ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER COURSE IN URBAN STUDIES [4CITIES]

DANIEL LUCAS VIANA SANTOS

WALKING THROUGH COLONIALITY

NARRATIVES OF COLONIAL HERITAGE IN GUIDED TOURS OF COPENHAGEN AND MADRID

BRUSSELS, 01 OF SEPTEMBER 2025

SUPERVISED BY PROF. HENRIK REEH / SECOND READER: PROF. WALTER MATZNETTER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work could not have been possible without the support of all those who have walked with me across different continents, languages, and cultures. Thank you to all the tour guides who trusted me and took some of their time to participate in this study.

To those who came before me and paved the way and now live in *Aruanda:* Dalva, Francisco, Joatam and Zeza. I hope that my paths can honour your trajectories on this planet. To my beloved parents, Edivam and Rosane, for always believing in my dreams and teaching me every day how to become a human being. To my brother and partner architect, Danilo, who always supported me and was essential in helping me understand the topic from the earliest stages of research.

To Válber, for his love and unconditional support in pursuing my dreams from day one.

To the friends without whom I could not have survived this journey: Ali, Adi, Júlia, Juli, Manaal, Paz, and Vicky. Thank you for sharing both the beauty and the hardships of 4Cities with me, and for allowing me to be my truest self. You are my family now.

To Débora, my longtime friend and business partner for always pushing me forward. To Filipe, my twin from a different mother, who has been so present in these amazing two years even from a distance.

To those who shared not only their houses with me during the programme but helped me feel a little bit more at home: Carola, Dineia, Marcelo & Giovanni, Lucas & Rogério.

To the staff of 4Cities, especially professors Carmen Hidalgo, Diego Barrado, Joshua Grigsby, Kristin Veel and Walter Matznetter. Thank you for the valuable insights during courses and conversations, which shaped this work in many ways.

Last but not least, I owe a special thanks to my supervisor, Henrik Reeh, for his generosity in believing in my project, fostering critical thought in creative and inspiring ways.

Finally, to my *Orixás* and *Entidades*, deities who always protect me, guide me when I'm lost, and calm me when I need it, even when I do not acknowledge their presence. *Saravá. Êpa Babá!*

ABSTRACT

Across different European cities, colonial memory and its legacies have become themes of dispute. Social actors have engaged in debates and practices such as the toppling of statues, the reinterpretation of monuments and the repatriation of artifacts. In this context, the urban landscape functions both as witness and support to contemporary practices of commemoration and memory-making. In this context, walking tours are seen as performative acts that narrate versions of the past and foster specific imaginaries on urban and national history. While the multiple tourism's impacts on cities have been widely studied, research on its engagement with colonial urban heritage remains limited. (Adu-Ampong & Berg, 2024; Kølvraa & Knudsen, 2020). This research addresses this gap with the following question: To what extent and in what ways do free walking tours in Copenhagen and Madrid engage with narratives and spaces related to colonialism? The study adopts decoloniality as its main epistemological framework, challenging Eurocentric traditions of knowledge (A. Escobar, 2007; Quijano, 2007), drawing on critical heritage studies, comparative urbanism, and memory studies. Methodologically, it combines spatial mapping with narrative-performative analysis, based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with tour guides. The findings indicate that colonial memories remain largely repressed in both cities, reflecting a broader "coloniality of memory" (Tlostanova, 2017). By foregrounding heritage and tourism practices as arenas of memory politics, the thesis highlights how colonial absences continue to shape European urban narratives.

Keywords: walking tours; urban heritage; tourism; coloniality

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In verschiedenen europäischen Städten sind die koloniale Erinnerung und ihr Erbe zu einem Streitthema geworden. Soziale Akteure beteiligen sich an Debatten und Praktiken wie dem Sturz von Statuen, der Neuinterpretation von Denkmälern und der Rückführung von Artefakten. In diesem Kontext fungiert die Stadtlandschaft sowohl als Zeuge als auch als Unterstützung zeitgenössischer Praktiken des Gedenkens und der Erinnerungsbildung. Stadtrundgänge gelten in diesem Zusammenhang als eine dieser Praktiken: performative Akte, die Versionen der Vergangenheit erzählen und spezifische Vorstellungen von Stadt- und Nationalgeschichte fördern. Während die vielfältigen Auswirkungen des Tourismus auf Städte umfassend untersucht wurden, ist die Forschung zu seiner Auseinandersetzung mit dem kolonialen Stadterbe nach wie vor begrenzt. (Adu-Ampong & Berg, 2024; Kølvraa & Knudsen, 2020). Diese Forschung befasst sich mit dieser Lücke mit der folgenden Frage: Inwieweit und auf welche Weise setzen sich kostenlose Stadtrundgänge in Kopenhagen und Madrid mit Narrativen und Räumen im Zusammenhang mit dem Kolonialismus auseinander? Die Studie verfolgt den Ansatz der Dekolonialität als zentralen erkenntnistheoretischen Rahmen und hinterfragt eurozentrische Wissenstraditionen (A. Escobar, 2007; Quijano, 2007). Sie stützt sich dabei auf kritische Kulturerbestudien, vergleichenden Urbanismus und Gedächtnisstudien. Methodisch kombiniert sie räumliche Kartierung mit narrativ-performativer Analyse, basierend auf teilnehmender Beobachtung und halbstrukturierten Interviews mit Reiseleitern. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass koloniale Erinnerungen in beiden Städten weitgehend verdrängt bleiben, was eine umfassendere „Kolonialität der Erinnerung“ widerspiegelt (Tlostanova, 2017). Indem die Arbeit Kulturerbe und Tourismuspraktiken als Schauplätze der Erinnerungspolitik in den Vordergrund stellt, verdeutlicht sie, wie koloniale Abwesenheiten europäische Stadtnarrative bis heute prägen.

Schlüsselwörter: Stadtrundgänge; städtisches Erbe; Tourismus; Kolonialität

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PROLOGUE

This episode happened in December 2023, when I was in London and decided to take a 'Free Walking Tour'. We walked through important streets and saw the iconic historic sites - The Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, The Mall, The London Eye – while our guide told us stories about medieval life, royal conquest, wartime grief, and surely, palace gossip.

The guide should have been in her early thirties and had moved from Colombia to London after some years of working as a tour guide at home. At the end of the tour, we talked a little – *there is always some feeling of connection when I meet Latin-American people in Europe*. As we shared experiences, I asked what had brought her to the UK. Due to the economic situation, she decided to leave the country and search for a better life, *like so many of us*. That was when she told us something around these words: "here, I can finally be in touch with where the *real history* happened".

"The real history". The History with capital letters written in my schoolbooks. The one that told me that in 1500 the Portuguese "discovered" Brazil. The History that has made us regard our own identity from a set of European lenses, with its own narratives and values. The same History which still plays a role in "othering" us – Latino bodies navigating European cities - in many different ways.

Those words disoriented me. Not because I hadn't heard them before, but because somehow, they came from *someone like me*. Perhaps the belief that Europe is the site of the "real History" is more widespread than I imagined – even among the educated, mobile younger generation.

I share this experience not just as a localized anecdote, but as a clue that became the seed of this research. It led me to ask myself: how are tourism practices articulating and producing memory in and about European Cities? Are they mere tools for the reaffirmation and repetition of coloniality?

And this is where I start, from disorientation.

Although I chose to narrate one single episode as a point of ebullition, this Thesis is born from the acknowledgement of my personal implication in a network of colonial entanglements. It is an attempt to produce knowledge from the wound, acknowledging the pain, the conflicts and the frictions which still traverse our bodies and urban landscapes in contemporary times.

This thesis is born from this wound. We approach it, listen to it, walk through it. And hope that such a journey can help us search a future *otherwise*.


SAGRADO

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the globe, in both former colonies and metropolises, colonial memory and its legacies have become themes of dispute. Contestation has been driven by social movements, permeated art institutions and museums, and generated a myriad of political discourses and responses[1]. These disputes expose the ways through which colonialism and imperialism persist in producing global inequalities in the present.

The contemporary contestations do not only take the streets or are confined to institutions, but they also reverberate in academic debates across multiple disciplines. In particular, they exemplify the cultural impact of Postcolonial Studies and Decoloniality over the last decades. Different authors recognize a growing interest in adopting such frameworks in urban studies (Carroza-Athens & Grosfoguel, 2023; Delgado, 2019; Delgado & Ruiz, 2014; Ha & Picker, 2022) and heritage studies (Harrison & Hughes, 2010; Knudsen et al., 2021; Nuñez, 2023; Paim & Araújo, 2018), pointing the enduring presence of coloniality in the production of knowledge and space.

Understanding the forementioned disputes requires situating them within the colonizing processes which lasted for over five centuries and have deeply informed uneven development patterns across the world. Colonial urbanization established certain planning practices, architectural aesthetics, and monumental artifacts which form the built environment in many cities in previously colonised spaces (King, 1989). At the same time, these processes also entailed the circulation of wealth, technologies, knowledge, and affect from the colonies to the metropolises, producing much of what is today considered heritage in European cities (Ha & Picker, 2022).

In this sense, the city is taken as a historical witness of continuous processes of domination and cultural imbrication, upholding a multiplicity of relations, archives and memories (Rock & González, 2020). The urban fabric, and especially colonial landscapes, can reproduce the multiple violent forces which shaped it over time; yet they may also foster the construction of new relational pasts and futures. As Lene Asp (2024) argues, cities are archives-in-the-making.

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[1] Examples of such contestations by social movements include the iconoclast interventions that followed Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020; within the art institutions, Documenta 15 2022 and the Venice Biennale 2024 aimed at decentring European curatorial practices; also in 2024, the National Museet of Denmark repatriated of an Indigenous Tupinambá cloak to Brazil, a demonstration of diplomatic responses caused by recent waves of debates on colonialism.

The interaction between urban heritage and tourism activities have generated profound social, spatial, and economic impacts on cities, especially in the neoliberal global era. Tourism has influenced city marketing strategies, agendas, and patterns of urban transformation (Ashworth & Page, 2011; Klaniczay, 2022; Rivera-García et al., 2023). As an embodied practice, tourism also has a powerful capacity to promote certain imaginaries of the past and to shape how heritage is experienced (Adu-Ampong & Berg, 2024).

Among these practices, guided tours have emerged as a prevalent form of structured engagement, particularly in cities experiencing high volumes of visitors (Nilsson & Zillinger, 2020; Waal & Arets, 2022). Not only do they offer important epistemological tools to understand a city (Lopez-Cantero & Robb, 2023), but they also contribute to either reinforcing dominant historical narratives (Asp, 2024) or facilitating alternative perspectives (Bryon, 2012; Mathisen, 2019). Through their performative dimension, guided tours integrate heritage and tourism by selecting certain narratives and providing a 'spatial practice of history' (Nilsson & Zillinger, 2020).

Christoffer Kølvraa and Britta Knudsen (2020) suggest that performative activities, such as protests, artistic interventions, or walking tours related to colonial sites are symbolic and practical tools to decolonize heritage. Despite recent scholarly calls to analyse how urban heritage practices address coloniality and their decolonial potential (Land, 2023; Paim & Araújo, 2018; Ruffo, 2022) there remains a lack of embodied studies on tourism practices and performances that examine their narrative strategies when engaging with colonialism, particularly on European cities (Adu-Ampong & Berg, 2024). Within this context, this thesis poses the following Research Questions (RQ).

Main RQ:

To what extent and in what ways do free walking tours in Copenhagen and Madrid engage with narratives and spaces related to colonialism?

Sub-RQs:

1. How are narratives and spaces related to colonialism integrated into (or omitted from) the broader historical and cultural image of these cities?
2. What factors shape tour guides' decisions to include or exclude themes of colonialism in their walking tours?

To address these questions, the thesis employs Decoloniality as its epistemological framework, shifting away from intra-European discourses of modernity and challenging the Eurocentric assumptions embedded in the

production of knowledge and everyday life. Methodology is inspired by the decolonial principles of applying critical reflexivity, reciprocity, embracing 'othered' ways of knowing and developing transformative praxis (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). The research analyses the ways in which colonial history and heritage is selected, narrated, and performed to the audiences by conducting participant observation and interviews with tour guides. The recordings from each tour, alongside transcribed interviews will be further analysed through narrative-performative methods (Riessmann, 2008).

This thesis follows a conventional academic structure but proposes some deviations. Its form mirrors the methodology: the text is understood as the register of a movement, with some interruptions, encounters, and situated reflection. Drawing on the metaphor of walking through coloniality, the chapters unfold as stops along a conceptual and empirical journey, inviting the reader to walk along and be affectively involved, rather than observing from a distance.

The first chapter sets the epistemological framing on which the argumentation is built, drawing on the Postcolonial critique and the Decolonial turn in the humanities and social sciences. The second chapter addresses the main disciplinary fields through which the research "walks": urban studies, heritage, and tourism, reflecting how the modernity/coloniality paradigm informs the debates across them. The third chapter frames the walking tour as an object of study, discussing its role in performing historical urban narratives. Chapter four presents the methodological framework for the analysis and describes the steps of research. The next two chapters present the two case studies of Copenhagen and Madrid, beginning with a historical contextualization of each country's involvement in overseas colonialism, against which the narrative analysis is situated. Chapter seven delves into the interpretation of the interviews and establishes comparisons between both cases. Finally, the discussion brings the findings into dialogue with theory, drafting answers to the research questions.

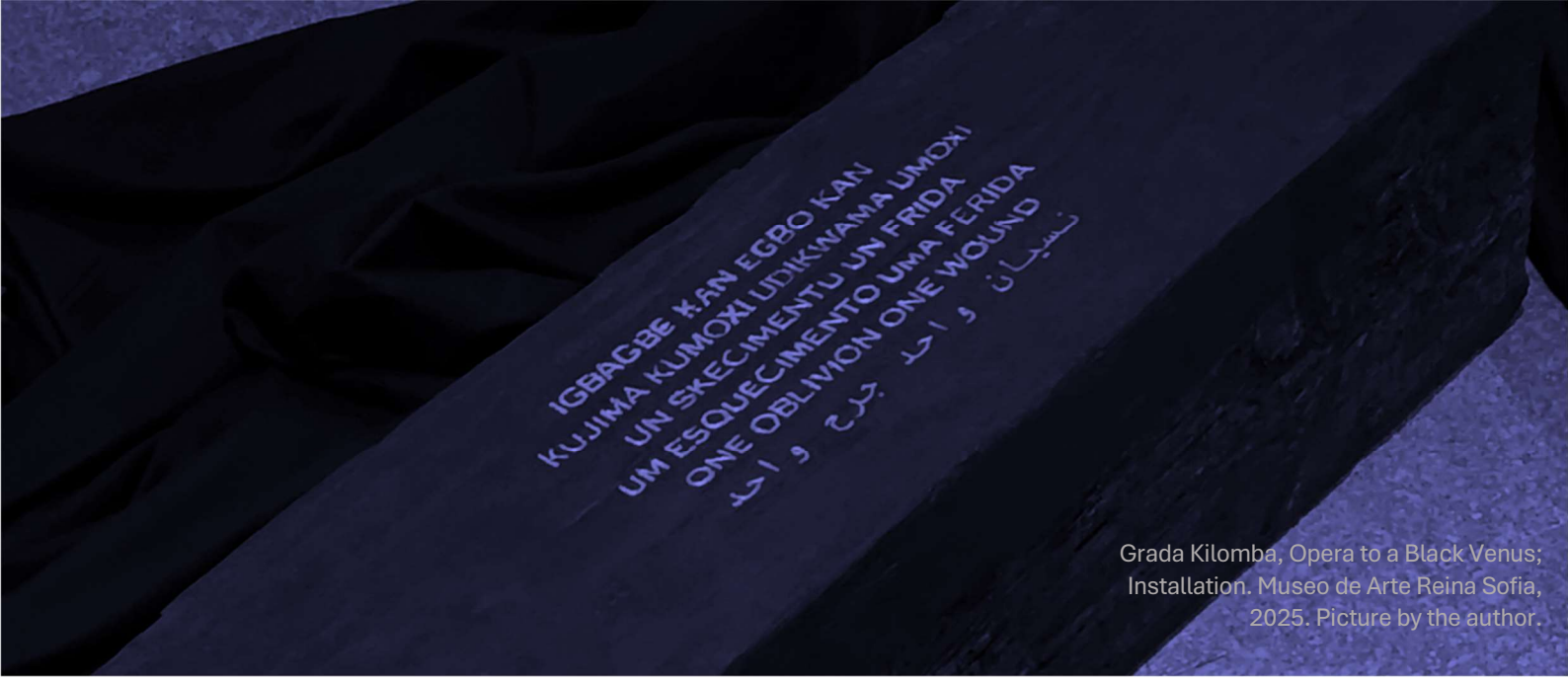
In doing so, the thesis employs multiple modes of narration. Academic rigour and disciplinary standards are maintained, but different voices speak. Sometimes, I, the author, speak in the first person to highlight very personal experiences or decisions made in the process, registering immediate *vivências,* or *Erlebnis* in a Benjaminian sense. At other moments, a more collective "we" appears, denoting positions informed by the many authors, artists, interlocutors in general whose ideas contribute to this work. This

subject makes evident a more shared, matured experience, which would be closer to the notion of *experiência*, or *Erfarhung*[2].

The use of images also happens in two ways. Some of them are included in the traditional format, accompanied by a figure number and referenced by the text. Some others, such as historical paintings, or collages made by the author are interwoven with the narration, with no direct mention. The goal is to form different narrative currents where the images invite us to think with and through them, creating a *montage,* in a reference to Aby Warburg. These decisions build a coherent and strong narrative, which is able to encompass these different voices and question ideas of 'neutral universality' by always speaking from somewhere.

In sum, the thesis critically interrogates how colonial histories are narrated in the everyday practices of urban tourism. By situating walking tours within broader debates on modernity/coloniality, heritage, and memory, it contributes to understand how the colonial past continues to shape European cities, offering insights into possibilities and limitations on the narrative and memory workings of coloniality.

[2] In Portuguese, my native tong, the words *vivência* and *experiência* have very similar connotations to the Benjaminian ideas around *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis,* and how the notion of experience is articulated by narrative.



Grada Kilomba, Opera to a Black Venus; Installation. Museo de Arte Reina Sofia, 2025. Picture by the author.

1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

In the prologue to this work, I have shared a specific episode which encapsulated some discomforts and became the beginning of a personal academic journey to engage with enquiry in urban Europe from a cultural perspective. Before continuing with the development of the thesis, I decided to take a step back and pose some fundamental questions on how to carry out this work.

How can I produce relevant knowledge which reflects my own position and paths within a transnational academic community? What does it mean to research colonialism in European cities from my perspective as a Latin-American researcher?

Before we move on, it is necessary then to make some epistemological choices which are able to provide clues on responding to such questions and anchor the research. To do so, I reference the artistic work of Portuguese Black artist and writer Grada Kilomba. In her installation and performance pieces, she interrogates the ideas of colonial memory, trauma, knowledge and violence: “What stories are told? How are they told? And told by whom?” (Kilomba, n.d.).

By taking inspiration in her work (Kilomba, 2010, 2015), I intend to engage with an epistemology which is able to include the personal experience as part of the academic discourse, recognizing that my writing is located in a specific time and place, and that my body has a personal history embedded in larger social realities.

The question of knowledge production in Kilomba’s art appears in alignment with central themes in Postcolonial Studies: the critique that European epistemologies – which have become hegemonic across the world – do not represent universality, but a specific locus of enunciation which is historical

and political. Addressing the question of one's own position may lead to the dismantling of universality as a myth and the production of situated knowledges as advocated by Donna Haraway (1988).

Postcolonial Studies and Decoloniality contest the colonial world system, challenging European historiographical traditions, and addressing the politics of knowledge production. By assuming them as epistemological references, we take a series of positions. This section represents one of the efforts – which encompasses one's whole life – to situate oneself in the colonial matrix of power and find ways to navigate it. In my case, this happens by doing research and finding my own voice, writing.

I. THE POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE, DISPLACING THE UNIVERSAL

The intellectual paths which allowed me to understand and challenge an apparent neutrality of heritage and history led me to Postcolonial studies. In this section, I engage with key Middle Eastern and South Asian thinkers whose critiques of Western modernity and knowledge production informed the initial conceptual framing of this work.

Edward Said, in his pivotal work *Orientalism* (Said, 2019 [1978]), looks at the production of knowledge during the nineteenth century and further fames it as a broader project of domination. He states that modern Western discourse and academia were created in relation to their other: societies whose values and logics did not mirror those considered white and/or civilized. In this process, the West invented not only the notion of *Orient* but also claimed a historical subject of enunciation, transforming into mere 'objects' of knowledge the cultures and communities subjugated by imperial rule. Following this same argument, such enunciator established the 'universal' as an epistemological category, eliding its own position and partiality.

In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Gayatri Spivak calls epistemic violence the historical silencing of colonized voices, alongside their cosmovisions, ontologies, and epistemologies. She further argues that even post-structuralism failed in recognizing the implications of imperialism in intellectual and economic history.. By relying on self-contained European perspectives, such violence perpetuates the asymmetrical constitution of colonial subjects as 'other' (Spivak, 1988). Gurminder Bhabra (2014) notes that Spivak is not suggesting that the history of imperialism is the only history of the West, but she addresses the question of how imperialism created domination and hegemony.

In the following decade, Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 2012 [1994]) conceptualized the main aims of Postcolonialism, which should "interrupt the Western discourses of modernity" (p. 345) and transform such narratives by re-inscribing other cultural traditions in them. Building on the work of his predecessors, he focused on problematizing modernity not only as a historical period, but rather as the process which constructed a specific position in historical enunciation (Bhambra, 2014).

Postcolonial studies powerfully challenge the myth of Western universality, and for the purposes of this thesis, they inform the unmasking of 'neutral' colonial heritage narratives. However, seeking for a framework which accounts for my own bodily, affective and epistemic positionality as a Latin-American researcher in Europe, I engage with the decolonial turn to build a more grounded and praxis-driven methodology.

II. CHOOSING THE DECOLONIAL OPTION: FROM CRITIQUE TO COMMITMENT

If the Postcolonial critique enables the unsettling of epistemic universality, it is the contribution of the decoloniality school which allows this research to confront the structural endurance of imperialism in in everyday urban life. Such contribution revolves around the concept of *coloniality,* not as a historical period – colonialism – but as a lens to understanding the ways in which urban heritage, tourism, and storytelling practices are still embedded in colonial projects.

Initially elaborated by South American diaspora scholars, notably Aníbal Quijano, Maria Lugones and Walter Mignolo, Decoloniality offers a world-systems approach to critique modernity from its margins. Such critique starts by the theoretical proposition of *modernity/coloniality* (A. Escobar, 2007). The concept reveals that the experience of modernity and its paradigms – progress, development, and capitalism – can only be fully understood by considering its underside, colonialism (Quijano, 2007). By locating the origins of modernity around 1492 with the European control of the Atlantic, the decolonial option proposes a world perspective to understand modernity, in opposition to an intra-European explanation.

Analysing the current global structures of exploitation, domination, and resource distribution, Quijano (2007) concludes that they continue to disproportionally affect groups that were historically categorized as colonized races, ethnicities, or nations during the formation of modern world power.

Overall, the idea of coloniality foregrounds processes of colonial domination and subalternization of other cultures and knowledges which are integral part of modernity. Thus, modernity/coloniality reveals two sides of the same coin (Vázquez, 2020). Despite the formal end of the colonial rule in the twentieth century, *coloniality* has endured as a powerful force in the contemporary world-system. It has allowed the current global hegemonic model that since modernity has articulated social life in benefit of capital accumulation and the preservation of power to European white elites (Quijano, 2007).

The concept of coloniality thus frames the analytical lens through which this thesis understands walking tours not as merely banal touristic practices, but as performances embedded in ongoing structures of racial, spatial, and epistemic domination. This is why this work aims at treating colonialism not as past, but as **a surviving logic integrated in the fabric of urban space**, which is the critical standpoint from which methodology is articulated.

III. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK THROUGH COLONIALITY?

The title of this research conveys a metaphor, a conceptual thread to weave together its theoretical, methodological, and narrative dimensions. It does not only address the object of study, the walking tours, but also the act of movement as a way of locating oneself in the tensions of power and knowledge production while navigating contemporary cities. It indicates a movement through spaces, histories, and one's own participation in colonial logics.

Working with the concept of coloniality first indicates this theoretical commitment to finding a locus of enunciation, or the *somewhere* from which knowledge is produced (Haraway, 1988).

Figure 1 - Claire Fontaine, Foreigners Everywhere; 2024; Venice Biennale. Picture by the author

When professor Rolando Vázquez (2024) asks:

> 'What is your position within the colonial difference?'

he invites us to research and write from within the very structures we seek to critique. To do so, one must take position – a position that is constantly negotiated and rearticulated at every step in the movement of walking.

