

## **“Plantation Memories”, Anastácia, Dandara, and Zumbi, the Slave Ship São José, and the Farms of São Tomé, Or Slavery, Colonialism, and Racism in the Work of Women Artists<sup>1</sup>**

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### Abstract

In this essay, I examine the ways in which women artists – Grada Kilomba (Portugal, 1968), Ângela Ferreira (Mozambique, 1958), Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala (Mozambique, 1987), Meghna Singh (India, 1981), and Mónica de Miranda (Portugal, 1976) – have critically addressed the history and memory of slavery and colonialism, as well as their contemporary legacies in the form of structural, institutional, and everyday racism in Portuguese society and beyond. They have done so with a critical focus on the pioneering and pervasive role of the Portuguese in the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans to the Americas, and with an emphasis on the experience of black women. Their works require an analysis that is attentive to the history of the trade in the Indian Ocean, as well as to the continuities between slavery and forced labour after a merely formal abolition in the Portuguese colonial empire. They also call for an intersectional feminist reading, in their focus on race and gender, alongside class and sexuality. This essay reflects on the critical valences of contemporary art for a counter-hegemonic public memorialization of these silenced histories and their enduring legacies, in line with an idea of epistemic decolonization and systemic reparation.

Keywords: Grada Kilomba, Ângela Ferreira, Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala, Meghna Singh, Mónica de Miranda; slavery, colonialism, and racism; women artists; contemporary art.

In the Portuguese art scene, the history and memory of slavery, the transatlantic trade of enslaved people, and their resistance have not been a recurring theme. Such an absence is itself symptomatic of the difficulty in confronting the violence of a centuries-old phenomenon spanning multiple geographies on a global scale, and structural to the very formation of European modernity, capitalism, and so-called humanism (from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, from the liberal revolutions to republicanism). However, some contemporary women artists – both Portuguese and others who have done research and exhibited their work in Portugal – have developed relevant reflections on such history and memory and, in particular, on the specific and pervasive contribution of the Portuguese to the beginning and perpetuation of the trafficking of African women and men of various origins on the continent, across the Indian and Atlantic oceans towards the plantations (of sugar cane, coffee, cocoa, cotton, etc.) and mines (of gold, silver, diamonds, etc.) of the Americas, notably in Brazil. Their reflections inscribe the history of slavery and of the resistance to it not only in the historiographical narratives of Portuguese colonialism and of the anti-colonial struggles in Africa and the Americas, but also in the sociological accounts of their present-day legacies in the form of structural, institutional, and everyday racism and of anti-racist activism.

Through the analysis of works by Grada Kilomba (Portugal, b. 1968), Ângela Ferreira (Mozambique, b. 1958), Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala (Mozambique, b. 1987), Meghna Singh (India, b. 1981), and Mónica de Miranda (Portugal, b. 1976),<sup>2</sup> I shall highlight the epistemic and ethico-political relevance of artistic practice

<sup>1</sup> A much shorter version of this essay was first published in Portuguese in Balona de Oliveira, 2019a.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the focus on these artists' works, I call attention to the fact that, among others, the Brazilian artists Rosana Paulino and Jota Mombaça also exhibited relevant works in Portugal: *Red Atlantic (Atlântico Vermelho)* by Paulino was on view at the Padrão dos Descobrimentos, in Lisbon, in 2017; and *Occupation (Ocupação)* by Mombaça took place at Galeria Av. da Índia, in Lisbon, in 2018.

for the critical memorialization of slavery. Despite being very diverse, these artists' works nonetheless share poetic, personal, and subjective perspectives that are also assumedly ethico-political, social, and collective. Their practices are as deeply affective as they are rigorously conceptual and research-based (namely, in their use of several kinds of archives). They are visual as much as auditory, performative, three-dimensional, and textual. Of course, acknowledging aesthetic and political common grounds must go hand in hand with the recognition that these artists' different ethnic-racial positionalities, within structural processes of racialization and racism, have impacted disparately on their life and work.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009, about one hundred and a half skeletons of enslaved Africans, dated from the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, were found in an old dump in the Vale da Gafaria area, just outside the medieval wall of Lagos, in Portugal. This is the city that, in 1444, became the first gateway to the slave trade in Europe. Significantly, the museum and the memorial to enslaved people, which had been planned for the site, were never built, with a parking lot (the construction of which had led to the finding) and a mini-golf being erected in their place; whereas the remains were embarrassedly and quietly sent to and kept in Coimbra, receiving the attention of no more than a few national and foreign researchers.<sup>4</sup> The building of the former slave market in Lagos – the first in Europe – has an exhibiting space since 2010, which was slightly expanded in 2011. It was classified as a monument of public interest only in 2014, renovated in 2015, and reopened as a museum in 2016.

In *Wattle and Daub (Pau a Pique)* (2016), Ângela Ferreira counters the amnesia surrounding the Portuguese pioneering of the trafficking of enslaved people from West Africa, as well as its subsequent extension to East Africa and, in particular, Mozambique, through a contemporary image of the scaffolded façade of Lagos' old market, taken by Ferreira during its recent renovation. This photo is screened on gallery and museums walls from a sculptural installation that, resembling a fence, is made with wattle and daub (*pau a pique*), an architectural construction technique commonly used in Mozambique. Thus, by means of the architectural reference, always important in Ferreira's work, she adds visually, spatially, materially, and formally another contextual layer to the scaffolding on the old market's façade in the screened image, thereby interconnecting spaces and times, geographies and histories.

At Ferreira's invitation, this three-dimensional space was occupied and activated by the musical performance of the Mozambican singer Selma Uamusse, who, at the opening of the installation at Escola das Gaivotas, in Lisbon, in February 2016, sang *Zumbi* (1974), the famous song in homage to Zumbi dos Palmares (Brazil, 1655-1695) by the Brazilian Jorge Ben Jor (Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> Together with his partner Dandara, Zumbi was one of the most important leaders of the *quilombola* resistance against slavery and Portuguese colonialism in Brazil, and is today a symbol of Afro-Brazilian culture.<sup>6</sup> Born free in the Quilombo de Palmares (founded in the seventeenth century in the Alagoas region of north-eastern Brazil by formerly enslaved people who had rebelled and fled), Zumbi was its last king, having been murdered by the Portuguese in 1695, while Dandara, of whom little is known, is said to have preferred suicide to enslavement in 1694.

