Cultural Restitution As a Duty of Memory

A Restituição Cultural Como Dever de Memória

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The Duty of Memory, the title that Primo Levi (2011) gave to one of his books, embodies the whole logic that underlies cultural restitution in a process that is underway, aimed at promoting the repair of the damage caused by colonialism. Although reparation will never be completely achieved, the attitude underlying it may reduce resentment in a sign based on diversity and not, as has almost always been the case, on a unilateral logic stemming from a western gaze. Through the use of memory, Levi focused on the holocaust — from which he coined the expression "duty of memory" — he gave his testimony as a Jew who was a prisoner of the Nazis so that nothing similar would ever happen again. An urgent duty of memory is to repair atrocities committed in colonial times through the use of violence by those who colonised. Therefore, the "duty of memory" represents the ethical responsibility never to forget.

Because it encapsulates a whole logic of cultural reparation very well and, thus, it can have a very broad scope, the duty of memory quickly expanded beyond the holocaust. It extended to other social, historical and human problems. It underlined an attitude towards the commitment to preserving and recognising cultural diversity held hostage by a grammar that silenced, marginalised and did not allow the existence of voices and positions foreign to those that the logic of western coloniality imposed for many centuries in several geopolitical contexts (Khan et al., 2021).

The colonial past persists through political discourse, which has repercussions in the public space and society, and through academia itself, despite the effort to change this state of affairs. That does not make the process an easy task. Quite the opposite, since it relates to mentalities, remaining beyond the administrative decolonisation, which is already almost half a century old (Sousa, 2019, 2021). Only nowadays are processes tending to cultural decolonisation developing. By the end of the 20th century, in the scope

of cultural studies, Stuart Hall (1992) predicted that the categories providing stability to the social world would collapse. He was echoed by Homi Bhabha (1994/1998), who questioned the essentialism of these same identity organising categories. Nonetheless, only very recently have we seen arguments leading to cultural decolonisation. Which necessarily entails processes of contestation about history, adding to new forms of cultural recognition in the public space: "not only is the sovereignty over these assets at stake but the entire international system of cultural heritage" (Jerónimo & Rossa, 2021, p. 8). Furthermore, fracturing topics like systemic racism, the persistence of the old colonial logic of racialisation and racial surveillance, and the struggles for gender equality will add up against the status quo. That translates into struggling with memory as a backdrop, often confused with history itself. Strictly speaking, the study of the past requires an ethical, civic and epistemic stance to bring the continuance of old logics of coloniality which permeate current social, political, historical and cultural contexts to the level of critical thinking (Meneses, 2021a, 2021b). Through the experiences that globalisation provides us with, we realise that the contemporary world is interdependent and that globalisation, notwithstanding all the criticisms attached, allows other modes of relationship. In this sense, it is relevant to highlight the argument that the world is neither static nor historically homogeneous (Sousa et al., 2020). It is worth remembering that the matrix of western modernity was underpinned by mechanisms embedded in principles such as hegemony, violence, racialisation and racial surveillance. The premise was to flatten the world of human diversity under criteria excluding from the outset all the unfit to the grand narrative and grammar of progress, civilisation and western development. This historical and ontological erasure has condemned thousands and thousands of human beings to backwardness. No latitude in the world has escaped this praxis, with western modernity being tentacular and agile in its mechanisms and devices of domination, appropriation, regulation and exclusion (Khan & Machado, 2021).