The research process is understood here as "actional thinking", grounded in the question of "how the world is inscribed in your skin rather than on how the novelty of post-structuralism affects your mind" (Madina & Mignolo, 2012, p. 35). This means that I take Latin America as my embodied perspective, and the Global South as the epistemological space from which I engage with European cities. The bibliography reflects an awareness of the diverse ways in which authors are marked by the experience of the colonial wound. This also entails privileging voices from different regions in the world – both in academia and beyond: in the arts, popular culture, and *othered* forms of knowledge.

Walking inspires the methodology, guiding the fieldwork not merely as 'data collection', but as a bodily negotiation with space, narratives, and subjects. By walking through coloniality, we propose a methodology which is able to articulate mobility, relationality, and contradiction. In such movement, research unfolds across geographies, histories, and epistemic frontiers. Finally, it also represents an effort towards guiding you, the reader, through the narrative of the thesis itself. On this walking tour, we hope to be guided by a desire to unsettle and reimagine the urban legacies of colonialism.

Iván Argote, Paseo; Video.
Venice Biennale, 2024.
Picture by the author.

2. URBAN EUROPE IN THE COLONIAL MATRIX: CITIES, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

The field of urban studies has historically positioned European cities as prototypes for modern urban life, serving as both the analytical and empirical reference point against which other urbanizations were assessed (Roy, 2009). This chapter takes a different approach by examining the European city from the perspective of modernity/coloniality, analysing how colonial power structures have shaped urban development, heritage practices, and tourism economies.

I. EUROPEAN CITIES IN BETWEEN MODERNITY/COLONIALITY

For several decades now, critical literature in the social sciences has acknowledged the role of colonial rule in shaping contemporary urban hierarchies (Castells, 1973; King, 1976). Anthony King (1989) argues that the spatial organization of the 20th century must be understood not only from industrial capitalism, but also through the core-periphery dynamics established during the long history of colonialism. From the 1980s onward, urban studies have focused on the themes of globalisation, world economy and the formation of world/global cities. However, such analyses failed to recognise that such world system is a product of colonial-industrial relations (Carroza-Athens & Grosfoguel, 2023).

Despite the significance of his theoretical work, King's earlier work (1976) focused largely on cities of formerly colonised regions, reinforcing a binary between "modern" European cities and "non-modern" urban developments elsewhere. This logic, despite acknowledging the relation core/periphery, assigns a hierarchy of values to it. Present in the genealogy of urban studies (Robinson, 2013), such understanding posits the European city as the site of

modernity and innovation, while situating other geographies as marginal, incomplete, or unmodern.

Recent scholarship, however, has been challenging such dichotomy. The works of Jennifer Robinson (2013, 2016) and Ananya Roy (2009, 2011) have dislocated such hierarchical understandings and the "Western/modern city" as a model, calling for other geographies of knowledge. Noa Ha and Giovanni Picker (2022) emphasize the need for historically grounded analyses that frame colonialism as a process of co-implication and circulation rather than a one-way projection of power. From this perspective, colonialism produced not only the periphery but also shaped European cities themselves through the circulation of technologies, knowledge systems, cultural imaginaries, and economic wealth.

Working from the conceptual framework of modernity/coloniality, we can thus begin to read European cities not simply as centres of modern progress, but as landscapes sedimented with colonial violences. The very infrastructure of European cities, such as monuments celebrating imperial conquest, buildings inherited from colonial governance, and museums whose collections have been formed by dispossessions, are only some material witnesses to these entanglements.

As Madina and Mignolo argue:

> "Europe and modernity have become synonymous and essential components of modern European identity. Coloniality, instead, has been swiped out and made invisible in the Eurocentric narratives as an encumbrance for the glorious march of modernity" (Madina & Mignolo, 2012, p. 37).

What happens then if we follow the hypothesis that coloniality is not a residue of the past but a constitutive force in the making of the European city? What if the idea of modernity itself, its aesthetics, infrastructures, and epistemologies, is inseparable from histories of dispossession, extraction, and racialized difference?

This is the hypothesis that grounds this chapter. We take Ananya Roy's (2009) call for a comparative urbanism that "thinks cities through one another", we mobilize epistemologies from the South to analyse processes materialised in the North, reading European cities through the lens of colonial entanglements and subalternized geographies.

II. THE COLONIALITY OF URBAN HERITAGE IN EUROPE

Departing from such theoretical background, how can one approach the specific context of Europe? Is it possible to define a European heritage? These questions entail some problems. On the one hand, the diversity of peoples, languages and traditions in the regions of Europe means a difficulty to define a cohesive legacy. On the other hand, political formations such as the European Union increasingly seek to shape a shared narrative of European identity, including through cultural policy and memory politics (Delanty, 2017).

Rather than denying the multiplicity of European experiences, the task is to critically evaluate what is shared by different nations of the continent, and how those commonalities have been constructed around the shared past of colonization.

Gerard Delanty (2017) works on the idea of a larger crisis compelling the reconceptualization of European heritage, which has been informed by Contestation movements such as protests, monument reinterpretation, and repatriation of artifacts. He observes: “underlying all these controversies is the basic question of what narrative of the past should be privileged, who tells the story and what purpose should it serve” (Delanty, 2017, p. 2).

The postcolonial and decolonial critiques help us understand “modern Europe” not as a self-contained geography, but as one produced through its encounters with colonial “others”. Yet, as Delanty (2017) cautions, this global re-contextualization of Europe must be attentive to internal divisions, precolonial histories, as well as different *colonial trajectories*. In other words, decolonial critiques must be historically specific and nuanced, not flattened into broad generalizations.

Building on this call, Kølvraa and Knudsen (2020) point that despite the differences in self-understanding, reach and style of colonialism and empire, most European countries shared a “zeitgeist of racialized superiority” and benefitted from global systems of political and economic domination. In this sense, there are good reasons to speak of colonialism as a shared European heritage – though it unfolded differently across geographies.

The authors suggest that cities were nodal points in these imperial systems, and as such, are crucial in understanding how this heritage is made visible, contested or forgotten. Urban space becomes both a medium of dominant historical discourse and a site for affective, creative, and critical interventions (Kølvraa & Knudsen, 2020; Smith, 2006). This perspective allows us to consider the European city not as a neutral scenery but as a dynamic archive in which colonial memory is spatialized, performed, and reconfigured in different ways by different actors.

Our two case studies, Copenhagen and Madrid, exemplify the diverse ways in which these broader dynamics of coloniality are manifested in Europe. Spain as one of the earliest and largest global empires, shaped alongside Portugal the so-called "Age of Discovery," and Denmark as a smaller but significant colonial power established possessions across continents and participated in the slave trade. These distinct trajectories influenced different forms of urban development and material legacies. In Madrid, imperial expansion was closely tied to the consolidation of monarchical power and the creation of a monumental capital. In Copenhagen, colonial trade routes and mercantile wealth directly shaped urban expansion in the eighteenth century, producing districts such as Frederiksstaden and Christianshavn. These developments will be examined in greater detail in the specific case study chapters. Yet, despite differences in scale and form, both cities reveal how urban space was structured through colonial connections, whether through monumental representation, trade infrastructures, or the circulation of wealth and goods. Considering them together highlights how the coloniality of urban heritage operates simultaneously as a shared European condition and a locally situated process.

III. REFRAMING HERITAGE: FROM THE AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSE TO CONTEMPORARY DEBATES

If coloniality is embedded in the material fabric of European cities, we could also infer that it is sustained through socio-spatial practices taking place there. In this section, we draw insights from critical heritage studies attempting to define it not as a passive legacy of the past but as an active cultural process which projects on the present and on the future. We also engage with debates around the idea of a "European heritage" and consider the possibilities and limits of decolonial critique in this context.

Following Laurajane Smith's (2006) work, we understand heritage as a cultural and political process in which societies negotiate and produce their relationship to the past. As she argues, it is a very complex and multilayered practice related with acts of communication and meaning making which constantly update the present. Far from being a neutral preservation of a "true" past, heritage is articulated by attitudes of selection, interpretation, and representation of what to cherish, what to remember, and what to forget (Turunen, 2020). As such, it is essentially future-oriented because such choices are a project for what will continue to be valued by the next generations.

Historically, heritage discourse has emphasized material objects (monuments, artifacts, and buildings) as the primary repositories of cultural historical meaning. As Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (2015) note, this object-centred focus shaped debates around classification, conservation, and interpretation shaped the discipline over centuries. Concerns with protecting cultural artifacts already existed in ancient times in different cultures. However, the 18th and 19th centuries have been central to the development of modern heritage (Souza, 2017), when national and international frameworks (such as treatises, charters, and conventions) emerged in alignment with the consolidation of imperial nation-states in Europe (Blake, 2000).

Smith (2000) understands that such historical context has created a hegemonic 'authorized heritage discourse' which reinforces both the grand narratives of nation and class legitimized by specific aesthetic and expertise assumptions. According to her, this discourse is also tied to social consensus and privileges monumentality and an innate significance to the artefact/site in question. In accordance with this thought, Luciana Souza (2017) notes that the genesis of the idea of heritage is embedded in the modern discourse, thus also rooted in relations of coloniality.

More recently, however, the debates on heritage have been affected by contestation, dissonance, and competing memories, causing a period of paradigm shift in the field. Critiques on the idea of heritage itself have foregrounded relational approaches, processes of engagement and construction of meaning. (Waterton & Watson, 2015)

The authors suggest that heritage has been re-evaluated, and critical studies have framed it not a static entity but emerging from active engagement, prompting reflection on shared meaning and inter-subjectivity. They emphasize that such engagement generates affect, which in turn evokes embodied experiences in "cultural moments of being there, found and embodied" (p. 10).

IV. HERITAGE PRACTICES AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

If heritage is articulated through authoritative discourses that produce visions of the past, it exercises symbolic and material power over the idea of memory, defining what must be remembered and cherished in the present. In fact, memory has been increasingly a field of scholarly attention, particularly since the surge of collective memory studies in the 1980s (Pakier & Stråth, 2010). Authors such as Laurajane Smith (2006), David Lowenthal (2015), and Waterton and Watson (2015) note that this "memory turn" has deeply

influenced heritage debates, though often in uneven ways. As Smith (2006, p. 57) observes, while memory studies have flourished, “there has only been a passing concern with memory issues in the traditional heritage literature.” This uneven engagement reveals the tensions between the celebratory tendencies of an authorized heritage discourse and the contested, often disruptive character of memory.

Smith (2006) argues that heritage is conventionally mobilized as a narrative of continuity, pride, and identity of a specific society or nation. This is done by highlighting the cultural expressions or historical episodes that foster belonging and pacification while marginalizing dissonant or painful aspects. Berthold Molden (2016) points how studies on collective memory, by contrast, have shown the contested arena of the authorized heritage discourse, destabilizing such consensus. Memory foregrounds remembering and forgetting as active cultural processes (Misztal, 2003, cited in Smith, 2006, p. 58), opening space for alternative voices and subaltern perspectives that unsettle hegemonic versions of the past. Thus, the incorporation of memory into heritage debates challenges the assumption that heritage is a neutral reflection of a unison “shared history”; instead, it reveals heritage as a political site where different actors struggle to define what is remembered, what is forgotten, and how these processes are narrated (Molden, 2016).

Pakier and Stråth (2010, p. 7) emphasize that “the imagination of a collective memory can only be a discourse, a social and cultural construct.” In agreement with the previous authors, they affirm that memories are not fixed or unequivocal, but the product of social forces and change over time through negotiation and debate. At times, these discourses consolidate into dominant frameworks and permeate public culture; at others, they remain fractured and contentious. In this sense, collective memories can be a socially articulated tool aiming at shifting how heritage discourses and practices are shaped.

Molden reinforces this perspective by highlighting the role of hegemony in prioritizing certain memories over others in relation to how power is arranged in a specific society: “There is no one history because every historical event can have different meanings, can be ignored, or interpreted from radically different perspectives” (Molden, 2016, p. 137). Smith (2006) argues that language is central to this process. The discourses, metaphors, and categories employed to categorize heritage not only frame how the past is understood but also shape what is possible to remember and what slips into oblivion.

The political instrumentality of memory becomes visible in practices of selective remembering and forgetting, which are the prerogatives of heritage.

As Pakier and Stråth (2010) note, discourses of collective memory shift between hegemonic stabilization and contentious challenge, often according to specific political landscapes. They cite the "pacts of silence" that followed periods of violence in Europe in Germany after 1945 and in Spain after 1975 as examples of how forgetting was actively produced to maintain political order. Such strategies emphasise that collective memory is never neutral; it is shaped by interests, ideologies, and struggles over legitimacy.

Taken together, these perspectives situate heritage practices within the larger field of the politics of memory. By conserving some monuments or traditions, and attaching specific discourses to them, the policies and practices of heritage inform societies' versions of their own past. When viewed through this lens, the analysis of urban walking tours must attend not only to the dimension of what is told but also to the silences, omissions, and strategies of memory at work in the performative narration of urban heritage.

V. TOURISM PRACTICES IN RELATION TO HERITAGE AND MEMORY MAKING

Tourism plays a central role in activating urban heritage, converting everyday cityscapes into symbolic sites of meaning. It is through tourism that many of the material legacies enter contemporary circuits of memory, shaping how they are encountered, narrated, and contested. In this sense, tourism can be understood as one of the primary mediators of colonial memory in the urban landscape. This section explores the paradoxical role of tourism within heritage practices, preparing the ground for the following chapter's focus on the narrative and performative aspects of walking tours.

In alignment with Waterton and Watson's (2015) understanding of heritage as an affective and negotiated process, we highlight that tourism is not merely a passive act of consumption. It activates heritage sites, assigns meaning to space, and shapes public memory (Park, 2016). As Emmanuel Adu-Ampong and Simone Berg (2024) argue in their study of guided tours in Amsterdam, tourism "operationalizes the past" by transforming historical content into spatially organized and embodied experiences. These encounters often dictate what is made visible, who is heard, and how discomfort is managed – or avoided.

However, tourism's entanglement with the history of colonialism complicates this potential. Denis Linehan et al. (2020) trace the emergence of modern tourism alongside imperial expansion, arguing that the industry continues to reproduce the political economies of colonialism. They point to the enduring ownership and infrastructure of airlines, hotels, and tour platforms, who

remain disproportionately controlled by actors rooted in former colonial powers. Within the urban spaces of the metropole, monuments, museums, and guided circuits often celebrate empire or aestheticize colonial violence, reinforcing a sanitized national identity built on imperial pride. In European cities, many heritage sites associated with empire or slavery are either sanitized, euphemized, or omitted altogether from mainstream tourist narratives (Adu-Ampong & Berg, 2024; Linehan et al., 2020)

Moreover, the tourist imagination is still shaped by echoes of colonialism. Across both former colonies and colonizing nations, colonial pasts are marketed as aesthetic styles or nostalgic experiences, often disassociated from the violence and exploitation they entail. This commodification often emphasizes the exotic or picturesque aspects of the past while rendering its structural injustices invisible. This reinforces Rolando Vázquez's (2020) claim that colonialism did not merely provide new destinations; it shaped the gaze of the tourist and the staging of place. Through imperial exhibitions, architecture, and image-making, entire cultures were rendered into consumable spectacles for European audiences (Vázquez, 2020). In this sense, tourism reinforces what Linehan et al. (2020) term the "coloniality of place", a spatial logic that organizes memory in ways that foreground white European authority and marginalize colonial violence.

This context places tourism in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, it functions as a vehicle for the reproduction of hegemonic narratives. On the other, it holds the potential to act as a platform for critical reflection and resistance, particularly when guides, institutions, or community actors choose to centre marginalized voices and disrupt dominant historical scripts. Adu-Ampong and Berg (2024) emphasize the delicate balancing act performed by tour guides, who must navigate tourist expectations for comfort and "positive experiences" while deciding whether and how to introduce difficult histories such as slavery or colonialism.

Hyung Park (2016) provides further evidence of this liminality. Through interviews with tourists engaging with colonial heritage sites in South Korea, she demonstrates that tourism can function as a reflexive process, allowing individuals to confront shame, process historical trauma, and reimagine community belonging. This affective and embodied engagement with the past challenges the notion that tourism is inherently superficial or commodified. Instead, it can offer a unique entry point for decolonial thinking and memory work.

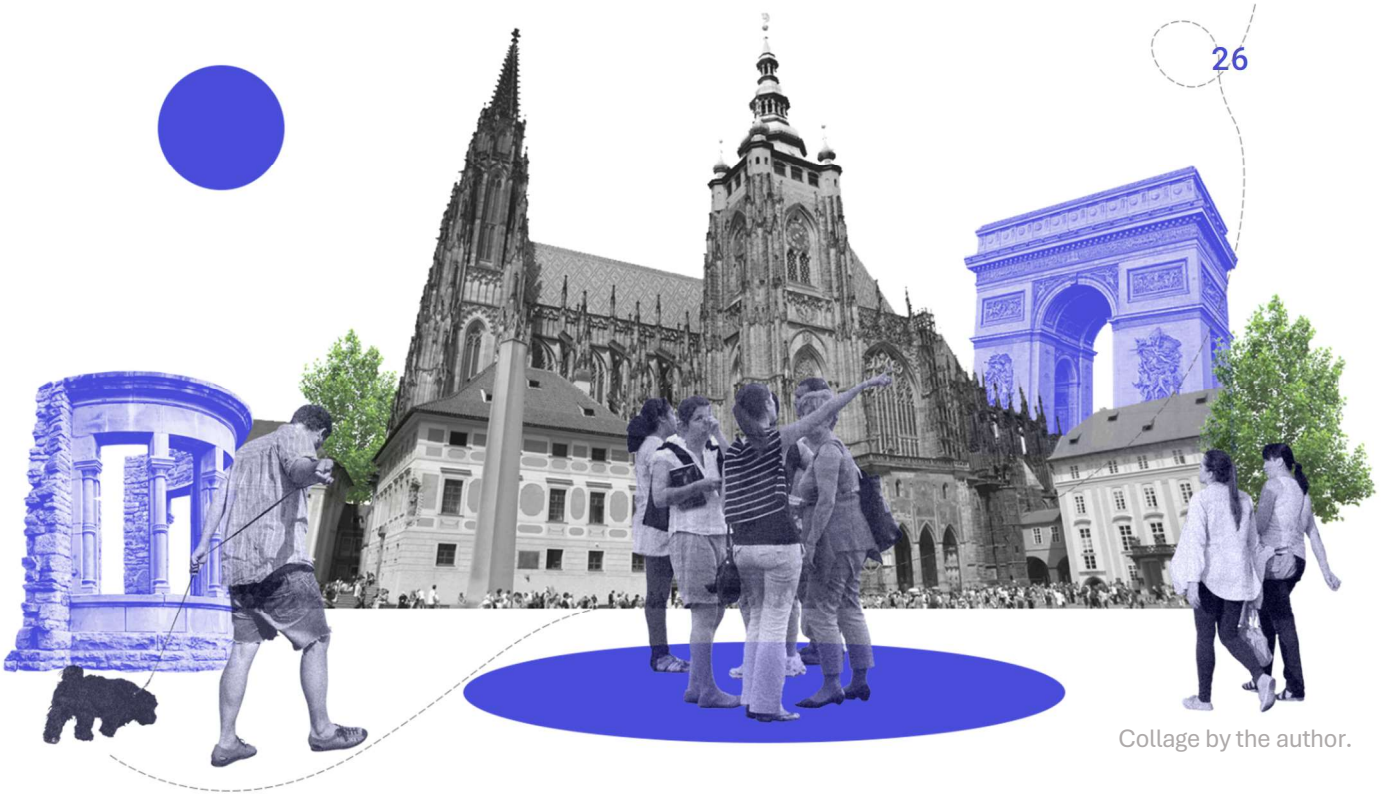
In this light, tourism and heritage emerge as sites of epistemic struggle. Alternative routes, affectively engaging guides, or community-driven storytelling can subvert hegemonic scripts and offer plural, dissonant, or silenced perspectives.

It is precisely this critical potential that this thesis seeks to explore. In the context of European Free Walking Tours, tourism functions as both an inheritor and reproducer of coloniality and a potential stage for decolonial narration.

Walking tours exemplify this performative process. Their choreography of walking, stopping, storytelling, and witnessing turns cityscapes into sequential archives. These spatial narratives can either reinforce established historical accounts or, in some cases, open ruptures within them (Hanna et al., 2019).

It is important to acknowledge, however, that critical heritage initiatives remain relatively marginal within the tourism industry. While alternative, community-based tours have emerged in cities like Amsterdam, Lisbon, London, and in our cases of Copenhagen and Madrid, they are often accessible only to a niche audience actively seeking them out (Linehan et al., 2020). Their impact remains limited compared to the scale and visibility of mainstream offerings.

This observation informs the central discussions in the next chapter. As long as critical interventions remain peripheral, the ghosts of colonialism will continue to wander the urban landscape, unseen, unspoken, yet profoundly shaping the imaginaries of millions of visitors. The following chapter builds on this argument by examining how Free Walking Tours operate as narrative performances, materializing heritage through walking, storytelling, and guided negotiation of colonial memory in cities.



Collage by the author.

3. THE WALKING TOUR – A NARRATIVE PERFORMANCE

As we begin this section, I would like you to follow a little imaginative exercise with me: please remember the first time you visited a city. Before arriving, you may have seen maps, read reviews, fiction, or got engaged with artworks that references this place, forming a fragmented sense of familiarity. But once you were there, and your flesh was against the city's stones, how did you navigate it?

While personal sensory impressions may shape one's first encounter with a city, guided tours often translate scattered perceptions into a coherent story. Through selection, narration, and spatial movement, they orient the visitor by performing the city. This section explores walking tours not as neutral touristic tools, but as embodied performances of urban narratives. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive account of tourism research, but rather to comment on how walking tours construct, transmit, and contest spatial memory through storytelling.

I. THE WALKING TOUR *AS* PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE

Investigating guided tours requires acknowledging their inherent complexity and employing interdisciplinary frameworks (Black et al., 2019). In this context, conceptualizing walking tours as performances enables us to analyse how these practices narratively interweave heritage and tourism in urban landscapes.

Ideas of performance and performativity have proliferated across different fields and everyday conversations, largely due to a "performative turn" that alongside the linguistic and the cultural turns, have shifted conventional understandings of social life. According to Ervin Goffman (1956), socialisation is organized through dramaturgical tools and the assignment of roles while humans negotiate identities. Consequently, one's bodily presence in the world reflects a dynamic tension between established norms and values, and contingent encounters with this world (Edensor, 2000). Thus, our intention here is to take performance beyond its institutional artistic forms (theatre, dance, circus etc.) with two different goals. First, to frame our object of study, and second, to highlight the performance's capacity to transform embodied experience into a form of knowledge (Davis, 2008), which will be further developed in the methodology section.

Walking tours can be understood as performative encounters in which a guide, assuming the role of storyteller, leads a group of participants through urban space (Bryon, 2012; Uzelac et al., 2015; Wong & Lee, 2012). These interactions unfold through a choreography of walking and stopping, during which narratives about the city's histories, figures, monuments, and material culture are actively constructed and communicated (Adu-Ampong & Berg, 2024). The practice is essentially spatial: places are carefully selected and connected by trajectories that shape both the physical and symbolic boundaries of the performance. Far from being neutral, these narratives carry embedded values, perspectives, and power relations. They are co-constructed through the guide's delivery, the audience's participation, and the broader dynamics of the city itself (Jonasson & Scherle, 2012), producing stories that are partial yet resonant, collective yet authorless.

Paolo Mura & Saeed Sharif (2017) critically analyse the emergence of narrative analysis in understanding tourism practices. According to them, scholars have used narrative frameworks to explore the performative and ideological dimensions of tourism, reflecting about broader cultural discourses and how they are shaped by gender, language, and power relations. Narrative analysis also reveals how tourism functions as a form of "worldmaking," where individuals and institutions co-create imagined geographies and identities. This approach has proven especially valuable in studying the role of storytelling in shaping perceptions of place, heritage, and selfhood. However, the investigation of silences, or what is not mentioned in tourism narratives, is not contemplated in any of the papers in their study.

In sum, walking tours play a significant role in shaping and negotiating meaning in urban contexts, especially in economies increasingly dominated

by tourism and its cultural industries. Moreover, these guided experiences actively mediate our relationship with history:

> "history consists of our stories of the past, interpretations brought to us not only by scientific research and education, but also in the form of popular science, literary fiction, film, media, in tourist practices – and guided tours (...) Thus, we argue that guiding is the practice of history taking place" (Nilsson and Zillinger, 2020, p. 289).

Mediating history also implies selecting not only narratives but also the spatial settings that support them. This selection is informed by structural factors, as well as by the guide's own involvement with the heritage sites in question. This interplay reveals the intrinsically political nature of guided tours (Nilsson & Zillinger, 2020), which points to the paradoxical position that guides often embody.

