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Cover image: "The Landing of Pedro Álvares Cabral in Porto Seguro in 1500" by Oscar Pereira da Silva (Barchfield, 2018)

Navigation of National Heritage: Examining Portugal's Age of Exploration in Museums through a Decolonial Perspective

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Abstract

Over the past decade, sociopolitical movements like Black Lives Matter have gained international recognition, bringing systemic racism fostered through colonialism and imperialism to the forefront. These discussions have prompted national discourse in many Western countries, leading to a critical reevaluation of historical narratives and the representation of colonial legacies in various cultural institutions, including museums. Although the decolonization process within museums is still in its early stages, countries such as Portugal and Spain have been criticized for being particularly uncooperative. This thesis scrutinized the current state of several museums in Portugal, including the Navy Museum and the Museum of the Orient in Lisbon, the World of Discoveries digital exhibit in Porto, and the Slave Market Museum in Lagos. These institutions represent the maritime heritage of the Age of Exploration, an integral aspect of Portugal's collective memory and national identity. The analysis was informed by a literature review of the formation of the Portuguese overseas empire, postcolonial theory, and decolonization practices within museology. Additionally, museum visits provided significant first-hand observations, and extensive engagement with museum archival data through their respective websites offered further insights. The findings revealed that the predominant narrative of these museums centered around the glorification of the Portuguese maritime legacy, portraying it more as an adventure and less as a history of exploitation and oppression. Furthermore, this study compared Portuguese museums to those in other European nations with colonial empires, highlighting differences in how colonial histories are presented. This comparison underscores the need for a more nuanced and inclusive representation of maritime heritage in Portugal, contributing to a broader understanding of the impact of decolonial perspectives and practices on contemporary society.

Keywords: Portugal, museum studies, heritage studies, maritime heritage, early modern period

I.   Introduction

1.1 Sociopolitical context

A 2018 petition proposed by *Nova Portugalidade* (New Portugality) — a nationalist association tied to the Portuguese far-right — titled "Lisbon needs a Museum of the Discoveries, Expansion and *Portugalidade*" sparked international debates, as it sustained reinforcement of pro-colonialist thought and romanticized Portuguese historical and cultural legacies (Borges, 2018). In this appeal, the Portuguese colonial project and its associated activities were mitigated through the concept of luso-tropicalism. This theory, developed by Brazilian sociologist and colonial administrator Gilberto Freyre, was later popularized and adapted by Salazar's Estado Novo (New State) authoritarian regime (1933 — 1974) to justify colonization (Standring & Cardoso, 2021, p. 205). The core idea of the concept presupposes that Portugal was "uniquely unafflicted by racial prejudice", (Standring & Cardoso, 2021, p. 205) contrasting itself with Western colonial powers. Hence, its colonial exploits (often still termed "the discoveries" [*os descobrimentos*]) were widely perceived as benign by the white population (Standring & Cardoso, 2021, p. 205).

Apart from the contentious debate surrounding the "discoveries," there has been a gradual and subdued shift towards discussing the restitution of cultural objects from formerly colonized countries within the context of Portuguese colonial heritage (Carvalho & Semedo, 2023, p. 21). The Dutch governmental and parliamentary voice for arts and culture, "*Raad voor Cultuur*", (Council for Culture) brought attention to the major southern colonial empires of Spain and Portugal within the early modern period (15th – 18th century). The Council emphasized the heavy involvement of Spain and Portugal in Western colonization, contrasted by their nations' lack of or inadequate response to current sociopolitical debates over the repatriation of looted artifacts (Raad voor Cultuur, 2021, p. 51). The lack of responses to such calls for action may reflect a general hesitation to publicly debate issues related to the objects from former colonized countries that exist in Portuguese museums, as well as their possible restitution. This hesitation, however, becomes apparent in the words of Pedro Adão e Silva, former Portuguese Minister of Culture (Carvalho & Semedo, 2023, p. 21). In 2022, when announcing the government's initiative to catalog all heritage from former Portuguese colonies in the nation's museums, Adão e Silva emphasized that this task should be conducted "discreetly and away from public debate" (Lusa/TSF, 2022, para. 1). Since then, this emphasis on discretion has faced significant criticism (Gerador, 2022; Lopes, 2022).

The focus of this research unfolds within this social environment in Portugal, where there is rising discourse concerning the country's colonial heritage and the restitution of cultural artifacts. The rhetoric is primarily fueled by global justice movements advocating for greater accountability from former colonial powers. Integral to this interpretation of the rise in decolonial movements is the aftermath of the 2020 murder of George Floyd and its impact on Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests which have wielded significant pressure upon governmental and private institutions to instate policies promoting the rights of African Americans (Speckart, 2023, p. 251). However, the BLM movement, its ideals, and values have not been confined to national borders, instead resonating with a global audience. Moreover, the movement's ethos of inclusivity and intersectionality aims to raise awareness regarding the daily oppressions of all marginalized groups, highlighting the interconnectedness of discrimination. In Portugal, this broader understanding of social justice has led to an expansion of the discourse surrounding colonial heritage and restitution, encompassing not only issues of racial injustice but also intersecting struggles such as sexism, homophobia, ableism, and environmental injustice. These protests not only spotlighted racial injustices within Portugal but also catalyzed conversations about the enduring impacts of colonialism. They prompted Portuguese citizens to confront uncomfortable truths about their nation's history and its ongoing reverberations, igniting a call for restitution and reconciliation (Marinha, 2023; Garraio, 2023).

Another significant aspect, increasingly politicized and divisive, is the immigration flows from formerly colonized regions such as Brazil, Lusophone Africa (including Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Equatorial Guinea), as well as India and China, which have profoundly shaped and continue to shape, Portugal's sociopolitical landscape. These immigration patterns, driven by the processes of colonization and decolonization, are unsurprising given Portugal's extensive colonial history, as the European nation with the longest history of colonialism, commencing in the 1400s. During this period Portugal became the first European nation to establish trade relations with kingdoms and states along the West and West-Central African coasts (Arenas, 2015, p. 353). However, paradoxically, Portugal's colonial history is marked by both early beginnings and a prolonged conclusion – as one of the last European powers to relinquish some of its colonized territories, with Mozambique and Angola gaining independence in the mid 20th century, and Macau being handed over to China as late as 1999. This long-standing engagement in global imperialism fostered a rich cultural exchange and hybridization between the West and non-West. It simultaneously challenged narratives surrounding identity and cultural heritage, driven by a diverse influx of immigrants, asylum seekers, and returnees as Portuguese nationals.

The fall of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship in 1974 and subsequent decolonization efforts in the late 20th and early 21st centuries marked a significant turning point, catalyzing demographic shifts and a notable increase in Portugal's population. This demographic surge presented formidable challenges in terms of

social, economic, and political integration, exacerbated by housing shortages, administrative complexities, and a saturated labor market. Despite these obstacles, colonial legacies, community rights, and governmental obligations played pivotal roles in facilitating access for immigrants from former colonies, even after direct colonial ties had been severed. Margarida Marques, a Member of the European Parliament, highlights the impact of communal pressure on immigration policies, which "benefitted tens of thousands of Africans and Brazilians in Portugal" (Bosma et al., 2012, p. 8). Notably, even after the formal restriction on the rights of non-repatriates following the collapse of the Luso-African Empire, many were still granted residency (Bosma et al., 2012, p. 8). Similarly, nearly two decades after Brazil's independence, settling in Portugal remained relatively accessible for Brazilians, with their command of Portuguese serving as a significant postcolonial advantage (Bosma et al., 2012, p. 8).

Accurate statistical data on Portugal's demographics is challenging to obtain due to several legal impediments preventing the collection of data based on ethnicity and race, leading to confusion around the country's changing demographics (Arenas, 2015, p. 357). A 2012 United Nations report on race in Portugal highlighted a "subtle racism" inherent within its society, partly attributed to the absence of ethnic grouping, which confines Portuguese-born Afro-descendants within the bounds of immigration, hindering their social advancement (Arenas, 2015, p. 357). The report also criticized the national educational curriculum for failing to adequately portray Portugal's colonial past or recognize the positive social contributions of Afro-descendants to the formation of Portuguese society (Arenas, 2015, p. 357). This issue extends to cultural institutions, where a lack of representation and the colonial erasure of those who were colonized are evident. These concerns will be further elaborated upon in the research conducted across the museums studied.

What remains evident is the profound impact of immigration flows on Portugal's sociopolitical landscape, reflecting a nuanced interplay between its colonial legacy and contemporary identity. The country's cultural fabric has undergone significant transformation, altered not only by its imperial history of maritime conquest but also by the contributions of descendants from previously colonized territories. These contributions span various domains, including cuisine, arts, literature, and sports, also extending to education and activism. However, despite their significant cultural influence, these communities often find themselves excluded from mainstream sociopolitical discourse. Given the pivotal role of cultural institutions as influential entities in shaping public opinion, it becomes imperative to examine how these marginalized voices are either acknowledged or overlooked within such establishments. Museums wield considerable power in defining cultural narratives and shaping collective consciousness, underscoring the importance of ensuring equitable representation and inclusion within them.

1.2 Aim of the research

This work will explore and scrutinize the representation of Portugal's maritime legacy as depicted within several museums in Portugal, two of which are in Lisbon, one in Porto, and one in Lagos. A primary concern and objective of this research involves an analysis of the construction (methods) of museological narratives and their visual presentations of maritime heritage, as depicted through the aforementioned cultural institutions. The findings will be challenged through post-colonial theory to unravel possible underlying power structures, biases, and marginalized voices in the portrayal of this heritage. Possible historical distortions and erasures will be highlighted and contextualized – whether showcasing certain ethnocentric selectivity, colonial glorification, or contested linguistic interpretation. Lastly, the impact and effects of the state in which early modern Portuguese expansion and conquest are presented and defined extensively, as Portugal's maritime history holds a significant place in global colonization and exploitation, shaping world history as well as, perpetuating and instilling an outgrowth of nationalism and resentment towards former colonies. By illuminating the current museum narratives of heritage institutions in Portugal, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of Portugal's maritime heritage and its impact on contemporary society, reflected and derived from decolonial perspectives and practices. Furthermore, attempts and efforts made regarding the inclusion of diversifying historical narratives concerning Portugal's colonial past are acknowledged and taken into account when assessing the level of decolonial engagement in the museums.

1.3 Research questions

The examination of maritime heritage within the cultural landscape of Portugal entices a closer inspection of the intricate layers of historical representation housed within important cultural institutions. An analysis of the methodologies applied by these institutions in establishing a certain museological narrative is fundamental to this study, in the hopes of providing a transparent portrait of their current position within a broader network of European museums mediating a colonial past. Central to this inquiry lies the following research question: *How do Portuguese museums address the complexities of colonialism through portrayals of the Portuguese maritime legacy and its implications for national identity and heritage representation?*

Chapter III outlines the methodological approach employed in this study in further detail. This paper seeks to address the research question through an interdisciplinary lens, incorporating postcolonial and decolonial theories, museological practices, and historical inquiry to contextualize the narratives

presented by museums. The primary case study is the *Museu de Marinha* (Navy Museum) in Lisbon, chosen for its significance as a primary source of maritime history in Portugal and its colonial origins. Moreover, the work will investigate the Museum of the Orient in Lisbon, being a recently established institution, its analysis will offer insights into a contemporary museum, allowing for an examination of any shifts that may have occurred over time within museological practices. Furthermore, critical perspectives on colonial narratives will be explored at the "World of Discoveries" in Porto and the *Mercado de Escravos* (Slave Market) in Lagos. The former targets a younger audience, while the latter primarily caters to tourists, both potentially enabling historical distortions. Through these case studies, this research seeks to evaluate the decolonization strategies undertaken by these museums in response to the research question.

