Bringing Slavery into the Light in Postcolonial Portugal

The rhetoric and poetics of a slavery exhibition

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■ **ABSTRACT:** In 2009, in Lagos, Portugal, the remains of 158 bodies of fifteenth-century enslaved Africans were unearthed. In 2016, Lagos City Council inaugurated a slavery-themed exhibition in collaboration with the Portuguese Committee of UNESCO's Slave Route Project. Through an analysis of the exhibition's rhetoric and poetics, I argue that the former is yet another instance of Lusotropicalism, a theoretical construct developed by Gilberto Freyre throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s to support the construct of Brazil as a racial democracy, and appropriated by Portugal to support the "benign" character of its colonial system. As a consequence, slavery and Portugal's role in the transatlantic slave trade, although apparently brought into the light in this exhibition, are in fact hidden in plain sight because both the rhetorical and poetic devices at play conspire to evade addressing the colonial order and its historical consequences, both past and present.

■ **KEYWORDS:** aphasia, exhibitions, Lagos, Lusophony, Lusotropicalism, Portugal, post-colonial, slavery

In 1415, the first expedition of caravels left the southern Portuguese city of Lagos and headed toward the North African coast in order to take the city of Ceuta. The acquisition of this African city by the Portuguese kickstarted the European colonial endeavors, geopolitical systems that were deeply rooted in the massive transatlantic slave trade that produced what Paul Gilroy (1993) named "the black Atlantic." But if Portugal was the first European nation to establish colonial rule, it was also one of the last to dismantle it: this did not happen until the mid-1970s, immediately after the democratic revolution of 1974.¹ Portuguese colonial rule was, thus, both long-lived and recent, making it a very important feature of Portuguese history and of the sense of "being Portuguese." This historical and ontological centrality of colonial rule accounts also for many features of Portugal's present-day landscape of race relations.²

In the History Galleries of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington, DC, Portugal takes first place among all the European slave-trading nations in terms of the number of enslaved Africans transported across the Atlantic to the Americas for over four centuries. But Portugal's massive role in the transatlantic slave trade is not prominently featured in Portuguese school textbooks and school curricula (Araújo and Maeso 2011; Pereira and Araújo 2017; Torgal 1988). This aphasia (Stoler 2011) is essential to the

self-conceptualization by the Portuguese of their colonial rule as benign. In turn, this self-conceptualization is intimately linked to the appropriation by Portugal of Brazilian anthropologist/historian Gilberto Freyre's (1958, 1961) theory of Lusotropicalism.³ The latter is characterized as "a discourse on the exceptionality of [the] southern [colonies of exploitation—as opposed to the North Atlantic] racial thought" (Anderson et al. 2019: 2).⁴ If Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1955) *Tristes Tropiques* is about *alterity* as the foundational element of the social, Freyre's (1953) *Aventura e Rotina* is implicated in the underlining of *similitude* as the foundational element of exceptionalism in Portuguese colonization (Bastos 1998). In fact,

[t]he term Luso-tropicalism was crafted in the 1950s by the Brazilian anthropologist and cultural historian Gilberto Freyre . . . [who] suggested that the Portuguese colonizers had a special ability to intermingl[e], intermarr[y] and interchang[e] cultural elements with different peoples, given that they were themselves the result of multiple mixtures . . . [This theory] was borrowed for political purposes by the Portuguese [rightwing] government and pasted into the official doctrine of the regime . . . [being] propagated in the 1960s and early 1970s. (Bastos 2019: 243)

This assumed benign nature of Portuguese colonial rule formulated by Freyre in the middle of the twentieth century did not disappear with the end of Portuguese colonial rule: it infuses, still, in present-day Portuguese society, and is often expressed in official sources.⁵ In fact, during his April 2017 official visit to Senegal, the Portuguese president visited the island of Goree (the largest slave-trading center on the African coast, ruled at one point by the Portuguese). During his visit, the first ever by a Portuguese head of state, and unlike other visiting leaders, he chose not to explicitly apologize for the nation's role in the transatlantic slave trade.⁶ Instead, he underlined that Portugal had been the first European nation to abolish slavery in 1761—but this date was of the abolition in the metropole alone (the trade was left untouched in the colonies). This situation provoked strong reactions, revealing the divide within Portuguese society (academia included) between those who argued for the need to recognize Portugal's role in the transatlantic slave trade—and publicly apologize for this historical legacy—and those who argued against it.

The absence from school textbooks of Portugal's role in the transatlantic slave trade is but one of the several instances that illustrate Portugal's inability to address this historical legacy. The fact that the experience of the nearly four hundred thousand settlers who, in 1975 in a space of four months, "returned" from Africa has hardly been the object of scientific inquiries (Peralta 2019; Pinto 2001) speaks volumes about the unresolved status of Portugal's colonial past within Portuguese society as a whole—and consequentially about Portugal's heritage as a major actor in the transatlantic slave trade. It is against this national background that the analysis of the 2016 Lagos permanent exhibition on slavery presented here must be read.

The City of Lagos, Southern Portugal

Lagos is located on the southern Portuguese coast of the Algarve. It was from Lagos that the ships departed to conquer Ceuta in the early fifteenth century. By 1460, Portuguese ships had reached Sierra Leone, diverting trade routes and bringing back to Lagos goods, including enslaved individuals of sub-Saharan origin (Caldeira 2013). When in the 1960s beach holidays became a sought-after attraction, the Algarve developed a heavily international tourism-based economy. Lagos, with its striking coastline, was one of the earliest international tourist cities of the Algarve, and it has stayed a tourism center and a site of delectation until the present.

