

Female landscapes: the presence of women in the photographs and images of the Portuguese colonial exhibitions

Patrícia Ferraz de Matos

Universidade de Lisboa, Instituto de Ciências Sociais

patricia_matos@ics.ulisboa.pt

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7322-3756>

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to reflect on the presence of colonized women in photographs and other representations, such as drawings, posters, postcards, exhibition catalogues, newspapers and magazines, which were disseminated in the context of the Portuguese colonial expositions, and in exhibition spaces conceived by the Portuguese with a colonial component. Generally speaking, the exhibitions sought to put forward the progress, taking into account land, rail and sea transport, but also roads, communications, trade, industry, arts, architecture, culture, and the most recent advances in science and medicine. The exhibitions were also places where the logic of colonial models was staged, showing a clear relationship between colonial domination and gender representation. The research includes several materials produced throughout the 1930s (a fertile period regarding the Portuguese participation in this kind of international events) intended to publicize these exhibitions or serve as a complement

to them. These materials may include art works or merely propagandistic works, or works that combine both components. The analysis will include materials associated with several exhibitions between 1931 and 1940, such as the International Colonial Exhibition of Paris (1931), the Lisbon Industrial Exhibition (1932), the Portuguese Colonial Exhibition in Porto (1934), the Exhibition of the Portuguese World in Lisbon (1940), and the Portugal of the Little Ones (*Portugal dos Pequenitos*) in Coimbra (1940). The contexts in which women appear and the way they are represented — as active beings (performing tasks), as contemplative beings (as in natural landscapes) or as objects of sexual desire, revealing the context of power (legislative, administrative, male and colonial) in which the images and the representations were produced — will be analyzed.

Keywords: women; photographs; images; Portuguese colonial exhibitions.

Introduction

My interest in analyzing the presence of women in photographs and images related to the Portuguese colonial exhibitions is not recent. However, in this article I systematize some of the information on this subject that I have gathered in recent years¹. The pertinence of coming back to this subject arose in 2019 when I was invited to participate in a joint anthology². The subject I was asked to write about, in two entries of this anthology, was the “Exhibition-Fair” of Angola, in Luanda, August 1938, based on two sources — the *Álbum Comemorativo da Exposição*³ and the official catalogue *Exposição-Feira de Angola*⁴. Since I was allowed only few words for each entry, I tried to be brief and made a global analysis of the images from both sources⁵.

The catalogue *Exposição-Feira de Angola* is a volume with a cardboard front cover presenting warm-coloured graphics — two shades of orange balanced with white and black details (Fig. 1). The cover shows an outline of a woman’s figure, stylized, slender, her arms stretched up and, on top, the symbol of the

¹ The first version of this text was written at the invitation of Filomena Serra (FCSH, NOVA University of Lisbon) to be presented at the colloquium *Quando a Fotografia Impressa faz a História* (When Printed Photography Makes History), as part of the project *Fotografia Impressa: Imagem e Propaganda em Portugal (1934-1974)* (Printed Photography: Image and Propaganda in Portugal [1934-1974]) [FCT PTDC/CPC-HAT/4533/2014], coordinated by Filomena Serra, which took place on May 21, 2019 at the National Library in Lisbon. A later version, revised and translated into English, was presented at the panel “World Fairs, Exhibitions, and Anthropology: Revisiting Contexts of Post/Colonialism” (of the Europeanist Network of the EASA – European Association of Social Anthropologists), organized by Hande A. Birkalan-Gedik (Goethe Universität), Patrícia Ferraz de Matos (Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa), and Andrés Barrera-González (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), for the 16th EASA Biennial Conference (“New anthropological horizons in and beyond Europe”), which took place between 21 and 24 July 2020 online. The questions and suggestions made to me on both occasions were important in improving my text. On the phenomenon of world fairs, see: Patrícia Ferraz de Matos; Hande Birkalan-Gedik; Andrés Barrera-González and Pegi Vail, *World Fairs* (Special Issue), *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 31, 2 (2022), p. 1-132.

² Filomena Serra (ed.), *Fotografia Impressa e Propaganda em Portugal no Estado Novo / Printed Photography and Propaganda in the Portuguese Estado Novo*, Gijón, Muga, 2021.

³ Portugal, *Álbum Comemorativo da Exposição – Feira de Angola*, Luanda, [s.n.], 1938.

⁴ *Exposição-Feira de Angola: Catálogo*, Luanda, Imprensa Nacional de Angola, 1939.

⁵ Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Commemorative Album of the Angola Exhibition-Fair” in Filomena Serra (ed.), *Fotografia Impressa e Propaganda em Portugal no Estado Novo / Printed Photography and Propaganda in the Portuguese Estado Novo*, Gijón, Muga, 2021, p. 321; Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Angola Exhibition-Fair: Official Catalogue” in Filomena Serra (ed.), *Fotografia Impressa e Propaganda em Portugal no Estado Novo / Printed Photography and Propaganda in the Portuguese Estado Novo*, Gijón, Muga, 2021, p. 352.

Portuguese shield (the *quinas*). Her nudity, her breasts, the undulating line of her head (suggesting curly hair), the ring-shaped earring, and bracelets on her arms and legs, suggest a young Angolan woman.



Fig. 1 – Cover of *Exposição-Feira de Angola: Catálogo Oficial* (Luanda, Imprensa Nacional de Angola, 1939).

The youth and the vigour implied in the cover drawing are suggested throughout the catalogue. It evokes the idea that anything planted in young soil would be able to germinate. In fact, the effective colonization of Angola, with pacification campaigns at least until the late 1930s, was recent. It explains the expression “new era of rejuvenation” used by the director of the exhibition Frederico Bagoro Sequeira (1891-1964)⁶. The investment had been great. It was not random that, Angola, and also Mozambique, were considered settlement colonies, being therefore the destination of a large part of Portuguese emigrants⁷ and the propaganda had an important role in encouraging the Portuguese to go to the African colonies instead of going to Brazil⁸.

