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Power and identity: the exhibition of human beings in the Portuguese great exhibitions

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Power and identity: the exhibition of human beings in the Portuguese great exhibitions

Patrícia Ferraz de Matos

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This article reflects on the inclusion of human beings in the colonial representations of the great exhibitions that Portugal organised or took part in during the first half of the twentieth century. It analyses the role played by the natives (from the Portuguese colonies), as well as the way they were represented and treated, based on various documents and interviews and on the study of the exhibition creation process. These exhibitions revealed some underlying tensions. On the one hand, they provided evidence of the differences between the 'civilised' and the 'uncivilised', of the diversity of 'races' and of their places in a hierarchy of civilisation. On the other, they extolled the way colonised peoples adopted Portuguese models. The ways those human beings have asserted their existence, under the power of the exhibition's organisers, provides a means to understand how they forged and assumed their identities in a context of rules.

Keywords: expositions; Portuguese colonial exhibitions; natives; identity; power

The great exhibitions emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and were a means for the North Atlantic imperial nations to display their industries. Most of them celebrated or commemorated a special event, historic or not, or showcased the latest developments in science and technology. Their aim was to highlight progress, with products arranged to show a hierarchy of economic, technological and racial development. Some were stages for the *mise-en-scène* of models of colonial administration, where supposed 'tribes' and their 'usages and customs' were put on display.

Although the roots of the World's Fair phenomenon went back to the Middle Ages at least, it is generally accepted that the modern exhibition age opened with the Great Exhibition held in the Crystal Palace in London in 1851. This was followed by the New York Exhibition (1853) and many more. The World's Fair survived until after the Second World War and each of them drew on the input of scientists, politicians, senior church dignitaries and other prominent figures.

Inspired by Marcel Mauss' classic work, Burton Benedict (1983) compared World's Fairs with enormous potlaches, rituals feasts of wealth and power in which the participants gave away or even destroyed their own possessions to gain

prestige and outdo their rivals (competitors, nations, cities, countries, colonial empires). They were costly events, organised on a lavish scale and their social, economic, political, legal, moral and aesthetic aspects turned them into a 'total social fact', in which all these dimensions made part of a whole.

One variant of the World's Fair was the colonial exhibition, which was designed to showcase the natural and human resources of the imperial power that organised it. The first international exhibition of this nature was held in the Netherlands (1883) and the second in London (1886). Other exhibitions, not specifically colonial also included elements related to colonialism. All these events had similarities, revealing attitudes that persisted over time.¹ According to Rydell, American organisers, like the European counterparts, combined imperialism and the supremacy of the whites (1992, p. 27).

The spaces where the exhibitions were held resembled places of popular entertainment, such as zoos, botanical gardens or circuses and temporary or permanent exhibitions organised by missionary societies or natural history museums – all of them stages for the display of other 'races' or species. The exposure of human beings can be traced back to the 1870s, when agents or officials were sent out to remote regions to bring back examples of so-called 'exotic types'. The Centennial Exhibition of Philadelphia (1876) included Indigenous Americans and non-western humans were exhibited in Paris (1878). 'Ethnographic villages' were re-created at the Exposition Universelle of Paris (1889), while the natives of Java, Samoa, Dahomey, Egypt and North America themselves were present at the Chicago Exhibition (1893).

Otis Mason (curator of ethnology at the Washington's National Museum) was impressed by the 'educational power' of the life groups (Hinsley 1991, p. 346) and he was enthusiastic about the idea of exhibiting them in Chicago (1893), on the fourth centenary of the New World's colonisation. For this exhibition, Franz Boas brought 14 members of the Kwakiutl group from Fort Rupert, British Columbia, with the aim of recreating the pristine pre-Columbian life. Each group portrayed various members of a community, in their traditional costumes, carrying out their typical daily tasks. Following Boas and the emergence of relativist anthropology, the emphasis shifted towards the placing of the objects of study in living contexts.² The cultures thus represented could be organised as part of an evolutionary sequence or as dispersed in a synchronous 'ethnographic present' (Clifford 1988, p. 228).

This wave of exhibitions persisted until the twentieth century, and the inter-war years were particularly fruitful. After the First World War, when the economic crisis hit and imperialism was under attack, some European governments used exhibitions as ways of promoting their empires. They sought to portray the supposed benefits of colonialism, regarded as an essential element of modernity and progress. The Portuguese case did not differ so much from others³ and was part of a much wider European model of colonial expos that exhibited human beings.⁴

1. Portugal in the wave of great exhibitions

Portugal (which had the first and longest colonial empire) joined to this wave in the nineteenth century, by taking part in exhibitions abroad and organising some at home. Examples of the former are Paris (1855, 1867, 1879), London (1862), Vienna (1873), Philadelphia (1876) and Amsterdam (1883); and of the latter Porto (1861, 1865), Lisbon (1863, 1882), Coimbra (1869, 1884) and Guimarães (1884). These participations also meant the affirmation of the Portuguese in the context of the occupation of Africa that was discussed in the Conferência de Berlim (1884–1885) and was stimulated by institutions like the Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa (created in 1875).

