

During the construction for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, an archaeological site of tremendous importance resurfaced: the Cais do Valongo (Valongo Wharf), main port of entry of enslaved African people to the Americas. Between 1811, the year of its construction, through the two decades of its operation, around a million Africans walked across the Cais do Valongo’s paved ground before being subjugated to the gruesome process of having their bodies exchanged for money. Exactly two centuries after its construction, in 2011, the buried wharf reemerged as a physical testimony of a history that is never again to be forgotten.

That same year, the state government of Rio de Janeiro attempted to demolish the old Museu do Índio (Museum of the Indian), a nineteenth-century building that has traditionally been a site for the discussion, promotion, and protection of Brazilian Indigenous cultures. Abandoned in 1978 when the museum was transferred to a new location, the building had been occupied since 2006 by people from approximately twenty different Indigenous groups intending to create a cultural center and symbolic place from which to claim their rights with the state. The eviction of the inhabitants and the attempted demolition of the building were part of construction performed near the adjacent Maracanã soccer stadium leading up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Brazil has conceived of itself as a racial democracy, a place where the historical coexistence and mixture of Amerindian, European, and African peoples and cultures creates a unique national identity based on tolerant race relations. The idea of a racial democracy has been used to gloss over the sharp racial inequalities that characterize Brazilian society. Although this concept has been contested starting from the mid-twentieth century by scholars such as Florestan Fernandes, it remains quite popular to this day. This essay compares the cases of the Cais do Valongo and the old Museu do Índio to explore how Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous communities have always been marginalized within official histories of Brazil and have fought for the protection of historical sites as enduring visual and spatial markers of their struggles and contributions to Brazilian history and cultural identity.

Anthropologist and historian Lilia Schwarcz, using Pierre Nora’s concept of lieu de mémoire (memory spaces), argues that disenfranchised communities can invest sites with symbolic meanings to tell a history that is different from that which the political and financial powers want to promote.1 In this essay I argue that to add to efforts from the communities involved, we must also expand the concept of heritage to allow for the co-existence of Western and non-Western models and the expression of different cultural identities within the urban fabric. I draw from the idea by Laurajane Smith, expert on cultural heritage, according to whom there is no such a thing as heritage, but rather an authorized heritage discourse that naturalizes a certain set of Western elite cultural values as being universally applicable.2 The two case studies demonstrate how the Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous communities challenged the authorized heritage discourse and expose the difficulties they encountered in negotiating a space in the hegemonic processes of heritage management, which fails to recognize not only alternative histories to the official one, but also the legacy of past events on current social dynamics. This approach to scholarship, which puts in dialogue urban and heritage studies, politically engaged archaeology and social anthropology, history, civil law and memory studies, is also a call to activism.

CAIS DO VALONGO

The Cais do Valongo was unearthed during the excavation phase of Porto Maravilha, an ambitious plan to renovate the historic port area of Rio de Janeiro in anticipation of the 2016 Olympic Games. The area around the Cais do Valongo was developed in the 1770s, when slave disembarking and

trade were moved from Praça XV de Novembro, in the center of the city, to the north in order to spare the Portuguese elite the spectacle of emaciated and ill Africans arriving on Brazilian territory. The rate of mortality was so high that a common grave had to be constructed for those who did not survive to live a life of captivity, abuse, and discrimination. Brazil bought and exploited the largest number of enslaved Africans in the Americas, with some estimates reaching over four million, and was the last country to abolish slavery in 1888, a year before becoming a republic.

The wharf went through several renovations over the course of two centuries. Its reappearance was not unexpected: historians, archaeologists, and some residents were aware that under layers of dirt and neglect there were the vestiges of the African genocide that had lasted for over three centuries. The Cais do Valongo, in fact, is located in an area that until the mid-twentieth century was known as Pequena África (Little Africa), which includes the neighborhoods of Gamboa, Santo Cristo, and Saúde. Physical reminders of the slave trade include the wharf, the burial site, and the slave market in Rua Camerino. The Pedra do Sul, an area considered the mythical place of origin of Afro-Brazilian samba music and a remnant urban quilombo, represents instead a space of resistance to slavery and a site celebrating African contributions to Brazil’s culture and history.