⁶ Frederico Bagoro Sequeira in *Exposição Feira de Angola: Catálogo*, Luanda, Imprensa Nacional de Angola, 1939, p. 13.

⁷ Cláudia Castelo, *Passagens para África: O Povoamento de Angola e Moçambique com Naturais da Metrópole (1920-1974)*, Porto, Afrontamento, 2007.

⁸ Valentim Alexandre, *Velho Brasil, Novas Áfricas: Portugal e o Império (1808-1975)*, Porto, Afrontamento, 2000. Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Entre el Mito y la Realidad: Desplazamientos

The images in this catalogue, in black and white, were printed on glossy photographic paper and are presented throughout the volume, interspersed with the text. They show the persons in charge of the exhibition (all men), landscapes (rivers, waterfalls and farms); and human figures, mainly men, on plantations and in diamond mines. In these photographs only two women appear, one in the province of Malange, with the caption “*Quioca* woman carrying corn”⁹, and another with the caption “*Quioca* woman”¹⁰, with bare breasts, taking two children with her, one about three years old, standing, and another on her back.

Therefore, despite the potential of the feminine figure revealed on the cover, the inside of the catalogue is inhabited by men — the organizers of the exhibition, political, business, religious and state representatives, giving the impression that the initiative was organized by men and for men with whom they shared ideas and will. The women who cooperated in the exhibition must have had a subordinate and servile role; the ones that visited it played a secondary role as observers/onlookers; and the ones depicted in the photographs are associated with agricultural and maternal tasks, as in similar events.

The presence of women was what most caught my attention and provided the reason to reflect on this subject. It is not actually a presence, but mainly an absence. When they are not absent, they occupy a subordinate place, even in spaces dominated by men. I then set out to analyze the images (I say images because, as well as photographs, I considered posters and drawings) that include women in the context of the Portuguese colonial exhibitions. This definition included those that were part of the exhibitions specifically dedicated to the colonial theme and the exhibitions with a non-colonial general subject, but where the colonial¹¹ component was included.

In the first section of the article, I will contextualize the phenomenon of international exhibitions. In the following section I will present and analyze several examples of representations of women in materials associated with various exhibitions between 1931 and 1940, such as the International Colonial Exhibition of Paris (1931), the Lisbon Industrial Exhibition (1932), the Portuguese Colonial Exhibition in Porto (1934), the Exhibition of the Portuguese World in Lisbon (1940), and the Portugal of the Little Ones (*Portugal dos*

de Personas, Propaganda de Estado y Imaginación del Imperio Colonial Portugués”, *Studia Africana*, 24 (2013), p. 11-28.

⁹ *Exposição-Feira de Angola...*, cit., p. 64-65.

¹⁰ *Exposição-Feira de Angola...*, cit., p. 67.

¹¹ On photography produced and inspired in the colonial field in the Portuguese case, see: Filipa Lowndes Vicente and Afonso Dias Ramos (eds), *Photography in Portuguese Colonial Africa (1860-1975)*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

Pequenitos) in Coimbra (1940). At the end, I make a systematization of what was presented, the contradictions that the materials reveal and the challenges that these images continue to pose.

Exhibitions: history and context

As written in the catalogue *300 Anos do Cartaz em Portugal (Three Hundred Years of the Poster in Portugal)*:

An exhibition is, in a way, a theatre. Like a theatre, a place, a physical space limited within the physical space; (...) a social place and, mainly, (...), a place for social behaviour, i.e., which structures a relationship between two poles, that which exhibits itself and that which observes the one exhibited¹².

From the second half of the nineteenth century, the industrial world started to be exhibited and made known in the metropolises of the North Atlantic. Most of these exhibitions aimed at celebrating a special moment, historical or not, showing the latest industrial and technological innovations, for example. They were held in temporary, purpose-built spaces, and did not last more than six months. Universal exhibitions or world fairs were events that sought to give an account of what was considered the modern world, in terms of development and technology, architecture and arts, but also imperialism (including representations of some territories then colonized) and their systems of differentiation and hierarchy. There people could see raw materials from the colonies, archaeological artefacts, and the latest architectural styles or innovations, as well as arts in general. On every level, the idea was to emphasize progress, encompassing land, rail, maritime, and road transportation, communication, trade, industry, arts, architecture, culture, science and medicine.

The exhibitions were turned into spaces where the logic of colonial models was staged, and the so-called tribes were put on display — the “uses and customs” of those “tribes”. In this process, “cultures” were organized and exhibited as if they could be placed on an evolutionary scale. On that scale, which went from the savage to the civilized state, we would see examples of the least black to the blackest in distant Africa, and also of the yellow or almost white people from Asia. The evolutionary ideas, often associated with a scale

¹² Portugal, *300 Anos do Cartaz em Portugal*, Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional, 1975, p. 9.

based on skin colour (chromatic spectrum), were reproduced in great exhibitions, in anthropological theory¹³ and in the popular conscience.

The practices connected to the great fairs, whether or not associated with religious festivities, originates from at least as far back as the Middle Ages. However, it is normally accepted that this phenomenon, which expanded to several metropolises, began with the 1851 International Exhibition held in the city of London at the Crystal Palace, designed by architect Joseph Paxton (1803-1865) for the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. This was followed by the 1853 Crystal Palace Fair in New York and then several others in the cities mentioned above and in Paris, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Buffalo, San Francisco, Seattle, Atlanta, New Orleans, Nashville and many others. This phenomenon, which lasted until the post-war period (1945), included the cooperation of scientists, politicians, individuals connected to the Church, entrepreneurs/industry related persons, and other prominent figures. Some exhibitions — designated as “colonial” — had specific goals regarding the publicity of empires (both for natural and human resources). However, in other non-specifically colonial fairs, we find elements related to colonization, as well as the exploration of ideas on how to take civilization to other peoples and take economic advantage of the resources of remote places¹⁴.

