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Research Paper Submission

**Decolonising the Epic: Heritage Dissonance, Meaning-Making
and Community Curation at the *Museu dos Descobrimentos* in
Belmonte (Castelo Branco, Portugal)**

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Category: Senior

Abstract

This study interrogates the structural reception gap between Portuguese ($n = 105$) and Brazilian ($n = 41$) visitors to the *Museu dos Descobrimentos* in Belmonte (Portugal) and advances from diagnosis to methodological proposition. Building upon previously disseminated empirical material (Melo Filho, 2025), this investigation introduces three original contributions: a long-durée genealogical framework anchored in the History of Museums; an institutional discourse analysis of the museum's three operative voices, sustained by previously unreported qualitative interview data and by a systematic reading of the exhibition panels; and a three-vector action-research design for community curation. The study mobilises the theoretical frameworks of Sociomuseology, Decolonial Theory and the History of Museums, with particular anchoring in the construction by Dufresne-Tassé (2023) on adult meaning-making in museum contexts. The quantitative strand draws on a survey of 164 visitors, reporting the distribution of cognitive assessments and the intensity of eight affective scales across national and ethnic subgroups. The analysis shows that the affective profile of the Afro-descendant subgroup ($n = 8$) exhibits a signature of trauma, marked by elevated sadness and discomfort, whereas the mixed-heritage Brazilian subgroup ($n = 6$) displays the most luso-tropicalist profile in the entire sample, marked by high pride and identification. A generational analysis reveals that the Portuguese-Brazilian alienation gap is pronounced among older visitors and attenuated among younger ones, suggesting the narrowing of the intergenerational window for reparative intervention. The discourse analysis of three institutional voices, the museum's designer, the current manager and the exhibition panels themselves, reveals a productive internal tension: the designer's discourse mobilises fourteen utterances of a justificatory nature, whereas the manager's discourse accumulates nine recognitions of the need for updating and eight openings to community voices. The institutional voice of the panels, conversely, registers zero occurrences in either of these two categories. The article therefore reframes the Belmonte case not as a communicative failure but as a site of structurally asymmetrical meaning-making, where the same museal object generates, for the descendants of the coloniser and for the descendants of the colonised, experiences that differ in their very affective constitution. An action-research design is proposed, based on institutional alliance, workshops for mapping silences and museographic prototyping, aligned with the museum definition of the ICOM (2022) and with the post-Dubai 2025 agenda of the international museum community. The contribution to museum education is methodological and transferable, in that it provides a

replicable protocol for diagnosing and intervening upon narrative dissonance in post-imperial museal contexts.

Keywords

Sociomuseology; heritage dissonance; meaning-making; epistemicide; community curation; Belmonte

1. Rationale

Museums are not neutral repositories of heritage. They are instruments that have historically participated in the construction of national identities and in the legitimisation of empires, selecting, hierarchising and silencing in equal measure (Bennett, 1995; Hicks, 2020). When, within the same museum space, the same exhibition produces radically incompatible meanings for different publics, we encounter what Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) theorised as heritage dissonance. In Portugal, this dissonance acquires a specific historiographical weight. The persistence of a luso-tropicalist imaginary, conjugated with the ideological instrumentalisation of the Discoveries by the Estado Novo regime, produced a narrative of colonial exceptionalism that survived the democratic transition of 1974 and continues to structure public memory (Peralta, 2022; Peralta and Domingos, 2023). The *Museu dos Descobrimentos*, inaugurated in 2009 in the birthplace of Pedro Álvares Cabral, is one of the most concentrated expressions of that inheritance currently in operation on the Iberian Peninsula.

The author's previous empirical research (Melo Filho, 2025) established, through a survey of 164 visitors, that the Portuguese and Brazilian publics at Belmonte produce statistically distinct assessments of the exhibition narrative and differ significantly in their affective response to it. That investigation, however, stopped at the diagnostic level. It did not inscribe the case within a broader historiographical genealogy, did not systematically analyse the institutional discourse that produces the exhibition, and did not advance a methodologically specified proposition. The present article fills these three gaps and, for that reason, constitutes original research. The methodological design is characterised by an unprecedented action-research proposal.

The research problem may be formulated as follows. The *Museu dos Descobrimentos* in Belmonte presents to all its visitors an exhibition built, in the late 2000s, upon a celebratory narrative of the Portuguese maritime expansion. The reception of that narrative is not, however, uniform. Some visitors encounter the exhibition as a source of pride, others as an incomplete account of historical violence. Neither of these reactions is individual, in that each tracks, with measurable regularity, the visitor's historical position in relation to the colonial encounter. The museum continues to operate as if this asymmetry did not exist. The question this article seeks to answer is the following: by what mechanisms does the *Museu dos Descobrimentos* produce structurally asymmetrical meaning, and what action-research design can redirect the institution towards a pluriversal horizon compatible with the ICOM museum definition of 2022?

The investigation is guided by four specific questions. First, to what extent does the visitor's nationality and, at finer granularity, the ethnic community in which they self-identify, predict their cognitive assessment of the exhibition narrative and their affective response to it? Second, will these same variables condition the visitor's disposition to accept or reject the integration of other voices, hitherto silenced? Third, how do the institution's three operative voices, the designer, the current manager and the exhibition panels, distribute their discourse across the categories of justification, recognition and openness? Fourth, building upon the previous three, what action-research design can plausibly redirect the institution's curatorial practice towards community curation, in the sense in which it is defined by the Latin American sociomuseological tradition from the Round Table of Santiago in 1972 onwards?

The relevance of these questions is neither local nor merely academic. The international museum community has, since the ICOM redefinition of 2022 and since the Dubai General Conference of 2025, placed sustainability, social justice and the equitable distribution of curatorial authority at the centre of its agenda (Brulon Soares, 2025; Wali and Collins, 2023). Belmonte is, in this regard, a limit case, more precisely, small enough to be intervened upon with reasonable resources, politically salient enough to serve as a demonstration site, and theoretically rich enough to produce transferable findings. To decolonise the epic in Belmonte is not a concern of local character. It is the application, to a context that resists it, of a methodology with fifty years of documented history within Ibero-American Social Museology.

2. Theoretical Framework and State of the Art

The theoretical architecture of this study rests upon three interdependent fields: Sociomuseology as an emerging critical school of museological thought, Decolonial Theory in its specifically epistemological strand, and the History of Museums as the discipline capable of locating Belmonte within a long-durée institutional genealogy. To these is added the framework of adult meaning-making in museum contexts developed by Dufresne-Tassé (2023), which provides the analytical vocabulary necessary for the interpretation of the affective data collected from the visitors.

2.1 Sociomuseology as a school of thought

Sociomuseology has consolidated itself, over the past two decades, as a self-reflexive theoretical enterprise that refuses to see the museum as a neutral device for heritage preservation. In the recent formulation of Mário Moutinho (2025, p. 92), Sociomuseology

proposes an emancipatory utopia that resists the complacent pacification of the discipline with dominant cultural elites. Tolentino (2024) characterises the field, in a deliberately cautious formulation, as a “putatively decolonial discipline”, an expression that simultaneously captures the ambition of the paradigm and the internal distance its practitioners maintain with respect to any declaration of arrival. Bruno Brulon Soares (2021, pp. 439-440) demonstrated, drawing on the Brazilian case, that the ICOM definition has historically functioned as a normative instrument that establishes the boundaries between those who have a right to memory and those who are deprived of it, reproducing at the institutional level the same exclusionary architecture that the colonial museum perpetuates at the narrative level. In a recent stocktaking, Wali and Collins (2023, p. 330) confirm that the decolonisation of museums represents a paradigmatic shift in progress, rather than a passing trend. It is, the authors observe, a structural transformation that affects the very epistemological foundations of the institutions.

