Poetics in Museological Crossroads: Nosso Sagrado, enchantment and the passage of time

Pedro Marco Gonçalves, Arantxa Ciafrino

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Nosso Sagrado, Museology, Museum; Musealization, Re-Musealization.

ABSTRACT:

The article examines the processes of musealization and re-musealization of the Coleção do Nosso Sagrado, a collection of sacred objects that narrates a history of religious oppression in Brazil within a colonial context. An analysis of three specific pieces and their custodial processes at the Museu da República, managed in shared custody with researchers and religious leaders, serves as a case study for a critical, decolonial, and reparative museology.

L'articolo esamina i processi di musealizzazione e ri-musealizzazione della Coleção do Nosso Sagrado, una collezione di oggetti sacri che narra una storia di oppressione religiosa in Brasile in un contesto coloniale. L'analisi di tre specifici pezzi e dei loro processi di conservazione presso il Museu da República, gestiti in custodia condivisa con ricercatori e leader religiosi, costituisce un caso di studio per una museologia critica, decoloniale e riparativa.

Opening Picture:

São Jorge, source: Nosso Sagrado/Museu da República. Photo by Oscar Liberal. Yet no provenance identified.

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Pedro Marco Gonçalves

Pedro Marco Gonçalves is a Museologist, Curator and Researcher. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Museology at the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - Unirio (2023), with research focused primarily on museum decolonisation, museological exhibitions and museums in Candomblé grounds. With the Laboratory of Experimental Museology, he researches the Museu Memorial Iyá Davina - Ilê Omolu Oxum, a museum inside a Candomblé temple. E-mail: pedromarcogoncalves@gmail.com

Arantxa Llanos Ciafrino

Arantxa Llanos Ciafrino is a Museologist, Art Historian and a Researcher. Currently a Ph.D. Candidate in Sociomuseology with a Research Scholarship from UNESCO at the Universidade Lusófona. She acts as a doctoral researcher at CeiED - Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Education and Development as part of the research project "CARIM: Contemporary Art: A Pathway towards Inclusive Museology". She holds a Bachelor's degree in Museology from the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - Unirio (2016) and a Master's degree in Contemporary Art History and Visual Culture, from a program organised collaboratively between the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Museo Reina Sofía (UAM, 2016-2017). E-mail: arantxa.ciafrino@ulusofona.pt

Introduction

Museums are fundamental institutions in modern society. They shape realities, *Zeitgeists* and communities, representing and reflecting power dynamics and historical injustices. The processes of reparation in museums are complex, nonlinear and involve a tangled web of interests surrounding objects and their social meanings. This complexity is especially evident when considering religious objects, particularly Afro-Brazilian items from *Candomblé*[1] and *Umbanda*[2] traditions, where the conventional Western notion of an "object" is challenged.

In this article, it is explored the case study of the Collection Nosso Sagrado and the multiple intersections involving its participants. Before and after the abolition of slavery, countless objects from Afro-Brazilian religious communities were forcibly taken and added to collections in Brazilian museums[3]. One particularly complex case involves a group of 519 afro-brazilian religious objects seized from various *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* temples between 1890 and 1946 in Rio de Janeiro. These sacred objects, first designated as cultural heritage in 1938 under the label "Museum of Black Magic", were held in the Museu da Polícia Civil do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Museum of the Civil Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro) until 2020. In September 2020, the sacred objects were transferred to the Museu da República, where curatorial responsibilities are now shared with representatives from different *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* communities. The collection was not only physically relocated but also symbolically transformed as it moved from one museological context to another. This shift can be seen as the construction of a new narrative for the collection. The initial musealization by the police in Rio de Janeiro is subverted by the shared authority of the Museu da República with *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* leaders. The objects are thus "re-musealized" within an ethical framework that prioritises life[4]and care.

It is not an easy task to write about unique cultural manifestations in Brazil for an international audience. Translating the complexity of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* - cosmovisions that offer extremely sophisticated perspectives on reality - is a significant challenge. The collection Nosso Sagrado points to crossroads of interpretation, reevaluation, and, perhaps, healing regarding the museum's role in addressing sensitive aspects of contemporary society.

Examining the non-linear musealization process of these "objects" reveals how the agency surrounding the collection enables new interpretations, even with the same material foundation. This dynamic of intention and perception, both material and immaterial, as displayed in the museum's exhibits, is the focus of the present analysis according to the Collection Nosso Sagrado. How do the possibilities for museological reparation emerge through decentralisation? In what ways can agency be distributed? How can museums become spaces for experimenting with participation and shared authority?