The end of the nineteenth century brought many political changes to the country that led to the end of the Portuguese monarchy in 1910. The First Republic began and until 1926 the country experienced opposing forms of Parliamentary Republic. The following period of maturation of dictatorship was institutionalised in 1933 under the designation of Estado Novo⁵ (new state) and remained until 1974. The holders of political power were then supportive of the existence of colonies and of the organisation of exhibitions in which these were represented. The exhibitions were a means of promoting the ideals of the Government on colonisation, and the presence of the colonies allowed them to convey an image of glory. However, although Portugal's exhibitions reached their golden age in 1940, this kind of phenomenon was on the decline elsewhere in the West.

In one of the catalogues (Cortesão 1930) of the Exposition Internationale Coloniale, Maritime et d'Art Flamand (1930), in Antwerp, Portugal emerges as a country of natural qualities and vast territories, a successful coloniser who had brought medical and moral care to the 'Indígenas',⁶ fought tropical diseases, spread occupational training and literacy, organised labour on a regional scale and engaged in missionary catechisation. After the Exposition Universelle of Brussels (1935), which the National Propaganda Office (1933–1944) supported, and also at the Exposition Universelle of Paris (1937) and at the New York World's Fair (1939), Portugal lost no opportunity to transmit propaganda for the policy of the regime. The National Bureau for Information, Popular Culture and Tourism (1944–1974) also played a key role in the centenary commemorations of 1940 and 1947 and also contributed to the Portuguese representations in international exhibitions.

The literature on the exhibitions which Portugal took part in from the nineteenth century onwards is sparse and not focused on the presence of human beings. Examples come from the fields of art history (França 1980, Portela 1982, Acciaiuoli 1998), history of science and technology (Silva 2000), geopolitics (Sidaway and Power 2005, Cairo 2006) and anthropology (Thomaz 1997). Omar Thomaz extols the importance of the empire for the affirmation of the Portuguese nation; however, he rather highlights the consensual aspects in those exhibitions. In addition, some critical literature on the world's fairs has largely overlooked Portuguese events, as Power and Sidaway (2005) argued.

This article will emphasise three expositions held during the Estado Novo: the Lisbon Industrial Exhibition (1932), the Portuguese Colonial Exhibition (1934) and the Exhibition of the Portuguese World (1940). The research is based on official publications, regulations, postcards, posters,⁷ interviews, periodicals and letters. Actually, the beginning of the twentieth century – mainly the 1930s and the 1940s – was characterised by a large amount of intellectual production and propaganda regarding the colonies, including the organisation of major congresses.⁸ My main objective is to contribute to a better understanding of these events and to reflect on the presence of human beings in these exhibitions. The article aims at questioning if these exhibitions intended to convey a real or a fictional image of the colonies and at determining its actual purpose. On the other hand, it intends to analyse how such participation was shaped and the contradictions involved.

2. A ‘Guinean village’ at the Lisbon Industrial Exposition (1932)

The Lisbon Industrial Exposition, sponsored by the Portuguese Industry Association, opened in the Palácio de Exposições of Lisbon’s Parque Eduardo VII in October and closed in December. One of the aims of the event was to reinforce the idea that fairs and exhibitions could raise the ‘level of civic education of the population’ (*IP* 52, p. 17). According to Garcez de Lencastre, agent-general for the colonies, it would be ‘interesting and unusual to divulge’ the colony of Guinea ‘among the population of Lisbon and outsiders’. On behalf of the general agency for the colonies, Lencastre suggested the organisation of an ‘Indigenous village’, a ‘typical settlement where artisans, such as weavers, tailors, smiths, saddlers, etc., would exercise their crafts and go about their daily lives’ (*IP* 51, p. 39).

The colonial part of the exhibition comprised an official section and a private-sector section. The former hosted a ‘demonstration of the tendencies and prospects of the *Indígenas* in the exercise of various industrial skills’ (*IP* 53, pp. 56–57). As a complement, an ‘Indigenous village’ was mocked up with living, working, performing ‘Guinean *Indígenas*’, and was ‘one of the biggest attractions’. The *Indígenas* were supervised and ‘guided’ by António Pereira Cardoso, a senior employee of the Curadoria dos Negócios Indígenas da Guiné. The event was publicised in film shows, on the radio, in the press and through regional associations.

