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IMPERIAL CRYPTONOMY: COLONIAL SPECTERS AND  
PORTUGUESE EXCEPTIONALISM IN ISABELA FIGUEIREDO'S  
*CADERNOS DE MEMÓRIAS COLONIAIS*

**Abstract:**

This essay proposes a reading of Isabela Figueiredo's *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*, namely its relation to Portugal's contemporary exceptionalist narrative concerning its imperial past, part of what Miguel Vale de Almeida has called "right-wing multiculturalism." As Figueiredo has stated in interviews, her memoirs aim to confront and interrupt how Portuguese colonialism is signified in the postcolonial metropolis. Through the theoretical frameworks of cryptonomy and spectrality, I aim to map Figueiredo's political project as the disentangling of the various layers of imperial narrativization regarding race, gender, class, and metropolitan privilege.

**Postcolonial Return and the Postcolonial Metropolis**

The end of formal colonialism in Lusophone African nations (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe) ushered in numerous political, societal, and cultural shifts on a transnational spectrum. Portuguese decolonization, following over a decade of counter-insurgency in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, and eventual fall of António Salazar's Estado Novo regime, led to the

migration of over half a million former-colonists back to the metropolis. Those that did not see a future outside of the colonial system of power, or feared ensuing political turmoil in the postcolony, arrived in Portugal in 1974 and 1975 to find a metropolis also at the beginning of political reconstruction following the Carnation Revolution. The process of repatriation began with the political coining of former colonists as *retornados* (returnees), the paradox of which resided in the fact that many were born in the colonies and had never been to Portugal. Angola and Mozambique had been the largest settler colonies of the late Portuguese overseas empire. Subsequently, the vast majority of *retornados* came from these two former colonies, even before they became internationally recognized sovereign nations.

António Lobo Antunes's *O Esplendor de Portugal* was arguably one of the first literary treatments of post-imperial Portugal, its present in conjunction with its imperial past, through the lens of *retornados*. Since then, numerous books have been published by or centered on *retornados*. These range in terms of both thematics and especially critical tone. Manuel Arouca's *Deixei o Meu Coração em África* (2005), Jaime Magalhães's *Os Retornados: Um Amor Nunca se Esquece* (2008), and Tiago Rebelo's *O Último Ano em Luanda* (2008) are undeniably imbued with heavy doses of colonial nostalgia and imperial adventurism. Meanwhile, works such as Dulce Maria Cardoso's *O Retorno* (2011) and Aida Gomes's *Os Pretos de Pousaflores* (2011) critically engage, on different levels, with the politics of return in terms of racial and cultural identity, in addition to rethinking the imperial past. The latter have garnered significant critical interest, while the former have enjoyed best-seller status in the Portuguese literary market.

Another title within this trend that has had a profound impact in the Portuguese public sphere and the collective reimagining of Portugal's colonial past is Isabela Figueiredo's *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*. Published in 2009, the collection of memoirs began as a series of blog-posts titled *Novo Mundo* by the author reflecting on her experience of being raised as a white girl in colonial Mozambique. Figueiredo was born in Lourenço Marques (present-day Maputo) in 1963; her formative years coinciding with the final decade of Portugal's colonial presence in Africa. Her colonial memoirs, composed of 43 of the aforementioned blog-posts relate her experiences of race, gender, and reproduction of colonial power, as well as the dawn of her insertion into Portuguese society as a *retornada* in 1975.

Anna M. Klobucka posits the national impact of *Caderno* in its opposition to the commonly held narrative of amicable relations between Portugal and its colonized peoples, made most famous by Brazilian sociologist/anthropologist Gilberto Freyre in a series of writings beginning in 1933. He notably theorized Portuguese love of the tropics to be at the core of an exceptional culturally syncretistic and hybrid civilization he coined "Lusotropicalism." Freyre's ideas were eventually appropriated by Estado Novo heads of state to legitimize Portuguese colonialism on the international stage. As Miguel Vale de Almeida notes, "this sort of 'right-wing multiculturalism' remains alive today in many sectors" (75).

