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Authors	Linehan, Denis;Sarmiento, João
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# Spacing Forgetting

## The Birth of the Museum at Fort Jesus, Mombasa, and the Legacies of the Colonization of Memory in Kenya.

Denis Linehan,  
Department of Geography, University College Cork,  
Western Road, Cork, Ireland.  
[Denis.linehan@ucc.ie](mailto:Denis.linehan@ucc.ie)

Joao Sarmento,  
Department of Geography, University of Minho,  
And Centre for Geographical Studies, University of Lisbon.  
Portugal  
[j.sarmiento@geografia.uminho.pt](mailto:j.sarmiento@geografia.uminho.pt)

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### I Cornerstone Geographies

At the cornerstone of the colonial expansion into East Africa, and consequently, one of the most important public buildings on the continent, Fort Jesus in Mombasa presents many opportunities to investigate the intersection of colonialism, memory and power. The fort was built in 1594 by the Portuguese, to help secure their foothold in East Africa and provision and protect their extensive trading network in the Indian Ocean. Listed by UNESCO as a potential world heritage site, the fort's caramel-coloured rampart of hewn coral loom over the old town district and is a hub of cultural activity and tourism in the city. (Figure 1). The site has a violent history and is shaped by multiple layers of history and memory. Over time it fell in and out of Portuguese control, and for three hundred years operated as the centre of command of the Omani Sultanate, and later the Sultan of Zanzibar (Hinaway, 1970). From the late 19th century, under the British, it functioned as a prison, until during a period in the 1950s that paralleled the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya, the fort was converted into a museum. This conversion was funded through the assistance of the Portuguese government who grasped the opportunity to restore the fort as part of their public commemoration of Prince Henry the Navigator, a central figure in Portuguese national and imperial identity. This chapter will focus on the transformation of the fort from a prison into a museum, a remarkable moment of colonial authority and anti-colonial struggle that involved key figures in the Kenyan anti-colonial movement, notably Tom Mboya and Pio Gama Pinto.

Drawing upon archival sources in Nairobi, and Lisbon, the essay will recover the history of the birth of the museum and will analyse how the alliances, motives and protests at the museums foundation were shaped by questions of memory, politics and colonialism. In undertaking this task we will read against the grain of the colonialist archive, drawing upon Said's proposals on the strategies available through a 'contrapuntal' critique of historical sources, which we will extended from text to space in an '...effort to draw out, extend, and give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present... in such works.(Said 1994:66). Like other colonial buildings, the museum's architecture was put to work to inscribe power and shape identities and the narratives it projected about the history of the Kenya coast, in the words of Ali A. Mazrui, played havoc which African memory '...initiating new forms of amnesia, nostalgia and false memories' (Mazrui, 2000, p.87).

These histories operated in colonial space, were constructed in what Said has termed ‘...an arc of interests and concerns spanning the hemisphere...’ (Said, 1994, p.101). Whilst at first glance these events may seem remote from the pressing social and political concerns in contemporary Kenya, we propose that the memory politics at work in Fort Jesus during this period remain relevant to debates about heritage and memory. With a firm eye on what Gregory has defined as the ‘colonial present’ the chapter will first consider issues around public memory and politics in contemporary Kenya and then reconstruct the ‘arc of interest and concerns’ that brought the museum into being in the 1950s, focusing up the construction of a colonialist perspective on the cultural landscape, the imperial memory work of the Portuguese and the contestation of this process at the time of the museums opening.



Figure 1 Fort Jesus (2007)

## II Memory Work and Disruption

Kenya is a challenging place to think about the cultural geographies of memory as the historical experience has created a disruptive landscape in which to consider the relationships between public memory, the production of knowledge and cultural self-definition. Public memory in Kenya is a volatile object, often politicised and frequently subject to omissions, erasures and amnesia. Both the legacies of colonialism and the inequitable social and political outcomes of the post colonial settlement contribute to this volatility. In colonial times, many aspects of Kenyan culture and history were systematically framed and controlled by western epistemological codes. Forms of knowledge found in anthropology, archeology and paleontology in particular, coded and categorized the Kenyan people from western perspectives. These forms of knowledge and the representations of land and culture embedded within them acted ‘...as a form of epistemic violence to the extent that it involved immeasurable disruption and erasure of local cultural systems’ (Simatei, 2005, p.85). As a consequence, Kusimba has criticized the ways in which anthropologists and historians have ‘...falsified history of the Swahilis, presenting them as descendants of Asian colonists, [causing] irreversible damage to the community's perception of itself in relation to other Kenyans’ (Kusimba, 1996, p.201). This has legitimated he argues the

destruction of Swahili sites and monuments and systematic appropriation of Swahili lands. Moreover, in spite of the existence of an extensive range of postcolonial criticism, the real impact of this critique in challenging these colonial modes of knowledge within the region has been ineffectual. The ghosts of the colonial episteme remain rooted in many aspects of cultural heritage in Kenya, such as in its museum and national monuments which continue to express an array of imperial traces, whilst evading the horrors of colonization and slavery.

Compounding the issues raised by these legacies, since independence, the Kenyan state has not manifested a strong memory making enterprise as part of a nation building exercise. Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya exemplified this approach, instituting an overarching discourse of 'forgive and forget' in order to restore the international reputation of Kenya, destroyed by the 'savagery' of the Mau Mau and more importantly, maintain the commercial and political fabric of a neo-colonial state: 'It is the future, my friends, that is living and the past that is dead' (Kenyatta, 1964, p.2). This decision to efface the past from which independence was forged, probably places Kenya uniquely in 20th century states to officially disavow its political origins. Since that period, Kenya has been diverging rather than integrating in civil and cultural terms. Kanwanja argues that '....Kenya has become a cesspool of all genres of political violence that have effectively confined it embryonic democracy to cold storage (Kagwanja, 2003, p.25). In stark contrast to the nation building orientation of the memory work of various postcolonial states in Asia, identified by Yeoh (2002), debate and discussions on the past have often been evaded, as to have done so would have disturbed the neo-colonial status quo and bring into question the motivations of the post-colonial elites. Memories of injustice, inequity, violence and abuse from the post independent period are still so strong in Kenya, that the principle memory work of the state has been invested in attempts to promote their erasure. As the Kenyan human rights lawyer, Pheroze Nowrojee has argued '....every office holder in Government have erased our history and moved to the aggrandization of Presidents and rulers.' (Nowrojee, 2002, p.1). Whilst Pierre Nora (1989) argued that there are sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) because the lived environments of memory (*milieux de mémoire*) have dissipated, we can argue that the opposite is the case in Kenya. Illustrated by the violence following the 2007 election, Kenya is engulfed by the consequence of the memories of unresolved injustices – a political problem which has been only recently acknowledged by the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in late 2008. Together, the colonial and postcolonial conditions have disturbed a coherent version of the past and throw into turmoil the process of public memory making. The dual origins of this condition in turn generate their spaces and outcomes, which over the last two decades has played into treatments of heritage and culture. The vacuum left by these disruptions has been filled by unfettered commercialization of culture, the lack of protection for national heritage (particularly cultural artifacts), an impeded treatment of history and a poor track record of commemoration.