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The history of the Collection Nosso Sagrado

Before examining the group of sacred objects itself, it is essential to recognize that Brazil was the first, largest, and most enduring slave-based society in the Americas. The social inequalities and racial hierarchies established during slavery persisted after abolition, permeating both legal and cultural spheres.[5] Brazilian museums are closely linked to this legacy of slavery, directly or indirectly.[6]

As noted by Julio Braga, police repression of *Candomblé* cannot be reduced to a societal reaction against a religious practice of marginalised classes. It was an ambitious effort to undermine a form of citizenship that existed outside the Western ideological framework.[7] Since the colonial period, religious practices with African roots were persecuted and repressed – referred to as *calundu*[8] and punished by the Catholic Church as heresy. In the Imperial period, the 1824 Constitution did not recognize Afro-Brazilian practices as religions but as sects.[9]

It is also worth noting that in Imperial Brazil, the Polícia da Corte was responsible for confiscating various objects from Afro-Brazilian religions. Afro-Brazilian temples, known as 'Zungus' and 'Casas de dar fortuna', were invaded, with people being arrested and religious objects looted. Between 1880 and 1887, during the last decade of slavery in Brazil, the director of the Museu Nacional, Ladislau Netto, negotiated with the police to have some of these looted objects transferred to the museum for study. A total of 93 objects, violently taken from various *terreiros*,[10] were brought to the museum to 'contribute to the advancement of ethnological studies.' These objects now form part of the "Kumbukumbu" collection at the Museu Nacional.[11]

Analysing Collection Nosso Sagrado involves acknowledging the pervasive impact of institutionalised racism in Brazilian society, deeply tied to its historical context. As Luiz Augusto Alves writes, the 1890 Brazilian Criminal Code, which predated the first Republican Constitution of 1891, criminalised "magic," "witchcraft," and "sorcery". Despite the 1891 Constitution establishing a secular state, this Criminal Code was used to target and violate Afro-Brazilian religious communities and their heritage. In 1912, the Rio de Janeiro Police Academy was established to identify criminal artefacts, creating a museum of crime that included bladed weapons, gambling paraphernalia, and sacred objects from Afro-Brazilian temples. In 1934, the museum underwent reorganisation, and the collection of objects was named the "Museum of Black Magic". In 1938, it became the first collection officially recognized as ethnographic heritage by SPHAN.[12]

Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum, Mãe Nilce de Iansã, Mário Chagas and Maria Helena Versiani recount that the objects were seized during police raids on various *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* temples between 1890 and 1946. Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum, the *Iyalorixá* of Ilê Omolu Oxum, stated: "This is not a collection. These are our sacred things. They were stolen from us".[13]

The authors explain that these objects were stripped of their original, essential meanings twice: first, by

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being violently removed from their temples and, second, by being dismissed as mere criminal evidence by the police. The sacred objects were stored in boxes, inaccessible even to researchers, for many years. In 2017, the campaign "Liberte Nosso Sagrado" led by *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* leaders and supported by academics, politicians, museologists and museums was launched. This campaign resulted in the collection being transferred to the Museu da República in September 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Mario Chagas, the museum director from 2017 to 2024, emphasised that receiving the sacred objects was not an act of favour but a social responsibility – an expression of care and an active response to the racism embedded in Brazilian history.[14]

In 2017, Pamela de Oliveira Pereira interviewed Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum about the photos of imprisoned objects documented by Yvonne Maggie in the Museu da Polícia. During the interview, Mãe Meninazinha highlighted several errors, including misnaming entities and incorrect identification of certain objects.[15] Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum emphasises that the collection was stolen by the police and the Brazilian State, an action taken against the *terreiros*. Pereira, in her text, highlights this contradiction or inversion of roles. Who, in fact, is the criminal? What, in fact, is the crime?[16]

In her doctoral thesis, Pamela de Oliveira Pereira writes that for 8 decades the sacred objects remained under the Museu da Polícia as "Museum of Black Magic", however some religious objects, and here specifically in afro-brazilian cosmovisions, are people, they have agency and life. Since the late 1980s, there have been efforts to reclaim the religious objects, and since 2014 other museums were open to receive the objects, such as Museu Nacional and Museu do Ingá. The author continues to state that different religious leaders had different perceptions of Nosso Sagrado, to Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum the very perception of "collection" is questionable due to how they were obtained, and to the *Balalawô* Ivanir dos Santos none of the museums should had the collection, instead a new museum should be created for the afro-brazilian religions.[17]