II. TOUR GUIDES AND THEIR ROLES

Tour guides are typically positioned at the intersection of multiple stakeholders, including tourists, employers, local cultural environments, and other actors in the tourism sector (Black et al., 2019). This role requires a constant negotiation between dominant historical narratives, institutional heritage frameworks, the companies' specific objectives, and the guide's own interpretive agency, knowledge, and embodied relationships with the city.

On the one hand, guides can reinforce hegemonic historical narratives – often glossing over themes of colonialism. On the other, they may introduce moments of disruption of contestation (Adu-Ampong & Berg, 2024; Alderman et al., 2016). Understanding the guide's role is not a simple task. Considering that this tension results in different *narrative performances,* it is crucial to consider the positionality of each guide. Aspects such as ethnicity, age, gender identities, education and employment status within a company shape how the guide navigates and performs historical meanings. Considering the tensions between agency and structural oppression may help us better frame and understand the factors influencing the selection processes we mentioned before.

III. FREE WALKING TOURS – FORMAT, INFLUENCE, AND SPATIAL DYNAMICS

The format of guided tours is another important aspect to the argumentation in this thesis. Walking Tours can occur in either rural or urban settings and engage with history and heritage aspects or focus on other themes, such as food, nightlife or literature, for example. This study focuses on the case of Free Walking Tours (FWTs), which have become a widespread type of tourist activity in cities characterised by significant volumes of visitors (Nilsson & Zillinger, 2020; Waal & Arets, 2022). These tours are characterized by two main features: The 'free' means that there is no fixed price, but attendees decide the amount to pay at the end of the tour, and in many cases, the guides are not officially registered professionals (Rivera-García et al., 2023). Their popularity enables us to examine how mainstream tourist practices engage broader publics with historical narratives, including those tied to colonialism.

Free Walking Tours have emerged in the context of collaborative economy as an alternative to mass-produced travel experiences (Londoño & Medina, 2017). Their rapid spread throughout Europe has been enabled by the development of platforms and websites, mirroring the dynamics of services as Airbnb and Uber (Rivera-García et al., 2023).

Empirical research has also pointed to the spatial impact of these tours, particularly in city centres where they contribute to the phenomenon of overtourism (Klaniczay, 2022), which relates to significant questions on the sustainability of tourism activity in terms of ecological, social, economic and psychological capacities in cities (Peeters et al., 2018).

In the European context, empirical studies have been conducted in Amsterdam (Koerts, 2017), Barcelona (Londoño & Medina, 2018), Berlin (Londoño & Medina, 2017); Budapest (Uzelac et al., 2015) and with especial interest to our case, Copenhagen (Meged & Zillinger, 2018; Nilsson & Zillinger, 2020), and Madrid (Navalón-Garcia & García, 2016). However, despite a growing body of work, only one study (Adu-Ampong & Berg, 2024) looks at the spatial narratives of colonialism in Europe.

IV. LEARNING FROM LITERATURE

The reviewed literature has provided important insights for the development of the thesis. First, it has helped conceptualize walking tours as performative encounters which construct meaning through narrative. Second, this has helped framing the role of the tour guide and their agency in storytelling,

revealing the political layers at play in the selection of places and stories to tell. Yet, current scholarship claims for deeper considerations on the entanglements of such performances with colonial structures of knowledge and memory. The affective labour of the guides, their situated voices, and the colonial echoes in urban narratives remain underexplored. Aiming at responding to these gaps, the research analyses Free Walking Tours as situated performances that negotiate colonial memory in contemporary European cities, foregrounding the positionality of the research subjects and a decolonial framework to the field of urban heritage. In the following section, we elaborate on the methodology which guides the study, as well as introduce the specific cases that ground this investigation.

Guided Tour in Madrid. Picture by the author.

4. WALKING WITH OTHERS – METHODOLOGIES IN MOTION

When we decide to approach decoloniality as an epistemological perspective, we recognize that it should not only shape the questions asked but also guide the methodological approach. Decoloniality, as both a critique of Eurocentric knowledge production and a commitment to plural epistemologies, calls for methods that challenge dominant narratives, foreground silenced histories, and attend to the positionalities of both researcher and researched (Denscombe, 2024). In the context of studying urban heritage narratives and walking tours, we seek to examine how histories are performed, which stories are prioritised, and how this selection process includes or excludes specific themes — all while being attentive to the power relations embedded in the act of narrating the city.

Rather than treating decoloniality as an abstract theoretical commitment, this research operationalises it in methodological practice following some key principles (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021):

1. **Critical Reflexivity –** This principle keeps me constantly examining my own position at different stages of the research, not only in terms of acknowledging my own privileges, but also by being attentive to the multiple forces and affects that traverse me during the research process (Haraway, 1988). It requires engaging with the feelings that emerge — interest, confusion, anger, empathy — and recognising when and how these positions shift[3].

[3] An aspect which became apparent during the research was the negotiation of my racial identity. Growing up in Brazil and mostly being socialized and interpreted as a white person, I hardly felt othered. Only living in Europe I felt racialized as a *light skin Latino*. A deep comprehension of this moving and tensioned positionality was essential in finding my own *speaking place* (Ribeiro 2024),

2. **Reciprocity –** This entails being attentive not only to my own position but also to building relationships with the other participants of the research, the tour guides. By listening affectively, not only with open ears and eyes, but also with heart and mind, I aim to create a trusting connection that values each guide's agency, while recognising moments of both resistance and complicity between spaces and subjects within colonialism.
3. **Embracing 'Othered' Ways of Knowing –** Together with the previous principles, this helps me decentre my work from the 'self' of knowledge (Escobar, 2007) and acknowledge that in each city, and with each group or new situation, different forms of knowing emerge. This includes those often downplayed in academic work, such as intuition and embodied insights.
4. **Transformative Praxis –** this principle involves producing actionable knowledge which must challenge colonial logics and be directed at further social change (Freire, 1970).

In practical terms, this meant building a research design that combined immersion in the tours' performative spaces with opportunities to listen to and interrogate the perspectives of the tour guides. To do so, I engage with the tours in three different manners toward a qualitative analysis: participant observation, the transcripts' narrative analysis, and semi-structured interviews. When doing participant observation, I could immerse in the spatial and affective dimensions of the tours; narrative analysis enabled a systematic coding of the stories told, tracing their temporal anchors, key characters, thematic clusters, and tones; interviewing the guides helped us listen to their own understandings, motivations, and constraints when selecting and delivering the spatial storytelling.

I. SELECTING THE CASES AND THE TOURS

The study focusses on the cities of Copenhagen and Madrid. This decision was shaped by both personal and research-driven reasons. Living in these two cities as the final destinations of the 4Cities Programme, offered more than geographical proximity to their landmarks; it allowed me to develop an embodied familiarity with their rhythms, atmospheres, and stories. This proximity helped me listen differently, to notice details that might pass

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considering the complex ways through which the wounds of colonialism and slavery traverse me (or not) in different contexts.

unnoticed to a short-term tourist, and to situate the tours within a broader lived experience of the city.

Beyond these personal ties, both cities are deeply revealing sites for reflecting on colonialism, though in different ways. Madrid, as the historic capital of an empire whose reach arrived at some point to all the continents on the globe, carries monumental traces of centuries of imperial rule. Its plazas, palaces, and street names are steeped in the symbols of Spanish expansion, extraction, and domination. Copenhagen, though the centre of a smaller imperial network, held a strategic role as a port city in the Danish colonial project, facilitating trade in goods such as sugar, coffee, and spices, beyond participating directly in the transatlantic slave trade. Both cities, in their different scales and geographies, offer layered material and symbolic landscapes in which the traces of coloniality remain visible.

As part of contextualizing the walking tours, the research included the elaboration of a historical summary for each case study. These summaries outline the trajectories of Danish and Spanish colonialism, emphasizing their timelines, territorial extensions, and economic activities. Importantly, the summaries also trace how colonialism intersected with urban infrastructures in Copenhagen and Madrid, identifying the material legacies and spatial imprints of empire. This step served as a bridge between the broader historical framework and the spatial-narrative analysis of the tours, situating the guides' narratives within the longer histories of empire that shaped these cities' built environments.

From this starting point, I sought walking tours that were representative of mainstream tourist offerings. The tours were chosen through an initial scan on the platform Guru Walks (www.guruwalks.com), which advertises Free Walking Tours in all major European cities led by different companies. Then, I listed those that combined popularity, accessibility, and coverage of the historic city centre. Given the study's focus on how walking tours engage with colonial narratives and spaces, priority was given to thematic tours that offered historical insights into both cities. Consequently, tours such as those focussed on food, "alternative", and "politically incorrect" were excluded.

In each city, three different tours were attended, led by different guides. These tours are summarised in the table below, detailing the company which operates them, the dates and times attended.

COPENHAGEN

TITLE	OPERATOR	DATE	TIME
1 - Grand Tour of Copenhagen	Copenhagen Free Walking Tours	24.10.2024	15:00 – 17:30
2 - Classical Tour of Copenhagen	Copenhagen Free Walking Tours	02.11.2024	12:00 – 13:30
3 - Historic Centre of Copenhagen	Walk and Tour	30.11.2024	14:00 – 16:00

MADRID

TITLE	OPERATOR	DATE	TIME
1 - Historic Town of Madrid	Trip Tours	17.06.2025	11:00 – 13:00
2 - Welcome to Madrid: From the Habsburgs to the Bourbons	Walkative!	19.06.2025	14.30 – 17:00
3 - Not Boring Historical Madrid Walking Tour	Spain Revealed	25.06.2025	16:00 – 18:00

II. ENGAGING WITH THE FIELD: WALKING, LISTENING, OBSERVING

Each of the tours above was a live performance, marked by a constant negotiation between controlled, expected moments, and unpredictability. Before each tour, I presented myself as a researcher to the guide and asked for their express permission to take pictures and record audio, maintaining their and the other participants' anonymity. My role involved moving with the group, listening to the narratives, observing the framings of stories, and noting the rhythms and atmospheres along the way. But I did not remain distanced from the group and their interactions: in some routes I met people and had small conversations with them in between stops; I asked questions when the guides made room for it; asked for clarification when something was not clear. My engagement could be described as something on the borders between

researcher in the social sciences, curious architect and temporary inhabitant of each of these cities.

In this participant observation, I aimed at perceiving the tour guides' performances, with particular attention to their general behaviour, interactions with the audience, and the ways in which they navigated the group both spatially and narratively. While doing so, I recorded the tours in their entirety. Overall, 7.5 hours of recording generated a total of 65,000-words transcriptions. These transcripts served as a primary source for the narrative analysis, capturing the nuances of speech, emphasis, and narrative framing.

During and after each tour, I also took fieldnotes to document my first reflections. These notes provided an additional layer of analysis, once I was able to track some intonations such as irony or criticism. The notes also helped articulate some ideas and understandings during the process and later inform the writing of the analysis and discussion sections that follow. These tools helped me address the first research sub-question:

1. How are narratives and spaces related to colonialism integrated into (or omitted from) the broader historical and cultural image of these cities?

Semi-Structured Interviews

The second research sub-question also indicated the necessity to go “behind the scenes” and talk to the tour guides, aiming to understand some of their motivations and limitations.

2. What factors shape tour guides' decisions to include or exclude themes of colonialism in their walking tours?

Three guides agreed on participating in semi-structured interviews: one of them after the tour, and two other were scheduled for another moment. These interviews explored the guides’ motivations in designing and conducting the tours, as well as their decision-making processes in selecting specific historical narratives. The interview guiding questions are included in the annexes.

The analysis of the interviews focused on:

- Why certain narratives and sites are included or omitted.
- The personal, institutional, or commercial factors influencing these decisions.

- How guides perceive their role in shaping historical memory within urban spaces.

III. CONDUCTING A SPATIAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Given the nature of this study, the analysis aims to uncover how narratives of colonial history are performed by tour guides and how this process is spatially anchored within the urban environment. It unfolded in two interconnected phases, combining spatial mapping with narrative-performative analysis.

a. Mapping the tours

The first phase involved tracing the routes and stops of each walking tour. This stage sought to identify where guides chose to stop, the spatial patterns that emerged, and whether these locations had historical ties to colonialism. Mapping provided a visual representation of how historical narratives are distributed in space and offered a basis for questioning the significance of particular sites within the broader context of the city's imperial past.

b. Narrative–Performative Analysis

The analysis followed Catherine Riessman's (2008) *Narrative Analysis for the Social Sciences*. Drawing on Bakhtin's dialogic perspective (Bakhtin, 1981), Riessman emphasises that narratives are inherently *polyphonic*, shaped by multiple voices, historical discourses, and power relations that extend beyond the storyteller. In walking tours, these narratives take form through live, situated performances, negotiated between guide and audience, speaker and setting, and embedded in these wider historical, institutional, and discursive contexts. Bakhtin's approach also draws attention to how words — and the languages they inhabit — carry the traces of past meanings, influencing how stories are told and understood in the present.

Approaching the tours as social performances (Goffman, 1956; Jonasson & Scherle, 2012; Meged, 2010), this analysis treats each story not only as historical content but as an expressive act, where guides position themselves, negotiate meaning, and manage interactions in real time. This demands attention to the theatrical and affective dimensions of delivery, as well as to silences, diversions, and tonal shifts. By listening closely to both major and minor narrative voices, identifying implicit discourses, and tracing absences, the analysis seeks to reveal how the tours construct, and occasionally unsettle, dominant understandings of the city's past.

These perspectives are central to understanding the tour guides' role in narrating histories in public space. On the one hand, it is important to acknowledge their agency in shaping the tour's route, selecting stories, and deciding how to approach each one: their performance makes the storytelling personal. On the other hand, this agency is not exercised in isolation, once the knowledge they present is situated and partial, shaped by their social identities, cultural backgrounds, and institutional contexts. Storytelling in this sense becomes both a creative act and a socially embedded practice, revealing the complex processes behind narrative selection. Within this study's decolonial epistemological framework, a dialogic, performative narrative analysis helps to uncover how coloniality operates at the level of historical narration, making visible both its presences and its erasures.

Drawing on Saldaña's (2013) principles of narrative coding, I adapted his broader framework to fit the scope and focus of this research. While Saldaña's scheme includes more than fifteen categories, many, though narratively rich, would have diverted the analysis away from the central questions. Since the aim was to understand how colonial histories are engaged with, or omitted in the tours, I concentrated on five key categories:

c. Categories of Analysis

1. **Sites**
    - *Variable:* The primary spatial reference where the guide stops (e.g., street, square, church, palace, harbour).
    - *Key Question:* Is the site connected to colonial history? If so, is this connection made explicit?
2. **Temporality**
    - *Variable:* The historical period referenced (categorised by century). When unclear, historical sources are consulted.
    - *Key Question:* Does the narrative align with periods of colonial expansion?
3. **Character**
    - *Variable:* Personal or collective figures appearing in the story (e.g., Felipe II, the "Danes", "Muslims").
    - *Key Question:* Are these characters linked in any way to colonial histories?

4. **Theme**
    - *Variable:* The main topic(s) addressed at a given location (e.g., royalty, local traditions, food and drink, historical events, prominent figures). Multiple themes at one stop are coded separately.
    - *Key Question:* Are these themes directly or indirectly tied to colonialism? For example, does a discussion of maritime commerce include references to the slave trade or other colonial processes?
5. **Tone**
    - *Variable:* The affective register of storytelling (humorous, critical, ironic, etc.).
    - *Key Question:* How does tone shape the treatment of certain themes and the audience's emotional engagement?

The transcripts have been carefully coded as shows the example below:

> *"But, during Christian IV's reign, a king we'll be talking about a good bet on this tour, he as ruling in the early 1600s. Think of the equivalent Henry VIII. He didn't murder any of his wives. He did treat women absolutely atrociously. You know what these things are like. Anyway. But he was the one who built up the Navy to certain extent to try and create a new colonial state of Denmark, but ultimately it was a bit of a failure".* (CPH Tour 2)

Each colour in the transcripts corresponds to one of the coding categories: yellow for characters mentioned in the stories, blue for the temporal frames referenced by the guides, red for the main themes addressed, and green for markers that helped identify the tone of the narratives. This interpretive coding informed the creation of a table for each tour, summarising all occurrences in a clear, visual format. Completing the six tables and producing an initial summary for each city provided the basis for cross-case comparison, making it possible to identify key patterns in how the guides engaged — or refrained from engaging — with colonial histories. These trends are explored in the following chapters. All the tables are included in the annexes.

d. Modalities of engagement with colonial heritage – a framework for analysis

The narrative-performative analysis, together with the spatial mapping of the tours and the interviews with guides, provides the basis for understanding how historical narratives are created in Madrid and Copenhagen. By situating

these narratives within the broader colonial context of each city, the research is able to identify which aspects of the colonial past are incorporated, marginalized, or silenced. In order to interpret these patterns, the study draws on the conceptual framework developed by Danish researchers Britta Knudsen and Christoffer Kølvraa (2020), who propose four modalities of colonial heritage practice. Their work, based on discourse and affective-aesthetic analysis of commemorative performances in Nantes, emphasizes the immaterial and processual dimensions of heritage, considering not just the physical traces of empire, but also how this past is mediated in the present.

The authors stress that these modalities are not fixed categories which could say if a specific practice fits in one or another box. What they propose are analytical parameters that allow researchers to grasp the complexity of how societies engage with colonial heritage. A single site, narrative, or performance could combine different modalities, or shift between them depending on the actors and contexts involved. Nevertheless, the typology is useful to identify recurring tendencies in heritage practices. The four modalities are:

1. **Repression** – Repression refers to practices where elements of colonial heritage are actively rejected or displaced from public engagement. This is not simple "forgetting" but an active refusal to acknowledge the past role of colonialism to different societies, as well as its enduring characteristics in the present. According to them, Repression can manifest in celebrating for example warehouses of colonial goods as mercantile architecture, without mentioning its economic foundations, or by narrating imperial history in terms of "discovery" and trade, while omitting violence and exploitation. Repression happens as a continuous process, one which is never completely successful, once the colonial past keeps haunting the present in multiple forms, revealing its presence.

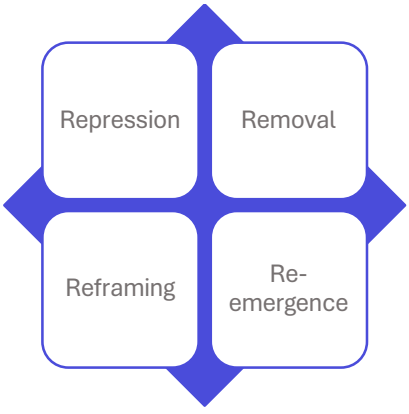
2. **Removal** – This modality involves direct contestation in demands to remove or replace colonial signifiers such as statues, monuments, or street names. Beyond physical removal, the essence of this modality is to make evident political antagonism and public confrontation. These struggles contest over visibility, recognition, and the right to define collective memory. Removal challenges the long-standing dominance of repressive silence and inserts colonialism into public debate, often through emotionally charged protests and performances in urban space. This modality also entails a wide range

of responses from different actors involved in the preservation and management of such heritage. Removal has also been contested in and outside academia in relation to its possibility of further erasing the material and spatial elements which generate dialogues on the past.

3. **Reframing** – Reframing refers to the creation of communal narratives that integrate colonial heritage into broader interpretive frameworks. This can be a progressive act once it moves beyond silence and allows marginalized voices to speak and reshape historical narratives. However, reframing may also function as a strategy of social control when directed from positions of power, stylizing or domesticating the disruptive potential of colonial histories. For example, acknowledging colonialism within tourist narratives but presenting it as benevolent, enlightened, or secondary to national progress would be a form of reframing which maintains existing hierarchies. In this case, the engagement with the colonial past can be subjected to larger marketing and consumption goals, devoid of ambitions to imagine and implement decolonial futures.

4. **Re-emergence** – Finally, re-emergence denotes practices that go beyond repression, removal, or controlled reframing by fostering new subjectivities, opening space for alternative epistemologies, and challenging existing power dynamics. Inspired by the work of Walter Mignolo, this modality emphasizes the reappearance of histories of struggle, resistance, and survival, in order to reenergize contemporary movements for justice and reparation. It involves not only recognition of past violence but also the mobilization of affect, imagination, and collective action toward constructing different futures.

Figure 1 - Modalities of heritage practice



Source: Made by the author, adaptation from Knudsen and Kolvraa, 2020.

By adopting this framework, the analysis can be aware of the binary "presence/absence" of colonial histories in the tours while enabling to ask *how* the past is engaged: whether through denial and silencing, confrontation, controlled inclusion, or transformative re-signification. The modalities thus provide a conceptual bridge between the empirical findings and the broader modernity/coloniality framework, helping to situate the practices of tour guiding within larger dynamics of heritage, memory, and power in European cities.

Note from the field:

Copenhagen, 24th of October 2024.

Soon I will do the first walking tour for my thesis. In my mind, there is a mixture of excitement and fear. Excitement for all the unexpected routes, the possible stories I may hear… I know I cannot have high expectations, reading the literature made me aware.

Well, what if nothing goes as planned? What if I cannot articulate myself well and the tour guide does not want to talk to me? What if nothing of this makes sense and I have to start the research all over again?

It's cold. Days are only getting shorter in Copenhagen, and so is my time to do fieldwork for the thesis. I am tired of all this movement, although I've always dreamt of it.

The unknown fascinates me.

Christiansted seen from Peters Farm, Danish West Indies. Unknown Artist_Public Domain.

5. THE CASE OF COPENHAGEN: A TRADING HUB IN THE DANISH COLONIAL SYSTEM

This chapter presents the Copenhagen case study, outlining the main findings from the spatial and narrative analysis of its walking tours. Considering that the aim of the study is to assess how these tours engage — or fail to engage — with colonial histories, it is first necessary to situate them within Denmark's own imperial past. This section therefore provides an overview of Danish colonialism, tracing its timeline, territorial extent, principal economic activities, and key figures. The purpose is not to offer an exhaustive history, but to give readers the background needed to contextualise the tours' narratives.

I. NOTES ON THE DANISH COLONIALISM

In many cultural and historical representations, Denmark is portrayed as a small, homogeneous welfare state, celebrated for its democratic institutions, human rights, and equity (Höglund & Burnett, 2019). As Björn Lingner (2021) argues, Danish history as a regional and global imperial power is obscured in many ways in public discourse, education, nation-narration, and even in academia.

Lars Jensen (2019) further indicates that when colonialism surfaces in Danish nation-narration, it is framed from four different perspectives: amnesia, repression, nostalgia, and benevolence/exceptionalism. The latter suggests that colonization under Denmark's rule was more humane than other

European empires because it did not engage with genocide, racial slavery, and dispossession in the same scale as other nations did. A recent scholarly effort has challenged these assumptions, addressing how Denmark and other Nordic countries "contributed to, benefitted from, and now inhabit colonial histories" (Höglund & Burnett, 2019, p. 1).

The Danish colonial empire consisted of heterogeneous domains in terms of geography, culture, and governance. Each of the territories in the North Atlantic, West Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of Asia had different levels of political autonomy and strategical role. However, as Kristín Loftsdóttir (2019) points, all of these colonial relations formed an economic system based on trade and exploitation informed by racial hierarchies.

Denmark-Norway, despite being the most powerful Nordic kingdom from the middle ages on, became a late explorer in comparison to other colonial powers, such as Portugal and Spain. Denmark's entrance into a global network of colonization is deeply related to the strong maritime position and naval power in the Baltic and North Atlantic during the early 17th century. According to Már Jónsson (2009), the struggle for hegemony established in this region in the 1620s was pivotal to nurture a global outlook toward the ventures in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, ventures which were modest in scale, but enormously lucrative and strategically significant.

This initial period is marked by the creation of trading companies by the Crown. Based on mercantilist principles, they aimed to monopolise markets in key commodities, following the examples of Dutch and English practices (Lingner, 2021). The empire reached its economic and territorial peak in the first half of the eighteenth century, due to sugar production in the West Indies[4] with the exploitation of African enslaved labour. The military defeats in the beginning of the 19th century brought the gradual dismantling of the Danish colonial holdings. Nonetheless, Danish citizens and enterprises continued to participate in other European imperial businesses.

The official start of Danish colonialism is marked by the founding of the Danish East India Company in 1616 with the initiative of merchants in Copenhagen, supported by King Cristian IV. As Jónsson points:

> "King Christian wanted to be part of this new **arena of opportunities and expansion**. However, instead of the inexorable and worldwide ventures of his competitors at

[4] The Danish Western Indies were sold to the United States in 2017 and today are an unincorporated territory, the U.S. Virgin Islands.

> Spitsbergen, Danish efforts resulted in a series of misadventures" (2009, p. 21, emphasis added).

