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"In a Class of their Own?" African Football Labour Migrants in Late Imperial Portugal (1949-1975)

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Abstract
This article investigates whether African football labour migrants in late imperial Portugal (1949-1975) enjoyed a more equal form of treatment than other African labour migrants, particularly in terms of racial discrimination. Building on the work of Todd Cleveland, the football players, migrating to Portugal from her colonies, who in many cases rose to stardom, are viewed as labour migrants. Through comparative historical analysis, which draws on scholarly literature, personal testimonies, and legal-historical sources, the article reveals that African footballers were treated more favourably partially due to their status as public figures and symbols of Portugal's colonial success under the Luso-tropicalism ideology. This stands in contrast to the overt racism faced by other homogenous groups of African labour migrants, like the Cape Verdean construction workers, who were ostracised and subjected to open discriminatory practices. African football labour migrants seemingly transcended the barrier, that skin colour typically presented in Portuguese society. In another avenue of comparison – access to higher education – no conclusive evidence for a more equal form of treatment could be detected. Ultimately, the study finds that while African footballers enjoyed privileged treatment, this was contingent on their utility to the colonial regime rather than a genuine commitment to racial equality.

Keywords: Football, African Labour Migration, Portuguese Colonial Empire, Luso-tropicalism, Comparative historical analysis, Eusébio, University of Coimbra

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An Introduction to African Football Labour Migration

The 1960s are remembered as a glorious time in Portuguese football history: regarded as one of the greatest and most successful football teams ever to grace this planet, Benfica Lisbon dominated the early years of the decade, securing back-to-back European Cup victories in 1961 and 1962 (Gonçalves 2015). Despite falling short of winning the 1966 World Cup, crowds were enchanted by Portugal's magnificent style of play, making its national team members heroes of the tournament (Cleveland 2013: 17; 2019: 207).

After his death in 2014, the body of Benfica´s standout performer and football icon, Eusébio, was even moved to the National Portuguese Pantheon, a site distinctly devoted to remembering distinguished (white) Portuguese citizens.[1] A deliberate nationalization effort led by the Portuguese state overshadowed that Eusébio was not of Portuguese descent but rather born in colonial Mozambique (Domingos 2019: 163ff.; Du Bruyn 2024). In fact, both the successful Benfica Lisbon team of 1962 and the starting eleven of the Portuguese *seleção* at the 1966 World Cup featured a total of four players of African descent, who played key roles in the teams´ performances (Admasie 2019: 418; Cleveland 2013: 23).

The fortunes of Eusébio and his African-born teammates were by no chance unique. Portugal was not the only colonial power to heavily and aggressively recruit African players to play for teams in the colonial metropolises. France and the Netherlands had already established viable scouting and transfer networks in (West) Africa to supply teams in Europe with high-level talent by the 1960s (Poli 2006: 397ff.). Meanwhile, Belgium used the Congo as a talent pool for its domestic teams (Admasie 2019: 418).

This movement of African footballers between their origin countries and the colonial motherlands as a phenomenon has been labelled African Football Labour Migration, a term that was first introduced, popularized, and further carved out by Paul Darby (Darby 2001; Darby et al. 2007). African Football Labour Migration to Portugal, which shall be the geographical focus area of this article, has even received a fair share of focused attention in Darby´s work (Darby 2007a). Darby is mostly concerned with the diffusion of the European game of football in Africa, the workings and economics of this development, and the consequent 'underdevelopment of Africa' as he terms it. Darby argues that African football remained economically and structurally weak due to its dependent relationship with wealthier European clubs. Drawing on Andre

[1] In 2014/15 Eusébio became the first footballer and black person laid to rest in the National Pantheon in Lisbon – a distinction he still holds today (Du Bruyn 2024).

Gunder Frank's concept of "dependent underdevelopment" (Frank 1969), this perspective views African football's integration into the global system as one in which value – particularly player talent – is systematically extracted by European clubs.[2]

This article, in contrast to Darby's perspective, sets out to use the term African Football Labour Migration in the manner it was adapted and shaped by Todd Cleveland. In his 2013 article, 'Following the Ball', Cleveland focuses on the migration of African footballers across the Portuguese colonial empire between 1949 and 1975 (Cleveland 2013: 16f.); he further expanded on this topic in his identically titled book in 2017 (Cleveland 2017). With regards to colonial Portugal,[3] Cleveland rightfully presents himself as "the first to consider the[…] [football] athletes' daily experiences beyond the stadium walls, far from the droves of cheering spectators and laudatory biographers" (Cleveland 2013: 19).[4]

Cleveland's approach is not only novel but fascinating: for the first time, the African footballers, who emigrated from the colonies to the colonial metropolises of Portugal, were thoroughly conceptualised as African labour migrants and located within the corresponding historiographical tradition. Cleveland, among other sources, uses an array of biographical info, such as (self-conducted) interviews and statements, to reconstruct the experiences of the African football labour migrants during the Portuguese colonial era (Cleveland 2013: 18f.). The avant-garde nature of Cleveland's studies was even confirmed by no one less than Eusébio himself – when Cleveland interviewed the footballing legend during the research for his book, Eusébio attested that nobody had ever asked him about most of his societal experiences off the pitch before (Cleveland 2023).[5]

Perhaps the most astonishing finding in Cleveland's comprehensive work on the African football labour migrants in colonial Portugal between 1949 and 1975 concerns the fact that, according to their own testimonies, apparently none of the African players during this timeframe actively experienced genuine acts of overt

[2] These clubs, operating from a position of economic strength, dictate the terms of football labour migration in ways that benefit their own development while undermining the growth of sustainable football infrastructure in Africa, thereby perpetuating a cycle of dependency and structural inequality (Darby et al. 2007: 144). Similar dependency-theory-based observations have been made regarding US Major League Baseball's (MLB) impact on the development of Dominican baseball (Klein 2007).

[3] Nuno Domingos also deals with the relationship between football and colonialism, examining the period when Mozambique was a Portuguese colony; however, his focus rather lies on appropriation and memory politics (Domingos 2007, 2019). Regarding France, especially see the vast work of Pierre Lanfranchi, e.g. (Lanfranchi/ Wahl 1996).

[4] Only recently has Darby integrated this experiential component in his work (Darby 2022).

[5] Cleveland´s biographical approach has been replicated by Ungruhe and Büdel with an ethnological modern focus, as they reproduced the experiences of two young African footballers with a strong emphasis on their journey to Europe from interviews (Ungruhe/ Büdel 2016).

racism (Cleveland 2017: 130).[6] Even though such a differentiation does not feature in Cleveland's work, this paper deems it important to distinguish between overt and covert acts of racism, as envisioned by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in its original form (Carmichael/ Hamilton 1992: 4). Overt racism is typically associated with individual racism – conscious, deliberate acts of hostility or prejudice committed by identifiable individuals, such as verbal slurs, physical aggression, or exclusion. Covert racism, by contrast, corresponds more closely to institutional racism. It is embedded in the policies, norms, and practices of institutions that systematically disadvantage groups. This form of racism is less perceptible, shaping outcomes in ways that may not be recognised as discriminatory by those experiencing or perpetuating them (Kendi 2022: 220ff.).