The group of the shared curatorship has the following *terreiros*: Ilê Omolu Oxum; Instituição Filantrópica Abassá Lumyjacarê; Associação Espírita Senhor do Bonfim Oxalá Kupapa Unsaba/Bate Folha; Comunidade de Terreiro Afro-Indígena Casa do Perdão; Ilê Omon Oya Legy; Ilê Axé Omiojuaro; Templo do Vale do Sol e da Lua; Associação Beneficente Ilê Axé Ofá/Axé Iyá Nasso Oká Ilê Oxum/Sociedade N. Sra. das Candeias; Ilê Axé Iyá Omí Layó Egbé Obá Aganju; Tenda Espírita Caboblo Flecheiro Cobra Coral; and Tenda de Umbandista Caboclo Urucutum e Pai Zacarias. Alongside the museological staff of Museu da República, the role of the museum is to mediate the sacred experience with the material and immaterial integrity of the pieces.

In the first meeting between the Museu da República and the religious leaders, three conditions for the preservation the collection were established:

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1. The objects must be received through the lens of reparation. It is understood that the preservation of the collection advocates for religious freedom, life and memory of afro-brazilian religious traditions;
2. The guard of the collection must be shared. The museum recognizes that the specificities of this collection require orientations of *Iyalorixás*, *Babalorixás* and other leaders beyond museological theories and practices;
3. The passage from Museu da Polícia Civil to Museu da República must be led primarily by the *terreiro* communities, with the museum serving in a supporting capacity throughout the process.

On March 21st 2023, the name of the collection was officially changed to Nosso Sagrado.[18]

Although it is not the focus of this paper, it is worth noting the historical context of the Museu da República. The museum building, Palácio do Catete, was constructed by Antônio Clemente Pinto, Baron of Nova Friburgo (1795–1869), one of the wealthiest men in 19th-century Brazil. According to Rodrigo Marretto, the Baron participated in the transatlantic slave trade between 1827 and 1830, a period when the trade of enslaved people was legal in Imperial Brazil.[19] During these four years, he brought 3.074 men, women, and children from West Africa to be sold in the slave trade and to work on his plantations. In 1854, he was granted the title of "Baron" and continued to purchase enslaved people until the year of his death in 1869. At that time, he owned 2.180 enslaved people across his plantations, most of whom worked in coffee production.[20]

The Palácio do Catete, built between 1858 and 1866, served as the official residence and office of the Brazilian president from 1897 to 1960. In 1960, it was converted into the Museu da República. As a *lieux de mémoire*,[21] the Museu da República has become a place where collective memory is revisited, reflected upon, and reframed. It now operates under a new museological ethic that opposes the objectification of Afro-Brazilian communities and their cultural heritage.

Analysis of three pieces of the collection

The following analysis highlights the specific needs and careful attention required for the documentation and custody of these sacred objects. This analysis is based on cross-referencing various readings, conference presentations, and interviews with Mario Chagas and Maria Helena Versiani. When the objects were entrusted to the Museu da República, various terreiro leaders advised Mario Chagas to care for them with respect and affection, as though they were still within the terreiro.

The representation of Nosso Sagrado collection, now managed through a shared curatorship process, introduces a new dynamic in the social construction of Brazilian history. By presenting three examples of pieces from the *Nosso Sagrado* collection, we aim to illustrate possible methodologies for participation and shared curatorship between traditional museums and communities

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historically targeted by religious racism. Through the establishment of shared authority and by challenging the historical silencing of these communities by national institutions, the leadership of Candomblé and Umbanda groups creates opportunities to explore new realities through musealization.

Although the collection was received by the leaders of the *terreiros* at the Museu da República in September 2020, it has yet to be fully exhibited to the public. There has been an online page in Google Arts and Culture[22] and a small exhibition in the museum gardens, but the exhibition is scheduled to open in March 2025. For nearly two years, the exhibition has been in development, with a collaborative curatorial effort involving leaders from *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*. A dedicated team has been overseeing the exhibition's organisation, museography, and curatorial narrative.

Alongside the exhibition, the Museology School of the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO) has partnered with the Instituto de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN) to document the collection's pieces over time and publish a comprehensive dossier of the collection. This initiative is conducted in close collaboration with the religious leaders who are part of the collection's shared curatorship. The research emphasises values of democratic society and religious freedom, while also recognizing the foundational role of African heritage in shaping Brazilian culture.