The Danes built different trading posts and factories in Asia, establishing three main settlements: *Tharangambadi* (renamed to Tranquebar) in 1620, Serampore in 1755 and the Nicobar Islands. *Tharangambadi,* in the southeast coast of India, became an important access point to spices, textiles and tea markets, an "exceptionally profitable venture" (Lingner 2021, p. 533). *Serampore* grew to a population of 10,000 in 1782 but declined after the British occupation in 1808. As *Tharangambadi,* it loses its importance after the British occupation of 1808. Both territories are sold to Britain in 1845. Even after this episode, Danish private merchants were able to make large sums of profit with British companies, including smuggling fortunes to Europe in Danish sips and/or via the port of Copenhagen (Lingner 2021).

In the 1660s, the Danish trading companies established forts in the Gulf of Guinea to participate in another commodity trade at the time: that of enslaved African people. The operation of these ports was intrinsically related to the sugar production at the Danish West Indies in the Caribbean, especially after the 1730s, when the acquisition of the Island of St. Croix increased the demand for enslaved labour.

Drawn into the Caribbean region to compete with Spain and other European powers, Denmark established settlements in what became the Danish West Indies in the 1670s. These islands were transformed into plantation economies producing sugar based on the genocide of indigenous populations and the exploitation of enslaved Africans. The sugar economy was, throughout the eighteenth century, the most profitable venture of the Danish Empire. The islands were initially managed by the trading company monopoly and came under direct crown administration after 1755. The decay of the sugar plantations' profits, related to the abolition of slavery led Denmark to sell the territories to the United States in 1917.

As Lingner (2021) points, the Danish relationship with North Atlantic territories of the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland are often treated as non-colonial, although they played a distinct role in Denmark's imperial system. The Faroe Islands, under Danish control since 1380 and more directly after 1814, functioned as a strategic maritime outpost providing fishing. Iceland, ruled by Denmark from 1814 to 1944, was considered a "white" colony and contributed through fisheries and agriculture, while also being subject to racialized governance. Greenland, known to the Europeans since medieval Norse settlements, was colonized in the 18th century and integrated as an Autonomous Danish Territory in 1953. It has been central to

Denmark's Arctic ambitions, offering access to fish, seals, and minerals, while its Inuit population was governed through paternalistic colonial policies. Despite differing timelines and racial status, all these territories were embedded in Denmark's racialized imperial formation.

II. COLONIAL LEGACIES IN COPENHAGEN'S LANDSCAPE

Within the Danish imperial system, Copenhagen functioned as both administrative capital and a major trading hub. By the 18th century, the city became internationally recognized for its role in the colonial trade, distributing sugar and other colonial goods across Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea (Lingner, 2021). Revenues from colonial trade allowed the emergence of a new nobility, what had impact not only in class structures, but also in the local industry, landownership, and urban development (Eldar, 2024). As Lene Asp (2024) indicates, developments in *Christianshavn* and *Frederiksstaden* over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are tied to the colonial expansion of Denmark.

Henriette Steiner (2016), reflecting on a map of Copenhagen during the so-called Danish Golden Age (1800-1850) describes Christiansborg palace standing at the centre of gravity of a "crumbling empire", surrounded by institutions of political, naval, and economic power. Tracing these sites today reveals a dense urban fabric where infrastructures bear witness to the colonial economy that sustained them.

In Copenhagen's harbour area, the architectural and urban imprint still echo colonial processes: from *Slotsholmen* through *Frederiksstaden* to *Christianshavn* and *Holmen*. In this region, the many quays, warehouses, palaces, and institutional buildings were conceived and constructed largely because of the city's role in the Danish imperial economy. These waterfront spaces formed the logistical hub of overseas trade, where goods, capital, and labour were channelled between the metropole and its colonies. This physical and narrative imprint, still highly visible in the present-day city, serves as our framing to which mirror the routes and stories explored in the walking tours.

Slotsholmen, an island at the city's core, concentrated three pillars of imperial authority: the royal court at Christiansborg Palace, the naval arsenal, and the *Børsen* (Stock Exchange).

In 1610, Christian IV inaugurated the new naval arsenal on Slotsholmen, a complex built to store different types of artillery, reinforcing Danish nautical

power over the Baltic region (Larsen, 2007). The Stock Exchange was completed only ten years later, part of a broader strategy to position Copenhagen as a leading maritime and trading centre. Its location signalled the king's vision of intertwined military and trading powers, with many merchant ships carrying armaments to protect cargo and assert control over maritime passages (Feldbœk, 1991).

Christianshavn was founded in the same period as a district for merchants. Its strategic location between the city centre and Amager Island made it both a defensive outpost and a commercial hub. By the 18th century, the *Asiatisk Plads* housed headquarters of the Danish Asiatic Company (Feldbœk, 1991), which controlled Danish trade of luxury goods such as tea, porcelain, silk, and spices. As Yrjö Kaukiainen (2025) points, Danish commercial success depended not only on these imports but also on its integration into a triangular trade system that linked Asian commerce with the exploitation of enslaved labour in the Caribbean.

Adam Gottlob Moltke was president of the Company from 1750 to 1771, and one of the most influential figures in the kingdom in the period (Bricka, 1897). A close friend of King Frederick V and a major landowner and investor in sea trading, Moltke influenced the development of Frederiksstaden, where he built a palace (Bricka, 1897). Such palace would later be bought by the monarchy and is today one of the four Amalienborg palaces.

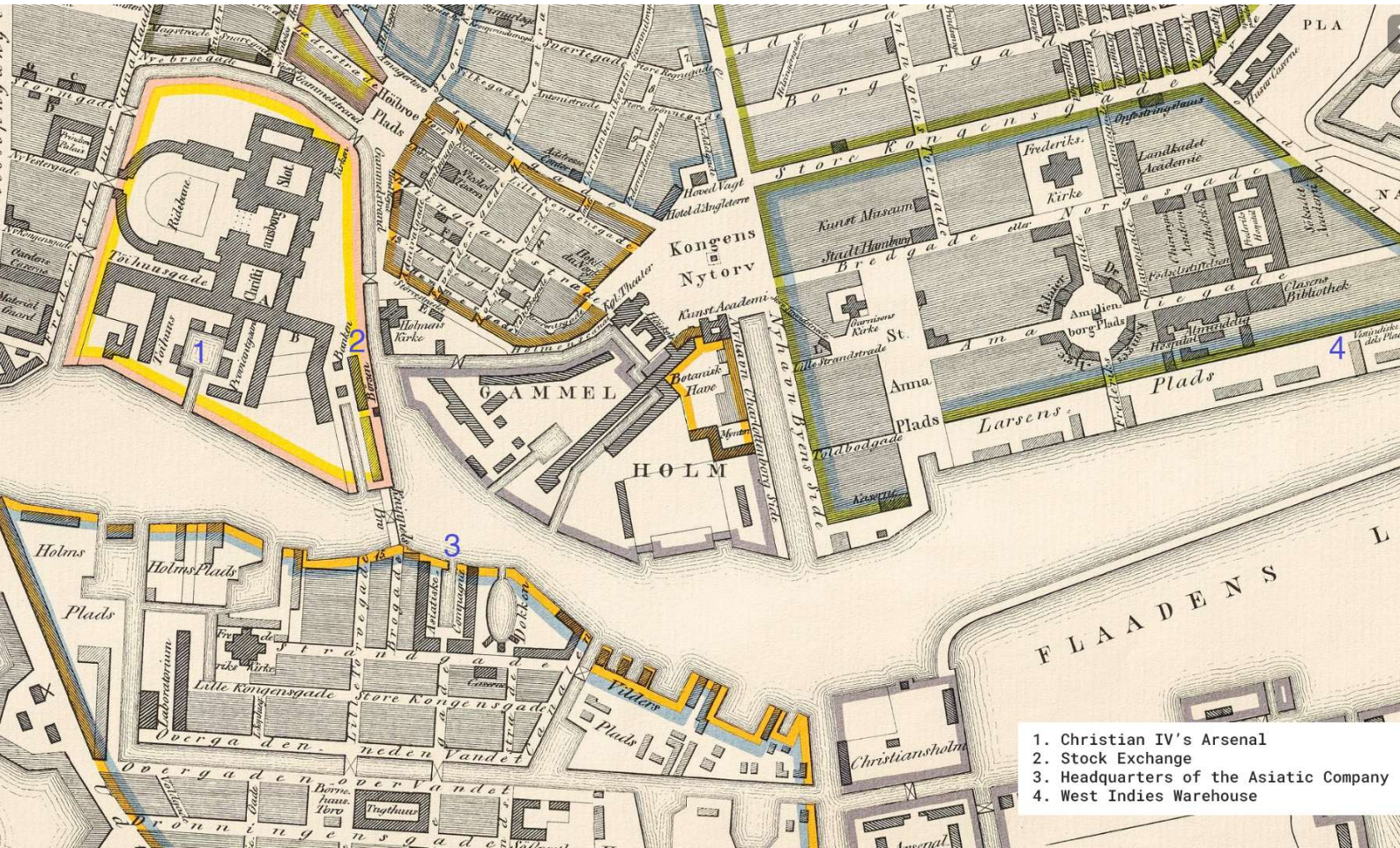


Figure 2 – Map of Copenhagen, 1839. Stern, N. S. Public Domain. Adapted by the author.

Moltke also persuaded the Asiatic Company to fund the equestrian statue of Frederick V that still stands at the centre of the square (Feldbœk, 1991). The Company's name is still inscribed on the plinth as a reminder of how colonial profits underwrote royal prestige.

Frederiksstaden, conceived in the mid-18th century as a monumental district celebrating the royal family's tricentennial, was financed in part through wealth derived from overseas trade (Asp, 2024). Not far from Amalienborg, along its harbour front, purpose-built warehouses served the logistical needs of empire. The *Vestindisk Pakhus* (West India Warehouse) stored sugar and coffee from the Danish West Indies before distribution to European markets, while The Blue Warehouse and The Yellow Warehouse, located nearby, were used for storing other colonial commodities, including goods from Asia and Greenland. These warehouses were not peripheral industrial spaces; they were central elements of the city's most prestigious neighbourhood, visually tying colonial commerce to the seat of Danish aristocracy and government.

Having outlined the broader historical context of Danish colonialism and its material traces in Copenhagen, we now turn to the walking tours themselves. The following section brings the spatial and narrative analysis of the tours, which are structured according to the coding criteria mentioned in the methodology.

III. COPENHAGEN WALKING TOURS

As the previous sections demonstrated, the centuries of Danish colonial expansion generated a legacy which is still embedded in Copenhagen's urban landscape. From this point onwards, the focus shifts from the presentation of historical accounts to the lived itineraries of current walking tours. At this point, the analysis aims at tracing how, and whether, they engage with sites, temporalities, characters and themes described above. The first layer of analysis is spatial, revealing patterns of inclusion and exclusion of spaces related to colonial history. In the sections that follow, we integrate this to the narrative-performative analysis to examine how the colonial histories are told or silenced in the guided tours.

a.The spatial choreography of the tours

The Copenhagen walking tours unfold within a relatively compact portion of central Copenhagen. All three routes walk through Indre By and Slotsholmen, indicating two main axes: one southwest-northeast ranging from Rådhuspladsen (City Hall Square) to Amalienborg Palace; and one southeast-northwest axis, connecting Det Kongelige Biblioteks Have (The Royal Library Gardens) to Nørreport Station.

In terms of typology, the tours engage with public spaces attached to important institutional buildings, with a prevalence of those of monarchical importance. In addition, the tours visit public monuments of previous Kings (Christian IX, Frederick V), scientists (e.g. Niels Bohr, Tycho Brahe) and artists (e.g. Karen Blixen).

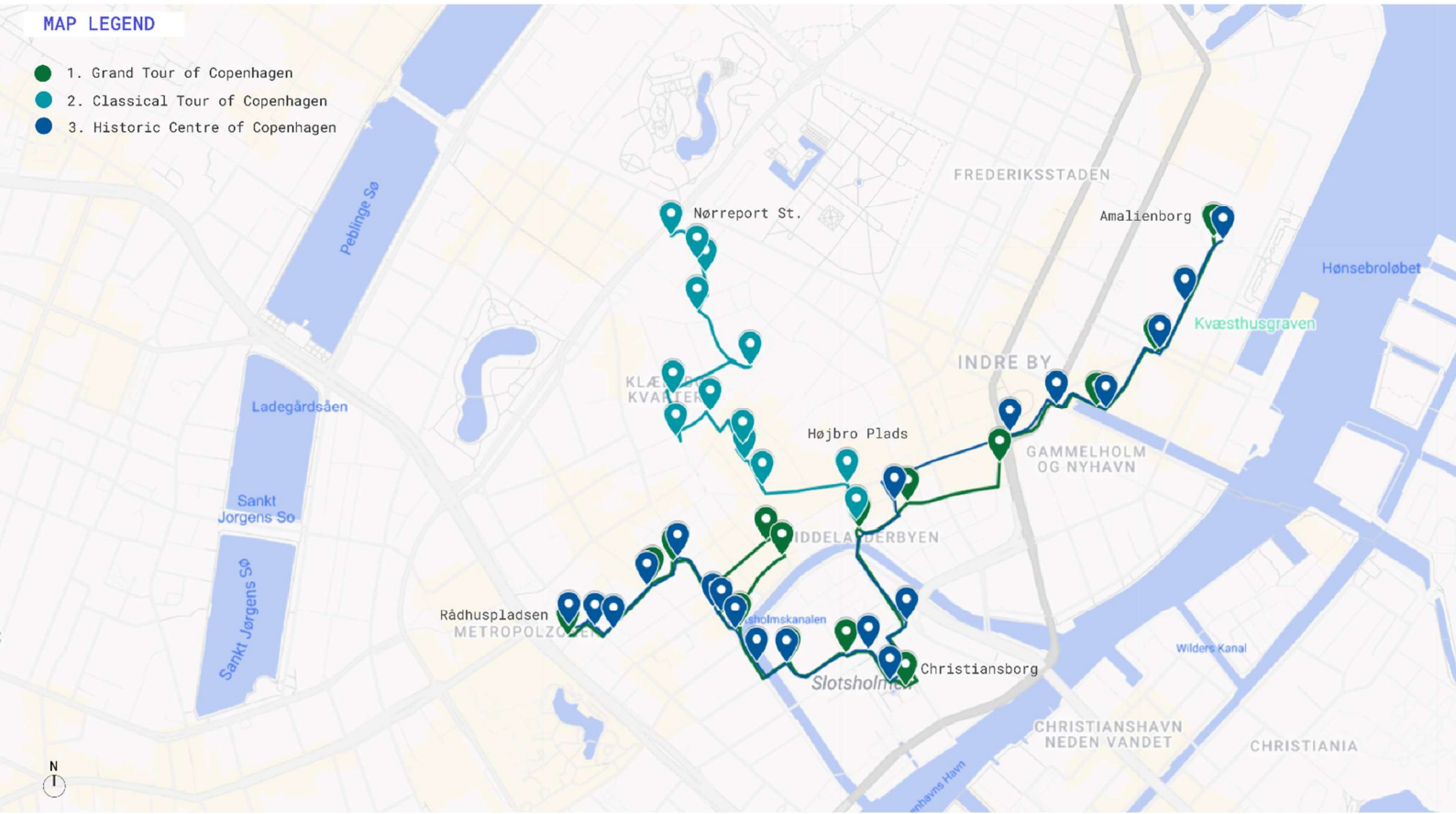


Figure 4 – Copenhagen Tours. Produced by the author.

Despite being run by different companies and advertised under distinct titles, two tours activate the urban space in very similar ways, both in terms of route and spatial storytelling. Tour 1, the “Grand Tour”, and Tour 3, “Historic City”, share a nearly identical route, starting at Rådhuspladsen (City Hall Square) and culminating at Amalienborg Palace, traversing key spaces related to administration, monarchic influence and civic life, such as Gammeltorv/Nytorv, Christiansborg, Kongens Nytorv, and Nyhavn. The Tour 2, the “Classical Tour”, diverges from this path, beginning at Højbro Plads and progressing northwest toward Nørreport Station, passing through the University of Copenhagen, the Round Tower and Kultorvet, activating a different spatial vocabulary tied more closely to religion, science, and everyday life. While some overlaps exist (e.g. shared stops like Højbro Plads), the divergence in routing also reflects a divergence in narrative focus, which will be further discussed in the next section.

Such footprint engages with the oldest, most dense, and perhaps most symbolically charged landscape of the Danish capital. In fact, the “Historical Copenhagen” as presented in the tours has clear anchoring points and geographical boundaries. Slotsholmen appears as the symbolic place of the founding of Copenhagen Castle in 1167 by Bishop Absalon, while the surrounding area corresponds to the medieval fabric of the city. The routes also pass through important sites of expansion in the 17th and 18th centuries, such as Kongens Nytorv and the neighbourhood of Frederiksstaden. By placing the tour stops in a map of 1725, it becomes evident that most of the spatial footprint was already consolidated by the early 18th century.

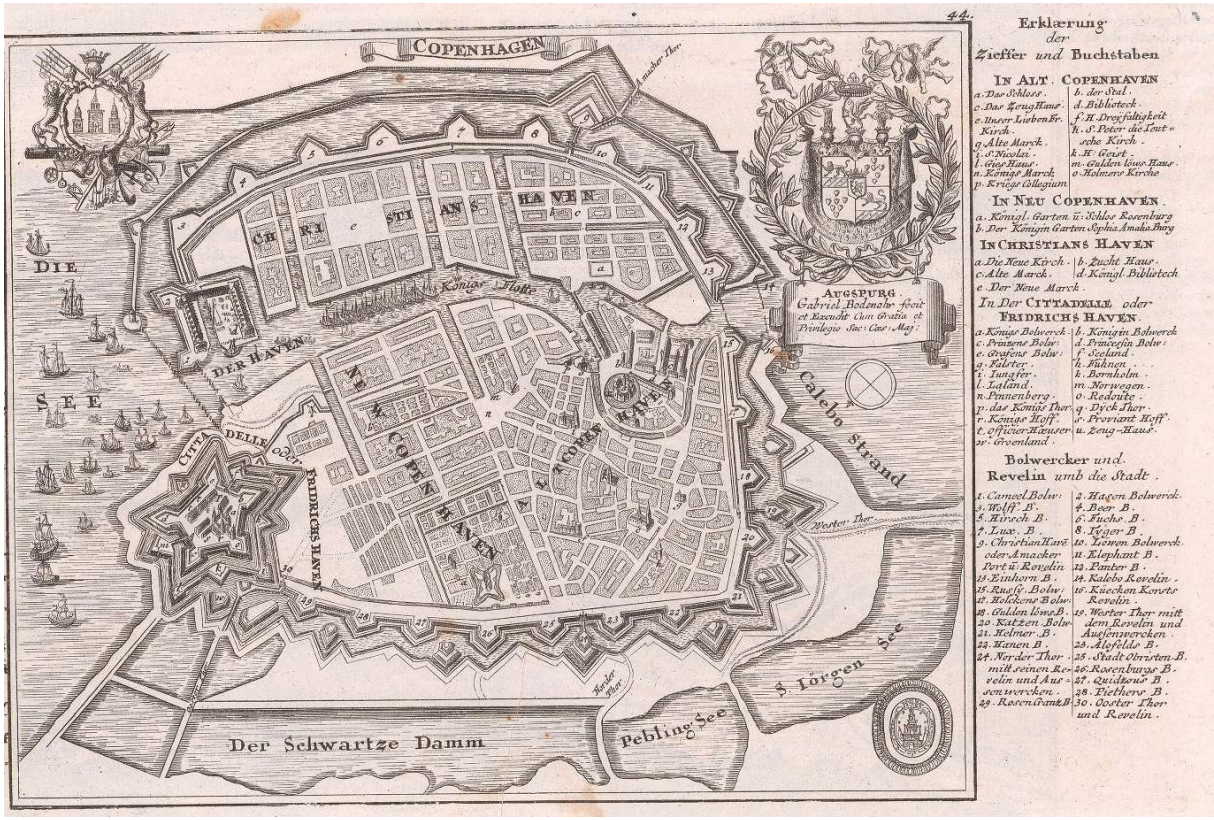


Figure 5 - Map of Copenhagen (1725)

Source: Bodenehr, G. (1725). 44. Copenhagen [Map]. Reproduced from David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries under Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-SA 3.0. The North is pointing down, so the representation is reversed from the previous map produced by us.

In sum, the tours are largely structured within the fabric of medieval Copenhagen, with key **spaces of political and civic power** serving as spatial and narrative anchors.

This first spatial analysis points to a crucial absence. The very name of the city references its origins as a harbour town, a *købmændenes havn*, or "merchant's harbour". The first castle was strategically located to allow maritime access, and the city developed over the centuries as a central trading hub in the Baltic and wider Scandinavian region. However, none of the tours reach the main harbour area nor do they cross the bridges towards Christianshavn. While such areas are occasionally mentioned, they remain marginal in the routes themselves. This could be partially explained by the fact that companies offer a Christiania Tour. Still, regarding the relationship of Copenhagen with maritime navigation and trade, the tours provide two main cues: first, *Nyhavn* is presented as a former port area of local reach, though most of its significance relies on the revival of the area in the second part of the 20th century; second, one of the guides mentions that the infrastructure around the Royal Library Gardens was being originally built as part of a naval harbour by Christian IV. In either case, these limited references caused a first sensation of absence. Where are the places directly linked to sea trading and naval expansion? Would them somehow be linked to the Danish colonial expansion? These spatial silences will guide the rest of analysis and will be revisited in the concluding section on Copenhagen's colonial infrastructures.

b. Temporalities and Characters

At this stage of analysis, attention turns to the first elements coded from the tour transcriptions: **temporal markers** and **historical characters**. Identifying the key timeframes referenced by guides allows us to outline the historical periods which support the narratives. This, in turn, provides a basis to understanding how the past is framed, particularly in relation to Denmark's colonial period (which roughly spans from the 17th to 19th century). What emerges is a pattern in which temporal and character anchors operate as narrative filters, making certain histories visible while occulting others. While the historical tours are temporally located on the centuries of Danish colonial activity, this relation remains narratively absent, revealing a selective lens on the city's past.

Across the three tours, some dominant temporal anchors occur. The Early Modern period (16th-18th centuries) is the most prominently cited by the guides. Such emphasis is directly aligned with the spatial coverage of the tours, focusing on areas developed or transformed during this period. In sum, the timeline of the tours can be summarized as such:

1. “Medieval Copenhagen”: particularly the mythical “foundation of Copenhagen” by Bishop Absalon in 1167, as well as everyday life during the early phases of urban consolidation.
2. 17th-18th centuries: They are narrated eras of naval expansion, as well as urban and architectural development. These are largely associated with the reigns of Christian IV and Frederick V, and that is the period when many of the built structures visited in the tour are said to have originated.
3. The Great Fires of 1728 and 1795 are often framed as moments of destruction and renewal, shaping the city’s current layout and architectural style.

Beyond these temporal clusters, other periods appear marginally. The 19th century is mainly portrayed in connection with two main threads: (1) the Napoleonic Wars and the dissolution of Denmark-Norway; and (2) the flourishing of arts and philosophy, illustrated by figures like philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and writer Hans Christian Andersen. Narratives of the 20th century predominantly focus on the Second World War, with a special attention to the rescue of Jews, as well as references to scientists such as Niels Bohr and Inge Lehmann.

While these temporal cues correspond to turning points in national history and urban development, they largely disengage with Denmark’s participation in global trade networks which later led to imperial expansion. Colonial timeframes are there, but they are evoked without narrative substance.

If the temporal markers help identify ***when*** history is being told, paying attention to the characters reveals through ***whom*** this history is narrated. Across the three tours, Kings and Queens dominate as historical agents. This is especially true for King Christian IV (1577-1648), the most cited character. He is framed as both having a flamboyant personality and being a visionary urban reformer who left his legacies in fountains, fortresses, palaces and even party anecdotes:

> “Whenever he became a king, (…) he came down here for the party! He ended up slaughtering 300 cattle to feed the populace, (…) and he also filled up the original fountain that was here full of wine, so that the locals were coming” (CPH Tour 2, at Stork Fountain).

Even tours which diverse in route and focus make important remarks about the relationship between Christian IV’s reign and the consolidation of Denmark-Norway as a naval and trading power. They do not interrogate

however the broader motives or labour systems which supported this expansion.

> "This is the library garden and if you look on this side, you see a large warehouse from the 16th century, when we had this big renaissance King called Christian IV. That was at the time where Denmark-Norway was one country, and we were the second largest Navy in the world" (CPH Tour 3, at Kongelige Biblioteks Have).

Dominating the narrative landscape, monarchs anchor much of the processes which happened in the country or in the city. Other social groups' (such as sailors, merchants, commoners in general) participation in history remain peripheral. This absence privileges the symbolic leadership of royalty over structural or larger social processes. This selectivity is particularly striking once the tours frequently reference the centuries in which Denmark was an active colonial player.

