

**CINEMATIC AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF  
AFRICANS AND AFRO-DESCENDANTS IN  
CONTEMPORARY PORTUGAL: CONVIVIALITY  
AND CONFLICT ON THE MARGINS**

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**Cinematic and literary representations of Africans and Afro-descendants in contemporary Portugal: Conviviality and conflict on the margins**

*This article offers an analysis of feature films and literary fiction related to sub-Saharan African immigrants and their descendants in contemporary Portugal. I investigate how this cultural production reflects the changing Portuguese nation, where the boundaries between postcolonial Portugal and its former African colonies, as well as the notions of what constitutes “being African” or “being European”, are being redefined.*

Keywords: postcolonialism, immigration, Africans, Afro-descendants, cinema, literature

**Representações fílmicas e literárias de africanos e afrodescendentes no Portugal contemporâneo: Convivialidade e conflito nas margens**

*Este artigo propõe uma análise de longas-metragens e romances ligados às experiências de africanos e afrodescendentes no Portugal contemporâneo, visando investigar como a dita produção cultural reflete uma nação portuguesa em plena mutação, onde as fronteiras entre o Portugal pós-colonial e as ex-colônias africanas, tal como as noções acerca do que é “ser africano” ou “ser europeu”, estão a ser redefinidas.*

Palavras-chave: pós-colonialismo, imigração, africanos, afrodescendentes, cinema, literatura

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*To Isabel de Sousa Ramos, In Memoriam*

The fates of Portugal and various regions in Africa have been intertwined for hundreds of years as a result of Portugal's maritime-colonial expansion and the transatlantic slave trade, that also co-involved colonial and independent Brazil, with profound historical, geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural consequences. Based on these historical circumstances, the relationship between Portugal and Africa is absolutely crucial for understanding the Portuguese national imaginary and the construction of its identity. While there has been a massive literary production in the form of historiographic, travel, memorialistic, and fictional writings on the experience of the Portuguese in Africa, in comparison, cultural production focusing on the representation of Africans and Afro-descendants in Portugal has been rather limited.

This article offers an analysis of feature films and literary fiction related to sub-Saharan African immigrants and their descendants in contemporary Portugal. I investigate how this cultural production reflects the changing Portuguese nation, where the boundaries between postcolonial Portugal and its former African colonies, as well as the notions of what constitutes "being African" or "being European", are being redefined. Furthermore, I wish to critically probe ideologies of exceptionalism such as Lusotropicalism, based on the notion of a benign and miscegenating Portuguese colonizer that have shaped the Portuguese empire and overdetermined in paradoxical and contradictory ways postcolonial Portugal. This dynamics is most apparent vis-à-vis the phenomenon of African migration, along with the ensuing emergence and growth of Afro-diasporic populations and identities, where marginalization, discrimination, and lack of citizenship have prevailed. By the same token, I aim at bringing attention to economic shifts in the power relations between Portugal and its former African colonies, especially Angola, with important geopolitical and social consequences for both countries, where migration plays an important role.

Cinema, literary fiction, and popular music, among other cultural expressions, are providing a key platform for the symbolic representation and socio-political empowerment of marginalized African and Afro-Portuguese communities, as well as a prism through which to posit a multiplicity of shifting, and at times, overlapping identity formations ranging from static binary categories such as foreign/national, black/white, African/European as well as localized, situational, and/or hyphenated identities. Throughout this article, I shall focus on aesthetic, narrative, and ethical strategies utilized by filmmakers Pedro Costa, Leonel Vieira, and Joaquim Leitão, as well as fiction writers Lídia Jorge and António

Lobo Antunes in their representation of Africans and Afro-descendants. Before, though, I propose journeying through history in order to understand the complex trajectory as well as the longevity of the African and Afro-diasporic presence on Portuguese soil.

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According to historian Isabel Castro Henriques (2009), there are signs of the presence of black Africans in Portugal, and the Iberian Peninsula in general, since the Roman, Moorish, and Medieval Christian periods based on limited iconographic, poetic, and sculpted evidence (pp. 18-23). Yet with the Portuguese maritime-commercial ventures along the West and West/Central African coasts during the late medieval and early modern periods there emerged a substantially large African population in Portugal in the form of slaves as well as free men and women (including African diplomats). The African and Afro-descendent population, comprising blacks and mulattoes, started to decline after slave importation was prohibited in the late 18th century to the point of near dilution into the majority white population by the early 20th century. This latter dynamics contributed decisively to modern ideas of Portuguese nationhood that emphasize homogeneity in terms of language, culture, race, and ethnicity. In spite of this, today, the African and Afro-diasporic population in Portugal has grown to levels that surpass the numbers of earlier periods.

The first written documentation of the presence of black Africans in Portugal, as Josiah Blackmore reminds us (2009, p. 27), is that of a slave auction market in the city of Lagos in 1444 in Gomes Eanes de Zurara's *Crónica do descobrimento e conquista da Guiné* [Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea], originally written in 1448. Since then, African slaves were imported for use in domestic and agricultural work in urban and rural areas in order to replace former Moorish slaves. Vitorino Magalhães Godinho in *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial* [The Discoveries and the World Economy], calculates that approximately 300,000 black African slaves were imported to Portugal throughout the sixteenth-century on the basis of historical documentation of the time period (1963-1965, p. 539). Based on these estimates José Ramos Tinhorão points out that in the case of Lisbon, 10%-20% of the total population was African during the sixteenth-century (1988, pp. 102-103). Various European travellers, journalists, and historians, some quoted by Magalhães Godinho (1963, p. 542), Tinhorão (1988, pp. 79-110), Jean-Yves Loude (2005, pp. 115-116), and Isabel Castro Henriques (2009, pp. 37-39; 67-69) describe the large African presence in Portugal between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries with words ranging from shock, wryness or mitigated

