



Black Images Matter: Re-inscribing African Lives in the Portuguese Imperial Archive and History

By
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Abstract

Until 2023, the finding aids of the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, Portugal (Overseas Historical Archive) did not provide information on the scope and content of the archival series “files of settlers and the repatriated” (“processos de colonos e repatriados”) created by the Ministry of the Colonies. While doing research on Portuguese settler migration to Africa, the author came across identification photographs of Black people who were applying for free passage to their birthplace as “repatriates”. The photographs in the files, taken for reasons of visual identification and included for bureaucratic requirements, alerted me to a paradoxically invisible reality: Black people inhabiting the imperial archive and the metropole geography. In this paper, I reflect on this chance encounter — in which image played a central role — taking into account contemporary discussion on decolonial archival and historiographic practices. I acknowledge that those files open new opportunities for historical analysis of Black lives in Portugal and intra-imperial migrations throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Looking closely to concrete cases, I argue that the visual record makes them even more real and human.

Keywords: Black Portugal, Colonial archive, Decolonial practices, Identification photographs, Migration, Population control, Portuguese colonial empire

Castelo, Cláudia “Black Images Matter: Re-inscribing African Lives in the Portuguese Imperial Archive and History”, Culture Unbound, Advance Access 2025.

Published by Linköping University Electronic Press:

<http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se> <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.4136>



Introduction

During my PhD research on Portuguese settlement in colonial Angola and Mozambique (early twentieth century-1974), I have identified, located and consulted the documental series “files of settlers and the repatriated” (“*processos de colonos e repatriados*”) from the fonds of the Ministry of the Colonies at the Overseas Historical Archive, Lisbon, Portugal (*Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*, hereafter AHU). In the early 2000s, the AHU did not have a catalogue drawn up in accordance with archival descriptive standards. The finding aid provided by the AHU to retrieve the material did not describe archival units (intellectual units) proceeding from the general to the specific, but merely the content of the storage units (packs, boxes and folders), reproducing the delivery notes that had accompanied the transfer of documentation from the Ministry services into the historical archive up until 1974, when the 25 April military coup put an end to the dictatorship and opened the way to formal decolonisation.

The name of the files’ creator, the title of the files included in the container, and its creation dates were the few elements at our disposal. No description of the scope or content at the series or item level was available. However, the General International Standard Archival Description – ISAD(G), established in 2000 by the International Council on Archives, considers scope and content a prescriptive element of any given description. Its purpose is “to enable users to judge the potential relevance of the unit of description”, and it should “give a summary of the scope (such as, time periods, geography) and content (such as documentary forms, subject matter, administrative processes) of the unit of description.” (ICA 2000: 22). Likewise, several national rules and guidelines for archival description also consider scope and content to be mandatory information (Portugal. *Direcção Geral de Arquivos* 2007). Without an accurate and a detailed description, the records literally remain hidden.

As I was studying Portuguese settler migration to the Portuguese colonies in Africa, my attention focused primarily on the “settlers’ files”. These files consist of applications for free travel to a Portuguese colony, presented to the Ministry of the Colonies by would-be settlers who claimed insufficient means for the journey, but guaranteed they had a job or financial support at their destination. The applications included two photographs of the applicants, among other documents. The “settlers’ files” were more numerous than the “files of the repatriated”, but both were stored in the same boxes and folders. Therefore, I soon came across a couple of “files of the repatriated”. Initially, I thought that they resulted from applications by white settlers living in Africa who wished to return to Portugal from the colonies. However, to my surprise, I was confronted by photographs of Black women, men and children, attached to the files.

After closer examination, I realised that these applicants, seeking repatriation to their birthplace, and claiming they had no means to pay for it, were Africans residents in the metropole. The photographs in the files, required by state-bureaucracy, taken for “official” purposes of visual identification, alerted me to a paradoxically invisible reality: Black people inhabiting the imperial archive and the centre of the empire.¹ Their gaze towards the viewer demanded actual visibility and intelligibility.

These Black images matter, as socially and historically situated “fragments of personhood” (Rizzo 2013, 265 and 269), and archivists and historians can no longer look away. The global movement Black Lives Matter resonates in a new awareness and ethical commitment of the professionals who deal with the colonial past and heritage.² In this article, based on my own archive story (Burton 2005), I reflect on this chance encounter – in which images played a central role as proof of the applicants’ African origin – in the light of my previous professional training as archivist, and my research experience studying Portuguese colonialism in Africa. This article draws on literature addressing three main subjects: the history of Portuguese empire and African presence in Portugal; colonial archives; and photography produced in colonial situations. I found inspirational the work of Lorena Rizzo (2013, 2014 and 2020) on the role of photography in the practice of applying for and issuing “documents of passage” in Southern Africa, the analytic concept of “presence” applied to photography as elaborated by Elizabeth Edwards (2021, 71-81), and decolonial perspectives on archives and visual culture (Bastian, 2006, 2019; Basu and De Jong, 2016; Agostinho, 2019). My primary sources are, of course, the “files of the repatriated”. However, this is an exploratory essay based on a small and random sample. The heuristic work is still ongoing. There are 150 boxes with “files of settlers and the repatriated”, but this paper relies on just 20 boxes (a little more than 10 per cent of the available material).

This article consists of three sections. The first exposes the historical context in which the “files of settlers and repatriates” were produced and the bureaucratic rational behind the workflow. The second section discusses African actual presence in the colonial archive and its role in archival contestation, on one hand, and historiographical renewal, on the other. The last section looks at some files whose photographs attracted my attention to demonstrate how they can provide a window for an unprecedented historical analysis of Africans in Portugal in the first half of the twentieth century.

The “files of settlers and repatriates” in historical context

Portuguese attempt of actual colonization of Africa started in the last decades of the nineteenth century, after military campaigns in Angola, Guinea and

Mozambique. Except for Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe, the establishment of Portuguese effective occupation would only occur after the First World War. Although all people living in the Portuguese empire were considered part of the Portuguese nation, not all of them were Portuguese citizens. The large majority of the Black population of Angola, Guinea and Mozambique, the so-called “indígenas” (natives), had a different political, social and criminal statute. To become Portuguese citizens they had to prove they knew how to speak and write Portuguese and lived according to Portuguese habits and customs. As the other European powers in Africa, Portugal used the in vogue rhetoric of the civilizing mission to elevate the backward races, but as in all colonial situations the main pillars of Portuguese colonial rule were racial discrimination, forced labor, tax exactions, and economic exploitation of the natural resources. To oppose real and imaginary external threats to the integrity of its empire, Portugal argued that the Portuguese had a special ability for colonization and privileged relationship with the natives, two ideas occasionally articulated since the eighteenth century.

