

The Memorialization of Empire in Postcolonial Portugal: Identity Politics and the Commodification of History

ABSTRACT: The entire experience of modern imperialism has profoundly shaped European national identities in ways that continue to matter in postimperial times. This is also true of Portugal; as the first and the most enduring of the European colonial empires, its end did not erase the self-image of the country as an imperial nation. Although re-fashioned in a matter of style and content, major public representations of the nation's collective identity remain anchored in the memory of empire. This official memory combines a strong emphasis on the period of the "Maritime Discoveries" with the representation of Portugal as the pioneer of cultural dialogue on a global scale and of the Portuguese as "inventors" of the modern world. In this article, I will address some examples of the way in which Portugal's imperial history has been memorialized to convey the country's "brand image," for the purposes of both identity politics and the tourism industry.

KEYWORDS: public memory, Portuguese empire, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, commodification

RESUMO: Toda a experiência do imperialismo moderno moldou profundamente as identidades nacionais europeias de maneiras que continuam a ser importantes nos tempos pós-imperiais. Este também é o caso de Portugal: sendo o primeiro e o mais duradouro império colonial europeu, o seu fim não apagou a auto-imagem do país como nação imperial. Embora remodelada em termos de estilo e conteúdo, as principais representações públicas da identidade coletiva da nação permanecem ancoradas na memória do império. Esta memória oficial combina uma forte ênfase no período das "Descobertas Marítimas" com a representação de Portugal como pioneiro do diálogo cultural à escala global e dos portugueses como "inventores" do mundo moderno. Neste artigo, abordarei alguns casos através dos quais a história imperial de Portugal foi memorializada para transmitir uma "imagem de marca" de Portugal, tanto para as políticas da identidade quanto para a indústria do turismo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: memória pública, Império Português, nacionalismo, cosmopolitismo, comodificação

Introduction

At the opening ceremony of the Eleventh Web Summit in Lisbon, in early November 2019, the mayor of Lisbon, Fernando Medina, offered an astrolabe to Paddy Cosgrave, the founder of the technology and entrepreneurship conference. As an instrument used by the navigators during the so-called Portuguese “Discoveries,” the astrolabe possessed a symbolism that Medina emphasized at the time:

Lisbon was the capital of the world five centuries ago, this was the starting point for routes to discover new worlds, new people, new ideas. From Lisbon departed a great adventure that connected the human race. . . . Today it is you, the engineers, the entrepreneurs, the creators, the innovators, the start-ups, all the companies. (Lusa 2017c)¹

In addition to establishing a line of continuity between the Lisbon of five hundred years ago and the Lisbon of today, calling it “a city of entrepreneurs and scientists,” Medina also stressed the welcoming character of Lisbon and the Portuguese society as a whole, concluding that “the innovation that Lisbon went through 500 years ago was due to the fact that the city and Portugal have an open society” and that “freedom, tolerance, diversity, the ability to understand and talk to each other are the values of Lisbon and the values that we want to keep for the future” (Lusa 2017c).

This narrative serves as one example (among many others) of how, in postcolonial times, the memory of the Portuguese colonial empire has been reshaped by political agents and public cultural institutions. In this reformulation, an almost exclusive emphasis on the historical memory associated with what is conventionally called the Portuguese “Maritime Discoveries”—corresponding to the voyages of maritime exploration that began in the fifteenth century and to the “golden age” of national history—is combined with the image of a modern and cosmopolitan country. Accordingly, Portugal is portrayed as a pioneer of cultural dialogue on a global scale and the Portuguese as “discoverers” of the modern world, while forgetting the system of asymmetrical power relations that also characterized Portuguese colonialism.

This narrative started to be regenerated in the mid-1980s, on the basis of old imperial myths woven since nineteenth-century liberalism and the First Republic (1910–1926) and intensified during the Estado Novo (1933–1974), but more recently has become adapted to the new postcolonial languages and the symbolic demands of European integration (Peralta 2017). After the fall of the Estado Novo regime in 1974 and the swift decolonization that followed, in the public political discourses—then characterized by a revolutionary tone—the former empire was a no-name land. But as the young Portuguese democracy was being successfully implemented and the country was on its way toward eventually acceding to the European Economic Market in 1986, Portuguese national identity started to be reworked to fit into the new political and cultural context of liberal democracies. In this way, Portugal's imperial history began to serve once again as a chief rhetorical tool for locating Portugal in a new space of European identity, a space now dominated by notions of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