The collection comprises 519 pieces, 126 of which have been recognised as cultural heritage by IPHAN, with 88 requiring restoration. All restoration and preservation efforts will proceed with the consent of the *terreiro* leaders. Notably, in addition to the collection's items, Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum chose to donate two personal objects: a metal *abebé* and a *fio de contas*. These objects were gifted by the *Iyalorixá* out of her own free will and agency, not taken through force or repression. Her donation contrasts with historical instances of police seizure and represents a shift in the relationship between Afro-Brazilian religious communities and the state, as embodied by the Museu da República.[23] This article examines the musealization process of three pieces from Nosso Sagrado, highlighting the collection's complexity, richness, and how its re-musealization represents a museological reparative and healing process.

1. Exu Ijelú/ Exu Lalu/ Caboclo Lalu (fig. 1)

Although documented by the police as Caboclo Lalú, however different leaders recognize the object also as the head of Exú Ijelú.[24] As a result, the museum now documents the piece under both names, recognizing the importance of addressing the transformations that the piece has gone through while being part of the museum collection. The *terreiro* leaders' authority influences the documentation process. Exú, as the one who comes first and is honoured first, played a key role: Exú Ijelu was the first item prepared for transfer from the Museu da Polícia and the first box opened at the Museu da República, following sacred protocols.

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01

Fig. 01: Exu Ijelú/ Exu Lalu/ Caboclo Lalu, source: Nosso Sagrado/Museu da República. Photo by Oscar Liberal. Mãe Luzia Cardoso. Centro Espírita Nossa Senhora da Conceição e São Jorge (Rua Araújo Leitão, 86, fundos, Engenho Novo). Year of Apprehension: 1934.

The object belonged to Luzia Cardoso, a 28-year-old domestic worker and religious leader who organized meetings as part of the practices of these spiritual traditions at the Centro Espírita Nossa Senhora da Conceição e São Jorge in Engenho Velho. On October 8th 1934, during one of these religious gatherings, the temple was raided by the police following complaints about "health concerns". It is important to highlight the complicity of orthodox medicine, which, driven by racist motivations, sought to suppress afro-religious healing practices. Luzia was arrested and some of the temple's objects were looted by the police as "evidence of the crime". Among these was the clay head of Exú Ijelu/Caboclo Lalu. The name "Lalu", from a line in *Umbanda*, refers to the entity Luzia was invoking at the time of the raid. Pai Roberto Braga and Mãe Palmira de Oyá identify the head as Exú Ijelu. However, as Pai Thiago de Ogum emphasises, the inherent diversity and flexibility within Afro-Brazilian religious traditions allow for varied interpretations of entities. Consequently, Exú Ijelu and Caboclo Lalu should not be viewed as fixed or absolute representations.[25]

The possibilities of a sacred experience of Nosso Sagrado also points at the museological sensibilities of how to respectfully and carefully address these different social readings with attentive ethics. The prescriptive nature of museums is here put in crossroads. Because the sacred objects have their own agency, the experience leads to a new dynamic, a in-betweenness, a turning point in how these museological relationships can be addressed through other cosmovisions.

It is also important to underline that the ambiguity of Nosso Sagrado is not the relativization of afro-brazilian religious as serious cosmovisions, but rather a museological compromise with the multiplicity and diversity that each *terreiro* has and how they express their understanding of material culture.

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2. São Jorge (fig. 2)

Another piece in the collection is a small sculpture of São Jorge slaying the dragon. It's important to note that in the context of *Umbanda*, São Jorge differs from his role in Catholicism. As many other catholic saints in Brazil, it acquired different meanings in *terreiros*. As *Umbanda* and *Candomblé* were violently repressed, its practitioners often used catholic figures to represent orixás and entities from their spirituality. This double meaning that catholic figures held, is a perfect exemplification of Brazil's syncretism and it evidences how it's development is also attached to a history of violence and religious prejudice.

This distinction led to the police seizing representations of São Jorge during raids. In many Umbanda practices, São Jorge is syncretized with Ogun, and the sculpture often allows for the simultaneous worship of both the orixá[26] and the saint. However, a similar sculpture in a church wouldn't have been targeted by the police at that time. It was seized from a *terreiro* because, within the *Umbanda* context, the object takes on a different social and religious meaning. Under the influence of an Afro-Brazilian religious community, São Jorge is framed in a cosmology beyond Christian or Western interpretations, making him a target of religious racism.