pity to condescension, repulsion, or horror<sup>1</sup>. It was the Marquis of Pombal (Prime Minister during the reign of José I between 1750-1777), who was also believed to have some African ancestry, who finally prohibited the importation of slaves into Portugal in 1761, not necessarily for humanitarian reasons, but in order to channel slaves to the Brazilian gold mines and to prevent its competition with free labor in his efforts to modernize the Portuguese economy. Even though slavery did not entirely disappear from the Portuguese landscape, as argued by Tinhorão (1988, pp. 374-375), this decision ultimately worked as a strategy of social engineering aimed at diluting what had become one of the largest black African populations in Europe. There is extensive material and immaterial evidence of the sustained presence of Africans and Afro-descendants either as slaves or as free men and women between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries in Portugal (especially in the regions of Lisbon, Alentejo, and Algarve) based on documentation found in municipal and newspaper archives, as well as in churches and museums. The Catholic brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of Black People and the festivities in honor of Congolese kings and queens (or *congadas*) – both widely popular in Brazil – were some of the longest lasting afro-centered institutional and cultural manifestations in Portugal until the late nineteenth century, according to Lahon (1999, pp. 57-76). Africans and Afro-descendants have left their marks in the Portuguese gene pool, in the origins of fado music<sup>2</sup>, in oral traditions, in lexical items that have been incorporated into the Portuguese language, and in toponyms, while images of Africans are not uncommon in early Portuguese iconographic and literary representations such as painting, tiles, drawings, ceramics, and sculpture, as well as in theater and poetry (see Tinhorão, Lahon, Loude, and I. Henriques). In spite of the rich evidence pointing to a vigorous African presence in early modern Portugal, its dilution since the abolition of slavery in 1869, accompanied by deeply entrenched racial and cultural prejudices, in addition to dominant Euro- and Christian-centric discourses of national identity embedded in the Portuguese collective imaginary that became further entrenched in the twentieth century during the Salazar regime, a state of “collective amnesia” (as Miguel Vale de Almeida defines it [2004, p. 74]) has prevailed regarding the presence of not only black Africans in Portugal, but also of Jews and Moors.

<sup>1</sup> See for example the accounts of English traveler Marianne Baillie in *Lisbon in the Years 1821, 1822, and 1823* (1825).

<sup>2</sup> Two highly regarded modern musicologists of fado, Brazilian José Ramos Tinhorão (1994) and Portuguese Rui Vieira Nery (2004), both agree on the African/Afro-Brazilian roots of fado, particularly at the level of rhythmic and harmonic structure, as well as choreography. Fado is believed to have its origins in several musical/choreographic/poetic strands: two Afro-Brazilian dance music genres of the eighteenth century – *fofa* and *lundum* – and the Spanish  *fandango* (also African-influenced, according to Tinhorão [1994, p. 16]). These were all very popular, sensuous, and transculturated musical genres that evolved into fado by the nineteenth century, which became an exclusively song genre.

One of the most salient developments in the context of postcolonial relations between Portugal and its former African colonies is the issue of immigration. It is a well known fact that after centuries of being a net exporter of migrants, since the Portuguese Revolution and Lusophone African independence between 1974-75, its accession to the European Economic Community in 1986, and integration into the European Union in 1996, Portugal has gradually become a recipient nation of immigrants from its former African colonies, Brazil, Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Romania, Moldova), and to a lesser degree, parts of South and East Asia (China, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan), in addition to non-Lusophone African nations (for instance, Senegal, Guinea, and Morocco). 2009 figures provided by AICEP (Agência para o Investimento e Comércio Externo de Portugal) pointed to 457,306 legal immigrants in Portugal<sup>3</sup>. The vast majority is concentrated in the greater Lisbon area and the largest national group is constituted by Brazilians. Among the African national communities, the most numerous are Cape Verdeans and Angolans. This relatively recent reality is the result of the significant improvements in the quality of life since 1986, in tandem with substantial economic growth and expanded job opportunities, particularly during the 1990s.

Nevertheless, since the late 2000s-early 2010s there has been a relative decrease in the number of Eastern European and Brazilian immigrants residing in Portugal as a result of the country's economic crisis and ensuing high unemployment. By the same token, as of 2012 there has been a steady flow of tens of thousands of professionals leaving Portugal in a poignant postcolonial migratory shift to Angola, Brazil, and Mozambique. There have been reports in the world press of up to 130,000 new Portuguese migrants in Angola. At the same time, there has been heavy investment on the part of the Angolan elites associated with the presidency of José Eduardo dos Santos in various sectors of the Portuguese economy ranging from the olive and wine industries to banking, energy, telecommunications, and real estate. The daughter of the Angolan president, Isabel dos Santos, is one of the largest investors in the Portuguese economy. In a complex postcolonial power dynamics of reversal and realignment, not only has the government of Angola offered aid to the suffering Portuguese economy, but the economic interests of the Angolan and Portuguese elites have been converging as Portugal stagnates in the midst of the great economic recession affecting a significant portion of the global North and as Angola emerges as a major African economic power. This dynamics reveals another important dimension in con-

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics reported on the publication *Portugal – Perfil País* available on the website of AICEP (<http://www.portugalglobal.pt/EN>). For another useful source of information on immigration to Portugal as well as updated bibliography, see: <http://imigrantes.no.sapo.pt/>

temporary global flows; not only a two-directional movement of migrants across the socio-economic spectrum within the Lusophone world, but also the two-directional movement of capital between Portugal and Angola, forging a strategic alliance between the economic elites of both countries with socio-politically detrimental ramifications for both nations, given the well known autocratic tendencies of the MPLA regime in Angola.