Many of these conditions intersect at Fort Jesus and it is arguable that the conditions of memory at work in the fort are symptomatic of the condition of public memory in many parts of Kenya. The fort is an important cultural centre for the city, and in some way is successfully claimed by the city to meet its needs for cultural expression and promotion. Fort Jesus was declared a National Monument under the Archaeological and Paleontological Interest Act in 1970, and the Old Town of Mombasa was scheduled as a National Monument in 1990. The fort houses a museum, a Conservation Lab, and Education Department and is the centre of research program dedicated to the archaeology of the coastal region. The Old Town Conservation Office, responsible for an area of roughly 33 hectares, is nearby. Presently, the Fort is open to the public daily, from 9:30 to 6:00 pm. To a large degree it can be understood a multifunctional space (see Wazwa 2006), since due to its location, not far from the business and commercial centre of Mombasa and on the edge of the old town, many local and regional functions take place here: corporate meetings, weddings, concerts, art exhibitions, and social meetings. Inside the museum, the active intervention on culture is limited and the exhibitions are static. The objects in display result from the archaeological excavations at Fort Jesus (essentially those conducted by Kirkman in the 1950s and 1960s), Gede,

Manda and Ungwana; items donated by colonial collectors; and shipwreck artefacts from the 1977 excavation of the San Antonio de Tana, a frigate which sank off the coast of Mombasa in 1697. Visitors walk through these exhibits of rocks, clay and glass which testify the cosmopolitan nature of the Swahili Coast, but as a result of a number of omissions they hardly engage in the dense spaces of struggle which the fort represents. These omissions operate on a number of vectors. Though the fort must have had a primary role in the slave trade – slavery was legal in Mombasa up to 1908 when there were over 4000 slaves in the city, the museum is silent. The passage way that runs down to the sea from the fort that facilitated the secure movement of slaves to waiting ships, are entitled 'Passage of the Arches' rather than bringing attention to it as a 'Passage of No Return', as they are widely described in slave forts in West Africa. The cells and prison buildings were destroyed during the restoration in the 1950s so the role of the fort as a prison is down played. Nowhere is there any mention that the fort was used a prison for political dissidents who campaigned and fought against British colonial regime. The fort is riddled with omissions, with silences and to all extends and purposes is spacing forgetting.

In the space left by this lack of narrative, tourists sit for fun on the cannons, pose for photographs on the ramparts, and make scenic landscape shots of the harbour, framing the fort as an Oriental ruin. Later, those with about €75 to spend can take a sunset boat trip in a traditional Arab dhow, followed by a candle-light dinner on the ramparts of the fort. Billed as the Mombasa Son et Lumière show, this event converts the fort into a theatre and restaurant. Statuesque figures in flowing white Kanzu gowns and kofia caps greet the dinners with flaming torches, drums beat in the distance, whilst actors pose as Portuguese soldiers in sixteenth century costume, Arab Traders and Omani aristocracy replete with head scarves and ornate Jambiya. Diners, served by waiters dressed as Portuguese naval officers, are presented with a flamboyant performance in which a history of the fort is presented in a specially choreographed show. This piece of theatre is a mixture of the exotic and the arabesque. Whilst the performance tells something of the turbulent history of the fort and of Mombasa, in its style and in its omissions it is undeniably interlaced with the legacies of imperialism. The role of the British, who governed Mombasa during the apex of European control in East Africa and who converted the fort into a prison and then the museum, are elided in the story. The past is overly romanticized for the diners. In its promotion and its styles, it has been subsumed into an exotic experience, where colonialism is shrouded in spectacle and nostalgia (Figure 2).



Figure 2: The Mombasa 'Son et Lumière show'

The performance illustrates some of the dilemmas facing heritage and cultural memory in contemporary Kenya. McMahon (2008) suggests that when performers use the past imaginatively in theatrical productions, the changes they make to representations of race, colonial authority and historical subjects' agency, relate strongly to the way a nation remembers its past. The benign story of the colonial encounter and the framing of the fort and the people of the coast are indicative of the public treatment of colonialism and its ambiguous present in public memory. The present is charged with the legacies of the colonial past, but one of the principle consumers of this history, namely the western tourist, is saved from feelings of guilt, and offered instead a stereotyped image and experience of Africa. This cultural framing of the coast is deeply consensual, and in light of the importance of tourism to the Kenyan economy, important to maintaining the 'acuna matata' (no problem-be happy) image central to the international profile of Kenya as a safe, secure and trouble free destination. Over the last decade, this image has been periodically damaged by acts of terror and political instability. The USA embassy bombing at Nairobi in 1998, the suicide car bomb at the Israeli-owned beachfront Paradise Hotel near Mombasa in 2002 and the civil unrest post the 2007 elections, have all undermined the Kenyan tourist industry.