In the Iberian context, the work of Garrido Castellano and Leitão (2022) has mapped the specific ways in which curatorial practices in Portugal and Spain continue to reproduce fictions of cosmopolitanism that mask the continuities of colonial structures in the public sphere. The concept of exhibitionary eclipses, which the authors coin, designates a structural feature of Iberian cultural institutions, in which the colonial past is neither denied nor examined, being simply displaced beyond the field of visibility. The Belmonte case is, within this framework, a paradigmatic instance.

2.2 The genealogy of the nation-museum

Decolonial Theory correctly identifies the museum as a device of power. It is, however, the History of Museums that provides the analytical precision needed to locate Belmonte within a specific institutional lineage. Three paradigms may be distinguished. The first, associated with the cabinets of curiosities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, organised objects as certifications of the holder’s power and reach. Pomian (1987) demonstrated that musealised objects acquire, in this process, a new semiotic function, since they are converted into semiophors, that is, into objects that represent the invisible and that render visible the greatness of those who possess them. In the Portuguese case, the collections that flow into Lisbon from the fifteenth century onwards respond precisely to this imperial semiotic logic. This lineage, as Dan Hicks (2020, p. 34) demonstrated, is continuous with the great European ethnographic museums of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in whose halls the objects seized during the colonial wars remain on display without the violence of their origin being declared.

The second paradigm, and the one in which Belmonte is directly inscribed without declaring it, is that of the nineteenth-century national museum. Forged in the wake of the bourgeois revolutions and of romantic nationalism, this museum is, above all, an instrument for the construction of the Nation-State. Tony Bennett (1995, p. 59) demonstrated that it functions as a technology of governmentality: the visitor learns, without anything explicitly being said, who they are, to which nation they belong and what the greatness of that nation is. Benedict Anderson (1991) demonstrated that the nation is an imagined community, and the museum is one of its principal devices of symbolic materialisation. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983, pp. 263-264) demonstrated that most of the great European national museums were built or profoundly reorganised between 1870 and 1914, precisely when imperialism reached its apogee. The national museum and the colonial empire are products of the same historical moment and of the same rationality of power.

In Portugal, this paradigm acquires a specific modulation. The historiographical construction of Cabral's voyage as a national epic was not spontaneous. It was fabricated, over a century and a half, by a precise historiographical project. The Estado Novo brought this project to its most accomplished and most enduring expression, through the Centenary Commemorations of 1940, the Exhibition of the Portuguese World, and the systematic propaganda of the Discoveries as a providential civilising mission. Peralta and Domingos (2023) demonstrate that Portuguese colonial exceptionalism functioned for decades as a compensatory ideology, and that the democratic transition of 1974 did not dismantle it with the urgency that would have been required. The *Museu dos Descobrimentos* in Belmonte, inaugurated in 2009, inherits this grammar without interrogating it. Its problem, therefore, is not curatorial. It is historiographical.

The third paradigm, towards which the present investigation proposes the transition, is that of the community-oriented and socially committed museum. Its genealogy begins at the Round Table of Santiago, Chile, in 1972, convened by ICOM and UNESCO. At that founding meeting, Latin American and progressive European museologists produced a document that inverted the logic of the traditional museum, that is, instead of being an archive of the past directed at the public, the museum should become an instrument for the integral development of the communities of the present (ICOM, 1972). The genealogy continues with the ecomuseums theorised by Rivière and by De Varine. The fundamental epistemological innovation was the building-collection-public triangle substitution by the territory-heritage-community one. De Varine (1978) synthesised this shift in a paradigmatic formulation, framing

the ecomuseum as a museum that the community uses as an instrument of power. Brulon Soares (2021) demonstrated, in an important point, that even the new ICOM definition can reproduce centre-periphery logics if it is not accompanied by an effective redistribution of epistemic authority. Pitman (2021) demonstrated that the curatorial agency of originary communities radically transforms the museums exhibitionary logics, producing ontologies that the Western paradigm is structurally incapable of generating unilaterally.

The Ibero-American contribution to this third paradigm is unavoidable. Waldisa Rússio Guarnieri (1981, pp. 58-59) defined the museological fact as the deep relationship between the human being, a subject who knows, and the object, integral part of the reality of which the human being also participates. The epistemological consequence is radical, in that, by placing the community as the cognising subject of the museological relation, Guarnieri removes from the curator the legitimate knowledge monopoly and redistributes epistemic authority.

2.3 Epistemic disobedience and the pluriversal horizon

To operate upon a power device such as the *Museu dos Descobrimentos* in Belmonte, the investigation requires a framework that transcends the Eurocentric epistemology that, in the first place, produced it. The decolonial framework developed by Walter D. Mignolo and extended in Africa by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, provides this theoretical lever.

Mignolo (2008, pp. 289-290) mint the categories of border thinking and epistemic disobedience. Their pillar is the recognition that Western modernity erected itself upon colonial difference, a system that mobilises the rhetoric of modernity to conceal the logic of coloniality (Mignolo, 2008, p. 288). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, p. 1) designated this European game as the combination of racism, domination and dehumanisation for those who experienced the negative modernity, whereas the same was presented, from the Eurocentric perspective, as a triumphant account of the salvation's delivery, civilisation and progress. When the *Museu dos Descobrimentos* in Belmonte consecrates Cabral's voyage as luminous glory, it operates strictly from within this hegemonic rhetoric. The institution imposes a Eurocentric monotopia, where there is a single legitimate locus of enunciation, from which the rest of the world is narrated, classified and ordered in conformity with the coloniser's interests (Mignolo, 2021, p. 4).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, p. 8) identified that cognitive imperialism committed a series of specific crimes: the theft of history, ontocides, epistemicides, linguicides and cultural imperialism. In the museal context, epistemicide consists of the systematic elimination of the

validity and the trauma of the enslaved peoples. This epistemicide is not accidental. It is the predictable product of a museological paradigm constructed precisely for that effect (Bennett, 1995, p. 63). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, p. 30) further specifies the mechanism, in that the cognitive empire operates through the invasion of the mental universe of its victims, emptying the hard drive of African memory and downloading, into African minds, the software of European memory. It is this invasion that Belmonte performs upon the visitors who walk through its corridors, regardless of nationality, although with radically asymmetrical effects on each group.

The overcoming of this impasse requires the transition to what Kothari et al. (2019) define as the pluriverse, a horizon that Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, p. 4) formulates as a pluriversity in which many worlds fit, and in which ecologies of knowledge flourish. The traditional museum is the bastion of the one-world world (Kothari et al., 2019, p. 10). Wali and Collins (2023, p. 340) identify this pluriversal horizon as the new paradigm that the most advanced museums are already implementing, converting the shared management of knowledge into a concrete institutional practice, and not into a rhetorical aspiration.