As has been widely established, immigration has become a socio-economic necessity throughout much of the global North. In fact, similarly to its European partners, Portugal's demographic growth is extremely low. Yet, as in the case of most Western European countries, in Portugal there has also been ambivalence towards the large presence of immigrants in the national landscape. This is reflected in research surveys conducted between 2000-10<sup>4</sup>. In contemporary Portuguese society, manifestations ranging from ambivalence and resistance to intolerance and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans (and their descendants) stand in sharp contrast with the deep seated national myths of Portuguese cultural exceptionalism such as Lusotropicalism, that are rooted in the perception or the interpretation of the Portuguese colonial enterprise as having been more "benign" and more open towards cultural and racial intermingling than that of other former colonial European nations. As pointed out by Inocência Mata, more than 30 years after the dismantling of the Portuguese colonial empire the discourse of the nation still "textualizes" Africans and their descendants as "the others" (2006, p. 289).

As of 2012 there is still an official lack of distinction in Portugal between the category of "immigrant" and the notion of "ethnic or racial minority". In fact, the question of "ethnicity" remains a taboo in official government discourse in Portugal, as well in other European nations such as France, as highlighted by Joana Gorjão Henriques (2012a, 2012b). In the Portuguese case, there are legal impediments to collecting data based on ethnicity or race. This scenario has led to a general paucity on the part of Portuguese political authorities and even some social scientists in grappling with the country's changing demographics. The 2012 United Nations report on the question of race in Portugal points to the "subtle racism" that prevails in the country. The report is critical of the official lack of racial and ethnic categories that keeps Portuguese-born Afro-descendants within the confines of immigration, thus forestalling their social advancement. Furthermore, it argues that textbooks and national curricula do not offer an accurate portrayal of Portugal's colonial past or any recognition of the positive

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<sup>4</sup> See survey on Portuguese attitudes toward immigration conducted by Universidade Católica Portuguesa in 2003 at <http://imigrantes.no.sapo.pt/index11.html> and the more recent studies compiled in *Os imigrantes e a imigração aos olhos dos portugueses* (2011) and *Imigração e racismo em Portugal* (2012).

contribution of Africans and Afro-descendants to the formation of Portuguese society<sup>5</sup>.

It is unquestionable that Portugal has now become, more so than at the height of its maritime expansion period between the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a multiethnic and multicultural society, and that being “Portuguese” or for that matter “European”, more so than ever no longer means being exclusively “white”. This quantitatively new reality underscores the constitutive finitude of Portuguese narratives of cultural homogeneity, while putting narratives of Portuguese cultural exceptionalism severely to the test. Thus, immigrants and their descendants, and in a particularly fraught manner, Africans and Afro-descendants in the case of Portugal (but not limited to it), “articulate the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at itself narcissistically in the eye” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 168).

The more recent immigration boom in Portugal as far as Africans are concerned, constitutes a new wave among a succession of differentiated migratory patterns in recent Portuguese history that reveal what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1992, p. 101) describes as a “dialectic of deterritorialization/reterritorialization” (borrowing the famous cartographic conceptualization model by Deleuze/Guattari [1980]), due on the one hand, to the collapse of the Portuguese African empire as a result of a prolonged three-front war in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, and on the other hand, to the accession and integration into the European Union. Thus, the first wave of modern African immigration to Portugal took place primarily between 1955-73 when 80,000 Cape Verdeans were recruited to the metropole in order to do construction work (according to Kesha Fikes [2009, p. 21] who cites António Carreira [1983] and Luís Batalha [2004]), primarily due to the scarcity of labor resulting from heavy Portuguese emigration to Europe and North America and the colonial wars in Africa after 1961. The second two-pronged wave took place at the time of de-colonization in 1975 and was constituted, on the one hand, by migrants from all the former African colonies, who were Portuguese nationals of African origin by virtue of parentage or by having worked as civil servants in the colonial administration. Contrary to the first group of African migrants, many of these were highly educated, in some cases white or lighter complected, who belonged to the upper class, often of mixed race. On the other hand, there was also the massive *retornado* population, which was overwhelmingly composed by white Portuguese and their African-born children who fled Angola and Mozambique at the time of independence. The flow

<sup>5</sup> See the UN Human Rights Council Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its eleventh session (Mission to Portugal) (2012) and articles by Jamil Chade in *O Estado de São Paulo* and Joana Gorjão Henriques in *Público*.

of *retornados* lasted between 1974-76 and their total numbers oscillate between 500,000-650,000. This population became gradually integrated into mainstream Portuguese society and today many occupy positions of leadership in the economic and political sectors<sup>6</sup>.

Yet, the most recent wave of sub-Saharan African immigrants since the 1980s and 90s has led to the leveling of differences between previous Afro-Portuguese and current African immigrants together with their respective progeny (many of them born and raised in Portugal), becoming all subsumed by the Portuguese populace in conjunction with the media under the labels of “Africans”, “African immigrants”, “second or third generation children of immigrants”, or “blacks” (either the more neutral term *negros* or the traditionally derisive term, *pretos*)<sup>7</sup>. All signifiers, from the more ostensibly benign to the more virulently scornful, imply the othering of Africans and Afro-descendants despite the fact that there is today a large and heterogeneous population in Portugal of Afro-descendants in terms of national origin, social class, legal status, cultural ties to Portugal and/or Africa, in addition to educational levels, that has been radically changing the landscape, especially in the Greater Lisbon region<sup>8</sup>. While Afro-descendants are making important contributions to Portuguese society especially in the economic domain, in addition to culture, sports, and to a very limited degree in education and politics, a large percentage of them – particularly Cape Verdeans (though not exclusively) – live in the most impoverished areas in and around Lisbon<sup>9</sup>.