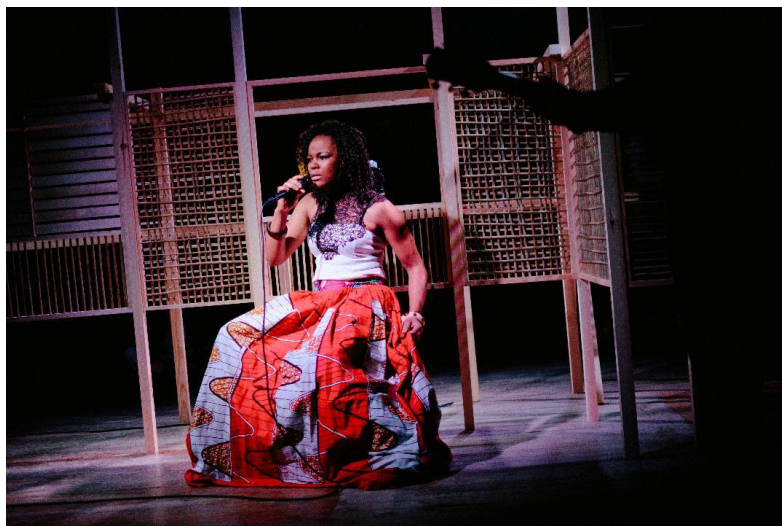
<sup>3</sup> Kilomba is a Portuguese of Angolan and São Tomean descent, who lives in Berlin; Kala is a Mozambican, who currently lives in Paris; Ferreira is a Mozambique-born Portuguese and South African, who lives in Lisbon; Singh is an Indian living in Cape Town; and Miranda is a Portuguese of Angolan descent, who lives in Lisbon.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Ferreira, Coelho & Wasterlain, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Ferreira's exhibition *Wattle and Daub (Pau a Pique)* was a part of the curatorial program *Old School*, developed by Susana Pomba. See Uamusse's performance in Ferreira's installation in Ferreira & Uamusse, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> *Quilombos* were the hinterland and highland settlements of escapee communities in Brazil.

**Figure 1:** Ângela Ferreira, *Wattle and Daub*, 2016. Performance by Selma Uamusse, *Ângela Ferreira, Wattle and Daub*, Escola das Gaivotas, Lisbon, 2016. Photo: Vera Marmelo. © Ângela Ferreira. Courtesy of the artist.



In Uamusse's musical performance in *Wattle and Daub*, the lyrics of Ben Jor's *Zumbi* underwent minor but relevant changes, since, between "Angola, Congo, Benguela / Monjolo, Cabinda, Mina / Quiloa, Rebolo", the singer inserted Lisbon, Maputo, and Nacala (in Nampula, in northern Mozambique), thus explicitly inscribing Portugal (within Europe) and Mozambique (within East Africa) in the set of Brazilian and African, Atlantic and Indian geographies referenced in the song.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, if *Zumbi* already expands Paul Gilroy's canonical Black Atlantic beyond Anglophone and Atlantic contexts (1993 & 2010), Uamusse's rendition connects Portugal and Mozambique decisively and specifically to the history and memory of the trade and slavery in Brazil; recalling, in particular, that in Lagos and Lisbon, too, there were large auctions with princesses and their subjects for sale,<sup>8</sup> and that people from East Africa were also enslaved in Brazil (beyond many other geographies, namely around the Indian ocean).<sup>9</sup> Ferreira's installation includes research material with explicit visual documentation of the skeletons found in Lagos, among old images of the slave market, information about the history of Portuguese colonialism, slavery, and *quilombola* resistance in Brazil, images of Ben Jor and Zumbi, as well as wattle and daub constructions in Mozambique.

Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala (in homage to her grandmother Zaituna) and Meghna Singh also devoted themselves to thinking about the global and transoceanic history of the trafficking of enslaved Africans to the Americas, with a focus on the role played by the Portuguese. Like Ferreira, to the extent that the geographies of their own personal histories partake of the broad cartography of this global history, Kala and

<sup>7</sup> Quiloa refers to territory of present-day Tanzania, which was temporarily occupied by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century.

<sup>8</sup> *Zumbi*'s lyrics mention a large auction with a princess and her subjects for sale: "... Aqui onde estão os homens / Há um grande leilão / Dizem que nele há / Uma princesa à venda / Que veio junto com seus súditos...".

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as we shall see, several works examined in this essay contribute towards the opening up of theories on the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993; Gilroy, 2010) and the Lusophone Black Atlantic (Naro, Sansi-Roca, Treece, 2007; Vale de Almeida, 2004), insofar as they explicitly include the Indian ocean in the history of the transatlantic slave trade and black Atlantic cultures, while keeping in mind the trans-Indian slave trade. See Harries, 2016; Vergès, 1999.

Singh addressed how East and Southern Africa and, in particular, Mozambique and South Africa make up contexts inextricable from the historiographical narrative of the trade and slavery. Coincidentally, both carried out research-based installations about the confirmation, around 2015, that the wreckage previously found off Cape Town belonged to the Portuguese slave ship *São José Paquete de África*, one of the first to transport enslaved people from Mozambique to Brazil, a route that would become frequent throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Having departed from Lisbon to Mozambique on April 19, 1794, this ship carried about five hundred Africans to the sugar plantations of Maranhão, in north-eastern Brazil, when, on December 27 of that year, it hit rocks in the Clifton area and wrecked. The crew survived, as did about half of the enslaved people, who were then sold in Cape Town, while the other half perished.

In *Sea (E)scapes* (2015-2018) (Fig. 2), which Kala started during a residency at Hangar – Artistic Research Center, in Lisbon, the artist elaborated a kind of poetic cartography using photography, video, drawing, found objects, sculpture, sound, text, and two performances in Lisbon and Cape Town (the documentation of which integrates the project).<sup>11</sup> Kala connected the collective histories of four geographic locations linked to the journey of the *Paquete São José*: the western tip of Europe in Portugal (to the north); the southern tip of Africa in South Africa (to the south); northern Mozambique (to the east), from where much of the Mozambican enslaved labour came; and north-eastern Brazil (to the west). She did so not only through the use of historical material found in archives in Lisbon, Cape Town, and Maputo, but also through her own journeys across (and embodied experience of) Lisbon, the Portuguese coast, Dakar, Maputo, Nampula, the Island of Mozambique, and the Cape of Good Hope. She recorded these journeys photographically with Polaroids, on which she wrote short texts commenting on these spaces. Such images are poetic, far from documentary, and mediated by a personal archive of Kala's own, as well as inherited experiences and memories (while her family lived through colonialism, which included male labour in the mines of apartheid South Africa, Kala lived in post-apartheid Johannesburg).<sup>12</sup> So, her gaze focuses decisively on the maritime landscapes of these spaces, united (through the specific geography and history of the *São José*) by the broader geographies and histories of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and their contemporary legacies, namely in the form of old and new, forced and voluntary migratory routes through which people and their cultures have circulated, both facing and resisting violence.

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<sup>10</sup> See Harries, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> The Lisbon performance took place in the framework of the collective exhibition *(Co)Habitar* at Casa da América Latina, in November 2016 (which also included Kala's *Measuring Blackness*, to be discussed below; see Brito Alves, Lamoni & Serra, 2018), while the Cape Town performance took place in the context of the *Infecting the City Festival*, in April 2017.

<sup>12</sup> See Kala's views on "becoming the archive" in Kala & Cotter, 2017. After her migratory experience in Johannesburg, Kala is currently living in Paris. Regarding the colonial migration of Mozambicans to the mines of apartheid South Africa, recruitment was often forced even when contracted. See Harries, 1994; O'Laughlin, 2002.

**Figure 2:** Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala, *Sea (E)scapes*, 2015-2018. Video still. © Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala. Courtesy of the artist.



