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## **Digital Museums: Challenges and Struggle for Memories**

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### **Resumo**

O objetivo desse texto é proceder a uma reflexão sobre o papel da memória na (re)constituição das identidades coletivas e as consequências das disputas pela memória em sociedades pós-coloniais. Isso significa entender como os registros memoriais e documentais nos museus digitais tem estimulado novas discussões nos campos da antropologia, museologia e história.

**Palavras-chave:** digital, museus, memória

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this text is to reflect about the memory in the (re ) creation of collective identities and the consequences of struggles for memory in postcolonial societies . It means understanding how the memories and documentary records in digital museum has stimulated new discussions in the fields of anthropology, museology and history.

**Keywords:** digital, museums, memory

### **Introduction**

December 11th 1958. Guinea-Bissau. Arrival of a military delegation led by Under-Secretary of State for the Army, Francisco da Costa Gomes, on a mission "of a military nature, but related to several local economic aspects, and to the location of military barracks within the province." July 1959. Costa Gomes comes back to Bissau "to study matters related to the activities of the Military Command" and warns Governor Peixoto Correia about "a revolt of the men who served the Port, cargoes and discharges, which were manjacos". August 3rd, 1959. Seamen from Bissau unleash a strike movement, with the participation of captains, boatswains, sailors and cooks, calling for wage increases (invoking the harsh working conditions and the cost of food - rice, palm oil and 'Casseque', which is a kind of dried fish). The majority of them were from the manjaco people and the ones who did the work of stowage.

The "Captains" called a rally at three o'clock at the port dock to return the boats and refuse to resume work until the salaries had been increased. About four o'clock in the afternoon, the chief Conceicao "went to the port to give orders to the sailors to continue to work and, as they did not even move from there, he began to push them and even slapped one of them"; the seamen retaliated violently, brandishing the oars, sticks, iron bars, and harpoons with which they had armed themselves.

The first shots (into the air) were heard , there was a struggle for gun control and several assaults, and blood began to flow. Police reinforcements were immediately called to the area of the wharf. They assumed combat position (the testimony of one of the "guards" says that "Lieutenant Simon went straight to the squad where he sent the men to Pindjiguiti because there was a war with the sailors '). The insurrection was generalized, the order was given for "fire!" by the military commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Filipe Rodrigues (for others, the order came from Lieutenant Simon). There were five minutes of gunfire and grenade launching, and chasing after the strykers trying to flee towards the quay and opening the locked gates.

In the end, there are about 13 to 15 dead people scattered on the pier of Pindjiguiti; many more corpses of seafarers and stevedores are dragged by the waters of the Geba, it is not known how many; some dying or seriously injured men will die in the hospital [Silva 2006: 125].<sup>1</sup>

The episode described above is considered a milestone in the history of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) and for the national liberation struggle in Guinea and Cape Verde. Having been in Bissau a few times since 2010 and listening to oral reports, watching documentaries produced by the Portuguese television network (RTP)<sup>II</sup> and reading some articles on that tragedy, I decided to take that episode as a trigger to ask the following questions: how to reconstruct the imaginary of a time or an episode? What can / should be taken into account? What are the historiographic, anthropological or even literary criteria for that analysis?

What is the role of memory in the (re) constitution of collective identities and the consequences of disputes over memory in postcolonial societies? How to understand the politics of meanings and the polyphony implied in the memorial and documentary records without slipping to hegemonic interpretations anchored to the practices of the coloniality of knowledge / power, as Quijano (2005) theorizes? Or, as intellectuals, how can we promote the emergence of a new generation of researchers theoretically and methodologically prepared to undertake new political, discursive, and technological 'devices' about the social processes of memory?

How can one politically interpret what happened on the night of August 3rd, 1959? To paraphrase Guimarães (2015), the survival of memory (as well as that of images) is not only about its posthumous life, but it is addressed to our present, aimed at by the past and will continue to haunt us in the future.

Far from exhausting the reflection on the interfaces between memory, politics, anthropology and historiographical making, the purpose of this text is, therefore, to propose analytical tools to understand the 'dispute over memory' in digital museums and how the history and past of subalternized populations have been musealized, expounded, claimed, and patrimonialized, serving as a stage for political and cultural struggle.