Meanwhile, Africa has been for some time a popular “cultural commodity” among Portuguese, most notably its music, literature, cuisine, and dance clubs. In fact, Lisbon has become one of the most African cities in Europe boasting a significantly rich and dynamic cultural scene. Lisbon is doubtlessly the musical and literary capital of Lusophone Africa. Not only does Lisbon remain arguably the symbolic and cultural axis of a now postcolonial Lusophone world at large, but it has also become more so than ever in its history a nodal point, albeit peripheral, both within an Afro-diasporic Europe and within the Black Atlantic (based on Paul Gilroy’s famous conceptualization [1993]). This is most apparent in the musical realm, where there are a number of well-established African artists who are partially or permanently based in Lisbon such as Angolans Bonga, Waldemar Bastos, and Paulo Flores or Cape Verdeans Bana, Celina Pereira, Tito

<sup>6</sup> See Regina Mezzei’s discussion on the *retornado* phenomenon (Mezzei, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller discussion on the various stages of modern African immigration to Portugal, see Fernando Luís Machado (1994) as well as Neusa Maria Mendes de Gusmão (2004) and Luís Batalha (2004).

<sup>8</sup> For a study on the cultural production of sub-Saharan African immigrants in Portugal and Maghrebian immigrants in Spain and the representation of contemporary African immigrants in the Iberian Peninsula, see Emily Knudson-Vilaseca’s dissertation (2007).

<sup>9</sup> For an exhaustive ethnographic study on the various waves of Cape Verdean immigration to Portugal in recent history, as well as on the lives of their second- and third-generation descendants, see Luís Batalha (2004).

Paris, Ana Firmino, Nancy Vieira, Danae, and Ritinha Lobo. The younger generation of “hyphenated” Africans, such as Cape Verdean-Portuguese Sara Tavares, Lura, and Carmen Souza (who currently resides in London), have become major references in the world music industry. Indeed, since the 1990s there has been a boom of young Portuguese artists of African descent recording hip-hop, soul, reggae, jazz-inflected, funk, African-fusion music, or electronica, sung primarily in Portuguese. Many Luso-African hip-hop artists have documented or denounced the lives of the marginalized Afro-descendant youths in Portugal, in addition to expressing hopes for a better life in a more tolerant and accepting society, while identifying with and appropriating the globalized aesthetics, language, sounds, and countercultural ideology of African American inner city youth. In fact, Portuguese hip-hop burst into the mainstream in 1994 with the album *Rapública*, which caused a profound impact, calling attention to the lives of Afro-descendants and their dynamic cultural scene at the margins of Portuguese society<sup>10</sup>. Some of the most talented and successful Portuguese hip-hop groups include Da Weasal, Boss AC, Mind Da Gap, Sam the Kid, Valete, and Chullage. Other Afro-Portuguese groups who have experimented with African, African American or Afro-diasporic influenced musical sounds such as soul, blues, reggae, or funk, in addition to dance electronica, are Orelha Negra, Cool Hipnoise, Blackout, and Buraka Som Sistema. The latter group has become a global phenomenon through its creative appropriation and adaptation of the Angolan urban dance music genre of kuduro.

In the realm of cinema, several works ranging from mainstream Hollywood-influenced feature films and ethnographically-oriented documentaries<sup>11</sup> to the

<sup>10</sup> See Teresa Fradique's pioneering anthropological study on Portuguese hip-hop, *Fixar o movimento: Representações da música rap em Portugal* (2003) [Fixating the Movement: Representations of Rap in Portugal] and Pedro Miguel da Cruz Calado's dissertation, *Não percebes o hip-hop: Geografia, (sub)culturas e territorialidade* (2007). For an analysis of the symbolic dimension of Afro-diasporic identity formation through popular music among young Afro-Portuguese during the late 1990s-early 2000s, see António Concorde Contador's *Cultura juvenil negra em Portugal* (2001).

<sup>11</sup> For a suggestive cinematic portrayal of immigrants in Lisbon today emphasizing the experience of Eastern Europeans and Brazilians, see the documentary *Lisboetas* (2004) by Sérgio Tréfaut. The acclaimed documentary series *Portugal: Um retrato social* (2007) [Portugal: A Social Portrait], written by António Barreto and directed by Joana Pontes, features the issue of immigration in the volume entitled *Nós e os outros* [Us and the Others], where the dominant voice is that of experts (i.e., social workers, lawyers, and educators) while the voices of immigrants and their descendants, particularly young Africans or Afro-Portuguese, are scarcely heard. In contrast, throughout the ethnographically-oriented *A ilha da Cova da Moura* (2010) [The Island of Cova da Moura] by Rui Simões, the only voices heard are those of a cross-generational and multiracial spectrum of community members inhabiting low-income Cova da Moura, where Cape Verdeans and Cape Verdean-Portuguese predominate, who altogether share richly textured and historically sedimented lives on the margins of Portuguese society. The documentary *Outros bairros* (1999) [Other Neighborhoods] by Vasco Pimentel, Inês Gonçalves, and Kiluanje Liberdade, centers on new identitarian formations emerging among Afro-Portuguese youth who inhabit the poor suburban areas around Lisbon that are on the verge of disappearing in favor of government-sponsored tenement building areas. Their subjects, located in a liminal space – neither entirely Cape Verdean/African nor Portuguese – display a heightened degree of creativity and pragmatism as they forge a new, autonomous, and proud culture in the heart of Portugal.