Singh also furthered her reflections on these themes while spending time in Lisbon, in the context of a residency at Hangar. From a personal point of view, she was interested in thinking about the colonial and post-colonial histories shared by Portugal, India (where she was born), South Africa (where she lives), Mozambique, and Brazil, by identifying the traces of the São José off Cape Town, within the broader framework of her visual research on migration and globalization. Initially, she developed the video work *Our Story in This Ocean* (2015-present) and, more recently, with Simon Wood, she has been dedicated to *Container* (2017-present), an installation made with virtual reality technology. With the history of the São José as a starting point and background, *Container* focuses on contemporary forms of enslavement and the subaltern condition of a majority of racialized subjects who migrate in search of better living conditions, as opposed to the easy mobility of a privileged minority. It establishes an unequivocal link between the former slave ship, the current oceanic transport of commodity containers, and the often deadly sea crossings (reminiscent of the transatlantic trade) of subjects whose black bodies continue to be commoditized and oppressed. Marked by Singh's lived experience in, and of, Cape Town, *Container* also reveals how apartheid's socio-economic and ethnic-racial segregation is far from over, by staging a kind of trans-historical encounter between the enslaved black bodies of the São José and the white bodies of the wealthy South Africans who frequent Clifton Beach.

As a result of the artist's presence in the city of Lisbon, *Our Story in This Ocean* examines, in turn, the history of the São José in greater proximity to the specificity of this European context (while, at the same time, inscribing both this history and this geography in the expanded chronology and cartography of global capitalism, which the title itself indicates by locating this shared story in the ocean). In addition to data (obtained from archives in Cape Town and Lisbon) on the transatlantic slave trade, the key role played by the Portuguese in it, and the route, wreck, discovery, and identification of the wreckage of the São José in South Africa, the video installation includes images of (mostly public) statuary and murals commemorating the Portuguese so-called discoveries, which the artist visited in Lisbon. Noteworthy are the busts of African

people at the Tropical Botanical Garden in Belém;<sup>13</sup> the statue of Adamastor in the Santa Catarina viewpoint;<sup>14</sup> a bust of Vasco da Gama;<sup>15</sup> and Almada Negreiros' panels at the Maritime Terminals of Alcântara and Rocha do Conde de Óbidos.<sup>16</sup> The juxtaposition of these references in the video installation critically draws attention to how the celebratory and epic, public and private memorialization of Portuguese enslaving colonialism as a benign civilizing, scientific, and multicultural mission, following the lusotropicalist ideas propagated by the Estado Novo dictatorial regime (1926-1974),<sup>17</sup> to this day continues to whitewash the predatory and extractive economic motivation of such a project and the enormous violence (physical, psychic, and symbolic) on black subjects that sustained it.<sup>18</sup> The price to pay for such whitewashing is the persistence of this violence in post-colonial times permeated with coloniality, in the form of structural, institutional, and everyday racism in Portuguese society. Structural racism is evident, for example, in the socio-economic and ethnic-racial segregation of Lisbon's urban peripheries (beyond many other spheres of social, political, and cultural life).

The economic motivation of the colonial and enslaving enterprise is also underlined by Kala in the performative video *Measuring Blackness and a Guide to Many Other Industries* (2016) (**Fig. 3**). Traditionally considered a symbol of white female purity in the West and, via colonialism, beyond it, the white wedding dress becomes a kind of standard measurement based on which other white materials are weighed upon a set of scales.<sup>19</sup> These are some of the materials associated with the history of the European colonial conquest in Africa (in particular, Mozambique), the enslavement and trafficking of African people across the Indian and Atlantic oceans, slavery and forced labour (which, in the Portuguese empire, including Mozambique,

<sup>13</sup> The Tropical Botanical Garden was created as the Colonial Botanical Garden in 1906, and hosted the colonial section of the Exposition of the Portuguese World, an initiative undertaken by the Estado Novo in 1940 in Belém, Lisbon, where people from the Portuguese colonies in Africa were displayed (see Ferraz de Matos, 2006). It was named Overseas Garden in 1951, that is, at a time when, after the Second World War, the Estado Novo tried to justify the colonial status quo by all means, including a change in nomenclature: the colonies became overseas provinces and the empire was promoted as a multi-continental nation. The garden became Tropical only in 1983, almost a decade after the Carnation Revolution in 1974, which put an end to Estado Novo.

<sup>14</sup> The Adamastor was a mythical monstrous figure, which the Portuguese so-called discoverers had to defeat when passing through the Cape of Good Hope. It was famously written about in the sixteenth-century epic poem *Os Lusíadas*, by Luís Vaz de Camões.

<sup>15</sup> Vasco da Gama was the first known European to reach India by sea in 1498.

<sup>16</sup> Almada Negreiros was a Portuguese modernist artist, who kept an ambiguous position vis-à-vis the Estado Novo: although anti-establishment, he received commissions from the regime.

<sup>17</sup> Theorised by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, lusotropicalism was appropriated by the Estado Novo after the Second World War to justify Portugal's maintenance of its African colonies when other European countries started to decolonize. It propagated the idea that the Portuguese mixed more with the African populations they colonized and were more benevolent towards them than the other European colonizers. These ideas are still pervasive in Portuguese society. See, for instance, Castelo, 1998; Anderson, Roque & Ventura Santos, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> An important memorialization initiative countering the celebratory narrative was Djass – Association of Afro-descendants' proposal for a Memorial to Enslaved People in Lisbon, which was chosen by Lisboners in the framework of the municipal participatory budget voting process in 2017. Subsequently, Djass invited the artists Grada Kilomba (Portugal), Kiluanji Kia Henda (Angola), and Jaime Lauriano (Brazil) to present three proposals, which were voted in six public gatherings across the city, notably in peripheral Lisbon where many African and Afro-descendant communities live and who were especially invited to participate. The winning proposal to be built by Lisbon's municipality is Kia Henda's. Djass' modus operandi contrasted enormously with Lisbon mayor's tourism-driven, top-down intention to open a Discoveries Museum, which received fierce opposition from activists, artists, and academics.

<sup>19</sup> From her own personal history of marriage, separation, and divorce, Kala first examined the use of the white wedding dress in Mozambique in the photographic series *Entre-de-Lado* (2012-2017), which, together with *Measuring Blackness*, culminated in the installation *Imagine If Truth Was a Woman... And Why Not?* (2016), exhibited at the Dakar Biennial, in 2016 (Njami, 2016). In these works, the wedding dress is Kala's own. *Entre-de-Lado* began as a historical and critical reflection on the introduction of western wedding traditions and dresses into Mozambican cultural practices during the colonial era. In particular, she analysed the impact of the circulation of photographs of the famous wedding of Queen Victoria of England to Prince Albert in 1840 (which was re-enacted for the camera in 1854). Kala presented *Entre-de-Lado/As Queen Victoria* (2017) in the collective exhibition *Being Her(e)* at the Galeria do Banco Económico, in Luanda, in 2017-2018 (see Balona de Oliveira, 2018, 2019b, 2020a & 2020b).

and despite changes in the law, lasted practically until independence in 1975).<sup>20</sup> This is why the work's title points towards an actual *measurement of blackness* by means of the weighing of white materials. This weighing also hints critically at the ways in which, from enslaving so-called Renaissance and Enlightenment, to colonial and capitalist industrialisation, to post- and neo-colonial global capitalism, whiteness has become a widespread and deep-rooted trope, even as a colour, for what is generally deemed better, superior or more valuable. Hence, next to the wedding dress, and depending on its weight, the artist (here performing as her character *That [BLCK] Dress*)<sup>21</sup> places on the scales some of the African (more specifically, Mozambican) raw materials commercialised by Europeans (in particular, the Portuguese): ivory (which, "too scarce to be filmed", the artist warns us in words written on a sheet of paper stuck on the wall behind her, is substituted with paper), salt, bone (made from candle wax), coconut, cotton, and plaster powder (used in construction).<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 3:** Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala, *Measuring Blackness and a Guide to Many Other Industries*, 2016. Video still. © Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala. Courtesy of the artist.