Four chieftains (*régulos*) were brought from Guinea, as representatives of the ‘Indigenous authorities’, and with them other natives⁹ that carried out tasks of various kinds – crafts, industry or folklore. Most stories in the press focused on the chieftains and the prince (the son of one of them) stating their names and highlighting their distinctive marks. According to the press, chieftains (Boncó Sanhá, Samba Iussufo Baldé, Bram-Dj’Ame Baldé and Demba Danejo) were ‘chosen from those of greatest prestige [and those who had performed] the most relevant services to the administration of the colony’; they understood Portuguese and spoke it ‘fairly well’; they had ‘excellent bearing’, were ‘very intelligent’ and had come ‘decked out in their best costumes and finery’ (*IP* 56, pp. 55–56). As for the

remaining natives, they were collectively referred to as 'Blacks' in their 'gaudy apparel', 'with warrior chants and marches', playing 'heathen instruments' (*IP* 56, p. 44). The prince, named Abdulbalder, aged 28, was described as most engaging with 'shining eyes' and 'teeth of a dazzling whiteness' (*IP* 56, p. 53). The (unnamed) *IP* journalist related that the prince was 'much in demand' and that 'White ladies' were making insinuations at him and even sending him letters with 'words more than friendly' (*IP* 56, p. 62). Moreover, perhaps because he was the son of a chieftain and spoke and understood Portuguese, and was a 'winsome and articulate young man', he was invited to 'visit the houses of rich people' who lived near the park (*IP* 56, p. 54).

The actions of the chieftains' companions were only accounted for when they played a distinctive role in the exhibition. The group included 'two weavers, one tailor-embroiderer, one shoemaker, one blacksmith and one goldsmith'; its performing artists numbered included 'one gourd player, one fiddler, one marimba player, two Jews (a man and a woman), dancers and musicians, one *caifás* (an acrobatic dancer), four *Futa-Fula* dancers and two wrestlers'. According to the press, there were 'ten young girls of characteristic beauty, [who had come] to sing as a choir and take part in the dances'. In all, the retinue numbered '39 *Indígenas*, belonging to various tribes of the Fula race' (*IP* 56, p. 56). The Natives themselves built the 'village', named Sam Corlá (after the Guinean chieftainship to which the natives belonged). It comprised eight 'hovels' or 'huts', with the women on one side and the men on the other and a separate enclosure housed several animals.

The Natives were also seen as deeply superstitious. One article mentions that, as they had been in the sixteenth century, the *Fula* and *Mandinka* were 'faithful to their infidel religion' (*IP* 56, p. 58). Prince Abdulbalder noted that the natives continued to observe their religious practices during the exhibition, praying five times a day and ate whenever they felt like it, not at fixed hours like the 'gentlemen' in the metropolis. The *Fula*, who were Muslims, could eat nothing that had not been prepared by fellow Muslims and back in Guinea their mullahs would not be pleased to hear that they had drunk wine, for example.

Discipline was imposed not only by the strict mealtimes ordained by the organisers of the exhibition but also by the village chiefs. Control was exercised over both the timetable and the people themselves. As Foucault noted, 'time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power' (1977, p. 152). Discipline was imposed and power asserted, via control over the natives' bodies. In addition, the natives were allowed to leave the exhibition precinct, but only with authorisation and when properly accompanied.

Visitors are said to have shown 'extraordinary curiosity' towards the *Indígenas* and this led to the 'practice of excesses'. It was the 'desire to see the *Indígenas*' that led to the village being 'stoned by curious onlookers who, in so unorthodox a manner, wanted to force them out of a shack where some of them were lodged, so they could see them'. For this reason, 'the settlement of the *Indígenas* was . . . put under the guard of the Police and some army recruits' for a few days (*IP* 56,

p. 56). One issue of *IP*, published after the end of the exhibition, mentions the high number of visitors – over 45,000 – and states that the populace had been ‘orderly and disciplined at all times’, and at no point had ‘the civil police had reason to intervene’ (*IP* 58, p. 34). Just two months later, the stoning episode seemed to have been forgotten and there was only occasion to celebrate the visitors’ behaviour!

3. Natives as *living artefacts* at the Portuguese Colonial Exhibition (1934)

The Portuguese Colonial Exhibition was held at the Crystal Palace in Porto from June to September 1934, closing with a colonial procession. With over 400 pavilions, the exhibition attracted 1 million visitors. According to the exhibition’s commissioner, Henrique Galvão¹⁰ (1935), who was one of the principal ideologues of colonial propaganda, ‘the average daily number of visitors was 12,000’. By putting on show the vastness of its possessions Portugal was no longer ‘a small country’, in a clear reference to the famous poster¹¹ published at the time of the exhibition. According to Galvão, the exhibition offered the opportunity to take a journey through the expanses of the empire, which together constituted ‘a whole’ (1934, p. 16).