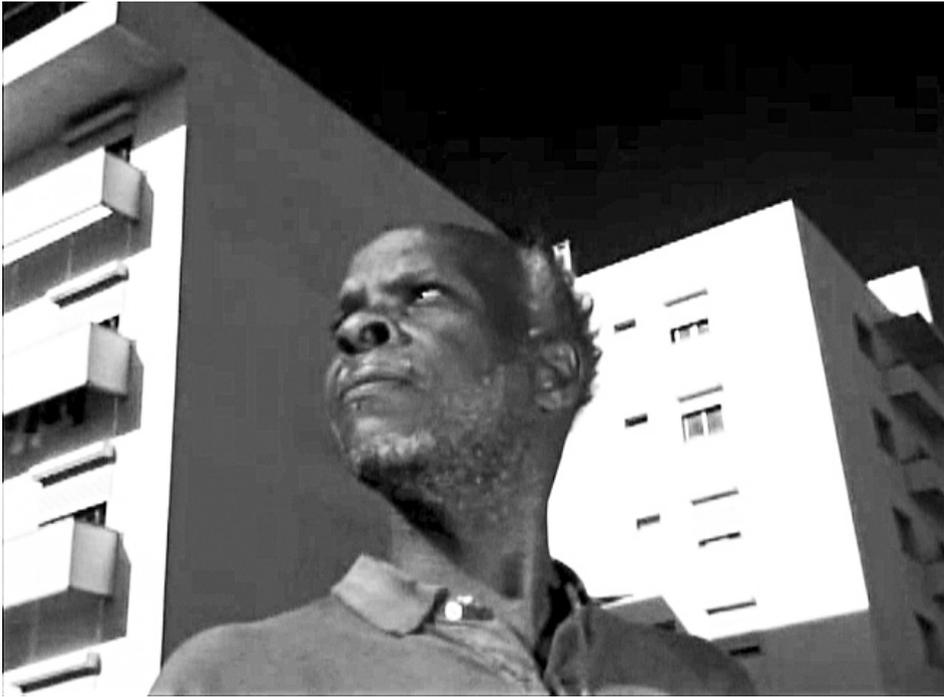
highly challenging and ethically probing art films of internationally acclaimed director Pedro Costa, offer contrasting aesthetic and ethical approaches as well as levels of depth in their portrayal of the lives of African immigrants and their descendants in Portugal.

Pedro Costa's hybrid films that often defy genre boundaries between fiction and documentary *Ossos* [Bones] (1997), *No quarto de Vanda* [In Vanda's Room] (2000), and *Juventude em marcha* [Colossal Youth] (2006), include Cape Verdeans who share with poor white Portuguese lives of tremendous hardship and profound social alienation in Lisbon's poorest neighborhoods. The "empathetic gaze" that dominates his films entails a highly self-conscious ethics of representation where subaltern subjects (in this case, embodied by marginalized and voiceless poor black and white men and women) are not only allowed to speak, but are also seen in their full splendor and dignity.

*Juventude em marcha* [Colossal Youth] concludes Pedro Costa's Fontainhas trilogy by featuring the destruction of the famed shantytown in Lisbon and its after effects on the inhabitants, as well as flashbacks of life before it was destroyed, represented by real-life characters featuring Cape Verdean Ventura and Portuguese Vanda as they are eventually relocated to antiseptic government-sponsored apartment buildings. Ventura is given special prominence as he wanders across multiple temporal planes between the remnants of Fontainhas and the new buildings visiting community members, including Vanda, whom he considers his children. Ventura attempts to gather the fragments of his life – his memories as a migrant construction worker since 1972, including the uncertainty and fear regarding the fate of Africans in the wake of the 1974 Portuguese Revolution, the euphoria of Cape Verdean independence, the longing for his *kretxeu* (or loved one) – as he searches for a new sense of home and co-belonging after the physical and symbolic destruction of his community, as a result of urban policies linked to the modern nation-state project.

*Juventude em marcha* is simultaneously Costa's most cinematically demanding and aesthetically stylized production. While sparse in dialogue, it attains astonishing heights of lyricism in both the quotidian and poetic registers of Cape Verdean Kriolu, which is the film's dominant language. Meanwhile, the desolate dwelling spaces (both the shantytown ruins and the swanky and blindingly white new buildings) together with the lonely phantom-like inhabitants are often depicted in tableaux-like compositions (evoking seventeenth-century Dutch Baroque paintings) where various shades of natural light and darkness grant the subjects of this film a sense of humanity, poise, and gracefulness that they are often denied in mainstream society, most especially poor black subjects. James Quandt

states that “The soulful close-ups Costa accords his abject characters verge on the beatific” (2006, p. 356). Deleuze’s notion of “affective framing” or “affection-image” (1983, pp. 145-172) is most apt in helping understand Costa’s intent, both aesthetically and ethically. The following image features a medium close-up shot of Ventura with his back turned against the new government-sponsored building to which he has been relocated. His majestic yet warm physical presence together with his contemplative pose, the dark complexion and curvilinear qualities of his human form, all stand in stark contrast to the cold and impersonal luminescence of the white modern architectural structures with their rectilinear shapes.