In Brazil, a sculpture of São Jorge would not be looted by the police from a Catholic church, but within a *terreiro*, the sculpture acquires a distinct significance, becoming a different object. The context and agency of Afro-Brazilian religions reconfigure the object both materially and symbolically. The experience of São Jorge, as well as Ogun, situates the sculpture within a relational framework, enabling the signifier (the sculpture) to embody multiple meanings (São Jorge, Ogun, or both), without the imposition of a prescriptive or direct museological interpretation.

02

Fig. 02: São Jorge, source: Nosso Sagrado/ Museu da República. Photo by Oscar Liberal. Yet no provenance identified.

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03

Fig. 03: Fios de Conta, source: Nosso Sagrado/Museu da República. Photo by Oscar Liberal. Yet no provenance identified.

3. Fios de Conta (fig. 3)

Fio de Contas are religious objects worn by axé communities. The Contas are specific to each person's religious path and how they learned with their own *terreiros*. As part of the Collection Nosso Sagrado there are some Fios de Contas, which were broken or torn. They are documented as in the photography above, in small transparent bags. If in the museological perspective the material integrity of the object is compromised, as the sacred guiding says, that the Contas should not be repaired. According to the guidance provided by the terreiro leaders, they have completed their spiritual journey and should be respected accordingly, just as within the religious framework.

Fio de Contas cannot be reused, as it is understood that they have fulfilled their mission.[27] This is another example of how the museological practice that deals with these collections needs to consider the immaterial aspect of the object, going beyond the pure historical value of the piece.

The process of negotiating is expressed by Versiani and Chagas as:

> *'Nosso Sagrado' connects a community of meanings, which shares values, affections, common interests, and a certain universe of religious practices, preservation, research, and communication. Museological practices and theories know little about Nosso Sagrado. Thus, to heal and care for Nosso Sagrado, in its multiple dimensions, the guidance of iyalorixás and babalorixás, as well as the caretakers of Axé, is indispensable.*[28]

The community of meanings and sensibilities is shown as a museological ethical standing regarding the social responsibilities of the museum staff and the historical reparation that this process demands.

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Creative Passages in Museums

Museums operate at the intersection of the material and symbolic worlds. Museology, as a discipline, simultaneously addresses cultural objectification and human experience. Early European museums, modern descendants of the 17th-century Cabinets of Curiosities, were exclusive temples of encyclopaedic knowledge, accessible only to an elite, primarily white men. Embedded within the colonial and imperial framework, these museums perpetuated Western dominance worldwide.[29]

The defining characteristic of the first European museums was their power to symbolise the nation publicly and "educate" visitors with authority.[30] For example, the British Museum, established by the British Parliament in 1753 and opened to the public in 1759, set a new standard for communicating universal knowledge to the masses through its collection.[31] In essence, museums became a tool for the State to assert power over modern societies. From the 19th century onwards, cultural institutions were systematically organised to civilise the population according to bourgeois values.[32]

The Western obsession with representation has been widely discussed by academics such as Heidegger and Derrida. In this context, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that Europe's construction as the Subject of history led to the creation of the cultural Other through epistemic violence and the erasure of non-European subjectivities. This intellectual discourse, representing postcolonial territories, becomes intertwined with Western economic interests.[33] Museums play a critical role in this Western narrative by representing the cultural Other through museological displays.

This experience, referred to here as "musealization" in museological theory, is central to contemporary debates and reevaluations. Musealization is not merely a representation of reality; it can construct reality itself. Museums do not just inform our worldview indirectly; they create a curated reality for visitors, arranging objects to convey a narrative. Museums shape social perception and function as ritualised performances of realities people participate in. Assigning, reassigning, or removing social value from an object places it within a new dynamic, preparing it to be publicly viewed and communicated. However, this process is complex and ongoing, dependent on the agencies controlling it rather than being an autonomous and immutable force.

Bruno Brulon describes musealization as a "creative passage" - a ritual performed by the museum, transforming objects into a sacred realm that exists simultaneously in ordinary and new realities.[34] In essence, museological exhibitions shape identity. As Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine note, when cultural "others" are involved, exhibitions convey who we are and, more importantly, who we are not. Exhibitions become privileged spaces for constructing images of self and 'other'.[35]

This creative passage can also crystallise experiences of domination. Museums, as they spread through colonial and imperial processes, became guardians of an "official histo-

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ry" endorsed by the State, often silencing marginalised communities. They are ideological instruments in society, despite their professed objective and neutral stance. Museums hold the power to determine whose voices are heard and whose are silenced.