This first coding reveals a first disjuncture, between the **temporal presence** of colonial periods, despite their **narrative absence**. Christian IV is celebrated for his naval ambition and infrastructural vision, but the colonial economies and networks which underpin them remain unspoken. In this manner, temporalities and characters structure the narratives, by filtering them and determining which pasts are celebrated, which are softened, and which are excluded altogether.

c. Themes and Tones

This section continues the narrative analysis by unpacking the main themes addressed in the walking tours, alongside the tones used to deliver them. A close reading and coding of the transcripts revealed a broad range of themes, varying both in historical scope and in symbolic weight. These themes were subsequently clustered into categories with common threads. Beyond identifying content, attention was given to the tone of narration, either by lexical choice or the guides' expressive attitudes toward specific events and figures.

In general, all three tours create an atmosphere of humour, relaxation and curiosity, often being ironic or playful. By tracing the interactions between themes and tone, the analysis reveals how tour guides highlight specific aspects of urban and national history, while softening or sidelining others. This selective process is not only manifest by choosing which stories to tell, but also by affectively engaging with them in different manners.

1. THE ROYALS – PERSONAL LIVES AND ANECDOTES

In the previous step of analysis, we emphasized how monarchs are often framed as the main historical agents in the narratives. Coding shows that not only this is true, but also their personal lives receive a substantial attention.

Tour guides tend to focus on two different narrative strategies: first, the characterization royal figures through their personality traits and quirks (e.g., Christian IV as flamboyant, excessive, or libertine); second, the detailed recounting of specific episodes in their private lives – which can have connections or not to larger national events. These stories are often told as anecdotes, sometimes mimicking royal speech and simplifying a complex historical event to a monarch's will.

> "Christian IV was a terrible sinner. His wife gave him 10 children, his second wife gave him 7 children, multiple mistresses and we don't know how many children he actually had, but I've seen estimates between 22 and 34. Somewhere in there. So yes, he did like to build a lot of churches because of all this sinning" *(CPH Tour 2 at The Round Tower)*.

> "But when the king changed his mind… when the current Christiansborg palace was constructed, the king changed his mind, he said: "I want to stay here". So The Royal family bought the entire 4 houses here" *(CPH Tour 3 at Amalienborg)*.

Notably, current royals are portrayed as "down to earth" or charmingly relatable. These anecdotes range from a very playful to an ironic tone. The storytelling resembles a tabloid-style celebrity culture, rendering royalty as accessible and entertaining, while masking the current and past political significance of monarchy. This is the case, for example, when different guides narrate how the current King Frederick X randomly met his wife at a bar in Australia.

> "So, Mary is the random Australian lady that was in a bar in the right time in the right place 24 years ago(…) And [then Prince] Frederick ended up there because he's very sporty and he was invited to be in the committee for the Olympics. And in an interview, Frederick said "it was love at first sight when I saw Mary". So, I can only imagine the door open, Mary stepped in, the AC started blowing her hair in slow motion and a cheesy song was starting in the background *(everybody laughs)"* (CPH Tour 1 at Amalienborg).

> "I would recommend you guys checking out Frederick and Queen Mary getting married because whenever you watch it on YouTube, you'll notice that they actually have human

> emotions. They smile, they have a tear in their eye. The Queen is a tear in her eye as well. I'm so used to having. Well, Charles, really, as a comparison. But this royal family has human emotions. They're a bit more relatable." *(CPH Tour 2 at Vor Frue Kirke).*

2. ROYAL INFRASTRUCTURES AND SPATIAL POWER

The private dimension of royal life is paralleled by an engagement with royal spaces – palaces, squares and monuments in general. These infrastructures do not only organize the spatial narration, as previously discussed, as they are also richly narrated. Guides use them to frame national ceremonies, such as coronations, New Year's Eve speeches, or political transitions, often tying them to the physical evolution of the city.

Spaces like *Kongens Nytorv* and *Amalienborg* become narrative platforms to discuss aristocratic urban design and architectural ambition. Here, the guide addresses the construction of Frederiksstaden, as her tone shifts to admiration and a gentle humour, combining reverence with some irony:

> "The street is wider, and houses are just white, as well, and it was a rich neighbourhood as well in the 1750s so everyone had a villa in here. And definitely a richer establishment (guide laughs softly). It was called Frederiksstaden, which means Frederick City, Frederick being the man on the horse that we're going see in the middle of Amalienborg that commissioned building everything at that time" (CPH Tour 1 at Sankt Annae Plads).

Amalienborg, on its turn, appears as a very symbolically charged space in the neighbourhood. Not only the stage of contemporary tourist attractions, such as the change of the guard and the royal museum, guides also tell how the estate became a royal residence.

> And then the royal family lives in the middle of this area. And the palace wasn't initially built as a palace, it was just meant to be a central square with four identical villas that were inhabited **by the richest families in the city**. You're going to see, the Palace doesn't really look like the conventional palace. It's basically just 4 houses, but they took over [the royal family] because their house kept burning down at Christiansborg" (CPH Tour 1 at Sankt Annae Plads).
>
> "So, this is the Royal Palace of Amalienborg. In front of you, there's an equestrian statue, and that is **Frederick V**, the man who intended this part of the city and the man who wanted this part of the city built to place Copenhagen on the European architectural map. He was a king and not

> too clever. And that statue actually costs what resembled about 80% of the annual budget of the state in the 1740. **So it was a very, very expensive statue to build**" (CPH Tour 3 at Amalienborg).

These quotes exemplify how the guides emphasize the spatial symbology of Amalienborg and the Equestrian Statue of Frederick V. However, what remains absent are the colonial economic networks which funded or motivated these projects, something we will return to later.

3. URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Beyond royal infrastructures, the tours also engage with Copenhagen's general urban and architectural evolution. Events such as The Great Fires of 1728 and 1795, the layout medieval streets, and public sanitation are narrated in vivid, though mostly descriptive, terms. They offer a tactile sense of historical change—focusing on materials, facades, and streetscapes. Here, the city is presented as a palimpsest, where past disasters and reconstructions play a significant role in shaping the contemporary city. Despite an apparent richness, the tone remains neutral, rarely prompting interpretation of larger social contexts.

> "This is what the city would have felt like before the two great fires of Copenhagen. A lot of this city was destroyed during the 1700s by them. But after that, they demolished the rest of the buildings and so just spread out the streets and made it a lot more squares and stuff. A bit, lot more open. But the city would have felt like this: very, very, very dark, also very smelly as well. The plumbing was terrible or so bad that we couldn't even drink our own water from the ground. People would have lived with a lot of their animals" (CPH Tour 2 at 4. Kringlegangen Courtyard).

4. EVERYDAY CULTURE AND DANISH IDENTITY

Although marketed as "historical", the tours also engage with aspects of contemporary Danish culture, commenting on important symbols and ways of life. Focus is given to daily customs, culinary traditions, and perceived national traits, such as *hygge,* the biking culture or welfare. In these moments, the narrative voice shifts, as guides share their personal experiences and opinions with the participants.

> "So, I feel like that's a huge difference in how people live here more comfortably. I don't define happiness as happiness in the sense that honestly, if you look around in here… In summer you do see people that are happy. But in wintertime, no one's smiling and people are kind of

> depressed, and the Nordics are the highest regions of antidepressants in the world (…) So it's not like people are just generally happier in here, but people are more comfortable, and they all have this security blanket that if you lose your job, you call on benefits. So that's why I want to say it's more about comfort, not happiness" (CPH Tour 1 at Det Kongelige Biblioteks).

"Denmark" is portrayed as progressive, humane and idiosyncratic, often through humorous and quirky details, such as the cinnamon traditions or babies napping outside during winter. Stories about the Danish food and drinking culture also emerge, leading to recommendations on restaurants and bars. These narratives create a sense of intimacy with Denmark's social fabric, often inviting participants to laugh, relate, or feel curious.

5. HISTORICAL EVENTS AND CONTEXTS

While anecdotal stories dominate, the guides also engage with macro-historical events: Denmark's role in the Kalmar Union, the Napoleonic Wars, especially its naval supremacy between the 17th and 19th centuries. In such moments, the stories place the city in a broader global system, taking Europe as the main scale, but again the narrative falters in acknowledging the role of colonial explorations.

The following quote highlights the role of Christian IV in the consolidation of the Danish Navy and it is an example of the **very few direct mentions to colonialism**.

> "But he [Christian IV] was the one who built up the Navy to certain extent to try and create a new colonial state of Denmark, but ultimately it was a bit of a failure. They only had certain colonial assets: one, Danish West Indies in the Caribbean. A small port in Ghana, where they picked up the slaves to be sent to the Danish West Indies. Some settlements over in India as well. They then became this massive colonial empire. The reason I bring this up is cause on this tour, we'll be talking about the end of Denmark's Navy being the dominating force in the Baltic and in the North Sea, and this was because of the Napoleonic force. Now, I want to give us a run time off the Royal Family as well..." (CPH Tour 2 at Højbro Plads).

Here, colonialism is mentioned but minimised with the use of different narrative tools. When the guide mentions that it was "a bit of a failure", limited to "certain colonial assets", such as "a small port", and "some settlements", he immediately downplays the historical, economic, and social impacts of the complex trading system which was established.

This furthers portrays the geographies of power created by Danish colonizers as a marginal, almost accidental engagement with empire. However, there is some contradiction in the mention of "a massive colonial empire", although there is no deepening on this fact. Actually, the next part of the narrative deflects the attention. When the guide links the reason for bringing this up with the fall of the Danish Navy, due to the Napoleonic Wars, we see that the listing of “colonial assets” is only evoked as part of a larger Naval History, but they do not forefront as part of a politico-economical sphere.

In this case we can also see a more impersonal tone in the narrative. The use of “they” instead of “we” subtly distances the speaker from the historical actors. Finally, the abrupt shift to a "run time off the Royal Family as well…", denotes a deeper discomfort in narrating empire.

Another tour addresses the same topic when the group was at Det Kongelige Biblioteks Have. Here, there is mention to the crucial role of Christian IV in building a new naval harbour and providing infrastructure for sailing and defence.

> "If you look on this side, you see a large warehouse from the 16th century, when we had this big renaissance king called Christian IV. That was at the time where Denmark and Norway was one country, and we were the second largest Navy in the world. We were very, very powerful. Only the British had a more powerful Navy than we did. So, Copenhagen was a very, very important city. On this side here we also have a warehouse which dates back from the 1600s. So, King Christian IV, he constructed this place(...) Originally, there was also a warehouse from the 1600s here. So this is actually the harbour or the arsenal; the ships would sail through that opening somewhere through the warehouses and be loaded with guns, and gunpowder, and with food and with everything they needed. And King Christian IV (...) is the longest reigning king in Danish history. And he's also one of the stupidest kings in Danish history (the group laughs)." (CPH Tour 3 at Kongelige Biblioteks Have).

In this passage, the guide is pointing to the infrastructure around the current Gardens of the Royal Library, highlighting how they were part of a larger infrastructure. There is a clear connection between the Danish-Norwegian naval power and the built infrastructures which supported it. However, what remains unsaid are the consequences of a naval harbour to the development of trading sailing, or the deeper interests that king Christian IV had in this. We will also provide further comments in the following section. The tone clings to reverence Denmark as “very, very powerful” and Copenhagen as an important city in this period. Similarly to before, the quote diverges the attention to this

very complex and rich moment in history to focus on character traits of the king and further telling anecdotes about his private life.

6. DIFFICULT PASTS

From these situations, we could assume that there is perhaps a general discomfort in narrating difficult or traumatic pasts. However, the tour guides demonstrate a certain ability to address some complex histories. The Nazi occupation of Denmark, the rescue of the Jewish population, and witch executions are treated with seriousness, empathy, and narrative care. In these moments, the tone shifts—humour is set aside, and the city becomes a witness to suffering and survival.

> "But then a lot of these squares used to be used for a lot of witch burnings that used to happen within Copenhagen, too, and including this one. They started it just before Christian IV's reign, with his father, Frederick. However, it really ramped up during his reign: around 1000 people would be prone to the stick under his reign (…)" (CPH Tour 2 at Nørreport Station).

Here, the guy narrated the case of the execution of Maren Spliid, accused of witchcraft, and he includes the involvement of Christian IV in her burning.

> "So he brought Maren to the city and ended up torturing her until she admitted that she was a witch. It was illegal to torture somebody before a trial had happened. Afterwards, you could torture them as much as you liked, but beforehand it was illegal, and that meant the Christian IV was breaking the law by doing this" (CPH Tour 2 at Nørreport Station).

In this case, historical violence is contextualized, and an authoritative figure is critiqued; the past emerges as a moral problem. Here, there is a clear contrast with how colonial history is treated: when mentioned at all, it is accompanied by vagueness, deflection, or euphemism. This suggests not an inability to narrate difficult pasts, but a selective reluctance.

By selecting themes and assigning them specific tones, Copenhagen's walking tours construct a specific historical imagination to the city, centred on royalty, architecture, and national culture. Colonial histories remain peripheral and fragmented. This narrative gap reveals a selective logic and a certain emotional calibration. Some pasts are celebrated, some others criticised, and some are even mourned. The past related to colonial entanglements, however, is mentioned but dismissed. What remain are some scattered clues across different narratives.

In the beginning of this chapter, we highlighted the main aspects of Danish colonialism. Having completed the narrative analysis of the tour, the next section will present a brief comment of the material legacies of colonialism in Copenhagen, providing a timeline, important actors, events and spatial traces of this often-muted history.

Note from the field:

Copenhagen, 2nd of November 2024.

I just finished my second walking tour today. As soon as I arrived, I saw many groups of tourists with guides in the city centre. That was very symbolic to me because it made me aware of a very strange feeling: I feel uncomfortable to be among these groups, to be seen *as* a tourist. No, I study and live here. I am not one of those people who obstruct the sidewalk with their cameras, their cheap conversations and collections of souvenirs.

Wait – do I actually live here? And how am I perceived by the inhabitants of this city?

But this feeling showed me something else: like it or not, tourism is relevant to understanding our cities.

I interviewed the second tour guide, and I felt a little uncomfortable too. I don't feel confident in formulating the questions, in 'extracting' something from other person… Is this relation also beneficial for them? I have been trying to being the nicest as possible, but what else can I offer them? Do they trust me? Am I being honest with them?

I am developing some empathy with the guides. Their backgrounds, their positions show me that we have a lot more in common than I thought. It must not be easy to work this part-time, fully depending on tips, with a minimal infrastructure around you. Managing you and others in public space, with all the things that could happen. And I even may end doing this job for a while after this masters… I think I could do it well.

I feel like I keep looking for something that I will not find.

Equestrian statue of King Frederik V, commissioned by Adam Moltke, on Amalienborg Square.

Ricardo Balaca, The Return of Columbus; 1874. Public Domain.

6. THE CASE OF MADRID: THE COURTLY CAPITAL OF A GLOBAL EMPIRE

This chapter develops the case study of Madrid, outlining the main findings from the spatial and narrative analysis of its walking tours. As with Copenhagen, the first section provides an overview of the Spanish empire, tracing its timeline, territorial extent, main economic activities, and political structures. The purpose is to situate the walking tours within a broader historical framework and to highlight how imperial narratives shaped Madrid as the symbolic and administrative heart of a global empire. The following sections account for the spatial and narrative analysis of the tours, as done with the previous case study.

I. NOTES ON THE SPANISH COLONIALISM

If Denmark was a “latecomer” into the era of overseas expansion, Spain was one of the earliest and most ambitious European colonial powers. Even before Columbus voyage in 1492, the crown of *Aragón* had already consolidated authority in the Mediterranean (Kamen, 2004), and *Castilla* was a major power in the Iberian Peninsula beyond the conquest of the Canary Islands since 1402 (Vallejo, 2018). As Martín Saloma (2020) argues, these experiences shaped the ambitions of the Catholic Monarchs into dynastic consolidation and a desire of expanding their power abroad.

The year 1492 marked both the completion of the catholic *Reconquista* and the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean. Over the next three centuries, Spain became the first truly transoceanic empire (Tarver & Slape, 2016), subjugating territories in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe. This system was built on the extraction of silver and gold, plantation crops, and monopolized trade routes (including enslaved people), reshaping global exchanges of people, goods, and ideas.

The Treaty of *Tordesillas* (1494) divided the non-European world between the two naval powers of Portugal and Spain, giving the latter privileged access to most of the Americas and to Pacific routes. Micheal Tarver and Emily Slape (2016) agree that this naval superiority, combined with strategic alliances and devastating epidemics, facilitated domination over indigenous empires such as the Aztec and Inca. The silver mines of *Potosí* (present day Bolivia) and *Zacatecas* (Mexico) became the backbone of Spain's colonial economy, fuelling its dominance in Europe yet tied to cycles of inflation and fiscal crisis (Tarver & Slape, 2016).

The newly funded Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru functioned as central hubs of silver extraction and transatlantic trade. The Caribbean provided sugar, tobacco, and other plantation products. Across the Pacific, the Philippines tied Spain into Asian commercial networks, while enclaves in North Africa (Ceuta, Melilla) maintained its Mediterranean influence, while Spain's possessions in Naples, Sicily, Milan and the Netherlands tied it to continental conflicts. Enslaved African labour was essential to sustaining the plantation economies, integrating Spain into the transatlantic slave trade — though often mediated through Portuguese and later Dutch merchants (Ferreira & Seijas, 2018).

The Iberian Union (1580–1640), when Spain and Portugal were ruled under one crown, temporarily created an empire of unprecedented global reach, encompassing Brazil, the coasts of Africa and Asia alongside Spain's own possessions (Fryer, 2016). Yet this expansion overstretched resources, and by the 17th century Spain faced mounting challenges from Britain, France, and the Netherlands.

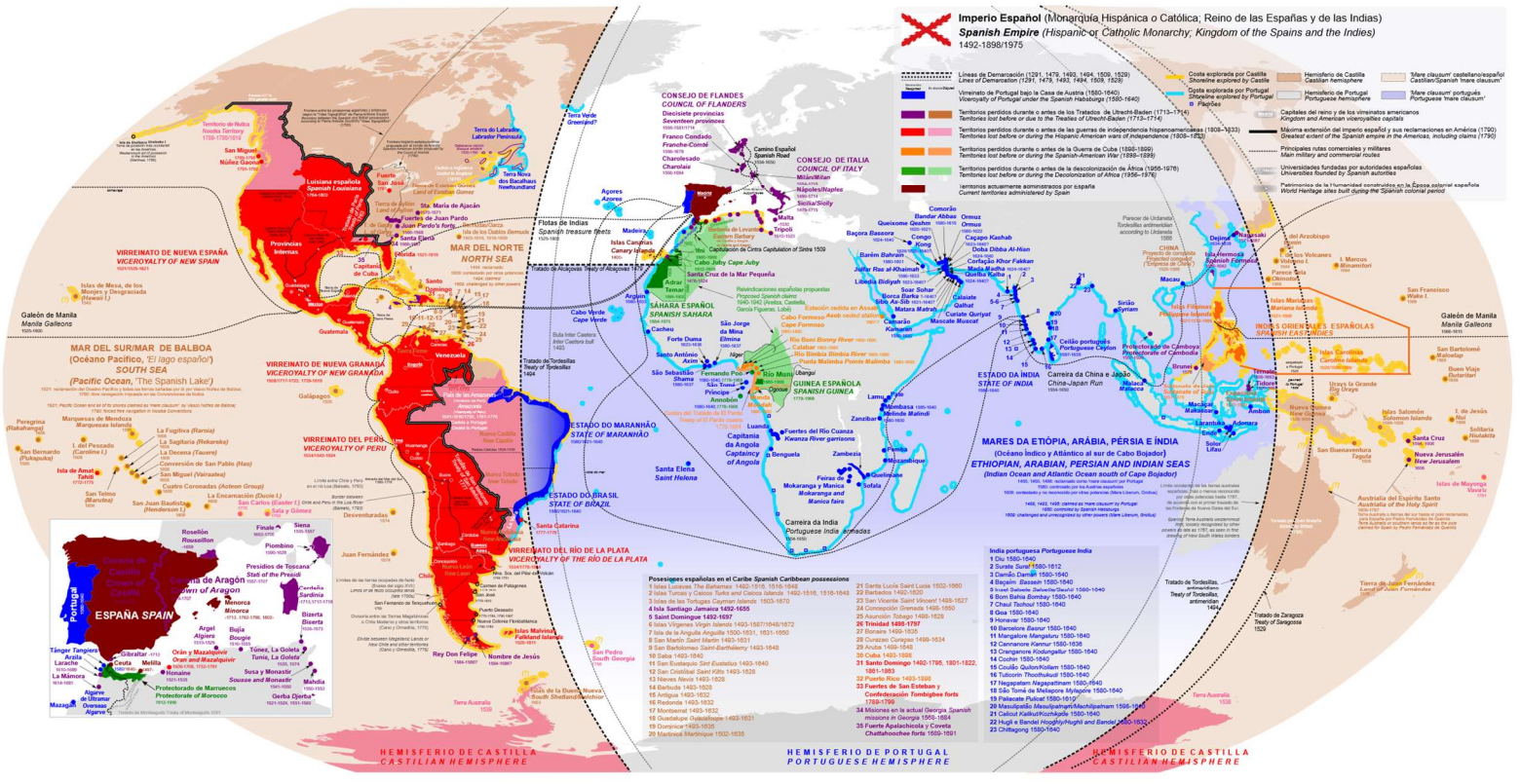


Figure 6 – Diachronic Map of the Spanish Empire (1492-1898/1975). Source: Nagihuin. (2023). Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The Bourbon reforms of the 18th century sought to reassert control, centralize administration, and increase revenues, establishing new viceroyalties such as New Granada and Río de la Plata. The nineteenth century brought the fragmentation of the empire through the wars of Independence (1808-1825), culminating with the Spanish-American War of 1898, destituting Spain from its last colonies overseas.

Today, as Celeste Muñoz Martínez (2024) reflects, colonial memory in Spain is fragmented across regions, political ideologies, and social movements. According to her, the lack of a national reckoning with colonialism still influences an imperial nostalgia which frames it as an era of greatness and progress, which has "benefitted colonial populations with humanism and enterprise" (Muñoz Martínez, 2024, p. 430. Own translation). However, anticolonial memory has increasingly reassessed Spain's colonial past, especially after the 1990s, around the commemoration of Columbus voyage fifth centennial[5]. Such critical reassessments emphasize the violence, exploitation, and inequalities which endure colonialism.

II. MADRID: THE LEGACIES OF AN IMPERIAL CAPITAL

From the reign of Felipe II, Madrid became the permanent seat of the Spanish monarchy (1561), consolidating its role as the administrative centre of the empire. Though smaller and less economically significant than cities like Sevilla or Valencia, Madrid's modest scale allowed the monarchy to shape its urban development according to imperial needs (Pablo-Martí et al., 2022). As Alejandra Osorio (2022) points, Madrid imposed its authority and cultural significance in the following centuries with the development of architecture, art, ceremonies, writings and publications, and the establishment of new nobilities under the Habsburgs.

The city's rapid demographic growth from a market town of 20,000 inhabitants to an administrative centre exceeding 100,000 happened in over a period of only around four decades (Ringrose, 1983). This growth was accompanied by infrastructural interventions such as the widening of streets, the construction of hospitals and convents. *Plaza Mayor,* redesigned under Felipe III, became the symbolic stage for the projection of imperial authority centred around baroque ceremonial values: a stage for royal festivities, bullfights, and the *autos de fe* of the Inquisition (J. Escobar, 2003).

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[5] The author refers to the occupation of Sevilla's cathedral (where Columbus tomb is) in 1991 as a symbolic genealogical beginning for decolonization struggles in Spain.

The old *Alcázar,* a former Muslim fortification, became the royal residence and administrative hub, housing the *Real y Supremo Consejo de las Indias*, one of the main advisory institutions in colonial governance (Osorio, 2022). The centrality of the palace, and development of elite residences further reinforced Madrid's role as the spatial embodiment of the monarchy, even as its architecture remained modest compared to other European capitals.

By the end of the Habsburg dynasty, Madrid had established its role as imperial capital, fenced by Felipe IV's defensive wall which established the historical limits of *Madrid de los Austrias,* articulated by key axes such as Calle Mayor and Calle de Atocha.

The arrival of the Bourbon dynasty after the succession war marked a decisive shift in Madrid's urban landscape, reflecting the centralizing ambitions of the new monarchy. Under Felipe V, initial reforms focused on the southwestern periphery, with the construction of the *Puente de Toledo* and the church of the *Virgen del Puerto*. The most emblematic transformation came with the construction of the *Palacio Real*, initiated in 1738 after the destruction of the *Alcázar* by a fire. This monumental project, completed under Carlos III, symbolized the Bourbon desire to project dynastic power through architectural grandeur (Sancho, 2004). The palace's scale and style marked a departure from the Habsburgs' more austere urbanism and positioned Madrid as a modern European capital aligned with French court aesthetics.

Figure 7 - Map of Madrid (1653). Albernaz, P. T. (1653). Mantua Carpetanorum sive Matritum Urbs Regia (Madrid Ciudad Regia). Public Domain.