The first subquestion, "*To what extent have Portuguese museums implemented decolonization strategies in curating and presenting the maritime legacy of the Age of Exploration?*" significantly influences the overarching research inquiry. The degree to which the aforementioned museums embrace decolonization practices serves as a reflection of these heritage institutions' perspectives on both colonialism and decoloniality. The second subquestion, "*In what ways do the maritime exhibits showcased in Portuguese museums differ from those exhibited in other European countries with colonial legacies?*" serves as a foundation for establishing a comparative framework. Through this framework, this study seeks to deepen the understanding of the present landscape of Portuguese museology as well as to anticipate its future developments and advancements in the field through cross-examination with other museums in Europe.

Moreover, the methodological framework and the selection of museums with diverse profiles ensure the acquisition of a wide range of data and practices, catering to different audiences and stakeholders. This study aims to evaluate the impact on identity and heritage representation within Portuguese museums by comparing their practices with those of institutions that have adopted decolonial frameworks to reassess their collections and narratives. It seeks to assess the progress made by Portuguese museums thus far, identifying any gaps and biases in the construction of narratives and exploring opportunities for improvement.

II.   Historical Background and Literature Review

2.1 Portugal's Age of Exploration

Given the emphasis of this paper on the portrayal of Portugal's maritime legacy within museum settings, it is essential to establish a comprehensive chronological framework to contextualize this period of Portuguese imperialism and expansion adequately. Such an approach can enhance the systematic and coherent analysis of museum collections relating to this colonial and maritime context. It is to be acknowledged that the scope of this section offers a condensed overview of Portugal's seafaring activities, considering the intricacies of the naval developments across Europe, and more specifically, the Iberian Peninsula, during this period. This segment will delve into select pivotal moments of Portugal's maritime exploits as they relate to the collections and narratives presented within the museums. It will spotlight prominent figures from the nation's cadre of maritime explorers, who are consistently highlighted and featured within these institutions.

Within this work, this historical epoch is referred to as the "Age of Exploration" rather than the commonly employed name, "Age of Discoveries". It is imperative to recognize that Portuguese explorers did not merely "discover" new lands, as such regions were already inhabited by indigenous communities long before European arrival. Moreover, it can be argued that various historical periods have been marked by significant discoveries, challenging the justification for exclusively labeling this period as *the* "Age of Discovery" (Arnold, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, the term "exploration" more accurately encapsulates the multifaceted objectives of these expeditions, which encompassed not only the charting of new territories but also the navigation and establishment of sea routes by Europeans. Although the term "exploration" may not be entirely neutral and could still harbor certain Eurocentric biases, it does accentuate the global influence attained during the 15th and 16th centuries, characterized by a more focused emphasis on the exploration process rather than solely emphasizing European dominance. Despite potential critiques regarding its perceived subtlety or oversimplification, this term will be consistently utilized throughout this paper for the sake of clarity and consistency. However, it is imperative to recognize this terminology's diverse interpretations and implications.

The ascendancy of Portugal's overseas empire seemed remarkable, representing a seemingly abrupt emergence, which is especially notable for a nation that had maintained a relatively insular stance within international affairs beyond Europe until this post-medieval period (Nicolle, 2012, p. 3). During this early modern era (15th century — 18th century), Portuguese chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara (c. 1410 — c. 1474) completes his *Chronica do Descobrimento e Conquista de Guiné,* (the

"Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea") in which he outlines five reasons for Portuguese territorial expansion. The motivations for Portuguese territorial expansion, as delineated by Zurara (1463), encompass a range of factors. These include religious motivations, such as the propagation of Christianity, and economic incentives, which arguably were the primary drivers. At the time, Portugal was a small country with limited resources and wealth, spurring its pursuit of trade opportunities. Other motivations included strategic and geopolitical interests focused on securing maritime routes, purportedly humanitarian objectives involving the perceived duty to civilize and educate Indigenous populations, and aspirations for national renown and honor. Zurara also proposes a sixth rationale for Portuguese expansion: "the inclination of the heavenly wheels" (Ellerkamp, 2016, p. 1). This notion marks a transition from a perception of divine providence to a pragmatic agenda grounded in material considerations, thus delineating the evolution of Portuguese overseas expansion (Ellerkamp, 2016, p. 1).

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Europeans possessed limited knowledge of the rest of the world, largely attributable to the significant constraints of their cartographic methods. These maps often provided only rudimentary, and frequently inaccurate, depictions of lands beyond their own shores (Arnold, 2002, p. 11). Among the sources deemed more credible were textual records dating back to classical antiquity, including Ptolemy's seminal work "Geography", as well as more recent travel journals such as those of Marco Polo, who embarked on an extensive journey across Asia in 1271 (Arnold, 2002, p. 6). Marco Polo's detailed narratives of his journeys instilled a captivating notion in the European consciousness: that Asia was a realm abundant with unparalleled riches. These writings kindled a fervent ambition within Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator, among other key figures and explorers, inspiring him to patronize voyages and exploration initiatives.

The official start of Europe's Age of Exploration, as believed by many historians, was in 1415, when the Portuguese, under the command of John I, Prince Henry the Navigator's father, seized the Muslim-controlled Moroccan port of Ceuta, marking the beginning of their overseas empire (Arnold, 2002, p. 9). This port in the Strait of Gibraltar became a newfound strategic advantage for the Portuguese, enabling them to control key commercial hubs. This control allowed them to exert influence over maritime trade, solidifying their emerging status as a maritime power in the late medieval period.

In 1419, the Portuguese began the colonization of Madeira, an uninhabited archipelago geologically situated on the African Tectonic Plate but culturally and politically associated with Europe, as its population is derived from Portuguese settlers. The exploration of the Atlantic continued with the colonization of the Azores around 1434. However, recent studies indicating possible evidence of pre-Portuguese human habitation in the Azores have introduced a challenge to the narrative of its

"discovery". This evidence includes man-made rock basins, arrangements of large stones resembling megalithic constructions, and stone inscriptions similar to ancient petroglyphs (Rodrigues et al., 2015). Although this evidence is fragmentary and requires further research, it contests the long-held assertion within sociopolitical discourse that the Portuguese were the first to discover the Azores.

By 1481, the Portuguese had erected a fort at Elmina on the West African coast, a crucial juncture in the transatlantic slave trade, thus a site strongly linked to memorialization practices (Rahier, 2020). This strategic outpost not only facilitated the control of gold and other resources but also marked the beginning of a dark chapter in history characterized by the exploitation and trafficking of enslaved Africans. Despite the castle dungeon passing through the hands of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British over time, its initial construction by the Portuguese makes it surprising that none of the museums examined in this study mention this significant location. UNESCO recognizes the castle as a World Heritage Site of Ghana, alongside other such establishments, for its testimony to the Atlantic slave trade. The absence of mention of Elmina Castle in Portuguese cultural institutions raises questions about the inclusivity of their historical narratives, particularly concerning the authenticity of Portugal's colonial period and maritime exploits overseas. This omission can be interpreted as neglect of significant historical and cultural elements, raising concerns about the adherence to the museological practice of presenting neutral and comprehensive accounts of history, pinpointing a clear reality: while museums are theoretically neutral, in practice, this neutrality often does not materialize, as evidenced in Portuguese museums.

In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias, a Portuguese navigator, achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first European to successfully round the Cape of Good Hope, demonstrating the feasibility of a sea route to the Indian Ocean (Axelson, 1988, p. 76). This discovery paved the way for subsequent expeditions, most notably Vasco da Gama's voyage to India, which established a direct maritime route from Europe to Asia (Axelson, 1988, p. 76). Da Gama's journey capitalized on lucrative trade opportunities, particularly in spices, significantly enhancing Portugal's economy. While historical narratives often celebrate Da Gama and Prince Henry the Navigator for their accomplishments, their involvement in trade included the exchange of goods for slaves, thereby contributing to the commodification of human beings and the establishment of the modern slave market, all in pursuit of securing Portugal's exclusive economic interests (Ghanzanfar, 2018, p. 22).

In 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral, a young Portuguese nobleman (Greenlee, 2017), landed in Brazil at Porto Seguro, claiming it for Portugal and initiating Portuguese colonization in South America. This pivotal event significantly expanded the Portuguese empire's influence and resources, integrating the vast Brazilian territory into their burgeoning global network. The repercussions of this colonization

included profound sociocultural transformations in Brazil, economic exploitation of natural resources, and people, and enduring legacies of colonialism that continue to shape Brazilian society today.

In 1510, the Portuguese seized control of Goa (Subrahmanyam, 1993, p. 217), transforming it into a crucial center for their Indian Ocean trade. Goa's strategic location on the southwestern coast enabled Portugal to dominate spice trade routes, establishing a stronghold in Asia. The Portuguese extended their practice of chattel slavery into Asia, employing various forms of enslaved labor across the region. However, there is little to no mention of these forms of exploitation in cultural institutions in Portugal.

Portugal's first contact with Japan occurred in 1543 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2021, para. 1), initiating a period of cultural and commercial exchange. This marked the beginning of substantial interactions between Japan and Europe, which influenced Japanese society and trade.

