



**White Innocence, Black Erasure:
Reviewing *Alcido* (2020) Against
the Fictions of Portuguese Colonial
Bonhomie**

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This essay uses Miguel Dores' documentary *Alcindo* (2020) to propose a critique of whiteness in Portugal. It is argued that the endorsement of narratives of *lusotropicalismo*, Portuguese colonial exceptionalism, forms a line of continuity between Portugal's colonial-fascist regime and the liberal democracy implanted after the 1974 revolution. The murder of Alcindo Monteiro in 1995, the fulcrum of Dores' intervention, offers a microcosm into these paradoxes of Portuguese self-representation. By rendering race into an inexistence, *lusotropicalismo* plays an instrumental role in Portugal's delusions of colonial innocence. The whitening of the history of the 1974 revolution matters, too. In need of new narratives, the new regime forged an image of future Portugal by excising Africa from accounts of its past and confining national history to the European nation-state. This deliberate amnesia, it is argued, rendered centuries of colonial domination "forgettable," while denaturalizing race, and therefore Black subjecthood, from the imaginary of modern Portugal.

Keywords: Whiteness, Race in Portugal, *Lusotropicalism*, Black History, Blackness in Portugal.

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Este ensaio usa o documentário de Miguel Dores, *Alcindo* (2020) para propor uma crítica do conceito de "branquitude" em Portugal. O ensaio defende que a insistência em narrativas de excecionalismo lusotropical e colonial em Portugal forma um veículo de continuidade entre o regime "colonial-fascista" português e a democracia liberal implantada depois da revolução de 1974. O assassinato de Alcindo Monteiro (1995), o centro da intervenção fílmica e etnográfica de Dores, oferece um microcosmo destes paradoxos da autorrepresentação portuguesa. Ao tornar a raça num factor inexistente, o lusotropicalismo cumpre um papel instrumental para a sustentação de ficções da inocência colonial portuguesa. O branqueamento da história da revolução de 1974 é, aqui, particularmente significativo. Em busca de novas narrativas, o novo regime forjou a imagem de um país futuro através excisão de África das suas narrativas sobre o passado, assim confinando a história nacional ao estado-nação estritamente europeu. Esta amnésia deliberada tornou séculos de dominação colonial "esquecíveis," deste modo desnaturalizando o conceito de raça e a subalternização negra do imaginário do Portugal contemporâneo.

Palavras-chave: Branquitude; Raça em Portugal; Lusotropicalismo; História Negra; Negritude em Portugal.

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Patrícia Martins Marcos*

“Até que vê a ponte Salazar
Ali ao lado esquerdo
Ou 25 de Abril
Como agora é bom dizer
E percebe que mesmo
Que façam pontes sobre o rio
[...]
Ela é só mais uma preta
Só mais uma emigrante
Empregada da limpeza
Só mais uma que de longe vê a imponência imperial
Do tal terreiro do paço da Lisboa capital
[...]

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São os outros cacilheiros
 Outras pontes do povo
 Porque a grande sobre o rio
 Mesmo se o estado é novo
 Tem nome de um grande herói da história colonial
 E ela mais uma heroína que não interessa a Portugal”
 Capicua, *Mulher do Cacilheiro* (2014)

One summer, in the midst of my dissertation research, I began a fellowship supporting work in Portuguese archives for scholars based abroad. On the first day, as I arrived at my host institution, the liaison person rejoiced at the realization that I, too, was Portuguese. After an initial exchange of niceties and a long disquisition on her institution’s history, my interlocutor paused. “You know,” she noted with a weighty demeanor, “I am so happy to see you are Portuguese.” Looking me straight in the eye, she concluded with a somber countenance: “It is just very hard for foreigners to understand the universality of the Portuguese soul.”

Over the years, reactions to this vignette have ranged anywhere between disbelief, sarcasm, familiarity, or laughter. This array of responses was not entirely fortuitous. Awareness of the Luso-Brazilian ideology of *lusotropicalismo* became a reliable predictor of the response garnered.¹

1 A theory articulated by the Brazilian social scientist Gilberto Freyre, purported that Brazilian “racial democracy” was a historical byproduct of Portugal’s propensity to promote racial mixing between colonizer and colonized. Between the 1930s and 1980s, Freyre sought to counter US eugenicist theories of racial realism with an essentialized view of Portuguese culture premised on rurality, ecumenic Catholicism, and the purported anti-racism inherent to sexual intercourse between “masters and slaves.” Such theories were, of course, entirely oblivious to problems of power, sexual abuse, and the violence inherent to colonial domination. Rather, for Freyre, racial and cultural mixing, both emblematic of the Portuguese “unique way of existing in the world,” produced “racial democracy” in Brazil while also promising to concretize “new Brazils in Africa.” In the post-war period, the Portuguese dictatorship (1928-1974) used Freyre’s work to reinvent a colonial policy capable of enduring the decolonial tides pushing through Africa from the 1950s, through the wars of African Liberation of the 1960s and 1970s. Gilberto Freyre, *O Mundo Que o Português Criou* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1940); Gilberto Freyre, *Aventura e Rotina* (Lisbon: Livros do Brasil, 1953); Gilberto Freyre, *O Luso e o Trópico. Sugestões em torno dos Métodos Portugueses de Integração de Povos Autóctones e de Culturas Diferentes da Europeia num Complexo Novo de Civilização: o Luso-Tropical* (Lisbon: Comissão Executiva das Comemorações do V Centenário da Morte do Infante D. Henrique, 1961); Gilberto Freyre, *Portuguese Integration in the Tropics* (Lisbon:

Those unfamiliar with the Portuguese myth that racial admixture — and the historical existence of mixed-race people — emblemized a regime of colonial domination operating without an inkling of racial animus, reacted with irony to Portugal’s paradox of self-representation.² Conversely, those accustomed to Portuguese fables of white innocence, saw this episode as another instantiation of the universalist fable of benign colonialism.³ On either case, universalism lay at the heart of Portugal’s denialist complex of Black elision and “color blindness.”⁴ Miguel Dores’ documentary *Alcindo* (2021), the subject of this essay, not only exposed the conundrum of a soul *so universal* its exceptional nature can only be grasped by those born within its embrace; but in doing so, identified in Portugal’s presumptions of a racial vacuum, a line of narrative continuity between the “colonial-fascist” regime of the past and present-day liberal democracy.⁵

Realização Gráfica, 1961). For a discussion of Freyre’s importance to Portuguese colonial ideologies see: Cláudia Castelo, *“O Modo Português de Estar No Mundo”: O Luso-Tropicalismo e a Ideologia Colonial Portuguesa (1933-1961)* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1998); Cristiana Bastos, “Aventura e rotina: um livro de meio de percurso revisitado,” in *Gilberto Freyre. Novas Leituras do Outro Lado do Atlântico*, ed. Marcos Cardão and Cláudia Castelo (São Paulo: Edusp, 2015), 35-48; Cristiana Bastos, “Luso-Tropicalism Debunked, Again. Race, Racism, and Racialism in Three Portuguese-Speaking Societies,” in *Luso-Tropicalism and Its Discontents: The Making and Unmaking of Racial Exceptionalism*, ed. Warwick Anderson, Ricardo Roque and Ricardo Ventura Santos (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019), 243-264.

² Paradox of self-representation is drawn from Gloria Wekker’s analytic: “paradoxes of white Dutch self-representation.” It articulates incoherences such as that expressed by my interlocutor: a soul so universal only a Portuguese citizen could grasp its meaning and significance. By definition, the elevation of one nation as universal excludes all “non-nationals” from universality. See Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

³ For Gloria Wekker “white innocence” expresses an “unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and affects based on four hundred years of imperial rule [designating how it] plays a vital and acknowledged part in dominant meaning-making processes, including the making of the self, taking place in Dutch society.” It expresses how, despite enforcing regimes of racial subjection based on “gendered, sexualized, and classed meanings” the cultural archive of colonial domination was nonetheless “excised” from Europe/the Netherlands. As a “regime of truth,” white innocence enacts the “forgetting” of colonialism from Europe by presenting it as space “free from race.” Gloria Wekker, “On White Innocence,” in *Living with Ghosts: Legacies of Colonialism and Fascism*, ed. Nick Aikens, Jyoti Mistry and Corina Oprea (Copenhagen: L’Internationale, 2019), 49-68, https://www.internationaleonline.org/library/#living_with_ghosts_legacy_of_colonialism_and_fascism; Wekker, *White Innocence*.

⁴ Black elision refers to the erasure of Black political agency from the imaginary of the Portuguese body politic. See Patrícia Martins Marcos, “Blackness out of Place: Black Countervisuality in Portugal and Its Former Empire,” *Radical History Review* 2022, no. 144 (October 1, 2022): 106-130, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-9847830>.

⁵ The analytic “racial vacuum” expresses how race was presented as constituting neither a viable analytical tool nor a valid actor’s category in Portuguese national history. Despite centuries of imperial domination, colonial extraction, and millions of enslaved people, race remains unfit for examination. Both in the aftermath of Alcindo’s death and in subsequent decades, this ra-

The exceptional soul evoked by my interlocutor, as Dores shows in *Alcindo*, was hardly an epiphenomenon.⁶ Its roots were woven to a past of deep silences enforced by “the managers of history” — a phrase Michel-Rolph Trouillot used precisely in and about Lisbon.⁷ The documentary, which premiered in 2021 in Doclisboa, was named after Alcindo Monteiro (1967-1995). Alcindo was a 27-year-old Black man of Cape Verdean roots who, on June 10 of 1995, Portugal’s national day, was murdered by neo-Nazi skinheads at the heart of Lisbon’s busiest commercial and nightlife districts (the areas of Chiado and Bairro Alto).⁸ Throughout the film, Dores reveals how the aftermath of Alcindo’s murder exposed the willful denialism that informed decades of Portuguese fables of colonial bonhomie.⁹

On June 11, when the brutal nature of the lynching became public, Portuguese authorities rushed to classify the case as an isolated and abnormal incident. Alcindo’s death was seemingly at odds with the Portuguese “lusotropical” *modus vivendi* theorized by the Brazilian social scientist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1986).¹⁰ In reality, as Dores’ shows, racism (and its denial) was so normalized in postcolonial Portugal that

cial vacuum returned in the phrase “Portugal não é um país racista.” “Colonial-Fascismo” was a term used in Mozambique by anti-colonial forces, especially FRELIMO. For the origins of the term see Hélio Jaguaribe, “Brasil: estabilidade social pelo colonial-fascismo?,” in *Brasil: Tempos Modernos*, ed. Celso Furtado (Rio de Janeiro: Paz & Terra, 1968), 49-76.

6 *Alcindo*, Documentary (Maus da Fita, 2021), <https://vimeo.com/662242892>.