The spaces where these exhibitions were held, such as zoos or botanic gardens, circuses and temporary or permanent exhibitions, can be compared to places of popular entertainment. They were addressed to a broad audience, not necessarily specialized, and held by missionary societies or natural history museums, in which other “races” and/or other species were represented¹⁵. These events made it possible to analyze several aspects, one of which is precisely gender: the representation, and the participation of women — as passive or active agents.

In the book edited by T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, which started from a feminist perspective, gender is analyzed as an instrument of power and resistance, a category for thinking about the construction of national and

¹³ Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *Anthropology, Nationalism and Colonialism: Mendes Correia and the Porto School of Anthropology*, Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books, 2023.

¹⁴ John Allwood, *The Great Exhibitions*, London, Studio Vista, 1977. Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Exhibiting the Empire, Imagining the Nation: Representations of the Colonies and the Overseas Portuguese in the Great Exhibitions” in Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *The Colours of the Empire: Racialized representations during Portuguese Colonialism*, Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books, 2013, p. 149-236. Patrícia Ferraz de Matos; Hande Birkalan-Gedik; Andrés Barrera-González and Pegi Vail, “World Fairs” (Special Issue), *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 31, 2 (2022), p. 1-132.

¹⁵ Pascal Blanchard; Stéphane Blanchoin; Nicolas Bancel; Gilles Boëtsch and Hubert Gerbeau (eds), *L’Autre et Nous: “Scènes et Types”*, Paris, Syros, 1995.

colonial identities. Gender is also the starting point for analyzing “the women’s activism, and the visual and spatial dimensions of fairgoers’ experience of fairs”¹⁶. Contributors to this book “critically analyze the significance of women as planners and visitors, organizers and administrators, performers and workers, guides, journalists, and pundits”¹⁷. This focus is different from mine in this article. Although regarding Portuguese participation in international events or events organized in Portugal, the organizers are mostly (not to say all) men and White, with women playing a mostly passive role — as visitors or as participants in the events, as happened with the women who came from the colonies, subject to the gaze of visitors (male and female) – there were also women present as interpreters and translators, assistants or journalists. Some examples of the presence of women in these events, as artists, writers, educators, artisans and workers, even without figuring among the organizers, have been analyzed in other works¹⁸. However, my analysis here is focused on colonized women represented in materials to publicize the exhibitions (and above all in images).

The 1893 Chicago World’s Fair conveyed an image of Japan as a modern nation that owed its place in the world to having a tradition-based past, the most revealing aspect of which was the fact that it was explicitly patriarchal. In other words, to represent Japan as an ancient nation, the organizers resorted to the presentation of a patriarchy that excluded women from the modern or contemporary moment, associating them with the domestic world, for example¹⁹.

Another example is the New York exhibition in 1939 where the “New Soviet Woman” was presented as equivalent to Soviet men, namely through souvenirs, educational booklets and other materials that promoted the existence of political rights and economic opportunities for women under Soviet socialism²⁰. But, as Boisseau and Markwyn point out and I claim in my argument, “women as agents are not isolatable from considerations of gender as an effect and producer of ideology. Neither are considerations of gender artificially separated from questions of racial, class, national, or colonial identity”²¹.

¹⁶ T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, “World’s Fairs in Feminist Historical Perspective” in T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn (eds), *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World’s Fairs*, Urbana, University of Illinois, 2010, p. 7.

¹⁷ T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, “World’s Fairs...”, cit., p. 6.

¹⁸ Myriam Boussahba-Bravard and Rebecca Rogers (eds), *Women in International and Universal Exhibitions, 1876-1937*, New York, Routledge, 2018.

¹⁹ Lisa K. Langlois, “Japan – Modern, Ancient, and Gendered at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair” in T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn (eds), *Gendering the Fair...*, cit., p. 56-74.

²⁰ Alison Rowley, “The New Soviet Woman at the 1939 New York World’s Fair” in T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn (eds), *Gendering the Fair...*, cit., p. 37-55.

²¹ T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, “World’s Fairs...”, cit., p. 6.

And it is in the context of these exhibitions that a clear relationship emerges between colonial rule and gender representation. The colonial initiative was set forth mainly by men, and they, themselves, reproduced the relations of colonial violence in the scope of relationships among different genders²². The woman's body depicted in the images is often used in an erotic or sexualized way in colonial propaganda²³. The presence of women in this context is mostly not a contribution to their empowerment, but rather their objectification, since women are considered as objects, disregarding their emotions or their psychological status.

Often, what is impressive is not the image itself, but what it is said around it, as in the article published in the newspaper *Notícias Ilustrado*, with the title "The symphony of black breasts"²⁴, where colonized women are also associated with landscapes and to other instances that denote male power and male chauvinism. This association of colonized people with landscapes was also explored in the contemporary art exhibition *Botânica*²⁵, by Vasco Araújo, which took place at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Lisbon in 2014; it exposed the predatory dimension of knowledge that reduced these people to natural specimens, that is, the focus on the exotic allowed their cultures and particular aspects to be distorted, which contributed to their submission to the colonial empire²⁶. Therefore, these kinds of images take us back to historical formulations, power relationships and racial and gender discrimination, and in the Portuguese case these elements were intensified by the myth of lusotropicalism²⁷. In this article, as in others²⁸, my option was to present a description of the content of the images, but not to include them in my text, thus avoiding the inconvenience that their dissemination (for the women themselves or their families) might cause.