Despite the historical importance of Pequena África, the public administration did not show signs of interest in digging up this aspect of the city’s past, and the memory of slavery had very little physical prominence in the architectural landscape of the metropolis. Historians Ana Lucia Araujo and Dain Borges maintain that until a few decades ago, Brazilian politicians and intellectuals attempted to cleanse slavery from public spaces and public memory, an attitude that Nelly Schmidt has described as “organized forgetfulness.”

The resurfacing of the Cais do Valongo provoked national and international attention and media coverage, however, and prompted negotiations between the city council and the Black community about the creation of a memorial site at its location. According to Andre Cicalo, who has carried out in-depth ethnographic research on slavery heritage in Rio de Janeiro, the change in the public administration’s attitude was determined by an increasing institutional sensitivity toward minority rights. This commitment was cemented in July 2017, when UNESCO nominated the Cais do Valongo as a World Heritage Site, acknowledging its importance as a physical trace of a horrendous human history. The Cais do Valongo adds to a list of memorials on slavery that have been erected in the last decade, such as the Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery in Nantes, the city with the largest share of French slave trading; the Permanent Memorial to Honor the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade at the United Nations, New York; and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, better known as the Lynching Memorial, in Montgomery, Alabama.

Archaeologist Tania Andrade Lima, who supervised the excavation works of the Cais do Valongo, remarks that even if experts knew about the archaeological importance of the area, without the Porto Maravilha project it would have been hard to obtain the authorization to excavate an inhabited public area. Porto Maravilha is part of a larger program of urban improvement called “Rio Pós-2016” which aims to provide the city of Rio de Janeiro with a new and modern look following the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. The plan, started in 2009, is still in progress and includes renovation of the sanitation network, reuse of public spaces, and real estate development. It also includes the construction of two new large museums: the Museu de Arte do Rio (The Museum of Art of Rio) by the local architectural studio Bernardes + Jacobsen, and the Museu do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow) designed by Spanish starchitect Santiago Calatrava, which opened in 2013 and 2015, respectively. The plan combines municipal, state, and federal funding. Besides financial incentives, urban regulations were changed ad hoc to facilitate the real estate development. At the beginning of the renovation plan there were thirty thousand inhabitants in the area; at the end of construction, it is expected that there will be one hundred

1. Quilombos, also known as mocambos in Brazil, were communities of fugitive slaves and their descendants. For security reasons, most quilombos were in remote areas, and the community lived off farming and raiding. Nevertheless, there are several cases of urban quilombos as well. Remnant quilombos still exist nowadays and are protected by the 1988 Constitution.


thousand new residents. As urbanists João Carlos Monteiro and Julia Andrade have pointed out, the urban refashioning project is coming at a high cost: alarming gentrification and the consequent displacement of lower-class residents. Due to speculation, the buildings’ value has more than tripled over the last decade, while in the nearby favela (shantytown) of Providência, one of the approximately 1,250 houses are being demolished, and many others will be dismantled in Gamboa.

Massive urban renovation and large-scale evictions are not new to Rio de Janeiro. Founded in 1565, it was the capital of Brazil from 1763 until 1960, thanks to the strategic importance of its port. Over the centuries, the city went through substantial urban reconstruction, which intensified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, following the ruling class’s eagerness to establish the capital as a modern and cosmopolitan metropolis. As a result, Rio de Janeiro became a laboratory for city planning and architectural innovations, and in the central streets, three or four generations of buildings occupied the same site during the twentieth century.

This stratification is made all the more evident on the archaeological site of the Cais do Valongo (fig. 1). The wharf was paved using a technique common in colonial towns: pé de moleque, which literally translates as “boy’s foot.” Its name derives from the fact that stones of irregular shape and size were arranged in a layer of sand that street children flattened by tramping. In 1843, the wharf was revamped and repaved with granite blocks for the arrival of Empress Teresa Cristina, from Sicily, who was betrothed to the Emperor of Brazil, Dom Pedro II. The Cais do Valongo was renamed Cais da Imperatriz (Empress Wharf), a toponomy trick to conceal its past as a site of misery and mistreatment.

