



REVISTA
DE
**CULTURA
VISUAL**

e-ISSN 2184-1284

No. 13 | 2024

Opening Note: Repairing the Irreparable Nota de Abertura: Reparar (n)o Irreparável

<https://doi.org/10.21814/vista.5813>

e024010

Ana Cristina Pereira



Gessica Correia Borges



Marta Lança



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Vista No. 13 | January – June 2024 | e024010

Published: 27/06/2024

Ana Cristina Pereira

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3698-0042>

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais,
Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

Gessica Correia Borges

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6565-891X>

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais,
Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

Marta Lança

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4296-2454>

Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Lisbon,
Portugal

In our increasingly fragmented world, contemplating reparation becomes ever more challenging. Wars that receive little attention in Western media have, in recent years, been overshadowed by others that dominate our focus. Globally, the blatant and violent manifestation of colonialism today renders concepts such as “coloniality” (of knowledge, being, or power) mere euphemisms for a reality that has always been colonial¹. Even decolonial theories, developed and nurtured

¹“Coloniality is a euphemism”, argued Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui during an open lecture on the sociology of the image at the NOVA Institute of Communication in Lisbon on April 18, 2023. The event was jointly organised with the Visual Culture Working Group of the Portuguese Association of Communication Sciences.

within academia, appear synthetic and inadequate in the face of the end of the world as we know it².

Paradoxically, the ubiquity of projects, proposals, and events linked to the word “reparation” reached proportions unimaginable just a few years ago when we first considered contributing to this discussion within the Portuguese and Lusophone public space³. Unsurprisingly, a substantial portion of these initiatives are opportunistic or media-driven, operating within the same exploitative logic. However, it is impossible to overlook the discursive shift that has occurred in the Portuguese public and governmental spheres in just a few years.

As we were writing this introductory note, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, as part of the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of April 25, argued that Portugal is responsible for the damage caused to colonised countries, stating: “we have to pay the costs. Have some actions not been punished, and have those responsible not been held accountable? Are there goods that have been looted and not returned? Let's see how we can repair this” (Lusa, 2024, para. 2). These statements sparked a strong political and media reaction, largely marked by the rejection of the President of the Republic's stance.

However, while Portugal is slow to acknowledge that the narrative of its glorious maritime expansion is inseparable from slavery, its silence speaks volumes, and Portuguese inaction regarding its history and the lack of effective reparations for colonised and enslaved peoples have been noted. In April 2024, six Brazilian civil society organisations expressed their dismay at Portugal's “absolute lack of position” regarding its slave-owning past and the absence of “reparations to the Black Brazilian population” (*Em Meio a um Evento na ONU, Mulheres Negras Exigem de Portugal Reparação por Escravidão*, 2024), during the “Permanent Forum on People of African Descent” (Nações Unidas, 2024), established in 2021 to promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of people of African descent worldwide. However, as Apolo de Carvalho (2024) pointed out, this discussion

involves numerous individuals, locations, contexts, and temporalities. That is not an agenda that “Portugal should lead”, as President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa suggests. There are several dimensions, particularly geopolitical ones, that require non-negotiable agency and protagonism from the “damned”. In other words, power is needed.

²“Decolonial is synthetic knowledge”, asserts Antônio Bispo dos Santos (2015) while acknowledging the contemporary relevance of decolonial concepts and criticising their academic Eurocolonial appropriation. He emphasises their synthetic, linear, and stark disconnect from the lived realities of Indigenous peoples and quilombolas. Instead, he offers a counter-colonial perspective that, from his viewpoint as a quilombola, is organic to the experiences of historically subjugated peoples.

³The inaugural public event of this project was participation in the *Restitution Art Lab*. This *Paradise Garden* production spanned several months and engaged academics, artists, activists, and musicians from Angola, Germany, Cameroon, the Netherlands, Mozambique, Portugal, and Switzerland. It culminated in a public presentation at the Volksbühne in Berlin on June 17 and 18, 2022 (Beleza Barreiros & Pereira, 2022).

The power to demand and to achieve. Otherwise, we are merely naively appealing to the compassion of the oppressors. (para. 10)

Despite all the impossibilities — which we have previously highlighted in the successive calls for papers that led to the current issue of *Vista* (e.g., Pereira & Beleza Barreiros, 2022) — the conversation on reparations has begun to take shape in Portugal, albeit timidly compared to the rest of the world.