All the streets and avenues in the exhibition precinct were named after regions of the ‘empire’. In addition to the part showcasing ‘European Settlement’, the exhibition also sought to ‘show the liberal and humanitarian models on which “Indigenous Policy” was based’. As for ‘Education in the Colonies’, the idea was to show the expansion of education in ‘primary’, ‘national’, ‘higher’, ‘vocational’ and in ‘central secondary schools’ (*Guia Oficial do Visitante* 1934, pp. 7, 13–17). The ‘Ethnography’ group included the ‘allegorical pavilions of S. Tomé, India and Macao’ and ‘heathen villages inhabited by Natives of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea’. Over the ‘Macao street’ was the pavilion of the same name; this featured a ‘teahouse’ with a resident orchestra of Chinese musicians. On the same street was a Hindu temple ‘garrisoned with dancing girls and *Indígenas*¹² of the State [of India]’ (Galvão 1935, p. 25).

Various sources inform us that 324 natives were present at the exhibition. However, a report compiled by the agent-general for the colonies mentions that the general agency for the colonies ‘gave assistance to 185 *Indígenas* from the Colonies’. A doubt remains. Did only 185 natives require assistance? Or did only 185 actually travel to the exhibition? Were the remainder already in Portugal? According to the anthropologist Mendes Correia,¹³ his French colleagues had not been authorised to study a single *Indígena* at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition of Paris, but in Porto it had been possible ‘to exhaustively examine over 300 *Indígenas*’ (*Trabalhos do I Congresso* 1934, vol. I, pp. 28–29). This observation denotes some of the efforts that were made in the Portuguese colonial anthropology in the laboratory, but also in the field by sending anthropology missions to the colonies (Matos, 2012).

In political terms, the Constitution and the Colonial Act¹⁴ (*Acto Colonial*) considered ‘all Portuguese, born in the Mainland, in the adjacent islands or in

the overseas provinces, to be Portuguese citizens' (*Portugal através do tempo* . . . 1934). In spite of this alleged equality, the arrival of people from Africa, India, Macao and Timor aroused great curiosity and some visitors did not behave correctly. As one of my interviewees told me, some men acted provocatively towards the native women, particularly the African ones, while some of the female visitors seemed enthralled by the naked bodies of the African men.¹⁵ On the one hand, the female visitors looked askance at the sensuality of African women. On the other, both press reports and oral accounts show that the behaviour of some female visitors, who gazed at the beauty and physical vigour of the African men, sullied the image of mainland women. In some texts we can find an articulation with excessive sexuality and polygamy. It happens, for example, in a text on Mozambique which highlights that 'polygamy is legitimate among the *Indígenas*' (*Album-Catálogo Oficial* 1934, p. 329). However, these statements are mostly devoid of proof.

In addition to being physically put on show, the natives were captured in images. For this, Galvão called on artists of a conservative stripe to make portraits of the natives. One of these was Eduardo Malta (1900–1967), whose portraits of members of each of the groups ('races') were published as a collection of picture postcards. Apart from this, Fotografia Alvão had the exclusive rights to take photographs of the exhibition. There are no reports of complaints from the subjects about having their photos taken and distributed. As with the films,¹⁶ produced on this and other exhibitions, the idea conveyed was that the natives were happy to see pictures of themselves.

At the end of the event, the colonial procession illustrated various episodes of the Portuguese discoveries and colonial expansion (*O Cortejo Colonial* . . . 1934) and all the natives were described as Portuguese. But in addition to the various classifications assigned to them,¹⁷ the fact that some were paid to participate while others did so for nothing suggests differential treatment. The emphasis in this procession was not on ethnological diversity, but on the fact that all participants were part of a single entity under Portuguese sovereignty. However, although they were all uniformly treated as *Indígenas*, each group was assigned to a level of civilisation according to its way of life, dress, social status, education and occupation.

4. The colonial section of the Exhibition of the Portuguese World (1940)

The colonies and the Portuguese discoveries returned to the limelight in the centenary celebrations in 1940. The act of celebration is also a way of creating a community – real or imagined.¹⁸ As Hobsbawm and Ranger (1985 [1983]) noted, the invention of traditions has a fundamental role in the construction of nationalist ideologies.¹⁹ In 1940, while most of Europe was at war and Spain was just emerging from its own turmoils, Portugal staged a great nationalist commemoration. The celebrations ran from June to December and included congresses, a historic exhibition and the imperial procession. They marked the centenaries of

the foundation of nationhood (1140) and the Restoration (1640) and were also designed to glorify the Estado Novo politics.