This rehabilitation began in 1983 with the inclusion of the Jerónimos Monastery and the Belém Tower in UNESCO's World Heritage List. UNESCO justifies this classification with the observation that the two monuments "reflect the power, knowledge and courage of the Portuguese people at a time when they consolidated their presence and domain of intercontinental trade routes" and recall "the pioneer role the Portuguese had in the 15th and 16th centuries in creating contacts, dialogue and interchange among different cultures" (UNESCO, n.d.). Since UNESCO is an institution that represents a culture of peace, democracy, and cooperation in the world, this permanent classification bestowed lasting praise and prestige, legitimating Portugal's imperial past, regardless of the political configurations that modeled the action (Harrison and Hitchcock 2005). On 12 June 1985, the Treaty of Accession of Portugal to the European Economic Community (EEC) was signed at the Jerónimos Monastery.² In 1986, the National Commission for the Commemoration of Portuguese Discoveries was created and its activity continued until 2002, representing a huge state effort to revise the historical record and restore historiographical legitimacy to the period of Portuguese maritime expansion.³ This endeavor would culminate in the commemoration of five hundred years of the "Discoveries" and the staging of the 1998 Lisbon World Exposition (Expo'98) with the theme "Oceans." From then on, two perspectives would be key in the composition of Portugal's memorial landscape with respect to the country's imperial past. First, a pedagogical perspective on the history of the nation, conveyed by the most diverse sectors of Portuguese society with an

interest in signaling the full democratic inclusion of the country in the European context. Second, a perspective of commodification, in which the past gains an exchange value in the cultural and tourist consumption market.

In this article, I will focus on several examples that show how these ideas were capitalized in postcolonial times to create a brand image of Portugal, targeting external audiences but also functioning robustly as a mechanism for reproducing the former imperial myths for domestic audiences. I will look at Expo'98 ("Oceans"), an event that completely refurbished the geography of the city, and also at several acts of public culture that have converged in conceptualizing Lisbon as a "Global City." Drawing on these examples, I argue that memory narratives are malleable and adaptable constructions that can be reworked to suit new identity demands and changing circumstances. For this, I use the concept of "cosmopolitan mythscapes," to which I will now turn.

Cosmopolitan Mythscapes:

European Memory, National Identity, and Empire

Empire was intrinsic to the construction of European nation-states; imperial projects are part of the history and memory of Europe, and the national and imperial categories remain deeply intertwined (MacKenzie 1986; Hall and Rose 2006). Even if it is particularly evident in countries that were former imperial centers, this condition has encompassed the whole of the continent because all European nations were complicit and involved in the imperial enterprise in several ways (Buettner 2018). Indeed, the making of modern Europe meant that countries that were not imperial powers were nonetheless shaped by continental histories of empire. Europe itself was formed through unequal geopolitical power relations woven by empire, with various instances of "internal colonization" (Peralta and Jensen 2017). Several countries without empires abroad embarked on campaigns to forcibly assimilate peoples and ethnic minorities within their borders, as happened with the indigenous Sámi of northern Sweden, Norway, and Finland (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012). Internal colonialism has also applied to unequal power relations between imperial European nation-states, as in the case of Portugal, which was a subordinate participant in the imperial system, particularly through its dependent position in relation to the British Empire. European colonialism thus established a series of interconnected processes that have impacted former imperial centers, the whole of Europe, and the world at large, with the establishment of an unswerving racialized dichotomy of relations

and the institutionalization of the modern nation-state, which favors a division of labor critical for the expansion of capitalist economies.

These power relations were not severed by decolonization. Empires, as structures of power and influence that span vast geographical spaces, may formally come to an end, but they continue beyond colonial rule through practices, subjectivities, and discourses (Wolfe 1997). As such, past imperial experience is a key component of the mythscape of the old European power centers and, in fact, the whole of Europe.

The concept of “mythscape” that I use here is drawn from the formulation suggested by Duncan S. A. Bell in a paper entitled “Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity” (2003). Acknowledging the importance and centrality of national myths and memories in the construction of national identities and narratives (Smith 1999), Bell sets out to challenge the mainstream and sometimes abusive usage of the term “memory,” considering that what scholars so often refer to as “memories” should be more accurately termed “governing myths” of the nation. Bell thus proposes the concept of mythscape, defining it as

the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm wherein the struggle for control of peoples’ memories and the formation of nationalist myths is debated, contested and subverted incessantly. The mythscape is the page upon which the multiple and often conflicting nationalist narratives are (re) written; it is the perpetually mutating repository for the presentation of the past for the purposes of the present. (Bell 2003, 66)

According to this reading, national identities are constructed, debated, negotiated, and contested in specific instances by resorting to a series of preestablished myths. The original foundational myth or system of myths is rewritten over time and continually updated as current circumstances change, even though it may maintain its vitality. This makes it possible for a relatively unchanging structure of national myths to retain its constitutive coherence as it is constantly reworked and adapted according to the identity needs and ever-changing meanings given to the past by each present circumstance (Kosher 2000).

In former European imperial countries, mythscape are inevitably associated with their imperial experience, which has left indelible marks on European cultural and symbolic landscapes. But the past is reworked to meet the demands of the new postcolonial setting established after the demise of European colonial empires following World War II. Decolonization entailed the transformation of

former European imperial powers into postimperial nation-states. Moreover, putting an end to empires and building the institutional architecture of the European Community were equally part of Western European politics after 1945. Not only did borders, previous economic relations, and citizenship rights have to be redesigned; the disappearance of the colonial empires also caused a large movement of people (former colonizers as well as formerly colonized people) to relocate to Europe, while the European integration project encouraged the movement of citizens within the Community (Laschi, Deplano, and Pes 2020). Furthermore, decolonization itself was the result of the affirmation of wider regional and transnational alliances after the 1960s—such as the Afro-Asian coalition under the framework of the United Nations (Oliveira 2017)—with their blunt condemnation of colonialism, along with their claims for indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination. It was the opening of a new era, a time for taking into consideration the demands of the new identity politics of the “native,” “aboriginal,” and “tribal” peoples and their growing presence on the world stage. This presence became even more apparent in the 1990s and was reflected, among other things, in the protests against the Columbian Quincentenary and against the ceremonies celebrating the “finding” of Brazil. Finally, the aftermath of the Second World War was characterized by an unprecedented globalization that continuously reshaped the world through global flows of people, technological innovations, capital, information, and ideas (Appadurai 1990).