Marita Sturken, in an interview with Barreiros (2021), argues that, nowadays, memory is challenged by the volatility of the debates between what nations remember and forget, confirming the inseparability between memory and oblivion, thus making sense of activism as a pivotal setting for producing research on memory. However, when the references incorporate the so-called "histories of the present", it might mean that "the transposition of past categories to identify their present correlates may serve to invoke history as a guide to the present and establish immediate causalities" (Jerónimo & Monteiro, 2020, p. 11). However, it does not serve the political and social imagination, and even less is it "grounded in a particularly agile and refined way of thinking about history" (Jerónimo & Monteiro, 2020, p. 11). Within this context, in contemporaneity, owing to living for the present and the speed that (further) fragments society, one runs the risk of "presentism", François Hartog (2003) pointed out, in which everything that is history becomes contemporary history. Still, the correlation between history and memory is highly debatable, as Pierre Nora (1989) highlighted, though he stated that, should one

have no memory, one accesses a reconstituted memory to give meaning to identity. That may explain why "presentism and memory-prosthesis are (...) the explanatory keys for understanding the culture of memory of the late 20th century" (Soutelo, 2015, p. 25), which also applies to what we know so far about the 21st century.

Marianne Hirsch (2008) introduced the concept of post-memory to define the relationship of a second-generation to unlived, "often traumatic, milestone experiences that predate their birth but have nevertheless been passed on to them so deeply that they seem to be memories in themselves" (p. 103). It is about a second-hand experience, for example, of a colonial past, problematising the relationship of the following generations with an era that they did not live through but of which they have a very vivid memory and glued to their subjective experiences and lives. This generational perception stems from the failure of the western and global post-colonial projects. Insightfully and around the reflection on post-memory in this current post-coloniality, Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Fátima Rodrigues (2022) remark: "this territory imagined as heritage — geographical, blood, cultural, political — is what allows us to uncover another history, hidden, silent or silenced, or even actively erased, by trauma, shame, resentment, but which explains us today" (p.21). In this mapping of memories to be recovered and repaired, the subject of post-memory and historical reparation becomes, as in the reflection of António Sousa Ribeiro (2021), "an active protagonist [who] literally puts on stage a set of representations of the past which he did not simply receive, but rather reconstructs and re-elaborates within the scope of a process of intergenerational confrontation and negotiation" (p. 15).

It embodies what António Pinto Ribeiro (2021) established about art in a time of post-memory. The second and third generations from ex-colonised countries, heirs of the colonial issue, reinterpret, rethink and deliver new historical languages about the past through multidisciplinary interpellations and various inspirations, like visual arts, literature, performing arts, cinema and music. They do so to overcome the multiple silences of a larger history, actively or unconsciously promoted by the other heirs to the colonial issue on the former colonial side. Notwithstanding the great complexity of the subject, the new communicational dynamics enhanced by the advent of social networks trivialise — and sometimes contradict — the academically produced and legitimated knowledge. On the one hand, this knowledge is more accessible than ever to the lay public. On the other hand, the possibility of sharing content almost instantaneously does not obey verifiable criteria. Making it possible to observe dynamics based on belligerent logics between the alleged "good guys" and "bad guys" of any given dispute in the public space. We risk simplifying and distorting the scientific process, as Diogo Ramada Curto (2021) notes. He believes that "only the exercise of analytical history, founded on problems, can free us from the weight of partial memories, constructed based on trivialised antagonisms, in which they want to enclose us forcefully" (Curto, 2021, para. 7). However, ultimately, this vision leads to elitist paternalism, as if only the historian were qualified to intervene on these questions in the public sphere.

In fact, it is part of the analytical history process to realise that the debates on historical reparations take place over a long period, confusing their chronology with that of philosophical and political modernity itself. Manichean views of these debates have a more favourable terrain to flourish in societies where, despite their pertinence, these questions have been little worked on, making their historical ballast invisible, as in Portuguese society.