These events are just a few of the many examples illustrating Portugal's historical relationships with its former colonies, which have enriched the nation's culture through subsequent immigration patterns fostered by processes of colonization and decolonization. Such events also led to the immortalization and mythicization of figures such as Henry the Navigator, who symbolized ambition and innovation in Portugal, celebrated in art and literature, and dedicated many monuments. Examples include the Monument of the Discoveries (see Figure 1) and the statue of Henry the Navigator at the entrance of the Navy Museum in Lisbon, as will be explored in the primary case study. However, while these colonial endeavors facilitated positive cultural exchanges between the West and non-West, they also exacerbated existing disparities and inequalities between the two. The resulting stark contrast between the West and non-West or more specifically, European settlers and (former) colonial subjects has significantly influenced the way Portuguese identity is perceived, particularly in the context of colonialism and its legacies.
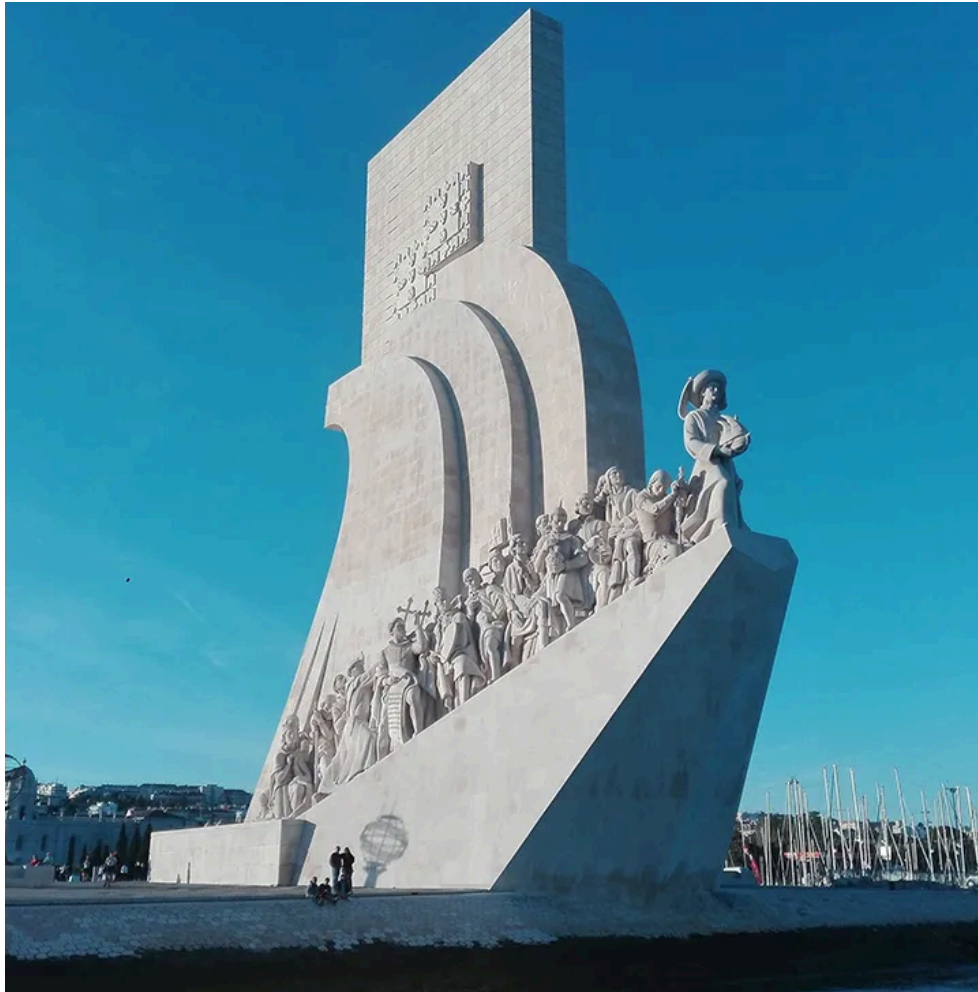
Figure 1: A photograph of the Monument of the Discoveries in the Belém district of Lisbon, viewed from the seaside and resembling a ship, with Prince Henry the Navigator prominently positioned at the forefront (Dickmans, 2022).

2.2 Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory draws from diverse intellectual and philosophical traditions such as post-structuralism, Marxism, feminism, and literary criticism. However, its significance for museological practice, particularly in the context of this paper's inquiries, is rooted in its association with "Subaltern Studies," an intellectual movement that emerged in the mid-to-late 20th century. This movement consisted of a group of South Asian scholars who focused on the legacies of (post)colonialism, primarily examining the binary relationship between the colonized/marginalized and the colonizer/ruling class and the interplay of dominance and privilege (Gandhi, 1998, p. 2). Their work aimed to amplify the voices of the marginalized within the networks of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism. Although initially centered on the context of India, the theoretical framework and

concepts developed by Subaltern Studies have been effectively applied to other nations. In this study, these concepts are applied to Portugal within the context of museological practice to answer the main research questions.

Gayatri Spivak's (1985) seminal question "Can the subaltern speak?" encapsulates the essence of this movement, which emphasizes the experiences of marginalized groups and challenges dominant historical narratives (Gandhi, 1998, p. 1). This focus on the subaltern, or those excluded from positions of power and authority, is crucial for postcolonial theory and its application in museums, as it seeks to amplify voices that have been historically silenced or overlooked. Furthermore, this research investigates the importance of portraying marginalized histories and its impact on shaping identity. However, as Spivak suggests, this endeavor also confronts the intricate relationship between historians/curators as "investigators" and the subjects of subaltern histories (Gandhi, 1998, p. 2). This entails navigating the complexities of "representation" and "representability", particularly in the context of museums depicting colonial narratives (Gandhi, 1998, p. 2).

As powerful instruments for shaping and influencing public understandings around history, politics, and identity (formation), museums play a dominant role within sociopolitical discourse. Their didactic role can be authoritative, reinforcing traditional, dominant Eurocentric narratives, or transformative, incorporating multiple perspectives, including those of subaltern communities that challenge such structures and historical injustices (Hooper-Greenhill, 2020).

By utilizing postcolonial theory, this work illuminates how Portuguese museums engage with their colonial past and how they can move towards more inclusive and representative practices. This involves not only acknowledging the contributions and experiences of marginalized groups but also actively working to decolonize the content and presentation of exhibits. Decolonizing education within museums, as will be explored in section 2.3, involves reevaluating and restructuring the ways in which history is taught and understood. It requires a commitment to presenting diverse perspectives, fostering critical thinking, and challenging dominant narratives that have historically marginalized subaltern voices. Ultimately, postcolonial theory provides a powerful tool for reimagining the role of museums in society. It encourages a critical examination of the past and offers pathways for creating more just and inclusive cultural institutions. By addressing the complexities of representation and engaging with the voices of those who have been historically marginalized, museums can play a transformative role in shaping a more inclusive national identity and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

2.3 Decolonizing the museum

Van Broekhoven (2019) affirms the existence of continuous efforts being made concerning decolonizing practices, activism, and teaching being implemented within the cultural sector spanning over half a century. However, these efforts have primarily focused on ethnographic objects, often overlooking other types of collections, such as those housed within national museums (van Broekhoven, 2019, p. 2). It is in more recent times, that the discourse has shifted in focus toward national museums and their extensive collections of objects, many of which are of ambiguous provenance. Many institutions have come under scrutiny for their misleading and inadequate representations of Indigenous objects obtained from former colonies. As decolonization debates gain prominence, these museums have been brought into the limelight, prompting a critical examination of their practices and narratives.

The rapid pace at which museums are increasingly confronted with challenges surrounding the topic of decolonization may have come as a surprise to many. However, it is also evident that an increasing number of museums are acknowledging and embracing the necessity for profound decolonial practices. In the United Kingdom alone, in 2018, institutions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, Tate, British Museum, Wellcome Collection, and numerous others organized meetings to address the impact of empire, colonialism, and decolonization on their practices (van Broekhoven, 2019, p. 2).

The focal point of this research, the Navy Museum in Lisbon, falls under the category of national museums. Aronsson and Elgenius (2014) state that the national museum is "a knowledge-based socio-political institution, with corresponding collections and displays that ultimately claim, articulate and represent dominant national values and myths" (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2014, p. 1). As influential structures not only within the realm of culture but also in the domains of social dynamics and politics, national museums have played a central role in the process of European nation-building. This influence was particularly pronounced during the nineteenth century, a period characterized by widespread nationalism across Europe. National museums served as powerful instruments for fostering a sense of collective identity and unity among diverse populations, promoting a shared cultural heritage, and legitimizing the authority of emerging nation-states. Moreover, during this period, a significant portion of the curated exhibits centered on warfare and military themes. These exhibits often depicted national struggles or, as was common across much of Western Europe, celebrated military victories as demonstrations of national power. This phenomenon is further examined in the research, particularly within the context of the Navy Museum which focuses on naval achievements.

Decolonizing these institutions is especially important, given their influential role in shaping collective memory, national identity, and cultural heritage. National museums often wield significant authority in presenting historical narratives and are perceived as the primary custodians of a nation's cultural legacy. Therefore, implementing decolonial practices within these museums is essential to ensure that the narratives they promote accurately reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of all citizens, including those historically marginalized or silenced.

It is imperative to delve deeper into the practical application of decolonization to grasp its full significance. By examining the tangible steps involved in implementing decolonial principles within museum practices, we can better understand its potential impact on reshaping narratives, representation, and power dynamics within these institutions. Additionally, providing a comprehensive exploration of what constitutes a correct and positive decolonial museological practice is paramount. This involves not only recognizing the need to dismantle colonial structures and perspectives but also actively engaging with communities, amplifying marginalized voices, and fostering equitable partnerships.

Van Broekhoven (2019) states that decolonization in museums challenges prevailing mono-authority and encourages the introduction of multiple perspectives. It prompts us to reconsider whose voices and stories are represented within museum spaces. Rather than solely attributing agency and subjectivity to specific collectors, often elite, white males, there is a need to foreground the voices of makers, traders, and individuals involved in the objects' design and philosophical thought processes. This entails acknowledging and telling the less convenient parts of history, including narratives that oppose the retention of objects in European museums (van Broekhoven, 2019, p. 2).

How can such biases be effectively addressed and mitigated within museum spaces, particularly within dominant national institutions? Scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt (1991) and James Clifford (1997) have examined the notion of museums as "contact zones", where the unequal power dynamics inherent in interactions between different cultures are acknowledged and navigated (Wali & Collins, 2023, p. 331). Only when this reality is acknowledged can museums proceed with the implementation of decolonization practices. The failure to recognize this inherent feature within formerly colonial museums highlights the enduring presence of a contemporary colonial mindset. This persistence reflects a broader reluctance or inability to confront the ongoing legacies of colonialism within museum spaces, suggestive of adherence to colonial narratives, power structures, and modes of representation that prioritize certain voices and perspectives while marginalizing others. By neglecting to address this reality, museums perpetuate a form of cultural imperialism that undermines efforts toward inclusivity, diversity, and decolonization.

A subsequent point in confronting and decolonizing museum collections involves a reassessment of the presented narratives and incorporating a more diverse range of perspectives, including collaboration with Indigenous and source communities where it is appropriate. This may entail seeking out and foregrounding the stories of makers, traders, or individuals involved in the creation, exchange, and conceptualization of objects within collections. Here, to participate in an ethical application of decolonization, the intended objects's context, purpose, and method of conservation need to be acknowledged, if not even practiced. For example, let us consider the Javanese kris dagger, a culturally significant artifact often found in Dutch museum collections. Traditional Indonesian conservation practices regarding this sacred item entail oil bathing the dagger during specific religious occasions such as *Muharram*, to uphold its supernatural attributes. However, in many Western museums, these daggers are not adequately preserved, resulting in the loss of their intended significance and value. Collaborating with Javanese communities to understand and respect the traditional methods of conservation can help preserve the authenticity and significance of the kris dagger within these museum settings.

Similarly, collections of objects recovered from Portuguese colonial ships that traversed the seas towards African coasts during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries present a poignant example. Without proper contextualization, these artifacts fail to convey the full extent of their historical significance, particularly concerning the transatlantic slave trade in which they were intricately involved. By examining these objects through the lens of the transatlantic slave trade, museums can offer visitors a more comprehensive understanding of the interconnected histories of colonialism, exploitation, and resistance that shaped this period of maritime exploration. Without this context, the objects remain static relics, lacking deeper historical and cultural significance beyond their role as technological achievements and symbols of national prestige.

The choice of objects exhibited and the manner in which they are presented/contextualized can both reinforce and question prevailing nation-building ideologies in impactful ways, offering alternative perspectives to ethnonational classification (Sutherland, 2017, p. 83). This means that museum exhibitions have the potential to either uphold or challenge established narratives about national identity and history, providing space for diverse interpretations and narratives that go beyond traditional conceptions of nationhood based solely on ethnicity or nationality.