According to the Argentine sociologist, Elizabeth Jelin (2002), coordinator of the project on the memories of repression in her country<sup>III</sup> we need to speak of 'memories' (plural), as a discursive construction which is punctured in its network, full of gaps, erasures and omissions resulting from socio-political conditions. That discursive construction turns the narrative, the way in which a subject makes sense of the past, into a memory that is expressed in a story and is transmissible with a minimum of coherence.

First of all, we must understand memories as subjective processes, anchored in experiences and marks which are both symbolic and material. Second of all, we must recognize memories as an object of disputes, conflicts and struggles, which aims to pay attention to its active role in producing meaning, which is marked by power relations. Then, we must historicize memories, that is, to recognize that there are historical changes in the meaning of the past, as well as in the place attributed to memories in different societies, climate, cultural spaces, and political and ideological struggles. (Jelin2002 :27)

The debate proposed here is organized into three spheres: (a) the discussion on the relationship between museum and memory; (b) the interface between museums, digital technologies and anthropology; and (c) the tension between museums of the future or the future of museums, referring with a bit of irony to an old maxim by Adorno, who in Valéry Proust Museum (1953), said that the pleasure of contemplation is dependent on the existence of museums.

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<sup>I</sup>Cfr. Joaquim Areal, «Crónica da Província», in *BCGP*, n.º 53, pp. 125 e segs In: SILVA, Antonio E. Duarte. Guiné-Bissau: a causa do nacionalismo e a fundação do PAIGC. Cad. De Estudos Africanos, Lisboa, 2006.

<sup>II</sup>A Guerra. Series produced by Joaquim Furtado for RTP. Available at: <http://www.rtp.pt/programa/tv/p26314>

<sup>III</sup>Jelin, Elizabeth. Researcher and Academic coordinator for the programme *Memoria Colectiva y Represion*, Bahia /Argentina supported by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Cone Sul.

## Discussions: MUSEUMS, MEMORIES AND NARRATIVES

Living like hedonists at a time when we are networked, wirelessly or not, almost obsessively - Era of Extremes, Interesting Times in the words of the late Marxist writer Eric Hobsbawm - it is up to us as researchers interested in the difficult work of organizing social and collective memory to ask Menezes' (1998) question: once the dilemma between relic (a historical object) and artifact (an object crossed by the web of symbolic relations internal and external to the museum) is overcome, what alternative to museums is there for those places of memory? To which I add: what is the role of digital museums as places for the reinvention of narratives about memories and their digital representatives?

Leaving behind the notion of common sense that defines the museum as a set of collections delimited and hierarchized, and accepting the idea of an imprecise and complex space, crossed by multiple agencies and devices (Guattari, 1992), I am interested in reflecting on the disputes over memory embodied in the new patrimonial policies that have been developed around the world, above all, from the notions of digital donation, copyright, copyleft and stimulation to the creation of countless platforms of digital museums, which suppose, as E. Glissant reminds us, another poetic to deal with a new archival and discursive policy, in the name of memory and the heritage of humanity.

Quiting the old canonical practices of colonial exhibitions, of collecting through spoils, robberies, expropriation of the cultural production by different groups to reach what is posited now, in the perspective of a new social museology of "collection of the present", is a challenge to all who are involved in the area of patrimonialization and culture, especially in postcolonial and post-independence societies.

The new social museology has argued in favor of the affirmation of museums as places to propose other strategies of preservation, representation, conservation and exhibition of the artifacts and their digital representatives. Moreover, that museums become spaces for criticizing those same artifacts and the discourse produced about them.

It is a known fact that museums are heirs to the practice of sequestering ancient treasures, cathedrals, palaces, and curiosity offices. It is also known that all the colonial empires during their expansion and domination projects produced barbarism, caused in many cases genocides (Congo, Haiti, Algeria, Abyssinia, Ethiopia, etc.) and promoted looting, robbery and destruction of art, books, as well as promoted the epistemicide of different ethnic groups. Countless objects were plundered by the various expeditions of Marcel Griaule and Henri Labouret in Africa, for example, which resulted in the great collection of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, causing the erasure of traces and vestiges of the history of those peoples. In fact, Walter Benjamin goes so far as to say that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."

