

COLONIAL AMBIVALENCE IN CONTEMPORARY MOVING IMAGES: THE PORTUGUESE CASE

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ABSTRACT

This article is an exploratory attempt to address the colonial ambivalence implicit in contemporary moving images in the Portuguese context. The postcolonial turn that emerged in the last decades in Portugal attests to an earnest attempt to problematise the nation's postcolonial condition, which in turn derives from a long-overdue admission that our contemporary societies were built from colonial plunder. Drawing heavily on the critique of Lusophony, I argue that this postcolonial turn is also a consequence of the need to inscribe the Portuguese national narrative within an increasingly global world arising from the subordination of culture to the “laws of the market”. In addition, I argue that this post-colonial approach found in Portuguese contemporary visual culture is ambivalent since it tends to ignore the problem of the legitimacy and the speaking position of the artist and/or intellectual. The legitimacy problem — of who speaks of and about others — is often paradoxically disregarded in contemporary audiovisual productions that address the Portuguese colonial past and its postcolonial condition. In the same way, the intrinsic relationship between visual production and knowledge is ignored, and consequently, between visual production and power. In this way, I argue that colonial ambivalence continues to pervade cultural discourses and contemporary artistic practices today, even when such practices and discourses appear to articulate a postcolonial critique.

KEYWORDS

ambivalence, colonialism, post-colonialism, cinema, Portugal

A AMBIVALÊNCIA COLONIAL NAS IMAGENS EM MOVIMENTO CONTEMPORÂNEAS: O CASO PORTUGUÊS

RESUMO

Este artigo é uma tentativa exploratória de abordar a ambivalência colonial implícita nas imagens em movimento contemporâneas no contexto português. O giro pós-colonial que emergiu nas últimas décadas em Portugal corrobora uma tentativa de problematizar a condição pós-colonial portuguesa, que deriva de uma admissão tardia de que a nossa sociedade contemporânea foi construída a partir da pilhagem colonial. Baseando-me na crítica à lusofonia, defendo que este giro pós-colonial é também uma consequência da necessidade de inscrever a narrativa nacional portuguesa num mundo cada vez mais global, necessidade essa que resulta da subordinação da cultura às “leis do mercado”. Além disso, essa abordagem pós-colonial presente na cultura visual contemporânea portuguesa é ambivalente, pois tende a ignorar o problema da legitimidade e da posição de fala do artista e/ou intelectual. O problema da legitimidade — de quem fala de e sobre os outros — é muitas vezes, paradoxalmente, ignorado na produção audiovisual contemporânea

que aborda o passado colonial português e a sua condição pós-colonial. Da mesma maneira que a relação intrínseca entre produção visual e conhecimento e, conseqüentemente, entre produção visual e poder é também ignorada. Dessa forma, defendo que a ambivalência colonial continua a permear os discursos culturais e as práticas artísticas contemporâneas, mesmo quando tais práticas e discursos parecem produzir uma crítica pós-colonial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

ambivalência, colonialismo, pós-colonialismo, cinema, Portugal

1. COLONIAL AMBIVALENCE IN CONTEMPORARY MOVING IMAGES: THE PORTUGUESE CASE

In recent years, the combination of anti-racist grassroots movements, public policies (despite timid) and a series of events that captured the general public attention have elicited a growing debate regarding the legacy of Portugal's colonial past within contemporary society. Among these events, I would highlight the election, for the first time, of three Black female members of parliament — Joacine Katar Moreira (Livre; a young Europeanist social democratic party), Beatriz Gomes Dias (Bloco de Esquerda; a left wing party) and Romualda Fernandes (Partido Socialista; a centre-left party similar for instance to the New Labour Party in Britain) in the 2019 general elections. It was a remarkable historical moment for Portuguese representative democracy, but it exposed the underrepresentation of minority groups in the parliament. Also, earlier that same year, there was a prescient parliamentary discussion regarding the use of racial and ethnic categories in the then-forthcoming national survey. The verdict of the committee, formed by stakeholders and representatives of racial and ethnic minorities (including Romani and African Portuguese communities), was not unanimous; therefore, these categories remain excluded from the national survey. This disheartening result complements the paradoxical social and political insistence on colour-blindness that postpones any attempts to redress structural racism in Portugal.