Portuguese settlement in Africa was advocated with enthusiasm by politicians and publicists, but the state was afraid of involving itself in driven a massive settler migration to the colonies, in particular of unprepared and deprived people, since there was plenty extremely cheap labor (the forced labor) at the destination. In addition, Brazil (a former Portuguese colony) continued to attract the majority of Portuguese emigrants as a land of opportunities.

As a means of cautious promotion of Portuguese colonization in Africa with no direct costs for the state, Portugal imposed to the shipping companies operating between the motherland and the colonies the obligation of transporting free of charge a small number of settlers and repatriates, in each trip.³ This obligation, which started in the late nineteenth century, lasted until the end of the Portuguese State’s subsidies to the companies, in the mid-twentieth century. After 1907 no passport was required for Portuguese travelling from the metropole to African possessions, but the intra-imperial mobility was controlled by the state until 1962, in order to avoid the unrestricted entering of poor and unemployed individuals. Portuguese with no capital or high education would have to ask for permission to travel and settle in a colony, and make proof of employment or someone responsible for paying their repatriation in the first two years of permanence in the colonies. The imperial state did not tolerate European beggars and homeless in the colonial cities. This uneasiness with poor whites in overseas territories was common to other colonial empires (for instance, Stoler 1989, 2009). In the colonies, work was the main pillar of their civilising mission among the natives and, in turn, a guarantee against Europeans “going native”.

In the opposite direction, the so-called *indígenas* could only enter the metropole if they worked for a Portuguese employer who would be responsible for

their repatriation in the first two years of permanence. The so-called *assimilados* (Africans considered Portuguese citizens) could enter in some circumstances, such as for attending high school or university, receive medical assistance, etc. The colonial subjects born in Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe (colonies where the “natives’ statute” did not apply) could travel if they proved that they had a job or someone responsible for their subsistence and repatriation (if occurring in the first two years of permanence) in the metropole.

On 24 April 1922, the Ministry of the Colonies transmitted its preoccupation to the colonial governors of “Portuguese Guinea” and Cape Verde after several natives from those colonies had showed up at the Ministry in Portugal, asking to be repatriated.⁴ Four years later, the Ministry of the Colonies transmitted the same concern to the governors of all the colonies, stating that they should never allow any native to leave the territory without a deposit to guarantee the payment of their return ticket to the colony.⁵ However, in 1935, the situation of indigent Cape Verdeans wandering about the Port of Lisbon once again triggered alarm, since “humanity and national dignity” were at stake.⁶ Portuguese citizens who brought native servants from the colonies to the metropole had to leave a deposit for the value of the return ticket at the treasury of the colony from which they had departed. In cases of doubt, the Ministry of the Colonies tried to determine if an applicant for repatriation had a domestic services contract in the colony of origin and if the return ticket was guaranteed by deposit or bail.

The “files of settlers and repatriates”, produced by Ministry of the Colonies, embody a technology of knowledge and mode of governance directed to low income population and migration within the empire. The files mirror the workflow of the applications for free of charge passage to Africa. Both administrative proceedings were conducted jointly. The files were organised and stored together, in function of the scale of the ships’ departure. For obtaining free transport all the applicants had to address an application to the minister of the Colonies written by the individual applicant or someone on his/her behalf, following a rather standardised minute. The application was supported by other required documents. The settlers had to deliver three ID photographs; a copy of the birth certificate; poverty certificate issued by the administrative authorities and a “letter of invitation” (*carta de chamada*) written by employers or relatives guaranteeing that the applicants would have employment or a means of livelihood in the colony; criminal certificate attesting a clean criminal record; and during the Estado Novo dictatorship, a police certificate proving “good political behaviour”. The repatriation applicants had to present two photographs, the birth certificate and the poverty certificate. All those documents were supposed to permit officials of the Ministry of the Colonies to verify if the applicants were legally entitled to benefit from free transport to the colonies. If the applications were accepted, the

files include a ministerial order authorizing the concession of the sea passage, information on their voyage to the colonies (the date and name of the ship), and the transit permit (*"guia de marcha"*).

The imperial archive intersects the paths of applicants as settlers and as repatriates at the instant they requested free transport to the colonies. Since they submitted themselves to similar bureaucratic procedures, their applications stand side by side in the archive. The ship gathered them in the archive just as it did on the actual voyage to Africa. Both settlers and the repatriated were poor or unemployed and had to provide proof of their poverty (in fact, lack of financial means to pay for sea transport). Through their written applications, they seem equals in terms of class. When granted free ticket by the Ministry of the Colonies, they all had to pick up the same kind of transit permit, before embarking on the same ships to the colonies. However, at their destination their status would clearly reveal. They would occupy distinct positions in racial hierarchies and in colonial society, with different expected roles and opportunities for social promotion. The settlers (Portuguese citizens) were supposed to colonise the African land, civilise the natives and contribute to the development of the colonial territories. The African repatriates (Portuguese colonial subjects) had to assume their colonised (inferior) condition and moral obligation to work for the settlers and the colonial power benefit.

The "files of settlers and repatriates" do not fix "settlers" and "repatriates" according to race, because these bureaucratic categories were not *strictu sensu* racial categories. Photographs in the files confirm that these categories did not correspond to race/colour. We encounter some photographs of Black, mixed-race people and Indians (from Goa) in applications for free transport as settler and several photographs of white people of European descent applying for free transport as repatriate. The categories in question depended on the place of birth/origin and destiny of the applicants: a person born in the metropole who wished to move to/settle in Africa would have to apply as "settler" (even in cases of Black people); a person born in Africa and living in the metropole would have to apply as "repatriate" (even if the person was white).

Racial classification (*"preto"*, *preta*, *"de cor"*) or the racialized legal statute (*"indígena"*) were only written down in the applications and attached documents in case of Black applicants. These applicants (themselves or the person who wrote the application in their name) sometimes confused the category under which they had to apply. This was for instance the case of Victória, 48 years old, a Black woman born in Huila (Angola) (fig. 1). The application written on her behalf in 1941 stated that she wished to embark as settler. The indigent certificate issued by the Charneca parish council (*"Junta de Freguesia"*), in the northern outskirts of

Lisbon, and the police and criminal record also referred to her request to travel as “settler”.