The struggle for historical reparations is multifaceted and has various temporalities. As historian Ana Lúcia Araújo (2017) underlines, since at least the 18th century, enslaved and/or free people have worked to conceptualise the idea of reparations through various strategies and resources such as correspondence, pamphlets, public addresses, narratives of formerly enslaved people and judicial claims. Even in periods and places where slavery was legal, enslaved or formerly enslaved people insisted on publicly expressing an awareness of the injustice of their situation. In settings where their enslavement was manifestly illegal, these people demanded material and/or symbolic compensation, and those were the grassroots of the first historical demands for reparations (Araújo, 2017). Although many of these remain unresolved today, it is worth remembering that several were successful. Curiously and something that should be given further and wider thought, the mill masters and entrepreneurs in the former English and French colonies of the Caribbean were the ones who received huge financial compensation for the loss of "property" upon the abolition of slavery in those societies. Whereas the bills demanding pensions for formerly enslaved people never passed, despite having mobilised many wills and generated debates that last to this day (Araújo, 2017, p. 3). As it introduces a trans-temporal dimension to the debate, an aspect worth considering is the recognition by the United Nations, in 2001, of slavery as a crime against humanity (World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Declaration, 2021). The accusations of anachronism thrown from various directions in the public sphere against activism then cease to make sense when we know that part of the definition of this crime is its unremitting character.

In Portugal, the last European empire to recognise their African colonies' independence, these issues have never had great visibility. Not only because the history of slavery is not a widely cultivated field for national research but also due to the false consciousness of liberalism has always been put into perspective by the very late persistence of slavery in the Portuguese territories. Some examples are the caricature that Eça de Queirós makes in *O Primo Basílio* (*Cousin Bazilio*, 1878), with the character of Conselheiro Acácio (Queirós, 1960), and a speech delivered by Alexandre Herculano in the Chamber of Deputies in 1840. In the later Herculano, seeking to establish the historical right of Portugal to what is now Guinea-Bissau, contested the idea of "infamous nations" in what Fernando Catroga (1999) defines as "defensive imperialism" (p 211), ultimately lessening the Portuguese involvement in the traffic of enslaved Africans:

> why are the Portuguese people accused of being slave traffickers when only twenty, thirty, or forty ships are engaged in this detestable traffic of human

flesh and servitude; when people of various nations man these same twenty, thirty, or forty ships? (many agreed). Portugal has three million inhabitants; perhaps two million have never seen a Black man from the African coast. How, then, dare one spill the ignominy of one hundred or two hundred men on three million individuals? (many more agreed). (Cordeiro, 1886, p. 31)

Upon the adoption of the paradigm of effective occupation following the Berlin Conference (1884–1885), the discourse of the "civilising mission" replaced that of historical precedence, though always linked to the issue of indigenous labour (Jerónimo, 2010, p. 9), in the configuration of colonial projects that would be developed by the First Republic and the *Estado Novo*. Nevertheless, the establishment of a new democratic political regime following the revolution of April 25, 1974, and the African colonies' independence which boosted it remain signs of these discourses' continuity. Such examples are the proliferation of monuments to the "overseas heroes" all over the country or the homage paid by the State to controversial figures of the previous regime, such as Lieutenant-Colonel Marcelino da Mata, which Elsa Peralta (2022) defined as "the non-memory of the Empire's collapse" (p. 64). That brings us to another modality of historical reparations, essentially symbolic, of the struggle for representation in the public space, which had important developments worldwide in the aftermath of the protests over the death of George Floyd in 2020.

In Portugal, in the city of Lisbon, strongly associated with statues and monuments celebrating colonial memory, the installation, by a consortium including the Lisbon City Council and the Santa Casa da Misericórdia, of a statue celebrating the supposed humanist pioneering spirit of the Jesuit António Vieira (1608–1697) in Largo Trindade Coelho triggered heated controversy and protest actions. Those included physical and symbolic interventions of various kinds toward a historical figure who remains consensual in Portugal, possibly to the extent of the enormous ignorance regarding his work, and namely the texts in which his apology for the enslavement of Africans is clearest and most forceful (Pereira, 2018, pp. 166–167).

Although mentalities are changing, the fact remains that ethnographic museums, which helped build some of the knowledge that shaped anthropology (Brito, 2016), have barely changed over time. According to Dan Hicks (2020), it means the museum is a reminder of the many spaces that are not postcolonial yet. They were made to be so from the outset, as certain institutions were built to cement the project of colonialism and thus naturalise and justify it, making it endure.