Carlos III's reign brought a comprehensive urban program that earned him the title "the best mayor of Madrid". His administration introduced paved streets, public lighting, and a sewage system, while also promoting civic monuments and green spaces (Ringrose, 1983). Key infrastructures from this period include the *Puerta de Alcalá*, the *Casa de Correos*, the *Palacio de Buenavista*, and the *Basílica de San Francisco el Grande*. The development of the *Salón del Prado* (later the *Paseo del Prado*) with its iconic fountains (Cibeles, Neptuno, Apolo), and the establishment of the *Museo del Prado* and the *Jardín Botánico*, reflected a vision of Madrid as a cultured, hygienic, and enlightened metropolis (Tarver & Slape, 2016). These transformations were not merely aesthetic; they redefined the city's spatial logic and civic identity, aligning Madrid's urban form with its role as the administrative and symbolic centre of a global empire.

III. MADRID WALKING TOURS

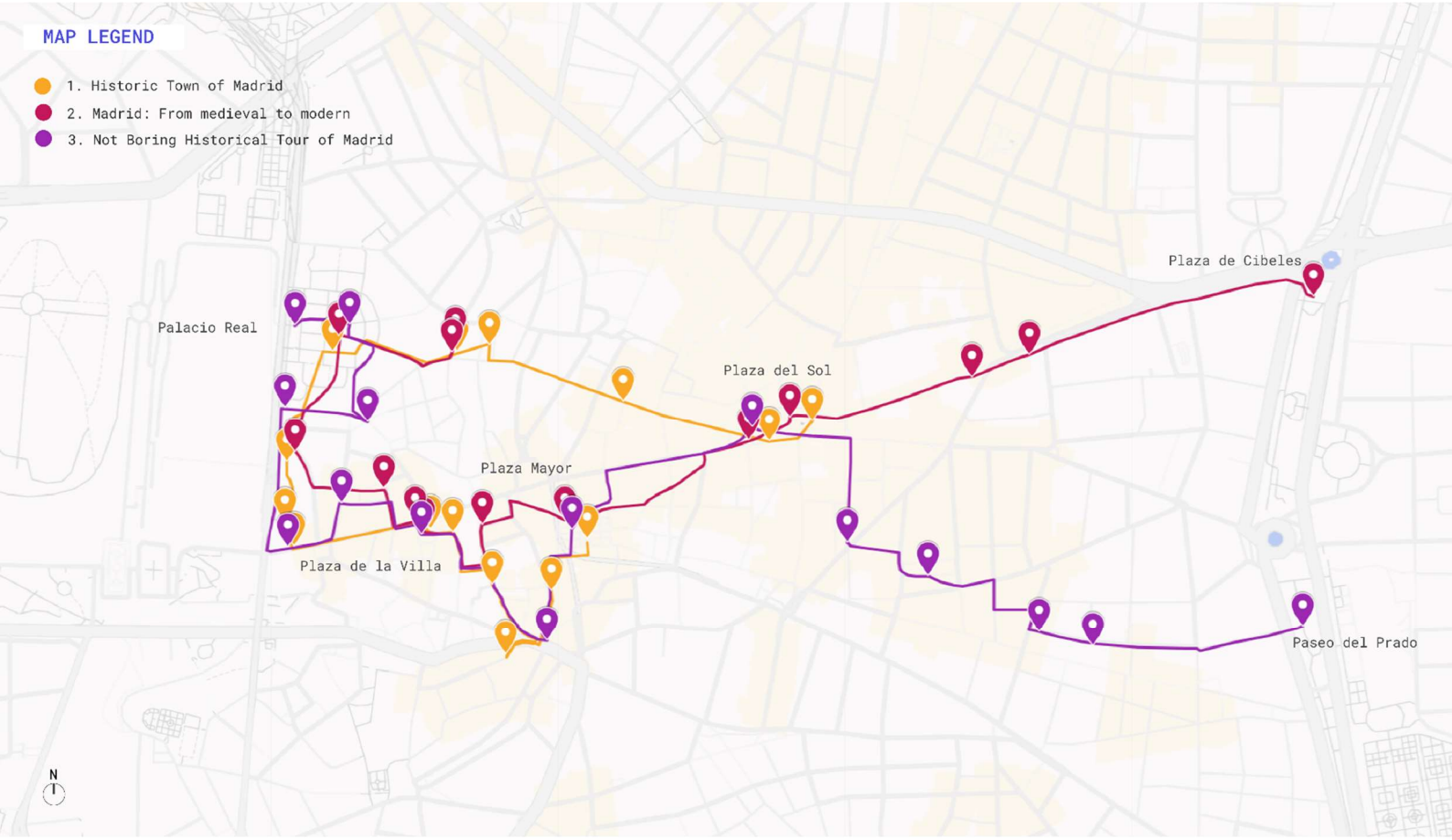
a. The spatial choreography of the tours

In the case of Madrid, the tours cover a small portion of the *Centro* district. Tour 1 (yellow) starts at *Puerta del Sol* and develops a counterclockwise movement finishing at *Plaza Mayor*. Tour 2 (red) starts at *Opera* and walks northeast, finishing at *Plaza de Cibeles*, and Tour 3 begins at the *Royal Palace*, finishing in front of the Prado Museum in an overall southeast direction. This footprint reveals a clear west-east movement axis, connecting the Palace to *Paseo del Prado*.

Here, the tours engage with a range of public and private spaces, with a special attention to squares, such as *Plaza del Oriente, de la Villa* (City's Square), *Mayor and Puerta del Sol*, which are visited by all three groups, revealing their symbolic importance. The *Calles Mayor, del Codo, de Alcalá* and *Lope de Vega* emerge as important streets which structure the storytelling. *Almudena's* Cathedral, the Royal Palace and the *Real Casa de Correos* appear as important built structures, Monuments are also taken with importance, such as the statues of Carlos III, Felipe IV and Isabel II.

There is a striking overlap between routes, especially in the western-most region, where all the paths converge by connecting the spaces cited above. Towards the east, *Puerta del Sol* articulates the routes following north and south, where *Paseo del Prado* delineates the borders. The cited symbolic public spaces are related to past and present centres of administration,

Figure 8 – Madrid Tours. Produced by the author.



royalty, religion and civic life. In general, such almost identical spatial coverage also reveals a similar approach to storytelling, as we will comment in the next section.

These spaces coincide with the consolidated urban imprint from the early 17th century, as the first general plan of Madrid shows (Figure on page 66). The "Historical Madrid", according to the tours, has its origins in the Muslim fortification built on the 9th century where a following church *Alcázar* was located. Then, the spatial narratives evolve from the Islamic fortification to the subsequent Christian city walls. Much of this fabric represents the *Madrid de los Austrias*, in reference to when the Habsburg dynasty ruled over Spain; architectural transformations after this period are referenced to the period known as part of *Madrid de los Bourbones*, when the Bourbon dynasty came into power following the Succession War in 1700. Overall, the stops connect spaces of royal and civic power, integrating them into a broader narrative of the development over the centuries. The following map of 1623 with the added stops of the tours makes visible how many of the symbolic spaces considered in the tours actually date back from this period in the urban history of the city. Tours rarely move beyond this **historical core**, reinforcing a myth of Madrid as a city rooted in the Habsburg-Bourbon continuum

b. Temporalities and Characters

At this stage of analysis, we shift attention to the historical periods and character figures most frequently invoked in the Madrid walking tours. Some specific epochs are elevated as symbolic reference points, while others are rendered marginal or omitted.

As in the case of Copenhagen, the narratives in Madrid are largely situated within the early modern period, coinciding with the reigns of the Habsburg and Bourbon dynasties. These centuries are related to both the consolidation of Madrid as the political capital of the Spanish Empire and its urban and architectural transformation. The temporal presence of Spain's imperial peak is evident, but as in the Danish case, its colonial entanglements remain discursively muted.

In the Madrid case, the key temporal anchors are:

1. 9th–11th centuries: These mark a mythic narrative of the "Muslim foundation" of Madrid. The tours mention the city's Islamic roots (*Mayrit*), its strategic defensive location, and architectural remnants (e.g., *mudejar* elements).

2. 15th–16th centuries: These centuries are spatially anchored through sites like the *Alcázar* and *Plaza Mayor,* and stories tied to figures like Cervantes and Álvaro de Basán. The Spanish Armada and figures like Carlos I and Felipe II appear, but only in connection to court life, architecture, and royal politics.

3. 17th century – The Habsburg Golden Age: This period dominates the narrative landscape. Characters as Felipe III and Carlos II are prominent, with a special attention to Felipe IV and his equestrian statue. The Habsburg decline is used to dramatize the transition to the Bourbon dynasty.

4. 18th century – Bourbon Rule and Urban Reforms: The reigns of Carlos III and Felipe V are central to the narration of Madrid's modernization. Carlos III, in particular, is portrayed as a visionary reformer responsible for sanitation, policing, and urban beautification. However, his role in colonial exploitation and the Bourbon reforms regarding the topic are ignored.

While less dominant, the 19th century is mentioned in relation to Isabel II, the Carlist Wars, and Spanish-American colonial independence. Narratives around the Spanish Civil War, Francoist repression, and Republican resistance characterize the 20th century. Elements of contemporary life—such as New Year's Eve traditions, churros, vermouth, and local humour—appear frequently, but they rarely connect Madrid's present-day diversity to its imperial past.

Such temporal markers coincide with important moments in the consolidation of the Spanish empire. But, similar to the Copenhagen case, these timescales are largely disengaged from the perspective of colonization.

In relation to the main characters in the narratives, like those in Copenhagen, are heavily populated by royal figures. Carlos III is often framed as an enlightened reformer. His administrative projects are portrayed as visionary but disconnected from the colonial economy that financed them.

> "This is Charles III. And he is known as the best major of Madrid and we're gonna see why" (MAD Tour 1 at Puerta del Sol).

Felipe IV's eccentric personality and life is heavily explored through anecdotes. Some artists such as Cervantes, Velázquez, and Goya, serve as supporting figures tied to urban and cultural development, but without reference to their context within the building of empire. Some figures such as

Francisco Franco and García Lorca appear as touchpoints in the history of 20th century Spain, tied to dictatorship and resistance.

> "You know, when we were walking out of the Plaza with the guy on the horse with Phillip IV and we saw a bunch of really tall white sculptures. Those are all previous kings. Those are past kings of Spain or the Spanish kingdoms here in the Iberian Peninsula" (MAD Tour 2 at La Almudena Viewpoint).

> "Do you know who is Diego Velasquez? Who is Velasquez? He's a painter. He's one of the most important painters in the Spanish history" (MAD Tour 1 at Plaza del Oriente).

As in Copenhagen, the narrative temporalities of Madrid tours coincide with colonial periods, particularly the 16th–18th centuries, but these are portrayed from the perspective of dynastic grandeur, as it will become clearer in the next section. Monarchs and elites monopolize narrative agency, while everyday urban inhabitants or colonized peoples remain absent or anonymized.

c. Narrative themes and tones

The coding process revealed a diverse and layered set of themes in the narratives presented during the Madrid walking tours. During analysis, it became clear that all of the coded material could be grouped within the six thematic clusters already established during the Copenhagen case. Thus, for coherence and comparability across the analysis, these original categories are maintained here.

However, while the categories remain consistent, the tone and narrative function of each cluster displays particularities in the Madrid context. As the Copenhagen chapter already explored in depth the rationale for coding structure and the interpretive dimensions of narrative tone, this section is more descriptive to avoid redundancy. A comparative reflection between both cities will follow in the next section.

Below, each cluster is presented with a description of the specific themes found in the Madrid tours, along with the dominant tonal registers that shape their delivery.

1. THE ROYALS – PERSONAL LIVES AND ANECDOTES

As in Copenhagen, monarchs dominate the narrative landscape. However, Madrid guides show an even greater investment in personal, scandalous, or humorous anecdotes tied to the royal figures. Here, the stories about Isabel II's sexual freedom, or Carlos II's inbreeding-related disorders – mentioned by all the three guides – are told with a tone that is often gossip-like. Guides often

approach them with sarcasm, spectacularizing the topic, as the following example shows.

> "And there's a lot of genetic issues in a lot of very serious ways. Mentally, physically and aesthetically as well. I know. Maybe it seems a little bit silly to talk about how the Habsburgs were very ugly but believe me when I say. **This is the most significant part of their reputation historically** (…) obviously infertility was a major issue for the King [Carlos II], and the king could not reproduce. There's no heir to the throne (…) It's not an assumption; I'm being very clear: it is inbreeding that led to the fall of the Habsburg empire here" (MAD Tour 2 at *Plaza del Oriente,* emphasis added).

Royal characters are used as entry points to explore broader historical change, but often become ends in themselves, framed through their eccentricity, failures, or charisma rather than the systems they governed. With these anecdotes, guides tend to create a form of affective intimacy with historical power, while deflecting critical attention from empire and its beneficiaries.

2. ROYAL INFRASTRUCTURES AND SPATIAL POWER

Madrid's built environment remains strongly associated with royal authority. Key sites such as the Royal Palace, *Plaza Mayor*, and *Plaza de Oriente* serve as symbolic extensions of monarchical power. The guides often describe these locations in terms of scale, aesthetic detail, and architectural features. Interestingly, all the three tours made long stops at the Equestrian Statue of Felipe IV at *Plaza del Oriente,* highlighting its long process of construction and the involvement of sculptor Pietro Tacca, painter Diego Velázquez and engineer Galileo Galilei.

> "(…) as I was telling you, these guys got involved not because he [Felipe IV] was a good king, because he was not at all. But just because he really supported the arts and because this statue was considered a masterpiece of engineering at that time. It's the first statue in the whole world that the horse is supported by only two legs" (MAD Tour 1 at Felipe IV's Equestrian Statue).

Compared to Copenhagen, there is a less descriptive and more consistent tone of admiration attached to the city's monumental spaces. While the palace fire and subsequent rebuilding are presented with dramatic flair, there is little critique of the political function of visibility and control embedded in these spatial narratives.

3. URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Urban reform and stylistic layering are central topics in the Madrid narratives. The tours highlight the Bourbon-era modernization under Carlos III, contrasting it with earlier Habsburg layouts. Some styles, such as *Mudejar*, Plateresque, and Neoclassical are described, but with limited technical detail or precision.

Across all tours, *Plaza de la Villa* appears as a symbolic administrative space spanning over five centuries, housing buildings from different periods. In this excerpt, the guide frames it with reverence. Madrid being the capital of a global empire remains a marginal reference, as there is no further contextualization offered.

> "And now we're walking into one of my favourite little squares, la *Plaza de la Villa*, which literally means town square or village square. And what's so interesting about this square is that almost 500 years ago, **when Madrid was the capital of a global empire**, this was one of the most important squares, if not the most important, in the city!" (MAD Tour 3 at *Plaza de la Villa,* emphasis added).

4. EVERYDAY CULTURE AND SPANISH IDENTITY

Madrid guides frequently turn to contemporary cultural references to animate their storytelling. Food, traditions, and linguistic quirks form a strong undercurrent to the historical content. From New Year's rituals in *Puerta del Sol* to the symbolism of vermouth and tapas, everyday life is portrayed with a sense of civic pride and cultural intimacy. These elements provide affective grounding to the tour experience, bridging distant pasts with recognizable, sensory references. The tone here is distinctly warm and celebratory, tending to portray a familiar version of everyday Madrid.

> "So we are next to the oldest and most popular chocolatería that is chocolatería *San Ginés*. It was founded in the year 1890. During the night there was a big tradition around here because we are next to the that it's a theatre, but in the night it's a disco and in the 90s it was really popular for famous people to come here" (MAD Tour 1 at *San Ginés* Bookshop).

5. HISTORICAL EVENTS AND CONTEXTS

This cluster spans a wide temporal arc—from the Islamic foundation of *Mayrit* and the *Reconquista*, through the Spanish Inquisition to the Napoleonic invasion, the 19th-century liberal struggles into the Francoist dictatorship. Similar to Copenhagen, in Madrid the military conflicts are addressed with

greater emotional depth. The colonial history of Spain, while temporally present in reference to the 16th–18th centuries, is largely absent in content—a narrative silence that mirrors the Copenhagen case.

For instance, one briefly references Felipe II's decision to move the court to Madrid and the symbolic need for a grand public square. Once again, this moment of imperial centralization is quickly sidestepped in favour of detailing the design of lampposts at *Plaza Mayor*.

> "But in 1561 Philip II the King of Spain decided something huge. He decided to make Madrid his capital and a capital needs a big square. So Philip II decided to design this, the *Plaza Mayor* for his new capital of the Spanish Empire, and there's a lot that's gone on here" (MAD Tour 3 at *Plaza Mayor*).

Another key historical transition cited in all tours is the shift from the Habsburg to the Bourbon dynasty, typically framed through aesthetic contrasts or anecdotal genealogies (in relation to inbreeding, as mentioned before) rather than its geopolitical context.

> "And there's actually a really big difference between the layouts of Madrid *de los Bourbones* and Madrid *de Los Austrias*. We look at those *Austrias*, we see these very narrow, winding little streets. Whereas *Los Bourbones* has big, grand, impressive streets and these two empires had very different aesthetic interests. So, the second that you crossed the threshold into the French city, even the architecture immediately changes. It's fantastic" (MAD Tour 2 at Madrid's Map, *Plaza de Isabel II*).

However, this process is not further contextualized in relation to the Spanish War of Succession or the structural reforms made to consolidate colonial rule. In this moment, the Spanish Bourbons sought to reorganize imperial administration for the benefit of the metropole, increasing revenues and asserting greater crown control—including over the Catholic Church.

In another excerpt, the guide frames the Napoleonic invasion as the moment when Spain "was not in their best moment," linking it causally to the independence movements in Latin America:

> "If we go back to that time of the 19th century, Napoleon was getting in here. Right. Napoleon got here in 1808. And when Napoleon got here, all the colonies back in Latin America, they took advantage of that to make their independence. So basically, that means that Spain was not in their best moment" (MAD Tour 1 at *Plaza de Isabel II*).

Across these examples, three important, decisive moments in Spanish imperial history are present but underdeveloped: Felipe II's rule; the Bourbon dynasty; and Napoleonic invasion in relation to the Spanish American Wars. These are minimally references, often framed through architecture or royal biography, before the narratives shift. Similar to Copenhagen, these moments are temporally acknowledged but redirected to activate other topics, while colonial history remains marginal.

6. DIFFICULT PASTS

Madrid guides engage more directly with what we are calling 'difficult pasts' than their Copenhagen counterparts, particularly when it comes to the Spanish Civil War, Franco's dictatorial regime, and the Pact of Forgetting. Emotional storytelling emerges in relation to Federico García Lorca, public executions, and collective memory struggles.

> "To be very clear with you guys, Franco was not a good guy. There are sometimes people that are kind of *facho*, or fascist, nowadays that's still you know, are supporters of Franco. He was extremely violent. He was a very aggressive man. He did not allow for opposition. He was not a good guy. So, this is another reason for why Franco is kind of considered less problematic today because also, the constitution was... When they made the Constitution, when they developed the Pact of Silence, they also made Amnesty Law, which basically granted amnesty to every single person who worked in the regime, including for example his key execution team. So, **there was no justice**" (MAD Tour 2 at *Puerta del Sol,* emphasis added).

In this example, the guide clearly articulates a political position toward the fascist dictatorship, critically reflecting on, according to her, the lack of justice during the democratic transition. A similar seriousness appears in references to the Spanish Inquisition, where guides refer to the site as a "dark" chapter of national history:

> "Yeah, kind of a dark history that's happened here in the front yard, but also lots of good things. Now it's the Christmas markets as we lead up to Christmas. So a little bit of, yeah. Yeah, a little bit of dark and light. That's Madrid. That's Spain, right? That's Spanish history" (MAD Tour 3 at Plaza Mayor).

This excerpt also illustrates the discomfort that arises when narrating controversial pasts. As observed in Copenhagen, there is a tendency to gloss over, minimize, or abruptly shift away from such topics. At times, the tone

reveals a desire to avoid unsettling the audience, what ends by naturalizing the historicity of the past.

Yet, this willingness – although limited – to engage with national trauma is not extended to Spain's colonial histories, even when they are spatially or temporally relevant. As in Copenhagen, colonialism exists as an unnarrated framework: its traces are present, but they remain not thematized. This contrast between what can be mourned and what remains unspeakable provides a key analytical insight for the following discussion chapter.

Note from the field:

Madrid, 2nd of November 2024.

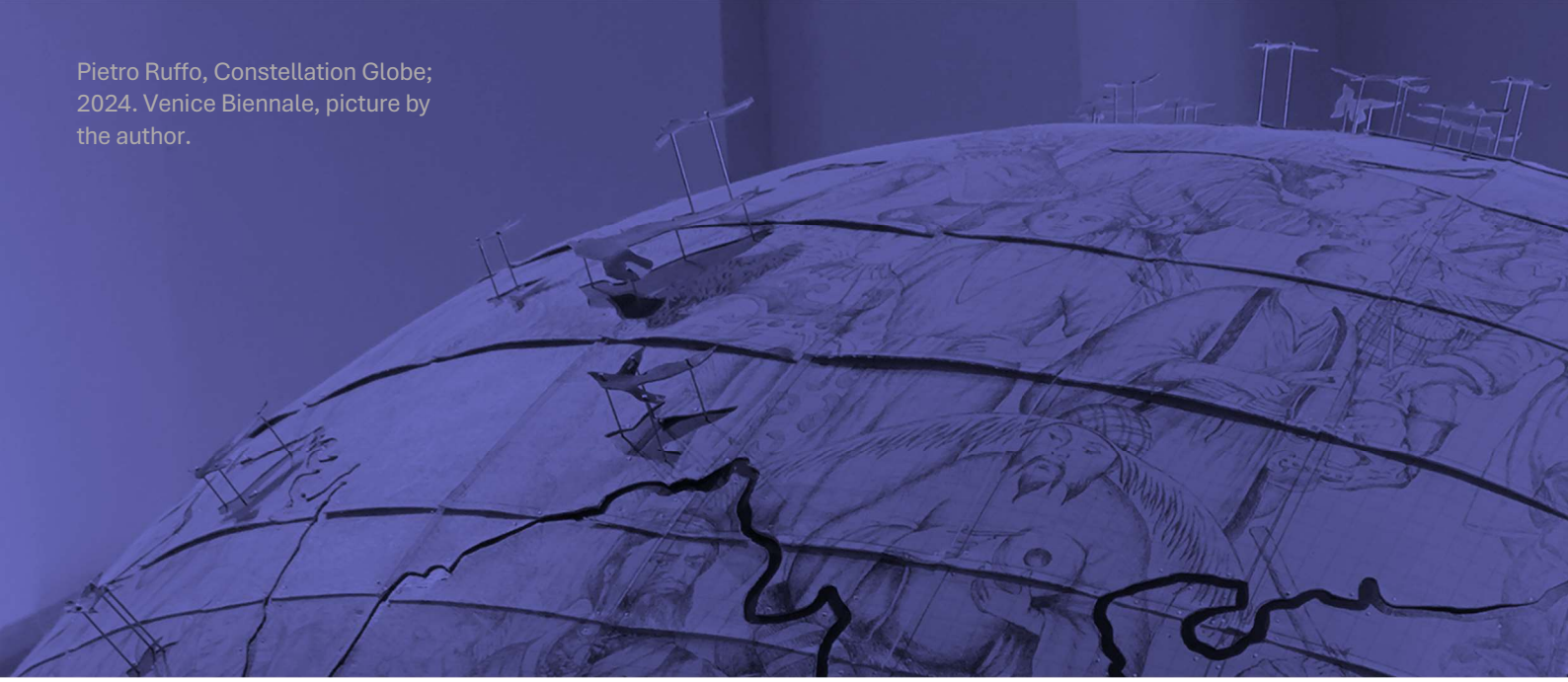
Today I was feeling very excited. I really care about what I am doing. I feel inspired to reflect on how we create our personalities in relation with space…

But after the tour, I feel bittersweet. Uncomfortable. *Incômodo.* Why? I am tired of listening to the same stories. I had high expectations about tours in Madrid. But in 2025, if you decide to go on a Free Walking Tour in this city, you will visit many royal places, hear interesting stories – even laugh with them, but will leave without a minimal understanding of how this space is also marked by the entanglements with other parts of the world.

Sometimes I try to make specific questions during the tour, and see what they spark. But that is so difficult. I feel like the guides leave no room for that. At the end of some stops, they ask us: "any questions?" but because of the rhythm, it's hard to come up with something on the spot.

I don't think that walking tours necessarily need to address traumatic events in our cities' histories. But there is no room for dissidence, for complexity, for conflict. I am angry, I am sad. Does it always have to be funny?

I am also tired: is this leading me somewhere?



Pietro Ruffo, Constellation Globe; 2024. Venice Biennale, picture by the author.