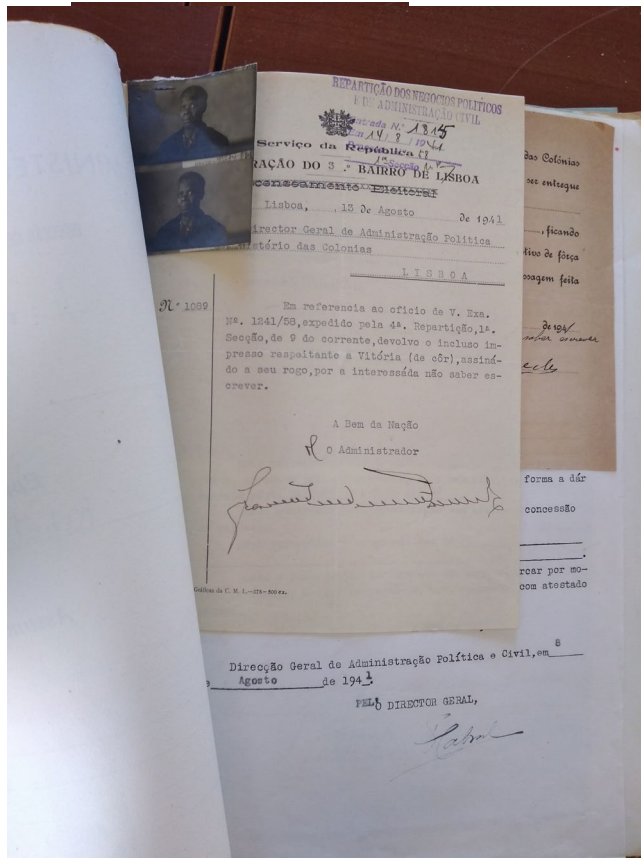


Fig 1.

A Cape Verdean woman resident in Lisbon asked for free transport as “repatriated” to Bolama, Portuguese Guinea, where she had relatives.⁷ The information of the colonial official was that repatriation could only be granted to the applicant’s land of birth; therefore, to obtain free ticket to Bolama, she would have to apply as “settler”. Still her application was rejected. The expectations regarding the race/colour of “settlers” – persons who intended to settle in the colonies – was expressed in a discriminatory manner by the Ministry authorities when appreciating an application of Cape Verdeans inhabiting in Cape Verde for free transport to Angola as “settlers”:

One notices that the majority of the families that intend to migrate to Angola are constituted by black. Therefore, their transportation to that

colony, for colonisation purposes, contradicts the very essence of the ministerial order no. 10919, 9 April 1945 and decree-law no. 34464, 27 March 1945, which refer the colonisation made by white and not by black people.”⁸

Contrary to what is stated above, the legislation did not make explicit reference to race, only to “Portuguese by origin” (birth/nationality). We can conclude that the Ministry of the Colonies had an expectation regarding the race/colour of the “settlers”, but no similar expectation regarding the race of the repatriated.

Photographs, archival contestation and historiographical renewal

My recent engagement with the “files of the repatriated” at the AHU, triggered, as abovementioned, by photographs, led me to revisit, on one hand, the discussion on the limits of the “colonial archive”, and on the other, the power of the archives custodian entity and the archival practice and its reflection on historiography.

There is extensive literature on the shortcomings and bias of the archives created by the colonial state. The notion that the voice of the colonized is absent or silenced in colonial archive continues to justify the reading of records against the grain, questioning colonial hegemonies and recovering African agency. Ann Laura Stoler (2009) has suggested an ethnographic approach to archives not as neutral or dormant repositories of sources, deposits from which to mine evidence and truth about the past, but technologies of the modern state, subjects that the researcher should study in their structural order and logic, to understand the dynamics implicit in the documental production. David M. Gordon (2018) observed that a post-positivist reading of archives appreciates silences, dissonances, and conflicts within archives, and that, through a process of crosschecking of different sources, it is possible to read archives both “along the grain” and “against this grain”. Roque and Wagner (2012: 18-19), instead, consider it is possible, under certain circumstances and after necessary criticism, to engage with colonial records in ways that allow for retrieving voices and studying experiences of those who were dominated. A reading strategy that explores colonial records as “multivocal” (do not just host or speak for the colonial power) and as means of gaining access to the entangled reality of indigenous and colonial worlds.

The “files of the repatriated”, produced and accumulated by the imperial state, actually contain African voices and images. What did or did not happen within the institution holding and responsible for the archival records care and communication that compromised their discoverability by the researchers? Archival records “wield power over the shape and direction of historical

scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies” (Schwarz and Cook 2002: 2). In turn, archivists “wield power over those very records central to memory and identity formation through active management of records before they come to archives, their appraisal and selection as archives, and afterwards their constantly evolving description, preservation, and use” (ibid.). The self-image of archivists as objective, neutral and passive keepers of records tends to obfuscate the fact that archivists control, in the present, what the future will know about the past (ibid: 5, 13). Before a box is opened in the research room by a researcher, archivists also intervene in the archival record, either by acts or by omission. In this particular case, an absence of information on medium and context has been the archivists’ undetectable mark on the archive. Although – I am certain – there was no conscious archival choice not to describe the files of the “settlers and the repatriated” (mainly the result of a lack of technical professionals at the AHU), this fact has created a filter that has limited the perception of the records and thus of the past (cf. Schwarz and Cook 2002: 14, 18).

Until recently, none of the stories of the repatriated had emerged from the archive. Bearing in mind calls for the decolonisation of the archival practice (Gaddar and Caswell, 2019), and the notion that “the power to decolonize the archives resides, at least partially, within archivists themselves” (Bastian 2019), it was up to the AHU archivists to inscribe the Black presence in the archival description in order to provide public notice of it in the inventory and ensure their discoverability for future inclusion in historical narratives. Fortunately, the AHU director, the archivist and historian Ana Canas, was sensible to our call and since December 2023 it is possible to find basic information through the archive’s search portal, and a process of description and digitalization of the files has followed.⁹

How can further a reparation materialise? A dignifying procedure and essential step would be to describe this archival series at the item level (each file). In this case, the bottom level of a description would be the individual: each application described would be a person rescued from the silence of the storage units and storage rooms. I consider very important that the description mentions Blackness – the users should be able to find the files of Black applicants and the photographs of Black people, when existent.¹⁰ People in these photographs are not anonymous, in contrast to many other photographs of Africans – anthropometric and ethnographic images – that I came across during a research project on scientific missions in the late Portuguese colonial empire. Acknowledging the names, race and biographical data of the repatriation applicants, so that the archival description – encompassing as full a story as possible – would also become a kind of tribute to Africans who lived in Portugal and became invisible.¹¹ Nevertheless, the option of identifying the race or ethnicity of the applicants cannot be taken

for sure since, in Portugal the discussion of guidelines for inclusive and conscious description has not yet begun.¹² Moreover, racial classifications are associated with the colonial past and not with anti-racist policies (for this reason, no ethnic or racial data is collected in the national census).