In 2009, due to the increased influx of tourists to the city, there was a need to build a parking lot adjacent to the old city walls. The construction work uncovered human remains, as well as remains of ancient stone walls. The latter proved to be the remains of a leper colony.⁷ Concerning the human remains, archeological digs were contracted to a private company, and a collaboration with a forensic anthropology team from Coimbra University was established. The analysis of the human bones confirmed them as the remains of individuals of African origin: 158 humans, including 107 “adults” and 50 “non-adults” (the terminology and numbers are from Ferreira et al. 2019). The osteological study carried out on the remains revealed “a morphology characteristic of African ancestry” (Ferreira et al. 2019: 671), while the genetic study confirmed their affinity with Bantu-speaking groups (Martiniano et al. 2014). The C14 analysis indicated dates between 1420 and 1480 (Ferreira et al. 2019). Adding to the archaeological data, there is the historically documented arrival at Lagos in 1444 of the first shipment of enslaved Africans.⁸ The remains of these 158 African individuals unearthed in Lagos are thus coeval with the historically recorded onset of the Portuguese slave trade that took place precisely in this city. Additional evidence suggesting that the human remains were of enslaved Africans included the noncanonical burial (in a city dump) plus the mode of interment: the archeological report stated that “[a] great number of individuals (52.6 percent, 51/97) seemed to have been buried without care” (Ferreira et al. 2019: 675). Also, according to the osteological report, some of these African individuals (6.5 percent) showed evidence of having been tied when inhumed. Additionally, a royal decree of 1515 had outlawed the practice of leaving the corpses of dead slaves to rot on the streets. The royal decree and the location and lack of care entailed in most of Lagos’s interments attest to the utter nonhumanity of the enslaved Africans in the eyes of the city’s earlier Christian/Portuguese inhabitants.

From all of the above, there is no doubt that what the 2009 underground parking lot construction uncovered is the oldest African slave burial ground known in Europe. However, this remarkable historical site is nonmemorialized. At the site, only the underground parking lot and a mini-golf facility built on its top are clearly visible. The burial ground of the enslaved Africans is hardly noticeable, its memory retained only by a small plaque by one of the lot’s entrances where a brief text (in Portuguese and in English) refers to the find, but even here it refers mostly to the leper colony.⁹ The only visible presence of the tragic past that was uncovered comprises the foundation walls of the leper colony. The traces of the first enslaved Africans on European soil are, in fact, left in the dark: unspoken and invisible. If slavery and its victims were invisible at the actual burial site, both were brought to light in two exhibitions. Both exhibitions were organized primarily by the Lagos City Council. One exhibition took place soon after the discovery, in 2010; the second opened in 2016. It is to both these instances of visibility and invisibility, and the forms used by the 2016 exhibition to produce them, that I now discuss.¹⁰

The Slave Market Building

In one of the old city’s most central squares stands an imposing statue of Prince Henry, the Navigator. Larger than life, this regal representation of the man behind the Portuguese maritime expansion, and one of the nation’s most celebrated figures, is an attraction for tourist cameras. In the same square, bordering one of its sides, is a building popularly known as The Slave Market—a name it holds despite historical records showing it never had such a use (Morán 2017). It was in this building that the Lagos City Council opened the two exhibitions dedicated to the dark heritage brought to light by the parking lot construction work.

I have already written both on the burial site discovery and on the 2010 exhibition, as well as on the latter’s postcolonial gaze ripe with imperial continuities (Santos 2018b). Relevant to

the analysis presented here is the fact that in the 2010 exhibition the actual remains of some of the dead enslaved Africans were on display, placed in glass cases, unnamed, unprotected, and subjected to the scientific gaze that objectifies them as part of the European master narrative. Centuries after their demise, these enslaved Africans became, again, a subject of an objectifying imperial gaze that continued to deny them the humanity that they have and are entitled to have recognized. In 2012, after two years of displaying the remains of the enslaved Africans, the first slave burial site exhibition closed so that a new one could be mounted.

The same year that the first exhibition closed, the Lagos City Council signed a cooperation agreement with the Centre for Studies on Africa and on Development, a research unit that was part of the University of Lisbon,¹¹ and with the Portuguese Committee of UNESCO's Slave Route Project (housed in the aforementioned research unit). The main focus of this agreement was the construction of a Lagos slavery museum. The latter would be constituted by three sites: the Slave Market building exhibition in the old city, a research center, also in the old city, and a purpose-built museum on the site of the burials. Although the architecture project for the latter was also presented at the time of the signing of the cooperation agreement (Rodrigues 2012), today, and eight years on, only the Slave Market building with its new exhibition has come into being. Thus, in 2016, the Slave Market building reopened its doors to the public with a new and permanent exhibition.

Because museums are envisioned as trustworthy scientific witnesses, because they are seen as places of authority, and because, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 6) put it, "display not only shows and speaks, it also does," I address here the form and content of the 2016 Lagos display on the broad realm of slavery (namely the trade of enslaved Africans) and on both Lagos's and Portugal's role in it. I frame the analysis through what is usually referred to as the exhibition's rhetoric and poetics.

Rhetoric and Poetics and the Museum Experience

Some of the literature on museums, particularly after the new museology, refers to the pairing of poetics and politics, such as in Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine's (1991) celebrated volume *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*.¹² With critical museology, particular attention started to be paid to representation, "producing greater 'reflexivity'—in the form of greater attention to the processes by which knowledge is produced and disseminated, and to the partial (in both senses of the word) and positioned nature of knowledge itself" (Macdonald 1996: 3). Issues of representation have also acquired a central role in anthropology since the final decades of the twentieth century. In one of anthropology's seminal books, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, James Clifford (1986) reflexively decodes the ethnographic endeavor as objectified in the text of the ethnographer. What Clifford describes as the determinants of ethnographic text are equally valid terms when applied to the museum:

(1) contextually (it draws from and creates meaningful social milieus); (2) rhetorically (it uses and is used by expressive conventions); (3) institutionally (one writes/[exhibits] within, and against, specific traditions, disciplines, audiences); (4) generically (an ethnography/[exhibition] is usually distinguishable from a novel/[department store shop window] . . . (5) politically (the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested); (6) historically (all the above conventions and constraints are changing). These determinations govern the inscription of coherent ethnographic fictions/[museum exhibitions]. (Clifford 1986: 6)