The Cais do Valongo was completely covered again in 1911 as part of the urban reconfiguration championed by the city’s Mayor Francisco Pereira Passos (1902–6), in his attempt to transform Rio de Janeiro from a colonial port into capital of the young federal republic. Major public works of sanitation and beautification came at the cost of large-scale demolitions of residential quarters and the eviction of residents. While the affluent inhabitants moved to salubrious neighborhoods at a distance from the center, such as Botafogo and Copacabana, the lower classes who inhabited the cortiços, low-income houses with a communal identity, were displaced to the outskirts of the city, forming the first favelas that still populate Rio de Janeiro. Among
them were the inhabitants of the Valongo, many of whom moved to the Morro da Providência. Urban renovations, thus, contributed to the spatial and social segregation of the lower-classes and Black people.

A century after Pereira Passos’s restructuring of the port area, history repeats itself with Porto Maravilha. This time, however, the reappearance of the Cais do Valongo constitutes an opportunity for reflection on the history of the city and its social dynamics. As Tania Andrade Lima emphasizes, archaeology has historically been at the service of the dominant classes to shape a certain historical and national discourse. It is now time, she argues, for it to have an activist and emancipatory function, and assume political responsibilities to become an antidote to social amnesia. This kind of politically engaged archaeology requires interaction, dialogue, and collaboration with marginalized communities. In her article “Arqueologia como ação sociopolítica: o caso do Cais do Valongo, Rio de Janeiro, século XIX,” Lima recounts her personal efforts to involve members of selected Black organizations from the early phases of the excavations. She also collaborated with leaders of religions of African origin to give meaning to the thousands of objects that belonged to the enslaved Africans, such as amulets, rings, ceramics, smoking pipes, horns and shells, and copper coins, which were uncovered together with the layers of cobbledstoned ground.

Despite the efforts made by the archaeological team to include the Black community, Afro-Brazilians have not yet appropriated the archaeological site in their celebrations and political struggles. Several scholars, including Cicalo, Araujo, Kimberly Cleveland, Francine Saillant, and Pedro Simonard, argue that because of Brazil’s troubled relationship with slavery, the descendants of enslaved people, most of whom continue to be socially and economically marginalized, do not want to associate themselves with the demeaning image of victim. Cicalo claims also that the neglect might be due to lack of knowledge caused by the exclusion of lower-class (and Black) people from quality education in Brazil.

In her article, which is interspersed with photographs of her and leaders of the Black movement visiting the site, Lima expresses her frustration with the deadlock and apathy: “We have brought the Valongo back to the community of Afro-descendants. Now it is up to them, as the most legitimate heirs, to take possession (or not, if they prefer so) of that which, by descent right, belongs to them. They have to decide, by mutual consent with those in power, what they want to do with their patrimony.” She concludes, “The Africans who arrived in the condition of enslavement were forgotten and obliterated by those in power, but to be forgotten by their own descendants is a double and undeserved condemnation.”

As laudable as Lima’s intentions and efforts are, it is clear that simply encompassing people historically excluded and assimilating them in established heritage practices will not challenge long-standing power relationships and the process by which heritage is defined. Laurajane Smith underlines that the self-referential authorized heritage discourse, which imposes a set of Western cultural values as being universally valid, is so prevalent among technical experts and embedded in state cultural agencies, that it undermines any alternative and subaltern ideas about the treatment and celebration of heritage. Drawing from Smith’s conceptualization of heritage, I contend that the way in which the memory of slavery is being institutionalized at the Cais do Valongo follows a hegemonic discourse about heritage based on Western values, which does not allow for the coexistence of alternative narratives.