As Donald Preziosi argues, we cannot escape museums because the modern world is the "supreme museological artefact", consuming everything displayed for visitors to experience. For Preziosi, European museums of the Enlightenment "consume" time through their objects, and through this unique relationship, they fabricate memory metonymically:

> Museology and art history are instrumental ways of distributing the space of memory. Both operate together on the relationships between the past and the present, subject and objects, and collective history and individual memory. These operations are in aid of transforming the recognised past in the present into a storied space wherein the past and present are imaginatively juxtaposed, where their virtual relationships cannot be construed as succession and profession; cause and effect. Where, in other words, the illusion that the past exists in and of itself, immune from the projections and desires of the present, may be sustained.[36]

> Understanding museums as standpoints for our societal narrative and collective memory means acknowledging their material and symbolic responsibility. Therefore, it is crucial to contest musealization processes, especially when they involve social inequality or historical violence.

The concept of musealization, as proposed by George Stocking, suggests that musealized objects exist in different dimensions. They originate from the past but are timeless, crossing temporal boundaries and encompassing both the values assigned to them in new contexts and their original meanings.[37] Museums are inherently political spaces. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach argue that museums "transform ideology in the abstract into living belief".[38] They often serve political agendas, including reinforcing racism in Brazilian society.

The analysis of museums as spaces of magic and devotion, despite their apparent contradiction with the Enlightenment paradigm of modern science, becomes more expansive with the inclusion of non-Western perspectives. The involvement of *terreiro* leaders as authority figures in Nosso Sagrado introduces the Museu da República to a new dimension of democratic use, accessibility, and social function - a process that is both political and poetic, animated by the transformative power of *axé*.

The notion of enchantment, as described by Luiz Rufino and Luiz Antonio Simas, is both a poetic and political stance that connects nature, the visible and the invisible across different temporal and spatial dimensions. According to the authors, the opposite of life is not death but rather disenchantment. Disenchantment represents a form of devitalization, silencing and a colonial politics of scarcity.[39] Through collaboration and negotiation, the objects

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in Nosso Sagrado are re-enchanted and revitalised by a new approach to musealization.

The practice of enchantment in Nosso Sagrado is a collective and collaborative effort that establishes a new material and symbolic condition, ensuring the continuity of *axé* within the pieces. Through the partnership between *terreiro* leaders and the Museu da República, this re-enchantment marks the beginning of a transformative phase for both the collection and Museology as an academic discipline. Nosso Sagrado envisions a museology shaped by diverse cultural matrices - a new path for the field that fosters dialogue between different systems of knowledge and, most importantly, redistributes the authority over the musealization process to new agents.

This shared authority, as understood in Nosso Sagrado, grants agency not only to terreiro leaders but also to the enchanted objects themselves. It reflects a musealization process rooted in the intersection of diverse epistemologies - a creation that is both poetic and political. These museological crossroads are not a rigid set of practices but rather a collaborative creation that enables constructive and non-violent combinations of social meanings. By combining the expertise of museologists with the traditional philosophies of *mães* and *pais de santo*, the process decentralises the specialist's role, fostering structural changes in the museum's relationship with society.

The enchantment, central to this process, signifies a paradigm shift, challenging the modern and rational legacy of museums. Nosso Sagrado reimagines the possibilities of what a museum can be and how historical violences can be addressed and re-signified. The Western institution is fundamentally transformed by the presence and agency of previously marginalised actors. The collective actions of Nosso Sagrado subvert the colonial and museological separation between subject and object. The objects' vitality is acknowledged and respected by the institution. As previously noted, the then-director Mario Chagas was instructed to care for them as if they were in a terreiro.

The creative passage of musealization is also positioned at a crossroad. The collection stands out not only because it has been musealized by the Museu da República but also because it was co-musealized with terreiro leaders. The creative passage is enriched by the sophisticated perspectives of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*. Their enchanted worldviews provide the tools to confront new challenges and bring about meaningful change, as a new social heritage is collectively being created.

The journey of the Nosso Sagrado collection illustrates how the values assigned to museum collections can change over time. Initially seized as evidence of a crime, the collection of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* artefacts was later reclassified as ethnological objects of supposed significance and now as an ongoing process of care, respect and healing. This evolving categorization reflects the dynamic nature of museological value as mediated by the institutions that preserve these collections.