The shameless theft of objects - in the case of African countries the emphasis on exotic elements that marked the place of the Other, as different, bestialized, soulless - worked very well on nourishing the ethnological tension between nature and culture, civilized and savage, colonizers and colonized, which helped to build some of the founding myths of anthropology.

After years of ethnographic missions, trips sponsored by colonial empires, reconstructed museums and rehabilitated memories - for example, the return of the remains of SaartjeBaartman<sup>IV</sup> made by Nelson Mandela - numerous questions are put in perspective: who do the objects, artifacts and collections exhibited in museums around the world belong to? What can be characterized as "cultural heritage"? What to do with the constant requests for repatriation of remains that are in museum collections? What does it mean to speak of authenticity and right to property over the pieces, fragments, narratives and representations of otherness translated by the objects in these institutions today?

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<sup>IV</sup> After the end of apartheid in 1991, one of the first Khoi-khoi claims to Nelson Mandela was the return to South Africa of the remains of SaartjeBaartman. The South African president spoke about the matter in 1994 with then-French President Francois Mitterrand who opposed South African claims using the argument of "inalienability of national collections." In 2004, however, parliament finally approved the return of Venus Hottentot as it was known.

The well-known and sophisticated historical, colonial or even contemporary museums still depict the complicated condition of an enclosed space where, according to Certeau (2011), two opposite operations are take place: Oblivion, which far from being a passive phenomenon is a device of struggle against the past, and Vestige, which is the return of what was once forgotten, that is, an action of the past henceforth forced into disguise. The past, like Hamlet's ghost, haunts the present. History is "cannibalistic".

Instead of constantly applying epistemological and methodological exercises to interrogate the past from within the museums, a more radical and emancipatory attitude would be, perhaps, to reflect on our relation with the collection of the present, its contradictions and discontinuities, promoting the inventory of places, in a geopolitical strategy that is more consistent with a critical attitude towards our role as intellectuals in the production and representation of individual and collective memory. Admitting, therefore, that its construction in time, the suppression and resurgence of its meanings, its uses and abuses, are more important than the event itself.

### **Burning Museums Down?**

In May of 1968 in France, the student movement raised the slogan "Burn the Louvre", for they believed museums were spaces of reproduction of the values of the bourgeoisie.

In 2003, Julian Spalding, former director of Glasgow's museums and galleries, challenged what he called a "canonical project" adopted by museums by saying: *museums are in the internet business. Our job is to generate interest.* In other words, museums should no longer be storerooms for objects, they should become businesses, inducing consumption and generating interest.

According to Menezes (2000) the show business trend that serves the logic of the market generates the so-called blockbusters exhibitions, which naturally seek to legitimize themselves with the aura of "culture."

I am convinced that, in the 21st century, museums can neither be anachronistic nor nostalgic spaces that avoid being contaminated with the virus of contemporary society - neighborhood museums, such as the Anacostia in Washington, and the so-called ecomuseums are examples of spaces that have brought remarkable renewal in the general field of museology - instead, they may constitute extraordinary pathways to knowledge and examination of that same society.

As stated by Scheiner (2009), late modernity allowed us to think of patrimony as a space for articulation between small singularities (individuals, local cultures and neighborhood) and instances of representation articulated under the shape of official institutions such as museums.

(...) Nowadays, digital technologies point to new and unusual relationships and heritage adheres to the digital era as a symbolic representation of different social groups. (Schneider 2009: 48).

In the XX and XXI centuries, Brazil became lavish in institutionalizing memory through the creation of museums to celebrate the national patrimony and heritage. Cunha<sup>V</sup> claims that can be explained, in the case of Brazil, due to the necessity of a (re)construction of imaginaries that would legitimize the nation. As Lilia Schwarcz(2006) reminds us, the Geographic and Historical Institutes, the Law and Medicine Schools, as well as the Museums, have established themselves as spaces were the ideal profiles of Brazil and Brazilian Men were studied, forged and presented to the public.

