Abstract: This article tackles the translation chain of the Valongo Wharf in Rio de Janeiro. An important site related to the African Diaspora, it was acknowledged as a world heritage site by UNESCO in 2017. Departing from the disparity between UNESCO’s and the Brazilian National Institute of Historical and Artistic Patrimony’s (IPHAN), understanding of the outstanding value of the site, the article will reflect on the translational processes around the re-discovery and recognition of the Valongo Wharf, highlighting its historical importance, based on an underlying acceptance of the site as an evidentiary site of African diaspora and the genocide of Afro-Brazilians.

Keywords: Valongo Wharf; Evidentiary site; Genocide; African Diaspora; UNESCO; IPHAN.

Introduction

Brazil is a country marked by the consequences of colonialism. Slavery, of both natives and Africans, left wounds in the country’s history which persist today. Portuguese colonialism in America is often disguised under the myth of a softer, more passive type of patriarchal regime in comparison to the neighboring Spanish colonies. Nonetheless, according to Florestan Fernandes, the Portuguese regime set the structure of an economy in which primitive accumulation was based on the appropriation of the physical capital of the slave. Although a mixed-race country both culturally and ethnically, Brazil is far from being the sort of docile, racism-free society as imagined by many. On the contrary, in 2017, the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) and the Brazilian Forum of Public Security (FBSP) published an updated “Atlas of Violence,” covering a ten-year period from 2005 until 2015. In the analysis of the data administered by the Ministry of Health, it was observed that in 2015 alone, 59,080 homicides occurred in the country. Between 2005 and 2015, 318,000 youth were murdered. While there was a reduction of 12.2% on the homicide rate on non-black people, the homicide

---

1 gustavo.racy@uantwerpen.be; vinyrodrigues@gmail.com
rate on black people increased to 18.2%. “Of every 100 people that suffer homicide in Brazil, 71 are black”.4 Also, it is estimated that the black citizen has a 23.5% higher chance of being murdered than the citizen of another skin color, “setting aside the effects of age, sex, schooling, civil state and area of residence.”5

The evidence gathered in this research, over a ten-year span, suggests that the increasing rates of homicide perpetrated against the black population are connected, beyond socio-economic variables, to racism. The data thus proves — with considerable delay — the claims that have been made by the black population of Brazil and called general attention to the quotidian of such a large portion of the country’s population. The reality, in numbers, is that every 23 minutes, a young black person is murdered in Brazil. To the Black Movement — that is, the ensemble of minority movements representative of Black Brazilians — this number is the expression of an ongoing genocidal process perpetrated against Brazilians of African descent;6 a genocide that is parasitical to the racist structures of a country sustained historically by slavery.

In the last half-decade, there has been productive discussion and activities happening around a heritage site of great significance for the history of slavery in Brazil. In 2011, with the urban restoration project of Porto Maravilha, in Rio de Janeiro, excavations led to the re-discovery of Valongo Wharf, the disembarkment point of the most extensive contingent of Africans in the Americas. The actual whereabouts of the Wharf were known and under the protection of the Service for National Historical and Artistic Patrimony (SPHAN, now known as the Institute for National Historical and Artist Patrimony – IPHAN), since 1983. However, the Wharf itself was put under state protection as a site of cultural relevance for the African legacy of the country only in 2011. Considering the relevance of the Valongo Wharf for Brazilian history, the IPHAN was able to propose the site for inclusion in UNESCO’s world heritage list, a proposal accepted in 2017. However, despite the success of the proposal, the relevant report of the World Heritage Convention shows that, of the two criteria under which the IPHAN described the Wharf as being of Outstanding Universal Value, only one was recognized. According to this discrepancy, even though the report recognizes the Wharf’s connection with tradition, it does not recognize it as a site bearing testimony to a specific civilization.

Departing from a historical contextualization of the Valongo Wharf, this article will

4 Ibid., 32.
5 Ibid. However, in 2011, the IPEA had already published another report, in which it became clear that the average schooling of the “black” population was of 6.8-7.8 years, compared to 8.8-9.7 years of “white” people. Cf. IPEA, Retrato das Desigualdades de Gênero e Raça, available at <http://www.ipea.gov.br/retrato/>, accessed on March 24th, 2018.
tackle the translational processes related to the site as an evidentiary site of a genocidal process. To accomplish this, the article is divided into four sections. First, it will briefly address the meaning of genocide and scholarly claims of a genocide perpetrated against black Brazilians. Second, it will explore the historical relevance of the Valongo Wharf. It will then address the discrepancy between both processes of recognition of the site, and address how, in IPHAN’s understanding, the Wharf translates and makes evident the genocidal character of transatlantic slavery. Finally, it will conclude with a reflection on the value of the Wharf and the ongoing translation provided by current practices and interventions. With that, the article is expected to raise awareness of the Valongo Wharf specifically, and the need to understand how it might translate the experiences of a population subject to constant marginalization.

“Lemkin’s word”: the genocide of Black People

According to Adam Jones, “the roots of genocide are lost in distant millennia.” In other words, as a phenomenon based on social difference and systematic execution of the subject deemed different, genocide is not a recent happening. Generating “a primordial sense of in-group versus out-group” has apparently always been a characteristic of the human condition, starting from the identification of the social self in the self-denomination of communities. From the foundational stories of the Old Testament to the Peloponnesian War and the Roman siege of Carthage, history has long provided us with accounts of mass murders fueled by the pursuit of wealth and power, as well as cultural beliefs. The term genocide was only coined after World War Two by the Polish-Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin who, after years of campaigning and having documented the Nazi “Final Solution” in Europe, “waged a successful campaign to persuade the United Nations to draft a convention against genocide.”