As noted by Kasfir (2004) political history and discomfort are effaced by the incessant presence of the paintings of idyllic tribal village life, wildlife and apparently 'authentic' sculpture of native tribe people in souvenir shops and markets (Kasfir, 2004). The journey through Kenya is soothed by the aesthetics of safari style, colonial chic or the self consciously primitivist décor of the restaurants, bars, and hotels where tourists mix. This stylisation of culture has been more recently enhanced though specialized encounters with 'locals' that facilitate apparently ethical forms of consumption or contributions to the environment. Gomongo Village near Mombasa provides '...a slice of life from about ten cultural groups in Kenya which include the Kikuyu, Turkana, Pokot, Maasai, Akamba...where tourists get to watch the preparation of food, feed crocodiles and meet witchdoctors (Gomongo Village, 2008). These forms of ethnographic spectatorship bear an

uncomfortable resemblance to the ways in which Africans were portrayed in the living dioramas of European and American exhibitions in the 19th and 20th century. But it is clear that such forms of ethno and colonial chic have consolidated as a pattern of western cultural consumption of African heritage. The Swahili coast is increasingly dominated by upmarket hotels whose architectural and interior design stylise not just the apparent mystique of colonial times, but also reproduce comparable race relations. Work undertaken by local people inside these exclusive hotel compounds is often done in uniforms that mimic the costume of colonial servants. Embraced inside the legacies of imperial spectatorship, the notion of African heritage inside these sites is constantly recycled in popular western representation of Kenyan culture. Notable amongst these was a recent issue of *Vogue* in June 2007, where the British actress Keira Knightly posed in a Yves Saint Laurent dress with tribesmen in the Masai Mara, and fed milk in a bottle to a baby elephant wearing a blanket adorned with a large Louis Vuitton logo. Like many Westerners drawn to Kenya on safaris, here she acted out a colonial fantasy that could have been scripted from the pages of Karen Blixon's *Out of Africa* (Sykes, 2007).



Figure 3 Colonial Nostalgia: Keira Knightly mimics Karen Blixon in *Vogue* (2007)

These apparently benign nostalgic memories of the colonial period are just a short step from the performance enjoyed by prosperous tourists on the ramparts of Fort Jesus. What they also illustrate is the extent to which the experience of colonialism has been elided, and how far from the aspiration of early post independence thinking about historical identity and cultural identity in Kenya has drifted. In 1977, the importance of culture, history and heritage to national consolidation in Kenya was underlined in Ndeti's report to UNESCO:

The main objective of government cultural policy is therefore clear. It is the realization of national unity and cohesion and the creation of national pride and sense of identity among our people. Apart from the need to protect and preserve valuable assets, the part played by culture in national consolidation is recognized as one of fundamental significance since culture is the symbol of nationhood, the grassroots from which people spring (quoted in Ndeti, 1975, p.35).

It is tempting to argue that the fact that this dignified and politically astute aspiration never emerged is due the disruption of memory work symptomatic of the colonial and post-colonial condition. Consequently, rediscovering the history of this memory work as it was manufactured at Fort Jesus offers insight into the origins of the legacies that seem to haunt the site today, as well as being important in terms of ways in which the memory of colonialism in Kenya might be considered, and also possibly contested. Close attention to the space of the museum, and its memory work, is arguably an effective route to follow the nature of public memory and its forms, transformation and meanings within civil society. As a western institution created in a colonial regime, the museum in Africa is burdened with the politics of colonial memory and challenged with the reconstruction new identities. The birth of the museum seems like the appropriate place to start with a critical history of the legacies of colonialism at Fort Jesus.

### **III Colonialist Cultural Landscape and False Memory**

Following the physical appropriation of land, laying claim its history and memory through its symbolic appropriation of the past was key to the colonial enterprise (Mudimbe, 1994). During the colonial period, through the activities of white Kenyan historians and British archeologists, Fort Jesus was re-situated at the centre of a cultural landscape, which constructed a distinctively colonialist understanding of the past. In the late 1920s, mirroring the goals of the Preservation movement in Britain, the Kenya colony began to legally protect a number of key buildings and archaeological sites. By 1929, 18 monuments and antiquities were protected by law. The significance of the Indian Ocean coastal region around Mombasa was clear from the beginning. Fifteen of the first protected sites, identified as 'Portuguese' and 'Arab' ruins were recognized there. At the same time, just two tribal sacred sites were protected in the early years of the colony (Hart, 2007). During the 1940s and 1950s Fort Jesus was re-imagined as an iconic ruin at the centre of a cultural landscape 'discovered' by British archaeologists. Under British rule, Fort Jesus operated as a prison. However, for the colonial elite in Mombasa, the presence of a prison at the heart of the city, and more especially within sight of the Mombasa Club – the centre of social life for the British colonial set - became increasingly unsatisfactory. During the 1930s and 1940s, the Fort was increasingly identified as an important but neglected asset to the burgeoning tourist industry of the coast. From the correspondence in the archive, it appears a strong view emerged in Mombasa that the fort had to become amenable for consumption from the metropole, and not 'wasted' on disciplining the natives, who could be imprisoned far away from the city. Prominent visitors to Mombasa were facilitated by the Prison Warden to tour the fort, but hoteliers and schools in the city were often spurned by the prison administration when they attempted to make organized visits\*.

Through the efforts of the journalist and broadcaster Edward Rodwell, the unsatisfactory status of the fort remained in the public eye and became a key issue for local members of the Kenyan Legislative Council, C. G Usher. In 1946, Rodwell had published *Gedi – The Lost City*. This evocative book was the first attempt to promote the archaeology of the region. Rodwell drew upon the 'Lost World' literary genre, and the text is littered with allusions to the mysterious origins and spectral qualities of the ruined city overtaken by the tropical forest. 'The natives who live thereabouts talk of ghosts and weird cries in the night...the sinister silence of the city...pathways that disappear, trees that burst into flames' (Rodwell, 1946, p.19) Rodwell also made clear that city had its origins in Arab settlement, and downplayed its indigenous African qualities. This theme he replicated in his later collection of essays entitled *Ivory Apes and Peacocks* (a clear allusion to



the biblical story of Queen Sheba and Solomon) which focused upon Persian, Arabic and European incursions into East Africa (Rodwell, 1949). In taking this approach he operated inside the colonial episteme, guided in this case by the myth of Azania – constructing memories of a kingdom in antiquity that was said to govern East Africa. The British archaeologist G. W. B Huntingford, who played a seminal role in archaeological exploration of Kenya, had also been a firm advocate for the Azanian thesis, identifying remnants of the 'Azanian' civilization in his reading of the landscape of stone enclosures, hut circles, tumuli and cairns, earthworks and irrigation system in his essay from 1933 'The Azanian Civilization of Kenya Antiquity' (Huntingford, 1933). Moreover, like many European antiquarians, anthropologists and archaeologists, Rodwell's work supported the Hamitic myth. Now largely understood as a European historical construct, the Hamites were depicted as a distinct population that were said to be either from Arabia or Asia, and at that time widely accepted as an historical fact (Dubow, 1995). The anthropologist C. G Seligman (1930) in his book *The Races of Africa* declared for instance '...the history of Africa south of the Sahara is no more than the story of the permeation through the ages, in different degrees and at various times, of the Negroes and the Bushmen by Hamitic blood and culture'. (Seligman, 1930, p 19).