7 “In the few square miles of Belém, the managers of history had tried repeatedly to impose a narrative. Perhaps they had tried too much. For in the monumental efforts of the Portuguese state to catch up with a history now eclipsed by nostalgia, I saw the nostalgia of the entire West for a history that it never lived, its constant longing for a place that exists only in its mind.” Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 109-110.

8 Media coverage tends to emphasize the location of Bairro Alto because that was where the violence started. Prior to Alcindo’s death, the group of skinheads moved swiftly across the streets of Bairro Alto, mostly taking aim at Black people and an interracial couple. They then descended on a fairly empty Rua Garrett, in Chiado, where Alcindo Monteiro, who was walking alone, was lynched. There were 11 victims, overall.

9 June 10, Portugal’s national day, was first instituted in 1924, in the penultimate year of Portugal’s First Republic (1910-1926). It became a particularly important ceremony during Portugal’s dictatorship (1926-1974), as a day of exhortation of “the race” (“dia da raça”). It was marked by military parades celebrating the nation in its physical, cultural, and military prowess. Colonial bonhomie is an analytic alluding to the Portuguese myth of *lusotropicalismo*, i.e., the notion that because Portuguese colonialism was based on miscegenation, there was a peaceful and harmonious relationship between the races.

10 See footnote 1.

Alcindo's death became all too predictable. Forewarning signs appear in the contextual set-up to Alcindo's last day — used by Dores to expose why anti-Black racism could hide in plain sight.¹¹ Mapping the repeated rejections that racism could exist in the everyday lives of Black subjects onto the growth of neo-Nazi groups in the suburbs of Lisbon, Dores identifies white innocence's most defining incoherence: confusing negation for absence. How else could race continue to “not exist” even as public walls increasingly bore hate speech and anti-Black physical attacks grew? Whiteness was so indelibly identified as innocent that the rise in neo-Nazi assaults targeting queer and Black subjects across the 1980s seemingly warranted no public concern.

Framed by Dores' — a trained anthropologist — as “the ethnography of a long night,” *Alcindo* carefully peels the palimpsestic layers of contradictions sustaining the Portuguese fiction of white innocence.¹² Put bluntly, the idea that despite five centuries of colonial domination in Asia, Africa, and the Americas race and colonial violence left no imprimatur on the Portuguese national self-imaginary became a pillar of Portuguese democracy. Hence, any examination of Portugal's role in the transatlantic slave trade — through the enforcement of regimes of commodification, sexual violence, and forced labor — could be excised from the modern retelling of the national past.

The post-revolutionary impulse to exonerate and elide by confining history to the modern nation (thereby separating it from its centuries-old empire) is not unique to Portugal. Indeed, it is precisely this phenomenon that Gloria Wekker coins as “white innocence.” In her analysis of the Dutch empire, Wekker notes how the categorical disappearance of race rested on the removal of colonial spaces from the nation's history. This sleight of hand confined the past to Europe; and, as race vanished, the imperial nation could suddenly disappear.¹³ Along

11 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 45.

12 Miguel Fonseca Dores, “Caso Alcindo Monteiro. Etnografia audiovisual de uma noite longa” (Master's thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2022).16/06/1995 For the phrase “reservoir of knowledge and affects,” see Wekker, *White Innocence*, 2.

13 Wekker, *White Innocence*.

similar lines, scholars of Blackness in France also debated how republican notions of universal citizenship remain riddled with exclusions. Mame-Fatou Niang, for instance, explored how Blackness was placed outside of the universal, thus ultimately calling for the “democratization of universalism.”¹⁴ Tyler Stovall, in addition, used French universalism to write a larger Western, modern history of the identification between freedom and whiteness.¹⁵

The crux of Portugal’s fabrications of racial blindness start, as Dores insists, with the history of June 10 itself. The loaded past poured into the *Dia de Portugal* — or “the day of the race,” as former President of the Republic, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, and Portugal’s Prime Minister at the time of Alcindo’s death, once referred to the June 10 celebrations — is revealed in the film.¹⁶ Indeed, the fact that the “*dia da raça*” remained an operable phrase in the mind of Portugal’s President in 2008, more than three decades after the Portuguese revolution, exposed how the genealogy of June 10th lay steeped in nationalistic and colonial legacies.

More than a mere throwback to fascism, Dores recovers the moment when, following two turbulent years during Portugal’s post-revolutionary history (1974-1976), the country of the future was interwoven with that of the past through the recovery of June 10 celebrations.¹⁷ This syncretic amalgam lay the ground for the elevation of Portugal’s “color-blind” liberal democracy; a regime where both the category race and Blackness became incommensurate with the national imaginary of

14 Mame-Fatou Niang, *Identités françaises. Banlieues, féminités et universalisme* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Julien Suaudeau and Mame-Fatou Niang, *Universalisme*, Collection Le Mot est faible (Paris: Anamosa, 2022).

15 Tyler Edward Stovall, *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021). For other comparative literature, see Sue Peabody and Tyler Edward Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Edward E. Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Devin J. Vartija, *The Color of Equality: Race and Common Humanity in Enlightenment Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).2003

16 Cavaco Silva was Portugal’s Liberal Democrat Prime-Minister between 1985 and 1995, and President between 2006 and 2016.