As Jones recalls, there are two developments through which “Lemkin’s word” resonates today: first, the adoption of Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide by the United Nations in 1948; and second, the development of comparative genocide studies in academia, beginning in the 1970s. The existence of a theoretical debate over genocide throughout the last forty to fifty years shows that despite the legal definition of the term through the UN Genocide Convention, the concept of genocide is still an object of dispute both in academia and civil society movements. Although the focus of this article is to show how activists and the UNESCO frame and act over a specific historical site, and not to prove whether slavery was a genocide or not, it is important to take a step back and present the reader with some of the tensions that orbit the concept of genocide, broadening the meaning of the term so that the local, native context of Brazilian reality may be better understood within the context of genocide studies.

8 Ibid., 4.
10 Jones, op. cit., 8.
According to the UN Genocide Convention, “genocide” is defined ‘by many acts... committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group’. Such acts may consist of:

1. Killing members of the group;
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group;

This list, whose groundings can be traced back to Lemkin’s *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, published in the United States in 1944 – 4 years before the UN Convention – allows one to approach genocide in a wider manner, so as not to forcibly equate the practices that unfold in the Brazilian colonial context all the way up to the present moment, but to compare the juridical concept established by the UN with that made by the Black Movement.

In this context, the American sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod suggests that social-historical narratives ought to be conceived in an anti-Eurocentric and imaginative manner, valuing a personal vision inspired by eccentricity and idiosyncrasy.\(^1\) This way, while accepting the international community’s definition of genocide as a legal and strategic instrument which may condemn and avoid genocidal episodes, it is necessary also to refuse the idea of neutrality suggested by documents and regulations that are pretentiously universal. In Lemkin’s *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, particularly in chapter 9, the author explains that genocide must be considered as a composed and multiple phenomenon, i.e., a coordinated plan of different actions designed to destroy the essential elements of a community. Such actions may not necessarily imply mass killing. They can be incremental, related to cultural, political, social, legal, intellectual, spiritual, economical, biological, physiological, religious and moral aspects. Lemkin himself, this way, provides a multifaceted definition of genocide that carries, in its genesis, a concern with the honour and dignity of different people and the future of humankind as a global community. That explain Lemkin’s understanding of genocide as a two-phase phenomenon:

one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization of the area by the oppressor’s own nationals.\(^2\)

---


This definition is useful to reflect upon the process of African colonization throughout the fifteenth century, tracing a path to the colonization of the Americas and, consequently, to slavery in the black Atlantic.

Between the end of World War II and the 1948 UN Convention, Lemkin was working on a book meant to tell the history of genocide. The manuscript, which remained unfinished until the author’s death in 1959, would give continuity to the pre-established relation between colonization and genocide, approaching the colonization process of the Americas by the Spanish, and, later, the English and the French. There, genocide comes forth as the result of a special form of relationship with territories disputed between majorities and minorities, with mechanisms of conquest and control, or with possible foreign occupation. Commenting on Lemkin’s unfinished work, A. Dirk Moses highlights the author’s careful thought on the modalities of genocide in situations in which the Europeans were in lesser number compared to the autochthony groups.

It must be clarified here that subjected groups may be a majority controlled by a powerful minority as in the case in colonial societies. If the majority cannot be absorbed by ruling minority and is considered a threat to the minority’s power, genocide is sometimes the result.

The existence of an intrinsic relation between genocide and colonization helps us understand how its traces show up in the processes of colonialism and slavery in Brazilian society, as well as how they are translated through the disinterment of the Valongo Wharf in Rio de Janeiro.

Another salient aspect that permeates genocidal practices, and that has been explored by scholars, is the relation between genocide, colonization and racism. If colonization is not necessarily motivated by racism, we can nonetheless ask which racist conceptions permeate the occupation, legislation and socialization of colonial forces in relation to colonized subjects? When Lothar Von Trotha, commander of the German Imperial Army, was put in charge of the German Colony of Southwest Africa, present-day Namibia, to substitute Theodor Leutwein, a more moderate commander who failed to pacify the conflict between colonizers and Hereros, he provided rich analytical toolsthat allow us to approach the racist element of colonial processes in relation to genocide. Von Trotha’s words speak for themselves.

---


14 It is interesting to notice the overall absence of approach to Portuguese colonialism in America. We believe this may happen for two important reasons: first the tendency to undermine Portuguese autonomy vis-à-vis Spain, and second, the general acceptance of the Lusotropicalist hypothesis that Portuguese colonialism was somehow more docile in comparison to that of other European empires.