Focusing on issues of representation and its production, I analyze the Lagos slavery exhibition through the pairing of rhetoric and poetics, two entwined frames of constructed meaning that should not be taken separately. In fact, the present-day estrangement between rhetoric and poetics is a development that arose only in the late nineteenth century (Berlin 1985). It was then that an attenuated eighteenth-century rhetoric based on a positivistic epistemology became dominant in the science classroom, while romantic poetics, which embraced a different epistemology, began to take precedence in the literature classes (Berlin 1985). However, although different, rhetoric and poetics complement and define each other:

[In Classical Antiquity] the important difference was that rhetoric was concerned with language designed to bring about action in the material world. Poetics, on the other hand, was concerned with language that existed as an object of contemplation. [Thus, while the text in poetics] was to be concerned with truth and goodness [its] distinguishing feature was beauty. Rhetorical texts, in contrast, were created for extrinsic purposes. [Although] also concerned with beauty, [in them the task of] making truth and virtue prevail through specific directives was more important. (Berlin 1985: 522)

Because rhetoric and poetics are qualities of a text that affect qualities in the mind of the perceiver (for instance: imagination by the presentation of the beautiful, and understanding by the use of logic) (Berlin 1985), to analyze the exhibition's rhetoric and poetics is to analyze them as forms that aim not at explanation but at persuasion. Although often referring to both poetics and rhetoric, the critical museology literature has made more frequent use of the former than of the latter while also paying particular attention to the politics of the museum (see Macdonald 1998; and Macdonald and Silverstone 1992). But some studies have addressed more centrally the rhetorics of display: matters of media and mode of display are considered by Sharon Macdonald (2007) to understand how particular exhibition "prompts" affect the visitor experience. Similarly, although in a different form, there is the study by Corinne Kratz (2011) that draws on the concept of "rhetorics of value" so as to assess how social meanings and judgments are constituted and understood through persuasive form in exhibitions. Kratz looks at how design and communication are at work in museum exhibitions by referring to what she calls "rhetorical repertoires" and by attending to "two media regularly included in exhibitions: lighting and texts" (2011: 29–30).

Although the roles of both the use of lighting and the mode of object display (namely the use of color or the play with scale) in effecting a mood or a feeling onto the visitor, in tandem with text that shepherds the visitors' understanding of the objects' meanings, are absolutely central to visitors' experiences of a museum exhibition, I propose here that it is the consideration of the moral orders of attraction (MacCannell 1976)—that is, the moral judgments elicited or muted by the exhibition's rhetoric and poetics—that truly speak to the core of an exhibition as a form that aims at persuasion. And because rhetoric and poetics really walk hand-in-hand, the description of the exhibition on a "difficult heritage" (Macdonald 2009) will not separate the two realms.

The Lagos Slave Route Permanent Exhibition

Titled *Lagos and the Slave Route*, this exhibition is part of Lagos's multisited Municipal Museum, and was inaugurated in June 2016 by senior officials of the nation (the Minister of Culture) and of the city (the Mayor of Lagos). The exhibition's executive coordination is credited to the Lagos City Council and its archeologist. The exhibition's conception is credited to the historian who was a founding member and head, in 1998, of the Portuguese Committee of UNESCO's Slave

Figure 1. *King Amador* by São Tomé artist Eduardo Malé Fernandes. Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

Route Project, and who worked as scientific coordinator of the studies of the 2009 archeological finds. This is a permanent exhibition, and when I visited it in April 2017, my ticket was valid for unlimited revisits until the end of the year. The museum is free of charge for Lagos inhabitants and City Council workers, for children under 12 years of age, and for schoolchildren; visitors between 12 and 18 years of age, as well as those over 65 years of age, receive a discounted rate.

The exhibition occupies the two floors of the historical building and is the product of the work of a highly professional team, as the extensive credits on display to visitors make clear: names of individuals and companies responsible for the exhibition's conceptualization and construction, photography, digital technology, animation, and historical topography. Those named also include those responsible for the restoration and architectural rehabilitation of the exhibition's building. The visitor to the exhibition finds on the ground floor an introductory space, in which the history of the building is made clear; also on display is a real life-size sculpture donated and made by a contemporary São Tomé and Príncipe artist representing a famous slave, King Amador, who in 1595 lead a rebellion on São Tomé Island against the harsh plantation conditions that the enslaved Africans were subjected to by their Portuguese masters. Also, on display on this floor is the present-day cartography of Lagos' slavery-related sites. Visitor reception is also located on this ground floor, while the actual slavery exhibition is located on the upper floor.

Once upstairs, the narrative offered to visitors is grouped around four themes: "the African world of the 14th and 15th centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese and the beginning of the massive slave trade"; "the tragedy of Modern era slave trade"; "the development of the inclusion and of the exclusion of Africans in Lagos society"; and "slavery in present times and the role of UNESCO" (Morán 2017: 216).¹³ Once on the upper floor, you are given an electronic tablet and you are informed that the visit is to be carried out with the help of this electronic device. A brief explanation is given referring to items located next to their display via the mediation of the

Figure 2. The white walls. Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

Figure 3. The black monoliths.
Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

multimedia device, which provides the possibility of broadening the information. I argue that this technological mediation is a highly relevant element in the visitor's experience,¹⁴ as my analysis of the exhibition's rhetoric and poetics will show.

Within the realm of the rhetoric and poetics of the Lagos exhibition, I argue that the main rhetorical resource is the *historical* material: objects, documents, paintings (even if facsimiles or reproductions), all of them seen as time-traveling witnesses laid before the eyes of the visitors, all of them embodiments of "truth." The poetics of the exhibition would lead us to consider the strategies of display meant to bring pleasure. Within the realm of poetics, I argue that, although also participating in the *historical*, the main resource employed within the exhibition is the pleasure of *modernity* in the form of the digital.