UNESCO, in recognizing the Cais do Valongo as a World Heritage Site, plays a major part in the consolidation of authorized heritage discourse. On the one hand, it guarantees the preservation and valorization of the site; on the other, the UNESCO listing process, in defining which

14. Lima, “Arqueologia como ação sociopolítica,” 102. “Nós o [Valongo] trouxemos para a comunidade afrodescendente e cabe a ela, como sua mais legítima herdeira, tomar posse (ou não, se assim preferir) do que, por direito de descendência, lhe pertence. E decidir, se esse for o caso, de comum acordo com os governantes, o que desejam fazer com seu patrimônio.” All translations are by the author.
15. Lima, 204. “Essa é uma iniciativa da maior importância, de caráter seminal, que pode estimular outras na mesma direção e livrar o Valongo do multissecular estigma do esquecimento. Os africanos que por ali chegaram na condição de escravizados foram esquecidos e apagados pelos dominantes, mas serem esquecidos pelos seus próprios descendentes é uma dupla e imercida condenação.”
sites are “universally significant places,” conceals the power relations beneath it.\textsuperscript{17} Gestures of reconciliation through the recuperation of the past are shallow unless they are accompanied by recognition of present injustices and action to rectify them.\textsuperscript{18} Even if Afro-Brazilian patrimony is being recuperated, Black people are being relegated to the past, and contemporary forms of discrimination and segregation are not being discussed. The evictions of the local population in Gamboa and Morro da Providência and the gentrification of the port area exemplify how urban regeneration reproduces in urban space the social exclusion that characterizes Brazilian society.

Moreover, blaming Afro-Brazilians for their lack of participation in the consolidation of the Cais do Valongo as a heritage site is misplaced. First of all, because the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade is so entrenched in Brazilian society, it should be everyone’s responsibility to come to terms with its history and implications. Most importantly, it is fundamental to recognize that Black people are not granted the same freedom and level of protection in public space as White people. Between 2009, when Rio de Janeiro was nominated for the host for the Olympic Games, and 2016, Rio’s security forces killed over 2,500 people, the majority of whom were Black and from the peripheries.\textsuperscript{19} According to a 2014 report by Observatório de Favelas, Black Brazilian teenagers are almost three times more likely to get killed than their White counterparts,\textsuperscript{20} and a 2017 Brazilian Forum on Public Security found that Brown and Black Brazilians account for 71 percent of the homicide victims,\textsuperscript{21} while they make up 51 percent of the population.\textsuperscript{22}

The episodes of harassment of Black people in public spaces have become so common and violent that one can understand why Afro-Brazilians are not occupying public spaces, such as the Cais do Valongo, to celebrate their heritage and culture.\textsuperscript{23} The Black community has been organizing events in places where they can feel safe and creating a counterdiscourse against the dominant authorized heritage discourse by fighting for the recognition of urban quilombos, such as the Pedra do Sal, as spaces for the collective memorialization of African heritage (see figs. 2 and 3).\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Quilombos} are spaces where the collective memory is continually revised and transmitted. Contrary to most slavery heritage sites, they are places about change, not chains.\textsuperscript{25} The question, thus, is whether the public administration would not only tolerate, but promote and cherish initiatives that break the rigid definition of heritage defended as the only viable option by the authorized heritage discourse. Such efforts are met with legal challenges and require a conceptual malleability. As Professor of Civil Law Alexandre Catharina has pointed out, the legal system is strongly marked by the individualized right to property, which contributes to the lack of recognition of the collective right to land by the quilombo community.\textsuperscript{26}

The public administration made exceptions in the legislation for Porto Maravilha and the Olympic Games. In order to grant the right to memory to different groups, it should demonstrate the same flexibility toward nonhegemonic initiatives and avoid imposing rigid models of mourning, celebration, or remembering. This principle applies equally to the Cais do Valongo and my next case study, the old Museu do Índio.