Rodwell's work was widely praised in Mombasa, and gave voice to a constituency of established Mombasa colonial families and business engaged in civic improvement. His work also encouraged the Royal Kenyan National Park to begin formal excavation of the archaeology of the region. In 1948, a British archaeologist, James Kirkman was made the Warden of Gedi National Park. This appointment, as outlined below, had a profound impact on the archaeology of the coast. Later, the impending visit of Princess Elizabeth to the city – an event that resulted in the construction of elephant tusk archways over what is now Moi Avenue in the city centre - stimulated more politicking, which resulted in some success. The Legislative Council instructed the Prison Department to build (using prison labour) a new prison to facilitate the evacuation of the inmates at Fort Jesus to Mtwapa and later in 1951, the award 10,000 pounds for the restoration of the site..

James Kirkman had a profound impact on the archeology of East Africa. He was highly productive, keeping up a steady stream of excavations, reports and publications in international journals such as *Antiquaries Journal*, *Current Anthropology* and *Oriental Art* and insured that almost 40 new monuments on the coast between 1954 and 1959 were protected by law. Following the excavation at Gedi, he completed work on other major sites along the Kenyan coast amongst them, Takwa, Ungwana and Mnarani. Through this work Kirkman denied the integrity of Swahili culture, and consistently argued that the important settlements in the region had their origins in earlier waves of Asiatic and Arab colonisation.. In *Men and Monuments of the East African Coast* he argued that "...the historical monuments of East Africa belong, not to the Africans but to the Arabs and Arabised Persians, mixed in blood with the African but in culture utterly apart from the Africans who surrounded them" (Kirkman, 1964, p.1). He added that without the influence of Islamic artisans the '... coast would have remained a land of mud or grass huts like the rest of tropical Africa' (Kirkman, 1964 p. 19). He maintained that "...Islamic as well as Christian art is descended from the adult, rational arts of the classical world or the equally mature art of Persia" (Kirkman, 1964 p. 51) – the clear implication being that African art was childlike, immature and irrational. In doing so Kirkman perpetuated a European myth that civilization came from outside Africa. His reports on key sites tended to ignore the history and culture of local people and focused almost entirely on shoring up his hypothesis about the diffusion of Arab and Asian influence through the coastal areas, supporting in turn an historical narrative about the imagined country of Azania. (Kirkman, 1960). More attention is placed on the architectural features of some buildings or individual Chinese porcelain plates, than on local tribes. His portrayal of Gedi makes the barest allusions to slavery and the settlements he discovered are portrayed in a vacuum and his texts are riddled with Eurocentric and colonial bias, using for example terms like 'cannibal' to describe the 16th century tribe that conquered the port of Kilwa. With the establishment of the British Institute of Eastern African in 1960, Kirkman's archaeologies played a key role in laying claim to the land and illustrate how the construction of historical narrative intersected with knowledge claims to nature, place and heritage, which were essential to

maintaining a colonial gaze over Kenya. Kirkman's work, to paraphrase Gregory was as much about '...making other people's geographies as it was about making other people's histories.' (Gregory, 2004, p. 11). Eventually living inside the grounds of the Fort Jesus himself, his work acted out a scientific practice which was alien to local culture, and helped to create a colonial edifice in the shape of a museum, inside a colonial fortress, to represent a colonial view of the coast in which local African cultures had a limited role. Through this practice, Kirkman contributed to the construction of a knowledge regime that resonated strongly with the identity politics of the British colonial elite, whose way of conceiving the landscape diverged strongly from the values of the people working and living on the land. In representing the histories of the coast as non-African, and establishing an imagined geography of invasion, diffusion and improvement, Kirkman's archaeologies acted as an instrument of colonial administration by providing truth claims to the colonial mission and promoting specific colonialist ideas of history and racial superiority. As such, Kirkman epitomized the observations made by the historian Basil Davidson in *Lost Cities of Africa* (1959):

Africans, on this view, had never evolved civilizations of their own; if they possessed a history, it could be scarcely worth the telling. And this belief that Africans had lived in universal chaos or stagnation until the coming of Europeans seemed not only to find its justification in a thousand tales of savage misery and benighted ignorance; it was also, of course, exceedingly convenient in high imperial times. For it could be argued (and it was; indeed, it still is) that these peoples, history-less, were naturally inferior or else they were "children who had still to grow up"; in either case they were manifestly in need of government by others who had grown up.

This perversion of the relationship between history, knowledge and place creates an unstable arena for the construction of memory. Kirkman constructed the heritage of the coast in a biased fashion, and on the basis of this knowledge, the British could conceive themselves as the latest and most powerful invader to civilize the coast, whose condition had it been left to the indigenous tribes, would in their view remained backward and primitive. Hence, one of the Governors of Kenya, Sir Philip Mitchell, could be reassured that '...until about five hundred years ago East Africa had probably been uninhabited.' And that '...[b]etween the stone implements of some 30,000 years ago and Dr. Livingstone there is nothing...Nothing at all of African Africa: not a ruin, nor a tomb, nor an inscription; indeed not even a legend supporting any thing resembling tribal history for more than a few generations.' (Mitchell quoted in Sutton, 2006, p. 300).