I now consider the exhibition's two major display *loci*: the white walls of the historical building's rooms, where paintings, maps, and texts are offered to the visitor (see Figure 2), and the tall, sleek, black monoliths placed on the rooms' wooden floors (see Figures 3 and 4). The majority of the historical objects on display are inside these black rectangular monoliths, each one over two meters tall, several to a room, creating a landscape of multiple, vertical black rectangular bodies. In

Figure 4. The white walls and the black monoliths. Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

these white-washed rooms, the peripatetic visitor walks through this forest of black sleek monoliths, wandering around each one until they come across the side that holds an inner niche where the historical witnesses (e.g., a pair of modern iron shackles; the facsimile of Gomes Eanes de Zurara's chronicle narrating the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to Lagos) lie behind the thick glass shrouded by the black inner parts of the monolith, hieratic in their stillness and lit by a soft overhead light. The rhetorical and the poetic effect on the visitor produces a sense of the "sacredness" of the historical object, enshrined inside the black monolithic case, protected by glass and illuminated from above like a sacred icon or deity.

But the black, sleek monoliths do not just hold the surprise of the softly illuminated inner niche where the historical object is presented for our contemplation. They hold awe-inducing properties (besides offering the visitor the face-to-face encounter with the historical witnesses of Lagos's slave-trading past). The sleek, tall black monoliths are in fact a structure of sophisticated electronic display: on their sides, and unknown to the visitor, there are snippets of video images that fade in and fade out of the monoliths' blackness, projecting to the then surprised but bewitched visitor fleeting portrayals of black individuals, of slaves, through images taken from historical sources (see Figures 5 and 6). These black figures who appear and disappear were only details in larger pictorial compositions, and thus often unnoticed—but here they are brought to light, both literally and metaphorically. Children love this feature of the exhibition, but both children and adults, once they realize that the black monolith will disclose new images, stop by the monolith and eagerly wait for the reemergence out of darkness of the image so they can gaze upon it, before the elusive black individuals—the enslaved Africans—fade again into the inner darkness of the monolith.

The two display *loci* of the exhibition are also related to two differential bodily relations to the actual displays. The visitor, in order to gaze at what is presented in the monoliths, has to come closer to the actual display (sometimes the objects on display are quite small), as their body bends so as to be able to read the printed information located at the base of the niche. When it comes to the information displayed on the walls of the exhibition rooms, quite often the body needs to distance itself from it since the scale of the display (large paintings, full-size wall maps,

Figure 5. Side wall of a black monolith and its brief display of an image of an enslaved African taken from historical sources. Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

Figure 6. Side wall of a black monolith and its brief display of an image of an enslaved African woman and child taken from historical sources. Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

or large texts) requires distance so as to grasp its wholeness. Thus, from the perspective of a phenomenology of the body, visitors to this exhibition move in and out of bodily postures akin to reverential (bowing by the niches in the black monoliths with their true historical witness) and subjugated awe (standing back and looking up at the large pictorial displays on the white walls). But this quasi-religious bodily experience of the displays (a common one in museum spaces) is juxtaposed with the modernity-as-electronic-experience that both the surprise video displays of the black monoliths and the electronic tablets bring to the visit. As stated above, the electronic tablets supplied to the visitor are meant to be carried throughout the visit. At specific points of specific displays, there is a possibility of obtaining additional information by placing the tablet in the right spatial relation to the item on display: the tablet screen will magically duplicate the display in front of you while offering additional images and additional text (see Figure 7). If the viewing of the niches in the black monoliths effects the visitor on an individual and mostly silent level in relation to the exhibited item, then the electronic tablet's disclosures lead to vivid interactions among the individuals who are visiting the exhibition together—and most audibly so when there are children or teenagers in the group.

Figure 7. The electronic mediation of the visit: the black monolith's niche (small object and respective caption) and the broadening of the information through the electronic tablet. Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

Concerning the written narrative, the texts on offer throughout the exhibition are multiple, but can be divided into two main categories: (1) the ones that act as clarification to the visitor on the nature and origin of the historical object in itself (these are the captions to the objects); and (2) those that aim at explaining and meaningfully constituting the universe on display (these texts are often printed on the white walls of the exhibition rooms, but on occasion are also available in the tablet's disclosures).

The written narrative is clearly centered on the Lusophone (i.e., the Portuguese-speaking) world and is, more particularly and profoundly, embedded in Freyre's Lusotropicalism. In fact, the first image visitors come across once on the upper floor is a world map where 11 Portuguese-speaking locations are highlighted spread throughout South America, Africa, and Asia (see Figure 2 – Note the absence of Portugal as such). The title of this world map is “Lugares da Lusofonia na ‘Rota do Escravo’/ Portuguese-Speaking Places on the ‘Slave Route.’” But in this exhibition the colonial is not presented as locked in the past. Actually, it is not even presented as such: the disavowal of the colonial past is achieved by not even referring to it in that manner, but only as early globalization. As such, the Lagos exhibition's texts, through their rhetoric and poetics, constitute Portuguese maritime expansion (and the ensuing colonial system) as the beginning of the globalized world of today. But where do slavery and the transatlantic slave trade fit in this narrative? Clearly, and because it is actually written in such terms in the exhibition's texts, this museum-like space refers to the slave trade only as early globalization and multi-cultural dialogue:

The process of opening to the world grew from the fifteenth century, with the establishment of contacts between geographical areas that until then had existed in relative isolation. Iberian voyages of discovery triggered the movement of people, goods, ideas and techniques, and marked the beginning of globalization. One of the consequences of this worldwide process was the increase in the slave trade. Slavery had already existed, but the contact

of Europeans with previously unknown African regions caused an increase in demand for this labour. Africans, reduced to being mere goods, were transported to Europe and later on were also sent in their thousands to America where Iberians developed societies and economies with a large amount of slaves. (English text from the black monolith titled “The Slave Trade”)