Naturally, the question arises why the experience of the African footballers was seemingly free of overt racist antipathies and therefore – to stick with the wording of Cleveland – "analytically distinct" (Cleveland 2013: 19). It is precisely in this field that this paper wants to make its impact. To put it in a nutshell, this contribution attempts to answer the question of whether African football labour migrants in Portugal between 1949 and 1975 enjoyed a more equal form of treatment than other (labour) migrants, who came to Portugal from her African colonies during the same period. Consequently, I put forward the thesis that the African football labour migrants were treated more equally than other labour migrants in the sense that they were not openly racially discriminated against, partly because of the status they enjoyed as famous athletes and flagships of the Portuguese colonial cause.[7]

[6] Cleveland, unfortunately, does not provide a clear definition of what he understands by racism. While he acknowledges that racism existed in colonial Portugal, his conclusions – based primarily on personal encounters with African football labour migrants – suggest that their experiences were largely free from racial discrimination (Cleveland 2017: 130). This interpretation, in my view, lacks sufficient nuance. The absence of reported individual acts of racism in players' testimonies does not necessarily indicate the absence of discriminatory institutional structures shaping their experiences, which Cleveland also acknowledges (Cleveland 2013: 30). It is important to consider that these players operated within a broader social and political system that was deeply influenced by discriminatory ideologies and practices – whether or not they were fully visible to the individuals affected at the time. To highlight this point, this paper adopts a distinction between overt and covert racism. Although not without limitations, this distinction serves as a useful analytical tool to prevent the marginalization or trivialization of institutionalized but more subtle forms of racial discrimination (see e.g. racismo cordial in Brazil (Boechat 2024: 26ff.)).

[7] The analysis considers both select overt and covert forms of discrimination to assess whether African football labour migrants experienced more equal treatment.

Cleveland warns "to resist extrapolating the experiences of the[…] African footballers onto members of other racial[8] minority groups in Portugal during this period, including other Africans", as he argues that "[h]istorical reconstructions of the prevailing racial sentiments toward, and experiences of, other, albeit numerically small, segments of the metropolitan population await further research" (Cleveland 2017: 130). However, to analyse and determine if African football labour migrants actually came to enjoy more equal lives, it is obligatory to set their experiences side by side with the ones of comparable labour migrants, who ventured to Portugal from Africa during the same time. Thus, throughout the next pages, a search for sound subjects and areas of comparison shall be conducted to answer the proposed research questions through sensitively carried out historical comparison.

In this respect, the methodology draws inspiration from Duncan Money's research, specifically *White Mineworkers on Zambia's Copperbelt, 1926-1974: In a Class of Their Own*, which employs comparative methods to examine white labourers in Rhodesia alongside other global labour groups (Money 2021: 19). Money explores how the Rhodesian mineworkers became one of the wealthiest segments of the global working class, occupying a unique and exceptional socio-economic position in the labour hierarchy. Effectively, the mineworkers' privileges "put them in a class of their own" (Money 2021: 255). Money highlights the role these workers' mobility and international connections played in shaping local social hierarchies and class dynamics (Money 2021). Lending this concept from Money, this article sets out to investigate through the lens of historical comparison whether the African football labour migrants, who constitute a similarly unique group, were subject to a more favourable treatment, which ultimately equally put them "in a class of their own". The utility of comparison for global labour history is emphasised by Prasannan Parthasarathi, who deems comparison "the means by which the divergent fates of laborers in different regions of the world may be comprehended and made sense of" (Parthasarathi 2012: 109).[9] "Making sense of the fates" of the African football labour migrants is what this study desires, thereby making comparison the ultimate methodological tool.

[8] The author of this work explicitly rejects insensitive and biased racial classifications. The selection of subjects for comparison is not based on such categories, but on objective and logical criteria (see chapter "Scouting Subjects").

[9] Parthasarathi is also credited by Money (Money 2021: 19).

The African Football Labour Migrants' Experiences in Late Colonial Portugal

Many scholars have tried to victimise African football labour migrants by highlighting the partially precarious circumstances under which athlete migration was transpiring, especially during the later stages of the 20th century. The still underdeveloped conditions in African sports were repeatedly attributed to European action (Admasie 2019: 418; Darby 2007b; Ungruhe 2024).

While such evaluations most definitely carry both truth and merit – African Football Labour Migration certainly has its origins in the colonial era and always was and will be "intrinsically linked to the colonial relationship" (Admasie 2019: 418) – at least for the Portuguese colonial era, Cleveland aims to refute "notions of these [football] athletes as victims" (Cleveland 2013: 40). In his narration, African football labour migrants are presented as individuals with considerable scope of action, who "not only reflected, but also actively shaped colonial relationships and policies" (Cleveland 2013: 40). African football labour migrants in colonial Portugal "adopted well-established African labor strategies"[10], hence, leading Cleveland to subsume the footballers under the general category of African labourer (Cleveland 2013: 16).

Furthermore, the assessment is made that the African football labour migrants had already begun a process of "cultural assimilation" before moving to Portugal since they by then had spent time in "colonized spaces" in their birth countries, where they were familiarised with Portuguese values and etiquette. Particularly through their Portuguese coaches in Africa, who acted as intermediaries, the future emigrants learnt to adopt a European style of play and a Portuguese way of life, both of which are said to have facilitated their transition upon arrival in the colonial metropolises (Cleveland 2013: 28f.).[11]

I suggest this concept of "colonized spaces" bears resemblance to Philip Bonner, Jonathan Hyslop and Lucien van der Walt's idea of "rethought worlds of labour" (Bonner et al. 2016: 90). "Worlds" are dually conceptualised, "signalling not just the physical spaces through which people move, but also social worlds", which influence "the subjective ways in which the world is understood by workers" (Bonner et al. 2016: 90). Both concepts highlight how colonial powers exploited

[10] Including the communication with more experienced footballers and various forms of secondary migration (Cleveland 2013: 31ff.).

[11] While this adaptation process indeed appears to have taken place, the notion of "cultural assimilation" warrants critical reflection: it risks normalising colonial hierarchies and may inadvertently echo a Eurocentric or even colonialist narrative in which adaptation to the coloniser's culture is portrayed as unproblematic or desirable. In this case, Cleveland appears to merely descriptively report a process without reproducing such a narrative.

labour across regions, integrating these regions into broader economic and racial hierarchies.

Upon arriving in the colonial metropolis, most African footballers adjusted swiftly to their new surroundings and came to enjoy great lives in their new home.[12] Apart from being awarded the privilege to move between continents, players were now able to compete and earn success at the highest level. Their salaries allowed the footballers to lead pleasant lifestyles and indulge in the lavish social life the Portuguese metropolises had to offer. Many engaged enthusiastically with popular culture, developing tastes in fashion, film, and music – and some even "achieved legitimate celebrity status" (Cleveland 2013: 26f.). The advantages and recreational activities in Portugal even led many African football labour migrants to start families in Europe and stay there after their careers had come to an end (Cleveland 2013: 28).