With expenditure on the event topping 35 million escudos, several commentators have described it as the biggest political and cultural ‘happening’ ever organised under the Estado Novo. Lisbon, the national capital, became an imperial capital. From start to finish, some 3 million visitors attended, including foreigners. Despite the political and ideological objectives of the commemorations, they seem to have mobilised artists and intellectuals from all shades of the political spectrum, many of them with views diametrically opposed to those of the regime. The interviews I conducted revealed a similar insouciance with regard to the presence of the natives. According to the *Roteiro dos Pavilhões*, the exhibition was divided into four sections: (a) the Historical Section; (b) the Regional Centre²⁰; (c) the Colonial Section; and (d) the Miscellaneous Section, made up of an amusement park, a large lake and other elements. Next to the Colonization Pavilion was the Pavilion of Brazil – a good example of the civilising endeavours of the Portuguese and the only official foreign participant.

If the Exhibition of the Portuguese World was to ‘ordain Portugal as an Empire’ (Catroga 1996, p. 598), the inclusion of a section which showcased Portugal’s overseas presence was fundamental. The desire to include a colonial section had first been voiced when Oliveira Salazar presented his plans for the centenary commemorations.²¹ Several families of natives had arrived in Lisbon by the end of May, where they were met as they came off their ship by the minister of the colonies and a crowd eager to see the ‘peoples of the empire’. Although there were fewer natives than at the Porto Colonial Exhibition (1934), there was an attempt to show the variety of human ‘types’ contained in the empire. However, in the whole arrangement, the colonial section was positioned in the background, away from the centre, which included the abbey of the Jerónimos and the Praça do Império. The representatives of the overseas possessions were banished to the margins. Some of them were considered examples of the ‘exotic’ and ‘strange’. One national newspaper described them like this: among the ‘*Indígenas* (. . .) with their exotic festive dress’ were the ‘Kipungu women with their bizarre and elaborate hairstyles, with rings and necklaces around their necks, and a group of musicians that elicited odd and barbaric drones from their strange instruments’ (*Diário de Notícias*, 28 June 1940).

The colonial section, divided into seven sectors (Galvão 1940), offered visitors the chance to discover, ‘in two hours’, the whole Portuguese empire ‘from Africa to the Pacific’ and was ‘an ethnographic document of three continents: Africa, Asia and Oceania’ (*O Século* 1940, p. 382). It was installed in the Jardim Colonial with a series of artificial sub-environments designed to give visitors the sensation that they were actually in the heat of the tropics.

The first sector contained the pavilions of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea and the Island colonies (Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe and Timor). As at the Portuguese Exhibition in Porto (1934), all the streets were named after regions of the empire. Rua da Índia did not seek to recreate Goan life, but to show ‘typical

buildings of Portuguese India' (Galvão 1940, p. 276). Rua de Macao reconstituted life in Macao with its pavilion, lottery houses, emporia, fan-tan (a popular game) dens, pagoda and houses of Native Macanese. The colours of the ensemble were striking, mainly scarlet.²² The third sector comprised the 'Villages and Dwellings of the Indigenous Peoples – a Document of Usages and Customs' where 'lived' 138 natives. The settlements it contained were: villages of the *Indígenas* of Guinea (Bijago, Fula and Mandinka); Angolan villages (including the house of the king of Kongo); the villages of the Muchope and Makonde peoples of Mozambique; replicas of 'typical' Cape Verdean and Macanese dwellings; a village of Timorese *Indígenas* on top of a cave; a 'house of the Natives' of São Tomé e Príncipe; typical Indian dwellings; and the Village of the *Muleques*, where the 'Indigenous' children could play.

For this exhibition I also carried out the research in the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU) in Lisbon into some 50 documents²³ (letters, telegrams and reports) which passed through the office of Vieira Machado, Portuguese minister for the colonies. This research enables me to establish what form the selection process took and how the natives were supervised and accommodated. I also attempted to determine why, since they did not represent the majority of the population of a given territory, or did not even belong to it, certain individuals were chosen rather than others, and whether there was any discrimination in those choices. The transport and installation of certain native groups was not trouble-free, contrary to what Thomaz (1997) appears to suggest when he emphasises mainly the festive aspects of the exhibition.

According to a letter (27 July 1940), the 'Angolan representation' comprised 'thirty-seven *Indígenas*', divided among 'civilized', *Assimilados* and 'heathen'. The 'civilized' were either Catholic (king, queen and princess of Kongo, their secretary and a king's minister) or Protestant (another king's minister). The *Assimilados* included two Catholics: the king's servant and the maid-in-waiting to the princess. The 'heathens' were the remaining natives, who were divided into 'tribes'. The names of them are never given, regardless of their social status. Only the king and his retinue were allowed to leave the exhibition whenever they wished.