III. Methodology

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach in examining the portrayal of Portugal's maritime legacy within different museological experiences across the country. By integrating methodologies from historical analysis, museology, heritage studies, and postcolonial theory, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the construction of museological narratives and their implications for heritage representation.

3.1 Site selection

This study focuses on four distinct museums in Portugal, each chosen for varying purposes and considerations. The Navy Museum *(Museu de Marinha)* in Lisbon is a pivotal site within this research and holds a central position within this paper for two key reasons. Firstly, due to its institutional focus on Portuguese naval history. This museum is one of the main institutions in Portugal which is dedicated to its maritime history, housing an extensive collection of maritime artifacts and documents, making it a key repository of Portugal's maritime legacy. Secondly, analyzing these particular exhibits alongside the museum's narrative surrounding the topic of maritime history is essential as they are representative of a dominant narrative that can heavily shape public perceptions and understandings of Portugal's maritime history.

The second museum, the Museum of the Orient, opened in 2008 and is a newer addition to Lisbon's museum landscape. Boasting an impressive collection of Asian art, the museum delves into the various sea routes taken by Portuguese navigators to reach different territories in Asia. However, the connection between the historical narratives it portrays and its objects remains to be explored in the case study. Within this inquiry, the Museum of the Orient serves as a valuable resource for examining Portugal's maritime legacy from an intercultural perspective.

Venturing beyond Lisbon, this exploration leads to the northern reaches of the country, to analyze a museum nestled in the city of Porto, the birthplace of Prince Henry the Navigator. The "World of Discoveries" is not a traditional museum; rather, it is distinguished by its interactive exhibits, meticulously designed to engage a younger audience. As per the museum's official website, they have curated "a space that reenacts the fantastical odyssey of the Portuguese navigators, crossing oceans to discover a previously unknown world" (World of Discoveries, n.d., para. 1). This museum holds particular significance for examination through a decolonial lens due to its portrayal of the Portuguese navigators' voyages and the exploration narrative they perpetuate. By dissecting the exhibits and

narratives within the museum, it is possible to uncover and challenge any Eurocentric perspectives or colonial biases embedded within its representations of maritime exploration. Additionally, analyzing how this museum engages with younger audiences offers insights into how colonial legacies are transmitted and perpetuated to future generations.

Finally, the museum housed within the historic "*Mercado de Escravos*" (Slave Market) building in Lagos was purposefully included in this research as it is one of the only museums in Portugal that explicitly discusses the country's connection to the transatlantic slave trade. By including this museum in the analysis, the aim is to shed light on the legacies of slavery and their impact on contemporary understandings of heritage, identity, and memory in Portugal. Moreover, exploring how this museum interprets and presents the history of the transatlantic slave trade allows for a critical interrogation of Portugal's colonial past and its ongoing implications for social justice and reconciliation.

3.2 Data collection

This section outlines the various data collection techniques that will be employed to gather information and insights for the research. The selected methodologies are specifically designed to address the multidisciplinary scope of this study, integrating historical analysis, museological practice, postcolonial theory, and critical heritage studies, which often intersect one another as demonstrated in Chapter 2. Furthermore, on-site visits to the museums under examination in this paper have afforded the chance to directly observe the physical layout, diverse audience demographics, and the various elements comprising the exhibits. These firsthand observations play a crucial role in comprehending the complete museum experience and the development of its narrative, a topic thoroughly examined in Chapters 4 and 5, but particularly in the context of the primary case study, the *Museu de Marinha*.

Firstly, archival research will be used to adequately contextualize the institutional histories of the museums, curatorial choices informed by museological theory, and the trajectory of their practices. In this manner, the archival analysis will formulate a narrative framed around the understanding of a varied range of materials such as photographs, maps and institutional records.

Secondly, museum content analysis and visual documentation complement each other in providing crucial insights into the acquisitions and possessions of the museums. These methods offer valuable reference points for evaluating curatorial practices, display strategies, and the illustration of museum narratives. By systematically analyzing the content and visually documenting the exhibits, this work can better assess the selection, organization, and presentation of artifacts within the museum space.

This combined approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of how museums curate their collections, the stories they choose to tell, and the visual and thematic coherence of their displays. It also aids in identifying any biases or gaps in representation, ensuring a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of history and culture. Furthermore, visual documentation captures the spatial and aesthetic aspects of exhibitions, providing a richer context for analysis and interpretation.

Similarly, while the physical display of objects within museum spaces is crucial, the digital presence of a museum – through its website and online platforms — is equally important, especially from a decolonial perspective. In this ever-evolving world, where global events like COVID-19 can disrupt the entire cultural sector, the digital space often remains the sole avenue for engagement and evaluation. By evaluating the accessibility, representation, and transparency of their digital databases, this research can determine how effectively museums are utilizing digital tools to support decolonial practices. This includes analyzing how well museums present diverse narratives, involve source communities in the curation process, and provide open access to their collections, contributing to their inclusivity and accessibility.

The final data collection technique will employ a comparative approach, analyzing various museums across Europe that share a colonial background and have engaged in decolonization practices within their institutions. This comparative study will consider the diverse social contexts in which these museums have emerged and currently operate, providing a fair and nuanced contrast between them. Such an approach is valuable because museums function within interconnected networks, are frequently compared, and learn from each other's experiences and practices. By comparing museums across Europe, this research will identify common challenges and successful strategies in their decolonization efforts. This will not only highlight best practices but also provide insights into how museums can collaboratively advance their decolonization agendas. Ultimately, the comparative analysis aims to foster a broader understanding of how museums can navigate their colonial legacies and contribute to more inclusive and equitable cultural narratives.

By employing a combination of the aforementioned data collection techniques, this work aims to generate a comprehensive and inclusive portrayal of Portugal's maritime legacy and its representation within museum contexts, while critically engaging with decolonial perspectives and methodologies.

IV. Primary Case Study: *Museu de Marinha* (Lisbon)

4.1 Historical context

Although the *Museu de Marinha* in Lisbon was established in the twentieth century, a substantial part of its collection represents eighteenth-century to nineteenth-century ideals and acquisition practices. These methods, once overseen by King Luís I (r. 1861 — 1889), often emphasized national power while neglecting the rights and autonomy of colonized populations.

Situated along the picturesque banks of the Tagus River within Lisbon's historic Belém district, the Navy Museum occupies a culturally resonant locale intricately tied to Portugal's Age of Exploration. Currently occupying the precincts of the Jerónimos Monastery, within the Portuguese parish of Santa Maria de Belém, the national museum stands proud as a testament to the country's maritime legacy. The museum was inaugurated on July 22, 1863, by a royal decree issued by Luís I of Portugal, which mandated the creation of a curated collection showcasing testimonies pertinent to Portuguese maritime endeavors (Comissão Cultural de Marinha, 2021).

"O Museu nasce da vontade manifestada por este monarca, de enorme sensibilidade artística e cultural, em conservar um passado histórico na memória coletiva nacional" [The Museum was born from the will expressed by this monarch, with an enormous artistic and cultural sensitivity, to preserve a historic past in the national collective memory] (Revista da Armada, 2012, p. 5).

The institution is part of the cultural facilities of the *"Commisão Cultural de Marinha"* (Maritime Cultural Commission), who claims that its role extends beyond a narrow focus on naval military affairs to encompass the preservation and dissemination of Portugal's maritime heritage, including a diverse array of human activities and aspects associated with maritime endeavors.

The Museum's collections have been housed in different locations over the years, from being constituted as the "Risk Room" (see Figure 2) of the Old Navy Arsenal in Lisbon, where the Naval Academy was located to the Palace of the Counts of Farrobo in Laranjeiras, before the museum finally received its permanent location in the west and north wings of the Jerónimos Monastery on August 15, 1962 (Comissão Cultural de Marinha, 2021).
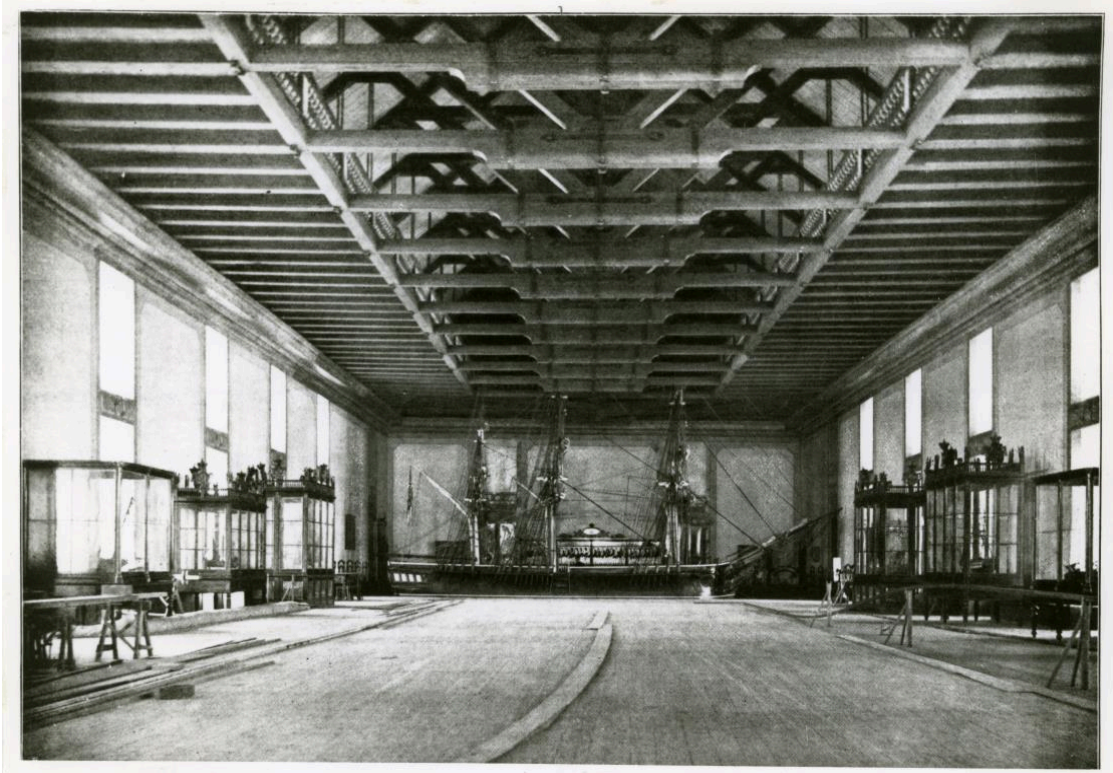
Figure 2: A photograph of the "Risk Room" with exhibits of the Navy Museum, Lisbon (Comissão Cultural de Marinha, 2021)
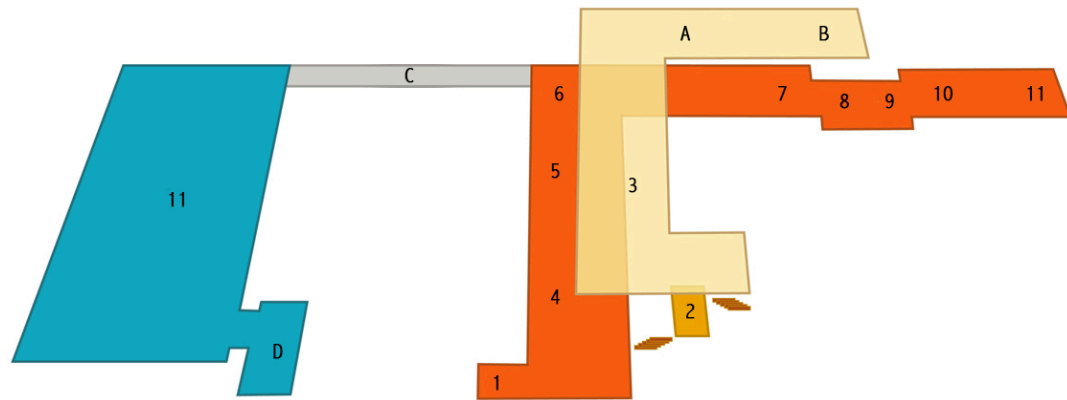
4.1 Mapping of the museum

According to Kirchberg and Tröndle (2015), the predominant method for analyzing a museum within the field of museum studies involves scrutinizing the historical, cultural, or critical aspects of the institution and its societal roles, such as didactic, leisure, self-actualization, and curatorial/collecting practices (Kirchberg & Tröndle, 2015, p. 169). However, the authors also find that the museum experience is significantly influenced by other factors often overlooked in museum studies, including spatial design, exhibit arrangement, visitor movement patterns, and individual visitor characteristics (Kirchberg & Tröndle, 2015). Therefore, presenting the physical layout of the Navy Museum, as informed by conducted visits, aims to foster a more nuanced understanding of the visitor experience. It must be acknowledged that individual experiences can vary, even when following the intended layout planned by the museum, due to differences in visitor characteristics. These characteristics include demographics (such as age and gender), prior knowledge (specifically, in maritime history), purpose of visit, physical abilities, and emotional state.