At the same time, the politics of access and use of the records should also be grounded in an ethics of care dealing with the individuals documented in ways that honour their humanity and recognise their objectification, and acknowledge the shared responsibility of the archive and the represented communities (Odumosu 2020: S295 and 2021:110). The archival institution, in the present case, could involve in equitable partnership African and Afrodescendent who may feel related to this past and researchers willing to work on the history of Black people in Portugal.

The historiography on the Black presence in Portugal has dealt mainly with the period before the abolition of slavery (Tinhorão 1988, Lahon 1999, Henriques 2009, 2011 and 2019). For most of the twentieth century, the Black presence is ignored or confused by representations of Africa and Africans in Portugal, in the press, propaganda, exhibitions, etc. or the presentation of human beings in colonial exhibitions (Henriques 2009, 2011 and 2019). The neglect has to do with colonialism itself and racial prejudices, the *Estado Novo* ideology and colonial categories, the smaller scale of the phenomenon compared to earlier and later periods, but also due to the alleged scarcity of documentary sources. Except for a few studies dealing with the Black intellectual movement in the early twentieth century, the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império* (an association of students from the colonies attending high schools and universities in Portugal, 1944-65), or the *Club Marítimo Africano* (an association of African seamen in Lisbon, 1955-61), there is no literature on the Black inhabitants of the imperial metropole (Castro and Garcia 1995, Zau 2005, Sanches 2013, Garcia 2017, Castelo and Jerónimo 2017, Domingos and Peralta 2019, Varela and Pereira 2020). This shortage contrasts with the available knowledge on Black London and Black Paris (for instance, Gilroy, 2007, Blanchard 2012, Matera 2015).

From the perspective of the researcher, discovering Black images in the archive provides new directions for studying the history of the overlooked flows of Black people from Africa to Europe and vice-versa, but also the history of Africans in the imperial metropole from the end of slavery (1878) until the decolonization (1974). The analysis of these files confirms the need to approach the analysis of colony and metropole within a common framework (Cooper and Stoler 1997). Because some applicants had been previously repatriated or deported to Portugal from Brazil, France, Spain, UK and US, the files could also enable us to reframe Portugal's imperial circulation within a transnational framework.

What can we say about Africans in the imperial metropole based on the “files of the repatriated”? Due to their internal logic, the records usually included applicants’ sociodemographic data and other contextual information (birthplace; age; gender; reason for being in the metropole; profession; reason for asking for free transportation to their place of origin). From a random sample of files, it is possible to present a general picture of the applicants for repatriation.¹³ They were people born in all the African colonies; men and women; single and married; with and without children; adults, youths and children; female and male servants (“*criadas*” and “*criados*”), sailors, manual workers, secondary school and university students, unemployed, indigent, mentally ill/insane (“*alienados*”); and individuals repatriated or deported from Brazil, France and the US. Those who had entered Portugal illegally and those deported were only temporary residents, but all the others had been permanent residents for at least two years.

The “files of the repatriated” enable us to recover the applicants’ presence in the institutional practices of the imperial state and gain a grasp of their biography and social existence in relation to others and the state, even if the subaltern consciousness in colonial records tends to escape us (Premsh Lalu apud Rizzo 2014: 692). Fortunately, sometimes, attached documents, such as personal letters and statements to the police, break the monotony of the rather standardised applications and illuminate the subjects’ agency.

What does photography add to the written record? What does historical analysis lose when the files have no photograph? Recently, reflecting on photographs and the practice of history, Edwards argued that photographs “inject a particular form of presence into the historical landscape – those of standpoint and experience” (Edwards 2021: 71). Looking at the photographs in the “files of the repatriated” which hold the presence of Black individuals who actually existed in Portugal, I felt a vital connection to their social being and lived experience. The idea of getting in touch with real people through their photos can be illusory, but also fruitful for further research and reflection.

“Presence” as “a matrix of experience, embodiment, standpoint and emotion” has the ability to change historical perspective (Edwards 2021: 72). The photographs pave the way for attempts to write histories “from below” based on the colonial archive or, at least histories about common/ordinary and dispossessed people. In the next section, I look into some files whose attached photographs attracted my attention. The cases are presented in chronological order. In view of “the unresolved ethical matters present in retrospective attempts to visualise colonialism”, I recognise the need for extra care in my own witnessing gaze (Odumosu 2020: S289) and for further reflection and analytic work.

Black lives in the archive

The portrait of Manuel Loureiro Nkiakuma, 19 years old, born in São Salvador do Congo (Angola), a former student of the Portuguese (Catholic) Mission of São Salvador, which was attached to his application presented on 27 October 1917, seems out of place in this bureaucratic context of colonial migration control. It is a refined image-object, a studio portrait printed on high-quality paper, with an elegantly crafted frame (fig. 2). The photographer is unknown. Nkiakuma presents a composed posture, neatly combed hair, and wears an immaculate shirt-collar, jacket and tie. He had come to the metropole with the missionary Daniel Simões Ladeira, probably in 1913, since Ladeira was in São Salvador between 1902 and 1913 (Vezzú and Ntanda 2007: 22), “to learn Portuguese well and the tailoring trade, in order to return later to the Mission and offer his services there”¹⁴. After concluding his training, he asked for free transport to Angola on a steamship due to leave on 7 November, in order to join the missionaries who were to embark on the same ship. The application was not written by Nkiakuma, but by canon José Pereira Mendes, the registrar of the ecclesiastic chamber of the Angola and Congo Diocese in the early 1900s (cf. Anonymous, *Portugal em África*, 1903, 10:438). This fact is intriguing because Nkiakuma had come to Portugal to learn the language. Moreover, the paternalist mentoring of canon Mendes results maladjusted to Nkiakuma’s dignified self. The file has no further information except that the applicant was granted free transport.



Fig 2.