17 Because of how June 10 was linked to Salazar’s dictatorship and more than a decade of wars against the self-determination of Portugal’s African colonies, all celebrations were suspended in 1974, the year of the revolution, until 1976.

the body politic. Dores symbolically stresses the liberal accommodation of the legacies of the past to the country of the future through the use of both black-and-white as well as color technologies in the 1977 broadcast of the first “democratic” June 10th national ceremony. Rhetorically effective, Dores relies on the simultaneous use of both technologies to mark how a country recently orphaned of its empire inscribed the “universal vocation of its people” into its democratic regime.¹⁸ Ultimately, Dores sees the return of June 10 as a compromise of a liberal democratic yet to come. The accommodation of the past to the present is signaled through the persistency of colonial narratives of *lusotropical* racial harmony “between black and white” and their democratic “reincorporation into the discourse of the nation” on June 10 on 1977.¹⁹

For Dores, the 1977 “reform” of the Day of Portugal marked Portugal’s revolutionary deluge. It signaled a desire to redeem the nation through a new self-image aligned with European liberal democracy. This yearning for the future meant moving past fascism. Hence, Portugal’s confrontation with the realities of life under colonial domination in Africa became verboten. Unwilling to let go of empire, Portugal’s elites opted to recapitulate old tropes about cultural *mestiçagem* and racial harmony. It seems that erasing the recent past demanded turning empire into a distant, early modern reality.²⁰

Yet, the lines of continuity between fascism and democracy remained. This point was made in an especially poignant manner through a montage linking Salazar’s 1963 speech on “overseas policy” to a vox populi repetition of the motto “Portugal is not a racist country,” common in the aftermath of Alcindo Monteiro’s murder.²¹ Salazar’s speech of August 12, 1963, was a noteworthy starting point. Delivered two years into the war opposing Angolan self-determination, Salazar reacted against the spread of anti-co-

18 Dores, *Alcindo*, min. 15:42.

19 Dores, *Alcindo*, loc. 14:03.

20 Dores, *Alcindo*, loc. 14:31.

21 António de Oliveira Salazar, “Declaração sobre política ultramarina,” August 12, 1963, APAT/Cx081/016, Museu da Presidência da República, <https://www.arquivo.museu.presidencia.pt/details?id=69347>; “Política ultramarina,” <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/politica-ultramarina/>, accessed February 3, 2023.

lonial armed resistance to Guinea-Bissau (1963) and Mozambique (1964) by stressing how “the multiracialism, which today begins to be cited and admitted by those [other countries and empires] who practically never accepted it [until now], can be said to be a Portuguese creation.”²²

Beyond the specific segment of the speech highlighted in *Alcindo*, Salazar’s full statements demonstrate the centrality of Freyre’s thesis of *lusotropicalismo* to the production of a mythology of colonial domination marked by the absence of racial discrimination.²³ The cornerstone of Freyre’s “Lusotropical civilization” and what he named the “unique Portuguese way of existing in the world” was defined by a capacity to surpass one’s “ethnic condition” (i.e., race) through culture. For, as Freyre put it, a “social [...] or cultural Portuguese could [...] be either yellow, dark, red, black, or white.”²⁴ Not by accident, these theories gained traction in Portugal and among Estado Novo elites precisely when Portugal faced a rising tide of anti-colonial resistance in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, *lusotropicalismo* served the instrumental purpose of upholding white innocence and legitimate colonial domination, from its very inception.

Powerfully, Dores exhibits the *lusotropical* line of rhetorical continuity by exposing the echoes of Salazar’s words in the statements of

22 In a speech drawing on Freyre’s words, Salazar spoke about Portugal as “a multiracial society [which] is not a juridical construction [positing] a conventional regime for minorities but, above all else, a way of life and a disposition of the soul [*estado de alma*] that can only [...] be maintained by a long tradition.” Portugal’s dictator then went on to describe the unique cultural traits that rendered the Portuguese civilizing mission into a benign and peaceful form of assimilation of Africa into the Portuguese Nation. Indeed, Salazar goes as far as accusing anti-colonial African resistance of “Black racism” (*racismo negro*) and a rejection of the “mixed societies — *luso-tropical* — historically established” by the Portuguese. He then concludes by paraphrasing Freyre by stressing that “the great difficulty in a multiracial society is not in its juridical constitution [...] but above all, it is its way of life and the disposition of its soul.” Concluding with a direct reference to Freyre’s work: “Such is our way of existing in the world, as it has already been affirmed by others.” Salazar, “Declaração sobre política ultramarina,” 8-9. See also *Alcindo*, loc. 18:00-18:13.

23 For more on this, see Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *The Colours of the Empire: Racialized Representations during Portuguese Colonialism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Cláudia Castelo, “‘Novos Brasis’ em África: desenvolvimento e colonialismo português tardio,” *Varia Historia* 30 (August 2014): 507-532, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-87752014000200009>; Castelo, *O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo*; Maria do Carmo Piçarra, “O império contra-ataca: a produção secreta de propaganda feita por estrangeiros para projecção internacional de ‘Portugal do Ultramar’,” *Media & Jornalismo* 16, no. 29 (2016): 44-59, https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-5462_29_3.

24 Freyre, *Portuguese Integration in the Tropics*, 46-47.

several figures of Portuguese democratic regime. From Mário Soares', president during Alcindo's murder, June 10th exultation of a long history of "*communion* with all the peoples and nations who speak Portuguese"; to members of parliament emphasizing a long and peaceful "tradition of *contact* with peoples of other races and cultures"; to a police spokesperson evocation of "a tradition of *hospitality* here [as well as] in other parts of the world"; to finally, a common citizen's confident affirmation that "racism has *ended* in Portugal."²⁵ While the innocence of these statements weaves a line of rhetorical continuity capable of transcending class — a variable often identified as more important than race for Portugal — the documentary effectively shows how the "colorblindness" of its agents remained unequivocally coded as white.