The Navy Museum, located within the Jerónimos Monastery, features twelve permanent exhibits and two temporary exhibits. Housing the collections in a structure not originally designed as a museum presents certain challenges. During the visit, noticeable inconsistencies in thematic and chronological linearity, as well as fragmentation in the physical space, were observed (Tarasconi, 2023, p. 37). For instance, models of ships from the Age of Exploration were displayed near artifacts from the 20th century Portuguese Navy due to spatial limitations, creating a confusing thematic overlap. Another issue, connected to the first, concerns the division of the space. Although the map in Figure 4 is somewhat outdated, as some exhibits have been removed or relocated, it still accurately represents the physical space, with its several long corridors, making the display of related objects and themes appear disjointed or fragmented at times, complicating the understanding of their collective history.

Furthermore, the decision to situate the collections within the Jerónimos Monastery can be interpreted as a sociopolitical statement, reinforcing nationalistic narratives tied to Portugal's collective memory of the "golden" Age of Exploration. The construction of the Monastery commenced in the sixteenth century, coinciding with the era depicted in the collections colonial maritime endeavors. Moreover, this location underscores two key aspects of Portuguese colonialism: its religious dimension and its focus on maritime exploration. By housing the museum in a structure that epitomizes Portugal's 16th century ideals, there is a strong connection between the physical space and the historical ideology of the period, highlighting how intertwined religion and maritime endeavors were in shaping Portuguese colonial history.

Although there were no explicit signs directing visitor flow or specifying the order during the museum visit, this should not pose a general issue. The Monastery's straight corridors, where the permanent collection is housed, naturally guide visitors, making it difficult to get lost even without consulting a map, and clearly indicating the intended layout. However, the suggested route, according to the museum map found on the website of the institution, is color-coded based on the type of exhibit (see Figure 3). The orange color represents the permanent exhibits, which aim to follow a chronological order. The yellow indicates temporary exhibits, while the blue highlights the location of the largest objects, a special class of ships used by the Portuguese monarchy.

1 - Entrada
2 - Marinha de Recreio
3 - Marinha Mercante
4 - Descobrimentos
5 - Grandes Veleiros
6 - Séculos XIX e XX
7 - Marinha na Atualidade
8 - Tráfego Fluvial
9 - Pesca Longínqua
10 - Pesca Costeira
11 - Camarinhas Reais
12 - Pavilhão das Galeotas

A - Sala de Exposições Temporárias "Henrique Maufroy de Seixas"
B - Sala de Exposições Temporárias "D. Luís"
C - Galeria
D - Loja / Cafetaria

Figure 3: Map of the exhibition rooms of the Navy Museum, Lisbon (Commisão Cultural de Marinha, n.d.)

In conducting an analysis of the space, the focus will be primarily on the exhibits pertinent to this research, particularly the *"Descobrimentos"* collection. This section is pivotal to the analysis as it represents the role and significance of maritime activities during the Age of Exploration. The other exhibits, which mainly cover more contemporary maritime and naval contexts, will be addressed only when they are relevant to the research questions. This targeted approach ensures a thorough and relevant examination of the exhibits that align with the research objectives, while also allowing for occasional references to other exhibits that provide context or support the overarching narrative.

Museums enable individual visitor experiences while also serving as centers for knowledge creation. The spatial experience of a museum can differ from the experience of viewing the collections, although they influence one another. This spatial experience often manifests as a feeling or "embodied experience" (Johnson, 2007), or "internal understanding" (Schorch, 2012). In the context of the Navy Museum, embodied experience refers to how visitors physically navigate the museum's corridors, interact with exhibits, and absorb the historical narratives presented. By being mindful of embodied experience, the museum can enhance visitor engagement and create a more immersive, inclusive

environment. Internal understanding arises from personal and emotional connections with the exhibits, as visitors relate their own experiences, memories, and emotions to the objects and stories displayed. It emphasizes the subjective, individual aspect of museum experiences, where each visitor's background and personal history influence their interpretation of the exhibits. At the Navy Museum, fostering internal understanding involves creating exhibits that resonate personally with diverse audiences, allowing them to see their own stories reflected in the maritime history of Portugal. The concept of embodied experience will be applied in the mapping of the museum, as it relates primarily to the physical space. Internal understanding will be addressed in the subsequent section on the collection and exhibits, ensuring a comprehensive approach to enhancing visitor experience and engagement.

By integrating both concepts into the museum's design and collections, the decolonization process can advance. This involves fostering a non-Eurocentric perspective by incorporating the voices and experiences of marginalized people, or the subaltern through collaborative curation. Additionally, it includes designing spaces that consider the physical realities of visitors, such as tactile displays, interactive elements, and navigable pathways. This approach ensures a more inclusive and engaging museum experience, allowing for a broader range of narratives and a deeper connection with all visitors.

Upon entering the museum, visitors encounter an entrance hall designed to make a lasting impression. Here, a large map planisphere depicting Portuguese colonial maritime exploration routes can be seen (see Figure 4). In the forefront of the map stands a statue honoring Prince Henry the Navigator, (see Figure 5) commanding attention alongside smaller statues of other Portuguese figures/navigators of the Age of Exploration flanking both sides. The strategic arrangement of these elements appears to be aimed at instilling a profound sense of pride and admiration for Portugal's prominent history of exploration and navigation — a recurring theme central to the museum's narrative, as will be explored further ahead.

Figure 4: The map at the entrance of the Navy Museum, Lisbon (photo taken by author)

Figure 5: The statue of Prince Henry the Navigator at the entrance of the Navy Museum, Lisbon (photo taken by author)

The subsequent hallroom arguably leaves an even more striking impression due to its rich array of objects. It features an extensive collection of paintings, navigational charts, instruments, ship models, and various other artifacts. Commonly referred to as the "Discoveries Room", this first hall is the only room explicitly addressing Portuguese colonialism and its maritime legacy (Tarasconi, 2023). Here, it is evident that the museum aims to address the complexities of colonialism by presenting diverse subthemes within the maritime colonization narrative, as evidenced by the segmentation of the hall into smaller exhibits. However, its physical space and presentation offer significant limitations in terms of inclusivity and decolonization, overall lacking in interpreting Portuguese identity in a diverse way.

The physical arrangement and nature of the exhibits predominantly highlight the achievements and advancements of Portuguese navigators and the tools that facilitated their voyages. These themes occupy the majority of the space and are presented prominently at the beginning of the museum experience. The hall's spatial layout can be divided into three sections: the right and left walls, and the central space. The walls feature labels, paintings, sculptures of Portuguese navigators, patrons of maritime voyages, and navigational tools, while the center displays miniature replicas of Portuguese ships and objects found onboard.

This layout aligns with a Eurocentric narrative emphasizing national pride and exploration triumphs, mirroring the approach of other maritime museums in Europe, similar to the Maritime Museum of Barcelona. Both institutions prioritize glorification narratives, overlooking their significant involvement in the slave trade facilitated through maritime endeavors. However, the issue is heightend when the experiences of colonized peoples and the transatlantic slave trade are not given comparable attention or properly acknowledged and contextualized. This lack of representation is evident as the only section explicitly referring to the slave trade is the subtheme titled "The Atlantic Slave Trade" (see Figure 6). This section consists of a single museum label at the end of the hall featuring one set of shackles, which can be intercepted as representation of the entire slave trade in which Portugal participated according to how the museum narrative unfolds within the space and the display.

Figure 6: The "Atlantic Slave Trade" section in the Navy Museum, Lisbon (photo taken by author)

The minimal allocation of space to such a significant aspect of history undermines the importance and impact of the transatlantic slave trade and the experiences of the colonized peoples. This is especially impactful as museums play a critical role in shaping public understanding of history and national identity (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). When museums fail to adequately represent the darker aspects of their nation's history, they perpetuate a skewed and incomplete narrative. This limited portrayal neglects the complexities of colonialism and its lasting implications on both the colonizers and the colonized, thereby hindering efforts towards a more inclusive and accurate representation of history (Macdonald, 2015).

Furthermore, while some of the sections of the Discoveries Room provide text in braille, a valuable decolonization strategy of the museum to include a more diverse audience, the "Atlantic Slave Trade" section does not. This lack of accessibility further marginalizes the significance of the subject matter, failing to offer an inclusive experience for all visitors. Ensuring that all sections, especially those dealing with sensitive and critical historical issues, are accessible and adequately represented is essential for fostering a comprehensive and equitable understanding of history (Sandell, 2008).

Embodied experience, as described by Johnson (2007), refers to the physical and sensory engagement of visitors within the museum space. The current layout, with its emphasis on Portuguese navigators and lack of representation of multiple voices, does not encourage an embodied experience that reflects the diversity of historical narratives. Instead, it perpetuates a singular, dominant perspective that overlooks the multifaceted nature of Portugal's maritime legacy. While visitors physically navigating through the hall are constantly reminded of the glory and achievements of Portuguese explorers, which is heavily reinforced by the spatial layout as it covers both sides of the walls, while the center portrays Portuguese replicas of colonial ships, they are not being equally confronted with the harsh realities and human costs of these explorations.

Lastly, the Navy Museum extends its presence into the digital realm through its website, offering a virtual space for additional information on the museum, its exhibits, and its narrative. However, the website's accessibility and content pose significant concerns. The primary issue is that the website is available only in Portuguese, which is problematic given the museum's location in a tourist-heavy area of Lisbon. Providing multilingual resources is crucial for accommodating international visitors and ensuring a more inclusive experience. The lack of language options restricts access to valuable information for non-Portuguese speakers, undermining the museum's educational mission as well as diversity claims.