<sup>20</sup> Mozambique's, Cape Verde's, São Tomé and Príncipe's and Angola's independence occurred in 1975, while Guinea-Bissau's was unilaterally declared by the PAIGC in 1973. On the continuities between slavery and forced labour in the Portuguese empire, see Bandeira Jerónimo & Monteiro, 2019; Castro Henriques, 2019. On forced labour in the Portuguese empire from 1944 to 1962, see Monteiro, 2018. On forced labour in Mozambique, see O'Laughlin, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Kala's performative persona *That [BLCK] Dress* appears in several works besides *Measuring Blackness*, such as *Telling Time: From Compound to City* (2014) and *Will See You in December...Tomorrow (WSYDT)* (2015). On the latter, see Balona de Oliveira, 2017 & 2020b. The former is a performative and conversational piece (with video) that took place twice a day (4am and 1pm) at the Jeppe train station, in Johannesburg. Kala reflected on the apartheid and post-apartheid commuting of black labourers to the city centre. In the early morning, in the absence of any announcement at the station – an apartheid legacy –, she announced the train times. In the afternoon, following a strategy similar to the one she would later use in the Maputo-based performance of *WSYDT*, she offered tea to commuters in exchange for their stories and memories of Johannesburg, whereby they also told of time, past and present. A camera recorded and screened their entering and exiting the conversation.

<sup>22</sup> When presented within the installation *Imagine If Truth Was a Woman* at the Dakar Biennial in 2016, *Measuring Blackness* was accompanied by other elements, namely text pieces with the written names of the six white materials (see Njami, 2016; Balona de Oliveira, 2019b, 2020a & 2020b). Kala worked purposefully with Mozambican materials: the salt and the wax came from Matola, near Maputo; the cotton, from Nampula, in northern Mozambique; the plaster powder, from a cement site near the Maputo airport.

Through visual and material presentation and performance, Kala deconstructs the notion of the European civilizing mission.<sup>23</sup> She unveils the intimate relationship, made visually, materially, and performatively explicit, between such purportedly benign civilizational ideals (notably female) and the violence of commodification (*measurement*) and genocide of black lives, and of the cultural epistemicide that accompanied them – a violence that, for black women living under slavery in plantation economies, acquired specific features, especially (though not exclusively) sexual ones, with enduring legacies.<sup>24</sup> The work's title presents this genocidal *measuring of blackness as a guide to many other industries*, whereby it underscores the necropolitical racialization (with its particular forms of [un]gendering black women outside of respectable white womanhood) at work in the capitalist and colonial exploitation of black bodies and labour by European modernity and industrial revolution (both before and after the abolitions) – a racialization that, under neo-colonial guises, continues to thrive in the present.<sup>25</sup>

Kala's critical analysis of whiteness is intensified chromatically by the fact that the entire space in which the performance unfolds is painted white, including the wall on which a map and other visual and textual elements are stuck, the table, the scales on which the artist determines the quantity of the raw materials based on the weight of the wedding dress, and the gloves with which she handles them, as if she had decided not to touch them with her bare hands, protecting herself. She thus highlights the blackness of her own body and dress, whilst at the same time signalling, by means of this very emphasis on black as a colour, that race is not only a social construct, but also a powerful one, with very real consequences for racialized subjects, and that racialization occurs both along and beyond purely colourist lines. Indeed, colourism as a preference for lighter skin tones is yet another instance of *measuring blackness* against the so-called standard of a white backdrop.

In Kala's deconstruction of whiteness, the black skin neither internalises, nor allows itself to be made invisible by the white masks, including female ones.<sup>26</sup> In line with intersectional feminism,<sup>27</sup> Kala examines how white supremacy, white feminism, and patriarchal anti-racism have denied the specificity of black women's experiences and the multiple forms of discrimination they face (for example, attempts to escape stereotypes of over-sexualisation have often culminated in conceptions of female respectability far stricter for black women).<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the whiteness of the wedding dress (and the similarly alienating white blackness of the widow, while also differing from sartorial expectations of Africanness and African femininity associated with the use of the *capulana*),<sup>29</sup> *That [BLCK] Dress* reasserts blackness as an embodied, historically

<sup>23</sup> On the Portuguese so-called civilizing mission between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, see, for instance, Bandeira Jerónimo, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> See hooks, 2015; Davis, 1983.

<sup>25</sup> See Mbembe, 2003, 2001, 2013 & 2016; Ferguson, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> See Fanon, 2008; Mama, 1995. As is well known, whiteness and "white masks" have also taken the shape of black faces on white bodies. In the performative video *Unlike Other Santas* (2013), Kala critically subverts, by appropriation, the entrenched racism of the stereotypical representations of the black body in the Dutch blackface tradition of the *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete). Displaced by a black female body – the artist's own –, the blackface is further disrupted by the cutting and shaving of the black hair and by a warrior-like face painting.

<sup>27</sup> On black, intersectional, post-, and decolonial feminisms, see, among others, hooks, 2015; Davis, 1983; Hill Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Spivak, 1988 & 1999; Mama, 1995; Vergès, 2017 & 2019.

<sup>28</sup> See hooks, 2015; Davis, 1983.

<sup>29</sup> Beyond the western female character of the bride dressed in white, in the Lisbon-based part of *Sea (E)scapes* Kala also looked at a related figure, a sort of "post" to the white bride: the old widow dressed in black, evoking namely the impoverished women left behind by the men who departed to the so-called discoveries and the colonial war (the wars of liberation in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau [1961-1974]). The artist sees this elderly woman, associated with oppressive stereotypes of female resignation and permanent mourning, as still prevalent in Portuguese society, notably the poor, rural, and religious. This figure, too, was propagated by the processes of colonization. To this white and



conscious, non-normatively gendered, and performative space of resistance to intersected racism, sexism, homo- and transphobia, and capitalism.

**Figure 4:** Grada Kilomba, *Table of Goods*, 2017. Installation view, *Grada Kilomba, Secrets to Tell*, MAAT, Lisbon, 2017-2018. Photo: Bruno Lopes. © Grada Kilomba. Courtesy of the artist and MAAT, Lisbon.