In the wake of that very argument, Tota (2000) said that in contemporary society, museums are a memory store where ethnic identities are traced and where historical and natural classifications inscribe and rewrite the past and the present of nations.

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<sup>V</sup>CUNHA, Marcelo Nascimento Bernardo da. Teatros de Memórias, Palcos de Esquecimentos: Culturas africanas e das diásporas negras em exposições museológicas. PUC. São Paulo. Tese. 2006 p. 285

It is true that, these days, the term Museum has been used indiscriminately<sup>VI</sup> to represent / signify elements of a deformed, confused and heterogeneous group formed by thousands of institutions scattered around the world. In general, they do not have their own collections, do not count on a professional body of professionals, nor have they accompanied or reflected on the great themes and demands of contemporary museology.

The conservative and canonical perspective of the Museum, which separates the public and the collections as entities kept apart by glass windows, tends to disappear. In order to fill this gap between the public and the collections, it will be necessary to induce, to produce different forms of patrimonial actions and policies, as well as different forms of museums, resorting mainly to technological innovations, without losing sight of the social, historical and political function of museums.

It has been said that Brazil is a country without memory and that museums have no guaranteed future given the scarce investments in the scope of public policies, although this scenario has gradually changed in recent years, as we can see in the data of the Brazilian Institute of Museums -IBRAM<sup>VII</sup> signaling that there are more than 2,600 mapped and registered museums in Brazil today.

A remarkable fact brought to light by that survey is that only 29 of the mapped museums are registered as virtual museums. In 2008 it was 18, including the Museum of Corruption and the Museum of Sex.

It is clear that a paradox has been set in the field of patrimonial policies, especially in countries like Brazil with a tradition of little memory and low investment in culture: the proliferation of museums of all kinds (Museum of the Person, Museum of football, Museum of Mines, Ecomuseum, Museum of Tomorrow, etc.) calls into question the role of the so-called "guardian of the past", since in many of those museums a kind of present continuum, whose function seems to be an actual celebration of our daily life as a memory of the future, is celebrated. Some museums have been politically created with regard for the future and for the effect of political resonance on future generations.

Never have so many physical museums been created, like what is seen today all over the world, especially in Brazil, in its age of affirmative actions. That makes this reflection even more interesting due to the ever-problematic relationship between costs, public investments, absence of a clear patrimonial policy in the federal scope and low investments in maintenance and conservation of existing and consolidated museum equipment.

In addition, we can also find differentiated digital media, grouped under the uncertain sociological definition of "social networks" that aim - or are self-appointed - to do the work of creating projects and performances treated as expographic devices with the intention of being a kind of "museum of everything" on the Internet, namely FLICKR<sup>VIII</sup>, Facebook and the latest major "media case", known as Pinterest<sup>IX</sup>.

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<sup>VI</sup>A blatant example is the Museum of Innocence that came from the pages of a book to become a real address. The Museum of Innocence is certainly unusual and gives title to the book written by Turkish Orhan Pamuk (winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize for Literature). The plot takes place in Turkey in the 1970s and tells the story of Kemal, a committed 30 year old man who falls in love with the young Fusun and who develops an obsession with the young woman. The protagonist organizes a melancholy museum of objects that refer to the image of his beloved. There are clocks, televisions, spoons, clothes and other small objects from that period of history, which are also part of the collection of the real life museum, located near Tazkim square, where the story unfolds. The museum was open by the Author in April 2012.

<sup>VII</sup>More informations <http://museus.cultura.gov.br/> IBRAM .

<sup>VIII</sup>Flickr is an image-sharing website, released in 2004 and purchased by Yahoo! the following year. It has more than 7 billion photos published at the moment. The free Flickr account allows you to upload 300 MB of photos and videos per month. Even the newly created Rio Art Museum (MAR) already has an account on that portal. ([Http://www.flickr.com/photos/rbpdesigner/8693175467/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/rbpdesigner/8693175467/)).