#### **IV Building a Museum and Celebrating an Empire**

If the memory work of the British ensured the European's claim to the land, and constructed a colonialist gaze on the cultural landscape that surrounded Fort Jesus, in a remarkable convergence of colonial enterprises, the involvement of the Portuguese, who funded the restoration of site through the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, re-enforced the European claim to Africa when they enrolled Fort Jesus into their plans to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator in 1960. The Portuguese had begun planning for the Henry the Navigator celebration in 1956. However, in the previous decades, the Portuguese state has orchestrated a whole series of events to promote the construction of the imperial nation, including various commemorations. While Europe submerged into war, Portugal celebrated its empire in the 'Portuguese World Exhibition' in 1940. Through the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos*, inaugurated in that same year in Lisbon and later replaced by a permanent monument in 1960, the regime appropriated Henry the Navigator as the national hero, a figure who 'contributed decisively to give the relations between European and non-Europeans, whites and coloured people, a path singularly luso-Christian' (Freyre 1961 in Léonard 1999: 42). Ironically, just as the Portuguese President Salazar never set foot in Africa or in any of the overseas provinces, Henry the Navigator, constructed as the wise man from Sagres, never participated in any of the adventurous maritime voyages for which he is renowned. Nevertheless for the Portuguese, the 500th anniversary of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator was a critical moment in which to assert

their sense of nationhood, and more critically affirm Portugal's imperial identity, under increasing siege from the rise of anti-colonial liberation movements in Africa and Asia. Between 1956 and 1960, 22 new African states became independent, of which Senegal, the Belgium Congo and Tanzania bordered the Portuguese territories. As such, for the Portuguese state, the celebration was not just a 'simple manifestation of historical nostalgia', but an 'act of faith in the destinies of the motherland, deemed necessary at this time of incertitude in the world's life' (Ramos, 2005, 192).

Almost a decade earlier, following representations made to him from Mombasa, Governor Mitchell had given his support to the local representative of the Legislative Council, C. G. Usher. He advised him against the construction of an aquarium in order not to compete with the Coryndon Museum in Nairobi, and nominated James Kirkman to lead the transformation of the fort. He recommended that what was needed was a Museum '...to represent the history, art and culture in its widest aspects on the Coastal areas, and including its ramification to the Persian Gulf, Karachi, Bombay, Europe, America and what-have-you'.\* However, following the declaration of the state of emergency by Mitchell's successor Evelyn Baring, in October 1952, the concerns of the colony quickly focused upon the Mau Mau uprising. Soon the colony had neither the funds nor the political will to proceed with the fort's restoration, and the grant of £10,000 was rescinded. The idea of a museum quickly lost support, especially as the prison at Fort Jesus played an important role in maintaining the security and judicial control of the coastal region during the Mau Mau period. Whilst too proximate to the scrutiny of an urban population to form part of the colony's infamous 'pipeline' of prison camps established to suppress the Mau Mau uprising, five years after the initial overtures to restore the fort, in May 1957, when Governor Baring was pressed by Kirkman to proceed with the restoration, it was established that there were 75 individuals on remand, 287 serving sentences and a further 80 detainees.\* Fort Jesus at this time was also being used to detain psychiatric patients. Baring suggested to the Ministry of Defense, that they assist in the evacuation of the fort, by constructing 'A' frames' to house prisoners at the maximum security prison at Shimo la Tewa, north of the city. At this stage, at huge cost to life and liberty, the Mau Mau rebellion had been brought under control and in 1958, the Kenya Government declared Fort Jesus a historical monument. Plans for the fort's restoration were given a new lease of life when it was established that the Gulbenkian Foundation would be prepared to fund the restoration. A memorandum prepared by Governor Baring reveals that L. S. B. Leakey, informed him of Gulbenkian's offer of £1000 for a library and a 'research place', and a possible further £30,000 if the fort was evacuated.\* Baring telegraphed Pereira acknowledging his help and expressing his '...joy that it will be possible to renew and preserve a fascinating relic of the connection of this port of Africa with the famous Portuguese navigators of the past'.\* Kirkman later established that it was Pedro Theotónio Pereira, the Portuguese ambassador in London and administrator of Gulbenkian Foundation in the 1950s, who had masterminded the whole arrangement through the British Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd.\*

The restoration of the fort was overseen by the Fort Jesus Advisory Committee, chaired by none other but Edward Rodwell. The committee membership was comprised entirely of the administrative elite in the city, with a sole representative of the Goese community in the city, whose colonial connection to Portugal, as outlined below, was to become central to the commemoration of Prince Henry the Navigator planned for 1960. There were no Africans on the committee and the archive entirely excludes any mention of their involvement in this restoration, save as labourers, night watchmen or gatekeepers. The committee decided that the fort should be restored as near as possible to its original construction of 1593. This would mean that the principle developments made in the fort during the Omani occupation would be erased, and the fort would be returned to its state as an example of an early modern European military fortification. However, in a decision which played upon nostalgia as much as diplomatic niceties, it was agreed that the 'old customs which had been handed over with the Fort should be preserved, meaning that 'the Sultan flag should continue to fly; a gun should be fired at the beginning and at the end of Ramadan, and advice should be sought from the Provincial Administrator concerning the blowing of a horn when a

ship was sighted'.\* As the work progress, the committee also decided that the 'prison period was of [little] interest'. Consequently, the Prison Stores building, the Prison Hospital building and the walls around the Women's Jail were all demolished. \* Almost a year later, the minutes of a meeting of the same committee reveal that it was found impossible to adapt any prison cells as public lavatories or ticket office, and these buildings too were neglected in the restoration.

## **V      Outdoing Mr. Khrushchev': Protesting Imperial Memory Work**

With the restoration of the fort in place, at an invitation of new Colonial Governor, Patrick Renison between 27th October and November the 2nd 1960, Pereira arrived in Kenya for a six days official visit. His itinerary was divided between two days in Nairobi, where he visited Goan Institutions and had several official meetings, and four days on the 'Coast Province', where he opened the museum at Fort Jesus in Mombasa, met with Goan Institutions, and unveiled the Vasco da Gama memorial in Malindi. Whilst not anticipated when the agreement was first made, by time the Portuguese arrived in late 1960s, the real-politik of de-colonization, and the emerging set of rules which were unfolding in the post-colonial world, encouraged the Colony to defuse any potential for controversy. In January 15th 1960 at the Lancaster House Conference in London, with Mboya heading the Kenyan delegation, Kenya's independence schedule was established. The funding and the decision to invite Pereira to the opening ceremony set in train various diplomatic negotiations and preparations, which in themselves offer insights into the political sensitivities of the period. For example the Governor was advised that Pereira should not receive visits from the Goan community whilst he was staying at the Governor's Mansion, as the '...Indians may be inclined to protest'.\*