Given this genealogy, and once the transversal continuity from fascism to democracy was established, Dores noted how the re-integration of a day of national exultation stood at the onset of a deeper amnesia. Portuguese democracy proved unable to reinvent new imaginaries devoid of the old tropes of maritime bravery, adventurous seafaring, and a ecumenic brotherhood with all of humanity. "Colonial aphasia" hid in this mythology.²⁶ And the 1977 decision to reintroduce the *Dia de Portugal* proved just that. The imaginary of imperial exceptionalism formed a *habitus* so deeply ingrained in the collective psyche that not even a revolution could either extricate or alter this *lusotropical* mode of thought.

In the deluge of compromise, the universalist promise of the new, liberal democratic republic was assumed to naturally produce a society operating in a racial vacuum. Hence, despite its colonial past, seemingly no operable concept of racial difference existed in Portugal's colorblind republic. It was as if democracy and African self-determination alone could produce a clean

25 *Alcindo*, loc. 18:00-19:13.

26 "In aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge is the issue. It is not a matter of ignorance or absence. Aphasia is a dismembering, a difficulty speaking, a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things. Aphasia in its many forms describes a difficulty retrieving both conceptual and lexical vocabularies and, most important, a difficulty comprehending what is spoken." Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France," *Public Culture* 23, no. 1 (2011): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2010-018>.

slate by erasing five centuries of colonial domination. The (illusion) of a re-start—which, after all, represented a recapitulation of *lusotropical* fables—was poignantly captured in a speech by António Ramalho Eanes, Portugal’s President on June 10, 1977, and recovered in Dores’ documentary:

What distinguishes the Portuguese man from other men is his exceptional ability to turn the whole world into *his* land, and of [turning] any human being his into brother without ever losing the traits of his *Lusiad* root. Today, like yesterday, our grandeur lies in the *universal dimension of our people*. Wherever they live, [be it] in Europe, in Asia, Africa, in the Americas, or Oceania, the Portuguese have been, and always will be, protagonists of the History of their Fatherland [*pátria*].²⁷

Why, five decades after Eanes’ speech, I could still hear its unblemished echoes of Eanes’ self-assured countenance in my Lisbon interlocutor? Answering this question constitutes the crux of Dores’ agenda for *Alcindo*. After introducing the night of racist violence leading up to Alcindo Monteiro’s lynching, Dores’ explores the genealogy of June 10 — and its post-revolutionary return — thus offering the viewer an important point of historical contextualization.²⁸ On the surface, the reincorporation of the *Dia de Portugal* by a democratic regime searching for stability reflected the assuaging of the most radical revolutionary impulses of previous years. However, lingering deeper underneath the surface, this gesture emblemized the extent to which the new country remained unable to part with the *lusotropical* mythos assimilated into Portugal’s imperialist discourse in the 1950s and 60s.²⁹ Such *lusotropical* fables served the redemptive purpose of rendering centuries

27 Speech by President Ramalho Eanes (mandate: 1976-1986). Reproduced in Miguel Dores, *Alcindo*, loc. 14:41-15:17. emphasis my own.

28 Nationalist fervor was heightened by Sporting’s victory of the final football match of the Portuguese cup.

29 Through the work of Brazilian social scientist Gilberto Freyre and Adriano Moreira’s tenure as professor and director of the Institute of Overseas Studies (Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos) and Minister of the Overseas Colonies (1961-1962). See Castelo, *O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo*.

of racial discrimination and colonial violence into unthinkable facts.³⁰ This silence critically allowed the illusion of normalcy. Both because of the tense reassimilation of half a million settler colonists (“*retornados*”) who departed from Africa in the aftermath of decolonization, as well as the return to civilian life of an entire generation conscripted to fight in wars against African self-determination (1961-1974), silence and the sublimation of the recent past offered alluring solutions for the immediate present.

Hence, neither the revolution which toppled fascism and colonialism in 1974, nor the subsequent years of a turbulent “ongoing revolutionary process” — i.e., the moment when June 10 celebrations were suspended — had the power to alter Portugal’s commitment to a collective narrative of maritime bravery and colorblind, racial harmony.³¹ If anything, the influence of French republican universalism among figures of the Portuguese anti-fascist resistance (turned influential leaders in Portugal’s post-revolutionary political parties), left an indelible imprimatur upon the new nation.³² Republicanism offered a vocabulary capable of reinventing the myth of Portugal’s “universal vocation.”

The promise of a new political regime with the same racial politics and no more colonies created a convention of knowledge based on the mutual exclusion between republic and empire. Thus, the same ecumenical discourses about universal assimilation into the faith mobilized since the 1400s to legitimate Portuguese imperialism and justify African slavery, re-emerged in 1974 under a secular and democratic veneer. Yet, much like in France, where racial data is not collected on account of the purported colorblindness of the category “citizen,” the same can be said of Portugal. In the Portuguese case, however, the

³⁰ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 45.

³¹ Also known as PREC, *Processo Revolucionário em Curso*. One of the epitomes of PREC was the “hot summer of 1975” (*verão quente de 1975*), when forces aligned with the Soviet Union and forces wishing to reinstate a right-wing dictatorship fought for political primacy. The process ended in 1976, with the approval of the 1976 Portuguese Constitution.