In a telegram (19 March 1940) the Cape Verde' governor announced that he had 'procured' a group of ten individuals, and collected 'folk songs' and 'anthologies of popular and erudite poetry' (good examples of 'assimilation'). The 'Timor representation' 'comprised a *suco* leader [equivalent to a parish] named Francisco, his wife, two of their children, a male servant named Moisés, a female servant named Herminia' and all were 'Natives of Hato-Udo, in the Civil District of Suro'.²⁴ With the exception of the king of Kongo, this is the first time the names of members of the 'Indigenous representations' are given, even the servants' names. All the men spoke Portuguese and women are not referred to. The leader's oldest son, João, spoke Portuguese perfectly and had been educated in the missionary school of Ainaro (Suro) – making him a fine example of assimilation. The report mentions that 'all the *Indígenas*' were Catholics, as well as 'sensible, respectful, and perfectly disciplined'.

The Macanese representation (11 August 1940) includes ‘one female singer and her attendant, two coolie carters who doubled as bankers in fan-tan, and three camphorwood carvers’, but of these craftsmen and coolies, only three spoke Portuguese. In the ‘order’ of the ‘Indian representation’ were included a snake charmer, a conjurer, a ‘sorcerer or astrologer’ and ‘two *Bayaderes*’ (20 November 1939²⁵). Significantly, this so-called representation included no aspect indicative of Portuguese influence on the Indian element. This suggests that the organisers sought to make the event as attractive as possible for a broad audience, and that this would be achieved if they included exotic attractions. The Indians were more demanding than the Africans as far as their travelling and accommodation arrangements were concerned.

The ‘Mozambican representation’ comprised ‘a group of forty Chopi formed by thirty men who were *timbila* (marimba) players and dancers, five women and five children’ and six members of the Makonde people of Nyassa (Cunha 1940). The ‘Guinean representation’ was comprised of 37 natives of Guinea, broken down by ‘race’: 15 Bijago, 12 Mandinka and 10 Fula. The supervisor had to sign a declaration of liability (11 August 1940) in the presence of the ‘Curator general of the *Indígenas*’ in which he pledged to ‘oversee and assist’ his charges. Apart from being delivered like merchandise, the *Indígenas* were ‘overseen and assisted’, a verbal formula that we frequently encounter.²⁶

By late August, one of the exhibition’s most hotly discussed topics was the marriage of two Africans in the colonial section and the later baptism of two children. All of the *Indígenas* took part in these ceremonies. But, instead of serving as good examples of the success of the civilising and evangelising efforts in the colonies, they in fact generated controversy, not only for the circumstances but also because various national newspapers carried stories on these episodes. Vieira Machado revealed he was ‘very surprised to have learned of the marriage of two African *Indígenas* only from the newspapers’, and considered the episode ‘shocking’ (27 August 1940). None of the delegates, however, accepted responsibility for that. Although the natives were ‘overseen’, certain phenomena escaped the control of their ‘guardians’. This is more than a case of resistance by the weaker party, the one that despite its subjugation and supervision proves capable of turning the situation to its own advantage; it also attests to the ability of the natives to organise themselves secretly, within a confined space subject to permanent observation, opposing the instituted discipline. Forms of resistance can emerge from power relations, and as such should not be viewed as independent of them.²⁷ In this case, the power of the natives also lay in their ability to organise themselves (an ability not normally acknowledged by the colonisers). As Foucault observed, where there is power there is resistance; and this resistance never exists in a position of exteriority relative to power (1978, pp. 95–96). Nevertheless, this resistance put up by the natives was not appreciated by those who wielded power there. The natives organisation was seen as a threat to the smooth running of the exhibition and the ‘order of the events’.

5. Discussion

The staging of Portuguese exhibitions involved the objectification of values such as nationality, with the empire being a part of the context, and the country was shown as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983). As McClintock notes, the imperial expositions reveal the conversion of the narrative of imperial progress into mass-produced consumer spectacle and the spectator 'consumed history as a commodity' (1995, p. 57). But what the visitors saw was not colonial reality per se, but a construction deliberately conceived as distinct from the western, urban, bourgeois and industrial world. As Corbey notes (1993, p. 340), it was not the natural elements of the colonies which were celebrated, but those which had been transformed by men. And it would seem that the natives were included among these natural elements. Thus, the exhibitions told an evolutionary story in which Portuguese or European hegemony was projected as the outcome of a desirable process of development.

In the visual staging of this 'history', each of the natives was expected to play a certain role, regardless of whether he or she was fit for playing it, as in the case of the Indian courtesans who came to play the role of dancers at the 1940 exhibition. The inclusion of human beings engaged either in recreations of daily activities or representations or formal performances created the illusion that the activities on show were real, not representations, and this in turn created an illusion of authenticity (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1991, pp. 413, 416). However, exhibitions were 'theatrical events' also similar to the practice of colonial politics based on a strategy of ordering everything with the aim of revealing a pre-existing plan and giving a meaning to such practice (Mitchell 1988, pp. 4, 178).