In a similar step to avoid controversy, it was decided during the preparation of the visit at Fort Jesus, not to invite the Governors of Uganda and Tanganyika. Felix Dias, the Portuguese consul in Kenya, had pressed for these invitations, arguing that for Portugal and for the Portuguese community in Kenya the event was very significant and should have the highest honours. However in a note to the Provincial Commissioner of the coast province, John Pinney was advised to downplay the event, noting sardonically that '...the Portuguese are addicted to the panoply of glory and would be inclined to make more of the occasion that we would'.\* Most likely aware of the political sensitivities around the visit, Pinney, vetoed Dias' proposal. Another blow to Dias was the decision by the Governor not to accompany Pereira to the coast, even though he was a guest of the government of Kenya. The Governor's exact motivations are not recorded but it is likely that he was sensitive to the controversy the visit was liable to generate both internally with the Kenya African National Union (KANU) and externally with India, which in the interest of the ongoing talks regarding de-colonization and international diplomacy he was hesitant to arouse. The colonial administration in Nairobi was right to be concerned about the Portuguese visit, as it had the potential to open a Pandora box of political controversy. Africa had entered into an intense phase of political change, and Portugal's trenchant opposition against decolonization made it a frequent target of anti-colonial protest.

One of the most important areas where this vexed political question would become apparent was amongst the Goan community, who's diasporic identity and anxiety about its future in Africa were caught up in what the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had termed the 'winds of change'. Even a quick glimpse over Boxer's work Fort Jesus and the Portuguese in Mombasa 1593-1729, is enough to recognize the deep historical connections of Goa with the East African Coast, and especially with Mombasa (Boxer and Azevedo, 1962). The Goese migrated to East Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, during the construction of the Uganda Railway. But India's independence in 1948, the increasing pressure on Portugal to leave its 'occupied' territories (Goa, Daman and Diu), the rigid position of Portugal under Salazar, and the rising nationalist movements in East Africa, all contributed to an escalating tension and sense of uncertainty within the Goan community in Kenya, which encouraged them to re-assert their relationship to Portugal. Reflecting the division that existed in Goa, there was also a divergence of opinion within the Goan

community in Kenya, between those who supported the Portuguese, reflected in several associations that were visited by Pereira in Nairobi and Mombasa – Goan Institute, Railway Goan Institute, The Goan Cymkhana, Santa Cruz Club, the Goan Taylor Society, Goans Overseas Association, The Goan Institute and the Goan Community - and those who were committed to ensuring the cause of Kenyan de-colonization, namely the East African Goan League led by Pia Gama Pinto. This divergence unfolded during Pereira's visit. On the one hand there were all those who were extremely eager to be present at most occasions and to get involved in the celebrations, organizing dinners, visits to the local associations and Goese schools, a local football tournament (the Henry the Navigator Football Cup which raised money towards the Vasco da Gama Memorial Fund), and so on. Newspapers such as the Mombasa Times, the East African Standard, the Sunday Post, and especially The Goan Voice were used to promote the visit, to boost the importance of Portugal, and the significance and integration of the Goan community. With Pereira's visit they sought Portuguese support and reassurance, particularly since the future of the Asian community in Kenya was perceived to be in jeopardy. On the other hand, members of Goan community also protested the visit, in part to criticise continuing Portuguese colonization in India and in part to ensure closer association with African nationalists and the cause for Kenyan de-colonization.

Throughout the 1950s, Pio Gama Pinto had been involved in the independence movement, working as a trade unionist and as a journalist promoting the cause for Kenyan liberation. As a young student in India he campaigned for the liberation of Goa, assisting in the activities of the Goa National Congress, but when faced with the possibility of deportation to the concentration camp of Tarrafal on Cape Verde, he returned to Kenya. Following his participation in Mau Mau related activities in Nairobi, in 1954 he was interned using special Emergency powers during Operation Anvil, first and briefly in Fort Jesus and then at the Takwa Special Detention camp on Manda Island for three years (Nowrojee, 2007). At this time, this camp on Manda Island was one of the severest and isolated of the colonial concentration camps and reserved for the Mau Mau 'hard-core' (Elkins, 2005). When he was released in 1957, Pinto recuperated and soon went to work as a political organizer and put his skills as a journalist to work, writing pamphlets, campaign materials, and letters to the press and eventually establishing the KANU newspaper Sauti Ya KANU.

In the weeks before the official opening of Fort Jesus, Pio, through the East African Goan League re-iterated his opposition to Pereira's visit, and contested the statement prepared by the Goan Overseas Association that 'Goans look to Portugal as their Fatherland'. On Pereira's arrival the East African Goan League presented an open letter to Pereira complaining that the Portuguese government had failed to recognize the basic human dignity and rights of its colonial subjects. Pio argued that in response to the 'legitimate human urge of the indigenous peoples to free themselves from alien domination...the Metropolitan government appeared to have turned a deaf ear and has resorted to repressive measures to sustain its authority'.\* Pio was supported by the small Asian Kenya Freedom Party who were broadly aligned with KANU, and who condemned the extension of an invitation to Pereira who they regarded as a representative of what they called a 'fascist regime'.\* Following this publication, a series of letters in the East African Standard condemned Pio's East African Goan League as unrepresentative and praised the fact that '...the Portuguese world is an independent nation and not an empire'.\* Another was so appalled that he suggested that Mr. Pio Gama Pinto had '...outdone Mr. Khrushchev in leveling charges against the Portuguese Government'. \* The East African Standard published just one letter supporting Pio's campaign, arguing that Pereira represented '...a regime detested the world over'.\*