<sup>IX</sup>The website was created in 2008 but only released in March 2010. It was created by American Ben Silbermann who used his habit of collecting things to come up with Pinterest. It is a social network of photo sharing that functions as image galleries with the option of thematic exposure. It is possible to find a gallery with collections of Brazilian museums there. [Http://pinterest.com/moyarte/museus-brasileiros-acervo/](http://pinterest.com/moyarte/museus-brasileiros-acervo/)

That exponential growth of environments to manage, organize and socialize photographs and stimulate digital collecting gives us an indication of the difficult and problematic relationship that our generation tries to keep with the past, and of the desperate attempt to store the present in pixels and bytes for future generations.

Despite the more engaged currents in the field of New Museology and the harsh criticism towards the concept of 'modern' museum - that is, produced within the historical temporality of modernity - which we learn about in school, it is undeniable that museums are still understood as expressions of national memory. In this sense, this museum boom – either physical or digital - tends to reinforce the idea that a museum is a guardian of national traditions and memory.

Heloisa B. de Holanda warned us, in a short text published in 2012<sup>x</sup>, about the close link between the creation of museums and the symbolic order of modern societies, which allows us to understand the fact that museums actually came about as an effect of modernization and their teleological commitment, that is, of their commitment to the future and not to the past or to tradition. It is not, therefore, the maintenance of the tradition that marks the origin of the museums, but, on the contrary, the threat of its loss, allied with the desire to rebuild it.

Contemporary narratives in the field of sociology of communication highlight the fact that we are experiencing the "age of planned obsolescence," that is, objects and artifacts are made to disappear. How then can we understand this recent obsession with the musealization of all things?

It is in this context that digital museums are reconfigured, as well as their spaces, their new territoriality, virtuality and interactivity, their policies and practices as expressions of a new cartography of the past and the present. Hollanda (2012) claims that this moment brings to surface a new architecture of museums, new policies of exhibition and, along with them, the transformation of the figure of the curator, who evolves from the guardian of collections to a mobilizer of collections.

Thus, museums become a space of transit, of virtual meetings, of celebration and affirmation of the past, of memories and longings for the future, a stage for entertainment rather than of didactic action, encouraging the sharing of places, people, objects, narratives and identities.

To think, for example, of the heritage and memory of the Afro-Brazilian population in the context of today's racial relations in Bahia and Brazil is undoubtedly a challenge and a bet on the possibility of bequeathing to future generations of Afro-descendants much of the intellectual and material production of black culture in the crossing to the New World.

The rapid advance of current digital technologies has both enabled us to put issues that are dear to this project into perspective - race, hierarchies, geopolitics of knowledge, intangibility of heritage – and stimulated new political, cultural, economic, ethical and aesthetic sensibilities for the areas of Museology, geopolitical management and strategies for memory preservation.

Unequivocally, when applied to museums, those digital technologies have facilitated the tasks of inventorizing, cataloging and managing collections, as well as the diffusion of that type of work. They have revolutionized the way in which institutions and individuals connected to the subject of affirmative policies and relations have been communicating, and proved to be agile and dynamic tools for both the development of different projects and actions within the scope of cultural heritage and for the design and diffusion of cultural and pedagogical contents.

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<sup>x</sup> HOLANDA, Heloisa B. **De que se fala quando se fala de memória.** Available at <http://www.heloisabuarquedehollanda.com.br>. Atualizado em 09/09/2012

The Museu Afrodigital<sup>XI</sup> is an example of that. It has provided digital access to the documentation related to the presence of R. Landes and L. Turner in Bahia. That documentation has been claimed by different groups and leaders in the field of anthropology and heritage. It is also widely sought after by students and researchers. That museum has also granted access to the wealthy collection of Melville Herskovits, which suggests that we are facing a so-called museum-friction, that is, a tensive political field where representations on the past of the Afro-descendant community - Brazilian and African - live the eternal tension between depending on the authorization of the specialized and legitimized views of the intellectuals or museologists and the search for their representational autonomy.

In that sense, the Museu Afrodigital of Universidade Federal da Bahia (a project that is part of a research network involving Bahia, Maranhão, Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro) is based on the perspective of reinventing discursive and meaningful practices regarding the making of ethnography and the treatment received by the memory of the survivors from the Black Atlantic and its generations. The museum is organized on three pillars: **digital generosity**, that is, the idea of a museum built from donations and popular participation; **digital repatriation**, an incentive for the archives to return to their places of origin; and reflection on the **memory of subalternized populations**.