In this changing context, former European imperial centers had to be imagined anew and the whole European colonial history renegotiated. Most often, this negotiation was conducted on the basis of a memorial display, still putting empire at the center of national identity definitions (Buettner 2016), which also served as an instrument for the creation of new political constituencies from former imperial governance systems, such as the British Commonwealth, French Francophonie, and Portuguese Lusofonia. Here, the negative connotations associated with the exploitative nature of empires are reformulated to appear beneficial to both colonizers and colonized, and are usually articulated around ideas of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and intercultural dialogue. These fit in tidily with both the cultural assertions of globalized indigenous movements and the liberal agendas of cultural recognition that have characterized contemporary forms of multicultural governance (Clifford 2007). It is against this general background that gestures such as French President Emmanuel Macron’s 2018 Report on the Restitution of African Art must be viewed and considered.

Therefore, returning to Bell's contribution, I argue that Europe's original governing myth—which framed its entire imperial expansionist experience—is of Europe as the bearer of a progressive civilization, structured by notions of discovery and forward motion. As Jacques Derrida noted,

In its physical geography, and in what has often been called . . . its spiritual geography, Europe has always recognized itself as a cape or headland . . . the point of departure for discovery, invention, and colonization . . . that of an advanced point . . . and thus, once again, with a heading for world civilization or human culture in general. (1992, 24)

The idea that Europe is an advanced space, radically superior to the rest of the world in all its forms of social and political organization, appeared in the sixteenth century when the European West imposed its interpretation of space and time on the world (Goody 2006). The recurrent axioms of Eurocentric diffusionism of Europe as innately superior, progressive, and innovating thus justified on moral grounds the civilizing mission of Europe's imperial enterprise by pushing forward the backward peoples and territories of the "rest" of the world to catch up with Europe's modernity (Blaut 1993). This European model of progressive civilization accommodates ideas of cosmopolitanism from ancient Greek philosophy and Immanuel Kant's reinvention of cosmopolitanism in the late 1700s as a utopian treatise for universal citizenship, as deriving from virtue and reason (Wood 1998, 69).⁴

I argue that today's specific European mythscape continues to be composed of a particular representation of Europe as cosmopolitan, modern, and civilized. However, because of the changing context imposed by the new world order post–World War II, this mythscape, while still maintaining its vitality, had to be reworked as a result of the new identity politics drawn in a context marked by complex interdependencies and everyday encounters with difference. Cosmopolitanism thus became reframed as a welcoming of difference, or, in Ulf Hannerz's words, "a willingness to engage with the other . . . an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences" (1990, 239). This construct points toward both postcolonialism and neocolonialism. On the one hand, it allows for the transition of former European imperial centers to postcolonial nations, but without putting an end to their respective governing myths that stem from imperial history. On the other, it is shaped by paternalistic undertones as it reveals the ways in which colonial expansionist enterprises continue to inform contemporary debates on cultural and social diversity (Clifford 2007).

With this conceptual framework in mind, I now turn to the case of Portugal to explore continuities in the ways national identity and empire have been narrated in colonial and postcolonial times, and to analyze how these narratives are structured by a governing European mythology of discovery and forward motion.

Expo'98 and Postimperial Discourse

Portugal's image as the "country of the Discoveries" and pioneer of cultural contact on a global scale has been widely used by successive democratic governments and various public bodies to brand Portugal for both internal and external audiences. Through these actions, the depth of historical experience is combined with aspirations of modernity, thus claiming for Portugal a symbolic and geostrategic position that centers around, on the one hand, its full integration into the European context and, on the other, its demarcated pioneering vocation. The most definitive and paradigmatic action in terms of rehabilitating Portuguese imperial history in postcolonial times was the 1998 Lisbon World Exposition ("Oceans"), an event that would reconfigure the entire geography of the city.