²² Clara Carvalho, "'Raça', género e imagem colonial: representações de mulheres nos arquivos fotográficos" in José Machado Pais, Clara Carvalho and Neusa Mendes de Gusmão (eds), *O Visual e o Quotidiano*, Lisbon, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2008, p. 145-173.

²³ On the difference between contemplation, curiosity and gaze, when analyzing photographs, see, for example: Elizabeth Edwards, "Looking at Photographs: Between Contemplation, Curiosity and Gaze" in Tamar Garb (ed.), *African Photography from the Walther Collection. Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*, New York, Steidl, 2013, p. 48-54.

²⁴ Luiz Teixeira, "A sinfonia dos seios negros", *Notícias Ilustrado*, 311 (1934).

²⁵ The description of this exhibition can be seen in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvvKaRDbwgQ> (accessed on June 2023).

²⁶ Vasco Araújo, *Botânica. Esculturas. Museu do Chiado*, Maia, Sistema Solar, 2014.

²⁷ Michel Cahen and Patrícia Ferraz de Matos (eds), "New Perspectives on Luso-Tropicalism/ Novas Perspetivas sobre o Luso-tropicalismo" (Special Issue), *Portuguese Studies Review*, 26, 1 (2018).

²⁸ On the exhibition of human beings in the Portuguese great exhibitions, see: Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, "Power and Identity: The Exhibition of Human Beings in the Portuguese Great Exhibitions", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 21, 2 (2013), p. 202-218.

Behind the propaganda associated with the colonies were important organizations, such as the Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional, created in 1933, led by António Ferro (1895-1956), who had connections with Modernists inside and outside Portugal — both in Europe and in Brazil. These modernists were fond of forms of African art that were the inspiration for some representations and creations — in terms of drawings and sculptures, for example, which were also part of these great exhibitions.

António Ferro would develop what was called the “politics of the spirit”, associating popular culture with nationalism. This was achieved through the organization of events, such as exhibitions, theatre and cinema, but also through the press and radio. In this period, until 1974, there was also censorship, which made it possible to control what was produced, how and for whom in a country that had a low level of literacy (only 38 per cent).

Exhibitions from 1931 to 1940

On the poster of the Portuguese representation in the International Colonial Exhibition in Paris, the art deco style of which denotes the first European vanguard influences (Fig. 2), we merely see an African woman, and the other inhabitants of the Portuguese empire are not evoked. This may be due to the fact that, back then, the greatest colonial investment was being made in Africa. The author of the poster was Fred Kradolfer (1903–1968), a Swiss designer who had lived in Portugal since 1927.

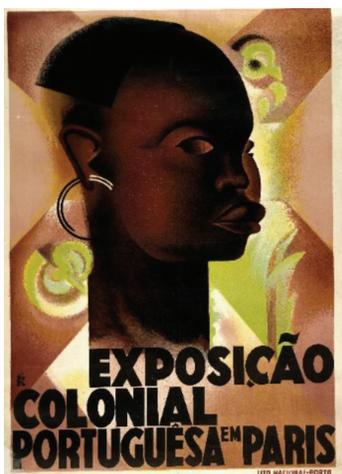


Fig. 2 – Poster of the Portuguese representation in the International Colonial Exhibition, Paris, Fred Kradolfer, 1931. Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon.

For the “Guinean village” at the Lisbon Industrial Exhibition, which took place in 1932, a space was built by the Guinean themselves who came to the event. While the men built the thatched huts, the women saw to the kitchen and other services. The village was named San Corlá, which was the name of their territory of origin in Guinea, and included eight “choças” or “palhotas” (thatched huts), in which 39 Guineans were distributed, separating women and men. In the captions of some photographs published by the newspaper *Indústria Portuguesa*, the word “beauties” is shown in inverted commas, as well as the word “prince” elsewhere, suggesting that we are not, in fact, in the presence of true beauties or true princes²⁹.

The photographic image of the son of one of the chieftains that came to the exhibition shows a group of women in the background, smiling. These and other women — visitors of the exhibition — were also talked about or criticized, since some of them invited the Guinean prince to come for tea at their homes, near King Edward VII Park, which was considered audacious on their part by some of the visitors I interviewed³⁰.

Shortly after, in 1934, The Portuguese Colonial Exhibition took place in the Crystal Palace (named Palace of the Colonies for the event) and its gardens, with the presence of about three hundred individuals from territories in the so-called Portuguese overseas³¹. In addition to being exposed, the women, representatives of the colonies, were fixed in images. “Casa Alvão”, a photographic studio in Porto run by Domingos Alvão (1895-1956), who has won several awards, had the exclusive privilege of photographing the exhibition. Alvão was used to photographing the so-called “types and customs” in the country — rural, peasant themes, with a certain naturalism. The images about the event evoke the past, but also have an orientation towards the future and seek to show a modern country. In Domingos Alvão’s photo album (with 101 photographic clichés) there is a contrast between photographic images that show modernity and progress and others that show the rustic character of the colonies.

These photographs (and proofs and negatives), now in the custody of the Portuguese Photography Centre in Porto, were published in *Notícias Ilustrado* and in the magazines *Civilização* and *Ilustração*. The photographs of Casa Alvão are often staged, representing supposed daily life. The presentation of the

²⁹ *Indústria Portuguesa*, 56 (1932) October; *Indústria Portuguesa*, 57 (1932) November.

³⁰ The interviews occurred in the early 2000s. On this subject, see: Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *The Colours of the Empire: Racialized Representations during Portuguese Colonialism*, Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books, 2013.