Today, the Afrodigital Museum is part of an international network where each digital museum is also a starting point, a stop, a gaze, a meeting point for scholars, researchers, collectors, students or just enthusiasts of the theme of Africanness and Afrodescendence.

The indexing strategy adopted is based on international standards for metadata registration, the same used by physical institutions, museums, archives and libraries around the world. The idea is to create a common language that allows the free circulation and exchange of documentary records between people and institutions in different parts of the world.

The partner universities in that network already provide online access to collections of documents, photographs, sound records and videos that draw a map of our historical and political landscape, and encompass great themes that articulate us as researchers who are interested in the theme of memory and the disputes over it.

In our search - somewhat like Julio Verne - we have creativity but poor technology. However, also like Julio Verne, we do not stop dreaming. We wish for a digital museum that articulates new social practices with the new ways of living and being in the world.

## **Memory, mobility and dispute**

There was a time when the displacement and mobility of objects and artifacts were generally the result of acts of piracy, looting, plunder, and theft.

The world has changed, as have the ways of selling and buying. The mobility and displacement of objects in their digital representations these days represent a new ethic in favor of the free circulation of bits. In practice, this means working under a three-pillar system: collaboration, knowledge and freedom.

The portability of the tools for production, transmission and representation of content simplified processes, which previously were unthinkable or very expensive, allowing different artistic expressions to be seen and accessed quickly by the virtual communication devices around the world. Those are called locative media. They allow mapping and georeferencing of intellectual, historical, and archaeological production, suggesting other ways of re-creating collective memory without the need for looting and colonial violence.

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<sup>XI</sup>The Museu Afrodigital aims to exchange and digitize documentation and research on the African diaspora, African studies and ethno-racial relations in Brazil, disseminating the information under the Creative Commons license, that is, all the documentation is of open and free use, with no commercial purposes . <http://www.museuafrodigital.ufba.br>

The Google Maps technology, for instance, allows you to add locative characteristics belonging to an individual or a group (such as photos, sounds and videos) to generic maps, turning cities, streets, or other spaces into places.

The way we see it, technologies based on location and mobility imply specific modes of mediation, inducing new practices in the museum field, redefining the understanding of place, and consequently adding new meanings to the space of the museum and the place of memory.

Locative media act in the space of digital museums operating on six main types of mediation: listening to social groups; writing; memory representation; ludic-pedagogical aspect; visibility and access.

In his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the historian Michel de Certeau presents a peculiar distinction between places and spaces in addressing the question of mobility that is now present in various artistic experiences. From his perspective, spaces are lively places, places practiced by displacements. Without mobility, there would be no space, there would be only static, fixed, and immutable places.

Mobility transforms places into ephemeral and provisional areas of traffic and transit, where moving is rather crossing the space and its own borders. Those new semantic-digital networks create a new environment, a scenario where sociotechnical acts are performed in never before seen dynamics, supports and formats. That makes us think about how collections can have their processes of preserving memories, stories and documents organized outside of traditional and canonical spaces such as libraries, archives and museums.

Today, the abundant material that composes our immense Afro-Diasporic heritage - which has been expanded with the donation of new files through digitalisation licenses or digital diffusion - is no longer made out of mass, clay, lime, iron or bronze, it is made out of zeroes and ones (0101010), a binary code that challenges us to rethink the historical, symbolic and real places of those black men, women and children who helped to (re)found identities in the Diaspora.

Recovering that immense collection is more than a duty towards affirmative action policies, it is a duty as intellectuals who are engaged in another vision of the world, one that is more generous and more ethically committed.

Therefore, we wish to reflect on the ethical, ethnical and aesthetic implications of the use of Afro-Brazilian images in museum contexts, that is, have the patrimonialization and spectacularisation of peoples who have been historically subalternized affected hierarchies and the racial imaginary about black people in Brazil?

We believe that thinking about the new patrimonial policies may be a possibility of producing the epistemic insurgency as a condition to decolonize the memory and the images of the Afro-Brazilian population.