My exact knowledge of many Central-African tribes Bantus and others, has shown me the convincing necessity that the negro doesn’t submit to contracts but only to raw violence ... This uprising (of the Herero) is and remains the beginning of a racial fight. I know enough tribes in Africa. They all resemble each other as that they only shrink back from violence. The exercise of violence with crass terrorism and with cruelty is my policy. I annihilate the rebellious tribes with streams of blood and with streams of money. Only on this seed can something new emerge which will remain.¹⁶

These ideas mirror the well-known nineteenth-century scientific racism developed in Europe, as well as a broader conception of racism defended by Portuguese historian Francisco Bethencourt, which permeates the worldview of individuals and of the State throughout colonialism and colonization.¹⁷ This racism is interestingly tackled by John Docker as he establishes and analyses the concept of genocide in relation to Lemkin’s work. At its heart, this refers to the intense debate with intellectuals and activists on the topic of black genocide in which Lemkin was involved after the war. To sum up, in 1951, an anti-lynching petition entitled “We Charge Genocide” was forwarded to the UN Secretariat in New York by Paul Robeson, actor, singer and black activist. Soon after, the same petition was forwarded to the UN General Assembly in Paris by one of its main authors, the black activist and leader of the United States Communist Party, William L. Patterson. The petition, which denounced the abuses perpetrated by the Jim Crow laws, accused the United States of perpetrating a genocide against its black population, highlighting, specifically, articles II and II of the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

Lemkin’s response to the accusation was extremely hostile and he engaged in a public discussion with Patterson. In December 1951, Lemkin declared to the New York Times that the action of black activists was but a manoeuvre to deviate attention away from true crimes of genocide that were occurring against Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanian, Poles and other Soviet-subjugated people, accusing Patterson and Robeson of being unpatriotic elements, in

¹⁷ In the introduction to Racisms: from the Crusades to the Twentieth Century, the author declares the following:
This represents a departure from the largely consensual view that the theory of races preceded racism. It also challenges recent revisionist scholarship, which traces the invention of racism back to classical antiquity. It rejects the idea of racism as innate phenomenon shared by all humankind. I argue that particular configurations of racism can only be explained by research into historical conjunctions, which need to be compared and studied in the long term. Racism is relational and changes over time; it cannot be fully understood through the segmented study of short periods of time, specific regions, or well-known victims – for instance, black people or Jews.

The notion of racism I will use in this book – prejudice concerning ethnic descent coupled with discriminatory action – provides the basis for this long-term approach, enabling us to chart its different forms, continuities, discontinuities, and transformations.

favour of foreign power. Essentially, Lemkin considered African Americans to be subject to racism, but not victims of intentional destruction or annihilation, even within a structure of racial segregation. Beyond the technical aspects that ground the juridical definition of genocide, and through which Lemkin refused to acknowledge the genocide of African-Americans, the issue shows how problematic and unspecific the concept of genocide is, especially when transposed to contexts other than from that in which it was coined.

This detour helps us understand why and how the claim of a genocide underway in Brazil by African-Brazilians is formed and legitimised. From the nineteenth century onwards, especially from the proclamation of the republic in Brazil in 1889, different eugenic policies were applied with scholarly grounding. Article 138 of the 1934 Constitution, for instance, stipulates as a duty to stimulate eugenic education. When the overall ideology did not proclaim that interracial marriages should be avoided, they stimulated it, only to guarantee the progressive whitening of the Brazilian population. The same was done elsewhere throughout the Americas, and the surpassing of Lemkin’s concept of genocide through the analysis of different social contexts is already a well-established matter. In short, although more detailed and specialised refelction should be set forth in order to provide a consistent argument on the genocidal character of the violence perpetrated throughout history over the African-Brazilian population, the argument of this article departs from this claim, in order to show how, in the process of revival of the Valongo Wharf, it comes as no surprise that the transatlantic slavery is deemed a genocide, first of all, by the descendants of those forcibly transferred from their homeland.

As Abdias Nascimento has discussed in his seminal essay, O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro (Brazil, mixture or massacre? Essay on the genocide of a Black people), genocidal strategies have long been repeated in Brazilian social structure. These strategies are inherently tied to the genesis of patriarchal Brazilian society, through which the black individual was brought into the white home, the women taking care of the household and serving as wet nurses, and the men guaranteeing the material means necessary for the reproduction of the economy. In the peculiar formation of Brazilian society, the violent means that reproduced a radically uneven reality were masked under the specific forms that sociability took within the country. The constant sexual exploitation of the African woman took the shape of love stories between benevolent slave-owners and their slaves, who now ceased being a possession and were assigned, in a Romantic narrative, the status of autonomous individuals. This exploitation left as its legacy, for instance, the “Brazilian mulata”, dressed in carnival costumes and representing the image of the Brazilian woman abroad, sexualized, exoticized and objectified.

A similar phenomenon was repeated with the male body, used extensively by a regime that did not recognize such a body as a human being during the wars against the Dutch in the seventeenth century and against Paraguay in the nineteenth century. The abolition of slavery

in 1888 did little, according to Abdias Nascimento, to solve the question. Instead, it rid former slave-owners, as well as the state and the church, from responsibility for the subjects which had, until then, been their property. In this process, the nineteenth century was a period central to the maintenance of social inequality and racial exclusion. The development of modern social science, with its positivist evolutionism, imported from France, justified the situation of the black population in Brazil based on an ontological status of barbarism, which would have been inherited from the Africans. This understanding delegated responsibility for the precariousness of the black population to this same population, as if the reason for their social disadvantage was their fault. Language, in this sense, played a significant part as a narrative resource on the origins and development of Brazilian society. Not only was the black person minimized in it, but they were also denied recognition as they were increasingly turned into the Other as someone who “is not part of human society,” or, we must add, who only becomes a part of it through concession.