Raw materials associated with the history of slavery also appear in Grada Kilomba's *Table of Goods* (2017) (Fig. 4). In this case, cocoa powder, chocolate, ground coffee, coffee beans, and sugar appear amidst a circular elevation of vegetable soil, the perimeter of which is punctuated by wax candles. The installation evokes a memorial, in the form of a burial ground and ceremony, in homage to the enslaved ancestors who perished in the transatlantic crossings and plantation economies, not only of the Americas, but also, for example, in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe (countries to the diaspora of which the artist belongs).<sup>30</sup> Indeed, despite the legal reforms with which, before the independences (1973-1975), Portugal attempted to silence the growing internal and external pressure and struggle against its colonial empire (which included protests and revolts, the crushing of which ultimately led to the liberation wars in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique between 1961 and 1974),<sup>31</sup> forced labour nonetheless remained a common practice until

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patriarchal female sartorial blackness, Kala counter-poses the figure of *That [BLCK] Dress*, the character which she herself performs, and with which the black dress becomes a symbol of resistance to racist, patriarchal, and capitalist whiteness (see Balona de Oliveira, 2019b, 2020a & 2020b). Kala examines the *capulana* in *WSYDT* (see Balona de Oliveira, 2017 & 2020b).

<sup>30</sup> The homage in the form of the proper burial relates to the fact that enslaved ancestors were deprived from it, while evoking the protracted temporality of the collective trauma of slavery and colonialism, restaged in racism: "our history haunts us because it has been improperly buried" (Kilomba, 2008, p. 146). The use of soil also evokes the dirt eating by means of which enslaved people often committed suicide (Kilomba, 2008; Ferreira de Carvalho, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Some of these massacres were: Batepá (São Tomé, 1953); Baixa do Cassange (Angola, 1961); Mueda (Mozambique, 1960); Pdjiguiti (Guinea-Bissau, 1959); Wiriamu (Mozambique, 1972), etc. See, among others, Nascimento Rodrigues, 2018; Cabrita Mateus & Mateus, 2011; Dhada, 2016. The liberation war began in Angola in 1961, in Guinea-Bissau in 1963, and in Mozambique in 1964. It was fought by the MPLA and the FNLA in Angola (subsequently, also by UNITA); by the PAIGC in Guinea Bissau; and by FRELIMO in Mozambique. In São Tomé and Príncipe, the MLSTP was founded in exile in Gabon in 1960.

independence in various contexts.<sup>32</sup> São Tomé and Príncipe, in particular, has a complex history of various and successive forms of enslaved labour, named differently after the formal abolition of slavery in the archipelago in 1875, which was largely due to São Tomeans' constant resistance. Henceforth, Portugal resorted to the importation of labour from Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique to São Tomé and Príncipe's cocoa and coffee farms or *roças*.<sup>33</sup> Many of these plantations were nationalized after independence and, subsequently, progressively abandoned, but some of them were re-appropriated and their ruined spaces occupied in various ways by former workers and their descendants.<sup>34</sup>

**Figure 5:** Mónica de Miranda, *Untitled*, 2020. From the series *All That Burns Melts into Air*, 2020. Inkjet print on cotton paper, variable dimensions. © Mónica de Miranda. Courtesy of the artist.



This is the reality examined by Mónica de Miranda in the photography, video, and sculptural installation *All That Burns Melts into Air* (2020) (Fig. 5), made in São Tomé and Príncipe. Miranda draws from, while transforming, the famous phrase "all that is solid melts into air". Purportedly inspired by one of Prospero's speeches in Shakespeare's early seventeenth-century *The Tempest*,<sup>35</sup> the phrase was elaborated by Marx

<sup>32</sup> On forced labour until 1962, see Monteiro, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> After the formal abolition of 1875, enslaved people were replaced by *serviçais*, subsequently called *contratados*. São Tomeans' historical resistance (escapes, hinterland *quilombos* or *mocambos*, revolts, etc.) to both slavery and the subsequent forced labour culminated, firstly, in the destruction of many sugar plantations in the sixteenth century and the concomitant decline of sugar production, which was transferred to Brazil and later replaced by cocoa and coffee, and, secondly, in the importation of forced labour (*serviçais* and *contratados*) from Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique upon the formal abolition. The surviving former forced labourers, who stayed in the archipelago after independence in 1975, and their descendants comprise contemporary São Tomean society, with the inherited colonial hierarchy that keeps them at the bottom having far from disappeared in the post-colonial period. On this colonial hierarchy and its legacies, see Seibert, 2015. On São Tomean *quilombolas* and their descendants, the Angolares, the 1591 slave revolt led by Amador, and their lusotropicalist denial by the geographer Francisco Tenreiro, see Seibert, 2012. On the continuities between slavery and forced labour, see Bandeira Jerónimo & Monteiro, 2019; Castro Henriques, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> For an architectural history of the *roças*, see Pape & Rebelo de Andrade, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Prospero says: "Our revels now are ended. These our actors,/ As I foretold you, were all spirits and/ Are melted into air, into thin air:/ And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,/ The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,/ The solemn temples, the great globe itself,/ Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve/ And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,/ Leave

and Engels in their 1848 *The Communist Manifesto*,<sup>36</sup> and retrieved by the Marxist philosopher Marshall Berman as the main title of his 1982 *The Experience of Modernity*.<sup>37</sup> Despite these three texts' very distinct contexts and times of production, they share not only an overall euro- and ethnocentrism, but also a focus on major shifts, upheavals, and contradictions of Western modernity: from the earlier period of colonial conquest, slavery, and capitalist primitive accumulation in *The Tempest*,<sup>38</sup> to the industrial revolution and rise of proletarian resistance in *The Manifesto*, to views on modern life and culture since the nineteenth century in Berman's *Experience*.

By highlighting heating as that which turns solid matter into liquid and gas, and burning as a transformative and/or destructive process, Miranda retains such a focus through a decolonial lens, insofar as she reflects specifically on the historical and contemporary destruction of human and non-human lives and earth systems, brought about by the extractive and predatory colonial and neo-colonial histories of racial capitalism and its attendant conceptions of modernity. At the same time, she inscribes these global pasts and presents in the very specific former geographies and enduring legacies of the Portuguese empire. In her images, the ruined *roças* are inhabited by São Tomean young women gazing from, and at, architectural and natural landscapes that have been deeply fractured by colonial slavery and forced labour, post-colonial abandonment and neglect, and neo-colonial grip. Importantly, these young women's bodily presence also testifies to a history of resilience and resistance and a desire for repair and reparation. The artist thus signals aesthetically and politically the potency of a multifarious sense of "melting into air": the "burning" inherent to the colonial and neo-colonial profit-driven environmental destruction, which has culminated in climate change and global warming, increasingly occurring worldwide as actual raging fires and melting glaciers; the "burning" of resistance and revolt, turned literal when enslaved people set fire on plantations, the colonized began armed struggles, and anti-racists ignited fiery protests; the "burning" of the anti-colonial and post-independence revolutionary dream of liberation, irredeemably extinguished and, yet, flickeringly rekindled in artistic and activist imaginations for the future; the healing and hopeful "burning" of a warming communal bonfire, a nourishing cooking flame, a protective controlled blaze, or of an illuminating candle, which, flaring in homage to past ancestors, may reveal the way forward towards more egalitarian and sustainable futures.