Klobucka reads Figueiredo's memoir "as a particularly forceful counter-cultural statement against the Portuguese and Freyrean tradition of infusing the representations of Lusophone colonialism and postcolonialism with postulations of affect as a centrally operative force" (40). Figueiredo accomplishes this by foregrounding "the violence and

falsehood that operated in the colony and in the consciousness of the colonists and the *retornados*, although she does so with a fiercely confrontational bluntness that has few, if any, equals in the literature of Lusophone postcolonialism” (41).

The bluntness of her stance is evident from the very outset of the collection. The first chapter/post critically alludes to Manuel Arouca’s *Deixei o Meu Coração em África* and its participation in propagating the Lusotropical narrative: “Manuel deixou o seu coração em África. Também conheço quem lá tenha deixado dois automóveis ligeiros, um veículo todo-o-terreno, uma carrinha de carga, mais uma camioneta, duas vivendas, três machambas, bem como a conta no Banco Nacional Ultramarino” (*Caderno* 11). The brief commentary dissects Arouca’s titular evocation of love for Africa as nostalgia for the privileges of colonial life founded upon systemic violence and exploitation. Figueiredo’s positioning of her text, from the beginning, against that of Arouca’s speaks to the latter’s recycling of Lusotropical thematics. One particularly noteworthy portion of Arouca’s novel focuses on the colonial war/anti-colonial struggle in Guinea-Bissau – as the protagonist joins the Portuguese military – but decenters the inherent violence of the confrontation in favor of an interracial love affair between the protagonist and a Fulani native. According to Figueiredo, such popularized treatments of Portugal’s colonial past ultimately drove her to write and disseminate her experience of such a past. In an interview annexed to the published memoir she states: “sinto que faço o que tinha de ser feito. [...] Estamos sempre a varrer o colonialismo para debaixo do tapete. O que mais gostamos de dizer, quando acusados relativamente ao nosso passado ultramarino, é que ‘a nossa colonização foi suave, não teve nada a ver com a dos ingleses, etc’” (Figueiredo, “Isto é a sério”).

The arguments of Lusotropicalism continue to permeate mainstream reflections of the colonial past in Portugal. The public focus on imperial endeavor and early modern navigation also produce similar erasures of colonial violence that dovetail with Lusotropicalism's claims of a non-violent colonial project. In 2009, for instance, the state-owned Rádio e Televisão Portuguesa (RTP) held a television and online poll/contest to select "As Sete Maravilhas de Portugal no Mundo," the 27 candidates of which were all imperial monuments ranging from forts, basilicas, and convents built across the southern hemisphere for colonial purposes. In the realm of sports, the run-up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, led to rehashing a somewhat lost tradition of attributing a team nickname ahead of a major tournament. National soccer team manager Carlos Queiroz thus coined the squad "Os Navegadores" – "Pelo tributo que temos de fazer aos nossos antepassados e à maior epopeia da história dos portugueses. Dividiram o mundo com a Espanha e chegaram ao Japão. Temos ali um simbolismo, mas acho que o termo *navegadores* adaptava-se mais a esta circunstância de jogarmos na África do Sul, num sítio onde dobramos aquele cabo" (Costa, "A Selecção"). Ahead of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, sports daily *Record* conducted an online survey to determine the national team's moniker, and the winning nickname was tellingly "Os Conquistadores." The selection of such a term for a sporting tournament held in a former colony only confirms the mainstream seduction of Portugal's imperial past.

Through the memoir medium, Figueiredo's proposed interruption of metropolitan narratives of the colonial past is undertaken via an overtly autobiographical posture; that is, through a narrating of her placement within ideology, specifically imperial narrativization and local colonial reality. The historical period that constitutes

Figueiredo's reconstructed past is one of overlapping and conflicting discourses. Born in 1963, her youth or pre-adolescence in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincides with the final throws of Portugal's colonial project, along with its exceptionalist rhetoric, and the on-going struggle for liberation in Mozambique, more locally, and various parts of the global south, more internationally. In other words, while Portugal's heads of state stubbornly defended a Portuguese presence in Africa, pushing the narrative of a trans-continental and multicultural nation composed of overseas provinces and amicable relations between Europeans and Africans, a young subject was being formed by the quotidian race-based violence that informed colonial reality "on the ground."