If one sets out to understand the reproduction of racism in Brazil from an everyday vernacular level up to the very political structure which reproduces exclusion and inequality, then Abdias Nascimento, Florestan Fernandes, Joel Rufino, and even Gilberto Freyre (whose school of thought helped fuel the idea of Brazilian racial democracy), and current scholars like Lilia Moritz Schwarz and Magali da Silva Almeida may provide a general outline of understanding. According to these authors, the past of the slavery regime left an open wound at the heart of Brazilian society by maintaining the same subjects that formed (and still forms) the backbone of the country’s production of wealth in a continuous situation of exclusion. The suggestion that slavery and the diaspora consisted of a genocidal regime is not surprising. As it will be shown in the following section, the case of Valongo Wharf bears witness to and provides evidence of slavery having consisted of systematic destruction and killing of the members of a group – originally several but put under the same rubric of “the” black African – by several strategies.

For all effects, “testimony” and “evidence” will be used here on a vernacular level, just as in IPHAN’s and UNESCO’s dossiers. They stand for material proofs of some sort, connected to past or current history, happenings, civilization, and so forth. This vernacular understanding is better grasped in relation to their translational character, which will be explored in the next section. In the case of the Wharf, the testimonies and evidence related

21 Nascimento, op. cit.
to the overarching area where the site is located, range from the archaeological material found to the cultural reminiscences safeguarded by the Valongo population or compiled through IPHAN’s work. It is difficult, thus, to narrow evidence and testimonies down to a couple of specific acts. Rather, the re-discovery of the Wharf must be accepted, itself, as an evidentiary act, as should the happenings which have unfolded since the discovery. This way, the Wharf is seen as a catalyst of the several types of testimonies and evidence of slavery as both a genocidal and a founding process of Brazilian society. In this context, it is precisely the grassroots, “on the ground” work between IPHAN and activist groups, that allows the Valongo Wharf to be once more approached, now through an alternative narrative that, thanks to pressure mounted by the Black Movement(s) and the intellectual and political concern of the IPHAN of giving voice to marginalized groups, provides a new perspective to the history and meaning of Transatlantic Slavery that takes into account the current reality of the country, especially in relation to the demands and claims of those who continue to be directly affected by the nation’s past.

The Valongo Wharf: transatlantic slave traffic’s largest arrival port

In the words of Abdias Nascimento, “in Brazil, it is slavery that defines the quality, the extent, and the intensity of the physical and spiritual relations of the children of the three continents that met each other in the country.”27 The relations between the European, the native and the African is, according to the author, defined by the social structure built upon the economic foundation of the country that was laid by the exploitation of forced labor. Similarly, Florestan Fernandes28 argues that the forms of slavery which the country endured, altered not only history but “the relations of production, the stratification of society and the articulation of the ‘races’ contained in the different poles of slavery domination.”29 For over three centuries, Brazil would receive contingents of enslaved Africans, trafficked over the Atlantic to sustain the economic backbone of the colony and, later, the Empire. As David Eltis30 recalls, the transatlantic slave trade caused the most massive forced displacement of people in history. Rio de Janeiro’s port zone was the center through which most enslaved Africans would pass, either remaining in the country or being transposed to other territories. The port zone of Valongo in central Rio received over seven hundred thousand Africans within the final decades of Atlantic trafficking alone. Founded in 1565, Rio de Janeiro became the capital of the Vice-Royalty of Brazil in 1763, and seat of the Crown between 1808 and 1821, after which, with the country’s Independence in 1822, it became the capital of the Empire of Brazil. Especially with the transposition of the Court from 1808 onwards, Rio became the core of Portuguese-Brazilian society, now fundamentally changed both regarding its political

28 Fernandes, op. cit.
29 Ibid.
function—it officially ceased being a colony—and infrastructure. As the seat of one of the vastest empires of the epoch, there was a demand for the expansion of the city in all its aspects. The renewal of business between the Court and pre-established slave traders in both Brazil and Africa (Allada, Dahomey, Ngoio)\(^{31}\) intensified the slave market in the city which, for its geographical position, was already an important port.

Located in Valongo Beach, the Valongo Wharf was built in 1811. Of the 40% of Africans that were taken off their native lands by force and landed in Brazil, 60% are estimated to have passed through the Valongo Wharf. “Besides being an entry point of enslaved Africans ... embarkment destined to other parts of South America also passed through Rio, which became a point of connection between the routes of the African diaspora in the continent”.\(^{32}\) The Valongo Wharf was the core of transatlantic slave traffic, especially in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, until in 1831 trafficking was forbidden by law due to British pressure. Although British rule was solemnly dismissed, the Wharf lost its function as

---


the primary trafficking hub of enslaved people. In 1843, it was renovated and covered over, giving way to a new wharf, named Empress Wharf, which was destined to receive the future Empress of Brazil. With the coming of the twentieth century, the Empress Wharf was also erased, over which the Jornal do Comércio Square was then built. The region around the old Wharf, however, remained inhabited by a majority black population, for the area was not comprised solely of the Wharf itself, but also of the contiguous complex of institutions devoted to the slave trade: houses of refuge for the brethren of African faiths, but also the lazaretto, the Pretos Novos Cemetery, and the marooned community of Pedra do Sal.