Likewise, the first of Kala's two performances, in the framework of *Sea (E)scapes*, included references to the Mozambican workforce taken to São Tomé and Príncipe by the Portuguese, while, at the same time, it mapped an anti-colonial cartography by establishing a parallel between the Mozambican and the Guinean revolutions through readings from the Guinean writer Flaviano Mindela dos Santos's autobiographical memoirs *East of Everything: Chronicles of a Childhood* (2018), which Kala found in Lisbon. In the video *Not*

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not a rack behind. We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on, and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep" (Shakespeare in Hylton, 1993). See also Scott, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Marx and Engels resort to this phrase to describe the bourgeois epoch: "Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind" (2000 [1848, 1888]). See also Scott, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Berman states: "[modernity] pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air'" (1988, 15); "To be modern, I said, is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air" (1988, p. 345). See also Scott, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> On primitive accumulation, see Marx, 1999 [1867, 1887]).

*a Time for Labour* (2012), Kala analyses forced labour (even when contracted) in Mozambique, predominantly female in the fields and male in the mines of neighbouring apartheid South Africa;<sup>39</sup> the manifold forms of resistance to it; the enormous socio-economic and psychic wounds it left behind; the ways in which Samora Machel's socialist revolution promoted its conception of a "new man" (*homem novo*) around various forms of work that were considered necessary for the construction of the new nation; and the changes that took place in neo-liberal times.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in the case of the Portuguese empire (and others), legal abolitions (notably, the one dated from 1869, which was supposed to end slavery progressively in all colonial territories until 1878) did not correspond to actual abolitions. Moreover, beyond the historical issue of the continuities between slavery and forced labour, critical thought and action around the notion of abolition (arising from the histories of black resistance rather than white abolitionism) continue to be necessary today, insofar as the wounds of structural, institutional, and everyday racism, as legacies of a long past of enslaving colonialism, remain open in Portuguese society (and others). Such wounds affect non-white people (Black, Romany, and other racialized communities) in various ways, and racialized women (both cis- and transgender) in particular, due to the intersections of race, class, and gender.

**Figure 6:** Grada Kilomba, *Plantation Memories*, 2015. Installation view, *Grada Kilomba, Secrets to Tell*, MAAT, Lisbon, 2017-2018. Photo: Bruno Lopes. © Grada Kilomba. Courtesy of the artist and MAAT, Lisbon.



<sup>39</sup> See Harries, 1994; O'Laughlin, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Samora Machel was the first president of independent Mozambique. He led FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, the Marxist-Leninist liberation movement that began the armed struggle against the Portuguese in 1964) after Eduardo Mondlane's assassination on 3 February 1969 and until his death on 19 October 1986. The aeroplane in which Machel was travelling from Zambia to Mozambique crashed in a mountainous area in South Africa. There have been suspicions, never confirmed, that the South African government might have been involved in the accident.

Kilomba reminds us of such enduring legacies from an intersectional feminist perspective, especially in *Plantation Memories*, which took the form of both a publication (2008) and a video installation of staged readings (2015) (Fig. 6).<sup>41</sup> The title and subtitle of her book – *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* – immediately make evident the continuity of the past of the plantation in the present of everyday racism (experienced on the street, at work, in relationships, etc.). The memories and episodes narrated, and elaborated upon by Kilomba, include those of the author herself (whose voice assumes the first person throughout) and of the two black women she interviewed (Kathleen, an African-American, and Alicia, an Afro-German, whose experiences are also recounted in the first person).<sup>42</sup> Thus, Kilomba highlights the ethico-political relevance of personal and subjective testimonies and psychic realities for the production of history and knowledge (against the myths of universality, objectivity, and neutrality) (2008, 24-36). She recalls the vital importance of ancestry to think about the present, namely the diasporic, and imagine the future; and draws attention to the fact that the entangled trauma caused by slavery, colonialism, and racism, as well as many forms of resistance, struggle, and healing have been transmitted through the body and the voice over generations. *Plantation Memories* deals with the processes through which, to this day, black people – in particular, black women – have not only suffered, but also resisted the physical, psychic, and symbolic violence of being made invisible and silenced, by becoming subjects of presence and visibility, speech and writing, history and knowledge. Kilomba's writing memorializes the "improperly buried" collective trauma of the enslaving and colonial past, which continues to erupt and hurt through unacknowledged racism (2008, p. 146). Memorializing the colonial wound and exposing racism become necessary, therefore, for the black subject's healing and decolonization, and the white subject's recognition and reparation.<sup>43</sup>

Seven years after the book was first published, *Plantation Memories* came to life as a performance of staged readings for video, in which the body and voice of three black female and two black male performers enact Kilomba's, Alicia's, and Kathleen's memories, experiences, and reflections on everyday racism. "Without regret, pity, shame, or guilt", they "expose what has been kept quiet as a secret", i.e. the pervasive violence of racist and sexist stereotypes around the black female and male body and psyche.<sup>44</sup> In two screens juxtaposing images of one, a few, and all of the speaking performers, who address the viewer and, at times, one another, one is invited to watch and listen: "When people like me, they say that I'm not black; when they dislike me, they say that it's not because I'm black"; "I hate when people touch my hair, ask me where I'm from"; "She committed suicide; I think she was very lonely"; "I had to be better than all the others, three times, four; black and smart"; "I'm not aggressive; angry, because this is aggressive"; "They're not interested in hearing that I'm from Berlin; rather, they want to hear a very exotic story".<sup>45</sup> The inclusion of male actors alongside the female disrupts any essentialist conception of gender and sexuality, whereas the passage from printed to performatively spoken, audible, and visible narration heightens the embodied potency of *Plantation Memories'* words. From Kilomba's experiences, theorizations, and conversations (not

<sup>41</sup> See Kilomba, 2008, 2015a, 2015b, 2017 & 2018.

<sup>42</sup> These are fictive names.