Many prominent African football labour migrants expressively stated the absence of overt racism.[13] Eusébio declared to never have encountered any form of racial prejudice and had never felt "different". In fact, he felt that racism towards black footballers was a much bigger problem in modern Portugal than it was during his playing days. To him, it had continuously been conveyed that the Portuguese-speaking players from the colonies were always the biggest success of his club, Benfica Lisbon (Cleveland 2017: 134f.).[14]

Even though discrepancies in salaries between white and non-white players existed, they were not solely connected with racist motives. Rather, players reported that different salary categories simply existed for players of different talent levels (Cleveland 2017: 130f.).[15] Similarly, limitations regarding mobility were perceived by the African players not as "overt racial discrimination in colonial-era Portugal" and, therefore, instead described as "racially based challenges" (Cleveland 2013: 30).

Of course, it would be more than a stretch to infer or suggest that racism (towards people of darker skin complexion) did not exist on the mainland of colonial Portugal. Cleveland himself acknowledges the undeniable existence of racism in Portugal during the time in question – racism in Portugal was present

[12] For potential reasons for struggle, like homesickness or injury, see (Cleveland 2013: 25).

[13] A small number of players witnessed exoticisation, a distinct "socioracial phenomenon" (Cleveland 2017: 132f.).

[14] Of course, Eusébio's experience was likely shaped by his role as the emblematic figure of the *Luso-tropicalist* ideal. His public celebration may have obscured for him the extent to which he was embedded in a system of institutionalised discrimination. This will be further explained in the following passages.

[15] The perception of a hidden racial compensation bias by player António Joaquim Dinis can be viewed as an exception (Cleveland 2017: 131f.).

in the past, and it still is today (Cleveland 2017: 130). But this is exactly what makes the case of the African football labour migrants in late colonial Portugal so interesting, as, according to Cleveland, it is the "absence of racism in their experiences [which] renders them analytically distinct" (Cleveland 2013: 19).[16]

Scouting Subjects – Cape Verdean Construction Workers as a Case for Comparison

As previously hinted, Cleveland bears the mindset that to this day, not enough research has been done "on numerically small segments of the metropolitan population" to justify a comparison of such population groups with African football labour migrants. (Cleveland 2017: 130). Logically, this statement already foreshadows the difficulty of finding sources on suitable subjects, whose experiences could be examined and consequently be likened to those of the African football players. Only by investigating the treatment that such a comparable group would have faced in Portuguese society – especially in terms of overt racial aversion or resentment against such a group – could the question of whether the absence of racism displayed towards African football labour migrants was a result of the more equal sentiment, which they just came to know courtesy of their status as famous football athletes, be solved.

Ideally, a commensurable societal group should share similar features with the African football labour migrants, for instance, regarding size or origin.[17] Effectively, this would render other groups of migrant labourers, who came from the Portuguese colonial lands in Africa to the colonial metropolises for other reasons than football somewhere between 1949 and 1975, the perfect subjects of research. Identifying such a pool of migrants proves difficult insofar as, for a long time, migration of Africans from the colonies to the Portuguese mainland was very scarce. Apart from the horrendous costs of completing the journey to Europe, highly complex and restrictive nationality and citizenship laws practically prevented Africans from emigrating to Portugal, as even in the colonies these legal ramifications "effectively prevent[ed] Africans from participating as equals in Portuguese social, economic, and political institutions" (Peralta et al. 2022: 415).

[16] As already mentioned, I do not agree that the lack of reported discriminatory acts towards the footballers necessarily can be equated to a general and total "absence of racism" in their experiences. For further contextualisation see fn 6 and the further deliberations in this paper.

[17] Of course, social standing/status cannot be viewed as such a factor since the status of the football migrants as "professional athletes" functions as the differentiating factor.

Probably the most well-known and biggest immigration stream to Portugal concerns the so-called *retornados* – Portuguese settlers, who returned to their motherland in the mid-1970s in light of the decolonisation processes and corresponding independence wars in the former African overseas possessions of Portugal (Carrington/Pedro 1996: 330ff.). Despite significantly influencing Portugal's economy and labour situation, this group of immigrants does not constitute a viable subject for comparison with the African football labour migrants, as the *retornados* were not a marginal, homogenous group but a mass movement of heterogeneous immigrants, which mainly transpired concurrently with the downfall of imperial Portugal (Kalter 2018: 257ff.).

Nevertheless, there was a group of labour migrants who started to arrive in Portugal by the mid to late 1960s and shared extensive characteristics with the footballers. After having to compensate for the emigration of Portuguese workers to other European and North American countries, Portugal's construction companies turned to the colonies and brought low-skilled workers from Cape Verde to the mainland to work on some of the largest and most essential infrastructure projects, as the Salazar regime only gradually and hesitantly granted labour permits to migrants to maintain the empire (Arenas 2015: 114; Batalha 2004; Carling/Åkesson 2009: 7; Stepanik 2019: 79).

Even though Arenas speaks about a few thousand Cape Verdeans, who initially came to Portugal as part of this group (Arenas 2015: 354),[18] while Cleveland estimates the number of African football labour migrants until 1975 to hover just around 200 (Cleveland 2013: 17), the two groups can be considered numerically small margin groups. Cape Verdean migration to Portugal did not turn into a mass movement until decolonisation was in full swing in the 1970s – the little involvement of the Portuguese state in the handling of the Cape Verdean migrants and immigration, which only picked up in the early 1970s, can be seen as an indicator of this assessment (Kalter 2024: 144).[19] Both the football labour migrants and the Cape Verdeans left the colonies in Africa to work and in the hope of improved living conditions. The Cape Verdean construction workers could at least to some extent be considered to form a "segment[…] of the metropolitan population" as they typically settled near Lisbon's Magueira shipyard and the nearby south bank of the Tagus river (Batalha 2004: 141). While any comparison, including this one, is bound to be imperfect in some

[18] See Batalha for further reflections on the number of Cape Verdean migrants, who headed for the Portuguese metropole during the respective time period (Batalha 2003: 200).

[19] Only in the 1970s, the *Centra de Apoio aos Trabalhadores Ultramarinos* (CATU) (Aid Centre for Overseas Workers) was established to handle the arrival of the growing numbers of Cape Verdean immigrants (Batalha 2003: 203).

aspect (Parthasarathi 2012: 109), all these continuities between the two groups make the Cape Verdean construction workers compelling investigation subjects for the objective of this article.

Football and Construction Migrants in Comparison – Perceived Racism and Luso-tropicalism

By no means shall this article turn into a full-blown analysis or reconstruction of the lives of the aforesaid Cape Verdean construction workers or a study on Cape Verdean migration in general.[20] Still, it is paramount to recount some aspects of their experiences and perception within the society of late colonial Portugal to contrast them with the story of the African football labour migrants. Thanks to the ample work of Luís Batalha done on the Cape Verdean construction workers, apprehensions concerning a possible vacancy of sufficient research can be confuted (Batalha 2003, 2004, 2008).