Moreover, the language used on the website and throughout the exhibits excessively employs terms such as "discoveries" and phrases like "the great adventure of the Discoveries," which further glorify this colonial period, as the they are not even prefaced accordingly to the historicity of the period. According to Cameron (2010), museum websites play a crucial role in shifting knowledge paradigms, and their design and content must align with contemporary decolonization efforts. Effective digital documentation and presentation can challenge traditional narratives and make space for more diverse perspectives. However, the Navy Museum's current online presence does not reflect these evolving paradigms, further entrenching outdated, colonial viewpoints through the use of problematic terminology and its monolingual nature.

Despite these shortcomings, the museum website does provide significant historical content and primary sources related to its establishment. However, it fails to fully address the consequences of

maritime colonization, resulting in a heavily biased narrative with numerous gaps. This incomplete portrayal neglects critical aspects of colonial history, leading to an unbalanced understanding of Portugal's maritime legacy. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach that balances the portrayal of motivations behind maritime endeavors with their broader historical impacts.

4.2 Collections & exhibits

The final section of the analysis of the Navy Museum specifically addresses the collections, the selection of objects displayed, and the curatorial practices concerning the contextualization of these objects. This approach directly engages with the research question by examining how the museum represents the complexities of colonialism and its implications for national identity and heritage.

The Maritime Cultural Commission presents the following excerpt regarding the permanent collection at the Navy Museum, showcasing a diverse array of maritime history facets and the myriad endeavors associated with the sea:

 "*Começado a ser reunido ainda durante o século XVIII, atualmente o acervo do Museu de Marinha conta com mais de 18.000 peças. Destas, cerca de 2.500 foram selecionadas para figurar na sua exposição permanente, retratando os mais diversos aspetos do passado marítimo português, bem como as diferentes atividades ligadas ao mar"* [Beginning to be gathered during the 18th century, the Navy Museum's collection currently has more than 18,000 pieces. Of these, around 2,500 were selected to appear in its permanent exhibition, portraying the most diverse aspects of the Portuguese maritime past, as well as the different activities linked to the sea] (Comissão Cultural de Marinha, n.d., para. 1).

The objects that contribute to the telling of this seafaring narrative are diverse, ranging from early models of ships, actual vessels housed in the Galleon Pavilion, to paintings, engravings, decorative artifacts, weapons, navigational charts and instruments, photographs, and diplomas, among numerous others (Comissão Cultural de Marinha, 2021).

The Discoveries Room delves into approximately thirty sub-themes, providing insights into historical events (Tarasconi, 2023, p. 46). It begins with the Portuguese conquest of the port of Ceuta in 1415, marking the onset of this period. The exhibition delves further into the motivations behind subsequent navigational journeys, primarily emphasizing economic factors such as trade and commerce, with religious influences playing a secondary role in shaping these expeditions. The subthemes exhbited most relevant to this study are, "The Portuguese Shipbuilding for the Discoveries", "Religion and

Missionary Work", and "Atlantic Slave Trade". The first subtheme portrays the development of early Portuguese ships and their typologies, (see Figure 7) as well objects found on board (see Figure 8). In doing so, this contextualizes the development of early Portuguese ships and their typologies; however, it fails to discuss the pivotal role of slave ships in maritime history, thus overlooking a crucial aspect of Portugal's seafaring legacy. The only reference to slave ships appears in the final panel of the room, on the Atlantic slave trade. This decision not to emphasize the interconnectedness of the slave trade with Portugal's history can be viewed as isolating this aspect, as it remains distinct from the broader narrative of maritime achievements and explorations celebrated throughout the exhibition.

Figure 7: Some of the early models of ships on display at the Navy Museum, Lisbon (photo taken by author)

Figure 8: Some of the artifacts found onboard of Portuguese ships, on display at the Navy Museum, Lisbon (photo taken by author)

The museum's collection, founded on the imperial power of Portugal, presenting the collection and role of the museum as one of authority, intrinsically connected to the expansion of the Portuguese crown (Tarasconi, 2023, p. 32). In Hooper-Greenhill's "Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture" (2000), she identifies two dominant museological paradigms: the modernist museum, which empahsizes traditional (mono)authority and expertise through the creation of subjective/universal knowledged transmitted to a passive audience, and the post-museum, which focuses on inclusity, audience engagement and diverse narratives through co-curation initiatives, engaging members of society and the institution in the creation of knowledge, as culturally situated and subjective. The primary reason the Navy Museum adheres to the modernist museum paradigm is due to its colonial nature and its foundation on nationalistic ideologies. Additionally, by establishing an authoritative narrative and emphasizing national history and identity, the museum characterizes itself through the

linear, didactic presentation of historical events, reinforcing a singular, dominant acount. The museum's central focus on maritime achievements highlights the nation's past glories, fostering a sense of national pride and continuity. Such an approach aligns with the modernist museum's goal of educating and shaping public consciousness through a curated and often uncritical representation of history.

In her paper, Tarasconi (2023) states that the curator of the Discoveries Room, Bruno Gonçalves Neves, an official of the Portuguese Navy, assumed the role of curator. In an interview with Neves, he acknowledges that although the collection was diverse, the museum presented an incoherent narrative. He attributed this lack of coherence to the varied nature of acquisitions, including donations and items from other collections, which did not represent a unified production or provenance (Tarasconi, 2015, p. 65). To address this issue, Neves initiated a renovation project in February 2021, aiming at letting the artifacts speak for themselves (Tarasconi, 2015, p. 65). While the interview does not specify the practical curatorial methods employed by Neves, it is assumed that he may have limited the display of certain objects, opting instead to showcase fewer items that are more representative of a specific theme or idea. Furthermore, Neves explains that Brazil and Africa are excluded from the panels and receive minimal to no attention in terms of displayed objects due to the institution's limited number of artifacts associated with these regions (Tarasconi, 2015, p. 66). Consequently, the narratives related to Brazil and Africa are not explored with the same level of depth as those concerning Portugal's voyages to the East (Tarasconi, 2015, p. 66).

The selective curation of objects is particularly evident in the subthemes "Religion and Missionary Work" and "Atlantic Slave Trade." In the former, the display features two untitled paintings (Tarasconi, 2015, p. 62) that highlight the miracle of missionary Francis Xavier leading the Portuguese to Asia. In the latter, the exhibition includes shackles used to restrain the enslaved (see Figure 6). While the primary function of these shackles was to physically restrain individuals, they also symbolize control and subjugation, stripping away the autonomy of people during the transatlantic slave trade. Through such artifacts, the museum aims to convey the harsh realities and oppressive nature of slavery, offering visitors a poignant and tangible connection to this dark chapter in history. This approach highlights the museum's intent to represent and evoke the complex and often painful aspects of colonial history.

It is understandable that the museum cannot present more objects associated with the transatlantic slave trade due to the limited number of relevant artifacts in their collection. However, the museum's transparency would benefit significantly if this limitation were explicitly stated on the panels accompanying the subtheme. By acknowledging the constraints in their collection, the institution would provide visitors with a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges in curating such exhibitions and the gaps in the narrative due to the unavailability of certain artifacts. This

transparency would enhance the museum's credibility and demonstrate a commitment to presenting an honest and nuanced portrayal of history, despite the limitations imposed by their collection. However, since this was not acknowledged in the panel, the Navy Museum risks marginalizing audiences, particularly those from communities directly impacted by the history of slavery, leaving visitors with an incomplete understanding of the complexities and breadth of the transatlantic slave trade.

The Navy Museum in Lisbon and the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam share similarities in their approach to presenting maritime history, yet diverge significantly in their overall museum narratives and transparency concerning their respective maritime legacies, making a comparison of their key differences worthwhile. The first key difference relates to the transparency evident according to the National Maritime Museum Amsterdam museum's website which explicitly emphasizes that in their programming "the topics of colonialism and slave trade always play a key role in the stories, as an integrated part of the whole [narrative]", acknowledging their crucial, dominant role in education regarding the combatting of (institutional) racism (Het Scheepvaartmuseum, n.d., para. 3).

Additionally, the museum in Amsterdam featured several exhibits bringing to light the voice of those enslaved on board of colonial ships such as the exhibit titled "See you in the 'golden age'". The Dutch exhibition at the Maritime Museum in Amsterdam takes a different approach compared to the Navy Museum in Lisbon, which has been criticized for marginalizing aspects of Portugal's colonial history, particularly related to slavery throughout this paper. In contrast, the Dutch exhibition endeavors to address these sensitive topics by focusing on the perspective of enslaved individuals, exemplified through the portrayal of a fictional character named "Amimba". This approach humanizes the narrative, offering visitors a more personal insight into the experiences endured on board slave ships. By highlighting such perspectives, the exhibition aims to foster a deeper engagement with the realities and consequences of Dutch colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade.

Finally, the Dutch museum has also taken a significant step towards the decolonization of language by acknowledging its impact. Since 2019, they have referred to the "golden age" in quotation marks and uncapitalized it. Moreover, they have replaced the term "slave" with "enslaved" in their exhibitions, reflecting a more respectful and accurate terminology that acknowledges the humanity and agency of those affected by the transatlantic slave trade.

V. Secondary Case Studies

5.1 *Museu do Oriente* (Lisbon)

The choice to analyze the Museum of the Orient in Lisbon, inaugurated in 2008, stems from its recent establishment, allowing for a comparative examination of contemporary curation practices. Unlike the Navy Museum, which is a national institution, the Museum of the Orient is privately owned art museum, adding another dimension for comparison. While the museum does not focus on maritime narratives to the same extent as the Navy Museum, it does concentrate on objects acquired during Portugal's Age of Exploration from Asia, attributing new meaning to them by emphaszing their aesthetic value. This analysis draws significantly from Peralta's (2015) detailed examination of the *Museu do Oriente*, where she identifies (collective) imagination and affect as the two predominant features of the exhibits.

In 1988, the *Fundação Oriente* (Orient Foundation) was established by the *Sociedade de Turismo e Jogo de Macau* (Tourism and Games Society of Macau) in compliance with the Portuguese administration's requirement for exclusive gambling rights in Macau (Peralta, 2015, p. 308). This ties the foundation's history closely to that of Macau, particularly in anticipation of the territory's handover to Chinese sovereignty in 1999, marking the end of centuries of Portuguese rule. As the first and last European colonial territory in China, Macau held significant historical and cultural importance. The official reason for the Foundation's creation was to recognize and continue fostering historical and cultural connection between Portugal and China, as well as other East Asian nations. Its aims, outlined in its bylaws, claim to encompass cultural, education, aritistc, scientific, social, and philanthropic endeavours aimed at fostering and promoting the historical and cultural links between Portugal and particularly China (Peralta, 2015, p. 308). Despite being a private foundation, the *Fundação Oriente* holds considerable influence in shaping Portuguese national identity. The museum catalogue (2008) asserts that the institution can be regarded as a national imperative, given Portugal's historical credited as the first European nation to reach the these regions in Asia and the last to cede control over its final territory (Peralta, 2015, p. 308).

As noted by Peralta (2015), the Museum of the Orient encapsulates Portugal's collective imagination regarding the opulence of its Eastern Empire. This portrayal is evident in the presentation of its exhibits and the overarching narrative. The museum prioritizes the object itself, followed by contextual comprehension, frequently intertwining shared recollections of myths, legends, and fantasies that have influenced Portuguese consciousness over time. Similarly, the term "Orient" in the museum's serve as a means to connect with Portugal's shared cultural and historical memory related

to its interactions with Asian cultures and civilizations, thus signaling "an emotive appropriation of the historical past" (Peralta, 2015, p. 308).