Expo'98 took place in Lisbon from 22 May to 30 September 1998, and it lay within the legal framework governing international exhibitions established by the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE). Advertised as "the last exhibition of the twentieth century," Expo'98 focused on a specific theme: "The Oceans: A Heritage for the Future." As stated in the *Final Report of the Exhibition*,

The idea to hold an international exhibition in Lisbon arose within the context of the work of the National Committee for the Commemoration of the Portuguese Discoveries, the objective of which was to organize a series of different events to commemorate the historical significance of the Portuguese Discoveries in the closing decades of the fifteenth century, which culminated in the first sea voyage to India, made by Vasco da Gama in 1498, and the commemoration of the arrival of Pedro Álvares Cabral in Brazil, in 1500. The historical relevance of Expo'98 therefore coincided with Vasco da Gama's sea voyage to India, where he arrived on 22 May 1498, thus opening up new perspectives for economic and commercial relations at that time, and promoting a process of intercultural exchange, which had major consequences for humankind. (*Exposição Mundial de Lisboa* 1999, 18)

This statement makes clear that the purpose of Expo'98 was to redeem the notion that Portugal's national history is linked to maritime expansion. But in order to

legitimize this reworking, the exhibition updated earlier imperial discourse and dressed it in modern clothes by using oceans as thematic material and relating it to issues of sustainable management and environmental protection, which are the contemporary concerns of so-called modern, developed countries. Through this diplomatic endeavor around the global management of oceanographic resources, the designers of the exhibition were targeting the international promotion of the country and its image (Ferreira 2005). As António Mega Ferreira, former director of Expo'98, wrote in the *Official Guide to the Exhibition*,

It was essential, when defining the concept, to understand that the Lisbon exhibition should distinguish itself from other recent events of the same type by the attention given to its main theme. Therefore, an ambitious thematic program was proposed, the aim of which was to place the oceans, their diversity and essential role in the equilibrium of the planet, at the center of the attention of the international community. . . . A strictly historical approach was therefore eschewed in favor of an orientation that approached the theme in terms of its future perspectives, by relating it to science, politics, technology, and art. The aim was to propose a new ethics regarding the relationship of humankind to the environment, a theme that seemed to us central to the political agenda of the twenty-first century. (Exposição Mundial de Lisboa 1999, 18)

Portugal was hereby represented, yet again, as leading the way to European and Western futures opened up by a reaffirmation of the faith in science, commerce, civilization, and modernity. By these means, Portuguese imperial discourses were reworked so the enhancement of the historical legacy of "Portuguese Discoveries" could be seen as a "gift to modernity," thus reclaiming a key position in the wider European identity construct in which Portugal was now placed. The whole exhibition was conceived to enhance and update this supposed gift, counteracting the secondary and peripheral role of Portugal within modern Europe. The thematic pavilions on the site included the Knowledge of the Seas Pavilion, the Oceans Pavilion, the Utopia Pavilion, the Pavilion of the Future, the Virtual Reality Pavilion (where visitors were given the virtual opportunity to travel to the depths of the ocean), and the Pavilion of Portugal. In addition, there were three "thematic areas": the Nautical Exhibition, the Garcia de Orta Gardens (named after the botanist who played a key role in generating knowledge through imperial expansion), and the Water Gardens. The exhibition also accommodated the pavilions of the various national and corporate participants,

restaurants and shops, a new theater (Camões Theater), and a new metro station, Gare do Oriente, that opened into the main entrance to the exhibition site.

All in all, Expo'98 was an ambitious enterprise that embraced not only the mounting of an international exhibition but also the building of an entirely new area in the city of Lisbon. It comprised the urban regeneration of a rundown area covering nearly 340 hectares of eastern Lisbon on the bank of the Tagus River. This was previously an abandoned outlying area, characterized by insalubrious and dangerous premises, a sign of the decay that accompanies the transition from an industry-based to a service economy. Building the exhibition site in this area would bring it urban amenities, transport and communication infrastructure, and innovative systems and techniques for the provision of urban services. Together with the construction of architecturally appealing buildings in the area, this development would enhance the image of the city and the country in general to a level comparable with major European capitals, that is, modern, clean, orderly, cosmopolitan, and ecologically balanced. As noted by Patrícia Pereira (2018), the transformation of the urban fabric of the Portuguese capital wrought by Expo'98 is part of a global competition between port cities as they seek to assert themselves as vibrant European metropolises. Within this movement, waterfronts emerge as showcases for cities, contributing to their international recognition and helping to anchor new dynamics of tourism and gentrification, with an impact on the sectors of commerce, services, housing, culture, and leisure. The aesthetics of the world fair, the regeneration of the surrounding area, the construction of architecturally advanced homes and services, and the functional layout of the site were combined with powerful allusions to the country's seafaring and imperial past. Once the fair was over, the site was given the name Parque das Nações (literally, Park of Nations) and its streets were named after Portuguese navigators or entities alluding to the empire. The poetics of the space (with theaters, bridges, schools, and streets baptized with names taken from the theme of the "Discoveries") worked to establish a strong intimacy with the empire, embodied in the very experience of the space itself (Peralta and Domingos 2019).

The sea (or oceans) as the route to cultural encounters on a global scale and as a metaphor for a modern nation that is multifaceted and tolerant was converted into the chief rhetorical tool to locate Portugal in a new European identity space. This metaphor strategically publicizes an image of a modern and progressive country, one that is not stuck in its own past but that, then and now, is

essentially expansionist, modern, and enterprising, a reading very accommodating to the neoliberal agendas with which the country's representatives were aiming to dialogue. Portugal was on show. The *Final Report of the Exhibition* is again instructive in this respect:

A "Projection of Portugal in the World" and an urban regeneration and implementation of the exhibition in accordance with "the highest standards of quality and efficiency," which involves proving the modernity of the country and its capacity to plan and implement very complex projects: these are the primary strategic goals of the global project.