In *The Brutish Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, published in 2020, Hicks (2020) argues that what British museums show harks back to colonial brutality. The bronzes from Benin (Nigeria), stolen during a British naval attack in 1897, can today be seen in the British Museum and are scattered in private and public collections worldwide, including Portugal. Hence, he advocates their return to their origin, as in all those cases under the same premises. It is not about returning everything

and shutting down museums but giving back upon request. The restitution of collections can provide new dynamics in many places. There is nothing new about this. In the 1980s, human remains from the holocaust and objects looted by the Nazi regime were returned. Although controversial at the time, this eventually became a matter of course in all museums in Europe and America.

Of course, restitution can uncover difficult to resolve gaps in museums. Achille Mbembe (2018) has written a text on whether the restitution of African artefacts would allow Europe the opportunity to get a kind of quiet conscience at a low cost. In *Necropolitics*, he highlights that this stems from the extractive colonialism ongoing today, but whose ideology dates back to the 19th century, notwithstanding its resurgence, disguised as capitalism, in contemporary times. Thus, he argues that the starting point for reflection should not be the museum but what he calls the "anti museum" since the museum is a mummified space that needs to be humanised. That entails the much-vaunted decolonisation of knowledge, changing how things are thought or pondered. It is a necessary and urgent action, one of the main lessons to be learned from Sarr and Savoy's (2018) report, which has slowly changed the state of affairs. Proof of this is the news concerning the return of artefacts in a logic of memory rather than of history, since museums are memory institutions, as they exist not only to tell history but to remember and reflect on who we are and how we got here. That entails fluidity and flexibility in connecting with the past and the present. In the interstices of the colonial past, the needs of the present, and the restitution of heritage, on the agendas of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other international organisations, donors, and funding agencies, ratifying the idea that restitution is not subtraction. On the other hand, Bénédicte Savoy (2022) underlines in a recent study how the restitutions of heritage which are now being discussed are far from new. The first demands date from the anti-colonial struggles and independence occurring after the Conference of Bandung (1965) and the most heated debate from the mid-1970s, in what the historian classifies as a "post-colonial defeat" (Savoy, 2022, p. 3).

The memories, narratives, manifestos, social activism and debates around recognition and historical reparation have become fertile ground and a commitment to historical introspection from a cultural and political point of view. Challenging battles are fought to construct a more just, equitable and repairing narrative. The confrontation with the colonial system until post-colonialism was a painful, bruising and tortuous path, requiring a definition of the collective memory's duty. It is pertinent to place at the heart of the academic and civil debate the multiple voices and narratives that contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive mapping of mechanisms of the colonial past still active in our contemporaneity to understand today the legacies of this modern coloniality. The texts that give voice to the historical and civic urgency that this thematic section aimed at addressing meet this challenge and commitment.

The thematic section introduces articles where books are the object of analysis. Sandra Sousa maps out the role of literature as a space for contemporary surveillance of

historical reparations in geopolitical contexts bound by colonialist and colonising western experience. Margarida Rendeiro describes how the narratives of Afro-descendant Portuguese authors destabilise cartographic imaginaries to reflect, on the one hand, the Afro-descendant postcolonial experiences and, on the other, how these narratives are tools for active processes of historical reparations. Susana Pimenta analyses how the postcolonial and *mestiço* condition of the post-memory generation confronts social, cultural and historical inequalities, taking upon itself the responsibility for an ethical choice of critical and intervention dialogue with the legacies of western modernity's past.

Following, Gustavo Freitas and Ana Teresa Peixinho justify, with unparalleled attention, how the analysis of images of a past between Portugal and Angola in 1960, years of Angolan insurgency leading to the Colonial War, remains hostage to an identity grammar linked to the selective processes of collective and national memory of two now emancipated nations, still interconnected in their common history. Patrícia Sequeira argues, in her text, how the post-colonial approach within the visual culture is ambivalent, as it ignores the problem of the legitimacy and the speaking position of the artist and/or intellectual. In this vein, the author reinforces the absence of greater attention to the relationship between knowledge and visibility, between power and visibility.