This text, and its use of vocabulary, are profoundly illuminating of the exhibition’s rhetoric and poetics: beyond referring to the fact that slavery existed before the European-led slave trade (a historical truth often strategically presented to both hide the unprecedented scale Europeans brought to the phenomenon and to whitewash Europe’s role in present-day geopolitical unbalances and racial divides), it presents the slave trade and the colonial system as early globalization. But what is truly remarkable in this text is the absolute absence of any identification of the Portuguese or Portugal with this trade: the chosen word is “Iberian” (or “European”). This fact is even more telling if one is knowledgeable about how the Portuguese sense of national identity is constructed on the pioneering role of the nation in European maritime voyages (João 2017; Peralta 2015), as well as on a strong sense of opposition to an overall Spanish identity (Pereira and Araújo 2017). It could be argued that the historical facts in the text are truthful, which they are. But that is the real role of rhetoric in a text: to translate a truth into a language perfectly intelligible to the person to whom you speak, and thus to persuade those who hear you of the truthfulness of your utterance (Berlin 1985). But to the rhetoric one has to add the poetics of a text. This text speaks of the historical facts, choosing a vocabulary that speaks to visitors’ (who are mostly international tourists holidaying in Lagos) present-day world (i.e., globalized and inhabited by intercultural dialogue), and as such it endeavors to positively affect its readers—because how is it not beautiful (and thus morally right) that the world has multicultural dialogue? But the slave trade can be spoken of and exhibited differently from the way it is in the Lagos exhibition, as the History Galleries of the NMAAHC in Washington, DC, attest.¹⁵

The NMAAHC opened to the public the same year as the Lagos Slave Route exhibition.¹⁶ The museum’s History Galleries have a large space dedicated to the transatlantic slave trade. This space includes a section where walls are covered by slave ships’ names, one after the other, in an overwhelming litany that displays for each ship the country of origin, the date of voyage, the number of enslaved embarked, and the number of survivors of the Middle Passage. The latter is represented here in its full gore; the visitor can actually see objects salvaged from the wreck of the *São José*, a Portuguese slave ship that sank off the coast of South Africa in 1794, killing 212 of the more than 400 enslaved Africans on board. And because, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett underlines, “original objects can add material presence and emotional resonance to a story” (2015: 227), these objects salvaged from the slave ship that was to be the coffin of over 200 enslaved Africans assume here the value of relics. They are displayed in a darkened room and made visible by the light gently washing over them from above. As visitors go through this small space, an audio recording recreates the historical voices who narrated in written documents the real-life experience of the slave trade and the arduous crossing of the Atlantic. The texts on display also speak of the horrendous experience of the crossing. No matter where you come from, the rhetoric and poetics of the NMAAHC’s display of the Middle Passage will affect you, shedding a light on the infamous trade, making its gruesome reality both visible and emotionally powerful for visitors, leaving no viewer ignorant of the scale of the trade and of the suffering it involved.¹⁷

If the NMAAHC opted for a rhetoric and a poetics of representation of the Middle Passage that constructs a powerful space, one that engages with its visitors, no matter their individual story, the Lagos Slave Route exhibition not only does not address the transatlantic slave trade as such,¹⁸ it addresses the topic in just one text displayed on one of the exhibition’s walls. A section of that text reads as follows:

After 1444 Lagos received annual shipments of African slaves who had been captured in raids or acquired by trading on the west coast of Africa. Brought to the Algarve aboard caravels, little is known about the living conditions on board, but they must have been very harsh for people violently taken from their homes and cultures. (English text from the Lagos Slave Route exhibition)

In the space dedicated to the Middle Passage in the NMAAHC, beside the walls listing the names of slave ships and the texts that speak of the sorrows associated with those vessels, the numbers of enslaved individuals transported by each European nation are also displayed. Here, the real magnitude of Portugal's role in the construction of "the black Atlantic" is made very clear: Portugal takes first place among all the nations listed with 5.8 million Africans transported across the Atlantic to the Americas between 1441 and 1836, followed by Great Britain a distant second, with a total of 3.3 million Africans transported between 1562 and 1807. No such statistics are present in the Lagos Slave Route exhibition.

I argue that both the rhetoric and the poetics of the Slavery Route display of the Lagos exhibition act so as to (paradoxically) divert attention from the darkness of the topic and to actually hide, while in plain sight, the magnitude of Portugal's role in the transatlantic slave trade. This exhibition's politics is achieved through the way in which the rhetoric and the poetics are intertwined in the use made of the resources identified here: the truthfulness of *history* (the objects and the texts produced by historians) and the playfulness of *modernity* (the electronic mediation of the reality on display). If on the one hand the former produces visibility (bringing history closer to the visitor with the "real" object on display and the "truth" of the texts), then on the other hand the latter works toward producing a distance (and thus invisibility) between the present (the visitor) and the past (slavery). This distancing/invisibility results from the fact that the relationship the visitor has with the exhibits and their dark heritage is strongly mediated by the modernity of the digital (the tablets carried by each visitor), but more importantly it is mediated by the playful nature (akin to computer games) of the interaction between visitor and exhibition through the use of the tablets and their "disclosure" function. As such, both the black monoliths' video displays and the tablets' disclosures work toward a technology of enchantment that is truly founded on the enchantment of technology (Gell 1992). In this exhibition, the visitor encounters the "enchantment" of the technological, as the visit is mediated by tablets that supply additional images to the visitor when triggered by the sensors next to some of the displays.