³² Many leaders of what became the Socialist Party, such as Mário Soares or Manuel Alegre, for example, lived in exile in France.

equation between the mere recognition of race and the praxis of racial discrimination has come to hinge less on overtly republican terms and more on the persistency of a secularized *lusotropical* grammar. This key point of “national incoherence” is captured by Dores in *Alcindo’s* opening scenes. Through its celebration of the nation, the country of colorblind colonialism crafted the fiction of its very own “race-free” European “racial democracy.”³³ These incoherences both nourished Portugal’s paradoxes of racial exclusion and fostered their oblivion. Dores marks them in the way democratic Portugal demanded Afrodiasporic labor force for its modern projects of “development,” while enforcing border regimes and citizenship laws where Black disenfranchisement became par for the course.³⁴

The opening scene of the film marks the first contradiction of Portugal’s narrative of hospitality. Dores captures the Atlantic Ocean mythologized over centuries in the Portuguese imaginary but, importantly, inverts the trajectory of the journey. Instead of mariners departing on adventures, Dores brings into view the postcolonial migratory flux used by Alcindo to arrive in (postcolonial) Portugal. Such an upturn exposes the colonial logic of the “white possessive” to which *lusotropicalism* is calibrated: Europeans can freely move to Africa, but Africans find very different fortunes when journeying towards Europe.³⁵ Through the

33 The idea of racial democracy is most traditionally identified with Brazil. However, given Freyre’s role in defining the concept and his important role to late Portuguese colonialism, it is key to consider its reverberations in Portugal too. See also Paulina L. Alberto and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, “‘Racial Democracy’ and Racial Inclusion: Hemispheric Histories,” in *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 264-316; George Reid Andrews, “Brazilian Racial Democracy, 1900-90: An American Counterpoint,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 3 (July 1996): 483-507; Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, “Gilberto Freyre and Brazilian Self-Perception,” in *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-Speaking World*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Adrian Pearce (Oxford: Oxford University Press and British Academy, 2012), 113-132; João Alberto da Costa Pinto, “Gilberto Freyre e a intelligentsia salazarista em defesa do império colonial português (1951-1974),” *História* (São Paulo) 28, no. 1 (2009): 445-482, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-90742009000100016>; Alberto Luiz Schneider, “Iberismo e luso-tropicalismo na obra de Gilberto Freyre,” *História da Historiografia: International Journal of Theory and History of Historiography* 5, no. 10 (2012): 75-93, <https://doi.org/10.15848/hh.v0i10.438>.

34 Marcos, “Blackness out of Place.”

35 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

inversion of hegemonic imperialist narratives, Dores highlights the impossibility of Black subjecthood in a country whose self-image hinges on racial mixture despite its investment in keeping it tacitly white.

Black incommensurability with Europe and the postcolonial nation-state was visible in the 1970s and 80s. As the story of the 1974 revolution congealed around the triumph of democracy and European civilization, African resistance was erased through a recentering of the narrative of “reconquered freedom” became centered on the “April Captains.”³⁶ This retelling was riddled with silences. The desire to re-define Portugal as a European nation-state informed a commitment to the teleology of liberal democracy — which, in turn, erased the vital role that anti-colonial African resistance played in the struggle against fascism during the 1960s and 70s. This whitening of democracy, both reinforced the illusion of *lusotropical* innocence and extricated African agency from the realm of Eurocentric civilization.³⁷ As a consequence, democracy became a story for the consumption of a European-facing Portugal; the “colonial wars” an African problem; Blackness an unnatural presence; and race a reality entirely foreign to either the past or present of the Portuguese nation-state.

This great pact of silence, as Dores shows, endures through the fantasy of white innocence that culminated in Alcindo Monteiro’s bludgeoning in 1995. Dores documents how the perpetuation of *lusotropical* tropes allowed Portuguese authorities to ignore the rise of “racialist” neo-Nazi groups in the Lisbon suburbs, while police forces and gov-

36 For a discussion of the problem of Black incommensurability with the Portuguese national imaginary of the liberal, democratic citizen, see Martins Marcos, “Blackness out of Place.” April Captains, or *Capitães de Abril*, refers to the field rank officials of the Portuguese army who led the coup in Lisbon against the Estado Novo regime on April 25, 1974. The centering of these mid-rank officials, however, tends to elide the role of African anti-colonial resistance and the enduring wars of African self-determination in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau (1961-1974).

37 In part, because Portugal struggled to assimilate a large contingent of “returnees” (*retornados*, i.e., former settler colonists), in the aftermath of African decolonization. On the other, the physical and mental wounds endured by a generation conscripted to fight for the regime in Africa and who had since returned home, made the war and fascism a difficult topic for public debate. The trauma elicited by both factors combined, produced an imperative of silence. Christoph Kalter, *Postcolonial People: The Return from Africa and the Remaking of Portugal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Ângela Campos, *An Oral History of the Portuguese Colonial War: Conscripted Generation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

ernment authorities assured the public that real danger lay in “black gangsterism.” Here, Dores recovers the words of Dias Loureiro, who was Minister of Internal Affairs at the time of Alcindo’s death. In a televised interview, this key cabinet member in a government led by Cavaco Silva linked the problem of public insecurity to Portugal’s asylum legislation and the need to “contain” the growth of Lisbon’s “peripheries.”³⁸ Unlike the United States, where words like “inner cities” and “urban” act as metonyms for Black, the term “periphery” or “suburb” produces the same effect in Portugal. As Dores stresses in his narration of the interview, without realizing, Loureiro offered “the best definition of racialism.” By attaching the problem of public insecurity to the rise of drug consumption in the peripheries, Loureiro argued more legislation targeting migratory fluxes and controlling the growth of suburban areas — both identified with the presence of Black and Afrodiasporic people.³⁹ To Loureiro’s mind, danger came only from without and never from within. In his view, Blackness inherently marked the threat of a foreign presence while whiteness was only legible as innocent.