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Conclusion

Musealization is not a straightforward or absolute process. The museological practice can simultaneously address both the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of an object. The transition from the Museum of Black Magic to Collection Nosso Sagrado - from a musealization marked by violence and prejudice to one characterised by shared authority - signals a transformation in the status of these sacred objects. This shift enables the collection to exist beyond the confines of modern objectification.

Shared curatorship redefines traditional museological authority, opening up new possibilities for agency. The collaboration between museum staff and the leaders of Candomblé and Umbanda has expanded the epistemological framework of the museum, resulting in a new, co-created praxis. The complexity of Collection Nosso Sagrado is acknowledged by the museum, creating a need to reconfigure its musealization in alignment with the sacred worldview of *terreiros*.

The "re-musealization" of Nosso Sagrado invites us to reconsider the various social relationships that surround museological objects and to transform the contexts in which they are situated. The agencies involved in this process are not merely representing *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* cultural heritage but are actively reshaping the social realities of Afro-Brazilian communities. This creative transformation reverses the traditional museological approach; instead of the objects being adapted to fit the museum's framework, the museum adapts its practices to accommodate Nosso Sagrado.

The experimental nature of this process is crucial, as highlighted by Maria Helena Versiani's concepts of the "democratic usage of the museum" and "museology as an inclusive and socially-based practice".[40] The Museu da República plays a key role in mediating these ideas, particularly by engaging with the traditional knowledge of various *terreiros*. This practice of involving non-academic and non-governmental agents in museum processes creates an opportunity to challenge the established structures and methodologies of modern scientific judgement.

The musealization process of Nosso Sagrado is, here, understood as a "re-musealization" precisely due to the presence of the agents around the process of researching, documenting, preserving and communicating. In her Master Dissertation, the museologist Silvia Patoja elaborates on the concept of musealization not as a chain or line, but rather as a confluence. Based on the concept of "confluence" by Quilombola leader Nego Bispo, Silvia Patoja proposes that the museological scientific processes be understood as a non-linear circular continuum.[41]

The museological practice in relation with the *terreiros* leaders can be also understood as a Rhizome. The multiplicity of agencies around the Collection is an ecosystem of social meanings. Nosso Sagrado is not only between institutions but also with the entities present within the sacred objects. The multiplicity such as in the concept of the Rhizomes can be understood, as Deleuze and Guatarri write, as roots which grow in a lateral, circular, non dichotomous and non-binary movement.

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The rhizomorphic form is structured around the connections made with different semiotic universes without the aim of reaching universal form, thus decentralising the principle of unity. The multiplicity of the Rhizome doesn't have a subject or object, but different fibres that hold together a system of variable dimensions.[42]

The musealization and creative process in Nosso Sagrado reconfigures traditional museum practices through dialogue and collective action. The distinction between subject and object fades, as the sacred nature of the objects is honoured through shared authority. The rhizomatic experience of Nosso Sagrado enables both poetic and political engagement, relying on active community participation. This exemplifies Social Museology, which highlights how museums can function as tools for democratic action in contemporary society.

The connection between Social Museology and the remusealization of Nosso Sagrado is evident during Mario Chagas's directorship of the institution.[43] In Brazil, Social Museology stands as a social movement beyond academics and universities standpoints. Social Museology is a museology with a strong social and ethical purpose, focused on fighting social injustices and inequalities through museum practices. Social museology is consciously opposed to the western and normative museology. It is a practice and theory working memory as a tool for liberation and in service of life.[44] Social Museology opens new pathways for understanding the museum as a space open for cultural diversitiy, which creates new relations through our material culture.

Social Museology works by recognizing the value in the memory of subaltern communities and how it can be used as a form for political resistance. The museological representation of oppressed communities and the collaboration with these communities allows new radical museum practices. The experience of Nosso Sagrado also points to a Social Museology practice made possible within a traditional museum, such as Museu da República.

Nosso Sagrado, as a flow of intention and perception, challenges the hegemonic museum paradigm. The profound transformation it brings establishes a new framework around shared curating and healing processes for sensitive museological collections, while promoting shared authority within museums.

Nosso Sagrado represents a historical turning point in museology. It cultivates an alternative universe of museum practices, emphasising curating as a healing process. It invites us to rethink what museums can become and how they can facilitate negotiation. It envisions a museum that embraces responsible and attentive citizenship while fulfilling a vital social function.

Axé!