The next paradigmatic image takes place at the Gulbenkian Museum, which Ventura helped build in real life according to Pedro Costa. It entails another juxtaposition, this time of Ventura and a classical (Western) bronze statue of a male figure. Once again we see the film protagonist in the foreground through a medium close up next to the profile of the statue head. Ventura becomes a sculpture in his own right. Through this juxtaposition Costa aims at relativizing canonized Eurocentric notions of aesthetic beauty, as he brings marginalized black shantytown dwellers such as Ventura to the center of high art, while figuratively collapsing the physical walls of the institution that men such as Ventura helped build. Jacques Rancière (2009) suggests that within the cinematic space of Costa’s

film there is a leveling of the aesthetic value placed upon the Flemish paintings exhibited at the Gulbenkian Museum and the still life images of empty colorful glass bottles on a table by the window of Ventura's shack that is suggested by the sequencing of shots (56-57). Moreover, we could argue that Ventura's physical presence at the museum entails a double *mise-en-scène* — the museum as an institution in itself, a product of European imperialism and traditionally a repository that has privileged Western aesthetic objects, and Ventura's "transgressive" presence within the museum, a black migrant subject who is a product of Portuguese colonialism who is in turn transformed by Costa's film into an *objet d'art*.



Pedro Costa's filmic trilogy, moreover, tends to underscore a sense of class solidarity among Lisbon's poorest and most socio-economically marginalized groups living outside the city limits, including a mix of Africans, Afro-, and white Portuguese, among whom there is a disproportionate number of drug addicts. Here, the former axis of the Portuguese empire is seen both from within and from the margins. At the same time, the world portrayed by Costa is largely shut off from mainstream culture, thus remaining unfamiliar to most Portuguese. In fact, the politics of empathy and equanimity vis-à-vis the "other" that prevail in

Costa's films reverberate into a double effect on its Portuguese spectatorship: the establishment of a complicity pact with the audience in relationship to the "other" that is represented on screen, while at the same time provoking a sense of the uncanny (or *unheimlich*) combined with claustrophobia, spatial disorientation, as well as cultural and linguistic de-territorialization. The latter dynamics is most striking in the opening scene, which takes place in the shantytown at night. The highly theatrical *mise-en-scène* involves the static shot of a dilapidated house through the use of vignetting technique whereby a studio light is projected onto the house while the outer edges are darkened. The aestheticization effect is that of a charcoal drawing typical of illustration books, thus setting the stage for the subsequent storytelling. Simultaneously, diegetic noise emanates from neighborhood voices along with the violent crash of appliances and furniture being thrown out the window, creating an uncomfortable atmosphere. Soon after, a defiant older Cape Verdean female figure (Clotilde) holding a knife emerges from the dark and engages in a long monologue spoken in the *badiu* variant of Kriolu in which she also breaks into song. Her monologue involves tales about her life in Cape Verde that serve an allegorical function, where as a strong and independent girl she would swim in the ocean as deftly as a fish to the point in which no boy or shark would dare catch up with her. Not even the longingly romantic *mornas* that the boys would serenade her could bring her back to shore. Clotilde also tells a story of her doubts about being a mother to her child and describes the terror expressed by her child at the prospect of being abandoned by the seaside. Once more, at the end, she defiantly asserts her independence *vis-à-vis* the boys, and by extension, the patriarchal order and the cultural expectations placed upon her as a woman. As she gradually withdraws into the background all we see is the knife shining in the dark, as a metaphor that condenses all the violence that will not be seen throughout the film. Later, we learn that Ventura was coupled with her, and that after being stabbed by her, she abandoned him. Here, the spectator is thrust into the sphere of intimacy of the characters' lives, both its universality as well as its Cape Verdean cultural and linguistic specificity in the heart of Portugal.

Costa underscores a paradoxical and shifting dynamics of "distant proximity" at work both between the metropole and the islands as far as the privileged historical, cultural, and linguistic links between contemporary Cape Verde and Portugal, as a result of colonialism, widespread miscegenation in Cape Verde, a relative sense of cultural affinity, a special legal status of Cape Verde within the Portuguese African colonial empire, in addition to mass Cape Verdean migration to Portugal and economic dependence. Thus, Costa attempts to address this dy-

namics of cultural and existential “distant proximity” adopting two ethical strategies: an axiographic principle (as theorized by Bill Nichols [1991, pp. 77, 93]) in the construction of cinematic space and a dialogical principle in the process of screen planning. We witness the former through the extensive use of contemplative close-ups, medium close-ups, and low angle shots that include contrasting geometric forms, texture, color and light, as previously pointed out, while the latter is developed through an artistic and personal partnership that the director cultivates with the actors in collectively constructing the scenes, including the conversation pieces that populate the film.



There are two important commercial films that emerge to a large degree as the antithesis to Pedro Costa's audacious art films: the successful pictures *Zona J* [District J] (1998) and *A esperança está onde menos se espera* [Hope is Where It Is Least Expected] (2009). *Zona J*, directed by Leonel Vieira, focuses on the children of Angolan immigrants, who share with poor white Portuguese youths a turbulent life on the fringes of Portuguese society in the working-class housing complexes of Lisbon. The faultlines of race, class, and nationality are brought to bear in an otherwise Manichean story where juvenile exuberance and hope are

dashed by the realities of a relentlessly prejudiced dominant culture. In fact, as Isabel de Sousa Ramos asserts, there is a crude depiction of racist attitudes and acts, which is rare in Portuguese cinema<sup>12</sup>. Additionally, for many of the young characters portrayed throughout the film, weak family structures and the lack of economic opportunities lead them to the temptations of crime. In the midst of this precarious existence emerges an interracial love affair between lower-class Angolan-Portuguese Tó and middle-class Portuguese Carla that is destined to fail under the pressure of the adverse powerful forces just described. One of the most remarkable elements of this pioneering film is its musical soundtrack which features the best hip-hop music of its time in Portugal, primarily by black artists, which was still somewhat of a novelty. The music soundtrack of *Zona J* emanating from the periphery of Portuguese society left an indelible sonic imprint on the cultural landscape of Portugal thus contributing towards the assimilation and appropriation of hip-hop as it gradually became part of the Portuguese musical mainstream.