The enchantment of the technological is also seen here in the playfulness of the technological. While the 2010 exhibition had the actual remains of the dead enslaved Africans on display inside glass cases—an enhanced visibility—as objects of the imperial and of its correlate, the scientific gaze, thus negating their humanity—an enhanced invisibility, the 2016 exhibition rhetoric and poetics work toward the distancing of the humanity of these individuals by presenting them through images alone, which are displayed inside the black monoliths in a way reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's (1969) original (art object) in the age of mechanical reproduction: as phantasmagoria. To this distancing of slavery and the enslaved individuals through phantasmagoria, one has to add the playful way the mediation through tablet presents the image of these mortal remains: akin to Pokémon GO pursuits, the electronic device, once placed in front of the black monolith displaying the archeological photographic register of the skeleton buried in the layers of the city's medieval dump, inscribes onto that dead enslaved African body the images of objects found there (bracelets, beads, etc.) as well as the historians' and archeologists' texts explaining the finds (see Figures 8 and 9). Both forms of visual display and of written text turn these enslaved Africans, the first to have died on European soil, into invisible victims of the Portuguese state and its slave traders: they are visible only as depersonalized osteological pieces, rendered as scientific and archeological finds.

Figure 8. Black monolith displaying enslaved African burial. (Note: the caption's text refers to the dead African as "captive," thus avoiding the use of the word "slave.")
Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

Figure 9. The enchantment of the technological: by placing the electronic tablet in front of the black monolith where the depiction of the burial site is displayed, and by moving the tablet down, the different objects found at different depths of the site's stratigraphy are revealed and made visible to the visitor. Photo courtesy of the author, 2017.

Bringing into the Light while Hiding in Plain Sight

This article is titled "Bringing Slavery into the Light in Postcolonial Portugal." In fact, both strategies of revealing and concealing are at play in the case study presented inasmuch as the Lagos permanent exhibition is (1) bringing slavery into the light: it is the first of its kind in Portugal and part of the earliest permanent slave-trade exhibitions to open in Europe;¹⁹ it is also the site where the remains of the dead Africans slaves were literally made visible by being displayed to visitors;²⁰ and (2) hiding this dark heritage in plain sight through both the non-memorialization of the actual burial site and through the exhibition's rhetoric and poetics that depoliticize colonialism. By accomplishing the latter, the Lagos exhibition is speaking to the continuity of Lusotropicalism, now in the shape of Lusophony. Through the latter, the imperial

continuities (Feldman-Bianco 2001) present in Portuguese society, and which account for much of its present-day race relations, are kept in the dark, hidden and unspoken.

I have referred above to the ripples in Portuguese society revealed by the 2017 visit to the island of Goree (Senegal) by the Portuguese head of state and his unwillingness to officially apologize to the victims of the slave trade. I close this article with a brief reference to further instances that speak of the tensions that still encumber the possibility of fully addressing the Portuguese colonial past in the postcolonial times of the present, the tensions which the Lagos Slave Route exhibition is a clear example of. These further instances can be seen as performing the forms of (in)visibility to which I have been referring in this article. They are both related to museum-like practices—that is, to the performativity of memory via the authority of the material display.

The Slavery Memorial, the Museum of the Discoveries, and the Fate of the Mortal Remains of the Lagos Enslaved Africans

Lisbon City Council has been running Participatory Budget (PB) programs since 2008.²¹ One of that year's winning projects was a proposal (made by DJASS, a Lisbon-based civic association of African descendants) for a Slavery Memorial in Lisbon. It obtained a total of 1,176 votes, placing it eighth among the 15 approved projects.²² As this article was being prepared for publication, in March 2020, which is 12 years after the initial proposal by DJASS, the memorial plan was finally decided upon.²³ But if the memorial design was finally approved, the exact location of the memorial in Lisbon was not. In 2017, the Mayor of Lisbon was reelected. Part of his program was the creation of a museum to be called "Museum of the Discoveries."²⁴ By March 2018, a very public debate emerged within Portuguese society, academia included, with academics placing themselves on different sides of the argument. This resulted from the suggestion that the construction of the Slavery Memorial should in some way be connected to the construction of the museum (both projects aimed at a location on the river banks to which the slaves had arrived—the memorial—and from which the caravels had departed—the museum).

Opinion pieces in the printed press, commentaries on TV news services and debates, and social media postings were all sizzling with a variety of opinions: some in favor of the museum and its celebratory treatment of the Portuguese "opening" up of the world, and others that, although supporting the creation of the museum, disagreed strongly with the choice of the name, and still others that were completely against the museum and completely against connecting it in any way with the Slavery Memorial, which, according to the text of the PB winning project proposal, was designed to:

pay tribute to the victims of slavery and the trafficking of enslaved people and all those who fought and resisted it; contribute to the recognition of the central role that Portugal, and in particular the city of Lisbon, had in slavery and in trafficking enslaved people throughout history; and point out the contribution of enslaved African people to the prosperity of Portugal throughout history, as well as the contribution of people of African descent to Portuguese society.²⁵

An open letter against the museum as "of the Discoveries" rallied the support and signatures of academics in Portuguese universities, but also internationally from places such as Brazil, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Italy, and Spain.²⁶ The museum project, as presented in the Mayor's electoral program, was to be a:

multisited structure in the city that includes some existing spaces/museums and others to be created anew and that promotes reflection on that historical period in its multiple approaches,

of an economic, scientific and cultural nature both in its more and less positive aspects, including a nucleus dedicated to slavery.²⁷

In 2018, still, the opposition to the museum project produced an open letter by one hundred African-descendants with the title “No to a Museum against Us!” objecting to the creation of the museum and the use of taxpayers’ money for that purpose, proposing instead the construction of a Black Resistance Museum.²⁸ In the face of the growing controversy and the escalating opposition to the museum, the Mayor of Lisbon put the project on hold.

If the dissent related to the proposed Slavery Memorial and the proposed Museum of the Discoveries is a testimony to the end of the colonial aphasia (Stoler 2011) in Portuguese society,²⁹ as well as to the importance of the material objectifications of memories that memorials and museums have in this current climate of increased culturalized politics, then what of the 158 African slaves who lay undisturbed for over five centuries in their barely dug graves in the dump of medieval Lagos until the pressures of the modern tourism economy brought them to light? What destiny befell them after their (not so) brief and very visible appearance in the 2010 Lagos Slave Market exhibition? What have all these voices that speak forcefully for and against the Slavery Memorial and the Museum of the Discoveries have to say on these African men, women, and children who were brought to live a slave’s life and to die as slaves on Portuguese soil? Nothing. These voices say nothing about these enslaved African men, women, and children unearthed in Lagos.