7. COMPARISON NOTES – RESULTS

I. SPATIAL NOTES ON THE TOURS

The route design and stop selection of both Copenhagen and Madrid walking tours demonstrate how spatial framing shape historical narratives. In both cases, the tours traverse spaces physically connected to periods of intense imperial activity, yet such connections are rarely made explicit.

In terms of distribution, both cities' tours focus on a clearly defined "historical centre", often anchored in mythologized stories of origin. From there, the trajectories extend into expansion areas, marked by consequent construction and destruction of walls. In Copenhagen, the tours foreground sites of political and mercantile power, such as Amalienborg Palace, *Slotsholmen* and *Nyhavn* – sites tied to Denmark's colonial ventures. In Madrid, the paths follow dynastic and monumental axes, including *Plaza Mayor, Plaza de Oriente* and *Puerta del Sol,* whose transformations symbolise the height of Spain's imperial expansion, particularly under the theme of *Madrid de los Austrias*.

In both monarchies, these infrastructures are narratively tied to royal ambitions and projects of modernity, encompassing territorial expansion through naval trade, each reflecting different experiences of colonisation. The cities' physical structures play a central role in organising these itineraries: the city are not just a scenery, but a storytelling medium. Buildings, squares, and monuments act as material nodes activating specific historical episodes, figures, or symbolic meanings. Sites crucial to empire-building are not avoided, but their historical framing detaches them from the imperial economies and extractive systems that underpinned their development.

Ultimately, the tour route is not a neutral path, but a curated experience shaped by a particular vision of the "Historical City" in tourism narratives. In

both cases, the absence of explicit colonial narratives stems not from the spatial choreography itself, but from the interpretive lens applied to it. The tours' performative storytelling sets the stage for engaging with the imperial past, yet the discussion is made absent in the narratives.

II. FINDINGS FROM NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Across both cases, the tours' temporal framing foregrounds periods that coincide with each city's peak political and cultural influence, yet without interrogating the colonial entanglements that made such moments possible. In Copenhagen, the narrative gravitates toward the 17th and 18th centuries — the age of naval expansion, royal building projects, and urban consolidation under monarchs like Christian IV and Frederick V. Madrid's temporal arc focus on the dynastic transitions between the Habsburgs and Bourbons, the Napoleonic invasion, and the Spanish Civil War. The Islamic roots of the city are also mentioned, though this is usually attached to the *Alcazar*. Yet, in both contexts, the centuries of active imperial expansion — while present as chronological markers — are treated as a backdrop rather than as central narrative threads. Despite allusions to the imperial dimension, it is not further elaborated on.

The main characters populating these narratives are similarly monarchs, who function as personalised anchors for historical change. Framed as charismatic or controversial figures, credited with grand architectural works and naval ambitions, Royals are often portrayed in playful or humorous tones. Their private lives are considered toward scandal, eccentricity, and intrigues. In both cases, this personalisation of power eclipses the broader structural systems — including colonial governance, trade networks, and labour regimes — that underpinned these rulers' achievements. Other social groups, such as scientists and artists also have the protagonism of some stories, though in a less prominent frequency. Ordinary people, subaltern actors, and colonised populations remain largely peripheral or invisible.

Thematic clustering further confirms the parallels we made so far. In both cities, royal infrastructures, urban and architectural transformation, and macro-historical contexts form the spine of the narrative. Everyday culture is used to create affective proximity, highlighting gastronomy, traditions, and linguistic quirks. The analysis also showed guides' different abilities in addressing "Difficult pasts", those moments which cause controversy, shame, or pain. In Copenhagen, WWII and the rescue of Danish Jews receive careful attention, while colonial history is minimised or absent; in Madrid, the

Civil War, Francoist dictatorship, and the Spanish Inquisition are narrated with greater emotional intensity, but again, the colonial experience is largely absent despite temporal and spatial relevance.

Tone plays a decisive role in shaping how these themes are received. Copenhagen guides often adopt a respectful or nostalgic register for monarchy, mix humour into royal anecdotes, and shift to a more factual tone for historical events. Colonialism, when mentioned at all, is treated evasively or with brevity. In Madrid, tones are gossip-like and sarcastic when recounting royal scandals, celebratory when speaking of cultural life, and explicitly political when condemning Francoist repression. Yet when colonial histories arise, the tone often changes abruptly. Frequently, it is diverted toward less controversial subjects or framed in ways that minimise reflection.

Taken together, these patterns point to a shared narrative mechanism: history is anchored in personalities and monumental spaces, animated through accessible or entertaining tones, structured to foreground certain views of the past while backgrounding others. The result is that colonialism — though materially and temporally embedded in both cities' urban fabric and historical trajectory — remains present only as narrative clues or appendixes to a larger and more important history.

While doing the field work, conflicting feelings took over me. Although I had an instinct feeling that many of the tours would not focus their narratives on colonial history, I still had the hope that they would at least take it as a main temporal or thematic framework to engage with these cities' histories. As time progressed and I followed more tours, I realized that, despite their differences, they had a very similar approach to storytelling. This made me feel all sorts of ways – from confused, to angry, to hopeful, and even hopeless. Talking to the guides and trying to understand their perspectives on their own work made me feel empathic about their position as well. In the next section, we go behind the scenes and comment on insights provided by tour guides during the semi-structured interviews. Although not all the guides accepted or had time to sit on another moment, it was still possible to talk to half of them and intend to understand some motivations and concerns that they have. This is what we do in the next subsection.

III. GOING BEHIND THE SCENES: INTERVIEWS, FIELDNOTES AND REFLECTIONS ON GUIDES' POSITIONALITIES

In this section, we summarize the insights from the semi-structured interviews conducted with three tour guides, two in Copenhagen and one in

Madrid. The aim is to move "behind the scenes" of the walking tours analysed earlier, trying to understand how the guides' positionalities, motivations and views on their own role influence the narratives presented to tourists. The conversations also shed light on practical constraints, economic incentives, and performance choices that shape the selective processes within the tours.

1. GUIDES' BACKGROUNDS

The three interviewed guides have varied professional experiences and motivations for guiding. Some indicated previous work or study in areas connected to history or tourism, while others came to the profession from different paths. Notably, five of the six guides in the wider study were not born in the countries where they work, revealing a position of framing national history and culture from the perspective of a 'foreigner'.

When asked about how they source content for their narratives, the guides mentioned popular and digital media – such as podcasts, online videos and encyclopaedias – as well as museum exhibitions and conversations with different people. This suggests that many of the views present in the tour come from a broader cultural relation to historical facts rather than from academic literature or specialized discussions.

2. MOTIVATIONS FOR BEING A GUIDE

The guides described a mix of motivations for their work. Several mentioned the enjoyment of sharing stories and presenting the city's history to visitors, as well as the satisfaction of seeing an audience connect with a narrative. Guiding was also described as offering a degree of independence and flexibility, with some indicating that it provides a main source of income. Entertainment was repeatedly mentioned alongside education — creating tours that are both informative and enjoyable for participants.

All the guides have a university degree, some with post-graduate studies, in fields ranging from tourism and art history to unrelated disciplines such as international relations and biology. The interviewed guides also noted that guiding provided a good employment opportunity after completing their studies, and that its part-time nature allows them to combine it with other income sources.

3. PERSPECTIVES ON COLONIALISM

All three guides acknowledged, in different ways, the presence of colonial history in the broader historical context of the cities where they work. However, they also pointed out that it is not a central part of the tours they currently lead. In Copenhagen, guides noted that colonial history is rarely a topic explicitly requested by audiences and can be challenging to integrate

into a short-format walking tour. In Madrid, it was acknowledged as a major part of Spanish history, but often addressed only briefly or indirectly.

In all cases, the limited inclusion was attributed to a perception that audiences may not expect or be receptive to in-depth discussions of colonialism. The Madrid guide mentioned that she approaches the topic when leading tours in Spanish for Latin-American audiences, as she feels they can relate more to the topic. This selectivity risks excluding colonialism from broader international and global frameworks, confining it instead to those with direct ancestral or geographical ties to former colonies.

4. IMPORTANCE OF INCLUDING COLONIAL HISTORY IN TOURS

When asked about the importance of including colonial history, all guides agreed that it adds depth and honesty to the historical account, and that omitting it leaves an incomplete picture. However, they also emphasised challenges in implementation: condensing complex histories, balancing potentially sensitive topics with audience expectations, and finding ways to make the subject engaging in a walking-tour format.

The guides also suggested the creation of tours dedicated to colonial histories, once they would attract audiences interested in the subject. We also noted a lack of institutional prompts or support for addressing colonial history, meaning that its inclusion depends on the individual guide's interests and initiative.

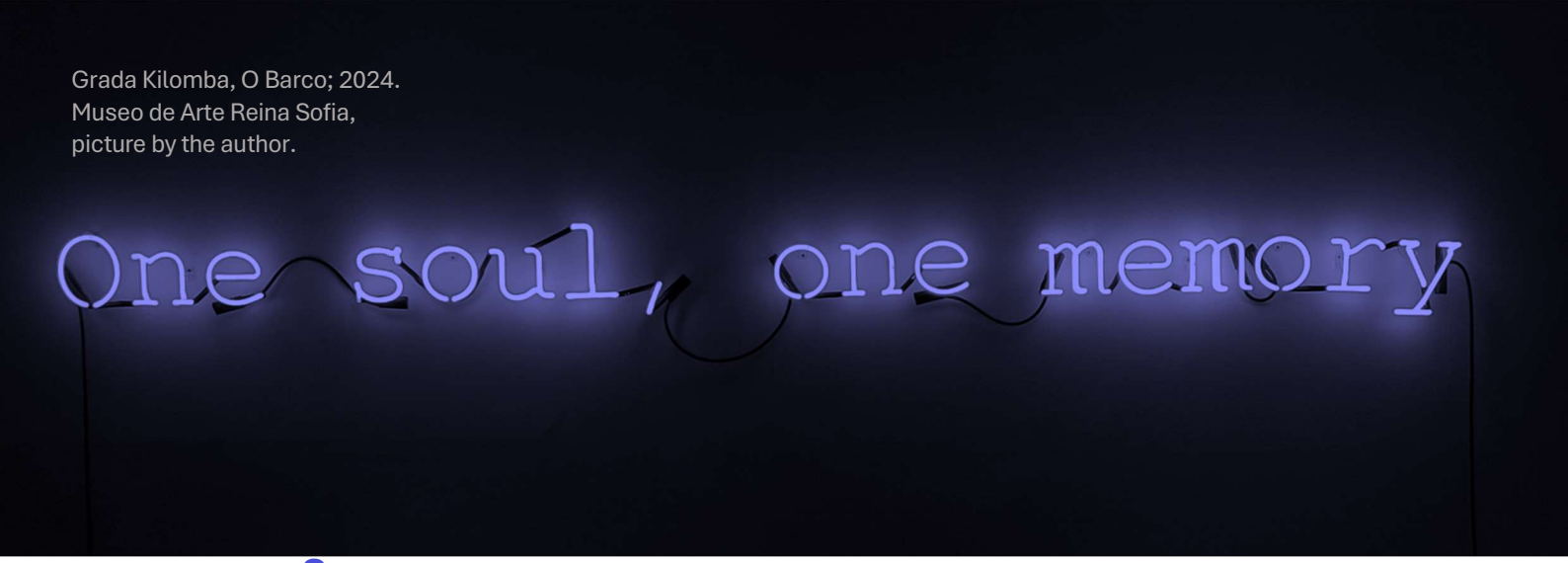
4.1 Entertainment, Atmosphere, and the Limits of Educational Commitment

Both Copenhagen guides explicitly reflected on the limited commitment that walking tours have to formal education or awareness-raising. They described the tours primarily as leisure activities, where the priority is to create a "fun" and relaxed atmosphere so that participants enjoy the experience. In this framing, historical accuracy and critical engagement often give way to entertainment value.

One of the guides linked this directly to the tipping-based payment system, noting that positive reviews are essential for the company's reputation and for her own income. This economic structure incentivises pleasing audiences, and highlights the entertainment aspect of tourism, sometimes at the expense of tackling more challenging or potentially uncomfortable historical topics.

The analysis of the tours reveals a complex interplay between what is highlighted, silenced, or reframed in the narration of Copenhagen's and Madrid's urban pasts. While both cities bear witness to colonial expansion in their landscapes and institutions, the tours tend to leave colonial

backgrounds at the margins. These patterns point beyond the choices of individual guides, reflecting wider structures of memory politics and heritage discourse. To further explore these dynamics, the following discussion situates the findings within the framework of modernity/coloniality and engages with theories of memory and heritage practice.



Grada Kilomba, O Barco; 2024.
Museo de Arte Reina Sofia,
picture by the author.

8. FROM REPRESSION TO THE COLONIALITY OF MEMORY: INTERPRETING ABSENCE

This chapter reviews the findings of the thesis in dialogue with our overarching theoretical framework of modernity/coloniality and modalities of engagement with colonial heritage. Its aim is twofold: first, to interpret the addressing of colonial histories in European cities; and second, to reflect on the broader implications of these findings for debates in heritage, tourism, and urban historiography. By returning to the theoretical arguments set out at the beginning of the thesis, the discussion draws out the tensions between agency and oppressive structures, presence and absence, that shape how colonial pasts are made legible or illegible in contemporary urban landscapes, taking the tour guide as one of the main agents through which narratives are performed.

1. MODERNITY/COLONIALITY AS A FRAMEWORK

The modernity/coloniality framework provides the epistemological ground on which this thesis is built. It insists that colonialism was not merely an episode of overseas conquest but a constitutive dimension of modernity itself. Colonial expeditions and trade have inaugurated an era of global fluxes of goods, peoples, and knowledges, defining geopolitics of core-periphery. It has allowed lifestyles based on the consumption of colonial goods, such as sugar and coffee, silver and gold. Settler colonialism and slavery generated genocides, voluntary and forced migrations at unprecedented scale, globalizing racial hierarchies. The cultural depictions of the invaded lands created specific discourses and representations towards the “other”. These processes are just few examples which demonstrate the “coloniality of power” (Quijano, 2000) as an enduring structuring force through which racial hierarchies, epistemic violence, and economic dependency persist and shape contemporary times.

When we argue that European cities must thus be understood within the modernity/coloniality perspective, we are able not just to frame them as centres of accumulation and representation where modernity took place, but

also highlight how colonial processes shaped their infrastructures, institutions and everyday life. This perspective reveals a dissonance in historical and urban framings which downplay the role of colonialism in the constitution of modernity. As Delanty (2017, p. 3) reminds us, following Ernst Renan, national identities – mostly created during the nineteenth century – have been forged through "the forgetting of history," with oblivion becoming the necessary condition for the fabrication of cohesive imaginaries. This selective memory is reflected not only in urban historiography, but also in heritage practices. Laurajane Smith's (2006) discussion of the "authorized heritage discourse" reveals how heritage gives 'the past' a material reality, attaching specific values to it in order to forge senses of common identity. Such discourse privileges monumental architectures, elite actors, and national stories, while marginalizing subaltern voices and inconvenient pasts.

Following the decolonial paradigm, contemporary heritage in Europe cannot be disentangled from coloniality. Certain urban and architectural developments, such as monuments, squares, and public spaces in general, are not neutral aesthetic artifacts, but also material archives of colonial histories. Their interpretation through tourism is equally entangled: tourist practices both reinforce imperial imaginaries and provide opportunities for epistemic struggle. Tourism, therefore, is a key arena in which colonial absences are reproduced, challenged, or re-signified.

2. EMPIRICAL RESULTS IN BRIEF

The comparative analysis of Madrid and Copenhagen reveals striking parallels. Tours in both cities gravitate towards a bounded "historic city": eighteenth century *Madrid de los Austrias*, and Copenhagen's medieval core plus its expansion to Frederiksstaden. These areas coincide with periods of imperial consolidation, but the narratives offered to tourists rarely dwell on colonial connections. In Copenhagen, for instance, harbour areas with dense colonial infrastructures are bypassed entirely, while in Madrid, references to urban development attached to the city becoming the capital of the empire are shortly commented on.

Accordingly, the tours privilege a very specific "urban history." The timelines coincide with the periods of colonial expansion, and royal characters become protagonists of the stories. Anecdotes privilege accounts of monarchs' personal lives, curiosities about specific monuments, and the description of architectural styles, often distancing the built environment from its production logics. Colonialism is treated evasively or with brevity. Humour and sarcasm dominate the tonal approach, while their critical capacity is limited.

This narrative framing produces an implicit portrayal of both cities as if their urban and architectural development unfolded independently of the colonial systems that sustained them for centuries. The result is a spatial and discursive disconnection: colonialism is bracketed as an external history, rather than recognized as intrinsic to the making of the European city.

3. TOUR GUIDES, THEIR ROLE AND AGENCY

A central interpretive question concerns the role of the tour guides. The findings show that guides are not passive transmitters of institutional scripts but active mediators who exercise considerable agency in shaping stories. Many of them are highly educated, working in precarious "gig economy" conditions, and using guiding as a flexible source of income. In general, they are aware of colonial histories in the cities where they work yet often choose to minimize or exclude them.

This minimization, however, cannot be read simply as ignorance or cynicism. It is shaped by broader structural forces related to economic aspects of the tourist industry: the need to entertain, to avoid conflict, and to secure positive reviews and tips. These results confirm Adu-Ampong and Berg's (2024) study in Amsterdam, revealing that this process can be further understood at a European scale. Considering the constant tense negotiation of creating pleasurable experiences and addressing difficult colonial legacies, their study notes an overarching imperative to create a positive atmosphere for tourist satisfaction. In this sense, humour, anecdotes, and personalization function as narrative strategies that prioritize enjoyment over critical engagement. Our findings expand on those, showing that this is also reinforced by the fact that the guides see their activity as having little educational or political impact, once they see tourist activity as mainly a leisure practice.

To this respect, Linehan et al. (2020) argue that many tourist experiences are designed to "offer an experiential rather than an informed understanding of the colonial past and help foreclose contemplation on its harms." Historically themed tours increasingly focus on specific periods and personalities, reinforcing individualized and dramatized views of the past. The findings exemplify Stach and Zündorf's (2022) claim that oral narration still privileges selectivity, personalization, stereotyping, and embellishment, all of which lend themselves to humour and anecdote but difficult the integration of complex, structural histories such as colonialism.

This scenario reveals that the critical potential of tour guiding narratives are not guaranteed; they depend on the positionality of the guide, their narrative

framework, and the openness of the audience. This illustrates the idea of tourist practices as battlegrounds of memory shaped by social negotiation.

The production of narratives in the tours thus emerges as a dialogical process. On the one hand, guides possess agency to decide what to highlight or omit. On the other, they operate within institutional and economic structures that encourage selective storytelling (Stach & Zündorf, 2022). This recalls Bakhtin's (1981) interpretation of narratives as polyphonic and dialogical: they emerge through the interaction of voices, expectations, and contexts, rather than reflecting a single author. Guides co-produce stories with their audiences, balancing their own knowledge with tourism industry's goals for entertainment, spectacle, or cultural consumption.

4. FINDING ABSENCE: REPRESSION AS A MODALITY OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COLONIAL PAST

By investigating how free walking tours in Copenhagen and Madrid engage with narratives and spaces related to colonialism, the research has found not only explicit omissions, but subtler forms of silence and diversion. How to make sense of this "lack", of something that is not there?

Lars Meier et al. (2013) argue that absence is not simply a void, but a rich phenomenon which can stimulate vectors of analysis. It makes us question: what is missing, where and for whom? The authors point that absence is essentially a relational phenomenon, "something that is made to exist through relations that give absence matter" (p. 424). It manifests concretely in places, stories, and interactions, yet its recognition depends on the corporeality of those who are able to feel it. Absence was felt by my body at different stages of research, – it caused disorientation, anger, suffering – in the dissonance between the narrative grandeur of the cities' urban development and the erasure of the colonial economies that financed it.

This absence, perceived as an uncanny presence, is not the result of a simple act of forgetting. Drawing on Knudsen and Kølvraa's (2020) framework, it is better understood as an "active forgetting," a refusal to allow certain pasts to surface. Such repression is not enforced by authoritarian censorship or overt violence, but by the quieter cultural mechanisms of heritage discourse. It shapes the very conditions of what can be articulated, hinted at, or surrounded by silence: "in what is said, not said, unsaid, indicated, hinted at or surrounded by uncomfortable silences" (Kølvraa, 2018, p. 5).

In the tours, colonialism surfaced on rare occasions, twice in Copenhagen, once in Madrid. Yet these instances were fleeting, often descriptive rather than analytical, they functioned more as brief markers in time rather than as

doors to discussing complex socio-economic structures. To this respect, we catch glimpses of what Knudsen and Kølvraa call reframing—colonialism acknowledged, but only as a footnote to larger national or urban histories. These minimal inclusions reveal how absence is normalised in historical tourism discourses. Repression remains the dominant mode, and colonial histories persist as ghostly remainders, "neither fully acknowledged nor able to be completely dispelled from communal life" (Kølvraa, 2018, pp. 2–3)

5. STRUCTURAL FORCES AND MNEMONIC REGIMES

Moving beyond the micro-level of guide–tourist interaction discussed earlier, our theoretical frameworks invite us to reflect on the broader structures that shape the recalling of colonial histories. The silences identified in Madrid and Copenhagen align with larger continental tendencies in the management of the past. Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (2010) highlight how colonialism and imperialism are often excluded from official European commemorative agendas. A striking example is the preamble of the European Constitution, which failed to mention Europe's colonial entanglements.

This pattern has been described by Doron Eldar (2024, p. 39) as a broader "colonial amnesia," in which colonial history is treated as an appendix to national development rather than a constitutive force in Europe's trajectory. The absences observed in Madrid and Copenhagen's tours mirror a what Berthold Molden (2016) terms hegemonic mnemonic cultures. According to him, these memory cultures tend to flatten the diversity of experiences that have shaped the continent, privileging narratives that serve to justify present political orders. Memory, for Molden (2016), emerges from a triangular power struggle between the historical experience (the events themselves), the structure which signifies them (or memory cultures) and the concrete agency of those involved.

This understanding situates our findings by revealing the multi-layered forces at play when historical narratives are performed in free walking tours. Guides in both Madrid and Copenhagen showed an ability to address what we may call difficult pasts—episodes marked by violence, pain, or shame. In both cities, the Inquisition, World War II, and the persecution of Jewish communities were narrated with respect and seriousness. Contrasting this with the absence of colonialism, we are able to reflect how mnemonic regimes enable certain difficult histories to be incorporated into collective memory while relegating others to silence.

Aline Sierp's (2020) research further illuminates this selective pattern by tracing how the European Union has recently entered the field of memory

politics, a prerogative traditionally claimed by nation states. She shows that the EU's interventions in remembrance remain highly selective. It actively promotes Holocaust memory and World War II commemorations but remains "curiously quiet about the memories of imperialism and colonialism" (p. 688). Policy instruments such as European Parliament protocols, Justice and Home Affairs Council deliberations, and EU-funded exhibitions demonstrate the Union's capacity to foreground colonial history, yet this potential is consistently sidelined.

Sierp's analysis provides a structural explanation for our empirical findings. Guides' ability to address some difficult pasts (e.g., fascism, religious persecution) and their reluctance to address colonialism reflect the broader mnemonic order shaped at both national and supranational levels, which is demonstrated by the production of specific policies. By unpacking the EU's selective engagement, we see not only the persistence of a hegemonic memory regime, but also the possibility of political advocacy at European level.

6. CONCEPTUALIZING THE COLONIALITY OF MEMORY

The analysis of walking tours in Copenhagen and Madrid has shown how colonial histories are marked not only by silences but by structured forms of absence. Guides operate in the tension between their own agency and the structural constraints of mnemonic regimes, producing spatial narratives that consistently repress colonial entanglements. When situated within broader European memory politics, these findings confirm how hegemonic cultures of remembrance actively marginalize colonial and imperial pasts. What emerges, then, is not a neutral omission but the reiteration of a mechanism central to modernity/coloniality: the systematic rendering of certain groups, territories, and histories subordinated and invisible. In this sense, the absence of colonial narratives in walking tours exemplifies the ongoing coloniality of memory (Tlostanova, 2017).

Coloniality of memory can be understood as a systematic machinery of repression and selective remembrance that serves to uphold colonial power structures. It disciplines populations into mnemonic submission, offering only sanctioned, "convenient" collective narratives that erase all traces of colonial trauma, humiliation, and violence. Through what Madina Tlostanova (2017) terms "self-legitimating violence," this machinery imposes ruptures in both communal and bodily memory, compelling societies to forget or forgive in ways that align with dominant political and economic orders. The past becomes a flexible archive, constantly re-scripted to serve the present needs of hegemonic regimes.

Yet coloniality of memory is never total. At its core lies an irreducible tension between official, textualized versions of history and the embodied, affective memories carried by individuals and communities. This memory is stubborn, non-verbal, non-rational, often lodged in the body itself. It resists indoctrination. Its eruption in forms of dissonance, trauma, or counter-narratives sustain a refusal to be silenced. Memory can be both an instrument of control and a disruptive force that exceeds colonial systems' attempts to overwrite the past.

