and significance of these urban spaces while refusing their invisibility.<sup>95</sup>

BYP has been further pursuing this effort to bring these spaces into wider public visibility by putting forward a toponymic project consisting of the creation of several stone plaques with historical information about these spaces and/or people connected to them. This project also includes the mounting of a bust of Pai Paulino, a freed enslaved man from Brazil who lived in Lisbon from 1834, becoming an important figure in the city's social and cultural life (Fig. 6).<sup>96</sup> These initiatives can be understood as a form of counter-territorialisation (or counter-monumentalisation) that not only challenge the dominant historical narrative, but more importantly,

<sup>87</sup> See Cole, *After the fall*, 8–9; Ana C. Marques, Bruno Horta and João F. Gomes, "'Descoloniza". Estátua de Padre António Vieira em Lisboa foi vandalizada', *Observador* 2020, <https://observador.pt/2020/06/11/descolonizacao-estatua-de-padre-antonio-vieira-em-lisboa-foi-vandalizada-com-dizeres/> last accessed 20 July 2023.

<sup>88</sup> See Barreiros et al. *The unbearable lightness*; Santos, *As Estátuas e a História da Arte*; Cardim, *O monumento ao jesuíta*.

<sup>89</sup> Lusa, 'Rui Rio: "Não há racismo na sociedade portuguesa"', *Sapo* 2020, <https://24.sapo.pt/atuabilidade/artigos/rui-rio-nao-ha-racismo-na-sociedade-portuguesa> last accessed 20 July 2023.

<sup>90</sup> Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Memorandum on combating racism and violence against women in Portugal', *Council of Europe* 2021, <https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-combating-racism-and-violence-against-women-in-portugal-/1680a1b977> last accessed 24 June 2023.

<sup>91</sup> James Sweet introduces these numbers based on the work of Jorge Fonseca and A.C. Saunders. James Sweet, 'The Hidden Histories of African Lisbon', in *The Black Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade*, ed by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs and James Sidbury, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 233–247 (p. 236).

<sup>92</sup> Isabel C. Henriques, *Historical Guide to an African Lisbon 15th to 21st Century*, (Lisbon: High Commission for Migration, 2021), p. 41, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Appearance of Black Lives Matter*, (Miami: Name, 2017), p. 21. Mirzoeff defines these spaces of nonappearance in relation to the violence that occurs inside them, and the lack of care of outsiders regarding such violence. We are drawing on his idea of invisibility and lack of care to define these spaces in opposition to spaces of appearance which, according to him, are spaces where people can claim a right to exist and therefore to matter.

<sup>94</sup> See Lila E. Gray, *Fado Resounding: Affective Politics and Urban Life*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>95</sup> More recently, BYP started new tours in the outskirts of Lisbon, in rural areas where enslaved Africans also left an important, but not yet recognised, cultural legacy.

<sup>96</sup> Paulino José da Conceição (1798–1869) was a soldier in the Portuguese liberal troops, and a judge in the brotherhoods of Black men, which advocated for Black people and denounced cases of illegal enslavement. He worked in the city as a plasterer, offering his services in São Domingos square. See Henriques, *Historical Guide* 73.



**Fig. 6.** The bust of Pai Paulino made by Mozambican artist Frank Ntaluma. Source: Batoto Yetu Portugal.

that counter the meanings of the city's spaces, and consequently, the power relations and identities shaped by the colonial territoriality that produced Lisbon's landscape as an imperial city.<sup>97</sup>

In doing so, BYP transforms such spaces into 'appearance zones', that is, spaces where an African presence and heritage is claimed, and therefore also its relevance and right to be seen.<sup>98</sup> Although this project was part of an initiative launched by the Lisbon Municipality in 2018 and the plaques are ready to be placed on walls since 2020, at the time of writing they remain stored, waiting for the conclusion of a bureaucratic entanglement involving the Municipality, its various parishes and BYP. It is not clear when these plaques will finally be placed, even though BYP has fulfilled all the requirements imposed so far, and media coverage helped obviate some of these obstacles. The fact that the city has undergone a political change in its leadership in the meantime is only another hurdle to this process.

