

Daniel F. Silva, *Empire Found: Racial Identities in 21st-Century Portuguese Popular Cultures*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022. 215 pages.

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In *Empire Found*, Daniel Silva boldly proposes to situate contemporary Portuguese popular culture within a critical discursive framework of de-colonization and anti-racism. In so doing, he seeks to draw attention to a selection of tropes, signifiers, and minority subjectivities that circulate in mainstream narratives of cultural production, while still challenging sanguine assumptions of Portugal's achievement of multicultural and multiracial harmony. One of the book's immediate strengths is its ample coverage of popular culture: from the history of ideas to detective fiction, football, celebrities, television programs, popular music, and even hair styles, each of its five chapters touches on major aspects of everyday life and fills important gaps in the existing scholarship for cultural studies of present-day Portugal.

Silva's primary methodological focus is a critique of whiteness in Portugal triangulated by African, Middle Eastern, and Spanish American cultural reference points. This is reflected in the first chapter, "Portuguese Whiteness and Racial Ambiguity in Intellectual Thought During Empire," which stakes out the intellectual history of colonialism by Lusophone intellectuals as distinct from at-times strategically ambiguous claims to Portugal's ethnic formation as a white European or Mediterranean nation.

The second chapter, "Post-Imperial Orientalism and Portuguese Claims to Late Capitalist Whiteness in José Rodrigues dos Santos's Mystery Thrillers," segues somewhat abruptly into a discussion of the controversial writer and journalist whose bestselling genre fiction novels, rather in the vein of Dan Brown, "politically align Portugal and Portugueseness within Global Northern and Western capitalist interests in the context of contemporary imperial mappings" (56). Identifying the author and his protagonist, Tomás Noronha, with a normative white masculinity and national chauvinism, Silva not only interrogates their problematic appeal in terms of gender and sexuality, but also what he regards as the texts' broader erasure of Islamic or Arabic history in the formation of Portugal's cultural identity. What remains—the Latinate, Christianized, and Eurocentric as "Portuguese White Savior" (83) complex—is funneled through the lens of pre-existing Western attitudes and Orientalist conceptualization of the Middle East and Islam.

There is another sharp turn from the second to the third chapter, “Football, Empire, and Racial Capitalism in Portugal,” which switches over to the national sport. Silva uses the occasion to discuss the unfortunately all-too-common episodes of anti-Black racism directed at professional athletes in European stadiums. He argues that the supposedly post-racial politics in Europe permit this form of hate speech “without broader inquiries into racial systems of power” (92). This is a welcome reminder that much needs to be done to educate Europeans about their own history of colonialism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of racial abuse. Still, when given the opportunity to broaden the discussion further, the sole observation Silva makes about Portugal’s most celebrated footballer is “Cristiano Ronaldo [was] born in Madeira” (106). Cristiano Ronaldo is not only the most popular footballer in Portuguese history, or sports figures in the world, but at 648 million followers on Instagram, he is quite literally one of the most popular human beings on the planet. I would have liked to learn what Silva has to say about the “CR7” phenomenon within Portugal proper. This lacuna typifies the challenges that sometimes await readers of *Empire Found*, especially those who seek a deeper dive into how popular culture is experienced in daily life, as opposed to how it strictly conforms to the constructs of racism, empire, and masculinity.

Chapter four, “Color Games: Anti-Blackness, Racial Plasticity, and Celebrity Culture,” covers television programming, such as variety shows and talk shows, including a long-running sketch comedy and interview format centered around television personality Herman José’s broadcast on the national public service channel Rádio e Televisão de Portugal (RTP). Homing in on an episode from 2018 featuring the Cape Verdean-descent singer Sara Tavares, Silva contests the host’s blithe dismissal of racism or the migrant/citizen duality often framed in Portuguese mainstream views of ethnicity and national origin. I found particularly compelling Silva’s exploration of the fraught debates in the public sphere over “interracial proximity and amicability” (132-33), and he is fully justified in deflating the “celebrated cultural trope” of the *mulata* (134) across the Lusophone world.

The final chapter, “Contemporary Portuguese Singers, Latinidad, and Latinx Musical Forms,” has the smoothest transition from the discussion of fado and samba at the end of the previous chapter, but now carries the discussion of popular music and celebrity singers into a dialogue with Latinidad and other pan-Latinist international organizations as the Latin Union (1983-2012), in which Portugal sought to play a part, memorably expressed by “the Estado Novo mantra of ‘Portugal não é um país pequeno’ [Portugal is not a small country]” (170). Silva then tracks recent developments in which Portuguese audiences and musicians partake in Latin American and Caribbean musical genres

(reggaeton, Latin pop, funk, etc.), yet also frequently engage in the reenactment of stereotypes and fantasized consumerist spectacles.

In my overall assessment, perhaps the most conspicuous absence in Silva's otherwise wide-ranging discussion of the legacies of race and empire in contemporary Portugal is Brazil. Notwithstanding the cultural crosscurrents between Portugal and Brazil over the last five centuries, which are mentioned in passing, it is also the case that nearly a quarter of a million Brazilians now live in Portugal and constitute the country's largest immigrant group. This amounts to about 30 percent of the total number of immigrants, or roughly 2.5 percent of Portugal's current population. If there was a certain reason to sidestep this issue, I would have preferred for that argument to have been made explicit rather than left inferred. Such quibbles aside, *Empire Found* is a valuable resource for Lusophone cultural studies and reassessing multicultural thinking in early twenty-first century Portugal.