No less important were the recent anti-racist demonstrations in 2020, following the killing of George Floyd, triggering proxy protests in Portugal and worldwide. The number of young Afro-Portuguese from the urban peripheries that participated in these demonstrations was unprecedented, thus revealing the urgency of correcting racial violence¹ and redressing the unequal representation in the public arena. Whereas these events were greatly celebrated, a heated public debate was also instigated by less positive events such as the election of the first extreme-right representative in 2019. In response to the proxy anti-racist demonstration, he organised a counter-demonstration absurdly called “Portugal não é um país racista” (Portugal is not a racist country). His bigoted comments and lies have been not only disseminated profusely by mainstream media

¹ Two mediated cases evidence the existing racial violence in Portuguese society: in 2015, a group of young Afro-Portuguese living in Cova da Moura in the periphery of Lisbon were subjected to violent aggressions and racial slurs by the police; and in 2020, the killer of actor Bruno Candé also voiced racial insults before shooting him.

but also are often uncontested. That has certainly contributed to the election of 12 of the same party representatives in the early legislative elections of 2022².

In the last 2 decades, we have witnessed the emergence of a postcolonial turn within Portuguese academic and cultural institutions. The exhibitions curated by António Pinto Ribeiro in Culturgest, *Uma Casa no Mundo (A Home in the World)* from 1995 to 2004, and the discursive events organised by Liliana Coutinho at Teatro Maria Matos from 2015 to 2017 are two examples of the cultural programs that, to some extent, have contributed to the correction of the official colonial narrative and the development of a critique of the myth of Lusotropicalism. Conversely, postcolonial studies are “a well-established field in Portuguese universities, with a growing number of scholars adopting a postcolonial prism” (Vieira 2015, p. 275). Despite that, the idea that Portuguese colonialism was exceptionally benevolent still prevails in our contemporary imaginary (Almeida, 2004; Santos, 2002); and some scholars continue to reproduce Lusotropicalist fantasies by persisting misusing the word “discovery” vis-à-vis the history of Portuguese colonial enterprise (Saraiva, 2018).

In his scholarly attempt to uncover the roots and ramifications of the Lusotropicalist discourse, Miguel Vale de Almeida (2004) recognises that the “imperial and expansionist rhetoric” (p. 45) has been continuously employed to reconfigure Portugal’s postcolonial identity. The author argues that this rhetoric can be found in the concept of Lusophony, which has gained currency in cultural products and institutionally as a means not only to regain what was lost politically and economically after the independence of the former colonies but also to redefine Portuguese national identity. Although Vale de Almeida (2004) is referring to the 500 years of the “discoveries” commemorated in the World Fair Expo ’98 under the theme of “The Oceans, a Heritage for the Future” and to the subsequent celebrations of the “discovery” of Brazil in 2000, his argument can be easily transposed vis-à-vis the controversy about former mayor Fernando Medina’s proposal to build a museum of “discoveries” in Lisbon in 2018. Besides Vale de Almeida, others have also amply criticised the concept of Lusophony, such as António Pinto Ribeiro (2018), who has claimed that it “is the last mark of an empire that no longer exists” as well as “the last impediment for a mature effort concerning the multiple identities in Portuguese Speaking countries” (p. 224). On the other hand, Paulo de Medeiros (2018) also stressed that “Lusophony is a neo-colonial concept that only emerges once the Empire is irrevocably dissolved” (p. 227). Despite this long-standing critique, Lusophone studies is a profusely disseminated term within the context of the Anglo-Saxon/British academy. As far as I understand it, this is the outcome of a necessity to recruit students within language departments and respond to the call to decolonise the curriculum. The dissemination of such term accompanies the postcolonial turn experienced within cultural and academic Portuguese institutions and the deployment of a postcolonial critical theory within the visual arts; for that reason, I would argue that this postcolonial turn responds to the need to inscribe the Portuguese national narrative within an increasingly global world resulting from the subordination of culture to the “laws of the market” as much as the marketisation of education.

² The author chooses deliberately not to mention the party’s name and its representatives.