More significantly Pio worked with the trade unionist and nationalist politician Tom Mboya to make a series of statement about Pereira's visit. Mboya, at this stage was one of the most significant figures in the KANU party. He also had a growing profile internationally, participating in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. In 1958 he established with Julius Nyerere, the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East and Central Africa. In response to Pereira's visit, Mboya

condemned the labour conditions in the Portuguese colonies which he likened to slavery. He argued that Portuguese colonial subjects were stripped of their dignity, and lived in conditions worse than in apartheid South Africa. In making these statements, Pio and Mboya clearly sought to disrupt the nostalgic narrative about Portugal and its navigators enacted at Fort Jesus, supported by James Kirkman and widely propagated by the Portuguese embassy. In June 1960, the Mombasa Town Planning Committee created 'Prince Henry Drive' in the city.\* Glowing portraits of Pereira and the benefits of Portuguese civilization in Africa appeared in the press in the run up to the visit. Throughout 1960 numerous articles about Prince Henry, the celebrations of his 500th anniversary, about Vasco da Gama, the impact of Portuguese influence on Africa were published in the Kenyan press. In March 1961, Kirkman had published a long tribute to Henry the Navigator in the *Kenya Weekly News*, and in January of that year Rodwell had promoted the Portuguese celebration, arguing that Kenyan participation '...would be a pleasant and polite gesture.' In the Goan press, these articles ranged from a report on the President of Brazil - Kubitschek - official visit to Portugal, including a significant photograph of Pereira with the Pope John XXIII, and another depicting Pereira way home after the 'triumphal visit to Goa and Pakistan'.\* At a dinner in honour of Pereira, Felix Dias, the Consul for Portugal praised Portugal for the '...great contribution in bringing together the various races and creeds in the world'.\*

In their challenge to this colonial memory work, both Pio and Mboya drew directly on Basil Davidson's anti colonial text *The African Awakening* (1955) which had republished parts of the devastating report on Portugal's African colonies prepared secretly by the Portuguese Inspector General of Colonies, Henrique Galvão. Mboya also raised the possibility of strike action in the port of Mombasa. This was a serious threat given the history of labour unrest over the previous decade, and which had prompted the colonial administration to commission the Mombasa Social Survey - a report on the economy and labour conditions of the city, co-written by Edward Rodwell (Rodwell, 1958). Mboya had been instrumental in resolving a major dispute in the port in 1955, and was a key figure in the organization of the Dockworkers Union in Mombasa and the Kenya Federation of Labour (Cooper, 1987). Mboya also sanctioned physical protest against the Portuguese visit, and instigated both a public boycott of the public celebrations by Kenyans, and a political boycott of private events which African members of the Legislature Council had been invited. Two Kenyan ministers who had recently been appointed in the Kenya Legislative Council, boycotted accordingly. The *Daily Nation* reported that six people were arrested outside the Nairobi Goan Institute on the 27th, after rushing Pereira's car as it approached the institute.\* This situation was repeated on the following day, when three people were arrested for protesting at the Goan school.\*

The Portuguese daily newspaper *Diário de Notícias* predictably made light of these incidents and highlighted the vivid demonstration of loyalty of the 1500 Goan residents in the capital and the 500 school children who engaged with the celebration, downplaying the protest of '...eight blacks exhibiting upside down banners'. \* At the same time, Pereira took every opportunity to tell journalists how the situation in the Portuguese 'overseas provinces' was under control. He informed the press that '...so far the situation within Portuguese territories is completely calm' and there are 'only minor incidents'.\* However, in spite of a highly polished media campaign to support the visit, the protests were sustained. At a political rally in Nakuru, the visit of Pereira was condemned as a '...danger to our freedom'.\* Action continued in Mombasa, where KANU applied for a license to hold a public meeting to exercise their right to protest the opening of the fort. The request was denied by the District Commissioner, but nevertheless one of the regional organizers of KANU's youth wing, Peter Lungatso, is reported to have '...warned Africans to stay away from the celebration' and instructed people to 'keep off the streets when he passes' and added that failure to do so would result in 'their being regarded as "the greatest enemy" of the African community'.\* Meanwhile, the Indian delegation in Kenya expressed their dissatisfaction more diplomatically. The Indian Trade Commissioner, Mr. V. V. Dev requested Mombasa City Council to ensure that all Indian flags were lowered in the city on the occasion of Pereira's visit.\*

## VI 'The panoply of glory': the birth of the museum

Against the background of these protests, on the 29th of October 1960, having inspected the Guard of Honour mounted by the Royal East African navy, Pereira solemnly entered Fort Jesus in Mombasa as the Bamburi Band played the national anthems of Portugal, Zanzibar and Britain. The Portuguese had lost the Fort to the Omani over 200 years before (26th November 1729), but due to the financial support of the Portuguese Gulbenkian Foundation, it was the Portuguese vice prime minister that unveiled a plaque to declare the opening of Fort Jesus museum. In addition to political representations from the Sultan of Zanzibar, gathered at Fort Jesus were the key figures of the colonial heritage administration: the palaeontologist and director of the Corydon Museum in Nairobi, Louis Leaky; Mervyn Cowie, the director of the Royal National Parks of Kenya; and of course, James Kirkman, the Warden of Fort Jesus and of Coastal Historical Sites. Following the speeches, Kirkman took Pereira on a private tour of the museum.\* The strike at the port had been called off – an unrelated dispute concerning pay for clerks at the Port having been agreed in the days before the visit - but newspaper reports do record that few 'Africans' were seen at the celebration, suggesting that the boycott of the commemoration was successful. It is recorded also that another anti-colonial protest was attempted that morning, but suppressed on Makupa road.\* But the fact that it went ahead also demonstrates that the police state that had been created to suppress the Mau Mau rebellion took protests to Pereira's visit in its stride.

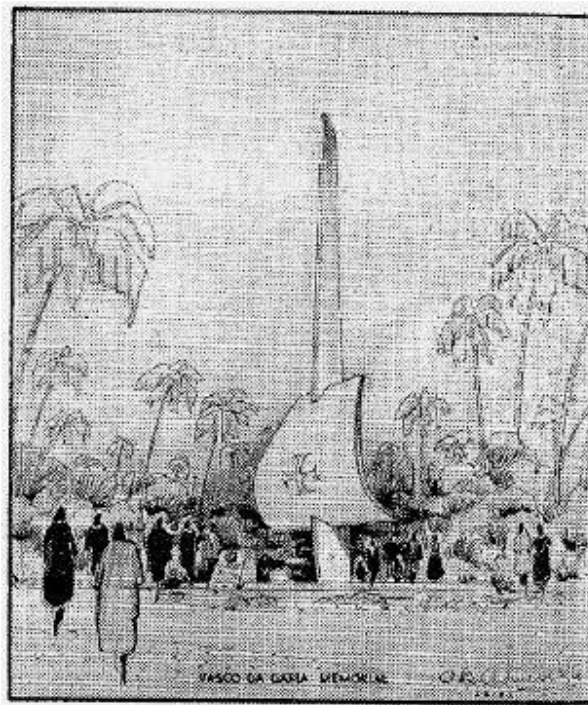


Figure 4 The Vasco Da Gama Memorial 1960 '