### **Father and Ideology**

Figueiredo's account of the past detailing numerous variably traumatic experiences ultimately offers a glimpse into the interpellational function of colonialism – how the privilege-based colonial society reproduces itself by means of subjectivation. The discourses of race, gender, labor, and capital – central to imperial power and its local colonial embodiment – ultimately hail, in the words of Althusser (174), Figueiredo into Empire's field of meaning. The most salient voice of this field, or the most prominent instrument for its reproduction, is Figueiredo's father. After all,

O meu pai era o colonialismo. Portanto, o meu pai era também a injustiça e a violência. Talvez eu não saiba bem, do ponto de vista histórico, o que foi o colonialismo – muito me escapará; mas sei muito bem o que foi o meu pai, o que pensava e dizia, e esse é um conhecimento prático do colonialismo que nenhum

historiador pode deter, a menos que tenha vivido a mesma experiência. (“Isto é a sério,” 21-22)

In tacitly opposing her words to those of historians, Figueiredo ultimately reveals her writing of the blog and the book-form memoir as a form of challenging how the Portuguese colonial past has been historicized. The close, and intimate voice that fills the memoir inevitably reemerges in the interview, making the latter a sort of extension of the former. This is especially the case when reflecting on her father. As the patriarch of a colonist family, the father embodies the intersecting point of whiteness, masculinity, heteronormative notions of sexuality, and control over racialized labor. His agency resides in the privileged experiences tied to these as separate and overlapping formations.

One of the father’s main privileges implies the right to signify and reproduce imperial signifiers while establishing the relationship between them and his daughter. Jacques Lacan referred to this role within the realm of meaning as the Name-of-the-Father, that which regulates the desire of the subject-offspring. The term, though, is not limited to a biological father or paternal subject. Rather, it refers to a “symbolic function” (*Écrits* 230) that enforces the law *vis-à-vis* the subject within ideology, from interpellation on.

More than simply hailing, ideology – in this case, the field of colonial meaning – must trace Figueiredo’s desire; that is, her subjective and corporal relationship with colonial space and otherness. While the father in Figueiredo’s memoir may represent the crystallization of colonialism’s violence and metaphysics, he is not the only source from which colonial meaning is communicated to the narrator. Isabela is racially and sexually placed as a white woman into the realm of colonial desire – being taught how to desire in

the colonial space as well as the trans-spatial domain of Empire. This is a process undertaken by and through various members of the colonial intersubjective space, namely those that have also been interpellated as white colonist women. Within the racial and gender compartmentalization of colonial space and social life, Isabela's body, genitalia, and their actions are traced by colonist wives, for instance, in contrast with those of black women: "Recordo as conversas ouvidas entre mulheres. Eu não tinha idade para entender, pensavam elas [...] porque as esposas de colono, quando se juntavam, falavam das cabras das pretas e da facilidade com que tinham filhos" (19).

Fantasies of racial and sexual otherness are central to the narrativization of colonial time, space, and power – one in which colonist women (in this case, cisgendered) also participate. In fact, Figueiredo's memoir articulates a white woman public (micro-)sphere where members inscribe their bodies, as well as those of black women, and their place within local colonial power. It is during the quotidian construction of white colonist womanhood that the young narrator learns of the colonial system of differences and her place therein.

As pretas tinham a cona larga, diziam as mulheres dos brancos, ao domingo à tarde, todas em conversa íntima debaixo do cajueiro largo, com o bandulho atafalhado de camarão grelhado, enquanto os maridos saíam para ir dar a sua volta de homens [...] As pretas tinham a cona larga e essa era explicação para parirem como pariam, de borco, todas viradas para o chão, onde quer que fosse, como os animais. A cona era larga. A das brancas não, era estreita, porque as brancas não eram umas cadelas fáceis, porque à cona sagrada das brancas só lá tinha chegado o marido, e pouco, e com dificuldade, que elas eram estreitas,



portanto muito sérias [...] Limitavam-se ao cumprimento das suas obrigações matrimoniais, sempre com sacrifício, pelo que a fornicção era dolorosa, e evitável, por isso é que os brancos iam à cona das pretas. (13)

This moment ultimately creates a specular image into which Isabela is interpellated – the corporeal and subjective place where she is to reside within the colonial field of meaning. In this public space, her body schema and its actions are elaborated as those of a white woman *vis-à-vis* the fantasy of the black female body.