When studying the lives of the Cape Verdean construction migrants in the 1960s and beyond, it almost immediately becomes apparent that their experiences regarding racism drastically differ from the ones of the African football labour migrants during the same time. While the footballers almost exclusively said to never have perceived any forms of racism, even if racial aversions might have been lingering below the surface, racism was a constant accompanying factor for the Cape Verdeans. In fact, Batalha affirms that race was one of the factors which worked to corner the construction workers in society. More concretely, the Cape Verdeans saw "in their skin colour the reason for the rejection by the Portuguese and tend[ed] to interpret their relation to the mainstream as a racial one" (Batalha 2003: 195f.).

The white population of mainland Portugal considered the construction workers as "´Cape Verdean´, ´black´, or ´African´, but never ´Portuguese´" (Batalha 2004: 195). For one, this strongly suggests that the Cape Verdean construction workers did not feel as equal parts of the Portuguese society but rather felt ostracised because of their origin and the complexion of their skin. Secondly, it also insinuates – as I have put forward – that the Portuguese society was in some form racially divided. This division was also openly practiced – the African football labour migrants just did not personally experience it; however, the

[20] See Valadas Casimiro for an overview of the state of the art of studies done on Cape Verdean migration (Valadas Casimiro 2014: 21).

experiences of the Cape Verdean construction workers evince how real this racial division of society was.[21]

Specifically in the context of *Luso-tropicalism*, the sentiments displayed by the Cape Verdeans are thought-provoking. *Luso-tropicalism* was an ideology which was heavily promoted by the Portuguese colonial regime during the last decades of its existence. Through this dogma, the idea was put forward that "Portugal was a multiracial country, geographically diverse, and yet a politically homogeneous unit" (Cardão 2018: 374).[22] Naturally, the stories of the African football labour migrants, who came from the outskirts of the colonial realm and migrated to the Portuguese mainland to gain stardom and in some cases even turned into global icons, fit neatly into this narrative. The story of Eusébio spearheaded the regime's efforts, which partly explains why he was declared and celebrated as a national treasure by Portugal's dictator, António Salazar (Cardão 2018: 379ff.; Cleveland 2013: 30). To no extent would an overt racist antipathy against the football migrants have suited the *Luso-tropical-theme*. Thus, the imperial authorities, with whom the Portuguese football clubs were closely intertwined,[23] did everything to exempt the African football labour migrants from open racism. This notion was reflected on and by the Portuguese public.

In contrast, it is possible to assume that the migration of Cape Verdean construction workers itself did not fit the bill of *Luso-tropicalism*. The necessity to facilitate the immigration of Africans to keep the infrastructure on mainland Portugal intact was a development that the regime was most likely initially keen to keep under wraps because it was synonymous with a concession towards the functioning of the empire. According to Batalha, "allowing Cape Verdean emigration would be" in the eyes of the empire "to admit that there were problems in the [Cape Verdean] archipelago" and beyond (Batalha 2003: 197). It meant confessing that the neglect of the colonies had led to such a futile labour situation in Cape Verde that emigration was inevitable, while also owning up to the fact that the bad labour conditions in Portuguese construction had triggered en masse outflows of white Portuguese workers that could only be compensated by bringing in colonial workforce (Batalha 2003: 197). As *Luso-tropicalism* was only utilised to promote the supremacy and flawless functioning of the empire

[21] That ideas regarding the "classification of persons based on race" were indeed present in 20th century society and have a long tradition on the Iberian Peninsula is also argued by Sweet (Sweet 1997: 144f.). De Matos also outlines how systems of racial classification were developed in Portugal in this period (de Matos 2019: 24f.).

[22] For an analysis of *Luso-Tropicalism* in the context of Portuguese migration and citizenship, see (Almeida/ Corkill 2015).

[23] Rui Raposo examines the links between Portuguese football clubs and the *Estado Novo* (Raposo 2010).

and thereby attenuate the international pressure against Portuguese colonialism (Almeida/Corkill 2015: 163), it is only logical that the Cape Verdean construction labourers were not embedded in this justification strategy.

Interestingly, shortly after the downfall of the colonial empire, a "re-imagination of a special relationship" between Portugal and its former colonial subjects started to materialise. *Lusophone* citizens came to be regarded as "more equal than others" (Almeida/Corkill 2015: 167; Marques 2004). This became especially apparent on the legal level, with benefits being awarded to Africans from Portuguese-speaking countries (Almeida/Corkill 2015: 167). However, during the *Estado Novo*, this theme of equality, which was postulated through *Luso-tropicalism*, only applied to the African football labour migrants.

Prejudice through Language as a Factor of Equality

A large majority of Cape Verdeans, who came to Portugal to work construction in the 1960s, had "black or dark" skin. This and the fact that they spoke little to no Portuguese when they arrived in the colonial metropole "slotted them into the stereotype that the Portuguese had of what a black person would be: someone who lived in the bush of Africa, unmannered, unreligious, and to be mocked" (Batalha 2003: 201f.; 2004: 135).

The term "to be mocked" does not only imply a feeling of racial superiority of the white Portuguese over the Cape Verdean immigrants but was also echoed in depictions of Africans in 20th century colonial Portugal. Isabel Castro Henriques describes how Africans were grotesquely portrayed in advertising during this time, as they were continuously and prejudicially brought in connection with negative character traits, like being "savage, primitive, and irrational" (Castro Henriques 2012: 86ff.). In the mind of the Portuguese public, a darker skin complexion and certain place of origin were typically linked with certain traits or features, which Africans somehow genetically or divinely inherently possessed (Castro Henriques 2012: 86ff.).

At this point, it must be mentioned that a perception embodying such sentiments was not entirely absent in Portuguese sports media at that time. Close followers of the game would tend to focus on African "players' physical, or 'natural' and 'instinctual' traits" over their tactical understanding, implicitly suggesting that athleticism compensated for a lack of intellectual engagement with the game (Cleveland 2017: 140). However, such notions were expressed very subtly towards the African footballers and could change over time (Cleveland 2013: 130). While African players would, for instance, regularly be praised for their

immense innate and divinely given talent, the skill of Portuguese-born players was solely attributed to their hard work, as they simply were not blessed with similar attributes (Cleveland 2017: 176f.; Lanfranchi/Taylor 2001). Even if the implications of such linguistic distinctions may not have been fully apparent to African football labour migrants at the time, I concur with the assessment that the narratives they advanced reflect the aforementioned negative stereotypes associated with African heritage and darker skin during this period (Cleveland 2017: 140).