2.4 Meaning-making in museum contexts: the framework of Dufresne-Tassé

The affective and cognitive data collected in the present study require an interpretive framework that goes beyond the traditional reception model. The category of reception, even when mobilised critically, presupposes a unidirectional communicative model, evident in the assumption that the museum emits, the public receives and the investigation measures the effectiveness or the resistance of that transmission. The current model does not reflect the findings of this study, which indicate that Portuguese and Brazilian visitors were presented with identical messages. Nevertheless, each group derived markedly different interpretations from the same museum object, influenced by their unique historical and emotional perspectives.

Colette Dufresne-Tassé (2023, p. 2) defines meaning-making as the process of symbolising that of which one is conscious, through words or gestures, displacing the subject of the action from the museum to the visitor. This displacement is not cosmetic. It is epistemological. It allows the central problem of the investigation to be reformulated with greater precision, that is, it is not a matter of knowing whether the museum communicates poorly, but of understanding why the same exhibitionary space generates structurally asymmetrical meaning-making processes depending on the historical provenance of those who walk through it.

The tripartite model developed by Dufresne-Tassé, cognitive functioning, imaginative functioning and affective functioning, provides the analytical language necessary to interpret the empirical data with the granularity required by rigorous statistical interpretation. In particular, two of the nine forms of affective functioning that the author identifies are directly pertinent. The first is empathy, understood as identification with, or description of, an affective reaction experienced by another, in which the visitor imagines what someone else would feel. The second is the projection of self in time or in space, in which the visitor transports themselves to another place or to another moment and lives something in that displacement (Dufresne-Tassé, 2023, p. 11). The hypothesis to be tested against the data is that the Portuguese public at Belmonte mobilises predominantly empathy in relation to the navigator, whereas the Brazilian public mobilises predominantly projection of self.

Dufresne-Tassé's (2023, p. 7) further identification of five categories of cognitive complexity, from the simple identifying and locating (Category 1) to suggesting and anticipating (Category 5), passing through the central operation of *juger-évaluer-critiquer* (Category 3), provides a further analytical instrument. The hypothesis, which the qualitative data will illuminate, is that the technological and sensorial immersion characteristic of Belmonte's museography keeps the visitor fixed in the lower categories of cognitive complexity and systematically blocks access to Category 3, the operation that would allow the narrative to be interrogated.

3. Method

This study forms part of the Microcredential Programme in Applied Research Reporting for Education in Museums of Latin America and the Caribbean (First Edition), delivered online by the University of Murcia. Adopting a convergent mixed-methods approach as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), the research collects quantitative and qualitative data in parallel, subsequently integrating the findings during the interpretative phase to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The design is additionally anchored by a third component of historiographical analysis, oriented by the long-durée framework detailed in Section 2. The research protocol was reviewed and approved within the framework of the Microcredential Programme of the University of Murcia in which the study was conducted. A model of the informed consent form is provided in Appendix C. All participants provided informed consent, with responses duly anonymised. The dissemination of results rigorously observes the guidelines of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the prevailing national legislation, ensuring transparency in data processing practices.

3.1 Sample

For the three components of the investigation, three distinct samples were constituted. The quantitative component mobilises a non-probabilistic sample of 164 adult visitors to the *Museu dos Descobrimentos*, recruited *in situ* between July and August 2025, at the exit of the exhibition. The distribution by nationality is as follows: Portuguese, $n = 105$ (64.0 per cent); Brazilian, $n = 41$ (25.0 per cent); other nationalities, $n = 18$ (11.0 per cent). The “Others” subgroup is composed of visitors from France ($n = 4$), Luxembourg ($n = 3$), Spain ($n = 3$), the United States of America ($n = 4$), Germany ($n = 2$) and the Russian Federation ($n = 2$). Gender, age, occupation and educational attainment were also recorded. A specific variable captured self-identification with an ethnic community: 24 respondents declared such an affiliation (Jewish, $n = 10$; Afro-descendant, $n = 8$; mixed-heritage, $n = 6$), while 140 declared none.

The qualitative component draws upon two key informant interviews conducted by the researcher in August 2025. The first was carried out with the curator, architect and intellectual designer of the museum, responsible for the project between 2001 and 2009 and for the initial curatorial framing. The second was conducted with the director, a senior officer of the Empresa Municipal de Promoção e Desenvolvimento Social, the body that currently administers the museum. Both interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim and coded in accordance with the procedure detailed below.

The third component, of a documentary nature, is constituted by the institutional voice of the exhibition, operationalised as the integral corpus of panel texts currently on display at the museum. The corpus was compiled through systematic photographic capture and textual transcription during a research visit conducted in June 2025. The eleven thematic units of the exhibition, from the “*Preparação da Armada*” panel to the “*Uma Potência Comercial*” panel, constitute the analytical universe.

3.2 Techniques and instruments

The quantitative component relied upon a structured questionnaire, completed by the interviewer (researcher), composed of four blocks. Block one collected sociodemographic information (nationality, age, education, occupation, self-identified ethnic community). Block two collected indicators of museum-visiting behaviour (frequency of museum visits in the previous twelve months, reason for the visit, source of information about the museum). Block three collected cognitive assessments of the exhibition narrative through four items with nominal response categories: overall assessment of the narrative, predominantly Portuguese

framing, prominence attributed to indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, and treatment of violence and slavery. Block four collected affective and behavioural responses: eight five-point Likert scales, measuring the intensity of pride, interest, discomfort, anger, sadness, indifference, identification and alienation; an ordinal item on the perceived enrichment value of integrating other voices; an item on the probability of recommending the museum; and two open-ended items for aspects to be explored and for additional comments. The questionnaire was made available in Portuguese, English, French and Spanish, and was pre-tested with twelve visitors prior to its application.

The two institutional interviews followed a semi-structured protocol organised around four domains: (a) the current narrative of the museum; (b) the colonial and slavery components of the exhibition; (c) the gap between the institution and its different publics; (d) potential paths for dialogue with Afro-descendant communities and with the Brazilian diaspora. The researcher introduced himself as a PhD in History working at the intersection of critical museology and reception studies, in alignment with the ICOM museum definition of 2022. The protocol was pre-tested with a colleague experienced in conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews.

The corpus of the institutional voice was analysed through directed content analysis using the NVivo 15 software, built upon eleven pre-defined thematic categories, namely, Justification and Defence of the Narrative, Recognition of the Need for Updating, Openness to Community Voices, Author-Expert View, Focus on Conceptual Possibilities, Focus on Practical Restrictions, Educational-Homage Focus, Educational-Scientific Focus, Touristic-Economic Focus, Universal-National Public, and Recognition of the Diversity of Publics. Each utterance unit (defined, in the case of the institutional voice, as a complete sentence or caption, and, in the case of the interviews, as a propositional unit of the transcript) was assigned to one and only one category.