³¹ On this exhibition, see Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Primeira Exposição Colonial Portuguesa (Porto, 1934) e desafios no presente” in Alexandra Balona; Melissa Rodrigues and Nuno Coelho (eds), *Um Elefante no Palácio de Cristal*, Porto, Galeria Municipal do Porto, 2023, p. 54-60.

people has an almost folkloric character, as they wear costumes, and ornaments that seek to distinguish essentialized types. The subtitles of the photographs are often “Indian type” or “Mozambican type”. The representatives of the colonies were also photographed at the Institute of Anthropology of the University of Porto³²; some of these photographs were published in the book *Raças do Império* by Mendes Correia³³ and can be consulted in the old collection of the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Porto (today in the custody of the Museum of Natural History). Sometimes, the captions of those photographs sought to identify the person or group to which they belonged and also some diseases or identifiable physical characteristics, as happens with the photograph that has this caption: “Bushman woman from Angola (Mucancala) with a child: steatopygia”³⁴.

All groups who came to represent the colonies included women in order to present their clothing and what was considered their native way of life. They also came to perform dances and songs, do manual work and some of them were responsible for feeding the groups and cleaning the places where the groups were staying. The Guineans were the first group to arrive in Lisbon, on 7 May 1934, made up of 18 Bijagós men, 24 Balantas, Mandingas and Fulas, of whom 14 were women and 20 men, five craftsmen, the régulo Mamadú Sissé (war chief, second lieutenant), his wife, two children — one of them was Abdulai Sissé (referred to as interpreter) and two servants. This group was followed by Alvão’s camera from their arrival in Lisbon. The women wore light dresses and headscarves, an outfit that we would also find in some women of the then metropolis. The men wore suits and ties or chose the Muslim bubu. However, in the exhibition site, their clothing changed or was removed, and their bodies are shown naked from the waist up, in stiff poses, as we can see in the photographs, some recalling erotic postcards of the early twentieth century.

The colonized women are also present in depictions of the work of missionaries, such as in the photograph in Fig. 3, based on which a postcard was created on the occasion of the exhibition, depicting a missionary woman teaching an African woman to sew with a sewing machine, with the caption: “Colonial Exhibition of Porto — A Missionary Sister of the Society of Mary teaching a black girl to work with a sewing machine”. Colonized women are also depicted in dioramas³⁵ on fighting disease, such as sleeping sickness.

³² Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “*To see is to know?* Anthropological differentiations on Portuguese colonial photography through the work of Mendes Correia” in Filipa Lowndes Vicente and Afonso Dias Ramos (eds), *Photography in Portuguese Colonial Africa (1860-1975)*..., cit., p. 171-192.

³³ António Mendes Correia, *Raças do Império*, Porto, Portucalense Editora, 1943.

³⁴ António Mendes Correia, *Raças do Império*..., cit., p. 27.

³⁵ The use of the diorama (created in the 1820s), with life-sized figures, became common in history and natural science museums and in great exhibitions.



Fig. 3 – “Part of the Religious Mission Representation Overseas”³⁶.

These representations also contributed to women being associated with domestic work and highlighted the success of the work of evangelization, which could lead to assimilation. Women (and men) who took part in the Cape Verde representation are referred as “*Indígenas*”, although the *Indígena* status was not applied in that country³⁷. The clothing of this group — with women in dresses and men in suits — suggests however that the Cape Verdeans had a higher civilizational status than the Guinean described before.

Women were present in the “Portuguese India” representation, which included musicians and dancers (although the documentation analyzed elsewhere³⁸ does not specify whether they were remunerated or not to carry out these activities) and they were also depicted in drawings, as in some posters of the 1934 colonial exhibition, in the leaflet of this exhibition³⁹, and in a message used to announce

³⁶ Álbum Fotográfico da Primeira *Exposição Colonial Portuguesa: 101 Clichés Fotográficos de Alvão*, Porto, Litografia Nacional, 1934.

³⁷ According to colonial ministerial decree 16473 of 6 February 1929, “*Indígenas*” were “individuals of the black race, or descended from it, or who by their ornament and custom, are indistinguishable from the common type of that race”; “*não Indígenas*” were “those of any race who did not meet those conditions”. There were differences in rights and duties between the assimilated (*assimilados*) and the *Indígenas*. Those born in Cape Verde, Portuguese India and Macao had a special status. The 1954 “*Indígena* statute” of the Portuguese provinces of Guinea, Angola and Mozambique incorporated an integration policy, but continued to impose segregation. The “*Indígena* statute” was finally abolished in 1961.

³⁸ Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *The Colours of the Empire...*, cit.

³⁹ *Guia Desdobrável da Exposição Colonial Portuguesa*, 1934.

it⁴⁰. They also appeared in postcards, in which some of the female participants are identified by name and origin, as is the case of Inês, from Guinea, Maria, from Angola, and Eugénia, from Timor, all drawn by Eduardo Malta (1900-1967).

Eduardo Malta created a commemorative album (also translated into French), with a foreword by Henrique Galvão (1875-1970), who was responsible for this exhibition⁴¹, and a postcard collection. The postcards aimed to represent each group that took part in the exhibition. The images would be distributed and made popular by the Portuguese in the metropolis, allowing them to remember the exoticism and the diversity offered by the “colonial empire”. Although, as a painter, Eduardo Malta⁴² was used to portraying Portuguese and Spanish high-society ladies (for example, he painted General Primo de Rivera, the Spanish dictator, and his family), in this event he painted African women, which was considered unexpected. In some of his works we can recognize some suffering, boredom and distance in the faces, which do not seem to perceive the exhibition as the “celebration” so often extolled in propaganda. This perception is mainly due to the realistic aspect of the drawings. The portraits by Eduardo Malta were incorporated into postcards and images that circulated in other exhibitions, such as the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1937, and the Exhibition of Portuguese World in 1940.