Fig. 3

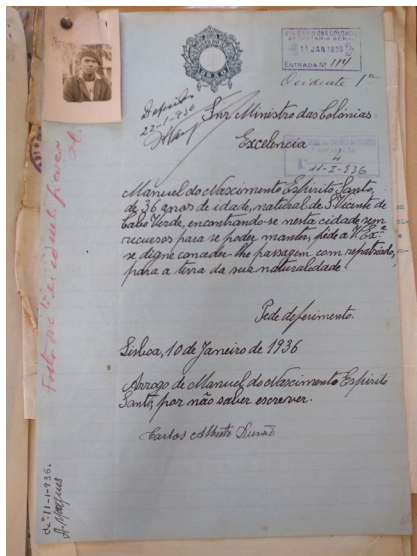


Fig. 3.1



Fig. 3.2

In the 20 boxes I have so far examined more closely, I have not encountered any other object with the quality of Nkiakuma's photograph in the "files of the repatriated", although there are other distinctive image-objects. One example is the photograph attached to the inscription certificate issued by the Portuguese consulate in Huelva (Spain) in the name of Pedro Paulo, single, seaman, born in Portuguese Guinea on 31 January 1876 (fig. 3). The print has a fading tone that may reveal a lower quality and cheaper process of production, but accentuates

the serenity of Paulo's gaze. A consulate stamp placed on the bottom right-hand quarter of the photograph leaves a bureaucratic mark on this rather distinctive image but is unable to threaten his personhood. The portrait presents the face and upper body of a refined man with a trim moustache, combed hair, wearing a fine suit, waistcoat and tie, a pocket watch, and a white flower in his lapel. The image conveying the dignity of Pedro Paulo contrasts with the information regarding his profession and, specially, the negative category of "indigent" that the administrative authority of the Lisbon's district assigned him in a letter to the minister of the Colonies asking for his repatriation. From this document, dated 24 August 1917, one learns that Pedro Paulo was transported at the expense of the Portuguese consulate in Huelva (Spain) to "this capital city", where he had no resources and wished to be repatriated to Portuguese Guinea, where he was born¹⁵. Was Paulo's portrait from a period on his life prior to his present economic difficulties? Were the clothes and the watch props borrowed exclusively to set the scene for photography? We cannot be sure. In any case, the pose and dress code in the portrait seem at odds with his socioeconomic condition. This happens in several other cases of poor and illiterate applicants. Still there is no comparable mismatch in other photographs of seamen applying for repatriation (for instance, fig. 3.1).

A bright smile, elegant appearance and confident look towards the camera caught my eye to Joaquim Domingos André, born in Cabinda (Angola) on 15 September 1910 (fig. 4). He wrote in an impeccable handwriting a detailed account, full of rhetoric and appeal to emotion, about his misfortune, and of his wife and new-born daughter.¹⁶ On 6 October 1934, he presented himself as a "poor black man due to being just another victim of the crisis, who drags himself around Lisbon, leading an almost vagrant life" (*"é um pobre preto por ser também mais uma vítima da crise, que arrasta por Lisboa uma vida de quase vagabundo"*). He tried to build an empathic bond with the Minister of the Colonies, stating that the minister knows "better than anyone the miseries with which the tremendous global crisis infests the world, and also our metropole". André followed this by arguing that the crisis had affected the metropole "to a lesser extent, thanks to the incomparable guidance of the current government, in which it is fair to highlight the president of the ministry and yourself, two colossi of tireless patriotism for the good of Portugal". He asked for passage to Luanda only for himself, explaining that he has in Lisbon a "charitable soul who houses" his wife and daughter, and his wife will be working as cleaning lady (*trabalhando "a dias"* [day work]) until he is able to call her to join him.