The museum prominently showcases Portugal's historical connections with India, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Japan by emphasizing the aesthetic value of objects acquired from these regions. This approach provides visitors with an immersive experience that fosters a sense of wonder and curiosity while reimagining the context and function of objects beyond their colonial origins. The curators achieve this effect by keeping the exhibition rooms dark, with minimal lighting emanating solely from the objects themselves (see Figure 8). This strategy places the aesthetic value of the artifacts at the forefront, often overshadowing the informational labels associated with them.

However, this approach, rooted in the paradigm of the modernist museum (Hopper-Greenhill, 2000) , which is object-centric, may not cater to a diverse audience. By focusing primarily on the visual allure of the objects, the museum risks alienating visitors who seek a deeper understanding of the historical and functional contexts of these artifacts.

Figure 9: Exhibit displays at the Museum of the Orient in Lisbon, illustrating the minimal lighting that emphasizes the objects (Fundação Oriente, n.d.)

Despite the visual contrast with the Navy Museum, which adopts a strategy of well-lit halls and somewhat balanced emphasis on both objects and their accompanying labels, the Museum of the Orient approach to narrative structure is strikingly similar. Both museums exhibit a deficiency in

historical representation, tending to simplify and selectively present aspects of Portugal's colonial history. This tendency to glorify colonial endeavors is evident in both institutions' highlighting of Portuguse technological advancements and navigational successes, while neglecting to equally address the exploitation and cultural disruptions caused by these activities.

In the case of the *Museu do Oriente*, this approach can inadvertently present the exhibited objects as a hoards of treasures amassed through colonialism, with minimal attention given to the contexts of their acquisition. This presentation fails to align with decolonization strategies of display, which seek to challenge colonial narratives and power dynamics. Instead of contextualizing the objects within a framework of colonial exploitation and cultural appropriation, the emphasis on sensory and emotional engagement risks romanticizing or glorifying colonial legacies. Therefore, while the use of affective elements may enhance visitor experience, it does not adequately address the complexities of colonial history and its implications for the objects on display.

It is imperative to acknowledge that employing affective strategies in conjunction with decolonization initiatives, such as incorporating multisensory elements, can evoke powerful emotional responses and facilitate a deeper cultural understanding (Peralta, 2015). This approach extends beyond superficial presentations of aesthetically pleasing objects, fostering a more profound engagement with the cultural narrative. One specific example of this approach is evident in the temporary exhibition titled "Japan: Festivities and Rites," running until December 31, 2024. In this exhibition, curators utilized multisensory elements to create an immersive experience for visitors. Ambient sounds, lighting effects, and other sensory stimuli were skillfully incorporated to evoke the atmosphere of traditional Japanese festivals and rituals. By engaging multiple senses, the exhibition goes beyond mere visual presentation to create a rich and evocative experience that can resonate on a deeper level with visitors, enabling affect. It is through the application of (mindful) affective strategies, that the *Museu do Oriente* endeavors to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of Japanese culture and traditions among its audience.

Other museum decolonization strategies are evident in its website, which offers a significantly more user-friendly, inclusive, and engaging experience compared to that of the Navy Museum. The website is accessible in both Portuguese and English, facilitating broader access to information about current, past, and upcoming exhibits. However, similar to the Navy Museum, the language used on the museum's website, while accessible, is highly contentious and selective. For instance, the website extensively discusses various aspects of trade relations, cultural exchanges, scientific advancements, and religious interactions. Yet, it conspicuously avoids addressing or acknowledging the unequal power dynamics and exploitative practices inherent in historical endeavors, such as forced labor and the engagement in Asian slavery. This deliberate omission extends to topics like the Japanese slave markets which the Portuguse actively procured slaves from, which have received comparatively less

attention both within and outside academic circles, particularly when compared with the discourse on slavery enterprises in Africa or Brazil (Zurndorfer, 2020).

The *Museu do Oriente* presents an unfortunate yet hopeful case within the museological landscape. While the museum demonstrates attempts to be inclusive and transparent through diverse content and language options on its website, as well as multisensory engagement in some exhibits, it falls short in fully addressing the extractionist/exploitative aspects tied to the formation of Portuguese (colonial) identity. Despite being a modern institution, the museum remains bound to traditional methods of (object-centric) knowledge creation, predominantly relying on the singular authority of perspectives of objects which are meant to speak for themselves, an observation acknowledged by Peralta (2015): "In other words, historical knowledge is first accessed in the context of the exhibition through the visualization of objects and their aesthetic features" (Peralta, 2015, p. 312). By following this approach, the museum fails to incorporate a wide spectrum of perspectives, particularly overlooking the voices of marginalized communities, whose very experiences are intricately linked to the creation and historical significance of the objects on display.

To combat the erasure of marginalized voices, a crucial first step would be to rework the language used in exhibits and on the website by acknowledging the exploitative acts of imperial endeavors. A second commendable step is to actively involve curators and artists from former colonies in the creation of exhibitions. This collaborative effort can help facilitate reconciliation and ensure a broader, more diverse range of perspectives in interpreting and presenting complex histories of objects. Incorporating contemporary art allows museums to create a dialogue between past and present. For example, the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium, successfully partnered with Congolese artists during its renovation. This collaboration transformed the museum's previously colonial-centered exhibits, providing new interpretations and added value to the collections. This approach not only enriches the museum's narrative but also honors the voices and experiences of those from former colonies, fostering a more inclusive and accurate construction of knowledge.

5.2 World of Discoveries (Porto)

The selection of the World of Discoveries in Porto is based on its intentional design to cater to a younger audience. Consequently, categorizing it with the same depth as other museums would be unjustified. Unlike institutions aimed at broader demographics, such as adults or scholars, children's

museums/exhbits purposefully simplify exhibits, enhance the application of interactive elements, and tailor educational programs to appeal to and promote learning to younger visitors. Therefore, this section will be more theoretically concise compared to the preceding museum analyses.

Nevertheless, museums catering to a children's audience should not be underestimated in regard to their didactic role. According to Hooper-Greenhill (2000), the educational potential of museums lies in their ability to facilitate active learning and individual meaning-making. By employing interactive and accessible exhibits, children's museums effectively engage young minds, fostering curiosity and a deeper understanding of complex subjects. Thus, while the practical approach differs to those of previous museums in this paper, the didactic effect on a visitor is similar in its goals, demonstrating why the impact of children's museums on education and cultural development is deserving of recognition.

The World of Discoveries website, available in Portuguese, English, and Spanish, presents the institution as an interactive digital exhibition and thematic park. This claim is substantiated by the evolution in the museum's layout and visitor-engagement strategies, particularly noticeable in sections 1 to 5, which initially focus on Portugal's prominent figures in navigation history as depicted on the exhibit's map (see Figure 10), to an immersive experience in the form of a guided boat ride attraction. Here, visitors are guided both physically and through audiovisual means. The boat ride utilizes pre-recorded audio narration, available in multiple languages such as Portuguese, English, Spanish, Italian, French, and German. This diverse language selection enhances inclusivity for international visitors, facilitating an accessible navigation of thematic areas 7 to 18, (see Figure 10) establishing a predominant digital encounter within the exhibition. Central to the museum's ethos is the aim of captivating young audiences with a multisensorial design presenting historical narratives. This is achieved by presenting a simplified yet engaging account of Portugal's maritime history. Compelling storytelling, visually captivating elements, and sensory experiences, including the infusion of scents such as spices, contribute to this immersive experience.

Figure 10: A map of the World of Discoveries, Porto (World of Discoveries, n.d.)

However, the thematic division employed by the World of Discoveries, raises concerns due to its potential for confusion and oversimplification. The institution's primary objective is clear in immersing youth in various historical spaces through storytelling and visually striking elements, aimed at representing territories within Portugal's colonial empire. The interactive exhibition divides them into broader categories such as "North Africa", "Black Africa", "India", "Timor and China", "Macau", "Japan", and "Brazil". This division is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the division lacks chronological accuracy in terms of Portuguese exploration, as Portugal's presence in Brazil preceded its presence in Macau. This can create confusion regarding the historical context and sequence of events. Moreover, the geographical grouping is flawed and ambiguous, such as East Timor being inaccurately grouped with China. This oversight fails to acknowledge the distinct sociocultural identities of these territories and can be viewed as racially insensitive. Lastly, the term "Black Africa" presents significant issues, particularly when sequenced with "North Africa". It not only oversimplifies the rich tapestry of cultures and complex histories found within sub-Saharan Africa but also imposes a simplistic racial categorization that assumes homogenity in skin color. Scientific research has conclusively shown that sub-Saharan Africa features the greatest diversity in skin tones (Relethford, 2000). Thus, applying such categorical terms overlooks the nuanced realities and undermining the sociocultural and genetic diversity that characterizes the regions.

Finally, let us draw a comparison between the interactive digital exhibition offered by the World of Discoveries in Porto and an exhibit at the Wereldmuseum (formerly known as Tropenmuseum) Junior in Amsterdam, as both institutions cater specifically to young audiences. Although both institutions prioritize interactivity and multisensory engagement in their exhibits, the Wereldmuseum Junior places a particularly strong emphasis on showcasing the diversity and rich culture of former colonies, such as Suriname. This is exemplified by the "Sabi Suriname" temporary exhibit, ongoing until July 1st, 2024. The exhibit endeavors to present Surinamese culture through its diverse sociocultural practices rather than a strictly geographical focus. By featuring universal themes that resonate with people of all ages — such as culinary dishes, rituals and festivities, and music — the exhibit creates a multifaceted cultural experience. This unique educational approach is facilitated by a "personal, authentic, and contemporary hands-on collection", (Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, n.d., para. 7) complemented by various activities that engage visitors beyond surface level, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Surinamese culture and identities. In this manner, the Wereldmuseum's approach, through its emphasis on universal shared cultural themes, could help prevent the stereotyping of identities by highlighting the commonalities that unite diverse cultures, rather than emphasizing differences that can lead to exoticized views.

5.3 *Mercado de Escravos* (Lagos)

The *Mercado de Escravos* (Slave Market), located in Lagos, a city in the southern Algarve region of Portugal, stands as a historically significant building intricately linked to the transatlantic slave trade. The building has been portrayed as a likely site where enslaved individuals were bought and sold, given Lagos's prominence as a key slave trade harbor. However, there is no explicit documentation confirming that such transactions actually took place within this specific building (Quinteiro et al., 2023, p. 13). Initial suspicions about the presence of enslaved Africans arose from the discovery of skulls with intentionally modified teeth found discarded in an urban dump outside the city's walls (Coelho et al., 2017). This hypothesis has been substantiated through detailed morphoscopic analysis, which examines specific observable skeletal traits, confirming the likelihood of African ancestry for these individuals (Coelho et al., 2017).

Regardless of whether or not this building functioned as a slave market, it is currently in this space that the collective memory of the first European modern slave market from 1444 is described and presented through the historical narrative perpetuated by the museum (Quinteiro et al., 2023, p. 13). To solidify these claims even more, the Slave Market Museum is part of a UNESCO initiative named "Routes of Enslaved People: Resistance, Liberty and Heritage" which aims to "contribute to the

production of innovative knowledge, the development of high-level scientific networks and the support of memory initiatives on the theme of slavery, its abolition and the resistance it generated" (UNESCO, n.d., para. 1).