2. A POSSIBLE ANTHOLOGY

The emergence of this postcolonial turn within Portuguese academic and cultural institutions is accompanied by a growing engagement with postcolonial critical theory within the visual arts, in general, but, in particular, within the production of moving images, which is at the heart of my argument in this article. Filipa César is among the artists who have used colonial and anti-/postcolonial visual archives to address Portugal's colonial past. Accordingly, César uses not only photographic albums of the colonial period (e.g., *A Embaixada* [*The Embassy*]; César, 2011) but also anti-colonial Guinean archival films (e.g., *Conakry*, 2013; and *Spell Reel*, 2017, among others). In *A Embaixada* (César, 2011), for example, Guinean archivist Armando Lona flicks through the pages of a photographic album that compiles colonial imagery of natural landscapes, buildings and infrastructures, and locals from different ethnic communities as well as “assimilated”, at times, together with colonisers, as if attempting to validate the so-called multicultural and multiracial nature of Portuguese colonialism, upheld by the myth of Lusotropicalism. In this way, the film seems to reproduce the colonially fabricated taxonomy implicit in these images. By distancing the viewer from what is seen, the image's double framing enhances rather than effaces the perspective of colonial power. The voice-over describes some of these photographs but appears incapable of reading them “against the grain”, or rather, against the purpose for which they were produced.

Other artists have deployed instead photographic family albums and home movies produced in a colonial setting. That is the case of Andreia Sobreira in her piece *1971–1974 (Estou em Moçambique)* (*1971–1974 [I am in Mozambique]*; 2011), but also Manuel Santos Maia in *Allheava-filme* (2006–2007), Raquel Schefer in *Avó (Muidumbe)* (*Grandmother [Muidumbe]*; 2009) and *Nshajo (O Jogo)* (*The Game*; 2011), and Daniel Barroca in *Soldier Playing With Dead Lizard* (2008). In *Avó (Muidumbe)*, Schefer repeats her grandmother's gestures, recorded in family films when her grandfather was positioned in a colonial administrative post to serve the Portuguese regime. Her films have been described as “decolonising the present” through critically examining her family's film archive (Oliveira, 2017, p. 21). However, the implication of public and private archives in the looting and expropriation of people from their culture goes often unquestioned in artworks and their critical reading.

The ways in which the production of images was part and parcel of the fabrication and dissemination of the Portuguese colonial imaginary have already been amply discussed in *Azuis Ultramarinos. Propaganda Colonial e Censura no Cinema do Estado Novo* (*Ultramarine Blues. Colonial Propaganda and Censorship in Estado Novo Cinema*; Piçarra, 2015), *Salazar Vai ao Cinema I and II* (*Salazar Goes to the Movies*; Piçarra, 2006, 2011), and in *(Re)Imagining African Independence: Film, Visual Arts and the Fall of the Portuguese Empire* (Piçarra & Castro, 2017). Despite the copious scholarly literature on the ways colonial imagery was instrumentalised to validate the colonial occupation during the *Estado Novo* (New State) regime, the purposing and utility of reproducing colonial imagery within contemporary cinema and the visual arts requires an earnest debate that cannot be dismissed with the need to show what Portuguese colonialism *really was*. Artists and filmmakers often neglect how the archive is not dissociated from the imperial project

itself, and as such, the endless reproduction of these images may instead reproduce colonial regimes of representation rather than offer an outwardly counter-discourse.

In the introduction of *O Império da Visão (The Empire of Sight)*, Filipa Lowndes Vicente (2014) deliberates on the inherent ethical problems when reproducing images depicting colonial violence. She concludes that scholars *have the right* to show images that are not meant to be seen, as long as these are contextualised within a critical and analytical framework exposing their inherent political and ethical problems. This argument stems from her musings on a circumstantial episode that she witnessed whilst attending a guided visit to Vasco Araújo's exhibition *Botânica* (Botany, 2014) in Chiado Museum and wherein fellow visitors made misogynistic and racist comments vis-à-vis the “'sculptured objects' that deliberate on the 'exotic' representation of colonial culture” (Vicente, 2014, p. 23). Despite using photography and installation as an artistic medium, Araújo's work is an interesting case study for my general argument regarding how colonial ambivalence pervades contemporary moving images. The artist was once celebrated for his use of postcolonial critical theory. Until his exhibition *Decolonial Desire* at the Autograph ABP in London in 2016, when artist and curator Eflua Bea (2016) wrote an expository piece published in *Media Diversified*, questioning the artist's “right to perform the raced and gendered cultural body” (para. 9). She also questioned his legitimacy to perform an “'historical re-enactment' when that same history belongs to the oppressed peoples that his country has humiliated and enslaved” (para. 9). Bea's argument lies in the following question: in what capacity can a White artist deploy colonial imagery to “speak” for subaltern positions?