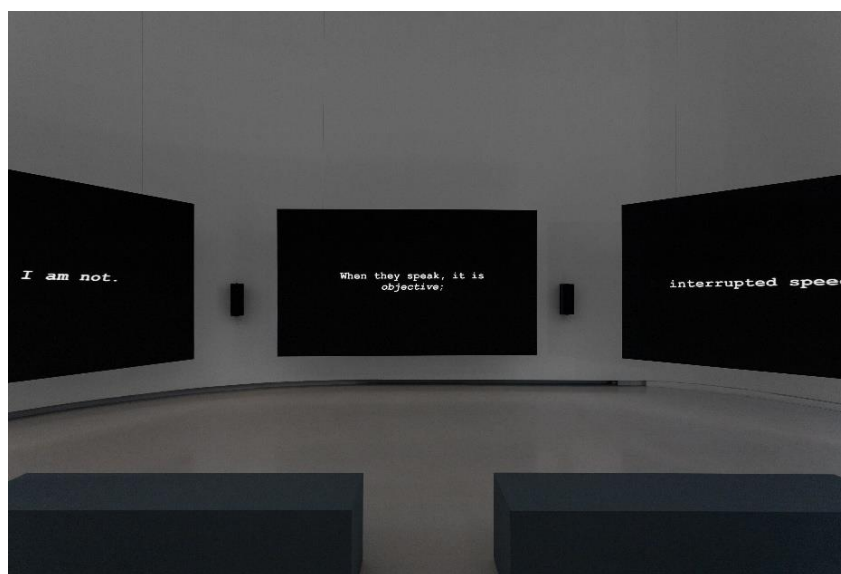
<sup>43</sup> According to Kilomba, the path towards the black subject's healing involves a sequence of ego defence mechanisms: negation, frustration, ambivalence, identification, and decolonization (2008, pp. 153-154). White subjects' ego defence mechanisms are denial, guilt, shame, recognition, and reparation (Kilomba, 2008, pp. 20-22). The latter gained visual presence as dictionary entries in the five-screen video work *The Dictionary* (2017) (Rapazote, 2018).

<sup>44</sup> See Kilomba, 2015a.

<sup>45</sup> See Kilomba, 2015a & 2015b.

only as an interviewer, but also lecturer and convenor),<sup>46</sup> to her written and printed publication, to the spoken performance for video, *Plantation Memories'* trajectory highlights the importance of oral and performative histories and knowledges, while never doing away with writing and the necessary task of countering the coloniality deeply embedded in both language and its silencing. In fact, besides the transition towards performative video, Kilomba's book also takes a spatial and architectural shape in the installation *Printed Room* (2017), in which *Plantation Memories'* pages cover entirely the walls of gallery spaces. Such pages are previously sent to, read, and annotated by invited collaborators, notably from African and Afro-descendant communities, whose written comments enter into dialogue with Kilomba's writing – a conversation that, accompanied by Moses Leo's sound, must be physically entered by viewers in order to be read.

**Figure 7:** Grada Kilomba, *The Desire Project*, 2015-2016. Installation view, *Grada Kilomba, Secrets to Tell*, MAAT, Lisbon, 2017-2018. Photo: Bruno Lopes. © Grada Kilomba. Courtesy of the artist and MAAT, Lisbon.



A similar decolonial thought and action is discernible in the video, sound, and textual installation *The Desire Project* (2015-2016) (Fig. 7), which is divided into the three acts *While I Walk*, *While I Speak*, and *While I Write*.<sup>47</sup> The three-channel video projection is visually made up of successive written words in white font on black screens, installed in a space which, filled with an immersive drumming sound (composed by Moses

<sup>46</sup> Kilomba curated and chaired the artist talk series *Kosmos*<sup>2</sup> at the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin between 2015 and 2017. The title of her series was critically retrieved from the *Kosmos* lecture series (1827-1828), delivered by Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) at the Singakademie – where the Gorki was later founded (1952) – after his travels to the Americas (1799-1804). The lectures were later published in his five-volume *Kosmos: Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* (*Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*) (1845-1862). Kilomba's series sought to problematize such a legacy with decolonial conversations.

<sup>47</sup> Despite being *The Desire Project's* third act, *While I Write* was the first to be made in 2015 (Kilomba, 2015c). As a whole, *The Desire Project* was commissioned by the 32<sup>nd</sup> São Paulo Biennial in 2016 (Volz & Rebouças, 2016; Kilomba, 2016; Ferreira de Carvalho, 2017).

Leo), viewers are invited to enter. The three acts unfold simultaneously (each on its own screen), so that viewers may follow them at the same time. In each of these acts, Kilomba's first-person script (I/we) recounts the ways in which the historical coloniality of everyday racism constantly tries to re-objectify black subjectivity, in a continuous restaging of the colonial past; and how the desire for the presence, visibility, and agency contained in walking (into all sorts of spaces, including the dominant),<sup>48</sup> speaking, and writing becomes a decolonizing and healing strategy of resistance. In *While I Walk*, citing Frantz Fanon, Kilomba writes: "I cannot go to a film/ (...) I wait for me./ I wait for the savages,/ the barbarians,/ the servants,/ the prostitutes,/ the whores,/ and the courtesans,/ the criminals,/ murderers,/ and drug dealers./ I wait for *what I am not* (...) *I am not* discriminated against,/ because I am *different*./ I become *different* through discrimination".<sup>49</sup> In *While I Speak*, one reads about the continuity of "an old colonial order", "a violent *hierarchy*" that defines, in oppositional, binary terms, who can be a subject of valid speech and knowledge: "They have *facts*,/ we have *opinions*./ They have *knowledges*,/ we have *experiences*". In both acts, plurals highlight critically the symbolic and psychic violence at work in the homogenizing fixity of racist stereotypes.<sup>50</sup> In *While I Write*, and despite language's entrenched coloniality ("I am embedded in a history of (...) forced idioms"), writing becomes a resistant tool for reclaiming agency for the black (female) subject: "While I write,/ I am not the 'Other',/ but the self,/ not the object,/ but the subject (...) I become me".<sup>51</sup> The accompanying soundtrack evokes historically resistant auditory and performative black knowledges around drumming, found in African cultural, spiritual, and religious practices that survived epistemicide both on the continent and in the plantation economies of the Americas, notably those related to ancestor calling and worship. The initial sound is actually comprised of a multitude of (presumably white) indistinct loud voices (recorded in public spaces), which, at first ignoring the drums' gradual appearance, become silent in order to listen. Indeed, the question is never solely whether the (female) subaltern can speak, in line with Gayatri Spivak's famous interpellation, for she has always spoken and resisted in one way or another (as Spivak concedes, despite her earlier negative reply [1988; 1999]),<sup>52</sup> Rather, the question must be whether her speech is heard or silenced, traced or effaced.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the drumming sound retains a subtle electronic quality, recalling the kinship between older and newer forms of black aural culture, which, in its rich diversity, has become a potent counterculture of modernity (Gilroy, 1993).<sup>54</sup> Whereas in *Plantation*

<sup>48</sup> Kilomba elaborates on the relevance, difficulties, and dangers of speaking at the centre (where one may finally enter but hardly stay), and a conception of the margin as a space not only of oppression, but also of resistance and possibility (which, however, must not be romanticized) (2008, pp. 24-36). She acknowledges the vital importance of brotherhood and sisterhood (2008, pp. 130-154), a sort of *aquilombamento* (indebted to the *quilombola* tradition of resistance).

<sup>49</sup> See Fanon, 2008 (1952, 1967), p. 107; Kilomba, 2008, p. 18.

<sup>50</sup> See Bhabha, 1994, pp. 94-120.

<sup>51</sup> *The Desire Project's* script is very indebted to *Plantation Memories* (the book), and *While I Write*, in particular, to Jacob Sam-La Rose's poetry, which Kilomba quotes at the beginning of her book: "Why do I write?/ 'Cause I have to./ 'Cause my voice,/ in all its dialects,/ has been silent too long" (2008, p. 10). For the complete acts, see Kilomba, 2016; Ferreira de Carvalho, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Spivak stated: "I was so unnerved by this failure of communication that, in the first version of this text, I wrote, in the accents of passionate lament: the subaltern cannot speak! It was an inadvisable remark. (...) after all, I am able to read Bhubaneswari's case, and therefore she *has* spoken in some way" (1999, pp. 308-309).