Throughout the history of Brazil, many testimonies have been made as to the social reality of the country’s civilization. Traditionally, and especially with the arrival of the Court, Brazil had been visited by foreigners, usually traders or cultural emissaries, from France to Germany, England to the Netherlands, always under the specter of exoticism and mystery. From the sixteenth century onwards, that is, from the foundation of the country on European standards, many artists from the European courts came to portray Brazil. Albert Eckhout, George Marcgraf, Jean de Léry, and later, Johann Moritz Rugendas and Jean-Baptiste
Debret\textsuperscript{33} fed the European imagination, avid for plants, animals, landscapes and for the habits of the “savage” natives. On this matter, Debret himself even provided a drawing of a slave “Boutique” on Valongo (figure 1). Likewise, Rugendas and Laurent Deroy captured the atmosphere of both the slave trade and the social life of the Africans brought to Brazil (figure 2).

Despite the physical and symbolic interring of the Valongo Wharf, the memory of slavery in Brazil remained. As IPHAN states,

\begin{quote}
this memory is revealed in the narratives of the descendants of formerly enslaved people, in the religious practices, in the celebration of festivities, in the body practices ... in the songs and poems that gave new meaning to the remembrance and narratives, as well as in the struggle of disadvantaged popular groups – mostly black.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Ultimately, the region where the Valongo Wharf is situated came to be known, in the nineteenth century, as “black city” (\textit{cidade negra}), a place where run-away slaves could find protection. “In these places, sociability networks were created by the black population, contributing to the creation of a territory marked by African heritage”.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, by a mere historical review, it becomes clear that the Valongo Wharf and its surrounding region was, and is, a focal point in the history of Brazil. From there, enslaved Africans would arrive, destined to remain in Brazil, or to be transported elsewhere in the Americas, bringing with them their languages, customs, and ways of being that slowly, and marginally, were integrated into Brazilian society, due to the slaves’ immense ability for survival. It is important to highlight that, although more than any other country, Brazil is believed to be a society freed of racism and racial prejudice given its particular miscegenation, the fact that the culture of the Africans – religions, vernacular, and social norms in general – survived is tightly connected to the particularity of Portuguese colonialism. The Portuguese used miscegenation, marked by systematic rape and fetishization of the African woman, as a means to create a purportedly docile colonial regime. Ultimately, miscegenation, although existing, was also a way of lessening the racial conflicts in favor of a hegemonic class.\textsuperscript{36} This historical awareness over the importance of the Valongo Wharf could only emerge in a new way when, in 2011, the urban renovation program set forth by Rio de Janeiro’s municipal government led to the process that eventually led to the Valongo Wharf entering the list of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites.

\textsuperscript{34} IPHAN, \textit{op. cit.}, 2016.
\textsuperscript{35} IPHAN, \textit{Proposta de Inscrição do Sítio Arqueológico Cais do Valongo na Lista do Patrimônio Mundial} (Brasília: Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, 2016), 92.
The meaning of the Valongo Wharf: IPHAN and UNESCO

The process of proposing the Valongo Wharf as a UNESCO World Heritage site began with the renewal of the port zone of Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Olympics. Thanks to the vast amount of historical documentation, the Valongo Wharf was known to be in the area where the works were to take place. Although it was not possible to know its precise location, Federal Laws and Municipal Decree guaranteed that the area should be put under IPHAN’s responsibility, as they made urban development works mandatorily subject to archaeological research. Thanks to this legal procedure, the archaeologists slowly started finding indications of what was once either the Valongo or the Empress Wharf. Initially, there were some doubts about the findings, since it was not known if the building of the Empress Wharf had merely covered or in fact replaced and destroyed the previous site. In total, 110 sectors and six trenches were excavated in Jornal do Comércio Square alone, and both wharves, were discovered, one on top of the other. Giving preference to the Valongo Wharf, the IPHAN soon started working on recognition beyond the national level. In January 2016, the IPHAN published a proposal for the inclusion of the Valongo Wharf on the UNESCO’s World Heritage list. The 443-page document consisted of an extensive account of the archaeological and historical works related to the re-discovery of the Wharf following the demands and premises of the World Heritage Convention (WHC).

The WHC originated in 1972, grounded in the recognition that “cultural and natural heritage is among the priceless and irreplaceable assets, not only of each nation, but of humanity as a whole”. The international community represented by the member states of UNESCO adopted the WHC with the goal of setting premises and plans for “the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission” of the world’s cultural and natural patrimony. The convention, provided with an own fund, is based on a set of strategic objectives (referred to as “the 5 Cs”, named after of the objectives: Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building, Communication and Communities), establishing the norms for the recognition of a cultural and natural heritage site. To be recognized, the site should be under the responsibility of a UNESCO member state and respond to UNESCO’s objectives, through which it is put under the care of the international community. As such, the WHC is the main supranational strategic agreement on global cultural heritage, with 193 signatory countries as of the writing of this article. In 2017, during the WHC’s 41st session in Krakow, the Valongo Wharf was recognized and inscribed in the World Heritage List according to criterion 6 (out of 10) of the WHC, which stands for being “directly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance”. This criterion is, according to the guidelines of the WHC, considered to be

---

38 Ibid., 10.
preferably “used in conjunction with other criteria”, a suggestion followed by the IPHAN, which originally inscribed the site by both criterion 6 and 3, which stands for bearing “a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared”. Unless there is any misinformation between the published versions of both the IPHAN proposal dossier and the WHC’s 41st session report, then the recognition of Valongo Wharf as World Heritage was not attained by the possibility of the site referring a testimony over a civilization either alive or disappeared. This way, it is possible to observe a discrepancy between IPHAN’s and UNESCO’s understanding of the criteria through which the Valongo Wharf would be considered of outstanding universal value.