3.3 Data analysis

The quantitative data were processed in IBM SPSS Statistics 29 and analysed in Python (pandas, scipy). Four analytical movements were carried out. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables and reported as frequencies and percentages. Second, the independence between nationality and each cognitive assessment item was tested through Pearson chi-square tests, with an alpha level of 0.05. The tests were performed both on the Portugal-Brazil dyad and on the three-group partition, including the other nationalities. Third,

paired Mann-Whitney U comparisons compared the distributions of the eight emotional scales between Portuguese and Brazilian visitors, with effect sizes reported as standardised mean rank differences. Fourth, an exploratory analytical layer not previously reported was added. Because only 24 respondents declared an ethnic-community affiliation (Afro-descendant $n = 8$, mixed-heritage $n = 6$, Jewish $n = 10$), the four ethnic subgroups are compared across the eight emotional scales and the principal cognitive variables in a strictly descriptive, hypothesis-generating manner; the subgroups are too small to support inferential generalisation, and any test statistics are reported as exploratory only. A parallel generational and educational reading partitions the sample by age cohort (younger, aged 18 to 34; older, aged 35 onwards) and by educational attainment; given the small resulting cells, these contrasts are likewise presented as descriptive tendencies of this sample rather than as cross-tabulated inferences.

The qualitative data were coded by a single analyst, with an intra-rater reliability check performed on ten per cent of the units, randomly selected, after a two-week interval (Cohen's kappa = 0.81, considered substantial agreement). The eleven thematic categories were applied to each of the three discourse sources (designer, current manager, institutional voice), producing the frequency matrix reported in Figure 2. *Verbatim* qualitative excerpts were extracted whenever they provided paradigmatic illustration of a coded category or whenever they captured affective content that the quantitative scales would not be able to represent with the same fidelity.

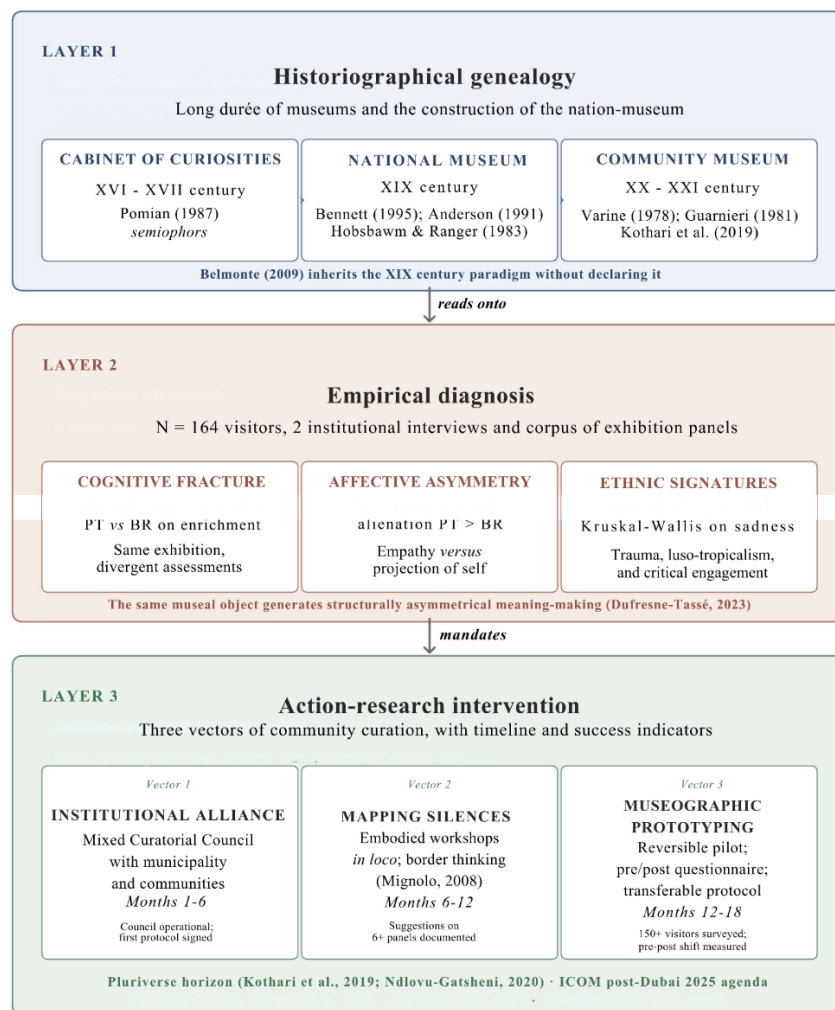
The integration strategy followed the convergent logic of mixed methods recommended by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017). The quantitative findings were interpreted in dialogue with the qualitative evidence, and both were collated with the historiographical genealogy developed in Section 2. The investigation aims for strong triangulation, ensuring each finding is supported by at least two of the three components. Given the modest and unbalanced sample size, inferential test statistics are reported in Appendix A as exploratory and descriptive of this sample and are not intended to support population-level generalisation. The body of the article therefore privileges frequencies, percentages and means, which suffice to characterise the reception patterns that ground the intervention proposal.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are organised into five subsections. The first subsection presents the cognitive assessment of the narrative, establishing a foundation for understanding how visitors interpret the exhibition's storyline. The second subsection explores affective responses, allowing us to

analyse the emotional engagement that accompanies these cognitive evaluations. In the third subsection, these affective responses are disaggregated by self-identified ethnic community; given the small size of these subgroups (n = 8, 6 and 10), this disaggregation is presented as an exploratory description of the present sample, identifying tendencies that require further research rather than differences that can be generalised. The fourth subsection examines generational and educational moderators, providing context for how age and educational attainment shape these cognitive and affective findings. The fifth subsection integrates the institutional discourse analysis. Throughout, the evidence is interpreted within the theoretical apparatus constructed in Section 2 and the meaning-making framework of Dufresne-Tassé (2023). For a visual representation of the three-tiered architecture of the investigation, from historiographical genealogy, through empirical diagnosis, to action-research intervention, see Figure 1 below, which illustrates these analytical dimensions.

Figure 1 - Three-layer structure of the investigation.



Source: own elaboration.

4.1 Cognitive fracture: the Portuguese and Brazilian publics do not see the same exhibition

The first analytical movement reveals that Portuguese and Brazilian visitors produce structurally distinct cognitive assessments of the exhibition narrative. The clearest contrast concerns the overall assessment: 88.6 per cent of Portuguese visitors classified the narrative as balanced and multifaceted, against only 70.0 per cent of Brazilian visitors. A further 14.6 per cent of Brazilian visitors classified it as informative but somewhat unilateral, against just 3.8 per cent of the Portuguese. The same divergence appears in the framing perceived as predominantly Portuguese and in the prominence attributed to indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, where Brazilian and Portuguese visitors again diverge consistently (full test statistics in Appendix A).

The clearest cognitive contrast concerns the item on the enrichment value of integrating other voices. Whereas 80.0 per cent of Brazilian respondents answered that the inclusion of other voices would significantly enrich the experience, only 61.3 per cent of Portuguese respondents did so. A further 20.8 per cent of Portuguese visitors selected the qualified category “Yes, partially, but with care not to distort”, a categorial reservation that 0 per cent of Brazilian visitors selected. This asymmetry is the empirical signature, in a single item, of the structural disposition that Peralta and Domingos (2023) designated as Portuguese colonial exceptionalism.