The Darwinian idea of the power of the strong over the weak was still evident in these exhibitions,²⁸ but now the emphasis was on showing that the objective of domination was the elevation of the colonised peoples – Portuguese colonialism was seen as a humanitarian mission. However, the term *Indígena* is indiscriminately applied as a descriptor of 'Native populations', even when the people in question did not have *Indígena* status. And discriminatory attitudes are not always rooted in the idea of 'race', but rather articulated in terms such as *colonizado* or 'under Portuguese sovereignty'. African/not African was another major line of distinction (the Africans themselves being classed as *Indígena*, *Assimilado* or *Civilizado*), as was relative proximity to the European, as in the case of the natives of India and Macao; here the 'civilisation' factor and social status played fundamental roles. In the exhibitions Portugal is projected like a country that had the gift of leading different human groups scattered all over the world, groups which thanks to the Portuguese could now aspire to a higher level of 'civilisation'. But there is a contradiction here: although the objective was to put the differences on display, all were lumped together in the same place, all were considered *Indígenas* and little or nothing was in fact known about them; some were even assuming a false identity. The description of Portugal as a unique, pluri-continental and pluri-racial country must be seen as an ideology. What the expositions ended

up recreating was a fiction based on reality but contrived to show only what was intended to be seen.

By placing the 'Other' in a distant past, those who developed this 'fiction' were acting similarly to early anthropologists. As an object of study, the 'Other' had to be different and distant from the one who was studying him. Those anthropologists did not aim at 'finding' the savagery in the 'savage', nor the primitiveness in the 'primitive', but at placing him in that condition (Fabian 1983, p. 121). In this case, a representation was made to create the illusion of the primitive (Kuper 1988) in order to locate the 'Others' in a time that preceded the Portuguese, and spatially at a distance. The manipulation of space was fundamental. The exhibition's visitors were panoptical observers. It was this phenomenon of 'seeing without being seen' – or being observed without seeing one's observer – that Foucault described as the panopticon effect (1977, p. 205). And the way the natives were accommodated in 'villages' also brings to mind Appadurai (1988), who argued that natives are not merely people who belong to certain places; they are somehow incarcerated in, or fated to occupy, these places.

All this rendered them exotic and strange in the eyes of westerners. As Adam Kuper (1988) argues, when we study constructions of the 'primitive', we are looking at mirror images of those who make those constructions, in that they are made by opposition to what those authors think to be or to represent – the modern society of which they were a part, and which developed from its antithesis. Gustav Jahoda (1999) also says that images of 'Others' reflect the peculiarities of those who conceive them rather than of those represented by them. Taking this further, it is possible to define the degrees of 'otherness', ranging from those who are in the close circle of relationships to those who are completely alien to it (Jahoda 1999, p. xiv). In the Portuguese exhibitions those degrees were made explicit in the different ways people from the colonies were treated.

The reactions of the visitors ranged from repugnance and disdain to fascination and sympathy. The exhibitions' organisers did intend to encourage an engagement with the exotic; yet a clear and sometimes even ironic distance was maintained. Visitor accounts, press reports and visual representations reveal a curiosity or fascination with the native men which stems from their supposed sexual prowess. But this fascination occasionally degenerates into depreciation of beings whose supposed bestial lasciviousness makes them repugnant. As Hinsley wrote about the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition of Chicago, 'the exotic and forbidden erotic merge as commodity' (1991, p. 354). There were explicitly sexual overtones at the Portuguese exhibitions in the interest shown by white males in semi-naked black women, and by white females in lean, healthy black men. In the newspapers and catalogues African women were commonly described as 'black Venus', 'beauties', 'fruits of the earth' and 'black beauty'. However, although they were described as pretty, good-natured and erotically permissive, they were also considered as *lacking* in beauty.

Among the images that elicited sympathy are: the photographs of the king of Kongo with his queen and baby daughter at the 1940 exhibition, or pictures

of children and babies. It was a frequent practice for visitors to give the natives money for their performances, or when they were asked. Yet, despite the sympathies they have awakened in the visitors, the natives were subjected to salacious comments, and at the Lisbon Industrial Exhibition (1932) the visitors even stoned them. In addition, while official discourse viewed the natives as lazy, they almost always appeared busy at some task, just like the craftsman of the metropolis; and those who performed these tasks were considered to be on the right track as far as their ascension to civilisation was concerned.

Conclusion

There seems to have been a certain tension between the different elements on show at these exhibitions. On the one hand, the objective was to illustrate the difference between 'civilised' and 'uncivilised', the diversity of 'races' and to arrange these 'races' in a hierarchy of civilisation. On the other, the objective was to celebrate the adoption by the colonised people of Portuguese models²⁹ of language, dress and religion. Thus, there was an inherent paradox in the process of civilising and evangelising the 'exotic' peoples.