Even if one tries not to see these bureaucratic obstacles as a sign of resistance against challenges to the dominant narrative materialised in Lisbon's urban space, comments made by some readers of the newspaper *Público* that reported on the toponymic project clearly show how alternative historical narratives can be highly disruptive, generating violent contestation.<sup>99</sup> While some complained about the funds being spent on such a project, others resorted to the widely used rhetoric of relativisation, by claiming, sarcastically, that the histories of the Romans, or the Greeks should also be addressed. Such reactions indicate at best a lack of awareness of the close connections between these histories and present-day society, and at worst a conscious unwillingness to allow marginalised and racialised groups to claim their space – and therefore

recognition – in Portuguese society. Others were yet more assertive, suggesting that an inverse project should also take place in the streets of Luanda, Maputo, and Bissau, as a recognition of the benefits brought by Portugal during colonial rule. All those comments reproduced in more or less subtle ways the lusotropicalist rhetoric, while others were imbued with obvious racist tones.

BYP's act of counter-territorialisation (through tours and the toponymic project) seeks to render Lisbon's African heritage visible, against a dominant narrative that has consistently erased not just the significant presence of Africans in the city and its historical and contemporary importance, but crucially, the main reasons for such a presence, that is, the fundamental role of Portugal in the transatlantic slave trade, and its long and extended colonial enterprise in Brazilian and African territories. Unlike the other examples analysed here, BYP and Henriques have been attempting to territorialise these Lisbon sites into 'spaces of appearance' by claiming a form of belonging anchored in their African heritage and meaning. In doing so, BYP and Henriques not only challenge dominant narratives, but also provoke new (more or less violent) reactions, ultimately rendering these spaces zones of contestation.

### Asserting belonging

What societies choose to remember collectively, through which media, by whom and for whom, plays a central role in constructing and reproducing notions of belonging and non-belonging. If some of the examples examined here seem to show an increasing openness to review long established narratives about the colonial past and their enduring meanings and materialisations in Lisbon's public space in more critical and inclusive ways, the contestation generated around them demonstrates that certain groups are not willing to accept voices and narratives that challenge the status quo. The strongest reactions have mostly stemmed from far-right movements and political parties, as in the cases of the coats of arms of the Empire Square, and the statue of Priest António Vieira.

Another recent example involving a far-right political party occurred in 2021, when two members of the *Ergue-te* (Rise Up) party stood up on the artistic installation of artist Grada Kilomba, titled 'The Boat' and shared pictures of this contestation on social media.<sup>100</sup> Kilomba's artwork was composed of different blocks of wood to form the silhouette of the bottom of a ship that would have been used to transport enslaved people. This act was meant not just as a performance of disrespect for the Portuguese artist of West African descent, but also to reinstate which kinds of narratives are seen to belong to the public space. In reasserting control of the decision regarding which narratives are allowed – and those which are not – acts like this one work to reinstate who is seen to belong to the city and the country more generally. These events cannot be disconnected from the structural racism that permeates many sectors of Portuguese society, wherein people of colour are systematically indexed to foreignness.<sup>101</sup>

Despite the fact that the strongest reactions to the resignification of public spaces have stemmed from the far right, that does not mean that challenges to the dominant historical narratives such as the ones presented here are being welcomed by more moderate political forces. Indeed, although the debate in Portugal, much like in the rest of Europe, is an extremely polarised one, driven by a relatively small group of individuals on the left and (far) right,

<sup>97</sup> Decker, 'Lines in the sand', 74; Randolph, 'Rumors of War', 45.

<sup>98</sup> Mirzoeff, *The Appearance*, 17, 18.

<sup>99</sup> See Ana da Cunha, 'Lisboa Africana: falta verba para colocar placas nos lugares desta história', *A Mensagem* 2022, <http://amensagem.pt/2022/04/02/placas-toponimicas-lisboa-africana-batoto-yetu-falta-de-verba/> last accessed 20 July 2023.

<sup>100</sup> Salomé Leal, 'Membros do partido Ergue-te pisaram obra de artista portuguesa no MAAT?', *Sapo* 2021, <https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/fact-check/membros-do-partido-ergue-te-pisaram-obra-de-artista-portuguesa-no-maat> last accessed 21 July 2023.