The photographs in newspapers and magazines, and the photographs of official catalogues or postcards less so, are those which offer the most eroticized images of women. Maybe due to the fact that newspapers and magazines were aimed at a more popular audience, their images are more susceptible to generate more comment; their aim may also be to attract more people to visit the exhibition. It is in this sense that a metaphor about gender is used to refer the colonial conquest and also a sexual conquest. The colonies were seen as landscapes with feminine features — beautiful, but savage, unexplored, aimed to be conquered, organized by the European man, who was virile and civilizing⁴³. An example

⁴⁰ “Aviso da Exposição Colonial Portuguesa”, *Portugal Colonial*, 38-39 (1934), April-May.

⁴¹ Although Galvão was one of the great enthusiasts of the empire and of exhibitions with a colonial component, in the late 1940s he became critical of António de Oliveira Salazar and his colonial policies. To escape arrest, he fled to South America and there joined other dissidents. He tried to create an opposition government in Angola and ended up in exile in Brazil where he died in 1970.

⁴² On Eduardo Malta, see: Ana Rita Rodrigues Duro, *Eduardo Malta: Director do Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea*, Master dissertation in Museology, Lisbon, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2012.

⁴³ On this subject, see also Nadia Vargaftig, “To See, to Sell: The Role of the Photographic Image in Portuguese Colonial Exhibitions (1929-1940)” in Filipa Lowndes Vicente and Afonso Dias Ramos (eds), *Photography in Portuguese Colonial Africa (1860-1975)*..., cit., p. 251-255.

of this is the cover photograph of the magazine *Civilização*⁴⁴, dedicated to the colonial exhibition, with a young Guinean woman (of the Balanta group) with her arms raised (in a position allowing the shape of her breasts to stand out).

In a context where most people coming to take part in the exhibition as representatives of the colonies are anonymous, and where this anonymity is related to their low social status in their communities of origin, some women were named and individualized. This was the case with the young women Rosinha (or Rosita) and Inês, for example, both from the Balanta ethnic group (in Guinea).

An interesting aspect of these names is the fact that the men of the Balanta group and of other African groups have kept their native or Islamic names and Rosinha and Inês are Christian-sounding names; this could imply influence of the Catholic Church (they may have been baptized or not) or at least Portuguese colonization, thus evidencing the success of the assimilation process. This aspect of the names is even more important because in a context in which most of the participants in these events are anonymous (their names are not known, unless they are people with high status in their places of origin), in these cases mentioned here — Rosinha and Inês, for example — their names are almost always given in the captions, which suggests a possible dissemination strategy.

Rosinha was highlighted in Alvão's album⁴⁵ and in the press. However, in Alvão's album, Rosinha's pose is more sober, while in the press her arms are raised most of the time, emphasizing her breasts and giving a sensual, and even erotic tone to the images, evoking the erotic postcards. It was as if African women, personified by Rosinha, represented the seduction of the colonies and the desire of the colonists to possess them⁴⁶. Still in the press, *Jornal de Notícias* organized a contest to elect the Queen of the Colonies. For a week, it published the images of the contestants, describing them as “ebony bodies” or “Black Venuses”⁴⁷.

The expression “Black Venus” may be associated with the poem of Isaac Teale (...-1764) “The Sable Venus: An Ode”, first published in Jamaica in 1765 and later included in Bryan Edward's *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West* (1793), as well as the illustration that accompanied it, by Thomas Stothard (1755-1834), author of *The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies* (1794), which was inspired by Sandro Botticelli's fifteenth-century masterpiece *The Birth of Venus*. This construction of the “Black

⁴⁴ *Civilização: Grande Magazine Mensal* (1934), June.

⁴⁵ *Álbum Fotográfico da Primeira Exposição Colonial Portuguesa...*, cit.

⁴⁶ Filipa Lowndes Vicente, “Black Women's Bodies in the Portuguese Colonial Visual Archive (1900-1975)”, *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*, 30-31 (2017), p. 16-67.

⁴⁷ Leonor Pires Martins, *Um Império de Papel: Imagens do Colonialismo Português na Imprensa Periódica Ilustrada (1875-1940)*, Lisbon, Edições 70, 2012, p. 179.

Venus” thus dates back to the eighteenth-century. It should be noted, however, that the black beauty that is invoked turns out to be inspired by a figure with a white woman, wherein beauty was supposed to lie, and whose proportions influenced much of the history of art in Europe⁴⁸, although a certain desire for these women, who were “undesirable” at the outset, could be registered. The term Venus was also used in the expression “Hottentot Venus” to designate a woman of one of South Africa’s ethnic groups, who was exhibited between 1810 and 1815 in London and Paris⁴⁹.

Women (Black and non-Black) were also in other exhibitions, and through them the organizers sought to highlight both the beautiful and the shocking. The erotic and shocking were also shown through the women, as when five Brazilian Botocudos were exhibited at Piccadilly Hall, a popular London theatre, in 1883. The group was measured and studied by scientists from the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, and performed daily for the public in London, Manchester and Sheffield, until they were sold to P. T. Barnum and joined the US tour of the Grand Ethnological Congress of the Bailey and Barnum Circus. An element that was considered exotic, although primitive, was the lip disc. For this reason, in a publicity image for the exhibition, the Botocudo woman who did not have a wooden lip disc was deliberately removed, which demonstrates the importance of the lip enlargement to the exhibition’s success⁵⁰. Another example is the performance of Balinese women at the International Colonial Exhibition of Paris in 1931, which sought to show Asian sensibility; women were associated with beauty, but also with their primitive character⁵¹.

Thus, the use of the expression “Black Venus” in the context of the election of the Queen of the Colonies, in parallel with the 1934 exhibition in Portugal, is not surprising. The president of the panel of judges of the contest was Henrique Galvão; the winner was the daughter of the soba Quipungo, from Angola, a 15-year-old girl (named the “Virgin of Quipungo” for the occasion), since she

⁴⁸ Umberto Eco (ed.), *História da Beleza*, Algés, Difel, 2004.