Regarding the restitution of objects, we recall that in 2020, when the then MP Joacine Katar Moreira presented a proposal to amend the State Budget, suggesting the establishment of a commission of experts tasked with inventorying objects acquired or stolen in a colonial context, the idea appeared absurd to most MPs and many prominent figures in the national public sphere. Moreira's proposal was largely rejected in Parliament, with the Portuguese Communist Party abstaining and the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) voting in favour. In the mainstream public sphere, criticism of the MP's proposal (and of the MP herself) was extremely harsh, with arguments such as “this discussion is imported” and “refunds have never been requested from Portugal” being frequently repeated.

Meanwhile, individuals with increased responsibility, such as archaeologist Luís Raposo, the president of the International Council of Museums Europe, and Paulo Costa, director of the National Museum of Ethnology, among other conservative interventions on the issue of reparations, on January 30, 2020, gave an interview to *Público* journalist Mário Lopes (2020), in which they declared themselves convinced that there were no illegally obtained pieces in national museums. Just over two years after Joacine Katar Moreira's proposal, in 2022, the then Minister of Culture Pedro Adão e Silva stated that he believed we could not discuss restitution without first making an inventory of the objects in our possession and conducting a thorough provenance study (Martins, 2022). He promised to support serious efforts undertaken by teams of specialists and museums, rejecting polarised public debate.

As it stands, the inventory process has been particularly secretive, and nothing is publicly known about the work that has been done or is yet to be done. Outside the governmental sphere, the efforts of academics (*Descolonizar os Museus: Sugestões de Leitura*, n.d.), artists, activists, and journalists, such as Flávia Brito (2023) with her report in *Gerador*, “Restituição às Ex-Colónias: A Luta Pela Libertação da Memória e Identidade” (Restitution to the Former Colonies: The Struggle for the Liberation of Memory and Identity), are gradually shifting the public discourse towards more dialogic and less negative positions. However, this is still far from the state of the debate (and tangible actions) in France, especially since the Sarr-Savoy report (Sarr & Savoy, 2018), *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics* and also in the Netherlands, Belgium, England, Germany, and Canada.

The restitution of certain objects can be significant for the communities to which they belong. It can fuel artistic and political reflections on gestures of reparation, as demonstrated in the article, here published, “Decolonial Twists

and Turns of the Tupinambá Cloak: Three Women Artists and Their Work on the Artefact that Became an Icon of Brazilian Identity” by Alessandra Simões Paiva. This text examines artistic and symbolic appropriations of the Tupinambá Indigenous cloak, which was recently returned to its place of origin. It aims to contemplate the recovery of ancestral techniques and knowledge as a form of reparation. However, the return of objects is just one facet of the effort to repair the fractured world we inhabit and can even be contested, even from a reparative standpoint. As Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (2019) suggests, if we consider the objects in the museums of colonising countries as undeniable evidence of their presence in colonised territories, the atrocities committed there, and the void left there, it becomes apparent that these same objects could be seen as the sole passport, visa, or residence permit that anyone from these formerly colonised countries should require to enter and live in Europe.

One of the forms of reparation to which this issue of *Vista* aims to contribute is undoubtedly the reparation of historical narratives that continue to exclude from collective memory and make invisible the contribution of racialised groups and people to the construction of the present. The visual essay “Repairing Colonial Violence Against Women: Revisiting *Mulheres Sempre Presentes*” by Teresa Mendes Flores, Soraya Vasconcelos, Catarina Mateus, and Carmen Loureiro Rosa, pays homage to the enduring struggles of Black women throughout history as historical subjects under the dominance of patriarchy, which, both in Europe and Africa, often consigned them to obscurity. This visual essay, in dialogue with Gayatri Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) reflects on the notion of women speaking and being heard and their condition of subalternity.

Continuing on the theme of repairing narratives, in “Armando de Almeida. A Lesson in Resistance in Portuguese Running Culture”, Luís Camanho, José Carneiro, and Susana Lourenço Marques reclaim the figure of the Mozambican-descent athlete, providing a biography of him and, consequently, resisting his historical invisibility, also through photographs. In addition to discursively analysing Armando’s presence in the Portuguese press and the tumultuous historical moment of the First Republic, the text reveals “Portuguese racism” (Henriques, 2016). It contributes to the debate on the presence and protagonism of people of African descent in the country as a multi-century historical phenomenon.

To repair is also to question the ruins, what lies hidden in their rubble, and what processes and tensions emerge and submerge from urban regeneration. This is what Flora Paim suggests in “What Endures in the Rubble-Image?”, an ontological analysis of the relationship between photography and death, but also — and perhaps most importantly — an artistic and political contribution to the stubborn persistence of the Aleixo neighbourhood in Porto’s urban memory.