These goals took form, in accordance with the program presented by the Expo'98 Commission, in November 1993, as the following seven objectives: 1) To evoke the pioneering and decisive contribution of the Portuguese Discoveries to the process of European expansion, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which led to an improved understanding of Man and the configuration of the planet, by projecting it into the future; 2) To reaffirm and give expression to the Portuguese vocation for peaceful and mutually beneficial encounters between different peoples and cultures; 3) To publicize the reality of a modern country, which is fully committed to the process of modernization and integration within a wider economic and institutional space; 4) To create an event with a worldwide projection, capable of creating a unique opportunity for the European Community to publicize and create a public awareness to the projects, activity and objectives of the Community in areas related to the exhibition theme; 5) To make a contribution to the affirmation of Lisbon as a great Atlantic city, by intervening in the renewal of its urban fabric in a creative and lasting manner; 6) To provide for the creation in Lisbon, in 1998, of a forum for the evaluation of the state of current knowledge about the oceans, thus contributing to the desirable creation of new systems to manage the planet's liquid mass and to preserve the ecological balance, by way of the rational use of marine resources; 7) To stimulate business activity in Portugal through the expansion of specific areas of the service and transport sectors and domestic industry and the creation of jobs. (*Exposição Mundial de Lisboa 1999*, 29–31)

Under the sign of the oceans, Expo'98 bridged the past—the Portuguese navigations and the maritime explorations—to the future: environmental concerns and oceanographic research. Adapted to globalizing languages, this image was

fundamental to signal Portugal's position as an advanced service economy, as required by European integration itself. As Francisco Bethencourt notes,

History is now used by the democratic power as a mere reference for cultural and tourist marketing, stripped as much as possible of its ideological burden, as it only serves as a way of drawing attention to a recognized past in other countries, making the ability of the Portuguese and their participation in building the future a central point. (1999, 450)

Expo'98 is thus a paradigmatic case of the way in which imperial discourses and earlier national mythologies were adapted to suit new identity needs in light of the challenges posed by Portugal's new European positioning. Cleansed of the previous associations with colonial institutions, the country's historical past was rehabilitated in the service of new identity negotiations. In those negotiations, the image of an imperialism without colonies emerges, picturing the country as having pioneered cultural encounters around the globe according to its new self-conceived position within a modern, democratic, multicultural, and cosmopolitan Europe (Neves 2019). To this end, the exhibition focused on the history of the Portuguese empire, particularly in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, searching in this past for the myths in which Portugueseness should be grounded at the end of the twentieth century, and thus articulating a post-colonial interpretation of the country's colonial past. The image of the country that Expo'98 projected, both nationally and internationally, was of Portugal as a European pioneer. As such, the country was overtly and intentionally reclaiming a high-ranking place in contemporary Europe, in spite of its peripheral geographic, political, and economic position. As noted by Marcus Power and James Sidaway, "In this spirit, Portugal has positioned itself as the exemplary European nation, insofar as it was the supposed pioneer exploration; the site of departure" (2005, 879).

Lisbon, Global City

Portugal's association with the ideas of leadership, discovery, and innovation, rewritten in accordance with the legacy of the "Discoveries," was successively capitalized, following the rhetorical reformulation carried out by Expo'98, through various public-culture initiatives and their branding of Portugueseness.⁵ These initiatives conveyed an image of Portugal as an entrepreneurial, modern, and cosmopolitan country, together with the idea of an open and unbiased society,

which is attractive to the tourism market and offers security to foreign investment. This was to be the happy result of a tolerant, nonracist, and hybridizing (imperial) history. The clear purpose of these operations was to place Portugal in the symbolic space of the West—modern, cosmopolitan, and enterprising—while using the country’s imperial and maritime history and its supposed civilizational legacy as its foundation.

This representation finds its zenith in Lisbon; formerly the empire’s capital, Lisbon is increasingly represented as the first global city in the history of the modern world, in line with the increasingly sustained interpretation of Portugal as the “pioneer of globalization” (Devezas and Rodrigues 2007). This is the favored representation reproduced in tour guides and websites geared to the touristic promotion of the country and of Lisbon in particular. For example, on the GoLisbon website, an online tourist information platform, Lisbon is presented to potential visitors through a semantics of tropes such as discovery, expansion, contact, and innovation. On the home page, two headings that read “Discovering the City of the Sea; The City of Explorers” and “Europe Starts Here—Welcome to Europe’s West Coast!” are followed by a paragraph describing Lisbon as

Europe’s second-oldest capital (after Athens), once home to the world’s greatest explorers, . . . becoming the first true world city, the capital of an empire spreading over all continents—from South America (Brazil) to Asia (Macao, China; Goa, India). (GoLisbon 2021)