The specular image of corporeal and subjective totality that the individual confronts and assumes in the Lacanian mirror stage is discursively produced through the power relations of the symbolic realm of intersubjective meaning. For Lacan, this stage marks the transition from specular *I* to social *I* (*Écrits* 79). It is this ideal image – or ideal ego – that “situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction” (76). Ever-ambiguous and polysemic in his wording, the “fictional” nature of the ego speaks to both the un-Real existence of meaning and the ego’s inscription within meaning – signifying chain written in the symbolic. In this regard, the moment the ego – nothing “other than an imaginary function” (*Seminar II* 52) – is enunciated is also “the moment the symbolic system appears” to the subject. This instance in which the specular totality of colonial white womanhood is articulated is also a moment in which the symbolic system of colonial power and meaning is presented to Isabela. Nevertheless, Isabela’s interpellation as a white cisgendered woman in the colony is complicated throughout her life, thanks in large part to the omniscience of her father.

## **Crypts and the Colonial Past**

The memoir, as a series of vignettes into Figueiredo's experience of the colonial past, autobiographically reflects on her corporeal and subjective entrapment, privileges, and perils in the realm of imperial meaning. In this regard, the contents of the book tell the story of a crypt – in the sense of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's term "cryptonymy" – of both Figueiredo's and Portugal's colonial past. As Abraham and Torok argue, "the crypt works in the heart of the Ego as a special kind of Unconscious" (80). The crypt itself is a psychic location of fragmented symbols stemming from the trauma of subjectivation. The most omnipresent fragmented symbol of the memoir is inevitably the father – the symbol responsible for consistently policing the narrator's body and intersubjective life within colonialism, subsequently embodying colonial power. At the heart of the split subject – between body and specularity – resides the paternal function/enforcer of colonial intersubjective Law, due largely to the father's dual and contradictory role prescribed by the exigencies of colonial power. It is Figueiredo's father that, more than other characters, conveys both restraint and excess. In terms of the laws of whiteness, the father posits himself *vis-à-vis* Isabela as "the negating law – a NO that foreclosed a YES" (Rothwell 19). The patriarchal foundations of Empire, however, allow the father to seemingly transgress the Law negating interracial sex, for instance; the caveat being that the father's actions always reproduce colonial meaning. Interracial sex between white men and African women, as evidenced in the words of colonist women in the memoir, repeatedly produces the colonized body – an edifice of imperial knowledge and historicization.

This seemingly irreconcilable duality of the father embodies, and is largely produced by, the machinations of colonial power and its narrativization. Under the guise of sexual constraint – such as the prohibition of non-normative sexual preferences for women and men of color – the father presents excess as a *modus operandi* of his quotidian power. Figueiredo finally seems to make sense of this contradiction through her act of writing, coming to the conclusion that it is in this very conundrum (of enforcing the Law while breaking it) that her father “was colonialism.” This paradox had of course been the subject of thought for Freyre and others, making sense of it through a narrative of interracial love stemming from Portuguese cultural and racial ambivalence between Europe and the tropics. What Figueiredo’s memoir teaches us regarding the tenants of Lusotropicalist discourse is that interracial sex did not blur or compromise colonial racial binaries and compartmentalizations, but rather reinforced them. Interracial sex and sexual violence were merely modes of reformulating racial difference – race as a floating signifier (as Stuart Hall coined it) reifying otherness through different discourses such as those of sexuality, gender, and science.