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Endnotes

1 *Candomblé* is a religion structured in the African Diaspora in Brazil. Candomblé Ketu, Jêje and Angola are recreated expressions of traditional African religions brought to Brazilian territory during the transatlantic slave-trade. The temples of *Candomblé* are conducted by the priestess or priest, referred to as *Iyalorixá* or *Babalorixá,* existing in an autonomous and independent hierarchy. The *Candomblés* in Brazil could also be understood in the context of other African Diasporic religions in the Americas due to slavery, such as the Cuban Santeria and the Haitian Voodoo.

2 *Umbanda* is a Brazilian religion expressed largely in the syncretism of Spiritism, Candomblé, Catholicism and Indigenous traditions. Umbanda temples are autonomous and independent, having their own leaders referred to as *mãe de santo* or *pai de santo*. Different from *Candomblé*, in most *Umbanda* practises, *Exús*, *Pombagiras, Pombogiras,* the Christian God, catholic saints, angels and caboclos are worshipped, as well as *orixás*.

3 Lody 2005. About museological collections with stolen objects from *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* see "Coleção Afro do Xangô de Pernambuco", Museu do Estado de Pernambuco; "Coleção Perseverança", Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de Alagoas; "Coleção Estácio Lima", Museu Afro-Brasileiro-UFBA; and the "Acervo Afro-Pernambucano", Centro Cultural São Paulo.

4 A direct reference to the 2017 Declaration of Córdoba (MINOM, ICOM): "A museology that doesn't serve life, is worthless"; see Declaración de Córdoba 2017.

5 Fisher, Grinberg, Mattos 2018.

6 The Brazilian Slavery period lasted from 1500 up to 1888, being the last country in the Americas to abolish it.

7 Braga 1995, pp. 19-20.

8 About *calundu* see Reis 1988: Marcussi 2015; Ferreira 2016.

9 Gama 2018.

10 "Terreiro" is a broad term to refer to Candomblé and Umbanda temples.

11 Cabral 2017; Soares, Lima 2013. The Kumbukumbu Collection and Nosso Sagrado are distinct collections, but they share similar historical aspects in how they were formed.

12 Alves 2023. SPHAN - Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, now IPHAN - Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional.

13 Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum *et al.* 2021.

14 Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum *et al.* 2021.

15 Pereira 2017, p. 100-101.

16 Pereira 2017, p. 54.

17 Pereira 2023, p. 69.

18 Versiani, Chagas 2024.

19 In 1831, the first law against transatlantic slavery was published, Lei Feijó. However transatlantic slave trade continued up to 1850, when it was repressed by Lei Eusébio de Queiroz, leading to a higher internal slave trade concentrated around the coffee plantations in Vale do Paraíba, being abolished in the whole country in 1888.

20 Marretto 2020.

21 Nora 1997.

22 About the online exhibition of Nosso Sagrado see https://artsandculture.google.com/story/nosso-sagrado-museudarepublica/mwWx9m6ZCuqk5A?hl=en.

23 Pereira 2023, pp. 92-98.

24 "Exu Ijelú - Exu, Legbara and Nzila are the messengers between the human and

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the divine, respectively of the Ketu, Jeje and Angola nations. Vital Force that streamlines movement, path and communication"; Google Arts & Culture, n.d.

25 Versiani, Chagas 2024.

26 Divine Yorubá entities present in Candomblé and Umbanda.

27 Pereira 2023, p. 95.

28 Versiani, Chagas 2024 (Translated by the authors).

29 Brulon 2022, pp. 46-47.

30 Poulot 2013, pp. 62-63.

31 Brulon 2023, p. 105.

32 Sauvage 2010, p. 205.

33 Spivak 1988.

34 Brulon 2018, p. 201.

35 Karp, Lavine 1991, p. 15.

36 Preziosi 1998, p. 61.

37 Stocking 1985, p. 4.

38 Duncan, Wallach 1978.

39 Simas, Rufino 2020.

40 Versiani 2018.

41 Pantoja 2022, p. 37.

42 Deleuze, Guattari 1987.

43 In July 2024, Mario Chagas was dismissed as director of the Museu da República by IBRAM, citing misalignment with the institute's direction. The dismissal sparked strong reactions from academics and the press.While the link between his dismissal and the museum's receipt of a collection remains unclear, Chagas's leadership was instrumental in acquiring and collaboratively curating it with religious communities. Appointed via IBRAM's 2017 national selection, Chagas proposed implementing Social Museology to transform the museum, acknowledging its hegemonic and historical significance.

44 Chagas, Gouveia 2014.

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