⁴⁹ On this case of the “Hottentot Venus”, see, for example: Itumeleng Daniel Mothoagae, “Reclaiming our Black Bodies: Reflections on a Portrait of Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman and the Destruction of Black Bodies by the State”, *Acta Theologica*, Suppl 24 (2016), p. 62-83; Robin Mitchell, *Vénus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century France*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2020.

⁵⁰ Marina Vieira, *Figurações Primitivistas: Trânsitos do Exótico entre Museus, Cinema e Zoológicos Humanos*, PhD thesis in Social Sciences, Rio de Janeiro, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2019.

⁵¹ Juliana C. S. Ladeira, *Entre Mondes: Voyages Récits et Entrelacements de Pratiques Autour du Topeng Balinais*, PhD thesis in Esthétique, Sciences et Technologie des Arts, Saint-Denis, Université Paris 8, 2016.

received the longest ovation. Rosinha and another young woman were her maids of honour⁵².

Rosinha also inspired illustrations, such as the one published in the newspaper *O Comércio do Porto*, in which two Europeans are talking and one of them points to the young woman (with a sign saying: “Rosita, the beauty”), and says: “You can see that the future is in the Colonies!”⁵³. The beauty of the young woman must have caused envy among other women, and this was depicted, for example, in the cover drawing of the weekly humour paper *Maria Rita* with the following caption: “Maria Rita, tired of hearing people praise Rosinha, shows her impeccable curves to the noble organizer of the Exhibition”⁵⁴. The context of the time — a mainly reserved and conservative society, under the strong influence of the Catholic Church and of its Jewish-Catholic morality — may have contributed to this kind of formulation; that is, Rosinha personified a young colonial empire, available to satisfy desires and wishes that were not allowed or were ill-considered. On the other hand, in a context in which African women were mostly invisible or associated with servitude, the visibility (and even prominence) received by these young women is an aspect that deserves to be highlighted. However, praise for their beauty did not imply a stimulus to cultural miscegenation or to some sort of Portuguese engagement with African culture⁵⁵.

In 1940, Lisbon hosted the Exhibition of the Portuguese World. The report of the Mozambican representation’s delegate shows the ship that brought the representatives of Mozambique and Angola to the exhibition⁵⁶. Some of them were even photographed on board and their arrival in Lisbon generated great curiosity⁵⁷. These representatives were also photographed in the historical parade and in the exhibition, highlighting some of the tasks performed by women (Fig. 4). The photographs in this report must have been produced with the aim of documenting the travel and stay of the group of people who represented Mozambique in the exhibition. In other words, these images were not produced with the intention of being used in catalogs or in the context of

⁵² Leonor Pires Martins, *Um Império de Papel...*, cit., p. 180.

⁵³ *O Comércio do Porto* (1934), 10th June.

⁵⁴ *Maria Rita* (Special Issue) (1934), 4 August, Porto.

⁵⁵ Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Racial and Social Prejudice in the Colonial Empire: Issues Raised by Miscegenation in Portugal (Late Nineteenth to Mid-Twentieth Centuries)”, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 28, 2 (2019), p. 23-44.

⁵⁶ Guilherme Abranches Ferreira da Cunha, *Relatório da Actuação do Encarregado da Representação Indígena de Moçambique à Exposição Histórica do Mundo Português*, Ministry of Colonies, Minister’s Office – Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, 1940.

⁵⁷ Guilherme Abranches Ferreira da Cunha, *Relatório da Actuação...*, cit.

colonial propaganda, which makes them especially interesting for this analysis. As in Fig. 4, the report includes several photographs in which people appear dressed and performing some tasks, although, in most cases, manual. Such images make it possible to demystify some of the ideas that were circulating in Portugal at the time – that Africans were always half-naked and that they were lazy or that they had no skills or abilities.



Fig. 4 – “Maconde women working with beads” (Guilherme Abranches Ferreira da Cunha, *Relatório da Actuação...*, cit.).

In the exhibition catalogue⁵⁸, women rarely have a name and are often referred to with the ethnic or racial “type”, or also the name of a group, as in the case of an Angolan woman and a Guinean woman. This ascription of “types” to designate a human group may be explicitly replaced by “races”, as we can see elsewhere⁵⁹. On the other hand, not only based on their clothing, but also on the way they were treated during the journey and on their accommodation on the exhibition site, we can infer that some of the women in representations, such as the Timorese and the Indian, possessed a different status from the Africans⁶⁰. The same can be inferred from the photographs in postcards, in which Angolan women, and African women in general, appear with their breasts bare. African people, and specifically women, are shown as examples of still savage humanity.

⁵⁸ Henrique Galvão, *Exposição do Mundo Português: Secção Colonial*, Lisbon, Neogravura, 1940.

⁵⁹ Henrique Galvão, *Exposição do Mundo Português...*, cit.

⁶⁰ Henrique Galvão, *Exposição do Mundo Português...*, cit.; Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Power and Identity...”, cit.



Fig. 5 – “Colonial Section of the Exhibition of the Portuguese World 1140 — Bicentenary — 1940. Negative by Cunha e Costa. King Pedro VII, the King, the Queen and the Princess of Congo”. Illustrated postcard, 1940 Exhibition.

The exception were the representatives from higher social strata, such as the Queen of Congo and her daughter (Fig. 5) or women from Macao — a territory where the Portuguese occupation was different and where, for example, the *Indígena* status was never applied. Colonized women from the places that were under colonial administration also appear in newspapers announcing the centennial celebrations⁶¹ and in paintings (Fig. 6).

⁶¹ “O Século, Suplemento dedicado ao Império Colonial Português e às Comemorações, nas Províncias Ultramarinas, dos Centenários da Fundação e da Restauração de Portugal” (Special Issue), *O Século* (1940), June, p. 78.