Phillip Rothwell, in his exploration of the paternal function and the construction of Portuguese nationhood and empire, concludes that when “the YES and NO of the paternal function [...] become a binary opposition, striving to obliterate each other, they empty paternity of its function” (174-175). The colonial space seemingly allows the father to circumvent such a binary. While placing Isabela’s desire in line with that of Empire through a series of constraints, the father also does so by sanctioning particular YESes over the colonized body. Although interracial sex is out of the question for white colonist women, as we will explore further, Isabela is introduced to the pleasures of

colonial power through the father's staging of physical violence on his African employees; a violence that Isabela then emulates. Through this sort of balance, the paternal function aims to produce white heteronormative colonist womanhood within a reproduced order of power. Figueiredo's relationship with her father, in other words, is "built upon a division between the body of knowledge that utters a discourse and the mute body that nourishes it" (de Certeau, *Writing* 3).

We can thus think of imperialism, and perhaps power in general, as a series of overlapping and/or contradicting narratives that give meaning to power – and namely how it organizes bodies (in terms of sameness and difference), resources, capital, and land. The final decades of Portuguese colonial presence in Africa, as experienced by Figueiredo, constitute one of the clearest examples of this. While colonial power was practiced through a system of differences that perpetuated the disenfranchisement (or the de facto enslavement) of the colonized, the violability of black bodies, and the privileges of whiteness (on different scales according to class), such a colonial reality was resignified on the post-war international stage as a culturally syncretistic endeavor. Shifting away from the paternalistic rhetoric of Europe's civilizing mission, Lusotropicalist thinkers and subsequently Estado Novo spokespeople posited Portugal's overseas mission as that of forming a new multicultural civilization based on interracial love. The two narratives came together for the sake of maintaining power – one narrative of difference on the ground and the other on the international front. Together, both served to consolidate the place of imperial history.

### **The Crypt of Imperial Historicization**

The contradictions of the father, represent also the contradictions of imperialism in its conflicting narrativization, or rather, Empire's multiple layers of signification. The colonial practice of power "on the ground" and its system of race-based privileges implies its own narrativization in order to reproduce a colonial hierarchy based on imperial forms of knowledge. The interpellating voices that surround young Isabela ultimately survey and reproduce the field of colonial meaning. At another level, one finds the grand narratives of western History that focus on endeavor – i.e. civilizing mission and intercultural humanism. These are not only contingent upon the localized narratives of power and bodies, but resignify the product of these, shifting focus from slavery, rape, and exploitation to "greater universal values." The Lusotropicalist narrative, for instance, reformulated the meanings pertaining to African women articulated in the excerpts above. This speaks to the internal dialogisms of the imperial spectrum of power. In other words, the colonist site of articulation differs from the metropolitan place of historicization. The grand narrative seeks to consolidate the different experiences of power – from the metropolitan elite to the colonized subject.

The grand narrative pertains more overtly to the historiographic project of the imperial West, while the "ground" narrative produces the material and metaphysical conditions for such a project. This implies a dissonance in scenes-of-writing between the two, between colonists of working-class origins and metropolitan (historicizing) elites. The latter ultimately synthesizes the two, if not speaks for the former. Figueiredo's memoir asks us to see the opposition as that of a colonial narrative of Empire and a metropolitan narrative carrying overtones of Lusotropicalism and *saudade* of Portuguese overseas endeavor.

At the moment of writing the memoir, it is the metropolitan narrative/historiographic project that prevails; its scene-of-writing negotiating the terms by which both narratives intermingle and form a totalized and comfortable whole. Michel de Certeau speaks of the historiographic endeavor as a mode of hiding through meaning: “this project aims at ‘understanding’ and, through ‘meaning,’ hiding the alterity of this foreigner” (*Writing 2*) – the sign for that which is other and outside the historiographic scene-of-writing. Historicization, as power’s writing of its past, must thus be a monological narrative project from which the heterologies (to borrow another of de Certeau’s terms) of the imperial spectrum of power are hidden. Within this spectrum, the voice of the colonized is effaced and foreclosed from historicization, from the encounter to the everyday imposition of power in the colony. The colonist voice that carries out the imperial field of meaning in the colony must also be occulted from the former metropolis’ historiographic reflections on its imperial project – hidden through the meaning produced about the past from historians, state television, bestselling fiction, and even sporting figures.