As Laurajane Smith (2011) has shown in relation to the museum-based commemorations of the 1807 abolition of the slave trade in Great Britain, visitors managed complex emotions about the subject [of enslavement and the slave trade]

ranging from active attempts to work through difficult issues, negotiating cognitive dissonance to mitigate their nation’s involvement in the slave trade, to “passive” refusals to extend empathy and recognition . . . [to, and on the other hand], African-Caribbean British visitors who were emotionally engaged with the exhibitions and issues, actively seeking recognition and empathy, not just for past wrongs, but to sustain a lively sense of engagement with contemporary racial politics. (Smith and Campbell 2015: 443)

The analysis presented here does not involve a study of the visitors to the Lagos slavery exhibition, which is a necessary element for a fuller understanding of the place and how its rhetoric and poetics affect its visitors. Nevertheless, the absence of voices about the destiny of the remains of Lagos’s enslaved Africans, some of the first to ever have arrived on European shores, requires some reflection. Why do we not find both strands of engagement identified by Smith (2011), particularly the one of active engagement in seeking recognition for past wrongs and actually addressing through this dark heritage issues of present-day racial politics, which is the acute social issue seen across the globe, especially now, after the events that led to the unlawful death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 and the global Black Lives Matter movement? Why is there no attempt to somehow connect the desire for a Lisbon-based Slavery Memorial to a desire for a humanized treatment of the remains of these dead enslaved Africans?

While awaiting further work that could illuminate this question, one strand of explanation can perhaps be put forward. While the project for the Slavery Memorial in Lisbon proposed by an association of Lusophone African descendants seeks (among other goals already quoted in this article) to pay tribute to the victims of slavery and the trafficking of enslaved people, the fact is that the African presence in today’s Portugal, although originating in countries that were once part of the Portuguese Empire, is not directly related to past contingents of enslaved Africans the way it was across the Atlantic, where they were taken for the plantations and mines

of the Americas. The present-day African presence in Portugal is more related to the flux of the postcolonial, and particularly post-1990s, changes identified by Kesha Fikes (2009) in which the pairing “colonizer/colonized” is substituted for the “citizen/migrant,” thus resulting in a persistence of the colonial but now within the framework of Lusophony.³⁰ It is perhaps within this “discontinuity” of history, between the fifteenth-century enslaved Africans of Lagos and the twenty-first-century African migrants and Portuguese of African descent in Greater Lisbon that the reasons for the aphasia of the dark heritage constituted by the mortal remains of these 158 enslaved African individuals can be illuminated.

My research has retraced the whereabouts of the mortal remains of these 158 enslaved Africans: they are stored in boxes in the city of Coimbra, the location of both the headquarters of the archeology company contracted to carry out the Lagos archeological digs and the state university that carried out the osteological study of the Lagos skeletons. With their corpses discarded by their Portuguese owners, put out of sight in the city dump outside the fifteenth-century Lagos city walls, these enslaved African men, women, and children have their remains still kept out of sight inside storage boxes in twenty-first-century Coimbra. They are what Kathleen Adams (2018) refers as “homeless heritage”: entities that once had homes and still have the potential to be reunited with those homes. The repatriation or restitution of human remains, and of remains of enslaved Africans,³¹ is a complex but not novel issue for museum or museum-like places, and although there is no space here to broach this matter, there is one certainty: the human remains of the 158 enslaved Africans cannot have as their final home the boxes of a storage facility.

Final Note: Effect

I came to know about the 2010 Lagos exhibition a couple of years after its opening, by chance, when reading a newspaper. Apart from all the material on the 2010 exhibition that I could find online and an initial visit to the Lagos burial site in 2015, the first time I was able to come across more detailed information on the remains of the enslaved Africans found in Lagos was through a poster presented during the National Congress of the Portuguese Association of Anthropologists in 2016.³² The poster displayed the first systematic analysis of what was found in the exhumation. Upon reading the text of the poster, I was taken aback by the absolute lack of acknowledgment of the humanity of the remains that the language used effected. It is not that the language of archeological science is unfamiliar to me, as my first postgraduate degree was in archeology. The poster’s sequence of images of the skeletons as they were being carefully dug up, plus the texts supplying the results of the study, displayed a subject made into (commodified as) an object, a subject made object (-lesson), supplying a multiplication of reinforcing facts that cannot but reiterate and perpetuate a disjuncture between “us” and “them”: in the “Results” section of the poster, I was informed that “most non-adult individuals (69.0 percent) appear to have been carefully inhumed, [by contrast to] adult individuals (38.2 percent).” Further down in the poster, in the “Discussion” section, I read that “interestingly, the differences [concerning inhumation with care or without care] were revealed between adults and non-adults [with more of the latter] buried carefully and in a fetal position.”

Absent from the scientific text and poster, and thus made invisible to the reader, is the immediate social and emotional meaning of the supplied quantitative data: that those African children had been laid to rest in their makeshift grave opened in the medieval city dump by people who loved them, probably by their mothers or other kin who accompanied them in this last part of their voyage and who shared with them the fate of forceful removal from their home and the degradation of an enslaved life.