At the same time, it is worth noting that African players in Portuguese stadiums were largely spared the racially motivated taunts and thrown objects they occasionally encountered elsewhere (Cleveland 2017: 140). Furthermore, the phenomenon of "stacking", the practice whereby "players are disproportionately assigned to certain positions based on ascribed racial or ethnic characteristics" (Alegi 2010: 84), appears to have been far less common in Portugal than in other parts of Europe, such as France (Cleveland 2017: 140ff.). In fact, many Africans played in positions that were perceived as tactically challenging, were made club captains, and even were publicly commended for their leadership skills by club managers (Cleveland 2017: 141f.). After their active careers, many Africans even took on high-level coaching jobs in Portugal – opportunities that African football labour migrants were often seemingly denied in different national settings (Alegi 2010; Cleveland 2017: 84).

These observations reveal a complex reality: though overt racism was rare, the rhetoric surrounding African football labour migrants suggests a consistent pattern of covert, institutionalised racism embedded in Portuguese society. Yet, this more subtle and ambivalent form of racism is markedly different from the overtly hostile language and symbolism directed at Cape Verdean construction workers, which was not only openly racist but also recognised as such by those targeted. The labour migrants from Cape Verde were coined ("simple minded") *pretos*, synonymous with the word *turra*, which stood for guerilla fighter or terrorist. The term guerilla fighter was insofar pejorative, as "guerilla movements were seen as the proof that 'blacks' were not to be trusted" (Batalha 2003: 208; 2004). That the Cape Verdeans were commonly referred to as guerillas meant that they were viewed as "treacherous" and "ignorant" by their Portuguese co-workers and landlords (Batalha 2003: 206).

No comparable cases of such derogatory language towards African football labour migrants can be identified. The language used to describe the players was significantly more respectful, inclusive, and equal – even if it hinted at the existence of covert racial prejudice. Perhaps most strikingly, the African football

labour migrants were never openly told by teammates or officials that they "would be better off now if they had never come to this country," as a construction union representative had once expressed about Cape Verdean workers in Portugal (Batalha 2004: 208).

Skin Colour as a Factor of Discrimination

Skin colour as a factor of discrimination, because of its significance, deserves its own section. As mentioned above, the Cape Verdeans were labelled with the stereotype of "uncultured blacks", but the tag of "being black" carried an entirely different weight and entailed much divergent consequences in the Portuguese metropolises than it did in the colony, Cape Verde. While in Cape Verde there was a "loose understanding of the categories ´black´ and ´white´", all skin complexions that fell somewhere in this spectrum were considered not more than simply different variations of colour, which had no meaning beyond that – skin tone had no implications regarding social status, class, prestige, or wealth in the eyes of the Cape Verdean population (Batalha 2004: 115; Meintel 1984: 98f.). Usually, when a Cape Verdean referred to someone's skin colour, it meant a mere description of that person's physical appearance but not the societal position of this person (Batalha 2004: 115; Meintel 1984: 98f.).

Without doubt, these observations are very generalising, and race relations are far more complex, yet they are still important to keep in mind since this indifference towards the implications of skin colour was not compatible with the Portuguese society. Cape Verdeans, who had migrated to colonial Portugal, were quick to find out that skin colour was to play a pivotal role in everyday life in their new home – many documented stories testify to this claim. Batalha interviewed a female immigrant, who belonged to the far smaller Cape Verdean "elite", which did not work in construction,[24] and recounts the following incident:

On the second day after arriving in Lisbon I was walking downtown with some of my Cape Verdean mates when one of them passed his arm over my shoulder and around my neck. Suddenly, a passing man shouted, "Hey you black, get your hands off and stay where you belong!" From that moment on I never looked at my colleague in the same manner. I had never seen him as different from me, for in Cape Verde we didn't pay attention to skin color. It was in the metropole

[24] For a description of who constituted the Cape Verdean immigrant "elite" and which occupational fields they frequented see Batalha´s remarks (Batalha 2003: 133ff.). Also consult the chapter "Access to education" of this paper.

that I began to pay attention to racial differences. The metropolitans were very racist, and for me, being a blonde with pale skin and green eyes, it was a bit difficult walking along with my darker or black Cape Verdean mates, for I could see disapproval in the people's eyes. At the time metropolitan people were not accustomed to see colored or black people mingling with whites. Sometimes, for example in dancing venues and cafés, I had to separate from my darker Cape Verdean mates in order to avoid trouble. (Batalha 2004: 115)

This narration is in pretty stark contrast to those of the African football labour migrants in Portugal, who reported to have had hassle-free and enjoyable times during their recreational activities, such as visiting the cinema, theatre or the beach (Cleveland 2013: 26f.). While black Cape Verdeans seemingly had trouble just spending time in the same establishments as white women, Benfica star Joaquim Santana made his appreciation of "blondes" publicly known,[25] and many African football labour migrants even married Portuguese women (Cleveland 2013: 26, 28). This is particularly noteworthy when considering that in the 1940s and 1950s significant social prejudice "with regard to interracial marriage" existed in the Portuguese colonies (de Matos 2019: 32). Many feared the "degeneration of the white race" and occasionally laws were erected to prevent miscegenation (de Matos 2019: 32f.). These circumstances unveil how present racist ideology was in colonial Portugal. Comparison therefore reveals that African football migrants were only accepted and allowed to mingle in Portuguese society due to their status.

As mentioned above, many Cape Verdeans and other Africans, who immigrated to the Portuguese colonial metropolises, were faced with serious and overt acts of racism. For instance, Cape Verdean Daniel Nunes, an agricultural engineer, who had moved to a remote area of Portugal in the 1960s to work on sugar beet growing, walked out one evening at dusk. As he came upon a terrified housemaid racing toward him along the route, she shrieked, "The Devil, it's the Devil!" and fled into the night with a pale face. Around the same time in Lisbon, a woman carrying a lot of packages stopped mixed-race journalist Paulo António dos Anjos in the street in Lisbon. She pushed them in his direction without asking, saying, "You, help me carry these to my home" (Castro Henriques 2012: 94). The general rule in the metropolis of colonial Portugal was that "skin colour was the absolute marker" for discrimination, which could not even be glossed over by recognised social standing (Castro Henriques 2012: 94).

[25] In public media formats, many players also openly expressed their admiration for white female celebrities (Cleveland 2013: 26f.).

However, the status of the African football labour migrants as professional athletes somehow seems to have transcended this rule.[26] The narrations of their experiences were free of overtly racist encounters, unlike the ones of other African immigrants.[27] This and the seemingly sheer absence of statements surrounding the significance of skin colour in Portuguese society in Cleveland´s encounters with the football labour migrants add to and fortify the conjecture that they were treated more equally than other African migrants, who lived in Portugal during the imperial closing stages.