\textsuperscript{17} Smith, 99.
\textsuperscript{18} Paula Straile makes this argument in her article analyzing another site of slavery in Brazil, also a UNESCO World Heritage Site (1883), the Pelourinho in Salvador da Bahia. Straile, “The Pillory/Pelourinho in Open-Air Museums in the US and Brazil: A Site of Racism and Racial Reconciliation,” in \textit{Erasing Public Memory: Race, Aesthetics, and Cultural Amnesia in the Americas}, ed. Joseph A. Young, and Jana E. Braziel (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 239.
\textsuperscript{22} According to the 2010 Brazilian census, 7.6 percent of the people identify as Black (negro), and 45.1 percent as Brown (pardo).
\textsuperscript{24} Figure 2 depicts the murals next to the iconic stairs of the Pedra do Sal. On the left side of the portrait of Zumbi dos Palmares, a seventeenth-century leader of the resistance against slavery, there is the sentence “Vende-se carne negra. Tel: 190,” which translates into “Black flesh for sale. Tel: 190,” where 190 is the emergency telephone number to the police, a reference to the killings by the police forces in the favelas.
The old Museu do Índio (Museum of the Indian) is a building from the nineteenth century (fig. 4) donated to the Brazilian Empire in 1865 by Prince Ludwig August of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (1845–1907), husband of Princess Leopoldina of Brazil (1847–1871). A great promoter of naturalistic studies, the prince bequeathed it with the specific goal of creating a center for research and study of Brazil’s Indigenous cultures. In 1910 it became headquarters of the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (SPI, Indian Protection Service), a government protection agency for Indigenous peoples, their interests and cultures. After SPI was
transferred to Brasília, the Museu do Índio, founded by Darcy Ribeiro, was inaugurated on April 19, Day of the Indian, 1953. It was housed there until 1978, when the museum moved to another building in the upper middle-class neighborhood of Botafogo, where it remains. The building was completely abandoned until 2006, when a group of Indigenous people from different cultures occupied it and renamed it Aldeia Maracanã (Maracanã Village). They are from the cultures of Guajajara, Pankararu, Xavante, Guarani, Apurinã, Fulni-ô, Patxó and Potiguara, among others. The occupation was a form of peaceful resistance against the commercialization of the building, as well as a means to gain visibility for their causes. Guajajara lawyer Arão da Providência filed numerous lawsuits to deed the property to the community for the creation of the Universidade Aberta Indígena (Open Indigenous University). The building was in a precarious state of conservation and needed urgent renovations so that its further deterioration would not become an excuse for its demolition.27 Nevertheless, its restoration was never initiated; in 2011 the state of Rio de Janeiro ordered the demolition of the building, together with other nearby structures. The Aldeia Maracanã is part of the Maracanã Complex, a set of sport facilities located in the district of Maracanã, in the northern part of Rio de Janeiro. The complex includes the Maracanã soccer stadium, built in 1948, the Maracanãzinho gym, the Clélio de Barros athletic stadium, and the Julio Delamare water park, all finished in 1965. Besides the sport venues, there are also the Friedenreich municipal school and buildings previously occupied by the Ministry of Agriculture.

In 2011 the state government gave the order to demolish not only the old Museu do Índio, but also the athletic stadium, the water park, and the Friedenreich municipal school, which is highly ranked for educational excellence among public schools. The justification for these demolitions was the construction of parking lots and a shopping mall, which would allow the stadium to meet FIFA requirements for parking, and at the same time become an important commercial attraction for private initiative. The stadium is owned by the government of Rio de Janeiro, which hoped these reforms would stimulate private parties to become interested in managing the stadium, which is a burden on the city budget.28


The Maracanã Complex is close to one of the most important intersections of the city. The favela Metrô-Mangueira is next to the stadium. Separated by the railroad, there is the favela Mangueira, the apartment complexes of the social housing program Minha Casa Minha Vida (My House, My Life), and the Quinta de Boa Vista park, where the National Museum was located, before it infamously burned to the ground in September 2018, causing an incalculable loss of Indigenous artifacts and sound material documenting Indigenous languages, among other items.29

As in the case of Porto Maravilha, the government established special conditions to promote investment in the area. The renovation plan included not only the demolition of buildings to build parking, but also the eviction of the inhabitants of the nearby Metrô-Mangueira favela. A special police unit, oxymoronically called the Pacifying Police Unit, was created to monitor the removal of the inhabitants. As for Porto Maravilha, the government planned the appropriation of urban space to foster processes of land valuation and gentrification.