Art is often regarded by artists, writers, and the general public as a particularly significant and effective arena for reparation efforts. Reflecting on the role of artistic production and cultural practices in processes of reparation (Demos, 2020; Eugénio, 2019) is crucial within the realm of visual culture as a field of knowledge. *A Tendency to Forget* is the title of a 2015 installation by Ângela

Ferreira, and it is now also the title of Viviane Almeida, Lurdes Macedo, and Renata Flaiban Zanete's interview with the artist. Understanding the importance of Ângela Ferreira's work in the genealogy of post-colonial debates in Portugal is essential, as it stimulates a critical examination of Portugal's colonial past and its international ramifications.

Continuing the topic of art and reparation, the article "There Are Many Possibilities and Impossibilities in This World: A Reflection on Spiral Time and the '35th São Paulo Biennial'" by Marcela Pedersen draws inspiration from the concept of "spiral time" by Brazilian thinker Leda Maria Martins, viewing time from a restorative perspective in the conception of the "35th São Paulo Biennial", titled *Choreographies of the Impossible*. The article focuses on the decolonisation of the institutions involved in the circulation, marketing, and validation of art. The ways in which we educate ourselves as a society and the voices we choose to listen to can serve as a restorative practice.

The article "*Taypis* of Racist Imaginaries and the (Ir)repairable in Denied Narratives of Black Women", by Nayara Luiza de Souza and Carlos Alberto de Carvalho, invites us to challenge the dominant imaginaries and narratives imposed by the colonial power structures, perpetuated by Brazilian journalism, especially regarding Black women. Thus, they propose potential reparations based on the concept of *taypi*, a "middle world", as described by Cusicanqui (2015), which, through its imagery and critical nature, reveals underlying fissures, symbolisms and hierarchies that may remain hidden in verbal discourse.

Even if we attempt these and other forms of reparation, the world as we have known it (Ferreira da Silva, 2019) may be irreparable. In such a scenario, it becomes imperative to envision alternative worlds. This call for creativity entails the courage to imagine fundamentally different institutions from those of modernity, which have been shown to benefit neither the planet nor humanity as a whole. Angela Davis' groundbreaking work serves as a beacon for those who believe in the possibility of a new world emerging from the rubble of the current one. In their article "Liberating Minds: The Intellectual Legacy of Angela Davis and Its Images in Film", Michelle Sales and Bruno Muniz explore Angela Davis's intellectual legacy through her film portrayal. They examine how Davis's struggle for civil rights and the fight against racial segregation in the United States contributed to the consolidation of the Black movement in Brazil and the dissemination of anti-colonial ideas during decolonisation struggles in African nations.

Last but not least, we contemplate the idea of repairing landscapes, delving into urgent ecological and political issues such as extractivism and strategies to combat it. We aim to explore forms of "reparative justice" that extend to the natural world as well. Rosa Cabecinhas, in her review of the book *Comunicación Radical. Depatriarcalizar, Decolonizar y Ecologizar la Cultura Mediática* (Radical Communication. Depatriarchalising, Decolonising and Ecologising Media Culture; 2022) by Manuel Chaparro Escudero and Susana de Andrés del Campo, reveals how radical communication entails constructing a fresh perspective that

enables us to “deactivate warring imaginaries”, replacing the “algorithm of hatred” with the ethics of care and the common good.

In a sense, this issue of *Vista* marks the culmination of a rather extensive programme dedicated to reparations, undertaken over the years by the Visual Culture Working Group of the Portuguese Association of Communication Sciences in collaboration with various partners and institutions. This edition also carries a symbolic reparative essence that transcends its pages and extends to the very selection of the editors. Rooted in the concept of self-repair, the invitation initiated by Kitty Furtado and later embraced by Gessica Correia Borges and Marta Lança represents an act of affection with radical political implications. As bell hooks (1999/2021) elucidates in *All About Love*, it embodies an ethic of love and collective self-agency as revolutionary gestures within a patriarchal, racist, and nihilistic cultural landscape.