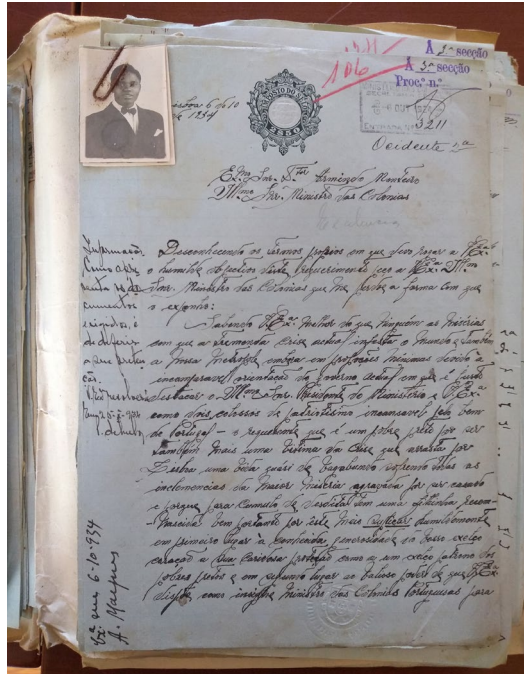


Fig. 4

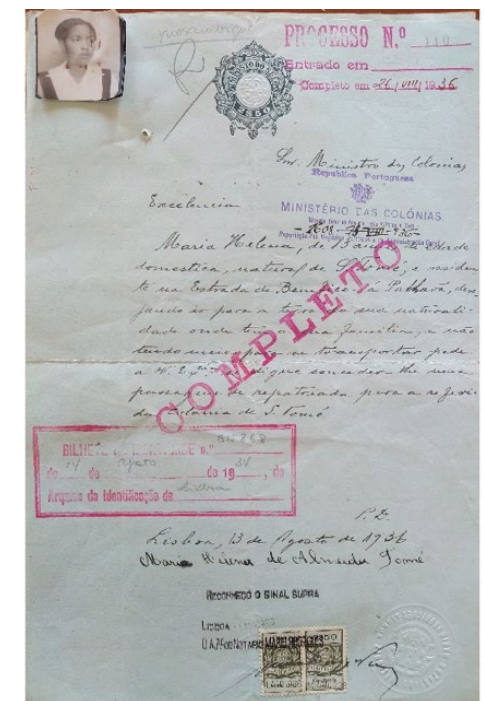


Fig. 5

The photograph in figure 5 is part of the application that Maria Helena Almeida Tomé delivered to the Ministry of the Colonies on 13 August 1936. She is not looking at the camera but slightly to her left. From the photograph is impossible to capture her intimate state of mind, but her eyes seem to have a sad expression.¹⁷ She is 13 years old, and she was born in São Tomé. She lives on *Estrada de Benfica a Pavalhã*, Lisbon, but one does not discover with whom. She did not write the application, but she signed it herself in perfect handwriting, so she must have completed primary education. In the application, she presents herself as homemaker (“*doméstica*”), but that does not necessarily mean she was no longer attending school. Her clothes may well have been a school uniform. From her birth certificate, one learns that Maria Helena was born on the Rio da Prata *roça* (plantation), on 23 March 1923, the illegitimate daughter (“*filha ilegítima*”) of Maria Júlia da Silva, 28 years old, single, born in Benguela (Angola), housewife, resident at Rio da Prata *roça*. Maria Helena was acknowledged as a daughter by the Portuguese Joaquim d’Almeida Tomé, single, property owner, and also resident at Rio da Prata *roça*. On 10 July 1936, Tomé wrote to his godfather (*compadre*) Henriques, accepting his advice to send Maria Helena back to São Tomé. The letter includes some insinuations about the expense involved in his daughter’s permanence in Lisbon and the debt the father had to incur on her account, probably with some Portuguese women entrusted with taking care of her or of her education.¹⁸ This case is representative of a very common, but not always openly admitted situation: children resulting from non-matrimonial (and usually enforced) sex between Portuguese men and Black women, generally domestic servants were taken from their mothers who were, thus, subjected to double violence (sexual exploitation and separation from their children). These children were then sent to the metropole to be raised by the fathers’ families, while the fathers remained in the colonies.

Like Maria Helena’s, João Afonso Rodrigues Santinho’s eyes do not face the camera directly, and his photograph has also a disturbing impact (fig. 6). Santinho was a 20-year-old man, born in Lourenço Marques (Mozambique’s capital), son of António Afonso Rodrigues Santinho and Joana Lopes Gomes. He was arrested for begging and imprisoned in the Lisbon Command jail of the Public Security Police (PSP).¹⁹ On 26 January 1940, the commander of the PSP, requested the Ministry of the Colonies to repatriate João Santinho, “in order to avoid the spectacle he makes in the downtown streets” of Lisbon.²⁰ He informed the Ministry of the Colonies that, some years ago, Dr. Mariano Godinho had brought Santinho to the metropole as a servant, but when the boss committed suicide he was abandoned.²¹ Later he worked in several factories, and suffered a work-related accident, which resulted in the amputation of some of the fingers on his right hand. Santinho’s photograph is attached to the letter from the Ministry of the Colonies to the PSP

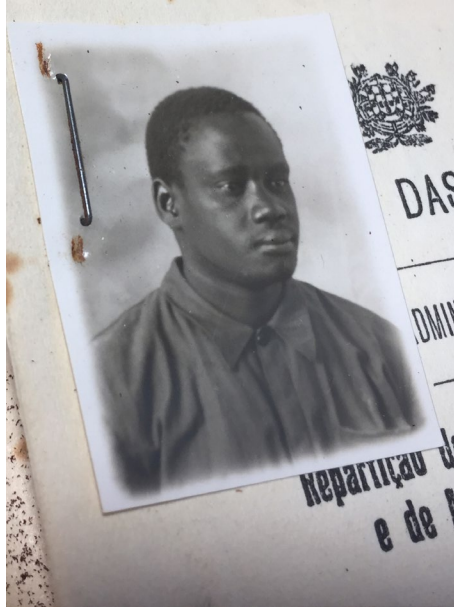


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

informing them that he had been granted free transport on the “Niassa”, leaving for Mozambique on 23 March, and should present himself at the Ministry on 21 March to pick up his embarkation permit and deliver two photographs. His ID photograph was probably taken at the police station. Among other cases prepared by police authorities, I recall the photograph of Januário Sousa, a 23-year-old Cape-Verdean sailor, repatriated by the Portuguese consulate of Antwerp, whose eyes are closed (fig. 7).²² Was it a reaction to the flash? Was it a conscious choice? Was it a response to police repression? One cannot tell, but his photograph epitomizes all the emotions an individual could be experiencing: fear, anger, sadness, etc.

Domingas (fig. 8), no surname, was a 12-year-old girl, born in Lobito, Angola.²³ Her quiet gaze into the distance touched me, and I wished I could take her in my arms, comfort her and give her a brighter future. This is evidence of the power of a portrait photograph to trigger personal responses, its unsettling ability to recreate the person's individuality and authenticity before us in the present (Rizzo 2014: 691). However, following Daniela Agostinho (2019: 160-161), I am aware of the entanglements of care and colonialism, and I have tried to devise an ethical mode to engage with this material. For now, all I can do is rescue a fragment of Domingas' story and her human dignity, combining sensibility with critical positioning.²⁴

On 7 January 1941, Lucinda de Figueiredo Valentim Lourenço, resident in Rua Antero de Quental, Lisbon, homemaker, and widow, who had travelled with

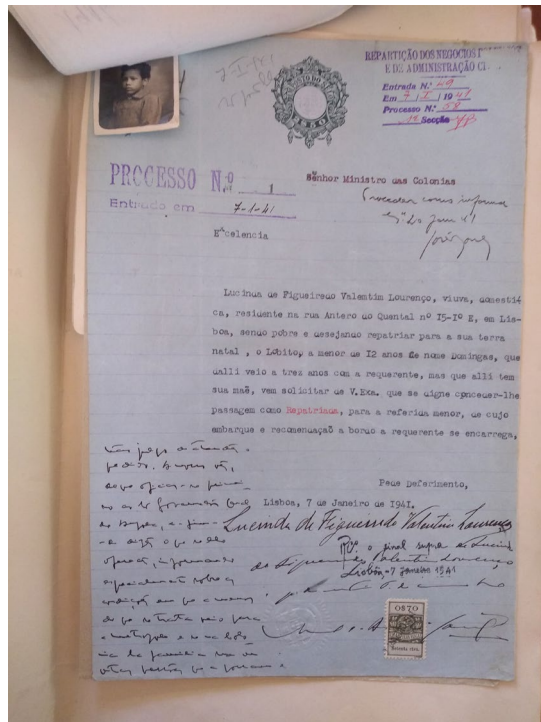


Fig. 8

Domingas to the metropole three years earlier, submitted a first application to the Ministry of the Colonies asking for the 12-year-old's repatriation to Angola, and claiming that she herself was poor. She attached the minor's birth certificate (the document is missing from the file) and two photographs. The Ministry of the Colonies asked the general government of Angola to ascertain the circumstances in which the minor had been brought to the metropole, and if she had family in the colony who were able and willing to take care of her. The relationship between Lucinda and Domingas is unclear. Were they mistress and servant? Was this a case of unpaid child labour disguised as protection and care? Lucinda did not say. Probably because a child under 12 years old could not be contracted for domestic service.