<sup>101</sup> Joana G. Henriques, *Racismo no País dos Brancos Costumes*, (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2018).

resistance to change has emerged from across the political spectrum. The delays in the erection of the Slavery Memorial and the BYP plaques (created by authorities from the Socialist party) constitute a subtle form of resistance against the creation of zones of contestation that can question the lusotropicalist and Eurocentric ideology underlining the official narrative about Portugal's past. As such, the Lisbon Municipality (in the person of its former mayor) can claim to be open to changing the narrative while hindering that same change and what it means in terms of social belonging – his proposal to create a Museum of the Discoveries highlights precisely this logic.<sup>102</sup>

The groups who do not see themselves represented in Portugal's dominant narrative nor in the city's heritage and toponymics – namely those descendant from enslaved Africans, those colonised by the Portuguese (and their descendants), those who came to Portugal from African countries in search of safety and/or a better life, those who perform the city's invisible yet important jobs (such as construction and cleaning) – are automatically excluded from a discursive articulation that is intended for a perceived culturally and socially homogenous society.<sup>103</sup> Portugal, as with so many other countries, is far from being homogeneous, and while the lusotropicalist myth celebrates a 'mixed' society combining the heritage of Moors, Brazilians, Brazilian Indigenous Peoples, and Africans, the dominant narrative about Portugal depicts it as white and European. The fact that there is no official demographic data about the various ethnic groups that make up Portuguese society only helps sustain such a depiction.<sup>104</sup>

The year 2017 marked the accumulation of a series of political and historical circumstances that led marginalised and racialised groups to contest more visibly than before the official narrative about Portuguese history and national identity. Simultaneously, such circumstances were followed by anachronic reactions – namely, the setting in stone of the coats of arms in the Empire Square, and the erection of the statue of the Priest António Vieira – that sought to reassert the colonial territorialisation inscribed in Lisbon's landscape. Such anachronism is perhaps what more clearly distinguishes Lisbon from other imperial projects and cities.

Indeed, if Lisbon has always been behind other European metropolises in the competition with, and emulation of imperial markers, the Portuguese empire was itself anachronic, justifying its existence in the 1960s (when other colonial empires were already dismantled or in the process of doing so) through equally anachronic political mechanisms, such as a supposedly scientific lusotropicalist theory from the 1930s, and the organisation of a colonial exhibition in 1940 (when most of these exhibitions had taken place decades earlier).<sup>105</sup>

Regardless of these anachronic reactions, by challenging the dominant narrative or adding new, contrasting layers to it, these groups are producing a "counter-memory" that challenges dominant views on the past, points to lacunae in the cultural memory and ... bring[s] new 'working memories' out of the archive and into circulation".<sup>106</sup> If the creation of zones of contestation constitutes the first step in unsettling and deconstructing existing dominant narratives, it is mainly through zones of appearance that counter-memories and alternative narratives can develop. Importantly, by creating such zones of appearance, under-represented and marginalised groups claim their belonging not just in the public space, but in the country's past, present and future. While these processes of contestation unsettle and subvert the foundational ground from which dominant historical narratives and concomitant heritage are produced, only through appearance can they combat exclusion and force the creation of alternative narratives that make visible and therefore acknowledge other heritages and belongings.

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<sup>102</sup> The current mayor (from the centre-right) seems to be following the same logic, by replacing EGEAC's director who was personally involved in the decolonisation efforts led by the Monument to the Discoveries, as described in this article. See Maria Escaja, 'EGEAC: nomeação ou concessão?', *Esquerda* 2022, <https://www.esquerda.net/opiniaao/egac-nomeacao-ou-concessao/82084> last accessed 20 July 2023.

<sup>103</sup> Stuart, 'Whose Heritage?', p. 6.

<sup>104</sup> Lusa, 'Governo apoia INE na decisão de excluir origem étnica do Censos', *Sábado* 2022, <https://www.sabado.pt/portugal/detalhe/governo-apoia-ine-na-decisao-de-excluir-origem-etnica-do-censos> last accessed 20 July 2023.

<sup>105</sup> Driver and Gilbert, 'Imperial Cities', p. 9.

<sup>106</sup> Ann Rigney, 'Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory', *Journal of European Studies* 35 (2005) 23–24.