Figueiredo, however, cannot elude the colonist voice, especially that of her father, who constantly reappears, much like a haunting. The first chapter/entry of the memoir establishes a tension between metropolitan historicization embedded in the present and her experience of colonial power in the past. This tension is inevitably guided by the ghostly presence of the father as she attempts to situate herself – and her colonial subjectivation – in the current metropolitan historiography of imperial exceptionalism. The father’s violent role within power is, of course, incompatible with such a historicizing endeavor, and must thus be excluded from the recorded contents of the past.

De Certeau argues, however, that “these voices – whose disappearance every historian posits, but which he replaces with his writing – ‘re-bite’ [*re-mordent*] the space from which they were excluded; they continue to speak in the text/tomb that erudition erects in their place” (*Heterologies* 8). We can, therefore, approach Figueiredo’s memoir as a spectral text, not only with regards to the apparitions of the father that imbue the writer’s memory, but most importantly with regards to how the memoir intervenes in the present.

Jacques Derrida is widely credited with bringing forth the spectral turn in critical theory and cultural studies with his *Specters of Marx* (1993); situating spectrality as a fundamentally ethical project:

If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of *justice* [...] It is necessary to speak *of the ghost*, indeed *to the ghost*, and *with it*, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. No justice [...] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. (xviii)

Derrida seems to posit the specter along the lines of disenfranchisement. We surely cannot do the same with the specter of Figueiredo's father – for her, the embodiment of colonialism. Nonetheless, the voice of this specter poses an inconvenient truth to contemporary exceptionalist historiography. In a way, the haunting of the father, and the writer's relationship with its specter, opens the possibility for “suffering to speak”<sup>1</sup> by reintroducing suffering into the exceptionalist narrative that strategically elides the violence of the past. By omitting violence, the specters of the colonized – which are also present in the memoir – are barred from all enunciation regarding the past.

As Carla Freccero argues with regards to the ethical potential of spectrality, “in the concern for justice, spectrality may allow an opening up – or a remaining open – to the uncanny and the unknown but somehow strangely familiar, not to determine what is what – to know – but to be demanded of and to respond” (207). The colonial spectrality of Figueiredo's memoir thus engenders a space for postcolonial de-silencing in the metropolitan public sphere – a collective ontological space where the everyday experience of nationality is negotiated through institutions, politics, and modes of mass communication. It is thus an ideological space in which “public opinion can be formed” (Habermas 49) and is “coextensive with public authority” (Habermas 30); a space where members are interpellated into a field of meaning that narrates the present and rearticulates the past, managing the relationship between individual and nation – in this case, imperial nation. The public sphere of meaning inevitably effects private life and the interactions of intimacy therein.

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<sup>1</sup> This is part of the famous Cornel West quote: “You must let suffering speak, if you want to hear the truth.”



In Jürgen Habermas's idealized version of the public sphere (prior to being coopted by bourgeois society), it represents "a society engaged in critical public debates" (52). Meanwhile, Hannah Arendt's take on the public realm points to deep power relations that construct a "common world" where particular "forces" "lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance" (50). Arendt goes on to mention storytelling as an example of such transformations – the translation of acts into words, by which the latter substitutes the former, thus delineating historiography's *modus operandi*. Arendt's quote above denotes its own notion of spectrality, as a shadow that is tenuously inserted into the realm of language yet resides behind the sign's public circulation. The same can be said regarding Portuguese imperial historiography and the aforementioned examples of colonial narratives presented in various cultural realms (literature, media, and sports) that reproduce the Portuguese "imagined community" (Anderson) or the Arendtian "common world."

Central to this common world of Portugueseness is the construction of time, namely the mournful chronometry of the imperial past, as what Dana Luciano has coined "sacred time" referring to "the altered flow of time experienced by the mourner" (7). The collective experience of mourning cannot, however, be separated from the power to produce meaning in the public sphere – and who holds such a right to signify; "dirigentes pátrios" as Eduardo Lourenço would call them (44). Drawing upon Freud's opposition of mourning and melancholia, we can think of mourning as a political project of signification by which the object of loss is established; as opposed to melancholia by which grief is detached from meaning, directed toward an unsymbolized phenomena, an