It is symbolic of the spirit of discovery and a motif of a mast and full sail are set in the surrounding pool of water. The sail is decorated with the Red Cross of the Order of Christ' Source (Daily Nation 31 October 1960)

Throughout these events, like the British, the Portuguese took every opportunity to tell their history in very particular ways. Not only did they distort the harsh reality of conditions in Angola and Mozambique, but they also used the opening of Fort Jesus and a whole host of events that followed to present a wholly nostalgic portrayal of Portuguese history on the coast. At the local Goan school, the school principal, Mr Ildefonso de Souza, was awarded with the medal of the

Portuguese Navy. Pereira also donated to the school, what the Daily Nation called a 'dream book...a lovely large volume bound in red with gold lettering on the cover containing some of the best maps made by the Portuguese since the early 16th Century – entitled Henry the Navigator'.\* Later that day, Pereira decorated James Kirkman, Edward Rodwell and the Portuguese Consul Felix Dias with the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator, an honour specially created in 1960 to mark the 500th anniversary of the Prince's death. The heroic sentiments represented in these gestures were reinforced soon afterward with the unveiling of the Vasco da Gama monument in Malindi originally conceived by Felix Dias and Edward Rodwell. (Figure 4) The monument was funded by monies raised within the Goese community and designed by the Tanzanian architect Anthony B. Almeida, of Goese origins. Eliding any reference to the Kenyan people, the Provisional Commissioner John Pinney told the Mombasa Times that the memorial would be a symbol of friendship not just between Britain and Portugal, but '...between English people and Portuguese nationals here in the coast Province'.\* In Portugal, the *Diário de Notícias* noted that '...this was further evidence of the profound loyalty of Goese to the motherland, as well as to the duty that the Portuguese government has in giving national solidarity full support to the community in Kenya'.\* In its official version, the Vasco da Gama monument depicts a sail ship trimmed down to its elemental form: the mast, the sail and the sea. Later Almeida (in Brussels 2005) argued that the monument can also be seen as an abstracted depiction of a sword. According to Brussels (2005: 119) this interpretation suggests that Almeida aimed to subvert the ambitions of the Portuguese to memorialise Vasco da Gama as a hero, since the monument could also act as a metaphor for '...a history of oppression, exploitation and slavery'. Whatever the effectiveness of this interpretation, which cannot be sustained from the discourse around its opening, today the monument lies in near ruin, forgotten by many in a neglected location in Malindi. It is its derelict state rather than Almeida post rationalization of his commission, that is perhaps a more authentic and critical response to the aims of original colonial commemoration and a suitable rebuke to the preservation of colonial myths at Fort Jesus.

## VII Orbits and Legacies

After leaving Kenya, Pereira toured Mozambique, Angola, São Tomé, Guinea, and arrived back in Portugal on the 18th of November 1960. On arrival in Lisbon he informed the press - 'Do you want to know what the Portuguese from Africa think? They are united and determined around the homeland flag'.\*For the British, the restoration of the fort also ensured that key colonial issues were addressed. The restoration allowed them to pursue an imperial archaeology that made the colony appear more 'civilized'. In the context of the Mau Mau revolt, it enabled a certain normalization of the colonial enterprise. The restoration was used to provide a good-news-story from Kenya, and was picked up in British and American newspaper and magazines such as *National Geographic*. This portrayal of Kenya was in stark contrast to the reportage about brutality that enraged the middle-England opinion from the late 1950s onwards, notably following the murder of detainees by colonial forces in the Hola concentration camp. (Anderson, 2004). The barbarism of the colony could in part be washed away by the new fort and its museum. In the months after, according to the Minister of Tourism, the future for the coast was bright. The arrival of air-travel he argued would enable coastal resorts like Malindi, just north of the fort, to become the 'new Miami'.\*

These events underlined that the restoration of Fort Jesus enabled a convergence of two colonial enterprises, who despite their diverging strategies on the future of the European colonization in Africa, manipulated the histories and memories of this site and its surrounding landscape for their mutual benefit. More broadly, the aims of the paper have been to comment on legacies of colonial knowledge on the political condition of public memory in Kenya. In doing so the paper has drawn upon what the potential for post-colonial theory to recover the marginalized voices of the oppressed and the excluded. Close attention to the birth of the museum at Fort Jesus, and its memory work has provided key insights into the politics of public memory, its forms, transformations and meaning with colonial society. The recovery of these events is also important



in terms of the understanding the orbit of colonial memory work that still afflict the consumption of the past and heritage at this site, and more broadly throughout Kenya.

Yet, in spite of all of this, we have our doubts. Despite the vast range of postcolonial criticism and plenty of new scholarship that have recast the history of the coast (see Wilding, 1987; Kusimba, 1999; Mazrui, 2002 and Middleton, 2003) the ghosts of the colonial episteme remain embedded in the fort. Whilst Fort Jesus was selected along with Mount Kenya as a national icon to be published in school children's text books following independence, like most national monuments in Kenya, the fort still tells a muted story about colonization. As we have noted in our argument about the highly politicized nature of public memory in Kenya, it is telling that the process of forgetting, eliding responsibility and ensuring a particular form of consensual and regulated fiction first performed by the Portuguese at Fort Jesus in 1960 is in part remade in the contemporary memory-condition enacted in the museum. Our hope is that the history of the resistance to the restoration of the fort and the visit of the Portuguese outlined in this paper can be used to elaborate an alternative narrative at the site. This story is even more potent, given that the two key figures involved in this protest, Pio Gama Pinto and Tom Mboya were both assassinated in the period following independence, by still unknown elements of the post-colonial regime lead by Kenyatta. As argued by Pheroze Nowrojee, for Kenyans, it is this kind of history that '...assures us that self respect and dignity are possible in periods of oppression. It demonstrates the vulnerability of tyranny; it is an example against oppression. These are the very strengths we need as citizens...to challenge unjust societies and the breakdown of the Rule of Law'. Nowrojee (2002)

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