The main challenge of digital museums today is to reflect on their role in this ever-changing world, that also keeps historical continuities, especially when it comes to racial issues. While time and space are suppressed, condensed, or subverted, museums can take their place in this setting as connectors, bridges between memory and oblivion, between individual and collective, local and global, between what one is, and what one intends to be. Museums allow us to access, in the present, the memory of the past in order to promote future perspectives.

Even though most existing museums on the web are only portals built and maintained exclusively to gather and display works of art originally generated by synthetic processes, or, by means of digital copies, the constitutive characteristics of the internet accord them another design that facilitates connectivity and broadens the possibilities of user-visitor interaction with the work, the creator and the curator eliminating spatial and temporal obstacles, while also imposing cognitive and technological constraints, as well as linguistic barriers.

The public archives and libraries that hold that kind of documentation, both in Brazil and in Africa, are in poor conditions and the documentation centers are missing the personnel and infrastructure to ensure the effective conservation of their collections. We know that dealing with the issue of racism and racial hierarchy in that country has been a challenge for social scientists, who are held hostages by the social imagery of racial democracy. That makes this project of a Digital Museum to think about the African memory and diaspora a necessary investment to dig into our history and assume our memory of pain, but also of resistances. In other words, it implies giving visibility to the Afro-Brazilian population, as we search for the best way to take care of their memory and their material and immaterial cultural heritage.

The reach of each topic posted on the Museum page on Facebook (a fanpage) is remarkable. Daily reach and impact on users can be as high as 600 people daily. That is far more than most physical museums can achieve with generally costly and under-visited exhibitions.

The average views for each post have been about 150 people. In a month, it would be as though the same photo, file or document was accessed 04 times a day by different users. The collections of F. Frazier, Lorenzo Turner and Ruth Landes are among the most accessed every month, either through the fanpage on Facebook or through the museum's website.

Reflecting on the concept of Identity, Africanity and Afrodescendence perpetuated through memory, which is now updated by the imagery and audiovisual registers, means recognizing and investigating the consequences and impacts of the preservation of the memory and heritage of the African peoples spread through computer and hypermedia processes; the goal is achieving what Walter Mignolo (2000) calls a *critique of modernity based on geopolitical experiences and memories of coloniality*.

These - not so - new Digital Museums also bring other challenges for those who like us are accustomed to dealing with documents and memory: how about the intellectual property issue? Or the digital rights issue? Or the custody of the originals issue? How do we carry out digital repatriation, that is, the incentive to have the files returned to their places of origin? How to ensure not only their preservation, but also develop devices for visitation that articulate the tactile, emotional, playful and intellectual experience without losing aesthetic fruition? How to encourage the development of specific platforms and softwares for museological heritage management in open access and free environments?

How can we expect that digital museums help not only objectify memory, but also stimulate the creation of interinstitutional and intergenerational networks to subjectify the memory of groups historically absent from the places where memory is legitimized?

How could those portals become more than mere electronic catalogs, serving as a mural to promote political games without fabricating effects of resonance on the memory policies of subalternized groups such as those in the black Atlantic diaspora, for example? Clearly, there are still many more questions than answers.

These are the context and spirit that support the existence of MUSEU AFRODIGITAL: it questions the ways in which the patrimonial politics are unfolding in Brazil, it proposes a kind of collective memory management through the cooperation of digital platforms and technologies, but also, and above all, the sharing of different kinds of knowledge, which contemplate and found a new engineering of social ties, traversed by the notions of solidarity in the sharing of collections, ethics in dealing with the documentation of ex-colonized peoples, stimulating autonomy and management of financial and intellectual resources, affirming a protocol of intent that guides the work of the digital museum around structuring principles for its proper functioning, ie open, public and free access to the digitized material; it promotes the sharing of information and technology used; it standardizes the use of image capture and treatment; it defines patterns in the informational architecture for collection and indexing within the repositories, facilitating the rapid retrieval of the information; it adopts digital preservation standards.

The questions that interest me at the moment are: can the ethnographic treatment based on the perspective of a digital exhibition project seeking to respect the historical, ethnographic and patrimonial character of the work of R.Landes and L.