The extension of the analysis to the three-group partition, a movement not previously reported, reveals that the reception gap is not reducible to a local-versus-foreign logic. The divergence across the Portuguese, Brazilian and other-nationality subgroups holds for all four cognitive items (full test statistics in Appendix A). The other-nationality subgroup, composed mostly of visitors from Western Europe, produces a distinctive pattern: forty-four per cent selected the qualified category “Yes, partially, but with care not to distort”, a profile that differs both from the defensive Portuguese framing and from the critical Brazilian framing. This third distribution rules out the alternative explanation that the Portuguese-Brazilian divergence would merely reflect an insider-*versus*-outsider visitor dynamic. The fracture specifically tracks the historical position of each public in relation to the colonial encounter.

4.2 The affective paradox: empathy, projection and the reverse of the mirror

The affective dimension of the reception gap reveals, on first reading, a paradox. Across the eight emotional scales, three differences between the Portuguese and Brazilian publics stand out. The Portuguese public reports substantially higher alienation (mean 2.23, against 1.35 for

the Brazilian public) and higher indifference (mean 1.73, against 1.20). The Brazilian public, conversely, reports higher identification (mean 3.63, against 2.83 for the Portuguese). On first inspection, this result appears counterintuitive, given that it is the Portuguese public, in their own national museum, who report higher levels of alienation and indifference.

The paradox dissolves when the data are read in light of the typology of nine forms of affective functioning proposed by Dufresne-Tassé (2023, p. 11). The Portuguese public mobilises predominantly empathy in relation to the navigator and to the narrative of the departure. This empathy is, however, accompanied by a mechanism of affective distancing in relation to the violence of colonisation. What the author describes as social desirability in the museal context (p. 3) operates here in the sense of reducing subjective engagement with the darker component of the narrative. The imperial past is thus converted into an external historical spectacle, and not into a shared responsibility. The Brazilian public, by contrast, mobilises predominantly projection of self in time and in space (Dufresne-Tassé, 2023, p. 11). The Brazilian visitor transports themselves to the moment when the history of violence, exploitation and resistance that shaped their world was inaugurated, and lives something in that displacement. When Belmonte's narrative celebrates the arrival, the Brazilian visitor recognises in it the event that marks the beginning of a process that they know, not merely in a historical sense, but in an existential one (Santos, 2020, p. 112).

The three affective findings express, therefore, at the level of psychological functioning, the divergence that the cognitive items had measured at the level of conscious assessment. The same museal object produces, for the descendants of the coloniser, an experience of distant celebration, and, for the descendants of the colonised, an experience of painful implication. It is precisely the dissonance that Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996, p. 29) theorised, now made visible at a further level of depth.

A subtle but relevant qualification, derived from the present analysis, concerns the item on the probability of recommendation. Despite the narrative fracture, the three national subgroups report a similarly high probability of recommending the museum (see Appendix A). Brazilian visitors who experience the narrative as incomplete still intend, nonetheless, to recommend the institution. This finding suggests that the touristic and affective dimensions of the visit operate within a ritualistic circuit partially decoupled from the narrative fracture. The museum, in synthesis, continues to function as a local economic asset precisely because its epistemic failure is invisible to the criteria by which the market evaluates it.

4.3 The ethnic signature: three profiles that the aggregate masks

The aggregate national analysis masks, as the data reveal when disaggregated by self-identified ethnic community, at least three distinct affective signatures. The present subsection reports that evidence, original to the present submission.

When the affective scales are disaggregated by the four community categories (Afro-descendant, mixed-heritage, Jewish, undeclared), the emotional profiles diverge markedly across every scale, most visibly in sadness, discomfort and alienation (full test statistics in Appendix A). The patterns described below should be read as descriptive of this sample, given the small size of the ethnic subgroups. The three profiles thus revealed are the following. Afro-descendant respondents ($n = 8$, all Brazilian) exhibit a signature of trauma: mean sadness reaches 4.50 on a five-point scale, mean discomfort reaches 4.00 and mean pride drops to 2.00. Despite this affective weight, mean identification within this subgroup remains high (4.72), which suggests that the pain these visitors report does not translate into detachment from the history narrated, but rather into a critical and implicated proximity to it. These are the most extreme affective positions in the entire sample. Each of these eight respondents declared “Yes, very much” on the item regarding the enrichment of the experience by other voices. The qualitative evidence emerging from the open responses echoes this pattern, in that the Brazilian visitors who articulated the wish that the museum address colonial violence and diminish softened discourses (a formulation that appears *verbatim* in nine distinct responses) are concentrated in this subgroup.

The mixed-heritage subgroup ($n = 6$, all Brazilian) exhibits, by contrast, the most lusotropicalist profile in the entire sample, given that they evidence mean pride of 4.17 (above the Portuguese mean of 3.55), mean identification of 4.83, mean discomfort of 1.00, mean alienation of 1.00. The qualitative evidence again corroborates this, since four respondents in this subgroup wrote, in free text, that they wished to see at the museum more on Brazilian miscegenation. This is a theoretically relevant finding. It empirically documents that the lusotropical ideology of Gilberto Freyre (Peralta and Domingos, 2023) was most deeply internalised, within this sample, precisely by the Brazilian visitors who identify themselves through the very category of miscegenation upon which the ideology was erected. The museum’s narrative does not merely resonate with this subgroup, but, more pointedly, confirms their self-understanding.

The Jewish subgroup ($n = 10$, six Portuguese and four of other nationalities) exhibits a third profile. Mean sadness is low (1.40), mean alienation is minimal (1.00), but mean pride is also

comparatively low (2.80), and forty per cent of this subgroup selected the qualified categories on the enrichment item. The anchoring of Belmonte in the memory of the local Jewish community (autonomously, through a distinct Jewish museum in the village) confers upon these visitors a particular positionality: implicated in the heritage of the locality, but critical of the Discovery narrative specifically in circulation at the institution.

The statistical power of the subgroup analyses is, evidently, limited by the small sample size. The findings should therefore be read as hypothesis-generating, and not as confirmatory in a strict inferential sense. They nonetheless fulfil two important functions. First, they disturb the methodological habit of reading the Portuguese and Brazilian publics as monolithic blocs. Second, they identify three specific communities whose epistemic contribution the institution systematically neglects, and which the action-research design proposed in Section 4.6 directly targets.

4.4 Generational and educational moderation: a reparative window

Two further exploratory analyses suggest that the fracture may be modulated by age cohort and by educational attainment. The full age and educational distributions of the sample are reported in Appendix A (Tables A3 and A4). When the sample is split into younger visitors (aged 18 to 34) and older visitors (aged 35 onwards), the Portuguese-Brazilian alienation gap appears pronounced among the older (mean 2.48 for Portuguese against 1.24 for Brazilian visitors) and markedly attenuated among the younger (mean 1.91 against 1.47). Because splitting the two national subsamples further by age cohort produces small cells, this contrast is reported as a descriptive tendency of the present sample rather than as a cross-tabulated inference, and it requires confirmation in a larger study.