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NOTES

1. Guinea-Bissau unilaterally declared its independence in 1973. In 1975 Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe became independent nations. Macau was devolved to the People's Republic of China in 1999.
2. On Portugal's present-day race relations see the statistics collected in Henriques (2018).
3. Freyre's most well-known publication is *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933) (English title: *Masters and Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*).
4. The works on the centrality of Freyre's Lusotropicalism to Portuguese self-identity as benign colonizers are quite numerous. Some example are Almeida (2004); Anderson et al. (2019); Araújo (2013); Bastos (1998, 2019); Feldman-Bianco (2001); Fikes (2009); Pinto (2001); Santos (2014, 2018a, 2018b); Sieber (2004); and Sobral (2010).
5. See, for instance Costa and Lacerda (2007).
6. The heads of state who visited Goree and had officially apologized for their nation's role in the slave trade were Bill Clinton in 1998, Lula da Silva in 2005, George W. Bush in 2008, and Barack Obama in 2013.
7. The leper colony was well documented historically; present-day Lagos's inhabitants call that area of the city *Gafaria*, *gafa* being a Portuguese word for leprosy.
8. See Chapters 24 and 25 of the mid-fifteenth-century chronicle of Gomes Eanes de Zurara on Guinea: *Crónica do Descobrimento e da Conquista da Guiné*.
9. For more detailed information on the plaque and its text, see Santos (2018b).
10. I visited the 2016 exhibition in 2017. Although I was living in Portugal, I did not live in Lagos, and I only came to know of the 2010 exhibition after the event; thus my knowledge of it is based on the search carried out online, in which I found texts but mostly images of the actual display. My 2017 visit was more driven by my position as a Portuguese citizen amazed as to how the burial site and its dark heritage were not stressed more in the record. Once there, and as an academic interested in issues of social identity related to space (but not focused on museums as such), I felt the need to extensively document via photography (and also some text) the way the exhibition engaged in dialogue with the visitor (in this case, me). Later, the experience of this visit resonated strongly with other topics I was researching and became part of a published text (Santos 2018b). But only in 2019 did my personal notes, which had my 2017 visit in them, become the basis of this academic reflection on the Lagos slavery exhibition. The pandemic that erupted in February 2020 prevented me from going back to

Lagos so as to revisit the exhibition, already with the text of the present article as a main frame of analysis.

11. Centro de Estudos sobre África e do Desenvolvimento (CEsA), which is part of the Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão of Lisbon University.
12. But see also Carpenter 2005; Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010; Crang 2003; Price 2007; Uriarte 2007.
13. My translation.
14. “*Experientiation*” is used in Immanuel Kant’s sense of knowledge of place as genuinely local knowledge that “is in itself experiential in the manner of *Erlebnis*, ‘lived experience,’ rather than of *Erfahrung*, the already elapsed experience” (Casey 1996: 18).
15. In November 2017, while attending the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, held that year in Washington, DC, I went to visit the NMAAHC. I had already visited the Lagos exhibition earlier that same year, and its effect on me had left me eager to see how slavery and the transatlantic slave trade were exhibited and presented in a nation where the entanglements of historic slavery in its various dimensions had a visibility and present-day urgency that seemed absent, or at least not visible, in Portuguese society.
16. For a full review of the NMAAHC, see Holt (2018).
17. For visitor-centered analysis of the NMAAHC History Galleries, see Kratz (2018).
18. The exhibition only addresses the initial travels between the African coast and Lagos.
19. The first is located in Liverpool (the leading slave-trading port of England from the mid-1700s onward): the International Slavery Museum opened in 2007 as part of the Merseyside Maritime Museum. In 2007 also, the city of Nantes, France (the leading eighteenth-century slave-trading port in France) opened in its Musée d’Histoire a room dedicated to the slave trade. In 2009, the city of Bordeaux, France (the second-ranked slave-trading port after Nantes) opened in 2009 in its Musée de L’Aquitaine a permanent exhibition on the city’s role in the international slave trade.
20. Even if in the 2016 exhibition the presence of the dead enslaved Africans is no longer made through the actual skeletons but through their digital representation, they are arguably still being displayed as scientific objects.
21. “Participatory Budget” refers to a process of democratic deliberation and a policymaking tool that directly involves citizens in budgeting decisions. Participatory budgeting allows citizens to identify, discuss, and prioritize public spending projects, and gives them the power to make real decisions about how some percentage of the City Council budget is spent. It was first used in Brazil in 1989, and, since then, more than fifteen hundred participatory budgets have been implemented across five different continents.
22. The total number of votes of the 2017/18 PB was of 37,673; the project placed first obtained a total of 5,925 votes. For all the relevant details, see <https://op.lisboaoparticipa.pt/edicoes-anteriores/58f5daad11d45d00080a3ea5>.
23. The approved project was the one presented by the Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda.
24. This Museum of the Discoveries was to be dedicated to celebrate the pioneering role of the Portuguese in the European maritime voyages of expansion. For an English written piece on the matter, see Barchfeld (2018).
25. My translation. For text, see: Lisboa eu Participo! website: <https://op.lisboaoparticipa.pt/op/propostas/593da5d66c747400097318a7>.
26. See full text of the open letter with list of signatures in Margato (2018).
27. My translation. See text in Martins and Paixão (2018).
28. See full text of the manifesto in Buala (2018).
29. Testimony also to this end of aphasia was the hosting by ISCTE/University of Lisbon in July 2019 of the 7th Biennial Network Conference of Afro-European Studies. The conference’s extensive and diverse program featured Portuguese researchers and Portugal-based themes. See the program at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JcVsIGexT-v9Ar45EYyH9G40W0fveHgw/view>.
30. As with most postcolonial contexts, the shifts in population between the former metropole and former colonies did not cease with the dismantling of colonial rule. In the year 2000, the number of citizens

from the PALOP (Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa; African Countries with Portuguese as Official Language) living in Portugal was almost 1 percent of the total. Cape Verdean nationals featured as the largest community (47,216 citizens), followed by Brazilians (22,411) and Angolans (20,468). By 2018, and with an overall immigrant presence of already 4.8 percent, Brazilians are the largest community (105,000 citizens), followed by Cape Verdeans (35,000). Although Angola is still the African nation with the second-largest community (18,300), the Angolans are ranked as the ninth-largest immigrant community in Portugal.

31. Within the Portuguese-speaking world alone, a well-known case is the Cemetery of the New Blacks in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: the site of the disposal of the eighteenth-century African slaves unearthed in 1996, and that today is both a memorial and a cultural center promoting the study of Afro-Brazilian heritage.
32. Ferreira et al. (2016).

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