For Brazil, represented through IPHAN, the Valongo Wharf should be recognized not only by its association with living traditions, belief, ideas, and so forth but by its evidentiary character. For IPHAN, in other words, the Valongo Wharf should be recognized for more than its symbolic character, its association with tradition, or its historical uniqueness. In fact, what the Wharf provides is evidence of continuity between a series of historical events and current communities. As the largest site related to the African diaspora in the Americas, the Wharf, through its process of re-discovery and disinterment, provides evidence of the genesis of a specific socio-economic structure that relates, also, to an area beyond that in which it is located. As the IPHAN dossier states, the Valongo Wharf constitutes an evidentiary site “in which materiality is condensed in living memory, an example of the arrival and fixation of Africans this side of the Atlantic”. This evidence is more than explicit in the findings of the archaeological research. Discovered under the ruins of the Empress Wharf, the researchers found in the Valongo Wharf a total of 1.200.000 archaeological items connected to the African diaspora, mostly apotropaic items. The symbolism of such findings says much about the relevance of the site.

It is important to recall that African religions were central to the maintenance of African cultures in the country. African languages, used mainly in liturgies, influenced Brazilian Portuguese, just as religious cuisine, musical rhythms and clothing became part of popular Brazilian culture. In a context in which it was necessary to build a collective identity as a response to miscegenation and possible de-characterization of ethnic groups, the division between “nations” – assumed by Europeans to designate different autochthone groups – united different African ethnicities in the same religious and familiar space. Strategically inserted in the quotient of the communities, these nations gave a new dimension to and amplified the specific ethnic dislocation of the individuals towards a general ethnic understanding exemplified in the Ketu, Jeje and Angola nations. Bearing this in mind, the 2.000 glass beads, corals (believed to have magical healing properties), crystals, and rings

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 IPHAN, Sítio Arqueológico Cais do Valongo. Proposta de Inscrição na Lista do Patrimônio Mundial (Brasília, 2016), 12.
44 “Ketu” refers to religious practices of West Africa, specifically the Yoruba, also known as Nago. Whereas Jeje and Angola refer to the practices of old Dahomey (current Benin), speakers of Ewe-Fon, and to the speakers of Bantu languages in Central Africa, respectively.
made of vegetable fibers (a unique finding to Brazil), gain evidentiary status of the many autochthone groups translocated to the Americas. We may add to these findings the many “figas” (amulets carved in different materials and used for protection against bad-luck and envy), pipes of different typologies, decorative bones and teeth, amulets, bracelets, earrings and pendants (mostly of copper), of different African origins found in the excavations.

As the archaeological research showed, the artifacts discovered testified and provided evidence not necessarily of activities related to port labor, but mostly to the “urban practices connected to that region of the city ... Testifying, above all, the encounter between diverse African cultures that did not necessarily have direct contact in its continent of origin”.

With the passing of time, despite the prohibition of trafficking and even after the covering of the wharf and the abolition of slavery, the Valongo region did not lose its connection to the black population. It was there, for instance, that André Rebouças, a black abolitionist, son of the only African-Brazilian to become councilor of the Empire, established the Pedro II Docks, a modern coffee warehouse, built opposite to the historical site of the Wharf, adding to the area yet another symbolic value in relation to slavery. Later, in the twentieth century, the religious temples of the Valongo similarly became a place of arrival and refuge for the descendants of African slaves that arrived from other parts of the country, especially from Bahia. Again, religion played an important part as a means of organization and resistance. It is worth remembering how the 1835 Malés Revolt began from within the Zogodô Bogum Malé Rundó Candomblé yard, where the money meant to help revolutionaries was hidden. It was also in the Valongo region that, in the early twentieth century, samba appeared, in communal parties and gatherings, as well as the first Carnival association. Importantly, however, at this moment in history – the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – African heritage was not seen as a cause for pride. Quite the opposite: under the dominant eugenic perspective, African culture was deemed savage or primitive, and the republican governments persecuted cultural manifestations of African origin, treating them as a police matter. This way, finally, the Valongo region “constituted itself as a black stronghold, with cultural and religious practices that were grounded on communitarian liaisons of long duration based on the memory of slavery and African ancestry”.

What we propose here is that the continuity, throughout different historical moments, of cultural practices related to the African diaspora within the Valongo area, forms not only evidence and testimonies of slavery, but a translational process of a continuous history of marginalization. Such a process began with the forced transposition of aboriginal cultures which, mixed and created anew, developed into a different civilization. Despite the genocidal structure of slavery, the traditions transposed to Brazil managed to survive through different strategies, and even created something new. In Brazil, it seems safe to say that the understanding of slavery as genocide is unquestionable within the Black Movement, although only partially accepted as such by a large sum of the population, especially its white parcel. It seems, indeed, that the translation of the Valongo and its national and global recognition as

45 IPHAN, op. cit., 2016, 80.
46 Ibid., 106.
a unique evidentiary site for transatlantic slavery as a genocidal episode, is at the heart of IPHAN’s practices. It is on these terms that the comparative analysis of the Valongo site seems to have been made, based not only on seeing it as a strategic site in the Transatlantic slave trade but also as a site that must be recognized as bearing the memorial and material traces of “the pain and the fear of the human beings that passed through them, as well as their capacity for surviving”.47 As such the comparative analysis related the Valongo to various other sites both in Africa and in the Americas, such as the Old City and the historical center of Ribeira Velha (Cape Verde), the fortress of Ghana, the Stone Town of Zanzibar (Tanzania), Aapravasit Ghat and Le Morne (Mauritius), Island of Moçambique, and the Isle of Gorée (Senegal), Bridgetown (Barbados), Habana Vieja (Cuba), Sans Souci Palace (Haiti), Salvador and São Luís (Brazil).