The stories told in this context can therefore be seen as mediators between two opposing states of humanity. They bring to mind Lévi-Strauss's (1971) interpretation of myth as a dynamic which embraces contradictions or paradoxes. But, as with myths, the contradictory or opposing forces need to be maintained. There can never be a complete harmony between them. The discordance between 'civilised' and 'primitive', 'White' and 'Black', 'Christian' and 'heathen', almost, but never quite, resolves. The discordance is necessary if the 'story' – one which exoticises and familiarises at the same time – is to continue (Karp and Lavine 1991). The exhibition of human beings in the colonial context should also arouse in us the desire to develop new research. In fact some of the social contradictions present in the contemporary societies may have resulted from a number of myths that have arisen during the colonial period. They were re-adapted to modern times, but did not disappear at all and may arise when we least expect them.

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Notes

1. On the differences between nations, see Benedict (1991) and Coombes (1991).
2. Boas (1887, pp. 61–62); Jacknis (1985, p. 83).
3. However, compared with the English, French and North American cases, the Portuguese imperialism is often ignored in the international literature.
4. See, for instance, Mitchell (1988).
5. It was a corporatist and authoritarian state idealised by António de Oliveira Salazar, characterised by a Catholic matrix and traditional and anti-liberal guidelines.

6. Under article 2 of colonial ministerial decree 16473 of 6 February 1929, which defined the political, civil and criminal status of natives, '*Indígenas*' (i.e. natives) 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'. The guidelines for colonial policy were established by the Colonial Act (*Acto Colonial*) of 1930, which laid down differences in rights and duties between those born in the mother country and those born in the colonies, and 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.
7. On the use of cartography as a tool of propaganda, see Cairo (2006).
8. Matos (2013).
9. Natives are also non-European people who were treated like an exhibit of European/Portuguese curiosity.
10. Galvão (1895–1970) wrote several texts and novels about Africa. During the Estado Novo, he was governor in Angola, director of Emissora Nacional, organiser of the Portuguese Colonial Exhibition (1934) and coordinator of the colonial section of the Exhibition of the Portuguese World (1940). After that he began to clash with the Estado Novo, was arrested in 1951 and he has been linked to opposition against Salazar (Matos 2013).
11. With the title 'Portugal is Not a Small Country', this poster was an attempt to show that the surface area of the 'Portuguese empire' was larger than Europe. This 'empire' was compared to other European countries, some of them larger, with no regard for any colonies they might possess. As Cairo (2006) notes, the mapmaking was a fundamental process in nation building. However, the map of Galvão with a multi-continental community was not a real threat to other European powers (Sidaway 2000, p. 122).
12. People could be classified as *Indígenas* indiscriminately, despite not having this status, as happened with the people of the State of India (who never had it).
13. On the work of Mendes Correia – the leader of the Anthropology School of Porto –, see Matos (2012).
14. France also possessed an unequal Colonial Act, compromised by the development of an approach founded on a 'racial hierarchy' and hidden behind an ideology that advocated the 'unity of races'.
15. Interview conducted in March 2003 with one of the visitors.
16. Matos (2013).
17. On the colonial categories and their exclusions, see Stoler (2002), who emphasises the place of the gender in the construction of the racial discrimination. McClintock (1995) also analyses the gendering dynamics of imperial power.
18. On the discussion of the Portuguese imperial imagination in post-colonial theory and literature, see Ribeiro (2004).
19. In the late nineteenth century Renan argued that it was necessary 'to forget the historic horror to create a nation' (1992 [1882]). In the Portuguese case there was an imperial nationalism; the Portuguese identity was also forged through the imagination of the empire (Ribeiro 2004, Matos 2012, 2013).
20. This section included the exhibition of representatives from the provinces of Portugal.
21. Salazar wanted an exhibition which exemplified the 'civilizing action' of Portugal around the world (*Diário de Notícias*, 27 March 1938).
22. Examples of what Edward Said (1995) called 'Orientalism': the representation of the 'Orient' in all its facets according to Western idealisation.

23. AHU, process no. 4/64, subject 'Exhibition of the Portuguese World'.
24. Report on 15 August 1940 (AHU process no. 4/64).
25. AHU process no. 4/64.
26. AHU process no. 4/64.
27. Abu-Lughod (1990) found something similar among Bedouin women, who were subject to the imposition of their menfolk with regard to marriage and morality. So to negotiate power and gender relations they resorted to stratagems – resisting power by using their own power.
28. On the relation between Portuguese colonialism and the idea of race, see Matos (2013).
29. While imposed assimilation was typical of the US and French colonialism, it was not as important in the British Empire.

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