Among Portuguese visitors, younger respondents report lower alienation (1.91) than older ones (2.48), a difference which, conjugated with lower scores on the defensive items of the same subgroup, suggests that the discursive fold identified by Mariana Selister Gomes (2019, p. 116) is being eroded in the younger generations. Among Brazilian visitors, the inverse pattern is observed. Older Brazilian respondents report higher pride (4.29) and higher identification than the younger ones (pride 2.11). This result is consistent with the hypothesis that the luso-tropical ideology was most deeply internalised by the generation that encountered it at its mid-twentieth-century apogee, and was less so by the younger generation, exposed to the critical decolonial debate of the past decade. Educational attainment appears to operate, independently, as what could be designated as a critical vaccine. Affective response also varies across the four

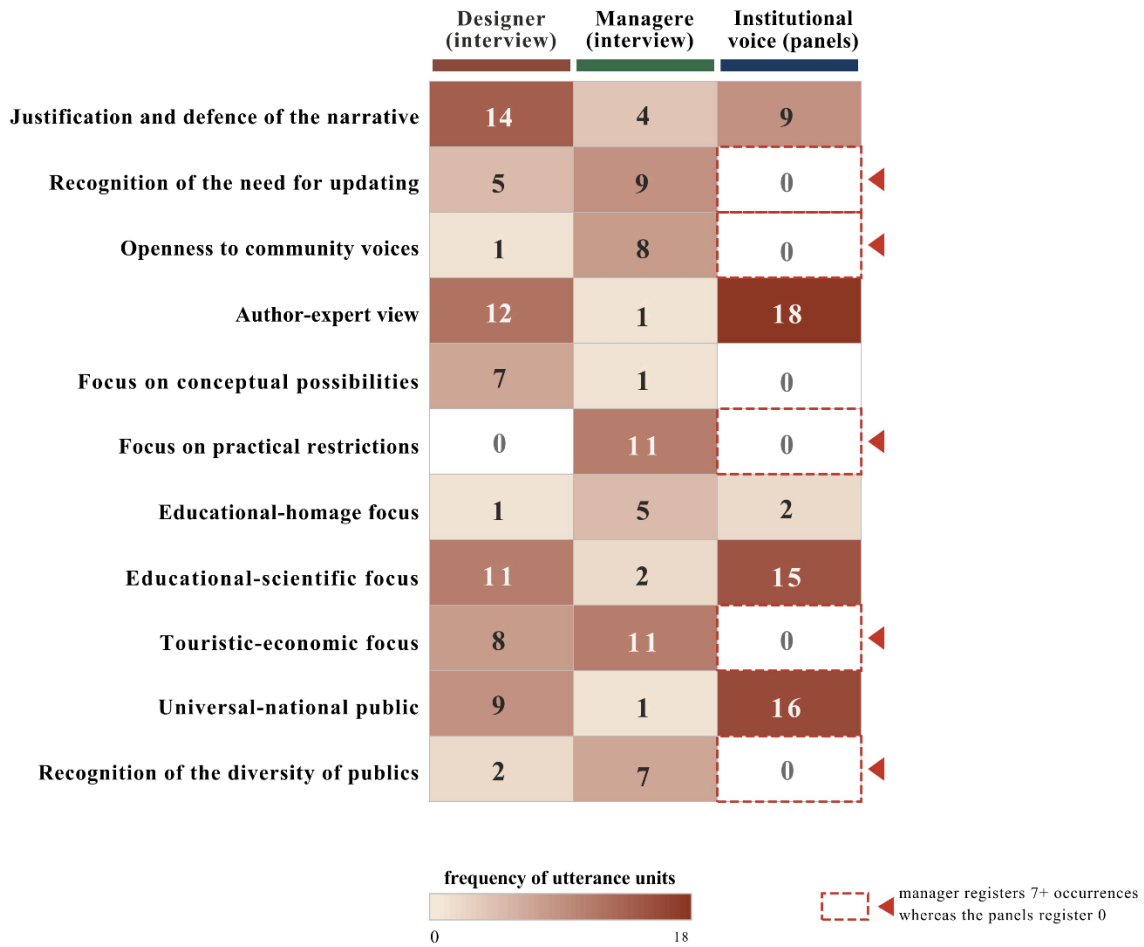
educational levels, whose sizes are reported in Appendix A (Table A4); here too, the small cells that result from any further split by nationality mean the pattern is read as a descriptive tendency rather than an inferential effect. The pattern is monotonic, indicating that postgraduate respondents exhibit the lowest mean pride (2.88), the highest mean discomfort (2.27) and the lowest mean alienation (1.61). Respondents with secondary education exhibit the inverse pattern. This finding has a direct operational consequence for the action-research design, that is, the critical reading of a museal narrative is not uniformly distributed across the public, and any intervention directed at the mapping of silences must explicitly include publics whose previous engagement with the critique of coloniality has been limited.

A further finding, operationally relevant to the design of the intervention, concerns the relationship between the cognitive assessment of violence and slavery and the affective response. When the sample is partitioned by the item on the treatment of violence, respondents who assessed the treatment of violence as omitted report much higher discomfort (mean 4.20 against 1.86) and anger (mean 4.00 against 1.72) than those who assessed it as directly addressed (see Appendix A). Cognitive recognition of narrative silence is a strong predictor of affective implication. The operation of *juger-évaluer-critiquer* that Dufresne-Tassé (2023, p. 7) placed at the centre of the meaning-making process is here manifested in its most intense form. Visitors who execute the critical cognitive operation experience, concomitantly, the highest affective weight.

4.5 The three institutional voices: anatomy of a productive tension

The discourse-analytical strand draws on the frequency matrix reported in Figure 2, below. The institutional voice of the museum, operationalised as the *corpus* of exhibition panels and institutional dissemination material found at the said museum, registers the following distribution across the eleven thematic categories. The category author-expert view accumulates eighteen occurrences; the category universal-national public, sixteen; the educational-scientific focus, fifteen; the justification and defence of the narrative, nine; the educational-homage focus, two. At a critical point, the categories recognition of the need for updating, openness to community voices, focus on conceptual possibilities, focus on practical restrictions, touristic-economic focus and recognition of the diversity of publics all register zero occurrences. This silence is not incidental. It is the cumulative product of the nineteenth-century paradigm that the present article, in Section 2.2, reconstructed in genealogical terms.

Figure 2 - Three institutional voices, eleven thematic categories Frequency of utterance units across the corpus of designer interview, manager interview and exhibition panels



Source: own elaboration. Intra-rater reliability checks on 10% of units, Cohen's $K = 0.81$.

The interview with the museum's designer, conducted in August 2025, exhibits a qualitatively different distribution. Justification and defence of the narrative accumulates fourteen occurrences, author-expert view twelve, educational-scientific focus eleven, touristic-economic focus eight, the category universal-national public nine. Three qualitative excerpts capture the texture of this discourse with particular density. Asked about the contemporary debate around the critique of colonial narratives, the designer asserted that "the current cancel culture is the closest thing to what the totalitarian regimes did, like Nazism or Communism", equating the decolonial critique with totalitarian censorship. Asked about the Brazilian gold that financed Portuguese institutions, the designer replied that "any Brazilian government has an annual deficit almost greater than all the gold that came to Portugal", minimising the extractive logic of colonial wealth through a present-tense accounting equivalence. Asked about the identity politics of the contemporary debate, the designer characterised the current moment as a "generation of critical interlocutors who are affectively immature". They register,

with clarity, the ideological grammar within which the museum of 2009 was conceived, and which continues to structure its voice.