It was in this contradiction between the unfounded fear of “black gangsterism” and Portugal’s affair with the safety of its white spaces (i.e., its borders and city centers), that Alcindo’s death was explained as an abnormality by authorities and politicians alike. Dores ethnographic sensibility comes to fruition in this section of the documentary, as exemplified in his reconstruction of the day of the murder through a series of simultaneous events. While on morning of the murder Alcindo Monteiro asked his mother to make *cachupa*, a traditional Cape Verdean dish, for Sunday meal; a crowd of veterans from the Portuguese wars against African self-determination gathered by the “Monument to Overseas Combatants.” The gathering evoked the military genealogy of June 10 as a day of nationalist and fascist elation. General Kaúlza de Arriaga, the military handmaiden behind operation Gordian Knot (1970) and a man responsible for countless deaths in Mozambique, was one of its protagonists.

38 *Alcindo*, loc. 43:04.

39 *Alcindo*, loc. 24:08-24:36.

In recovering this moment, Dores locates the complex of white innocence at the heart of Portuguese delusions of racial blindness in the respectability endowed to war crimes and their manufacturers. For those still lamenting the lost empire — those, that is, who were not conscripted but willingly fought to uphold the colonial domination of Africans — June 10 of 1995 elicited both indignant rage and nostalgia. Accompanied by other high-ranking officers, Arriaga waxed poetic about the “colonial war.” Longing for the “glorious empire” they pursued until the very end, Arriaga made veiled accusations of treason against the then President of the Portuguese Republic, Mário Soares. Soares, who was founder of the Socialist Party, had been an active anti-fascist resistant and lived exiled in Paris at the time of the revolution — for, among other reasons, refusing to fight in the wars in Africa. On the day of Alcindo’s death, one part of the country continued to cry out for empire with great fanfare and naturalized impunity.

The willingness to normalize imperial nostalgia and to grant respectability to figures from within Salazar’s inner circle, was integral to democratic Portugal. In exposing these scenes, Dores also reveals the hubris of liberal democracy.⁴⁰ Emphasis on democratic moderation and pluralism is seen by Dores both as symptom and cause. Namely, it explains why white citizens and Portugal’s political elites so easily turned a blind eye to anti-Black violence. By framing racist speech as a problem of difference of opinion — one to be naturally expected in a pluralistic society — threats against the lives of Portuguese Afrodescendants

40 In 2022, this normalization and reintegration became especially visible when Adriano Moreira (1922-2022), who was Salazar’s Minister of Overseas Affairs (1961-1962), died. Moreira, who re-opened the prisoner camp of Tarrafal where political prisoners were tortured, remained an adamant defender of *lusotropicalismo* until the very end of his life. He was also minister during the beginning of the war between Portugal and Angolan forces. Upon his death, Moreira was celebrated as a key figure to Portuguese democracy. See, for example Lusa, “Adriano Moreira, o político da história democrática com a maior longevidade,” *Público*, September 5, 2022, <https://www.publico.pt/2022/09/05/politica/noticia/adriano-moreira-politico-historia-democratica-maior-longevidade-2019406>. For recent writings by Adriano Moreira where he continues to express a *lusotropical* line of thought see: Adriano Moreira, “A lenta marcha para a igualdade,” in *Senhores e Escravos nas Sociedades Ibero-Atlânticas*, ed. Maria do Rosário Pimentel and Maria do Rosário Monteiro (Lisbon: CHAM and Húmus, 2019), 17.24, <https://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/89763>; Adriano Moreira, *A Espuma do Tempo: Memórias do Tempo de Vésperas* (Coimbra: Almedina, 2009).

become either normal or altogether unimportant. Such a framing posits hate speech as natural to democratic life. By the same token racism and anti-racism appear as symmetrical stances; two sides of the same coin.

This complex of *lusotropical* white innocence was fully visible in 2019, in an incident mentioned by anti-racist activist Lúcia Furtado. Mário Machado, one of the skinheads sentenced to prison for his involvement in the assassination of Alcindo Monteiro, featured as guest in Portugal's top rated morning show.⁴¹ The host, Manuel Luís Goucha, not only neglected to inform his audience of Monteiro's long history of racial violence (never naming Alcindo), but invited the neo-Nazi to comment on the prompt: do "we need a new Salazar" in Portugal? Faced with public critiques, Goucha exhibited a parade of arguments reminiscent of 1995, treating anti-Black hate speech as a normal by-product of a pluralist democracy and decrying the dangers of "political correctness" against freedom of speech.⁴²

Building on this point, Dores shows how how, following Alcindo's death, Portugal sunk in a paranoid preoccupation with "anti-white racism." This point is illustrated in the film by the way journalists rushed to Lisbon's "peripheries" to record exoticizing accounts of Black life. In one particular case, a journalist tellingly rephrases a suggestion made by one young Black interviewee. The journalist frames the call for better public infrastructures to practice sports, organize social gatherings, and create spaces that "promote creativity" mentioned by the Black youth as a deterrent against Black "invasion." Without flinching, the young man calmly explained: "We don't invade; we are not invaders; those [spaces]

41 Recently, Mário Machado was found to have standing in a defamation suit against the anti-racist activist Mamadou Ba. Ba was made defendant in trial for stating that Machado "was one of the main figures of Alcindo Monteiro's assassination." This statement was factually corroborated by Machado's conviction as an accessory to the murder. Ana Naomi de Sousa, "Anti-Racist Faces Trial for Defaming Neo-Nazi in Portugal," *Aljazeera*, December 21, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/12/21/anti-racist-faces-trial-for-defaming-neo-nazi-in-portugal>.