More than a decade later, in *A esperança está onde menos se espera* directed by Joaquim Leitão, the world of the posh upper-class oceanside suburb of Cascais intersects with that of Cova da Moura, the best known shantytown in Lisbon, where mostly poor Cape Verdean immigrants and descendants live. The story entails the disgracing of a popular and wealthy soccer coach (Francisco Figueiredo) who is ethically opposed to game rigging, which is part of the corrupt culture of world professional soccer. In the process, he loses his fortune as well as his wife (who emigrates to Angola), while his son (Lourenço) is forced to transfer from his elite bilingual school to a public school that is attended by many low-income black students from Cova da Moura. While his father suffers from paralyzing emotional trauma, the son struggles to and eventually succeeds in regaining his sense of dignity and self-worth by cultivating a romantic relationship with a Cape Verdean-Portuguese female classmate. While Lourenço is ultimately accepted into her family and community, he rescues his father from the abyss and brings him into Cova da Moura to become the local coach. The Hollywoodian happy ending of *A esperança está onde menos se espera* amid Portugal's contemporary economic despair contrasts significantly with the tragic ending of *Zona J* during the euphoria of Portugal's economic boom of the late 1990s, culminating with the World Expo of 1998.

Lisbon is also the primary publishing center for Lusophone African literature (as much as Paris is for Francophone writers) and authors such as Mia Couto,

<sup>12</sup> This remark is based on Isabel de Sousa Ramos' unpublished manuscript written in 2011 to whom I remain always grateful.

Pepetela, José Eduardo Agualusa, and Ondjaki have become a fixture in the realm of Portuguese lettered culture and their books are often on bestseller lists. Africa has been an object of representation in contemporary Portuguese literature and cinema (more consistently so in Portuguese novels) since the April Revolution of 1974. More often than not, the authorial/directorial gaze is projected toward various periods throughout the history of Portuguese colonialism in Africa or toward the colonial/liberation wars between 1961-74 in an attempt to critically re-visit the past, while deconstructing and exorcizing imperial phantasms and fantasies (following the terms used by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Ana Paula Ferreira [2003]) still alive in the Portuguese collective imaginary<sup>13</sup>. More recently, however, there has been a boom in colonial memorialistic literature as the children of white Portuguese who were born in Africa during late colonial times are coming of age<sup>14</sup>.

Yet, scant attention has been given to the presence of Africans and their descendants in Portugal in the realm of literature, except for two of the most important fiction writers, Lídia Jorge and António Lobo Antunes, who have systematically engaged with questions related to the experience of Portuguese colonialism in Africa and its aftermath in the metropolitan center. One of the most outstanding fictional works to do so until now is Lídia Jorge's *O vento assobiando nas gruas* (2002) [The Wind Blowing Against the Cranes]. In this paradigmatic novel the destiny of the contemporary Portuguese nation is an object of critical reflection and symbolic transfiguration. As suggested by Ana Paula Ferreira, Jorge's literary representation offers a compelling testimony to individual and collective fates shaped by larger historical forces (2009, p. 19). Thus, in this novel Lídia Jorge probes the postcolonial question through the experience of two families: the Leandros, an aristocratic white Portuguese family, and the Matas, a poor though socially mobile Cape Verdean immigrant family. The lives of several generations of these two families intersect in a story where racism and the fear of miscegenation, especially on the Portuguese side, play a central role. Here, the myths of a white European nation together with that of an intrinsically Portuguese openness towards other cultures and races are systematically debunked. This novel reveals

<sup>13</sup> See for instance the critically acclaimed novels by: António Lobo Antunes, *Os cus de Judas* (1978) [South of Nowhere]; and *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo* (2003) [Good Afternoon to the Things Down Here]; Teolinda Gersão, *A árvore das palavras* (1997) [The Word Tree]; Lídia Jorge, *A costa dos murmúrios* (1988) [The Murmuring Coast]; and Miguel Sousa Tavares, *Equador* (2003), among others. In addition, see the films *Um adeus português* (1985) [A Portuguese Farewell] by João Botelho; *Non ou a vã glória de mandar* (1990) [The Vain Glory of Command] by Manoel de Oliveira; and *A costa dos murmúrios* (2004) [The Murmuring Coast] by Margarida Cardoso.

<sup>14</sup> The most outstanding examples of memorialistic literature based on the late-colonial Portuguese experience in Mozambique and Angola (respectively) in terms of their complexity, nuance, and unflinchingly non-nostalgic approach are Isabela Figueiredo's *Caderno de memórias coloniais* (2010) [Notebook of Colonial Memories] and Dulce Maria Cardoso's *O retorno* (2011) [The Return].

the various strategies employed by members of these families in coping with the social changes taking place in their midst. The historically dominant metropolitan group rejects the immigrants and their descendants at the same time stifling their social mobility, while one member of this family, Milene, accepts them, at the same time desiring a mutual integration that is cultural, affective, and sexual. On the other hand, the group of immigrants (in this case, Cape Verdeans) and their Portuguese-born offspring display contrasting attitudes and strategies vis-à-vis life in Europe, whether it be self-segregation and cultural preservation, varying degrees of integration, and/or a fluid and pragmatic attitude towards social mobility. Lídia Jorge points to different directions where their individual and collective lives may lead in the new Portugal that is emerging today.