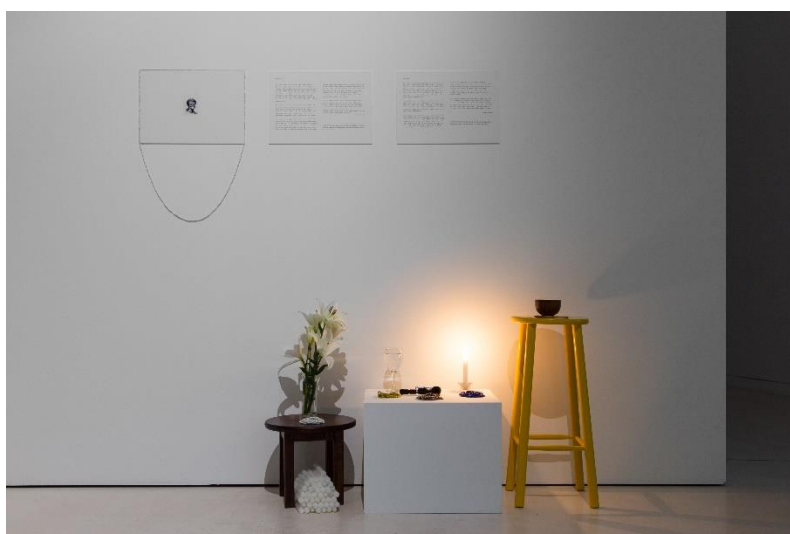
<sup>53</sup> Despite Spivak's later clarification, the question remained: "As I have been insisting, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri was not a 'true' subaltern. She was a woman of the middle class (...) What is at stake when we insist that the subaltern speaks?" (1999, pp. 308-309). Kilomba takes Spivak's caution into account: "It is unnecessary to choose between the positions of whether one can speak or not. Spivak, however, warns postcolonial critics against romanticizing the resistant subjects" (2008, p. 25).

<sup>54</sup> On musical and performative, alongside written and spoken, Black Atlantic culture, see Gilroy, 1993 & 2010. In the former, Gilroy elaborates on a (discursive) politics of fulfilment and a (performative) politics of transfiguration as the "sibling dimensions of black sensibility" (1993, p. 38).



*Memories* the performing body is visible and spoken words are audible, in *The Desire Project* the performing body becomes audible and written words, visible. Like *Plantation Memories*, *The Desire Project* unveils the deep connection between racism and the history of slavery and colonialism: not only through its written words and performative sounds, but also by paying homage to a speaking and silenced ancestor in *The Mask* (Fig. 8). This is an altar that, placed at the entrance of the video projection, is dedicated to the figure of the enslaved Anastácia.

**Figure 8:** Grada Kilomba, *The Mask*, 2017. Installation view, *Grada Kilomba, Secrets to Tell*, MAAT, Lisbon, 2017-2018. Photo: Bruno Lopes. © Grada Kilomba. Courtesy of the artist and MAAT, Lisbon.



It was Kilomba's grandmother who told her about Anastácia's story, urging her granddaughter never to forget it. An enslaved black woman in Brazil, Anastácia was forced to wear a mask over her mouth to silence her emancipatory words (and prevent white listening), having become, like Dandara and Zumbi, a symbol of resistance to slavery, colonialism, and racism (in particular, for black women), and a venerated figure in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé and Umbanda religions.<sup>55</sup> Every Friday in the living room of Kilomba's grandmother, they both used to place a lit candle, a white flower, a glass of clean water, and a bowl of fresh, unsweetened coffee next to the image of Anastácia, following Candomblé's worship of the Orixás, in particular, Oxalá. This creolized and resistant black religious tradition is often practiced in ancestor-calling

<sup>55</sup> There are different versions of Anastácia's biography, varying namely with regard to her place of birth (Angola, Nigeria or Bahia) and the reason for the mask punishment, which, despite variations, usually includes resistance to rape and other forms of resistance. Although her historical existence is doubtful, she became a revered figure in Afro-Brazilian religions and some catholic shrines, and a symbol for black feminism. Tin masks, iron collars, and other physical and psychic torture devices were commonly used in Brazil to silence, humiliate, and punish enslaved people. According to various accounts, the masks were intended to prevent them from eating food, such as sugar cane and cocoa beans, while working on the plantations, drinking alcohol, and committing suicide by dirt eating, etc. The image that became known as Anastácia's is the lithograph *Châtiment des Esclaves (Punishment of the Enslaved)* (1839) by the French Jacques Étienne Arago (1790-1854), which was first published in the first volume of his *Souvenirs d'un aveugle: Voyage autour du monde (Memories of a Blind: Journey around the World)* (1839-1840), and which derives from a drawing he made during his stays in Brazil (1817-1818, 1820), while travelling as a draftsman for a French so-called scientific expedition (Handler & Steiner, 2006; Handler & Heyes, 2009). For Kilomba's theoretical elaborations on silencing, speaking, and listening around Anastácia's mask, see Kilomba, 2008, pp. 13-22.



music and dance ceremonies – some of the auditory and performative black knowledges evoked by the drumming sounds of *The Desire Project*. In *The Mask*, Kilomba recreates in gallery and museum settings the Friday domestic altar of her grandmother's living room, making the same offering to Anastácia and inviting the viewers to partake in her homage by lighting their own candle. The altar includes a wall text next to Anastácia's image, recounting the artist's familial memory,<sup>56</sup> as well as the beads and smoking pipe of Candomblé.<sup>57</sup> The re-enactment of the female family ritual, based on this living ancestral knowledge, occurs in the immediate vicinity of the high-tech video projection, whereby material, digital, and spiritual forms of being and knowing become irrevocably enmeshed. Perpetuating the voices of Anastácia and her grandmother through her own (like Kala, who carries her grandmother's name next to hers) in the structurally white spaces of museums and galleries, Kilomba thus calls for the necessary and urgent white labour of listening, acknowledging, and repairing.

In conclusion, despite these artists' different backgrounds and experiences, notably vis-à-vis their own racialization and ethnic-racial positionality, and their fairly distinctive artistic practices, they can be said to assemble ethico-politically in their urging for a critical and counter-hegemonic public memorialization of slavery and colonialism, as well as their enduring racist, patriarchal, and capitalist legacies in contemporary Portugal and beyond. They meet around the acknowledged need for epistemic decolonization and systemic reparation. For my part, I hope to have made my own decolonial contribution by historicizing these artists' significant gestures.

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<sup>56</sup> For *The Mask's* wall text, see Ferreira de Carvalho, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Although Candomblé has been a part of Kilomba's life since her childhood, she has spoken about the relevance of her time spent in the Candomblé shops of São Paulo's peripheries for the making of *The Mask*, and of the significance of showing *The Desire Project* in Brazil (Kilomba, 2016).

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