A year and a half later, Lucinda Valentim presented a new application for Domingas' repatriation, with two letters by Albano Abreu, dated Lobito, 18 April 1942 – one to Lucinda and the other to Domingas – offering to become Domingas' employer in Angola. He assured them that, as a servant (*criada*) in his house in Lobito, Domingas would be close to her mother and brothers as she wished and as the family had asked him. The official at the Ministry responsible for evaluating

the case did not consider the letters sufficient to grant Domingas free transport for repatriation to Lobito, and insisted that the Angolan authorities should clarify who authorised Domingas to leave the colony. Heard by the colonial authorities in Benguela on 13 May 1942, Guilhermina, Domingas' mother, a laundress, born in São Tomé, daughter of Jimbe and Filipa, and resident in Benguela, stated that she did not recall the day or year in which her daughter left Lobito for Luanda in the company of Lucinda Valentim, travelling the following year from Luanda to Lisbon. She also stated that she did not know which authority gave permission for Domingas to leave the colony. Finally, she said she wanted her daughter to return home.

Probably due to the constraints of the Second World War, Lucinda was only notified in mid-January 1945 that Domingas could pick up her embarkation permit to Angola at the Ministry of the Colonies, but Domingas had already left on 17 December 1942. Who paid for the return ticket? From the file, one does not know, but it is plausible that it was Domingas' new boss.

Figure 9 is the ID photograph of Maria Simões, attached to her permit of transit to Portuguese Guinea from 30 April 1949.²⁵ One sees a mixed race (near white) teenager smiling, wearing some lipstick and a fashionable checked dress. In March 1948, the Ministry of the Colonies received an application for Maria Simões' repatriation at State expense. At the time, she was 16 years, and lived on *Avenida Almirante Reis*, Lisbon, "staying at a charitable person's home" ("*em casa de quem se encontra por caridade*"). She did not know how to read and write, so another person – probably the woman she was staying with – wrote and signed the application at her request ("*a rogo de Maria Simões por não saber ler nem escrever*"). In 1946, Maria Simões had come to the metropole as servant of Leopoldina Pontes Hugh[k]. When Leopoldina got divorced from her husband, João Hugh[k], of German nationality, she also had to get a job, and dismissed Maria.

From the birth certificate issued at the request of Maria Simões on 12 December 1946, one learns that Maria was born on 4 November 1931, child of unknown parents ("*filha de pais incógnitos*"). Leopoldina Ponte Hugh[k], 35 years old, married, housewife, Irene de Oliveira Barbosa, 28 years old, married, housewife, Leonor Ledo Pontes, 40 years old, single, housewife, and Benjamim Pinto Bull, 29 years old, single, public servant, all resident in Bissau, were witnesses of the birth registration at the Bissau Civil Registry. Leopoldina and Benjamim declared they were godparents of Maria. On 8 October 1948, Manuel Araújo, a Post Office official in Bissau, wrote a "letter of invitation" to Júlia Maria Araújo Nunes (resident in Lisbon) offering to receive the servant Maria Simões and provide her a livelihood. Júlia Araújo Nunes, a widow and pensioner, had already offered to take responsibility for Maria Simões during the journey back to Bissau. The Ministry of the Colonies had five free tickets to Cape Verde and Portuguese

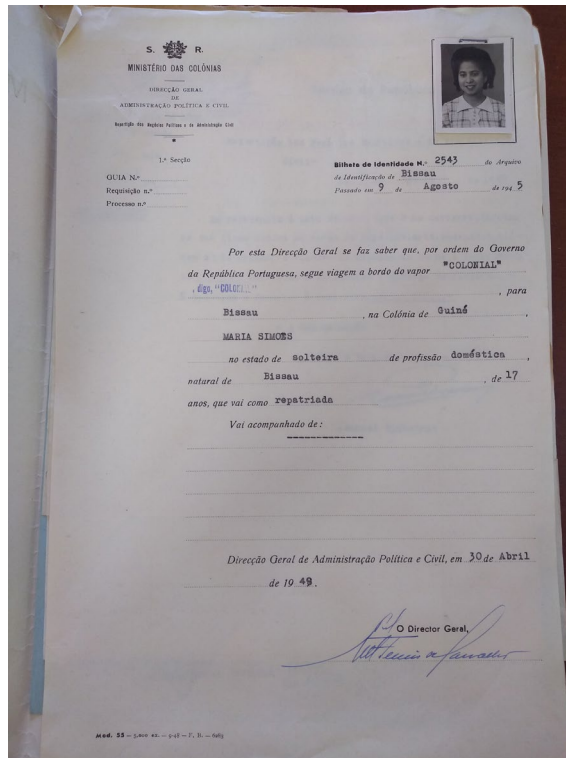


Fig. 9

Guinea on the “Guiné”, a ship of the *Companhia Nacional de Navegação*. As the “Guiné” was being repaired, on 8 February 1949 a Ministry of the Colonies official suggested that the “Colonisation Fund” (a state fund to promote white settlement in Portuguese Africa) pay for the repatriation. This pragmatic suggestion revealed the confusion between the categories of repatriated and settler, already abovementioned. Nevertheless, the ministry ordered the General Directorate of the Colonies to study how the colony of Guinea could pay for the ticket.

Conclusion

The “files of settlers and the repatriated” help us to reset our ideas on the limitations and possibilities of the imperial archive. They are important documents as historical sources and as memories of the empire. Reading the regularities of those files one understands the effort made by the imperial state to control and manage the flows of people within the empire and their settlement in the various

territories, in the context of the “mission of colonisation and civilisation”, and the concern of the imperial state with poverty and disorder. The colonial state machinery tried to put citizens and subjects in their proper place when they had no job or were poor, and the shipping companies became essential collaborators in this management of imperial circulation by providing the state with a small number of free tickets in each ship’s journey.

The “files of the repatriated” in particular complicate previous ideas about the movement of people across the empire (the direction of flow, and the people involved in it) and are an invaluable collection of information on long-overlooked subjects in the Portuguese historiography: the Black migrants from Portuguese colonies in Africa living at the centre of the empire. Black people’s everyday lives in the imperial metropole remain almost invisible in historiography, but they are visible in the repatriation files, as poor, unemployed, indigent, and deported. Adverse circumstances – of an economic or familial nature – forced them to go back. In several cases, their bosses wanted to get rid of them (especially in the case of women and children). One cannot help considering Kesting’s reflection (2014) on the “negative” visibility of migrants who were not fully acknowledged as citizens. Even when the repatriated were Portuguese citizens and not “*indígenas*” (subject to a different juridical statute), they were treated as “disposable” things, whose gender only aggravated the situation.