Diogo Goes offers a singular reflection on the phenomenologies of non-identification with cultural and artistic heritage, namely, the architectural and sculptural installed in the urban public space. In this sense, the author establishes the relationships between iconoclastic phenomena, contemporary mythography and postcolonial and neo-colonial discursive practices, addressing the social and political issues underlying racism, which may be at the origin of iconoclastic practices against heritage. Tatiane Almeida Ferreira discusses the relations between power, memory and the archive surrounding the Malês revolt, a historical event narrated in *Bahia de Todos os Santos: Guia de Ruas e Mistérios*, (Bahia de Todos os Santos: A Guide to the Streets and Mysteries) by the writer Jorge Amado (1977). She shares reflections, tensions and intentions that the contact with post-structuralist and decolonial studies can trigger before history, as a movement of insubmission able to potentiate a critique of official thought and hegemonic. Luca Bussotti and Laura António Nhaueleque argue that the ethnic question has never been an explicit element in the construction of the Mozambican state. According to the researchers, this absence characterised the country's public life with relevant but generally disregarded tensions. In this sense, the study presents evidence of how the long process of ethnic forgetfulness was, in fact, a political program designed and implemented since the liberation struggle that continued, with the necessary adaptations, until today, directly influencing the diffusion of local cultural and artistic production.

The article section concludes with a focus on discrimination issues. Lorenzo Dalvit focuses his analysis on stories related to issues that received extensive media coverage, such as mental health, police brutality and gender-based violence. To this end, he seeks to problematise the Eurocentric human-rights discourse that influences public and

scholarly discussions. His analysis focuses on the link between current understandings of (dis)ability and a violent colonial and apartheid past legacy. Rovênia Amorim Borges presents a thorough analysis within the scope of decolonial studies. It starts by mapping the intersectionality between race and English language proficiency of Brazilian students in Portugal and the United States. It demonstrates that the constraints stemming from intercultural (mis)communications between students from Brazil and Portugal can be explained by the contemporary reverberation of the coloniality of Portuguese language teaching in both countries, experiences and perceptions that leverage the emergence of a "decolonial awakening". Camila Lamartine and Marisa Torres da Silva critically explore the use of cyberspace as a form for denunciation and feminist activism through a case study of the profile @brasileirasnaosecalam, based on content analysis. The project appeared on the digital social network Instagram to anonymously report harassment, discrimination and prejudice that Brazilian immigrant women suffer in Portugal, specifically for carrying their own nationality. Thus, through cyberactivism, which is also feminist activism, the authors show how women have a new cycle of political opportunities driven by the building and consolidation of ties around the globe.

Finally, this thematic section includes a critical book review on the paths of contestation and reflection on cultural and historical heritage by Pedro Costa and a interview on knowledge production, intercultural communication and historical reparation by Rosa Cabecinhas and Miguel Barros.

The "Varia" section welcomes works that contribute to understanding communication phenomena and the reading of social and cultural reality. This volume offers the reader an analysis of the relationship between the internet and social media and the brand engagement level. Focusing on the consumers' group from 55 to 75 years old — portrayed as "digital immigrants" or baby boomers —, María Victoria Carrillo-Durán, Soledad Ruano-López, M-Rosario Fernández-Falero and Javier Trabadela-Robles conducted a study based on focus group sessions in Portugal and Spain. The researchers from the University of Extremadura sought to analyse the use that baby boomers make of social networks, their reasons for joining these platforms and their behaviour regarding these interaction spaces. Identifying socialisation as one of their main motivations to use social networks, the authors also conclude that "brands do not seem to speak the same language they do" (p. 261), nor do they manage to create a strong bond with older people.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

Acknowledgments

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