The texts featured in this issue explore significant aspects of reparations in a broad sense. However, it is important to note that this edition represents just a fraction of the material generated during the various activities of the programme mentioned above. The discussions and work presented at forums like the “IV Visual Culture Meeting” (organised by Kitty Furtado and Inês Beleza Barreiros at the mala voadora theatre in Porto in 2023) and the Oficina de Reparações (2023), which led to the “Declaração do Porto” (Porto Declaration), as well as the texts and exhibitions featured in *Buala*, and the reflections from the *MigraMediaActs* project conducted at the Communication and Society Research Centre, all continue alongside this publication. The term “reparations” may run the risk of being emptied, but its political significance is immense and will expand with various future approaches.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

Acknowledgements

This work is supported by national funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the project UIDB/00736/2020 (base funding) and UIDP/00736/2020 (programme funding). Ana Cristina Pereira and Gessica Correia Borges developed this work within the scope of the project “MigraMediaActs – Migrations, media and activism in Portuguese language: decolonising mediascapes and imagining alternative futures” (PTDC/COM-CSS/3121/2021), supported by national funds through F.C.T. - Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P, Portugal. This work received financial support from Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P. (FCT), through the Pessoas 2030 / Portugal 2030 programme, co-participated by the European Social Fund and national funds from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES), through the award of a Research Grant with reference 2023.01522.BD.

Biographical Notes

Ana Cristina Pereira (Kitty Furtado) is a cultural critic committed to bridging the gap between academia and the public sphere. She has curated (post)colonial film exhibitions and promoted public discussions on memory, racism, and reparations. Holding a PhD in Cultural Studies from the University of Minho, she is a researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre, where she coordinates the migrant activism research line of the *MigraMediaActs* project (2022–2025) and is preparing to launch her individual project, *The Black Gaze* (2023.08077.CEECIND). She is part of the curatorial team for Portugal's representation at the “2024 Venice Biennale”, for which she curated the *Biomes* program, and coordinated the Visual Culture working group of Portuguese Association of Communication Sciences from 2019 to 2024. Among other texts and special editions, she co-authored the book *Abrir os Gomos do Tempo: Conversas Sobre Cinema em Moçambique* (Opening the Buds of Time: Conversations About Cinema in Mozambique; 2022) with Rosa Cabecinhas.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3698-0042>

Email: kitty.furtado@gmail.com

Address: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho - Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057, Braga, Portugal

Gessica Correia Borges (São Paulo, Brazil) is a social communicator with a degree from the Anhembi Morumbi University (Brazil), a master's degree in African Studies from the University of Porto (Portugal), with research on memory, identity and resistance through the oral history of Black Brazilian women. She is a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at the University of Minho (Portugal), and holds a scholarship from the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (reference 2023.01522.BD). Also contributes as a researcher to the project *MigraMediaActs - Migrations, Media and Activism in Portuguese: Decolonising Media Landscapes and Imagining Alternative Futures* (Communication and Society Research Centre). Her research usually focuses on themes such as decolonial activism, oral history and Black women. Gessica is a writer and poet by passion, with texts published in Brazilian anthologies, including *Poetas Negras Brasileiras* (Brazilian Black Women Poets; Editora de Cultura, 2021). Also a member of Portuguese anti-racist collectives and associations such as the União Negra das Artes.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6565-891X>

Email: ssica.ge@gmail.com

Address: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho - Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057, Braga, Portugal

Marta Lança (Lisbon, 1976) holds a degree in Literature and Portuguese Studies and is a PhD candidate in Artistic Studies at the School of Social and Human Sciences of the NOVA University of Lisbon. She has collaborated with Portuguese and Angolan cultural publications and created the magazines *V_ludo*, *Dá Fala*

(in Cape Verde) and the portal *BUALA* (<http://www.buala.org/pt>) on post-colonial issues, which she has been editing since 2010. She has lived in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in Luanda (she taught at the Agostinho Neto University and collaborated with the I Luanda Triennale), in Maputo (the "Dockanema" documentary festival). She has produced many cultural projects in Portuguese-speaking African countries. As a programmer, she has organised several projects, including "Roça Língua" (São Tomé and Príncipe, 2011 and 2022); the cycle "Paisagens Efémeras" (Lisbon, 2015); "Expats" (2015); "Vozes do Sul" (Festival do Silêncio, 2017); the *NAU* project with Teatro Experimental do Porto (2018); "Para Nós, Por Nós: Produção Cultural Africana e Afrodiaspórica em Debate" (2018) and "*sou esparsa, e a liquidez maciça*": *Gestos de Liberdade* (maat, 2020). She has translated authors such as Asger Yorn, Achille Mbembe and Felwine Saar from French into Portuguese. You can read some of her articles at <https://www.buala.org/pt/autor/marta-lanca>.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4296-2454>

Email: martalanca@buala.org

Address: Av. de Berna, 26 C1069-061 Lisboa

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