Integration into Society: Public Life, Access to Labour, and Housing

The significance of skin complexion becomes even more visible in the tale of the Cape Verdean construction workers, who ultimately settled in the Algarve. Lisbon had always been the main target for the majority of Cape Verdeans coming to Portugal, but a big shortage of construction workers in the Faro district and the rising demand of buildings because of the rapidly growing tourism sector made Portugal's south a logical destination for construction labour immigrants. Yet, the advent of the Cape Verdeans was met with strong resistance both by the local population and by employers. People were even less accustomed to seeing black people around and only extremely hesitantly gave in to changing that. Despite being in desperate need of labourers, construction companies in the Algarve initially refused to hire Cape Verdeans, mainly because of their dark skin colour and the associations that were assigned to being black (Batalha 2003: 204). It is paradoxical that on one end the Portuguese regime, construction industry, and population regarded it as a last resort to bring black African migrant workers to the country and tolerate their stay, while on the other end authorities and football clubs went above and beyond to recruit African football labour migrants and attempted to make their migratory transition process between the colonies and metropolises as smooth as possible.[28]

Similarly, housing situations were entirely unequal for the African football labour migrants and the Cape Verdean construction migrants. Highly paid

[26] Many African football labour migrants had mixed heritage, with black African mothers – primarily from Angola and Mozambique and white Portuguese fathers who had arrived in the colonies as part of the colonial administration (Cleveland 2013: 23f.). Like many scholars, Cleveland employs the term *mestiços* in a non-derogatory but uncritical way to describe this background. However, research highlights the deep-seated prejudice in colonial Portugal surrounding miscegenation and the children born from such unions (de Matos 2019). The fact that some footballers may have had a lighter skin tone does not negate the broader salience of race as a marker of discrimination.

[27] It is worth mentioning here that Batalha explicitly describes the large majority of Cape Verdean construction immigrants as "black or dark mulatto" (Batalha 2003: 201).

[28] In many ways, this dynamic is still existent today and is by no chance limited to Portugal.

athletes lived in better conditions than building labourers. The Cape Verdean builders were usually deliberately made to live apart from their Portuguese co-workers and often had to build their own shacks in the construction sites with materials provided by their employers. The early construction immigrants, who tried to rent accommodation, faced difficulties since the locals were reluctant to rent to "blacks" (Batalha 2003: 202, 204; 2004: 142; Carreira 1982: 92).

A vastly different picture can be painted of the housing situation of the African football labour migrants, a picture that is based on union rather than separation. Many players, like the ones of Benfica Lisbon, stayed in so-called "team houses", where all teammates would eat and practise together every day. Eusébio reaffirmed the vital role the Benfica team house played in his arrival in Portugal, as the time he spent with his (black and white) teammates created a sense of togetherness and allowed him to adapt to his new environment. Other teams rented out hotels for all of their players, where they would live in similar conditions as in the team houses, with cleaning and cooking being taken care of for the players by the club (Cleveland 2013: 26). In this regard, the African football labour migrants were treated entirely equal to their Portuguese teammates. Meanwhile, an initial desire to keep the Cape Verdean construction workers separate from their white co-workers and therefore not fully integrate them into Portuguese society can be inferred. Housing can be seen as a milieu in which the "myth" of *Lusotopia*, which shaped the Portuguese *Estado Novo´s* race relations, becomes particularly apparent. While equality was realised for the football players, it most certainly was not for other groups of African migrants.

Overall, the disparities in housing opportunities emphasise the point that the African football labour migrants were "in a class of their own", transcending their "race status". Even if the Cape Verdean construction labour migrants could come to be regarded as honest and hard-working and over time earn a good reputation with those Portuguese co-workers with whom they would spend bigger amounts of time (Batalha 2004: 142), the previous deliberations evidently show that they faced significant stigmatisation in the Portuguese society. In not just a few cases, stigmas manifested in overtly racist incidents. While social standing normally was not a factor that could exempt African migrants from racist antipathies in Portugal, the absence of such hostilities shown to African football labour migrants must be deemed an indicator and simultaneously a result of a more equal treatment of these athletes.

Access to Education as an Indicator of Inequality

Contrasting two groups of African labour migrants, namely the footballers and Cape Verdean construction workers, is not the only manner in which comparison to assess equality can be conducted. Alternatively, particular avenues of the lives of the African football labour migrants can be identified and analysed as potential sources of more equal treatment. This article specifically supposes that access to higher education could be such an avenue.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Cleveland argues that the football migrants engaged in practises, that were not uncommon in other African labour milieus (Cleveland 2013: 16). Probably the best known and most elaborately described of these strategies is the engagement in secondary migration through education (Cleveland 2013: 23f., 33f.). Due to their oftentimes relatively privileged backgrounds in the colonies, many players had been indoctrinated to appreciate the value of higher education in general and to earn a university degree from a young age. Given the social background of many African football labour migrants, whose fathers had frequently worked high-profile jobs in the colonial administration,[29] they valued education over athletic success. Oftentimes, they had originally aspired to work in medical or engineering professions before becoming footballers. In some cases, the footballers' parents even had to be convinced to allow their children to play professionally, as this typically meant sacrificing the educational path (Cleveland 2013: 23f., 33f.).

Alert to the fact that the salaries paid by the Portuguese football clubs were not nearly high enough to guarantee financial security well after their playing days had come to an end, many African football labour migrants sought to broaden their education even during their playing days. The preferred method of doing so was by enrolling in Portugal´s premier university in the city of Coimbra. To be able to study in Coimbra, many players requested a move to the football club Académica de Coimbra, as the club was associated with the city's university and allowed players to simultaneously study and professionally play football (Cleveland 2013: 33f.).

Making the decision to play for Académica not only meant giving up huge parts of one's salary, as Coimbra´s football team was by no chance in the position to match the wages afforded by the likes of Sporting or Benfica Lisbon but also settling to play on a much smaller stage. Still, players were willing to take this risk, knowing that the earned education would provide them with better chances of financial security in the future (Cleveland 2013: 33f.). As Mário Wilson, who

[29] See fn 26.

joined Académica after his time at Sporting, put it: "Sporting exposed me to a school of learning about football in all of its different aspects, but Académica and Coimbra showed me an authentic 'school of life,' which went far beyond football" (Cleveland 2017: 170).

In view of the research interest of this paper, this episode of history raises the question of whether other (black) African migrants also got the opportunity to earn a degree at such a prestigious educational facility as Coimbra University. If other Africans were significantly hindered at this or even entirely denied access to schooling institutions, it would effectively mean that the African football labour migrants were once more subjected to a more preferential treatment than other African migrants in colonial Portugal between 1949 and 1975.

The first pitstop in getting to the bottom of this conundrum is to explore whether the African football labour migrants were the only African migrants allowed to enrol at Coimbra University – if they in fact would have been the only ones who had gotten to enjoy this educational privilege, the entire matter would be one-dimensional. However, there is conclusive evidence to support the claim that black students were attending Coimbra University already by the 18th century (Reginaldo 2018). Records show that between 1700 and 1771, a total of 39 students from Angola and other presumably African colonies graduated from Coimbra University (da Fonseca 2007: 10). Moreover, the attendance of the first female student from the Cape Verde Islands was registered in 1936/37 (Vaquinhas 2018: 230).