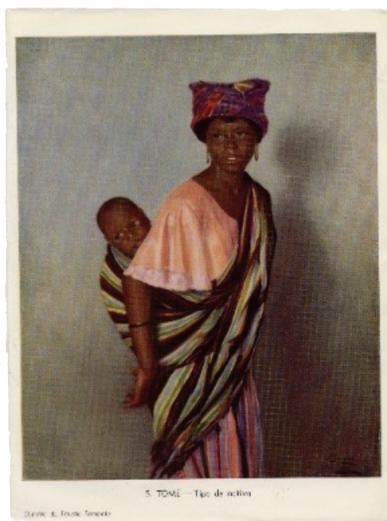


Fig. 6 – “S. Tomé — native type”. Painting by Fausto Sampaio (Henrique Galvão, *Exposição do Mundo Português...*, cit.).

Colonized women are also depicted in the edification Portugal of the Little Ones (*Portugal dos Pequenitos*⁶²) inaugurated in 1940. This theme park, idealized by Fernando Bissaya-Barreto (1886-1974) (doctor and responsible for several examples of social work) and designed by the architect Cassiano Branco (1897-1970), was aimed at children and can still be visited today. On the exterior, it showed the sculpture of a half-naked African woman by the Guinea Pavilion, near natural elements, that is, following a depiction that suggests to children her primitive character, previous to a state of civilization⁶³. On the other hand, outside the chapel representing the work of the missions it was possible to see the sculpture of an African woman with a child on her back, conveying the “good” sentiments generated by motherhood and, by analogy, the “good” sentiments of Portuguese missionaries who, with their effort and dedication, led the colonized peoples to a state of “civilization”⁶⁴.

⁶² For a deeper analysis of the history of this construction and its exhibition spaces until the mid-2000s, see Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “A História e os Mitos: Manifestações da ideologia colonial na construção do Portugal dos Pequenitos em Coimbra” in *7º Congresso Ibérico de Estudos Africanos – 50 anos das independências africanas: desafios para a modernidade*, Lisbon, CEI, 2010. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10071/2194>, accessed in June 2024.

⁶³ Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *The Colours of the Empire...*, cit., p. 227.

⁶⁴ Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *The Colours of the Empire...*, cit., p. 228.

Closing Remarks

The way the women who came to the exhibitions were treated, from the moment they were chosen (the younger, healthier, those with a higher social status and also the most useful for the organization of the exhibitions being preferred), their anonymity or not, and the way they are represented denotes the status of each of them in the colonial territories (and among their inhabitants). We can therefore perceive a hierarchy (at a racial and socioeconomic level) among the individuals that inhabited the empire, despite the idea being conveyed that all were part of the same Portuguese world. Many of them, in fact, had *Indígena* status, which did not allow them access to full citizenship, and in order to achieve it they previously had to bear the assimilated status⁶⁵.

In the exhibitions, and particularly in the case of the representation of Africans, the exotic and erotic elements arose as “merchandise”⁶⁶. There was an implicit erotic connotation in the interest of white men in half-naked Black women and of Portuguese bourgeois white women in handsome and healthy Black men. Some of the visitors mentioned, when interviewed, that several visitors, male and female, stared and it was embarrassing⁶⁷.

My starting point was the analysis of the materials I consulted on the Exhibition-Fair of Angola, which took place in Luanda in 1938, based on which we can observe two worlds. One evoking industry, technology and the male world in general, and the other evoking the landscapes, the beauty and the exuberance of the natural world, where we can find rivers, waterfalls, the magnificent African sunset and also the female world, associated with the collection of products from nature and motherhood.

By widening my analysis to encompass other materials on the colonial context, and specifically some exhibitions, I concluded the following: the presence of colonized women, or women under Portuguese colonial rule, in the scope of the colonial publicity and propaganda is often marked by bodies as a metaphor for colonial rule. This occurs sometimes as a mere object of desire, sometimes with a practical character, and on yet other occasions associated with motherhood or with daily tasks with handmade artefacts or in rural activities. We also have depictions of women, the aim of which is apparently to highlight

⁶⁵ Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *The Colours of the Empire...*, cit., p. 228.

⁶⁶ Curtis M. Hinsley, “The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World’s Columbian Exposition” in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display*, Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991, p. 354.

⁶⁷ Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Power and Identity...”, cit.

their social status or their origin in spaces that, despite being under Portuguese administration, held a distinguished status.

Therefore, although some images seem to extol the youth and the beauty of women through their nudity or half-nudity, others highlight their abilities in performing a task, even if only manual, and artistic skills. On the other hand, most of the time we do not know their names, only the designation of their groups of origin or their status in the community. It is certain that we must not see the colonized woman as a merely passive and subordinate subject, since women, in all places, can be agents of change or play a mediating role (as was demonstrated by Abu-Lughod⁶⁸), which they actually did in the colonial context as members or collaborators in the independence movements of the colonies⁶⁹. However, it is also certain that, in the case of the images produced in the scope of colonial propaganda, not only the photographs, but also the settings chosen, the framing, and the suggested pose, etc., reveal a lot more about the author of the photographs or those who ordered them than about the people they depict; and this reveals above all the context of power (legislative, administrative, male, colonial) in which they were produced and the ideas they sought to disseminate.

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⁶⁸ Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women", *American Ethnologist*, 17, 1 (1990), p. 41-55.

⁶⁹ Patrícia Godinho Gomes, "Mindjeris di Guiné, ka bô m'pina, Ka bô burgunhu. Narrativas de mulheres na/sobre a luta de libertação na Guiné Bissau (trajetórias, construções e percursos emancipatórios)", *Abe.África: Revista da Associação Brasileira de Estudos Africanos*, 6 (2021), p. 81-106.