Despite the consensual critical perception today regarding Araújo's work, the subject/speaking position of the intellectual and/or artist and their legitimacy for using and reproducing colonial imagery is still overlooked within Portuguese postcolonial scholarly literature. As evidenced in Vicente's (2014) account, her uneasiness is triggered by the way Araújo's photographs were uncritically perceived by “60-year-olds with the 'preppy outlook' of people that usually attend museum guided tours in the afternoon” (p. 23); instead of the inherently unethical rationale behind the artist's reproduction and the museum's exhibition of violent colonial imagery, in the first place. Initially, Vicente (2014) probes if one has the right to reproduce images of people without their consent, swiftly brushing off the question to argue that because they were reproduced *ad infinitum*, such images already convey a variety of mediation layers. Her argument becomes even more indefensible when affirming that in the case of medical photography, these images were only available to the medical community, which, accordingly, are the photographs' legitimate consumers. However, the medical community was not only crucial in the production of the “scientific knowledge” necessary to the validation of western racist assumptions but also has grotesquely scrutinised and objectified, when not brutalised, the racialised body in the name of science. What transpires from Vicente's assertion is the assumption of intellectual transparency that chooses to ignore how academic disciplines have been instrumental and constitutive of colonial power itself.

In her essay “Toward the Abolition of Photography's Imperial Rights”, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (2021) argues, for instance, that “photography was conceptually built from

imperial looting” (p. 78), thus suggesting that the advent of photography is intertwined with the history of colonialism. Accordingly, photography was instrumental in collecting, archiving and preserving colonial pillage. Thus photography not only registered but also replicated the extraction of natural resources and human capital from the colonised territories. Photography emerged from the colonial necessity to document, record and classify what was already there “for imperial eyes” (Azoulay, 2021, p. 78). Photography is then a technology not only inherently imperialistic but one that cannot be decolonised without first abolishing the imperialistic practices that permeate our contemporary societies and culture. Cinema is no different, for from its inception, the moving image has been an instrument of power (Stam, 2000), and the early stages of cinema have coincided with the pinnacle of imperialism (Shohat, 1991).

Because of this, I would like to draft an initial anthology comprised of audiovisual artists and filmmakers that have addressed the Portuguese colonial past and its legacies as the artists mentioned above. In this anthology, I would include Pedro Neves Marques, whose films *Where to Seat at the Dinner Table?* (2012-2013), *Semente Exterminadora* (*Exterminator Seed*; 2017) and *A Mordida* (*The Bite*; 2019) intertwine Amerindian cosmologies with technology and colonialism, and Gabriel Abrantes, in a similar vein, correlates technology and colonialism in his work. This correlation is often laced with irony, such as in *Humores Artificiais* (*Artificial Moods*; 2016) and again in *A History of Mutual Respect* (2010), where Abrantes and Co-Director Daniel Schmidt seem to comment on the intersection between neo-colonialism and colourism. In my view, however, Abrantes’s use of irony is a deceptive mannerism that results in the disavowal of a possible critical stance regarding Portugal’s colonial past. I would argue, following Fredric Jameson (1998), that in the case of Abrantes, closer to pastiche than to parody, irony is a symptomatic feature of postmodern art in late capitalism that by replicating “the logic of consumer capitalism” (p. 20) becomes vacant of critical value.

Other filmmakers also address Portuguese colonialism in their work. It is the case of Margarida Cardoso, who, in her documentaries, *Natal 71* (*Christmas 71*; 1999) and *Kuxa Kanema* (2003), deploys family memories and photographic archives, in the case of the former, and film archives from Mozambique’s decolonisation period, in the case of the latter. Cardoso has also dealt with the same topic in her fictional films, as evidenced by *A Costa dos Murmúrios* (*The Murmuring Coast*; 2004) and *Ivone Kane* (2014). In this regard, Ana Pereira (2021) identifies a political whiteness at the core of Margarida Cardoso’s films insofar as the director seems to invert “the terms of reality showing female colonisers more confined than female colonised” (p. 45).