While the university records do not always disclose the skin colour of the students, who hailed from the African colonies, and little is known about the fates of the black students attending Coimbra University during this time (Reginaldo 2018), the number of students from the Portuguese colonies started to substantially increase in the 1950s because of the migratory patterns between the Portuguese motherlands and the (former) colonies (Vaquinhas 2018: 233, 239). This allows to infer that between 1949 and 1975, a sizeable, even if undisclosed, number of black African students must have attended Coimbra University, meaning that higher education at Portugal´s most esteemed university in general was not just limited to the football labour migrants but also open to other migrants coming from the African colonies.

It is worth mentioning that during the *Estado Novo* regime, access to university education was extremely limited for all population groups, and those who ended up going to university usually belonged to societal and urban elites. In total, under 1% of the Portuguese adult population completed higher education

between 1940 and 1970 (Amorim 2018: 396; Cruz 2007: 401). This would make interpreting the informative value of numbers of black African students who attended Portuguese universities during this time and contextualising them challenging. It is certain that the African football labour migrants constituted a societal elite, as they were given the opportunity to earn education at higher educational facilities.

Yet, as outlined above, they were not the only members of African elites that could be found at Portuguese universities during the late stages of Portuguese imperialism. Batalha explicitly refers to a "highly educated" Cape Verdean "elite", which "belong[ed] to the middle- and upper-middle classes within Portuguese society"(Batalha 2008: 61). Through education and enculturation, this "elite" could come to obtain a feeling of "Portuguese-ness", also known as *portugalidade* (Batalha 2008: 61). This stands in clear divergence with the sentiments portrayed above and underscores the importance of education regarding a feeling of belonging.[30]

It is important to point out that, just like the Cape Verdean "elite", most African footballers had held an elevated status in society already prior to arriving in Portugal. In this sense migration did not necessarily offer a platform of social mobility. Since absolute attendance numbers are existent for neither group, it is also impossible to assess whether the football migrants constituted a majority of black students in Coimbra and therefore were relatively favoured.[31]

Adding a layer to this story is the observation that even the technical branches of secondary education were extremely exclusive to all members of the Portuguese society during the dictatorial era. Only in the 1980s broader access to vocational schooling was introduced (Abrantes/ Roldão 2019: 32). For the 21st century, "a major orientation towards vocational tracks [...] among students of African descent", effectively steering them away from academic careers, could be detected (Abrantes/ Roldão 2019: 27).[32] It remains questionable, however, whether similar efforts to limit African immigrants´ access to certain areas of higher education were already at play during colonial times. Batalha alleges that the high dropout and functional illiteracy rates among the youth of the lower classes are not exclusive to Cape Verdeans in Portugal. Rather, he renders them

[30] See chapter "Skin colour as a factor for discrimination". It is worth reaffirming that, unlike for the African football labour migrants, skin colour could remain a differentiating factor even for the Cape Verdean "elite" in Portugal.

[31] Without further reference Cleveland mentions "a handful of African students who had been permitted to come to the metropole for higher education" in Coimbra (Cleveland 2013: 28).

[32] Abrantes and Roldão refer to this as "the (mis)education of African descendants in Portugal" or potential "vocational traps" (Abrantes/ Roldão 2019: 27).

general problems of the Portuguese lower-middle and lower classes (Batalha 2008: 70). From this angle, African football labour migrants were members of an educational and societal elite, which enjoyed definite privileges in the field of schooling; however, they did not only become part of this elite by joining Portuguese football clubs. Rather they already held this status prior to migrating to mainland Portugal (Cleveland 2013: 23ff.).[33]

Another way of determining whether a more equal treatment regarding access to higher education occurred is to look at admissions criteria. Centralisation policies during the *Estado Novo* led the Ministry of Education to uniformly set tuition fees[34] for all higher education facilities (Pedro 2008: 28, 62). In 1941, the annual tuition fees for all higher education institutions were raised to 1200 *escudos*.[35] This number was reaffirmed in August 1973,[36] meaning that during the Salazar regime, this was the annual amount university students were expected to pay.[37]

African footballer António Brassard, who was an Académica de Coimbra player between 1964 and 1970, gives an interesting account of his financial situation during his time in the university city: "My subsidy was 1,500 *escudos* at that time. I spent 800 to pay for housing and food, so I was left with 700 to handle other expenses, such as coffee, clothing, and smoking" (Cleveland 2017: 171). Interestingly, Brassard makes no mention of tuition fees despite carefully listing all other possible expenses. So, did the African football labour migrants not have to pay any tuition fees?[38] This, in fact, would not just constitute a more equal treatment within Portuguese society but rather, once more, put them in a "class of their own".

However, there is no definite answer to this question. It is more likely that the African football labour migrants at Académica de Coimbra occupied a role that is comparable to the one of modern-day student athletes, as Brassard states that

[33] This is in line with Cleveland and Domingos´ assessment that, in certain aspects, many cases of African football labour migration represented more of a geographic than social mobility (Cleveland 2013: 23ff; Domingos 2007: 239).

[34] So-called *propinas*.

[35] See Decree Law (*decreto lei*) n.° 31 658 of 21 November 1941, Diário do Govêrno, I Série – Número 272, 1012.

[36] See Decree Law (*decreto lei*) n.° 418/73 of 21 August 1941, Diário do Govêrno, I Série – Número 195, 1466, Art 3° (3).

[37] Reductions of these fees were foreseen in several provisions. This number also excludes the one-time matriculation fee, which amounted to 100 *escudos* in 1973 (see *id.*).

[38] To this day, black international students at Coimbra University consider the higher tuition fees that foreign students have to pay an indication of institutional racism (Spolle 2022: 60f.). Of course, the African football labour migrants technically were not regarded as foreigners as they stemmed from the Portuguese colonies.

the players were "not professionals" and received "subsidies", not wages. As a return for playing for the club affiliated with Coimbra University, the players were most likely exempt from the described tuition fees. Whether this constitutes a more preferential treatment essentially is a matter of perspective. Fees were a general standard set for all people, no matter their origin or skin colour – not having to pay them was a privilege afforded to the footballers. This privilege was insofar limited, as they forwent the much larger salaries, which they could have received at bigger and more competitive clubs. It can also be argued that in this case, the football migrants did not constitute a "class of their own" but rather got to join an existing distinct class, namely the one of student athletes, courtesy of their athletic skills.[39]

Lastly, there is an interesting statement by the aforementioned Mário Wilson that deserves to be integrated into this discussion. Wilson remarks that his transfer to Académica was initially blocked and could only go through in 1951 after a law change by Minister of Education Fernando de Andrade Pires de Lima, who coincidentally (or not) was a University of Coimbra alumni, had facilitated all transfers of African players to the Portuguese educational hub (Cleveland 2017: 170). Undoubtedly, a law specifically tailored to African football labour migrants, which allowed for improved geographical mobility and attached social/financial mobility through education in the future, could be an intriguing source of a more equal treatment of African football labour migrants. This adaptation of the law must have ensued sometime between 1949 and October 1951, as Wilson had come to Portugal in 1949 and made his statement in October 1951 when he was already playing and living in Coimbra. However, the *Diário da República*[40] does not entail a law change that specifically mentions the African football players or their ability to move between clubs, and there is no other means to validate Wilson´s assertions.[41]

What can be said with certainty is that despite the disdain of many clubs, the Portuguese regime promoted moves of African players to Coimbra. Having

[39] Unfortunately, no information on whether other athletes at Portuguese universities were exempt from fees during this time could be found. For an overview of the physical education politics in the *Estado Novo* see (Domingos 2010).