The inhabitants of the Aldeia Maracanã organized a peaceful resistance (fig. 5). One of them, Zé Guajajara, climbed a tree and guarded the old Museu do Índio for twenty-six hours to prevent its destruction. Despite the resistance, in 2013 the inhabitants were forced to move to a shelter in Jacarepaguá, a neighborhood that is about fifteen miles away. Indigenous people explained that in this location they were not able to pursue their communal life, perform their ceremonies, or freely receive visits from the outside. Protests over the eviction of the Metrô-Mangueira favela and the old Museu do Índio were repressed with violence, involving human rights violations (see fig. 4).

These protests caused an outcry, and further protests were organized by the Comitê Popular da Copa e das Olimpiadas, a group of popular organizations and initiatives that includes NGOs, social movements, academic institutions, and populations impacted by the reforms. Under this pressure, when FIFA made clear that the work under consideration was not part of its requirements, the government announced that it would stop the demolition. A small group of Indigenous people decided to go back to Aldeia Maracanã. Public funds were promised for its restoration, but to date nothing has been done, and the condition of the building is even more precarious.

Inhabitants of the village have remarked that the public tends to think of Indigenous peoples as relegated to the past, and to a life of isolation in the forests (no mato).30 There is mainstream resistance to conceiving Indigenous peoples as living in an urban environment. In the past,


the building has been a space for the preservation and presentation of Indigenous cultures from a Western perspective that sees them as vanishing or dead. Nevertheless, I would maintain that what makes a space a heritage site is not necessarily the site itself, but the use of that site for the transmission of knowledge in a culturally appropriate space and time. As Smith has pointed out, “socializing and creating a sense of community can also be part of heritage building, especially if the community is frayed by geographical separation.”

Australian Aboriginal political activist and scholar Michael Dodson explains:

indigenous peoples throughout the world recognize that, at the core of the violation of our rights as people, lies the desecration of our sovereign right to control our lives, to live according to our own laws and determine our futures. . . Recognition of a people’s fundamental right to self-determination must include. . . the right to inherit the collective identity of one’s people and to transform that identity creatively according to the self-defined aspirations of one’s people and one’s own generation. It must include the freedom to live outside the cage created by other people’s images and projections.32

This observation is particularly relevant to the case of the Aldeia Maracanã. As opposed to the new Museu do Indio in Botafogo, where Indigenous peoples are not allowed to speak for themselves because self-appointed experts feel entitled to present their cultures, the organizers of the Aldeia Maracanã want the museum to be alive, a place where the inhabitants can transmit their culture to their descendants (fig. 6). The Aldeia Maracanã is also a space where Indigenous people recently arrived in the city can find a community and a shelter, and where the general public can learn Indigenous languages and cultures. Education, sharing knowledge about Indigenous cultures, is in itself a form of preservation of heritage and a tool for the consolidation of tolerance and understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

According to scholar Bruno Carvalho, Rio de Janeiro is a porous city, “a metropolis without a past of defined ethnic boundaries, a city permeated by history of often fluid frontiers between order and disorder, popular and erudite, Black and White, nature and urban, public and
Nevertheless, as the two case studies presented demonstrate, Rio de Janeiro’s public administration has tried to conceal and disrupt this inherent aspect of the city. While Rio de Janeiro was preparing to host two mega events, new regulations were passed to allow for the expropriation of land and eviction of marginal sectors of society. One of the consequences has been an escalation of violence against marginalized groups and the aggravation of the spatial segregation of people based on social class and race.

The cases of the Cais do Valongo and the Aldeia Maracana demonstrate that traditional conceptions of heritage are too rigid to be applicable to non-Western heritage celebrations. Moreover, preservation of heritage based on social justice and inclusion requires an honest recognition of the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and genocide in today’s society. The public administration and the experts of heritage management should welcome counterdiscourses that challenge the authorized heritage discourse and encourage silenced histories to emerge. It is only through the coexistence of competing memories that a process of collective healing can be, with time and dialogue, achieved.

Camilla Querin
University of California

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Camilla Querin is a research assistant at the Getty Research Institute, a doctoral candidate in the history of art at the University of California, Riverside, and a curatorial fellow at the California Museum of Photography. Her dissertation investigates the artistic production and curatorial practices developed during the military dictatorship in Brazil.

33. Carvalho, Porous City, 10.