On the other hand, since shooting *Casa de Lava* (*Down to Earth*; 1994) in Cape Verde, Pedro Costa has turned the camera to the slums of Fontainhas; as such, Portugal’s colonial legacy comes into view in most of his films. This is the case of *No Quarto de Vanda* (*In Vanda’s Room*; 2000), *Juventude em Marcha* (*Colossal Youth*; 2006), *Tarrafal* (2007), *A Caça ao Coelho* (*The Rabbit Hunt*; 2007) and *O Nosso Homem* (*Our Man*; 2010), *Cavalo Dinheiro* (*Horse Money*; 2014), and *Vitalina Varela* (2019). Following Costa, the depiction of the urban periphery as a colonial remainder and reminder due to its demographic

composition is also found in the films *O Fim do Mundo* (*The End of the World*; Pedro Pinho, 2013), *Altas Cidades de Ossadas* (*High Cities of Bone*; Renée Nader Messor and João Salaviza, 2017) and Basil da Cunha's *Até Ver a Luz* (*After the Night*; 2013) and *O Fim do Mundo* (*The End of the World*; 2019), all from a younger generation of directors. Recent depictions of an earlier colonial period are found in the examples of *Mosquito* (João Nuno Pinto, 2020) and *Posto Avançado do Progresso* (*An Outpost of Progress*; Hugo Vieira da Silva, 2016); whereas, João Salaviza's *Chuva É Cantoria na Aldeia dos Mortos* (*The Dead and the Others*; 2018) and the documentary series *No Trilho dos Naturalistas* (*On the Naturalists' Trail*; 2016) produced for the Portuguese public media service, Rádio e Televisão de Portugal, by film cooperative Terratrema are some of the examples closer to ethnographic cinema. *No Trilho dos Naturalistas* retraces the scientific explorations carried out in Africa by scholars from University of Coimbra during the first Portuguese republic and the *Estado Novo* regime.

In addition, one of the most internationally successful and discussed films that recollect the Portuguese colonial imaginary is *Tabu* (Miguel Gomes, 2012). Carolina Overhoff Ferreira (2014) argues that the film recomposes “the landscape of the visible” by using a multiplicity of references to challenge the “disciplinary thinking put forward in social and human sciences such as luso-tropicalism and lusophony in post-coloniality” (p. 44). Other scholars have argued instead that *Tabu* appears to reinforce stereotypical depictions of the colonised other (Pereira, 2016) as well as claimed that despite disengaging “with traditional views of Portugal’s civilisational role”, Gomes’s film leaves “the past empty except as a playground for nostalgic idealisations of youth and exoticism” (Medeiros, 2016, p. 209).

The upsurge of postcolonial scholarly literature and the growing number of visual and discursive cultural artefacts that address Portuguese colonialism attests to an earnest attempt to problematise and redefine the nation’s postcolonial condition. That derives from a long-overdue admission that our postcolonial societies were built from colonial plunder. But, does the proliferation of images provide a more equitable regime of representation and knowledge production vis-à-vis the Portuguese colonial past and its legacies? Rather than reaching an all-encompassing conclusion, I would rather attempt to formulate this exploratory question. As I understand it, the productions of moving images that either revisit or problematise Portugal’s colonial past to address our contemporary society’s racial and social inequalities also seem to stem from an effort to gain cultural currency. I argue then that even if unwittingly, these artistic practices contribute to the redefinition of the nation’s postcolonial peripheral position in an attempt to gain cultural relevance within an increasingly global academic and art market. In this way, this postcolonial turn within Portuguese cultural and academic institutions and the deployment of postcolonial critical theory within the visual arts is, following Vale de Almeida (2004), Medeiros (2016) and others, akin to the concept of Lusophony itself. Despite the need for a closer and individual analysis of each audiovisual object, not permitted due to the length of this article, I would argue that viewed as a group, these moving images appear to disclose a broader tendency within contemporary cinema and the visual arts.

This tendency indicates the need to reflect upon Portuguese colonialism and Portugal's postcolonial condition and how colonial ambivalence pervades our cultural discourses and artistic practices when not asserting the so-called benevolent exceptionality of Portuguese colonialism.