This predominant representation of Lisbon as a global city was also used as a differentiating factor in the 2009 presentation of the *Carta Estratégica de Lisboa 2010/24* (Lisbon Strategic Charter 2010/24). In response to the fifth question posed in the charter—“How to Affirm the Identity of Lisbon in a Globalized World?”—Commissioner Simonetta Luz Afonso and her team proposed establishing a “Lisbon Brand” that would clearly identify the “Lisbon product” in a highly competitive tourism market. Her suggestion was that this brand should be sought in a renewed, “uncomplicated and modern,” relationship with the national past:

What would be the distinguishing proposal of Lisbon? Is it Lisbon the city of departures and arrivals? The city of travel? From the Discoveries to Bernardo Soares’s disquiet, that great inner journey of Fernando Pessoa. Political discourse always tends to insist on modernity, which is certainly important, but

don't those who visit us want to know more about our past? Wouldn't there be more visitors if we had an uncomplicated, modern discourse about the past? A past that has made Lisbon an exemplary city from the standpoint of tolerance. (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa 2009, 9)

As we can clearly infer from these words, the production of difference for the tourist consumer market involves the composition of a cosmopolitan memory, which, while maintaining or even strengthening national or local memory configurations, reshapes them in global terms. The modernizing discourse ends up fitting in syncretically with the depths of historical discourse to construct the image of a cosmopolitan, modern city that projects historical heritage as a differentiating asset for the future. The issues of national identity, once mobilized by ideological agendas, are now repositioned by reference to the demands of the consumer and leisure markets, especially tourism, increasingly compounding what Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002) have termed cosmopolitan memory cultures.

These discourses are strongly imprinted on the space of Lisbon itself, leaving their mark on both the territorialization of urban space and the processes of urban development and regeneration, often carried out in certain old and degraded neighborhoods in central Lisbon such as Mouraria and the squares of Martim Moniz and Intendente. Historically inhabited by poor and marginalized populations (Frangella 2013), which in recent years have been joined by various niches of immigrants, including Indian, Chinese, and Bangladeshi populations, these areas of the city have recently been the subject of a rehabilitation program initiated in 2010 by Lisbon's City Council. Like the models of multicultural governance of the main European capitals, the planned intervention in the urban space was not limited to upgrading buildings, but extended to an intervention in the field of local memory and related social representations whose main "leitmotif is diversity" (Oliveira 2013, 580). The performance of various cultural activities in the area, such as the Todos: Walk of Cultures Festival and the Fusion Market, seeks to create practical conditions and structures for the functioning of interculturality in the area, while at the same time mobilizing creative production, attracting gentrifiers, and capturing tourists who seek "authenticity." Intervention in this area of the city has thus been "built and grounded around diversity and interculturality as synonymous with cosmopolitanism and tolerance" (Oliveira 2013, 582), updating prevailing lusotropical myths inherited from earlier imperial ideologies

(Castelo 1999), which are now converted into economic and symbolic resources prone to encourage postmodern lifestyles and consumption patterns. In these instances, the destabilizing experiences of race, ethnicity, and class are read in the light of ideas such as multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue, which function as differentiating features in the market of global cities.

The same effect has been pursued through several acts of public culture. In this context, two exhibitions deserve special mention. Both took place at the National Museum of Ancient Art (MNAA) in Lisbon and conveyed an association of Portuguese imperial history with a globalizing enterprise. The first of these exhibitions was entitled *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* and was featured at the MNAA between July and October 2009. This exhibition was originally produced by the Smithsonian Institution and displayed in the Smithsonian's Sackler Gallery in Washington, DC, between June and September 2007. In Portugal, the exhibition, which was sponsored by the Portuguese government, brought together 170 pieces, including some national treasures that had not been included in the original event.

The exhibition was structured around six geographical areas that followed the course of the Portuguese voyages of expansion. The first unit, focused on Portugal and sixteenth-century Europe, was followed by sections dedicated to Africa, India, China, Japan, and finally Brazil. Focusing on the first voyages of maritime expansion made by the Portuguese and the effect of these on the dissemination of knowledge about the world throughout Europe, the exhibition aimed to enhance the role of Portugal as the undisputed pioneer of the present globalization era. At the same time, it emphasized the beneficial contribution of the Portuguese voyages to establishing contacts and interaction between all peoples around the planet, thus creating the conditions for the cultivation of a markedly modern worldview. As stated by Aníbal Cavaco Silva, the President of the Portuguese Republic at the time of the opening of the exhibition, in the preface to the exhibition catalog,

Portugal is one of the oldest states in Europe and the westernmost of the Old Continent. Since the beginning of its history, the sea has always been present, both as a source of natural resources and as an open frontier, stimulating the connection with the most diverse peoples, civilizations, and cultures. The voyages by Portugal's navigators that began in the fifteenth century, and which, in the words of poet Luís de Camões, gave "new worlds to

the world,” owe much to this experience gained by the people in maritime activities and the knowledge acquired in their contacts with other peoples. (Museu Nacional da Arte Antiga 2009, 5)