The “files of the repatriated” resonate with difficult life histories, injustices and violence, affection and disaffection, aspirations and disillusion, and the dependency and autonomy of Africans in Europe. Being “sources bathed in humanity” (Edwards and Mead 2013:33), the photographs have a special ability to “populate” the history of the imperial metropole during the first half of the twentieth century with Black social beings and lived experiences. As argued in the third section of this article, the visual record makes the cases even more real and human.

Pictures, despite their ability to become lost in text archives (Mitman and Wilder 2016:6) caused me to re-examine and realise the need for future archival inscription and historical research. As Ballantyne (2019) points out: “archival institutions and archivists play a key role in organizing collections, controlling access and setting terms of use, and (...) they can provide powerful clues to how archival materials should be read.” At a time of increasing awareness of colonial and racial prejudice in contemporary societies, after the Black Lives Matter and the Rhodes Must Fall movements, archives, museums, and other heritage institutions that curate the colonial past are under scrutiny. In this demanding ethical environment, the AHU must provide visibility for the “files of the repatriated” through a complete archival description available to the public. These files can in a near future take on a new life and become powerful material for documenting

Portuguese African lives and recounting the History of the Black presence in Portugal. This can undo the perceived linear relationship between African and migrant, so that Afro-Portuguese people can re-appropriate and reframe their past. This can be part of a strategy to empower children and youth against racial discrimination, and promote anti-racist education in general, involving an innovative joint effort by archivists, historians, artists, Afro-descendants and antiracist activists. The images provide rich opportunities for decolonial action (Basu and De Jong 2016) and can act as windows into a post-colonial imagination within museology, and artistic and literary projects.²⁶

Author

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Endnotes

1 Caroline Bressey (2006: 51) states that photographs have become an important primary source in her search for the Black presence in nineteenth-century London institutions that collated albums of their residents, such as prisoners and hospital patients.

2 On the situation in British Archives, see Chilcott, et al. (2021). It is worth mentioning, for instance, the effort of the London School of Tropical Hygiene and Medicine Archives: “to re-examine the way we work, the stories we tell and the role we can play in promoting different versions of history. (...) The global response to the Black Lives Matter movement further encouraged us to engage with our collections and archival practices from a decolonising perspective.” Retrieved from <https://blogs.lshrm.ac.uk/inclusion/2021/06/30/lshrm-archives-service-re-examining-the-way-we->

work-and-the-stories-we-tell/. To my knowledge, there has not yet been a comparable change in approach and practice in Portuguese archives.

3 For Mozambique, 12 settlers and 2 repatriates, for Cape Verde and Guinea 6 settlers and 1 repatriate, for Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe 6 settlers and 1 repatriate in each voyage.

4 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral das Colónias do Ocidente, n. 266.

5 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral das Colónias do Ocidente, n. 266.

6 Letter from the General Administration of the Port of Lisbon to the Minister of the Colonies, Lisbon, 25 March 1935. AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral de Administração Política e Civil, n. 266.

7 Application of Justina de Oliveira Lima, 15 October 1927, information from the chief of section, 18 October; and dispatch, 25 October. Portugal, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral das Colónias do Ocidente, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 266.

8 Information elaborated by the official in charge of the service of settlers, 5/10.11.1948, AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral de Administração Política e Civil, n. 10-11, 2-2).

9 See <https://digitarq.ahu.arquivos.pt/asearch>

10 Not all the files have photographs. Files from the late nineteenth century do not include photographs, and they seldom appear in files from the 1910s. In more recent files, a reason for a lack of photographs was the urgency of the imperial state to repatriate “undesirables”. In such cases, it could dispense with the presentation of some of the documents normally required for the process, such as an ID photograph or even a birth certificate. Sometimes, to get rid of “indigents” around the port of Lisbon or in jail, an incomplete file did not deter repatriation.

11 Elizabeth Hobart (2020: 216) in a courageous analysis of her own cataloguing special collections past practice and the traps of colour-blind racism in the US context, demonstrates that “ignoring race is an act of erasure”.

12 Charlotte G. Lellman, Guidelines for Inclusive and Conscientious Description, last change January 20, 2022. Available at: <https://wiki.harvard.edu/confluence/display/hmschomman/Guidelines+for+Inclusive+and+Conscientious+Description>

13 As stated above, there are 150 boxes with “files of settlers and the repatriated”, and for this paper I have consulted and relied on 20 (boxes 1-7, 11, 19.1, 19.2, 20, 23.1, 23.2, 266, 452, 1738, 2335, 2336, 2345 and 2355). So far, I am not able to say how many files there are.

14 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral das Colónias, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 2335.

- 15 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral das Colónias, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 2335.
- 16 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral de Administração Política e Civil, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 4.
- 17 On the dangers of over-reading photographs, Edwards 2021: 79-80.
- 18 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral de Administração Política e Civil, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 2.
- 19 The repression of begging and vagrancy increased in the early years of the *Estado Novo* regime. The Public Security Police Begging Hostel, known as *Albergue da Mitra*, was created by the PSP in 1933 to arrest the “bum” and “clean” the capital’s streets.
- 20 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral de Administração Política e Civil, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 4.
- 21 The application has no further information on Mariano Godinho, and I was unable to find much on his biography. I presume he was a lawyer (since the abbreviation *dr.* in Portuguese usually signifies a law graduate) and had Indian origins (he was member of the board of the Goan Sportive Club, in Beira, Mozambique). *Anuário de Lourenço Marques*, 1939, 755.
- 22 Photograph attached to a letter from PIDE to the Ministry of the Colonies, 4 April 1937. AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral de Administração Política e Civil, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 20.
- 23 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral de Administração Política e Civil, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 3.
- 24 Edwards (2021: 80) refers that “presence introduces a vital (in both senses of the word) sensibility, and like all historical practices, it requires critical positioning. Such an assessment is part of the historian’s craft.”
- 25 AHU, Ministério das Colónias, Direcção Geral de Administração Política e Civil, Processos de colonos e repatriados, n. 5.
- 26 On participatory photography projects with (self-) portraits, see Kesting 2014.

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