3. VISUALITY AND COLONIAL POWER

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (2008) describes his experience of being subjected to the gaze and scrutiny of a White child to explain how colonial subjects are dispossessed of authority over their own image and identity. According to Stuart Hall (2003), this is why power should be understood “not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way” (p. 259). That means that regimes of representation reinforce power structures. Assuming that all representation is inherently ambivalent since meaning is never fixed, can we read this growing proliferation of moving images within the Portuguese context against the grain? As I understand it, this proliferation of audiovisual objects tends to reproduce a colonial regime of representation rather than a more equitable regime and knowledge production vis-à-vis the Portuguese colonial past and its legacies. Often disregarded in these artistic practices is not only the problem of legitimacy — of who speaks of and about others — but also the intrinsic relationship between visual production and knowledge, and consequently, between visual production and power.

Hall (2003) stresses this relationship when arguing, for example, that the “circularity of power is especially important in the context of representation” insofar as everyone “is caught up, though not on equal terms, in power's circulation” (p. 261). In a similar vein, Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) also argues that “the authority of coloniality has consistently required visibility to supplement its deployment of force” because visibility “sutures authority to power” (p. 6). As a result, to claim the right to look presupposes *autonomy* vis-à-vis that authority, which the artist and/or the intellectual can hardly claim. Within the variety of moving images addressing Portugal's colonial past, the subject/speaking position remains as a blind spot, thus suggesting ambivalence. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha (1994) argued that the colonial discourse already contains the seed of its own demise insofar as it “speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false” (p. 85) when exposing its own contradiction by classifying the colonised as the same but not quite. As such, ambivalence is at the heart of the colonial discourse. In this article, I argue instead that colonial ambivalence continues to pervade cultural discourses and contemporary artistic practices today, even when such practices and discourses appear to articulate a postcolonial critique.

Some scholars have already identified a melancholic attachment to the nation's colonial history even when attempting to redress such a past (Vieira, 2015). Accordingly, melancholia corresponds to the incapacity to mourn the loss of the object of our affection, thus leaving the ego to turn narcissistically to him/herself. In discussing the *Transmission From the Liberated Zone* (Filipa César, 2015) and *The Current Situation* (Pedro

Barateiro, 2015), shown in the 20th edition of Videobrasil in 2017, Patrícia Mourão (2018) also identifies a melancholic attachment in these two pieces. Insofar as both artists appear to “share the same feeling of nostalgia vis-à-vis the European ‘current situation’ and its past”, positioning themselves “as agents of a narrative, archivists and researchers” (Mourão, 2018, p. 209). While César uses, akin to most of her artwork, Guinean postcolonial film archives, Barateiro interlaces two different events. He uses the anti-austerity demonstrations outside the São Bento parliament in Lisbon and the cutting of the last palm tree plagued by the red palm weevil (beetle) brought to Portugal with a cluster of “palm trees from the former colonies” (Mourão, 2018, p. 208). The natural plague of beetles that were devastating palm trees in Lisbon is here used as a metaphor for the austerity “plague” as the outcome of the global economic crisis, and whose effects were particularly felt in Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain³. Interestingly, in the first film, *O Inquieto* (Volume I; *The Restless One*) of *Mil e Uma Noites* (Arabian Nights) trilogy (2015), Miguel Gomes opens with a segment that conflates the layoffs at the shipyards of Viana do Castelo with the unusual story of a man who ingeniously invented a way to exterminate the Asian wasps’ nests that were plaguing the bee farming in the region. The Portuguese textile industry was severely affected when the textile production was re-allocated to the more competitive South-East Asian market. As I argued elsewhere (Sequeira Brás, 2017, 2020), Gomes alludes to the capital’s fluidity and overarching capacity yet offers a superficial critique laden with a nostalgic veneer that fails to recognise that capital extrapolates its own cyclical crises by moving to cheaper labour markets.