Turner induce a new dialogue with the communities affected by this work? Is it possible to question the regime of truth imposed in a traditional view of historiography that imputes to documents a character of witness? Could a way of dealing with documentation that opens up the channel of communication with society around the archives help create new narratives about the past?

What past are we talking about? The vintage past sold in the souvenir shops in museums around the world? The past presented as a refrigerator magnet expressing the non-historical void and the refusal to the flow of time? The past expressed in the recreations of slave-ships trying to drive the problem out of historical consciousness and the past we would not like to remember? The haunting past disguised as a fashion trend and turned into colors and shapes that can be carried in hand luggage from holidays trips?

At a time when the exacerbation of memory seems to have become the key to understanding / interrogating our history and our past, we should remember Jelin's (2002) warning:

A basic fact must be established. At any time and place, it is impossible to find a unique memory, vision and interpretation of the past, shared by a whole society. (...) There will always be other stories, other memories and alternative interpretations in the resistance, in the private world, in the Catacombs. There is an active political struggle about the meaning of what happened, but also about the meaning of memory itself. The space of memory is then a space of political struggle, and not infrequently this struggle is conceived in terms of struggle (against oblivion): remember not to repeat. (Jelin 2002: 06)

According to that author, the struggle of memory against oblivion (against silence) hides a battle between rival memories (each of them with its own oblivion). It is actually memory versus memory.

### **Conclusions: Brief Considerations About the Future of the Past**

Memory can and should be understood as an important element for the analysis of social thought. Sometimes as an aggregating agent (memory of African ancestry), some other times as a hindrance to the formation of a modern and mestizo nation as G. Freyre and S. Romero have stated.

If the notion of race was constructed as a "Brazilian problem," memory as a discursive and political device helps to fabricate the multiple interpretations about Brazil, operating alongside categories such as ethnicity, nation, territory, identity, Aiding in the difficult task of anchoring the real or forgotten facts. Perhaps, one plausible way to understand this statement is to agree with the writer G. Garcia Marquez (2005)<sup>XII</sup>: *My only explanation is that just as real facts are forgotten, some facts that never happened can be in one's memory as if they had happened.*

I share Furtado's point of view:

The writing of the memory reconciles the work of mourning and the possession of the origin, the verticality of the loss and the horizontality of the lineage, the exile of the history and the myth of the paradise lost, the nomadic destiny and the return to the locus amoenus from where we never left. (Furtado 2003: 21)

Cuperschmidt in a seminal text about the narratives produced on Auschwitz in a chapter entitled *Imperative of memory* tells us that the work of memory is inseparable from social life.

Memory is a kind of 'affective category' in our relationship with the past and with history. Or, as Selligman-Silva says, memory exists only in the plural. In this sense, the war of memories can be the result of our frequent struggle between the desire to represent the past (in our image and convenience) and the need to tame the future by framing the present. (Cuperschmidt 2011: 122)

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<sup>XII</sup> In: Memórias de minhas putas tristes. RJ: Ed. Record. 2005

Authors such as Pierre Nora and Maurice Halbwachs devoted part of their work to unveiling the insides and the porosities of the so-called "places of memory", which allowed Jacques Le Goff to undertake a small treatise in his entry on "Memory" written for Encyclopedia Einaudi, where it states:

[there are] topographic places, such as archives, libraries, and museums; monumental places such as cemeteries and architectures; symbolic places such as celebrations, pilgrimages, anniversaries or emblems; functional places, such as manuals, autobiographies, or associations (1990: 473)

There is, ultimately, what we may call 'places behind the places', it is where we find ourselves with the strength and resistance of those who do not surrender, nor give up, the peoples who raised up nations when exiled from their own land, whose memories have not yet been revealed, whose monuments have been destroyed and aesthetics reinvented; bodies-subjects-places-speech-memories. Struggles for the right to remember and for the right to forget. Battles of signs torn by the oceans; war without winners in a minefield, devastated by the remains of stories. Remains, shadows, exiles, asylums, clothes, routes, words, carved in the fire of memory that burns in ruins.

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