42 Inês Chaíça, "Manuel Luís Goucha: 'Não branqueio ditaduras nem ditadores, mas o politicamente correcto é perigoso'," *Público*, January 4, 2019, <https://www.publico.pt/2019/01/04/sociedade/noticia/goucha-1856620>, accessed February 2, 2023; "Racismo: ERC investiga acusações a programa de Goucha," *Público*, January 3, 2019, <https://www.publico.pt/2019/01/03/sociedade/noticia/racismo-erc-investiga-acusacoes-programa-goucha-1856581>, accessed February 2, 2023.

are public and we go there because the Earth is free.”⁴³ Through a slip of the tongue, the journalist subliminally exposed white Portugal’s limited imaginaries for Black life.⁴⁴ Invasion marked foreignness.

Throughout the film, Dores demonstrates a steadfast commitment to elaborating on his central thesis: “The denial of violence is the very flesh of the Portuguese colonial project.”⁴⁵ Over and over, the case for denial — which I equated with a commitment to white innocence — is reiterated through the portrayal of anti-Black, white supremacist violence as abnormal, unnatural, and as a mere isolated incident. Rejecting racism, an attitude tied to the denial of colonial violence and concretized in the silence surrounding Portugal’s role in the transatlantic slave trade, remains a knee-jerk reflex of the present. For this reason, Dores ties the political silence surrounding Alcindo’s death for 25 years, to the murders Bruno Candé (2020) and Luís Giovanni (2020).⁴⁶ Dores recounts how the first day of filming, in January of 2020, coincided with a demonstration protesting the murder of 21-year-old Cape Verdean student Luís Giovanni. After listing the name of other victims of racial hatred in Portugal, Dores admits that such “a documentary about memory could only become a document about the present.” With this phrase, Dores marks his political commitment. *Alcindo* excavates the depths of structural racism in Portugal, but, most importantly, it retells how denying its existence constitutes Portugal’s most veritable “way of life.”

In extremis, centuries of tacitly inflicted racial hierarchies became so normal that in the 1990s, Portugal’s white supremacist groups were perceived with apathy while Black people were presented as threats.⁴⁷

43 *Alcindo*, loc. 43:40-44:18.

44 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Martins Marcos, “Blackness out of Place.”

45 *Alcindo*, loc. 17:56.

46 Bruno Candé was murdered with four gunshots to the chest by a veteran of the Portuguese “colonial war.” Luís Giovanni was lynched by five young men. On both instances, the police rejected any racial motivation despite the overt anti-Black language used by the perpetrators.

47 This incoherence was immediately visible on June 10 of 1995, the day of Alcindo’s murder. Bolstered by Sporting of Lisbon’s victory in the final match of the Portuguese Cup in soccer,

While whiteness was equated the absence of race itself, — the embodiment of a default setting of virtue and belonging — Blackness marked the threat of foreign “contagion” through its very existence. Hence, Black subjecthood had to either be extricated through border regimes or exterminated through assimilation. In either case, it was vital to ensure a steady access to Afrodiasporic labor force, thereby perpetuating Black subalternization through the vectors of race, class, and gender. In modern Portugal (both pre- and post-revolutionary), the tokenization of Blackness in *lusotropical* discourses cohered precisely with the political disenfranchisement of Afrodescendants via their ineligibility for citizenship. Herein lays Portugal’s nexus of white innocence and Black erasure. In 2023 —much like in 1963, 1977, or 1995 — hegemonic views of Portugal’s collective identity proved unable to transcend the imaginary of its once “glorious empire.” For that reason, political power and its representatives remain unable to see the struggles of Black, Afrodescendant and Afrodiasporic citizens as problems of collective life. For them the nation meant something (and someone) altogether different. Herein, too, lies the key to Portugal’s lusotropical paradox. Models of uniform assimilation inevitably negate the promise of equality and universal belonging. Instead of endorsing the dillution of all into one; concretizing the promise of democracy entails, as shown in *Alcindo*, intolerance towards the intolerant and a readiness to let go of the Portuguese soul.

the violent rampage that culminated in Alcindo’s death was led by a group of neo-Nazis with ties to the club’s hooligan ultras, Juve Leo. Mário Machado, one of the men convicted in the case of Alcindo’s murder, has since been released and ran in 2018 to become president of Juve Leo, something he announced after “a patriotic lunch.” Liliana Borges, “Mário Machado quer presidir à Juve Leo. E diz que vai anunciar a sua candidatura num clube... que desmente,” *Público*, June 7, 2018, <https://www.publico.pt/2018/06/07/desporto/noticia/clube-escolhido-por-mario-machado-para-candidatura-a-juve-leo-desmente-evento-1833630>.

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