A growing number of African-Portuguese artists (e.g., Kiluanji Kia Henda, Grada Kilomba, Mónica de Miranda, Jaime Lauriano, among others), as well as filmmakers (e.g., Welket Bungué, Silas Tiny, and Vanessa Fernandes), have also engaged with the nation’s colonial past and its legacies in contemporaneity. In *Havemos de Voltar* (*We Shall Return*), Kiluanji Kia Henda (2017) reflects upon Angola’s colonial past and its postcolonial present and future through the voice-over of a stuffed antelope named Amélia Capomba, displayed at the archive centre in Luanda. Amélia wishes to return to her natural environment but appears willing to compromise, hoping to be acquired by Chinese businessman Daniel Jianping and then displayed in his nightclub to escape the museum. Her monologue not only suggests the impossibility of returning to the past but also the danger of becoming hostage to her own nostalgic fantasy when refusing her condition of imperial spoil to become (once again) a commodity displayed in a club. *Havemos de Voltar* (Henda, 2017) offers a cautionary tale, serving as an allegory to Angola’s postcolonial present and future and a critical stance vis-à-vis the relation between the archive and the museum and the imperial project and the intersection between colonialism and capitalism.

In *Constelações Equatoriais* (*Equatorial Constellations*), on the other hand, Silas Tiny (2021) uses archival images and testimonies regarding the aerial bridge in São Tomé e Príncipe designed to rescue children from the Biafra conflict. Aware of how images

³ After Greece, Portugal reached an agreement with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund regarding its own financial bail-out in May 2011, accepting to cut public spending, privatise national energy companies and Portuguese airline TAP, and increase sales taxes, in return for the loan (*Portugal Reaches Deal on EU and IMF Bail-Out*, 2011).

of un nourished children were amply disseminated and displayed, Tiny uses the photographic archive sparingly, choosing as the source, the testimony of the people involved in the conflict to testify for the violence these children experienced.

These artworks and other have already been thoroughly discussed vis-à-vis a decolonial framework in recent scholarly literature, thus pointing out the urgency of bringing these artists and filmmakers to the centre stage of a cultural debate that is still far from diverse (Oliveira, 2016; Sales & Lança, 2019; among others). As argued by Michelle Sales (2021), the decolonisation of art is “not dissociated from the emergence of artists, writers, and intellectuals” (p. 1). However, as Jota Mombaça (2017) has rightly pointed out, the “number of texts that denounce the prevalence of racism (...) is disproportional to the number of Black artists and intellectuals visible” within the Portuguese context, thus evidencing existing “regimes of erasure” that exclude those whose bodies have “been socially and historically implicated in racialisation” and colonialism (para. 1). Brazilian scholars and artists, such as Jota Mombaça, are often the ones calling into question the lack of Black representation and visibility in Portugal (Duarte, 2021). Following a prosperous economy, between 2003 and 2010, President Lula da Silva instituted a series of government social programmes, including an equal opportunities policy that permitted Black students from economically vulnerable communities to enter State universities. That has, in turn, led to a conversation about representation, visibility, and speaking/subject position — “lugar de fala” (place of speech) yet unprecedented in Portugal.

Symptomatic of such “regimes of erasure” is the redemptive motive found in many of the already mentioned films and video art objects and artists and filmmakers’ discourses, which I believe is ignored by scholarly literature. For example, this redemptive motive is found in an interview with director João Nuno Pinto. He says that his film *Mosquito* (2020) is “a way to redeem for the fact that [he is] a son of colonisers” (Mourinha, 2020, para. 1). In Daniel Barroca’s work, redemption is described as “haunted by ‘an obscure feeling of guilt’” (Piçarra & Castro, 2017, p. 233). Again, in *Uma Cabana* (*A Hut*; Suleimane Biai and Filipa César, 2012), César alludes to the fact that her father was a Portuguese soldier who fought in the colonial war against the independent armed struggle movement in Guinea, suggesting an indirect implication within the Portuguese colonial history to justify her legitimacy for co-directing the film. This redemptive gesture is frequently overlooked, despite the overabundance of discourses about Portugal’s colonial history and the academic writings published about and around these visual objects. It may be so because of the fear of “throwing out the baby with the water bath”; because the purpose of such a postcolonial turn in academia, cinema and other visual arts derives from a long-overdue admission that our postcolonial societies were built from colonial plunder that is today materialised in social and racial inequalities. However, if this postcolonial turn is to become productive, one needs to navigate these murky waters in which this redemptive gesture brews to bring to the surface the ambivalences at work in these audiovisual objects. Despite the need for a detailed formal analysis of each individual object as a group, these moving images can be understood as “a *collective* fantasy

symptomatic of a *collective* itinerary of sadomasochist repression” (Spivak, 1988, p. 296) that reproduces, rather than effaces, the colonial act itself.

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