FERRAZ DE MATOS, Patricia. — *The Colours of the Empire: Racialized Representations During Portuguese Colonialism*

Cheryl Mei-ting Schmitz

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- 1 At Portugal dos Pequenitos, a children's park built in 1940 that continues to welcome visitors every year, young guests can receive an education in the history of the Portuguese nation, including its relationship with territories abroad. A section of the park, originally designated "Overseas Portugal," has been re-named "Portuguese-Speaking Countries" but vestiges of a specifically Portuguese version of imperialism remain. A square at the center of the section features a bust of the park's founder, a supporter of the authoritarian Estado Novo, flanked by six large sculptures of nude African men. Visitors are free to enter pavilions celebrating each of the former (and some current) Portuguese territories—Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guiné-Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe, India, Macao, and the Azores and Madeira. Inside the pavilion for Angola, for example, one might read a text describing how in the fifteenth century, Diogo Cão "met and negotiated with the Black king of Kongo, and brought the latter's son to Portugal, where King João II had him baptized and educated. Thus began, peacefully, the civilizing action of the Portuguese in Angola—our biggest overseas province" (p. 254).

- 2 Through such a description, one catches a glimpse of some of the major ideological features of Portuguese colonialism. Indeed, for English-language readers, Patrícia Ferraz de Matos' study of racial science and colonial discourse in twentieth-century Portugal provides an important window onto a topic that has received little attention in the non-lusophone world. The book begins with an introduction and a brief chapter outlining the history of European racial ideas, from possible origins in Antiquity, through the Enlightenment, and the subsequent development of modern racial science. References to early Portuguese encounters with civilizational "others" are included in this chapter, and anthropologists are implicated in both the propagation of evolutionary racial theories and, later, counter-theories of environmental determinism and cultural relativism. These themes are developed further in the second chapter, which concentrates on how colonization was represented in Portugal from the late nineteenth century on. This chapter examines both the work of professional anthropologists, attempting to classify and characterize native populations, and that of politicians, filmmakers, and educators who justified and praised Portuguese colonial projects. The third chapter focuses on public exhibitions in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These were designed to showcase European and North American industrial achievement while displaying specimens of the non-Western world as exotic curiosities. In Portugal under the Estado Novo, such exhibitions sometimes featured living people from the colonies, accompanied by a discourse that emphasized the benefits of Portuguese civilizing efforts, as well as the natives' innate capacity for physical labor (p. 161).
- 3 Ferraz de Matos highlights some important contradictions at the core of Portuguese colonial endeavors. She provides many examples of how colonial populations were classified into fixed racial categories that could be ordered hierarchically according to level of civilization. At the same time that supposed civilizational differences were reified according to "scientific" rubrics of race, however, colonial discourse emphasized the possibility of "native" assimilation to Portuguese-ness. Indeed, the idea that Portugal and its overseas territories constituted "a single, indivisible whole" (p. 45) was a core principle of Portuguese colonialism, one that in later years was deployed to argue that Portugal's overseas interventions were different from those of other European powers. Thus, at an Imperial Conference in 1933, attended by governors of each of the colonial territories, Minister of the Colonies Armindo Monteiro could claim "the nation is the same in every part of the world," that "sons of the same flock, emerging from the same history, covered by the same flag," coexisted with "no antagonism." At the same time, he said, Africans had "limited horizons" and required European interventions to "elevate" their lives "to increasingly high levels of moral and material necessity" (pp. 113-114). This contradictory principle was extended even as Portugal faced increasing criticism of its colonial policies after World War II. In the 1950s, the process of civilization, euphemized as "assimilation," was de-emphasized in favor of a notion of "integration," and a nineteenth-century term, "overseas provinces," was reinstated in place of the, by then unfashionable, "colonies" (p. 145). Departing from evolutionary racial science, the Estado Novo regime began to rely on theories of an exceptional Portuguese propensity for multiculturalism and race mixture.
- 4 A major aim of the author seems to be to counter persistent ideas of Portuguese exceptionalism by showing how racial ideas were fundamental to colonial projects and

how inequalities were pervasive, despite discourses of inclusiveness. Ferraz de Matos repeatedly emphasizes how colonization under Portugal was not “different” from that of other European powers. She describes the stubbornness with which Portuguese colonial anthropologists held onto rigid racial taxonomies, even after their North American counterparts had discarded such frameworks (p. 137). This troubles any myth of Portuguese settlers as benevolent colonizers willing to mix, socially and sexually, with the native population. She also shows how natives of the colonies were consistently assessed in terms of their potential for labor. Viewed primarily in terms of physical, rather than cultural, characteristics, natives of the colonies were considered less as compatriots than as raw material for agricultural production and industrial development (p. 161).

- 5 Ferraz de Matos effectively exposes the hypocrisy of Portuguese colonial administrators and proponents of racial science; however, because the book is organized topically, there is much overlap in chronology between the chapters, and it becomes difficult to trace changes over time. Moreover, perhaps because the book has been translated from Portuguese, certain unexplained references might cause confusion for readers unfamiliar with Portuguese history or politics. One would have to do additional research to understand Gilberto Freyre’s theory of “Luso-tropicalism,” for example, or the Salazarist slogan, “proudly alone,” as a description of Portugal under the Estado Novo. Nonetheless, *The Colors of the Empire* contains a wealth of information; much of the material discussed would merit book-length treatment to develop all of the ramifications. Further, an analysis of the experiences and treatment of human beings brought from the colonies to serve in exhibitions in Portugal, for instance, would be a fascinating addition to this story of colonial encounter. The broader significance of this study could be drawn out by connecting the material provided to theoretical and ethnographic treatments of race and colonialism in other contexts. Further comparison with analogous phenomena under the British or French empires, or dialogue with theories of race developed in the North American context, could serve to elucidate the uniqueness of the Portuguese case. In this way, we might see how race and inequality were constituted differently under the specific circumstances of twentieth-century Portugal, not because Portuguese colonialism was less evil than others’, but because it involved a particular configuration of ideas and practices we might productively contrast against our own. Rather than confirming conclusions that have already been made about racism and colonialism in other contexts, we could then consider how this case forces us to think about empire and the construction of human difference in a new way. For those dedicated to comparative and theoretical work on colonialism and racial thinking, this book leaves us with such a task.