If, on the one hand, IPHAN set forth a comparative analysis consisting of localities testifying the European presence in Africa and the places of the arrival of Africans in the New Continent, on the other hand, the Institute was also aware of a highly necessary comparison with two other World Heritage Sites: Auschwitz-Birkenau and Robben Island. According to the IPHAN, the connection between the three evidentiary sites – as World Heritage Sites – exists in that they all bear witness to the strength of the human spirit to resist appalling conditions of adversity.48 As slavery may be defined by the “non-recognition of the person as human being, once it starts being treated as a commodity,”49 Robben Island, Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Valongo Wharf are connected, according to IPHAN, through the ethos of “violence and dehumanization”.50 This translation insists on the acknowledgment of Valongo Wharf exclusively as an evidentiary site testifying (following the terminology used by IPHAN), to the reality of the nineteenth century. In connection to the Holocaust in Europe and Apartheid in South Africa, the Wharf bears witness to the reality of the recent past. Perhaps more importantly, it testifies to the continued relevance of this reality in the present, as it presents the evidence of slavery to the lives of the descendants of the enslaved African populations and Brazilian society in general.

Underlying our interpretation of IPHAN’s rendering of the Wharf is the acknowledgment, although not explicitly declared by the institution, of the creation of the African diaspora as an event that is of a genocidal character. As the archaeological findings promoted a new understanding of the different autochthonous groups debarked at the Wharf, it similarly promoted a new understanding of the whole area of the Valongo and of the process through which this area acquired an essentially Afro-Brazilian identity. From a historiographical and archaeological angle, the discovery of the Wharf brought in new material for understanding the undisclosed process of racial prejudice, exclusion, and exploitation in Brazil, thus adding to the claims for the acknowledgment of an ongoing genocide perpetrated against black Brazilians. This understanding becomes clear, for

47 Ibid., 125.
50 Ibid.
instance, in Tania Andrade Lima’s51 declaring of the work done by IPHAN as consisting of a socio-political action. According to her, IPHAN’s central objective is to dignify and bring to light that which “in the past was pretended to be interred and hidden, presenting its evidence to current societies so that they can revive this past and find new ways to deal with it”.52 In this particular case, it is also a matter of acknowledging the fact that, in regard to the Transatlantic slave trade, the evidence goes beyond material and written cultures, as the “history of African slavery in the Americas remains a past that makes itself present until our current days, even if it was attempted to distort history, silence the written references or raise new constructions over its material bases”.53 The Valongo Wharf translates, thus, the suffering connected to the most extensive forced migration process in history, which has been pointed out by the Black Movement of Brazil, as indeed a genocidal process.

Translating the evidence of the African diaspora

As Roberta Guimarães Sampaio54 recalls, until the beginning of its renovation, “Rio de Janeiro’s Port Zone was predominantly classified by the city’s moral geography as a region of prostitution, drug traffic, and favelas”.55 The memory connected to the region was, in this way, one of marginality. The fact that the region was given attention once more with the process of the re-discovery of the Valongo Wharf (and, parallel to it, the landmarking of the Pedra do Sal Maroon Community as an Afro-Brazilian historic and religious monument) must be approached beyond the official, written accounts of documentation and research. Although the archaeological work that led to the re-discovery of the Wharf was a central element in the acknowledgment of the site as one of outstanding value, as the site became open to the public, the practices and interventions surrounding it are the acts that set forth a new signification of the Wharf. Looking into the uses of the site and the population’s relation to it in both a banal and extraordinary sense turns the Wharf into at once an evidentiary site, a national memorial site, a world heritage site and an important historical testimony of the heritage to the African diaspora. This implies that the Valongo Wharf is a site where a translational process is put into motion. “Translation,” in this case, stands for a productive activity that renders “past annihilatory violence narratable, hearable, readable, and seeable”.56 To be able to be at the Wharf, to see it, hear it, feel the spatial dimension of the site, adds to the intellectual experience of getting to know and becoming aware of the Wharf’s importance. As both experiences overlap and translate each other, they also translate the

52 Ibid., 181
53 IPHAN, op. cit., 2016, 142.
experience of a history that, so far, in the context of the Brazilian State’s institutional violence, has only been told through and as resistance. Despite the need for a continuous investigation, the Wharf became a site for interventions on behalf of artistic, activist and educational groups, which allows us to reflect on the processes through which the Wharf is translated from a historical site to an evidentiary site of genocide. This expresses the act of translation as one related “to displacement, drift, invention, and mediation”. It is a process through which a cultural, historical, social phenomenon is set in motion and travels, carrying with it an overall universe of meaning to which it may relate.