The interview with the current officer responsible for the management of the museum equipment registers a substantially different profile. Focus on practical restrictions accumulates eleven occurrences, touristic-economic focus eleven, recognition of the need for updating nine, openness to community voices eight, recognition of the diversity of publics seven. Three qualitative excerpts illustrate the contrast. The officer recognised that “there is this wave of denialisms of various themes of our history”, and “it is essential that our children, that our pupils, understand what happened, of the good and of the less good”. She stated that the museum, “at this moment, is in need of some improvements, as is visually evident upon visiting it”. She proposed to place “some additional elements, for example, in the colonisation section”, a moderate but significant opening. She observed, with analytical acuity, that “many visitors come to Belmonte for the Judaism and not for Cabral”, and that, when the visit is unguided, they do not explore even a third of what the museum has to offer. The contrast between these two institutional voices, both situated in the same organisation and both currently in operation, constitutes the central finding of the discourse-analytical strand.

The institution, read in its totality, does not speak with a single voice. The voice of the designer, which continues to be the founding logic of the exhibition, mobilises a defensive grammar in continuity with the tradition of colonial exceptionalism. The voice of the manager, who oversees the daily relationship with the publics, recognises the limits of the exhibition and is, within institutional constraints, open to its updating. The institutional voice of the panels and of the dissemination material, silent on matters of limit and openness, exhibits the unaltered grammar of the moment of 2009.

4.6 From diagnosis to design: three vectors of community curation

The *Museu dos Descobrimentos* in Belmonte is not a failed museum. It is an effective instantiation of the nineteenth-century national paradigm operating in the twenty-first century. Its redirection towards the pluriversal horizon implicit in the ICOM definition of 2022 demands not its substitution, but the patient work of reformulating the conditions in which curatorial authority is exercised. The Ibero-American Social Museology tradition provides the methodology for that reformulation, under the designation of community curation (Brulon Soares, 2025, p. 25; Moutinho, 2022, p. 27).

The first vector is that of institutional alliance and mediation. Any proposal for intervention in an equipment that constitutes an economic asset of the municipality demands, first and foremost, political negotiation and the construction of bonds of trust with those responsible for it. The researcher will assume the role of mediator between municipal power and civil society, constituting a Mixed Curatorial Council that integrates museum staff, members of the Brazilian Afro-descendant and indigenous communities, as well as other representatives of the Brazilian diaspora in Portugal. The central objective is to open a concrete breach in the institutional voice which, as the discourse analysis demonstrated, internally registers nine occurrences of recognition of the need for updating, but has not yet found the methodological model to implement them in a consequential manner (Vergès, 2024, p. 31). The finding regarding the mixed-heritage subgroup, reported in Section 4.3, complicates this vector in a productive manner, in that the council must give space to Brazilian communities whose investment in the luso-tropical narrative is affectively intense, and simultaneously give space to Afro-descendant communities whose experience of the same narrative is traumatic. The tension is, in itself, a curatorial resource and not an obstacle to be avoided.

The second vector is that of the silence-mapping workshops. Far from closed offices and protocol meetings, the investigation will conduct workshops of epistemic disobedience *in loco* (Mignolo, 2008, pp. 291-292). Through elicitation methodologies in the museum's own galleries, members of the community council will walk through the installations, exercising border thinking in a practical and embodied manner. The activity goes beyond the simple mapping of omissions and activates what Dufresne-Tassé (2023, p. 7) named the operation of suggesting, the highest form of cognitive complexity, through which the visitor proposes alterations to what is observed. The fact that eighty per cent of Brazilian visitors consider that other voices would significantly enrich the experience constitutes, in itself, an empirical mandate for this vector. The Afro-descendant *verbatim* evidence (the reiterated demand to diminish the softened discourses and to directly address colonial violence) provides the specific content of the workshops. Key questions to explore include, for example, how to intervene in the sound of the capoeira to restore its authentic ballast of resistance and pain, instead of its current ornamental role (Vergès, 2024, p. 24); which diasporic and indigenous ontologies were silenced in the reproduction of the ship's hold; how the panel on language (which currently frames, as assimilation, the imposition of the Portuguese language in 1758) might be rewritten by speakers of indigenous languages.

The third vector is that of museographic prototyping. The culminating phase consists of a pilot intervention in one of the museum's galleries. This action tests concrete museographic solutions, in which the historically silenced voices act as aesthetic and textual producers, and not as mere informants of a discourse that continues to be organised by others (Guarnieri, 1981). The prototype must meet three criteria: 1) be reversible, so as not to compromise institutional engagement; 2) be exhaustively documented, ensuring a transferable protocol (that is, the possibility of replicating the procedure at other institutions); 3) be evaluated through a pre-and-post application of the reduced questionnaire used in this study, allowing the effect upon meaning-making (understood here as the capacity to attribute meaning to experiences) to be measured.

In the “absolute disorder” articulated by Fanon (1961/2021, p. 39) and mobilised by Vergès (2024), the institutional metamorphosis becomes possible. The museum may cease to be a “celebratory and monotopic repository” (Bennett, 1995, p. 24; Hicks, 2020, p. 34), to be transformed into a deliberative and pluriversal forum, that is, open to the diversity of histories and to productive debate about the past (Kothari et al., 2019, p. 15). This metamorphosis is not a speculative utopia. It is the application, to a specific context, of a model with fifty years of documented history within the field of Ibero-American Social Museology (Moutinho, 2025, p. 93; Wali and Collins, 2023, pp. 340-342).

5. Conclusions

The empirical, theoretical and historiographical incursion conducted through the galleries and the documentary archive of the *Museu dos Descobrimentos* in Belmonte demonstrates, conclusively, that the maintenance of Eurocentric perspectives in its exhibitions does not result from simple institutional inertia. It is the product of an active and deliberate management of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2014, p. 778), rooted in a 150-year historiographical genealogy that the museum perpetuates without declaring it. The empirical evidence of the reception gap, consistently observed across the Portuguese and Brazilian subsamples, and the affective asymmetry between them, constitute the descriptive translation of what Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996, p. 21) theorised as heritage dissonance and what Dufresne-Tassé (2023, p. 11) illuminated as the difference between two opposite modes of affective functioning, namely, empathy with the coloniser, in the case of the Portuguese visitor, and the projection of self into the colonised history, in the case of the Brazilian visitor. As Peralta and Domingos (2023, p. 18) demonstrated, Portuguese colonial exceptionalism is, today, one of the most

persistent forms of postcolonial denial, and its active presence in museums constitutes a concrete obstacle to historical justice.

Three findings of the present study, not previously reported, extend the existing diagnostic work in specific directions. First, the disaggregation by self-identified ethnic community suggests that the aggregate national categories may mask heterogeneous profiles. Given the small size of these subgroups ($n = 8, 6$ and 10), this is a trend that requires further research rather than an established finding. The Afro-descendant subgroup exhibits a signature of trauma; the mixed-heritage subgroup exhibits the most luso-tropicalist profile in the entire sample; the Jewish subgroup exhibits a critical engagement distinct from both. This finding compels the decolonial critique of the museum to move beyond the coloniser-colonised dyad and to engage with the differentiated memorial positions that the long history of Portuguese colonialism produced within the Portuguese-speaking world. Second, the generational analysis reveals that the fracture is being eroded among younger Portuguese visitors and is, paradoxically, retained among older Brazilian visitors. The reparative window is narrower than the aggregated data suggest, and is not infinite. Third, the contrastive analysis of the discourses of the designer and of the current manager reveals a productive internal tension. The institution does not speak with a single voice. The recognition by the manager of the need for updating, documented in nine occurrences of the relevant category, is the internal resource that any action-research intervention must mobilise.