> "I am therefore speaking of a colonial trauma that has been memorized. The colonial past is memorized' in the sense that it was 'not forgotten.' Sometimes one would prefer not to remember, but one is actually not able to forget (…) One cannot simply forget, and one cannot avoid remembering." (Kilomba, 2010, p. 132).

How, then, might we move from repression toward other modes of engaging with colonial heritage? Knudsen and Kølvraa's (2020) framework offer a useful horizon: alongside repression, there are modalities of removal, reframing, and re-emergence. Decolonizing narratives on urban and national history requires precisely such a shift. Perhaps the first step is making visible the infrastructures of empire that remain hidden in plain sight, situating monuments and buildings within their colonial economies, changing the relation we maintain with our built environment. More than adding information, this practice should allow suppressed histories to re-enter the public sphere in ways that unsettle dominant narratives, inspire critical reflection, and open space for new political and ethical futures.

In this sense, the walking tour becomes not just an object of study but also a potential tool for transformation. As performative, embodied practices, tours could move beyond reproducing hegemonic silences to foster decolonial forms of remembrance. Re-imagining their narratives and routes and confronting the cities' entanglements with empire, shifting the urban archive from repression toward re-emergence. This reconsideration would be able to indicate what past processes and structures societies desire to transform into future inheritance, and which should be re-interpreted, dismantled, re-configured, or even left into ruin.

> By bearing witness to different pasts, one is not a passive observer but is able to turn from interrogating the past to initiating new dialogues about that past and thus bringing into being new histories and from those new histories, new presents and new futures (Bhambra, 2014, pp. 116–117).

Christopher Columbus Statue Torn Down at Minnesota State Capitol on June 10, 2020. Picture by Tony Webster under Creative Commons License CC BY 2.0.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to examine how guided walking tours in Copenhagen and Madrid engage with the histories of colonialism and how these engagements are narratively performed. Framed through the epistemological lens of modernity/coloniality, it investigated how tourism narratives articulate urban history across spatial routes, temporal framings, and narrative approaches. By combining spatial mapping with narrative-performative analysis, it sought to uncover both the material traces of empire in the urban fabric and the ways in which tour guides mediate these traces for contemporary audiences.

The findings point to a selective and partial narration. Stories in both cities privilege royal figures, monumental architecture, and aesthetic descriptions, while they marginalise or erase colonial histories. Tracing the tours' routes makes evident that the "historic city" is itself a curated construct, where absences and silences are as central as what is spoken. It reveals how urban historical narratives continue to reproduce a Eurocentric memory that disconnects the European city from its colonial entanglements.

The study contributes to the broader field of decolonial praxis by demonstrating how coloniality persists in both spatial and mnemonic registers. Following Quijano's (2000) notion of coloniality of power, the analysis shows that colonial hierarchies of knowledge and memory are not confined to the past but remain embedded in the symbolic, material, and affective dimensions of urban heritage. It also highlights the role of tour guides as mediators who negotiate between structural oppressions and own agency. Their storytelling is shaped not only by a notion of "history", but also by their labour conditions, tourist expectations, and wider mnemonic regimes.

Methodologically, the thesis demonstrates the value of combining spatial analysis with performative approaches. Mapping the tours' routes exposed the disjunctions between the presence in places connected to colonial trade and the absence of narratives about these ties. Narrative-performative analysis, drawing on Riessman (2008), revealed how guides rely on creating specific atmospheres of humour to engage the audience and frame history away from politically sensitive themes. It also revealed that some "difficult pasts" are articulated by the guides, as an example of specific EU-level policies which have been aiming such themes.

This study also carried limitations. Its scope was adjusted to two cities in which I only lived for approximately five months, and only a handful of tours were conducted. The focus on the tour guides' approaches provided important insights but left the audiences' expectations and reception

unexplored. Comparative studies across a broader set of post-colonial cities whether in Europe or beyond, could expand the analysis and trace different mnemonic regimes. Triangulating guide perspectives with tourist interpretations would enrich understanding of how colonial memory circulates in tourism. My disciplinary grounding in Architecture and Urbanism brought sensitivity to the spatial dimensions of heritage but limited engagement with historiographical and literary theories of narrative. These constraints shape both the strengths and the blind spots of this work.

At a theoretical level, the thesis calls for a decolonial rethinking of urban and architectural history. Exploring the implications of modernity/coloniality in architectural historiography could disrupt the canon of European heritage and challenge the epistemic silences that sustain it. For heritage policy, the findings underline the responsibility of cities to confront their colonial legacies not only within museums but also in public spaces. Walking tours, as accessible and performative practices, emerge as critical sites of memory-making: while they currently normalise absence, they also hold potential as tools of intervention, creating affective cracks in dominant narratives that may foster recognition, dialogue, and repair.

The broader implication is that the repression of colonial histories in tourism does not indicate a natural forgetting, but an active production of absence. Absence is curated through institutions, economies, and performances that frame what memories are included in national histories. Listening to these silences reveals the ongoing coloniality of memory.

To decolonise urban narratives means shifting from heritage practices of repression toward re-emergence. It involves making visible the infrastructures of empire inscribed in urban landscapes, amplifying marginalised voices, and fostering alternative narratives that reconnect European cities with their entangled global pasts. This task is not about replacing “self-satisfaction with self-flagellation” (Pakier & Stråth, 2010, p. 2) but about creating space for emancipated subjectivities - European and non-European alike – who are able to recognize their relational position within a pluriversal world.

In this light, the thesis points toward a horizon where the European canon itself can be “othered”, situated within a global network of epistemologies and ontologies that does not reproduce colonial power structures. Politically, such a shift could underpin debates on historical and racial justice, reparations, and migration, addressing centuries of violence that continue to reverberate today. Conceptually, it affirms the decolonial vision of pluriversality: a world where difference is exercised not through domination

but through interculturality, where borders can be blurred, and languages transposed. Cities where urban heritage becomes a site of mutual recognition rather than exclusion.

This research is a small step in that direction. By situating walking tours within the politics of memory, it has shown how everyday practices of storytelling both sustain and could potentially disrupt coloniality. The challenge ahead is to reimagine these practices so that European cities confront not only their architectural heritage but also their epistemic debts to histories of exploitation and resistance. Only then can we begin to walk toward a more just, transmodern future.

“For all the lost names,

and the forgotten bodies;

to mourn them and bury them

to wash them and dress them;

to sing and cry for them,

to give them a name.

To produce memory

and to piece together this fragmented history.

(…)

And what if the ghosts of the past

are spirits that are doomed

to wander because

their stories did not have a dignifying burial?

Retelling history

anew and properly

is a necessary ceremony,

a political act,

otherwise history becomes haunted.

It repeats itself.

It returns intrusively,

as fragmented knowledge,

interrupting and assaulting

our present lives”.

(Kilomba, 2019)

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ANNEXES

1. Table for analysis – Copenhagen Tours
2. Table for analysis – Madrid Tours
3. Semi-structured interview questions

COPENHAGEN TOUR 1 - ANALYSIS TABLE

STOP	TEMPORALITY MARKS	CHARACTERS	THEMES	TONES
1 RADHAUSPLADSEN	1728 1795 1600s 1700s 2024	Residents of Copenhagen (implicit)	City Hall Great Fires of Copenhagen [their influence on urban layout] History of the city reconstruction	Humorous Descriptive Anedoctal (arrival in Denmark) Celebratory (Copenhagen's adaptability)
2 SLUTTERIGADE + NYTORV	12th century 1300s Pre-1400s Post-1795 Present	Jacob Christian Jacobsen The Danes Prisoners/public	Evolution of the City Halls Public executions and gallows Medieval city infrastructure and life Carlsberg and beer culture Little Mermaid	Descriptive Critical (old public punishment) Humorous Detached (distancing from the violence) Evasive (abrupt changes)
3 KOMPANIESTRADE 23	Post-1975 Present	Local designers The Danes	Survival of historic buildings Construction laws post-fire Local shopping and food culture Danish culinary recommendations	Descriptive Ironic (commercialization of public space) Playful (shopping) Detached (current economic functions)
4 MAGSTRAEDE 3	1600s Post 1795 Present	Past residents Tourists Friends of the guide	Origins of the street Fire-related buildings Surviving architecture and photography	Nostalgic (oldest city's street)
5 NYBROGADE	12th century Present	Bishop Absalon Danish Royal Family Frederik X Queen Consort Mary Tour guide	Origin of Copenhagen Absalon's role in the early urbanisation Castle Island and palace construction Palaces of Copenhagen Tourist transport options	Descriptive Advertising Anedoctal (Absalon's building) Reverential (Rosenborg)
6 CHRISTIANSBORG PALACE	1700s 1794 1813 1928	Bishop Absalon Danish Royal Family Kings Christian and Frederik Father-in-law of Europe	Royal stables Previous versions of the palace Fire safety and architectural survival Cultural attractions	Proud Descriptive Ironic (building surviving the fires) Ironic (only achievement of the king) Advertising (recommendations)
7 GARDEN OF THE ROYAL LIBRARY	WWII 2000s Present	Jewish Community Architect of the Museum The guide (personal story) Guide's friend The Danes	Jewish rescue operations Architectural features Memory cultures (Berlin vs. CPH) Hygge Happiness and welfare in Denmark	Admiring (architecture in museums) Personal (sharing experiences) Humorous Critical (welfare and happiness)
8 HØJBRO PLADS	1100s 1400s 1700s Present	Bishop Absalon King Valdemar I Pirates and merchants	Copenhagen's geographic and trading advantages Origins of the name 'Copenhagen' Absalon's role in the early urbanisation Second Great Fire Cultural features	Descriptive Activating (imagine 1700s)
9 NIKOLAJ KUNSTHAL	Post-fire Present	Carlsberg family Single Danes Babies and parents	Transformation of the church Carlsberg Foundation and heritage Cinnamon traditions Cultural customs Parenting practices (babies outside)	Descriptive Humorous (cultural customs and practices) Personal (sharing experiences) Ironic
10 MAGASIN DU NORD	1650 Post-2000s Present	Christian V Guide's colleague Visitors of Copenhagen	Christian V's urban planning French influences in Denmark Architectural inspirations Nyhavn and the harbor aesthetics	Descriptive Humorous Activating Ironic (architectural mimicry)
11 NYHAVN	1650 1950s 1800s	Sailors and prostitutes Frederik IX Royal Family	Transformation of Nyhavn Cultural and food traditions Historical boats Tatoo Ole and King Frederik IX	Descriptive Humorous (hot dogs, royal tattoos) Romanticised (sailor culture) Celebratory (oldest tattoo shop)

	Present			Anedoctal (Frederik IX tattoos)
12 SANKT ANNAE PLADS	1750s January 2024 Present	Frederik V Margrethe II Frederix X Danish citizens	Development of Frederikstad Architectural features Amalienborg as secondary residence Royal abdication + public reaction	Descriptive Nostalgic (Margrethe's abdication) Personal (sharing experiences) Celebratory (Frederik X)
13 AMALIENBORG	2000s Present Future	Frederik X Qeen Mary Nikolaos of Greece Margrethe II Australian tourists Maersk CEO	Function of the villas Ceremonial traditions and royal life Frederik and Mary's romance Scandal and gossip	Romanticised (the Royal romance) + gossip features Humorous Critical (Opera House donation) Tone close to celebrity media

COPENHAGEN TOUR 2 - ANALYSIS TABLE				
STOP	TEMPORALITY MARKS	CHARACTERS	THEMES	TONES
1 HØJBRO PLADS	Kalmar Union Early 1400 1600s Viking age	Margaret I Olaf Christian IV The nobility King Hans Henry VIII of England Christian XI Frederick X Gorm the Old Harald Bluetooth	Danish Monarchy and symbolism National Identity Unification of Sweden Stockholm bloodbath Danish Navy Colonial state of Denmark	Playful Anedoctal Humorous Eliciting Minimizing
2 STORK FOUNTAIN	1600s	Young danes Christian IV	Royal festivities Graduation traditions Popular party for Christian IV's coronation 30 Years War City Markets Shop Royal Copenhagen	Celebratory Humorous Vivid Critical (Shop Royal Copenhagen)
3 HELLINGAANGSKIRKEN	Reformation wars 1500s	Franciscan Monks Christian II Christian III Frederick I Peasants Catholic Church Harald Bluetooth	Reformation Nobility privileges Stockholm bloodbath Christian IV's deposition Lego	Critical Celebratory (Christian II as a progressive king)
4 KRINGLEGANGEN COURTYARD	1600s 1800	Copenhagen Government Residents	Urban infrastructure Public health Great Fires of Copenhagen	Descriptive Anedoctal
5 GRÅBRØDRETORV SQUARE	1600s 1849	Corfitz Ulfeldt Christian IV Frederick III Frederick VII The nobility The Swedes The British	Monasteries Treason Absolutism vs. Constitutional democracy	Dramatic Critical
6 DET LILLE APOTHEK RESTAURANT	1800s	Hans Christian Andersen	Culinary culture Traditions	Nostalgic, humorous
7 FRUE PLADS	1900s 2000s	Inge Lehmann Niels Bohr Einstein Christian IV Frederick X and Queen Mary	Representation of women in public memory science Manhattan Project (World War II) Royal Family Copenhagen University	Reflective Ironic Humorous Celebratory (Bohr's role in saving Jewish people in WWII, the 'relatability' of the Royal Family)
8 FIOLSTRAEDE 18-8	1700s 2000s	Copenhagen Government Danish Police Jewish Community	Urban architecture Fire regulations Great Fires of Copenhagen Security Terrorism	Descriptive Cautious (about the police presence in front of the Synagogue)
9 THE ROUND TOWER	1600s	Christian IV students of Copenhagen University Czar of Russia	Construction of the tower Climbing competitions Christian IV's sins	Playful Rumorous
10 TYCHO BRAHE	1600s 2000s	 Tycho Brahe Kepler Queen Sophie Frederick II Frederick X	Pork indutry Science history Biography Order of the Elephant	Humorous Quirky
11 KULTORVET	2024	Norwegian immigrant Prime Minister of Denmark	Hot dog stands Telephone booths Safety	Casual Anedoctal
12 SANKT GERTRUDES STRÆDE 8	1800s 1900s	Christian VII British Navy French Navy Margarethe II	Napoleonic Wars Battle of Copenhagen inbreeding Swedish independence	Dramatic Nationalistic Humorous (mad King)
13 SØREN KIEKERGAARD'S HOUSE	1800s	Søren Kierkegaard Nietzsche Camus Sartre	Philosophy Existentialism Religion	Philosophical Reverent

14 ROSENBORG PALACE	1600s	Christian IV	Construction of the palace Royal museum	Heroic (Christian IV at war), anecdotal
15 NØRREPORT STATION	1600s	Christian IV Frederick II Finance Minister Maren Spliid	Food hall Witch trials	Dark Critical (Christian IV) Tragic

COPENHAGEN TOUR 3 - ANALYSIS TABLE

STOP	TEMPORALITY MARKS	CHARACTERS	THEMES	TONES
1 RÅDHAUSPLADSEN	WWI 1700 1167	Lord Mayor Bishop Absalon	Town Hall architecture features Medieval town centre Foundation of Copenhagen	Descriptive Critical (architectural descriptions)
2 LURBLAESERNE	1911 1913	JC Jacobsen	The Lur Blowers Lurpak 100th anniversary of Carlsberg Barometer Foutain on the plaza	Celebratory (Carlsberg donations) Rumorous Ironic (tax paying and war expenses)
3 REGNBUEPLADSEN	Couple of years ago Present		The square over the centuries	Descriptive Cautious (food recommendations)
4 SLUTTERIGADE	1800s 1813 Present	Condemned people Hans Christian Andersen	Court of Justice functioning and architecture Centralhørnet Christmas markets Napoleonic Wars	Advertising (bar) Descriptive Celebratory (Court's funcioning) Critical (Christmas markets)
5 COPENHAGEN DOMHUS	1807 1813 Present (EU)	Christian Frederick Hansen British Navy Denmark Britain	Building's architectural features Bombardment of Copenhagen European Union New Square	Reverential (UK-Denmark relations) Critical (british supporters of Empire; Christmas Markets)
6 VANDKUNSTEN SPRINGVAND	Middle Ages		Pedestrian streets in Copenhagen	Advertising (restaurants)
7 MAGSTRAEDE	Present Medieval times	Past residents	Food recommendations History of the street	Descriptive Advertising (restaurants)
8 NYBROGADE	1884 WWI 1924 1795 1800s	Frederick X Margrethe II Christian Frederick Hansen	Royal succession Christiansborg's architecture and uses over the time	Rumorous (abdication) Descriptive Anedoctal (Castle's reconstruction)
9 FREDERIKSHOLMS KANAL	1800s 1960s-70s-80s	The Muslims The Christians	The National Museum collection	Advertising (museum) Silent (colonial collection)
10 CHRISTIANSBORG PALACE	Post - WWI 1795 1953	Royal Family Christian IX Queen Alexandra English and Greek Royalty Queen Victoria of England	Palace's architecture and uses Grandfater of Europe Danish politics (Constitution)	Reverential (royalty) Celebratory (allowing women to be Queens) Descriptive + Evasive (on the positions of the Colonies post 53)
11 FOLKETINGET	Present	Prime Minister Danish Elected Politicians	Election results	Descriptive
12 ROYAL LIBRARY GARDENS	1600s 1880s 1588-1648 (C4's reign) 1815-1905 (N-S-union)	Christian IV Christian X Queen Victoria of England Bishop of Bergen	Denmark-Norway's naval power Naval harbour Colonial relations with Greenland	Critical (the King's reign) Nostalgic (Norway-Denmark's possessions)
13 CHRISTIANSBORG SLOTSPLADS	1640s 1967 1820s-1880s	Christian IV Frederick VII Arne Jacobsen Normans	Copenhagen's stock exchange Equestrian statue of Frederick VII Church of Holmens National Bank of Denmark Danish economy	Sad (about the fire) Reverential (king who gave us democracy) Descriptive
14 NIKOLAJ KUNSTHAL	1801-1807	The English	Restaurants in the church Bombardment of Copenhagen	Descriptive
15 KONGENS NYTORV	1874 Present	Frederick V Hans Christian Andersen Queen Margarethe Foreign presidents	Development of the square Danish Bank Royal theatre Hotel D'Inglaterre	Descriptive Anedoctal (royal roles)
16 ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS	Present	Royal Princess	Description of the building	Descriptive
17 NYHAVN	1660s 1658	Swedish prisoners of war Sailors Prostitutes	Denmark-Sweden war Redevelopment of the canal	Critical (touristification) Rumorous (different house colors)

18 SANKT ANNAE PLADS	1880s 1912–1947 1864 1920s 1940–1945	C.F. Tietgen President Wilson Christian X Princess Alexandra Karen Blixen Ernest Hemingway	Statues contextualization Controversial figure of C X Nazi occupation	Reverential (Tietgen; Karen Blixen) Descriptive
19 AMALIENGADE	Present	Maersk family	Holding of the company	Descriptive
20 AMALIENBORG	1740s 1795 1770s 1890s	Maersk Russia, China, President Trump Aristocratic families Frederick X Frederick V Christian VII Tietgen	Royal Opera House (donation) Danish Navy Disputes over Greenland Palace's architecture and uses Equestrian statue of F V Frederick's church	Descriptive Evasive (colonial relations to Greenland) Anedoctal (Palace's buying) Critical (king's role) Reverential (Tietgen)

MAD TOUR 3 - ANALYSIS TABLE				
LOCATION	**TEMPORALITY MARKS**	**CHARACTERS**	**THEMES**	**TONES**
1 PLAZA DE ORIENTE	9th century 11th century 1734 18th century	King and Queen (current) the Moors Berbers and Arab elite the Christians Kings and Queens of Spain	The location where Madrid was founded The amount of rooms in the palace The previous Alcázar (fortress) Spanish Reconquista The fire at the Alcázar Prado's collection (remnants from the fire)	Descriptive Humorous Activating (questions) Reverential (saving of artworks)
2 FELIPE IV EQUESTRIAN STATUE	17th century	Felipe IV Tacca Galileo Galilei	Construction of his statue; its artistic challenges; the meanings related to the horse legs' position;	Activating Reverential (statue's history)
3 PLAZA RAMALES	1810 1660 1999	Diego Velázquez	The outline of the church Prado Museum Search for Velázquez' body	Mysterious Activating Humorous
4 CALLE DEL FACTOR	16th century 1993		Views of the Royal Palace Casa de Campo La Almudena Cathedral (architectural styles; time of construction)	Descriptive
5 EL VECINO CURIOSO		The Moors	Remains of an old church and mosque Good luck rumour	Descriptive
6 SAN NICOLÁS CHURCH	1700 12th century	Felipe IV Habsburg dynasty; Carlos II Joanna "the Insane" The Moors The Christians	Barrio de los Austrias Inbreeding (and its alleged genetic dysfunctions) The oldest church in Madrid Moorish architecture (*mudejar*) Mixing in the Royal Family (Bourbon–Habsburg) Alcázar (fire, reconstruction)	Humorous (inbreeding features) Activating
7 PLAZA DE LA VILLA	500 years ago 1693 17th century 16th century 15th century	Álvaro de Vasán The King Descendants from England	Madrid, the capital of a global Empire Habsburg architecture *Mudéjar* architecture The narrowest street in Madrid Spanish Armada's invasion of England	Descriptive Humorous (ironic) Activating
8 CALLE DEL CODO	—		Extremely narrow street	Admiring
9 CRUZ DE PUERTA CERRADA	going back centuries	Founders of Madrid	Motto and meaning of 'Madrid' Botín; the oldest-running restaurant in the world	Anedoctal Descrpitive
10 PLAZA MAYOR	11th century 1561 17th century	Felipe II Madrileños	Madrid becoming capital of the Empire Bull fights Fires Inquisition Only building remaining from the 17th century	Evasive (Spanish Empire) Activating Softening Admiring
11 PUERTA DEL SOL	19th century 2011 18th century	French troops Madrileños Goya Bourbons Landlords	Square of the people (protests and war resistance) La Mallorquina Kilometre 0 plaque New Year's Eve Carlos III's Urban reforms	Rumorous Celebratory (square of the people) Anedoctal Humorous (madrileños)
12 CASA DEL ABUELO	20s and 30s	The owner	Gambas al ajillo (related to the Civil War)	Advertising
13 PLAZA SANTA ANA	1936 1931–1936 1936–1939	Federico García Lorca Francisco Franco Velázquez Bull fighters Manolete	Spanish Civil War Spanish Republic Lorca's missing body Grand Hotel Bull fights	Admiration (statue and García Lorca) Critical (Republic vs. Dictatorship)
14 CALLE LOPE DE VEJA	16th century 17th century	Miguel de Cervantes	Don Quijote	Descriptive Humorous (losing of bodies)
15 CONVENTO DE LAS TRINITARIAS	1616 2015	Cervantes Shakesperare	Trinitarian convent Search for Cervantes' body	Mysterious Humorous
16 PASEO DEL PRADO	1820s 19th century	Goya	Goya's work in the Prado Food recommendations	Advertising

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

University of Copenhagen – Department of Arts and Cultural Studies

1. BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

- Can you tell me about your background and how you became a tour guide in Copenhagen?
- How long have you been conducting historical walking tours in the city?
- What motivated you to become a guide for these tours?

2. TOUR PREPARATION AND DESIGN

- How do you prepare for your tours? Do you agree that it is somehow a performative activity?
- Can you describe the process of conceptualizing and designing a walking tour?
- Who decides on the paths and monuments included in the tour?
- How do you select the stories and historical events to highlight during the tour?

3. NARRATIVE AND STORYTELLING

- How do you approach the storytelling aspect of the tour? What are your priorities? How do you want to tell that story (gestures, feelings etc.?)
- What sources do you rely on to construct the narratives you share with the participants?
- How do you ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the historical information you present?

4. COLONIAL HISTORY AND ITS REPRESENTATION

- What are your personal perceptions of Copenhagen's colonial history?
- How do you incorporate the colonial history of Copenhagen into your tours?
- How do you address the complexities and sensitivities of colonial history in your storytelling?

5. PERSONAL AGENCY AND INFLUENCE

- To what extent do you feel you have personal agency in shaping the content and delivery of the tour?
- Have you ever faced challenges or resistance when including certain historical narratives in your tours?
- How do you balance your own perspectives with the expectations of the tour participants and the tour company?

6. IMPACT AND RECEPTION

- How do participants generally react to the inclusion of colonial history in the tours?
- Have you noticed any changes in participants' perceptions or attitudes after the tour?
- What feedback have you received from participants regarding the colonial history content?

7. REFLECTION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- In your opinion, what is the significance of addressing colonial history in walking tours?
- How do you think walking tours can contribute to the broader conversation about coloniality and its legacy?
- What changes or improvements would you like to see in the way colonial history is presented in urban heritage tours?