[40] The *Diário da República* is Portugal's official government gazette, where all legal and administrative acts are published. It serves as the official record for Portuguese laws, decrees, resolutions, and other governmental decisions. It is publicly available under https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/home and http://www.soleis.pt/dr-1-a-serie-1910-a-2016-pv2.

[41] See *Diário da República* and the corresponding summaries of all political actions of the Ministério da Educação Nacional in the Resumo do Diário da República (the summary report to the Diário) between 1948 and 1951 (http://www.soleis.pt/dr-1-a-serie-1910-a-2016-pv2). Despite my background in legal research, I only managed to detect a change of the statutes of the *Assoçião Académica de Coimbra* in Portraria n.° 12:491 of 15 July 1948, Diário do Govêrno, I Série – Número 163.

African footballers from the outskirts of the colonies study at the empire´s finest university was great propaganda for the regime´s colonial ambitions and fit exactly in the *Luso-tropical* narrative (Cleveland 2017: 169f.).[42]

Be that as it may, the football labour migrants were not the only student groups from the colonies, which the Portuguese administration aimed to encourage to enrol at Coimbra University through policy changes (Cruz/Pereira 2009: 205). This indicates that the football athletes did not receive an extraordinary treatment, a claim which is further emphasized by the fact that players, who joined Académica on loan, could be sent back to their mother clubs if they significantly underperformed academically, meaning that the African footballers at Coimbra University had to adhere to certain conditional rules and were not above the law (Cleveland 2017: 170, fn 103).[43]

The obvious omission in these considerations is the examination of the treatment that the players faced from their classmates and professors compared to other Africans at Coimbra University. Although research of this nature would most likely be very interesting, attaining and analysing the scarce useful sources on this topic is decidedly challenging. The records and archives of the University of Coimbra could serve as a promising point of departure for further enlightening research in this direction.

Nevertheless, it shall not be left unsaid that the University of Coimbra functioned as an important point for political radicalisation and allowed an African intelligentsia, whose members would later have a significant impact on and play vital roles in the various independence movements in the (former) colonies, to coalesce. Some football players were influenced by and took part in these political movements (Cleveland 2017: 196ff.; 2019: 215ff.). Political involvements were one of the few areas where the African football labour migrants could encounter serious impediments and consequences from the Portuguese authorities, as Portugal´s secret police (PIDE)[44] would investigate and confront the footballers regarding their political motives. However, this does not signify an unequal – in the sense of a worse – treatment of the African football labour migrants, as all politically active students from the colonies were

[42] See chapter "Football and construction migrants in comparison – perceived racism and Luso-tropicalism".
[43] In this regard the footballers were, therefore, not "in a class of their own".
[44] Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado.

under the same scrutiny and surveillance by the Portuguese government (Cleveland 2017: 196ff.; 2019: 215ff.).[45]

Conclusion

This article set out to address a central research question: Did African football labour migrants in late colonial Portugal enjoy a more equal form of treatment than other African labour migrants, particularly in terms of racial discrimination? The aim was not to provide a detailed analysis of African football labour migration itself but to critically examine whether footballers received preferential treatment compared to other African labour migrants. The article summarises the current research, makes historical comparisons, and draws on personal accounts to explore this complex issue.

One of the key points made is that, while African football labour migrants were undeniably part of a broader system of African labour exploitation within the colonial empire, their experiences differed significantly from those of other African labour migrants. The article builds on the work of scholars like Cleveland, who argues that African footballers, despite their colonial context, were able to actively shape their own experiences rather than simply being passive victims of colonial policies. Unlike other African labour migrants, these athletes were treated more favourably because of their importance to Portuguese football, their public visibility, and their symbolic value in promoting Portugal's colonial narrative, particularly through the ideology of *Luso-tropicalism*.

The findings in this paper highlight the ways in which African footballers like Eusébio, who became national icons, were co-opted by the Portuguese regime to bolster the myth of racial harmony in the empire. *Luso-tropicalism* presented Portugal as a multiracial and multicultural nation, and African footballers were idealised as evidence of this supposed racial inclusivity. Their success on the football field was framed as a testament to the empire's capacity for integration, masking the reality of racial inequalities that persisted in Portuguese society. The article critiques this narrative by juxtaposing the experiences of African footballers with those of Cape Verdean labour migrants, who were often subjected to overt racism, discrimination, and economic marginalisation.

The comparative framework, which contrasts African footballers with Cape Verdean construction workers, is vital to bolstering the main argument of this

[45] For more info on the political activities of the African football labour migrants, read the chapter "Calculated Conciliation. Apoliticism in a Politically Charged Context", especially the Subsection "Coimbra: The Epicenter of Political Radicalism" in Cleveland´s Book (Cleveland 2017: 176ff., 196ff.).

study. Cape Verdeans, who migrated to Portugal for manual labour, were frequently segregated from Portuguese workers, lived in poor conditions, and faced overt racial hostility. They were viewed as "outsiders" by the Portuguese public, labelled with derogatory terms, and often struggled to gain acceptance. This was not the case for African football labour migrants, who, most likely due to their status as professional athletes, were largely shielded from the racism faced by other African labour migrants. The article emphasises that while discrepancies in pay between white and African players existed, these were perceived to be more related to talent and skill rather than race, and the footballers' testimonies reveal an absence of overt racism in their personal experiences. African football labour migrants held a unique place and status in Portuguese society that set them apart from other African migrants – they were in a "class of their own".

However, the article also underscores the limitations of this more favourable treatment. For one, it was shown through another avenue of comparison – the access to higher education – that, while constituting a social elite, the African football labour migrants were not verifiably treated more equally in all aspects of society. African footballers were still part of a colonial system that was inherently unequal, and their privileged status was largely contingent on their value to the colonial regime. The Portuguese state, through its football clubs, promoted the success of African footballers as a way to project an image of racial harmony and to distract from the realities of colonial oppression. The state of research suggests that while African footballers enjoyed better treatment than other African labour migrants, this treatment was conditional on their utility as symbols of Portuguese imperial success.

In conclusion, the article achieves its aim of answering the central research question: African football labour migrants did hold a special status and enjoyed more equal treatment in various aspects than other African labour migrants during the late colonial period. However, this equality was not born out of a genuine commitment to racial inclusivity but rather a pragmatic decision by the colonial regime to protect and promote these athletes for their symbolic value. Their success helped reinforce the myth of *Luso-tropicalism*, allowing the regime to present an image of racial harmony while continuing to exploit and marginalise other African labour migrants. Thus, the experiences of African football labour migrants, while relatively privileged, cannot be generalised to represent the broader reality of African labour migration in colonial Portugal.

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