Figure 11: A picture of the Slave Market historic building in Lagos (Keshvani-Ham, 2022)

The Slave Market museum, (re)opening to the public in 2016 in the same building, was selected for this study primarily because it stands as one of the few museums in Portugal dedicated specifically to the topic of slavery, and the "country's first monument acknowledging its history with slavery" (Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 2). Therefore, the museum can be viewed as a representative institution for examining the historical and cultural implications of Portugal's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, an integral aspect of the country's maritime activities during the Age of Exploration. This section aims to delve into how the museum presents this somber chapter of the country's history to visitors, addressing a topic often overlooked in contemporary discourse.

According to an article in "Portugal Resident", there is an indication that the museum initially opened in November 2010 (Portugal Resident, 2011; Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 3). However, due to multiple administrative issues, the museum closed a couple of years later, and underwent renovations before reopening on June 6, 2016 (Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 5). The initiative to establish the Slave Market Museum stemmed from the 2009 archaeological excavations at *Valle da Gafaria* (Valley of Lepers), situated outside the medieval walls of Lagos. This site garnered public attention when it was conclusively revealed to have been used, from the 15th to 17th centuries under the Portuguese empire, as a dumping ground for imported ceramics, African-style ornaments, and enslaved individuals (Killgrove, 2019).

The museum has two exhibition floors, with its curation predominantly relying on interactive elements such as digital screens. On the first floor, there is a life-sized straw sculpture of Rei Amador, the leader of a 1595 slave rebellion on the island of São Tomé and Príncipe, placed next to two small benches facing each other, integrated into the space, marking where enslaved people reportedly waited to be sold (Contreras, 2019; Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 5). The second floor delves into the aforementioned archaeological excavations, displaying reproductions of various artifacts unearthed, including an amulet that belonged to a biracial child (Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 6). The rest of exhibit's narrative centers around demonstrating various ways in which enslaved Africans were progressively integrated into Portuguese society, showcasing a document with a notarial seal of freedom granted to a child named Maria, of African and Portuguese heritage (Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 6).

Although this exhibit does portray aspects of the enslaved people's lives, it can appear as if the narrative focuses marginally on the harsh realities they faced, and quickly shift perspectives to demonstrate how Portugal integrated these communities into society. In presenting the historical narrative in such a way, the museum does not adequately acknowledge the institutionalized hardships and racism fostered under Portugal during the peak of the early modern period, thus failing to fully address the systemic nature of these injustices as well as their ongoing implications.

Criticism surrounding the museum mostly center around certain curatorial choices regarding accessibility. Fistly, the museum does not have an online website, which makes it difficult for potential visitors to access information about the exhibits and historical context remotely. Secondly, while the museum boasts several well-considered interactive elements, such as an interactive exhibit guide accessible via mobile devices that offers detailed information about each displayed artifact, visitors are not adequately informed about the availability of this tool upon entering the museum (Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 11). Moreover, there is a lack of clear signage on the exhibits themselves to indicate the presence of these interactive features (Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 11). On top of this, many of the interactive features incorporated within the exhibits appear to be dysfunctional or are simply turned off (Keshvani-Ham & Ng, 2022, p. 11).

I will bring forth a comparison between the Slave Market Museum in Lagos and the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool in the hopes of offering distinct approaches to museum narratives and decolonization strategies within the context of slavery. The Slave Market Museum in Lagos primarily focuses on local history, particularly the slave trade activities that occurred in the region of Lagos during the Age of Exploration. In doing so, it aims to illuminate Portugal's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and its impact on the local community. However, criticisms have been raised regarding its accessibility and inclusivity, including issues with interactive elements and the absence

of a comprehensive online presence. This limits its ability to effectively engage a diverse audience and promote a nuanced understanding of historical narratives.

In contrast, the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool takes a broader approach by examining the global dimensions of slavery, encompassing its historical roots, legacies, and contemporary implications worldwide. This museum integrates diverse perspectives and narratives, highlighting resistance, abolition movements, and ongoing struggles for human rights. Most notably, unlike the museum in Lagos, the Liverpool museum actively engages with decolonization strategies by fostering critical reflections on the historical injustices of slavery and addressing contemporary issues of inequality and racism. For example, the "Legacy Gallery" recognizes and highlights the contemporary impacts of colonialism on Black populations. It also emphasizes their resilience and contributions to European culture through literature, art, music, cuisine, language, and more (National Museums Liverpool, n.d., para. 3). Therefore, while the Slave Market Museum in Lagos focuses on local history and faces challenges related to accessibility and inclusivity, the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool adopts a broader, more inclusive approach that integrates global perspectives and robust decolonization strategies in its narrative and educational outreach efforts.

VI.   Conclusion

6.1 Summary and Key Findings

In this concluding section, I have assembled my findings by addressing the three research questions in relation to the sequentially presented case studies. The central focus of this study was to investigate how Portuguese museums addressed the nuanced complexities and enduring challenges posed by colonialism, particularly for marginalized communities, through their portrayal of the Portuguese maritime legacy. Additionally, the study explored the implications of these representations for national identity and heritage.

How do Portuguese museums address the complexities of colonialism through portrayals of the Portuguese maritime legacy and its implications for national identity and heritage representation?

I attempted to illuminate the various methods employed by museums to assemble their exhibits, drawing from both theoretical frameworks and practical strategies. This exploration was informed by a comprehensive literature review and first-hand museum visits conducted by myself, supplemented by observations from other academic visitors. To effectively address the main research question, it was essential to formulate two sub-questions that would provide the framework for any claims and observations presented. This approach included employing a decolonial perspective through the first sub-question, which allowed for an examination of museums informed by both postcolonial theory and a practical explanation of decolonization as it manifests within museological spaces.

To what extent have Portuguese museums implemented decolonization strategies in curating and presenting the maritime legacy of the Age of Exploration?

The second sub-question addressed in this thesis aimed to compare the practices of Portuguese instiutions with those of other European museums grappling with the legacy of their former colonial empires. These museums similarly engage with issues of reconciliation and memory related to their extensive involvement in maritime activities, including the transatlantic slave trade and the displacement of populations during the Age of Exploration.

In what ways do the maritime exhibits showcased in Portuguese museums differ from those exhibited in other European countries with colonial legacies?

The Navy Museum in Lisbon, under curatorial control by the Portuguese Navy, raises significant concerns concerning heritage representation and identity. Rooted in its historical connection with the Portuguese crown, the museum maintains traditional collection and display methods. This context is reflected in its narrative, emphasizing nationalistic pride and celebrating Portugal's achievements in maritime exploration through sculptures of navigators, explorers, navigational instruments, and miniature ship models. The museum predominantly focuses on Portugal's maritime "discoveries," highlighting routes to Asia with limited coverage of Brazil and Africa due to the scarcity of associated objects. Although the museum acknowledges the transatlantic slave trade with minimal representation, transparency about these limitations is lacking. In contrast, the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam integrates colonialism and the slave trade prominently, humanizing the narrative and using respectful terminology. While the Navy Museum has taken initial steps to acknowledge the transatlantic slave trade, there is a pressing need for greater transparency and inclusivity to foster robust decolonization efforts.

As part of the secondary case studies, the Museum of the Orient, a new art institution in Lisbon, was examined. While the institution prioritizes the presentation of objects, it does so with an emphasis on their aesthetic value, interpreted through the collective (re)imagination of Portugal's Eastern empire. This approach frequently overlooks the artifacts' original historical context and function, failing to address the complex realities of colonialism. The museum's emphasis on the visual and artistic merits of its exhibits overlooks the deeper historical narratives and cultural contexts that these artifacts represent. Furthermore, the physical layout of the museum discourages visitors from engaging with the historical context, instead encouraging them to focus solely on the aesthetic appeal of the objects. This method reinforces a romanticized view of Portugal's colonial past, rather than critically engaging with the imperialistic and exploitative dimensions of that history. To achieve a more decolonial presentation, the Museum of the Orient could incorporate contemporary art created by the communities from which they feature objects, similar to the approach taken by the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium. This method not only provides a platform for contemporary voices and artistic expressions but also bridges the historical past with the present, allowing for a more dynamic and multifaceted understanding of cultural heritage. By showcasing contemporary art alongside historical artifacts, the museum can create a dialogue between past and present, highlighting ongoing cultural traditions and the contemporary relevance of historical narratives.

The "World of Discoveries" digital interactive exhibit in Porto endeavors to educate children about Portugal's colonial past through interactive storytelling centered on the country's maritime routes. However, its didactic role is perhaps more passive than its entertainment role. This is evidenced in its categorization of colonies and use of certain terms that may unintentionally reinforce and perpetuate

certain stereotypes. The exhibit in Porto could benefit from adopting a more nuanced, hands-on approach similar to that of the Wereldmuseum Junior in Amsterdam.

Such a proactive approach to learning is essential for cultivating a generation that is informed and sensitive to historical complexities and cultural diversity.

The final museum scrutinized was the Slave Market Museum of Lagos, housed within its eponymous historic building linked to the transatlantic slave trade. The establishment of the museum itself marked a pivotal step within Portugal's reconciliation with its own dark past. The museum features interactive exhibits and artifacts from nearby excavations, illustrating the lives and integration of enslaved individuals into Portuguese society. Criticisms are directed towards the museum's physical inaccessibility, as it has not been effectively marketed and seems to cater primarily to tourists, and its internal issues such as dysfunctional interactive features. In contrast, unlike the museum in Lagos, the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool adopts a more global perspective, focusing on the autonomy of enslaved peoples, highlighting resistance movements, and emphasizing ongoing human rights struggles. Importantly, the Liverpool museum also highlights the ways in which historically marginalized communities have enriched Western culture. The Lagos museum's limited scope and accessibility issues underscore its challenges in effectively addressing the systemic injustices of slavery and implementing robust decolonization strategies compared to its global counterparts. Nevertheless, the existence of the Slave Market Museum in Lagos represents a hopeful sign for Portugal's engagement with its historical legacy of slavery. It signifies a growing recognition and willingness to confront this challenging history through dedicated museum spaces, paving the way for more comprehensive and inclusive representations of Portugal's colonial past in the future.

6.2 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

While this thesis aimed to scrutinize and analyze the representation of Portugal's maritime heritage across museums in three different cities, it recognizes several limitations that require acknowledgement. Methodologically, the research primarily relied on literature reviews and museum visits conducted within a limited timeframe. While these methods provided valuable insights into the selected museums, they may not fully capture ongoing changes in museum practices or visitor responses over time. Another limitation concerns generalizability; the findings and suggested strategies for further decolonization may not apply universally beyond the specific museums and contexts studied. Variations in museum governance, funding, and public engagement strategies across regions or countries with colonial histories could present different challenges and outcomes in implementing decolonization strategies.

Future studies could explore longitudinal analyses to track changes in museum practices over time, and more in-depth examinations of visitor responses and engagement. Additionally, investigating the impact of digital technologies in presenting decolonized narratives and engaging with local and diasporic communities to co-create exhibits could provide further insights into effective decolonization strategies within museum contexts. This is a crucial component of decolonization within museum studies, which I hope to see implemented across multiple museums in Portugal soon.

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