As stated implicitly by the IPHAN, the evidential character of the Valongo Wharf serves as an excellent point of departure for reflection on the construction of memory as well as its translation. We may say, for all effects and purposes, that a first translation of the Wharf was the onset set in motion by the archaeological work of IPHAN vis-à-vis the processes of recognition of IPHAN itself and the UNESCO. The negotiation between the judgments over the outstanding character of the site translated the social and knowledge structures in dialogue for the recognition of the Wharf as an evidence of a genocidal process. Different cases of translation are those of actual, material intervention on the site, once it was disinterred and liberated for the public. The translation chain of the Valongo Wharf is relevant, in this sense, as it is of historical and political importance. Such importance was made clear from the onset of IPHAN’s archaeological inquiry which, understood as a socio-political intervention, invited different institutions to join them in the translatableity of the site. Working as an intermediary, the Pretos Novos Institute reached out to different organizations on a federal, state, and municipal level. On March 17, 2011, the representatives of the Palmares Foundation, of the State Council for the Rights of the Black Population (CEDINE), and members of the Pretos Novos Institute visited Valongo. Upon recognition of the importance of the site, the representatives drafted a document entitled Carta do Valongo (Valongo Letter), proposing the creation of the African Diaspora Memorial. A second episode, recalled by Tania Andrade Lima, took place when members of the Incubadora Afrobrasileira group, an “organization created in 2004 with the goal of developing the economic protagonism of the black population” spontaneously visited the site, speaking with the archaeological personnel. These episodes led, in 2011, to an event, organized by the Palmares Foundation, in which the Valongo Wharf came to the attention of both national and international organizations and personalities, like the Inter-American Development Bank, the UNESCO, Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Lagos Erelu Abiola Dosonmu, Erelu Kuti IV; Wole Soyinka, Nobel Laureate of Literature; Elisée Soumonni, of the University of Benin, Paul Lovejoy, from the University of York (Canada), and many more.

On the basis of this 2011 meeting it was decided that the Valongo would be the site for a religious ceremony in honor of the seventh day of death of Abdias Nascimento, which was repeated on the one-year anniversary of the death of the writer, politician, poet, activist,

---

59 Ibid., 191.
playwright, actor, and professor. This second event expanded IPHAN’s initiative in inviting religious authorities, specifically of religions of African origin, to visit the disinterred site. Four religious authorities were consulted, and it became clear, through an interpretation of the inventory of the artifacts discovered, that the Wharf had also been a site where, originally, African religious practices took place “at least one hundred years before what is proclaimed”. In the same year, during the Black Consciousness Week, the municipal government approved the creation of the Historical and Archaeological Circuit for the Celebration of African Heritage, inaugurated in 2012, when the ialorixás (the priestesses of the religions of African matrix) washed the stones of the Wharf (figure 3), joined by the Afoxé Filhos de Gandhi group, in a religious gesture praising their ancestors. This religious ceremony was repeated in 2014, in praise of the centennial of Abdias Nascimento and, the same year, the Valongo was the location of an event entitled “African Heritage – Urban interventions on the path to the Port”, organized by director Zózimo Bulbul, to whom the 2014 event was dedicated and which included theatrical performances (figure 4).

---

60 Ibid., 198.
As Fazil Moradi, Maria Six-Hohenbalken, and Ralph Buchenhorst\textsuperscript{62} observe, the aftermath of genocides is not necessarily restricted only to those who survived it. Memory is a social process and, thus, it is an ongoing construction negotiated between members of different communities. In the case of the Valongo Wharf, the aftermath is directly connected to the lived experience of the descendants of slaves. In a country that consistently marginalizes and condemns its black population to violent death, as the data presented in the introduction of this article shows, the remembrance of its slavery past is a direct connection to survival practices of the ancestors. Their celebration is a ritual binding of centuries-old struggles for freedom. Seen this way, the Valongo Wharf is a stage of narrative, of multisensory, aesthetic and political translation of the experience of marginalization. It is not only an evidentiary site itself, but a continuous provider of evidence, as long as civil society intervenes, addresses it and occupies it. The examples given above and illustrated by the images exemplify how this translation occurs. However, it may also occur indirectly, through academic research, or audio-visual reproduction, for instance, as far as it allows the past, in this case, to take “place in the present, [becoming] a field of endless translational practices”.\textsuperscript{63}

Finally, the re-discovery of the Valongo Wharf represents the importance of the colonial slavery regime as it translates the reality faced by those who suffered the most, as

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{62} See Fazil Moradi, et al., \textit{op. cit.}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 5.
well as their descendants. This translational process has been in some ways always present, as the region surrounding the Wharf remained predominantly of African Brazilian cultural matrix safeguarding religious cults, cuisine, language, arts, and different forms of customs of African origin. But the work done by IPHAN gave way to a different material and institutional type of translation, as it not only brought the Wharf back into public view, but also put it under national care and turned it into a global memory. The revelation of the Wharf represented the material and symbolic revelation of Brazilian history, and the findings translate the histories of autochthonous African groups who mingled to add to the formation of a new national culture. Add to that the happenings, interventions and experiences of being on the Wharf, the actual human component was also allowed to be translated. As actors, capoeira practitioners, religious authorities and the population in general experience the site, we are provided with a translation of the suffering inflicted by slavery. Furthermore, as many of these practices, especially religious ones, link past to present, we are given evidence of the cosmogonies and epistemologies of Africa and its descendants who have been silenced for so long. Perhaps through these simultaneous and multiple processes of translation we may be able, at last, to start dealing with the “pharisaic confusion” denounced by Florestan Fernandes,\(^6^4\) that makes us believe that in Brazil, “black” and “brown” have opportunities equal to those of the “white” population. After all, the Brazilian standard of social relation ... was built by slavery society, that is, to keep the “Negro” subject to the “white”. While this pattern of social relation is not abolished, the economic, social and political distance between “black” and “white” will be large.\(^6^5\)


\(^{6^5}\) idem, 172.