The second exhibition, titled *The Global City: Lisbon in the Renaissance* was on display at the MNAA between 24 February and 9 April 2017. It featured 249 pieces belonging to 77 Portuguese and foreign lenders, and was anchored by two paintings of unproven origin depicting Rua Nova dos Mercadores, “Lisbon’s main trading artery in the fifteenth century, full of merchants, mummers, musicians, hawkers, knights, jewelry, silks, spices, exotic animals, and other wonders imported from Africa, Brazil, Asia” (Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga 2017). The purpose of the exhibition was, as stated on the MNAA website (2017), to “rebuild the heart of the most global city in Renaissance Europe,” based on the argument that, in the transition from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, Lisbon became a global city because objects and people from different origins and continents converged there. According to the exhibition’s curators, Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and Kate Lowe (2015), there are five reasons for conceiving fifteenth-century Lisbon as a global city: the fact that it was at the center of the movement of commercial products; its population being a mixture of indigenous people (that is, Lisbon-born or Portuguese), other Europeans, and people from all over the globe; its “global consciousness”; its recognition by other cities as having this capability; and lastly, its position at the forefront of new forms of knowledge, technology, and communication.

Aside from these conceptualizations, the exhibition lacked a fuller contextualization of the curators’ arguments and generated considerable criticism. Furthermore, the authenticity of the paintings of Rua Nova dos Mercadores was seriously called into question. The curators attributed their authorship to an unknown Flemish artist, who would have painted them sometime between 1570 and 1619, and contended that they belonged to the collection of the nineteenth-English painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. However, several historians have questioned the paintings’ provenance and authenticity: João Alves Dias, after having studied several elements of the paintings in detail, is certain that it is “a painting forged in the twentieth century to imitate the past”; for his part, Diogo Ramada Curto considers it impossible for the paintings to have belonged to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s collection and believes that their authenticity remains to be proven (Cadete, Carita, and Franco 2017). Even greater criticism was directed

at the promoted interpretation of Lisbon as a global city in the fifteenth century. After all, who was depicted in the paintings? Barefoot Black people—most certainly slaves—occupied in menial tasks are the most noticeable facet of the many hierarchies of power that stand out in these works. Only very euphemistically could one consider them as proof that fifteenth-century Lisbon was a place for the meeting of cultures on a global scale. Ramada Curto again spearheaded this criticism in an article in the Portuguese weekly newspaper *Expresso*, which contested these interpretations, giving expression to a postcolonial critique that was beginning to take shape in Portuguese society at a time when the country was increasingly haunted by rampant national debt (Curto 2017).

Contesting Mythscapes and the Rewriting of History

Instead of being extinguished due to ruptures in the political and social order, national narratives are often updated and reconfigured to meet the demands and aspirations of each new present. In the case of Portugal, the imperial narrative that had structured national identity over several generations and successive regimes was renovated in the postcolonial period, either for reasons of internal identification or to respond to yearnings for political and economic affirmation on the international stage. As before, this narrative continues to revolve strongly around the early voyages of “discovery” and expansion, regarded as the “golden age” of national history. This focus on the idea and image of the empire closely approximates the phenomenon observed by Paul Gilroy in *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005); as in the British case, so in Portugal there seems to be—notwithstanding the obvious differences between the two contexts—a refusal to accept the symbolic loss of the empire that had previously provided a sense of coherence to national culture. This image not only remains vivid in the national social fabric but is also deeply internalized by Portuguese of all social origins and generational strata (Cabecinhas and Cunha 2003). It even pervades the imagination of people visiting the country, who, subjected to Portugal’s unequivocal representation as conveyed by the tourist information media, are seduced by a particular idea of history that is highly mythicized.

However, returning to the concept of “mythscape” suggested by Bell (2003), it should be noted that the governing myths of nations, whatever their stability, are incessantly subjected to debate, contestation, and subversion, in particular when a previously excluded national population forces its own writing upon history. The political mediation of the legacies of imperial power is conditioned by

the migrant flow from the former colonies to Portugal and becomes prominent in the tensions and ambivalences that characterize the relationship between the white Portuguese population and the populations that came from Portugal's former colonies and their descendants. These are often perceived within the framework of the assimilationist model inherited from the colonial past, which conveys the idea of a cultural hybridism characterized by peaceful coexistence with racial and cultural difference. However, these assimilationist myths are usually in stark contrast to the pressing social marginality that often afflicts the descendants of migrants from former colonies and the neighborhoods in which they live, on the outskirts of Lisbon. As in other European capital cities that were formerly imperial power centers, ongoing material structures of inequality in Lisbon are significantly calling Portugal's governing myths into question. Embattled immigrant suburbs, together with the Euro deficit and the consequences of the financial crisis, are altering the image of Europe as a model of progressive civilization (Behr and Stivachtis 2015).