The Leandro family through the grandmother figure, Regina, owns a building that used to house a cannery founded in the 19th century. Regina rents the building to the Mata family who moved there from a shantytown symbolically named “Bairro dos Espelhos” (or Neighborhood of Mirrors). Since she died, her adult children plan to sell the prime real estate to a Dutch firm interested in building a new urban development, but such would entail evicting the Matas. Meanwhile, Milene, the novel’s protagonist who is the orphan granddaughter raised by Regina, afflicted by oligophrenia and greatly marginalized within her family, falls in love with Antonino, one of the Mata’s sons. This love affair causes deep consternation within the Leandro family, to the point of having her criminally sterilized, thus denying her (and themselves) a mixed-race descentance, thus fulfilling an eugenicist fantasy, though not forestalling the emergence of a multicultural society in Portugal, in spite of the fact, as argued by Paulo de Medeiros (2006, p. 356), that Portuguese society still largely refuses to recognize itself as such.

António Lobo Antunes’ *O meu nome é Legião* (2007) [My Name is Legion] is a novel that conjures a highly charged psychological atmosphere through a radically fragmented, polyphonic, and multi-perspectival narrative, underscoring a fundamental socio-economic, racial, and psychic chasm at work in contemporary Portuguese society. The highly elliptical story revolves around a police investigation of a gang of eight mixed-race, black, and white adolescents from the low-income suburbs located north of Lisbon who commit violent crimes such as burglaries and muggings, whom are eventually killed by the police one by one. In this novel a proliferation of interior thoughts, bits of truncated dialogue, and fragments of a long police report on the crime suspects are interwoven together, where the official discourse of power is frequently undermined by an array of contradictory as well as vexed private emotions and thoughts. The dominant, albeit fractured point of view, is that of the inspector who conducts the investiga-

tions on the crime wave. By the same token, he constitutes the embodiment of a profound ideological contradiction, whereby he is capable of simultaneously harboring racial hatred for the boys whom he kills, while at the same time gradually developing an intimate relationship with a mixed-race woman who lives in the same neighborhood where the boys live, thus overcoming to a degree his racial prejudices.

Throughout Lobo Antunes' novel, there is a repetitive and obsessive quality in the thoughts and utterances that populate the novel that not only provide a rhythmic pattern throughout the narrative, but also provide multiple points of articulation, among others, for a hyper-racialized discourse and its racist expression (following David Theo Goldberg's conceptualization [1993]), revealing its intrinsic pathology and the effects on the objects and subjects of such discourse. There is an incessant reiteration of racialized epithets with a racist effect, while a vast repertoire of racial stereotypes are deployed including dehumanized notions of the "other", in this case, the mixed-race and black youngsters who are the object of obsession throughout this novel, even though their voices are rarely heard. When their point of view finally emerges towards the end of the novel, what is revealed are deeply troubled lives of children and youngsters deprived of solid family and societal structures of support. This scenario coupled with widespread socio-economic and racial discrimination creates a sense of profound alienation vis-à-vis mainstream society, thus leading to a life of crime. Antunes' novel offers a grim diagnostic of contemporary multiracial and multicultural Portugal, or for that matter, Europe. Ultimately, through this novel, the author argues that there is a decisive pattern of continuity in the racist ideology intrinsic to colonialism in postcolonial Portugal, particularly in relationship to African immigrants and their descendants. While this sentiment is shared by fiction writer Lúcia Jorge and all the film directors featured in this study (Pedro Costa, Leonel Vieira, and Joaquim Leitão), the nihilism that pervades in Antunes' novel (also detectable in the hopelessness that ultimately prevails in the film *Zona J*) stands in stark contrast with signs of equanimity that are present in the otherwise profoundly unjust social universe presented by Jorge's novels or Costa's films. In the works of these particular authors, as discussed throughout this essay, various modes of social conviviality are possible, together with alternative modes of symbolic representation with the ultimate goal of opening spaces for the exercise of "social citizenship" (a term suggested by Étienne Balibar [2001, pp. 298-299]) within the Portuguese nation-state, and by extension, in Europe.

In their gestures of equanimity and ethical responsibility towards the "others" (in this case, black and mixed race Africans and Portuguese), all the (white

Portuguese) fiction writers and filmmakers featured throughout this study ultimately emerge as cultural mediators between a predominantly white mainstream Portuguese society and its “others”. By the same token, there are other key sites of cultural and artistic production, such as popular music, theater, and visual arts (beyond cinema), where there is a presence of unmediated African and Afro-Portuguese voices that heretofore have seldom been the object of critical reflection, but that will surely become the focus of future studies. Cultural and artistic production highlighting the experiences of Africans and Afro-Portuguese plays a fundamental role as a supplement to the lack of full political citizenship and continued legal absence of the category of racial and/or ethnic minorities in contemporary Portuguese society. This essay has privileged the mediation efforts on the part of white Portuguese artists in their representation of Africans and Afro-Portuguese, many of whom are caught in a liminal space between being African immigrants and being Portuguese subjects of African origin in the quest for enlarging the space for the exercise of “social citizenship”.

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