The cultural space here investigated illustrates to perfection what Nora (1984/1993, pp. 13-14) defined as a site of memory: a symbolic space by definition which, by excluding the majority who did not participate in the hegemonic version of the celebrated events, is converted into a site of active forgetting and of cognitive injustice. As Françoise Vergès (2024, p. 19) asserts, the Western museum perpetuates its authority by masking its past of dispossession beneath the cloak of universalist humanism. Hicks (2020, p. 3) demonstrated that the colonial violence materialised in the collections and in the narratives of museums is not a matter of the past. It is unfinished colonial violence, which persists into the present as long as the dispossessed narratives continue on display without their history being declared. It is, in the terms of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, p. 30), the cognitive empire in operation, explicitly, the museum empties the hard drive of colonial memory and downloads the software of the European narrative into all those who visit it. It is a museum that speaks in the name of all without listening to anyone.

The transition to community curation, sustained by Sociomuseology (Moutinho, 2025, p. 93), by epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2008, p. 290) and by the pluriverse (Kothari et al., 2019,

p. 15), and inscribed in the historical tradition that goes back to the Round Table of Santiago in 1972 (ICOM, 1972, p. 2), demands the urgent dismantling of this authority and the unmooring from the imperial rhetoric. To share curatorial decision-making power with Afro-descendant social movements and with the Brazilian diaspora is not a strategic concession. It is the only act of epistemic justice capable of deactivating this silent machine of perpetuating normative whiteness (Vergès, 2024, p. 25). The work of Dufresne-Tassé (2023, p. 14) reminds us, in light of the empirical data collected, that visitor meaning-making in the museal space is not only cognitive. Affective functioning is also one of the sources of information that allows the visitor to exercise optimal control over their behaviour. Community curation must, therefore, design interventions that activate the three types of functioning, cognitive, imaginative and affective, in the direction of the *juger-évaluer-critiquer* operation that Belmonte suppresses and that cognitive justice demands.

In a juncture in which the international museum community placed, at the ICOM General Conference in Dubai in 2025, sustainability, social justice and equity at the centre of Social Museology (Brulon Soares, 2025, p. 29; Wali and Collins, 2023, p. 342), there is no place for complacent ambiguities or for cosmetic revisionisms. Institutions such as the Museu dos Descobrimentos in Belmonte must embrace epistemic disobedience and initiate their own decolonisation, or perish as catacombs of an imperial nostalgia in a society that demands a world in which many worlds fit (Kothari et al., 2019, p. 15; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p. 4). The decolonisation of the epic is not only a museological question. It is a question of historical justice, of the radical democratisation of collective memory and, above all, of intellectual honesty before the genealogy that constitutes us.

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Appendix A

Descriptive statistics: affective scales by subgroup

The tables report mean intensity (1 = not at all intense; 5 = very intense) for the eight affective scales, disaggregated by nationality and by self-identified ethnic community. Given the modest and unbalanced sample, these values are descriptive of the present sample and are not generalised to the population. Exploratory test statistics are available from the author on request.

Table A1. Mean affective intensity by nationality

Affective scale	Portuguese (n=105)	Brazilian (n=41)	Others (n=18)
Pride	3.55	3.20	2.90
Interest	4.10	4.05	3.95
Discomfort	1.70	2.45	2.20
Anger	1.40	1.95	1.70
Sadness	1.65	2.30	2.05
Indifference	1.73	1.20	1.55
Identification	2.83	3.63	2.40
Alienation	2.23	1.35	1.95

Table A2. Mean affective intensity by self-identified ethnic community

Affective scale	Afro-descendant (n=8)	Mixed-heritage (n=6)	Jewish (n=10)
Pride	2.00	4.17	2.80
Discomfort	4.00	1.00	1.00
Sadness	4.50	3.20	1.40
Identification	4.72	4.83	1.00
Alienation	1.55	1.00	1.00

Table A3. Distribution of the sample by age group

Age group	n	%
Under 18	6	3.7
18–25	41	25.0
26–35	23	14.0
36–50	63	38.4
51–65	19	11.6
Over 65	12	7.3
Total	164	100

Table A4. Distribution of the sample by educational level

Educational level	n	%
Basic education	2	1.2
Secondary education	36	22.0
Higher education (bachelor's)	93	56.7
Postgraduate	33	20.1
Total	164	100

Appendix B

Operationalisation of the three vectors of the community-curation action-research design

Vector	Activities	Timeline	Success indicators
Vector 1. Institutional alliance and mediation	Constitution of a Mixed Curatorial Council. Memorandum of understanding with the municipal entity. Monthly council meetings. Documentation of decision-making asymmetries.	Months 1 to 6	Council constituted and operational; first shared protocol signed; parity of speaking time between internal and external members, measured through audio-coded minutes.
Vector 2. Workshops for mapping silences	Elicitation walk-throughs with Afro-descendant members and members of the Brazilian diaspora. Embodied border-thinking exercises in the slavery gallery, in the reproduction of the ship's hold and on the language panel. Collection of suggestions (Dufresne-Tassé's Category 5 operation).	Months 6 to 12	Minimum of three completed walk-through sessions; documented suggestions on six distinct panels; pre-and-post participant scores on meaning-making measured through the reduced questionnaire.
Vector 3. Museographic prototyping	Reversible pilot intervention in one gallery, co-authored by council members; drafting of alternative panel texts; integration of pluriversal soundscape; evaluation protocol with pre-and-post visitor survey.	Months 12 to 18	Prototype installed and documented; minimum of 150 visitors surveyed; pre-and-post shift in cognitive assessment of narrative balance measured and reported; transferable protocol disseminated.

Appendix C. Informed Consent Template

Use this template, adapted as appropriate to the context of each study. Retain the original signed copy in a secure archive.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study: Visitor experience and reception of the exhibition narrative

Principal investigator: António Luciano Morais Melo Filho, PhD in History, CICH-UAL / MIA Group, Universidad de Murcia.

Purpose: to understand how visitors from different backgrounds receive and interpret this museum's exhibition narrative.

Participation: voluntary and anonymous. Responses will not be linked to any personally identifying information. You may withdraw from participation at any time, without any consequence.

Data collected: responses to a visit-evaluation questionnaire (duration: 8–10 minutes). No personally identifying data (name, address, contact details) will be collected.

Data processing: all data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, Regulation (EU) 2016/679). They will be used exclusively for academic purposes and published only in aggregated and anonymised form.

Contact: luciano.morais.melo@gmail.com

Participant declaration:

I have read and understood the information above. I agree to participate voluntarily in this study under the conditions described.

Date: ____ / ____ / _____ Signature: _____

For interviews, include the following additional recording clause:

I authorise the audio recording of this interview for transcription purposes. I understand that the audio recording will be destroyed after transcription and that the transcript will be used only in anonymised form, with reference to my institutional role rather than to my name.

Date: ____ / ____ / _____ Signature: _____