In this overall context, although there has been an increasing tendency toward the commodification of the national past (which contributes to a deflation of its ideological content), areas of contestation and articulation of counter-memories with regard to the legacy of the country's imperial past have also emerged, especially in recent years. Calls for a more problematizing representation of Portugal's colonial past reached unprecedented proportions in 2017. In that year, the *Testimonials of Slavery: African Memory* series of exhibitions was organized as part of the Lisbon 2017 Ibero-American Capital of Culture agenda (Lusa 2017b). This agenda also included the exhibition *Racism and Citizenship*, held in the Monument to the Discoveries (Padrão dos Descobrimentos 2017). At the same time, several associations of Afrodescendants active in the field of memory were created, such as the Djass Association, which in 2017 submitted a proposal to the Lisbon City Council's Participatory Budget to create a Memorial to the Victims of Slavery in Lisbon (Djass 2017). Several controversies arose with the emergence of divergent readings on the legacies of Portugal's imperial past. One of these disputes was triggered during the state visit of the President of the Portuguese Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, to Senegal in April 2017. Specifically, at the end of his visit to a former slave-trading post on the island of Gorée, where Pope John Paul II had apologized for slavery, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa stated that Portugal recognized the injustice of slavery when it abolished the institution in part of its territory "by the hand of the Marquis of Pombal in

1761" (Lusa 2017a). In response to these statements, an open letter was published in the newspaper *Diário de Notícias* on 19 April 2017, entitled "A Return to the Past in Gorée: Not in Our Name" and signed by numerous academics and intellectuals, who thus repudiated the "politics of memory advocated by the political powers in Portugal" in relation to the country's legacy of colonialism (*Diário de Notícias* 2017).

Another controversy that arose that year was associated with the inauguration of a statue in Largo Trindade Coelho, in Lisbon, to honor Father António Vieira—a distinguished Jesuit clergyman who was born in the Portuguese capital in 1608 and died in Bahia, Brazil, in 1697. At the inauguration ceremony, Fernando Medina, the mayor of Lisbon, considered it an essential tribute to "one of the greatest personalities of Portuguese thought," so far without "the proper expression of recognition" in the city (Barros 2017). The inauguration of the statue again provoked a protest, firstly because António Vieira accepted slavery, albeit selectively, and, secondly, because of the sculptural design chosen for the statue, which depicts the clergyman in a clear position of dominance over indigenous figures who are represented as children. The group *Descolonizando* (Decolonizing) called a demonstration to protest the statue.⁶ However, the organization was unable to carry out the proposed action, scheduled for 5 October 2017, because of the presence of far-right groups on the site.

Still in 2017, a heated reaction met a proposal, included in Medina's electoral platform, for the City Council of Lisbon to create a Museum of the Discoveries (Silva 2020). More than one hundred academics, historians, and social scientists from national and foreign institutions signed and published an open letter in the *Expresso* newspaper, entitled "Why a Museum Dedicated to the Portuguese 'Expansion' and the Processes It Has Unleashed Cannot and Should Not Be Called 'Discoveries Museum.'" According to the letter, the term "discoveries" "crystallizes a historical inaccuracy," since the word "only refers to the perception of reality from the point of view of the European peoples," whereas "for the non-Europeans, the idea that they were 'discovered' is problematic." In conclusion, the letter's authors stated that, "at a time when debates on Portuguese colonial history intensify, . . . it is important that a new museum should also be a reflection of this problematizing richness" (Margato 2018).

All these initiatives were unprecedented in calling for a more problematic and critical memory of the long Portuguese imperial history that does not refer exclusively to the "golden age" of the "Discoveries." Thus, while the imperial

past is still a memorial reference to national identity, these instances of counter-memory have contributed to break the “dialogical forgetting” in relation to the imperial past in Portuguese society (Assmann 2010, 9–11). At the same time, counter-memories add to the growing debate on identity politics that in recent years has become apparent in Portugal. It is difficult to predict how the governing myths of the Portuguese nation will adapt to this newly contested landscape. In today’s overall scenario of global crisis, former imperial myths and mentalities seem to have gained a second life, often testifying to a grip on a nostalgic and biased version of the colonial past. However, this phenomenon sometimes helps to initiate a more complex debate on the legacies of colonialism, which still exert an influence on cultures and social relations, not only in former empires like Portugal, but also in Europe as a whole, which, as Benoit De L’Estoile (2008) has claimed, was shaped both objectively and subjectively by the imperial experience. As scholars, it is our task to continue to observe and analyze the unfolding of events that point to the renewed ways in which individuals and communities make sense of times past and present.

NOTES

1. All translations from Portuguese are mine.
2. The Jerónimos Monastery was also the venue for the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon on 13 December 2007.
3. For details of the activities of the Commission, see Oliveira 2003.
4. Cosmopolitanism is an ancient term with roots in the third century BC (e.g., the philosophy of the Stoics).
5. A good example of these initiatives was the national campaign launched in 2007, when the Treaty of Lisbon was signed at the Jerónimos Monastery. The campaign, called *Portugal: Europe’s West Coast*, was sponsored by the Ministry of Economy and Innovation, Turismo de Portugal, and the Portuguese Agency for Investment and Foreign Trade (AICEP), with the aim of promoting Portugal’s image abroad.
6. Descolonizando is a Facebook group composed of “researchers, teachers, artists, and activists from different nationalities” whose aim is “reflecting, discussing, and acting to promote the construction of a critical narrative and the elimination of racism and inequality” (<https://www.facebook.com/Descolonizando-1948301182079309>).

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