“unknown loss” (Freud 245). In the political project of mourning, the power that regulates the public sphere traces the parameters of what is worthy of mourning, or “entitled to veneration” (Luciano 7), transforming the past into a consumable version of itself; the consumption of which informs notions of Portugueseness. One can oppose this signified object of loss to Lourenço’s remarks regarding the psychological vestiges of empire on the Portuguese soul: “*marcas duradouras na alma de quem ‘teve’ quinhentos anos de império nada, ou só a ficção encarecente que n’Os Lusíadas ecoa, não como mudadora da sua alma, mas como simples nomenclatura extasiada de terras e lugares*” (44-5) [author’s italics]. For Lourenço, Empire was always-already a loss of nothing, a void over which fictions and stories were inscribed, a phenomenon not experienced by the vast majority of the metropolitan population. To put it in Arendtian terms, the past of Portugal’s imperial project was the shadowy, uncertain existence that was transformed to produce a common experience.

Although there is a level of mourning in *Caderno* revolving around the tumultuous paternal figure, the spectrality of colonialism (embodied by the father) destabilizes the transformative project of public historiography by disrupting the political project of mourning and the sacredness of the mourned object. The *revenant*, Derrida’s term for ghost, is “that which comes back” (*Specters* 224, n1); “comes from and returns to *the earth*, to come from it as from a buried clandestinity (humus and mold, tomb and subterranean prison)” (116). The clandestinity of the father’s place in the past must thus be barred from the venerability of the lost object that structures the present, the cohesive signifying chain of Portugal’s exceptionalist imperial past. Derrida’s philosophical obsession with understanding the ways and ends in which meaning is produced through

exclusion, presence, and absence, make it no wonder he was interested in Abraham and Torok's notion of the crypt. Furthermore, in Derrida's foreword to their *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, one can grasp the incipience of his interest in the spectral and its relationship to presence through his treatment of the crypt. His reflection on the crypt can help us better comprehend the spectral function of Figueiredo's memoir.

As a location of meaning, the crypt is "not a natural place [*lieu*], but the striking history of an artifice, an *architecture*, an artifact: of a place *comprehended* within another but rigorously separate from it, isolated from general space" (Derrida, "Foreword" xiv) [author's italics]. In other words, the crypt is not simply an artifice in itself, constructed by meaning. The term refers, also (not rather), to a layer of signification outside the crypt; the running narrative that historicizes an existing signifying chain, reformulating by way of presenting and omitting. Figueiredo places her memoir in opposition to the cryptonymic framework of imperial historicity, its "system of partitions, with their inner and outer surfaces [...] the assembled system of various places" (Derrida, "Foreword" xiv) or "nomenclatura extasiada de terras" to use Lourenço's words above. Imperial historicity, as a crypt, takes on a shifting existence within what Derrida calls the "forum" or "public square" – "a place where the free circulation and exchange of objects and speeches can occur" ("Foreword" xiv). In this public sphere, "the crypt constructs another, more inward forum like a closed rostrum or speaker's box, a *safe*: sealed, and thus internal to itself, a secret interior within the public square, but, by the same token, outside it" ("Foreword" xiv). In other words, by residing within the inner partition of the Portuguese exceptionalist imperial narrative, Figueiredo's father is subsequently masked within an tomb of the Portuguese public sphere. The cryptic safe of imperial

historicization “protects from the outside the very secret of its clandestine inclusion” (“Foreword” xiv). To be sure, the father is inevitably included in this historicization – as he participated in the material construction of power – but as a safeguarded secret, written over through the transformational process of historical inscription. Hence Derrida’s insistence that the crypt also implies the signification means by which it is hidden.

It is through the absence of the father and his violence (in the forum) that a particular version of Portuguese imperial history is made present in the now – the forum’s temporal present. Imperial presence as the object lost through decolonization is recovered through inscription in the forum – an example *par excellence* of the politically strategic chronometric reordering Luciano addresses above. Such a reordering of time is predicated on the crypt’s “sepulchral function” (Derrida, “Foreword” xxi) – here, Derrida begins to expound upon a nascent theorization of spectrality with regards to the crypt. The cryptic underpinnings of imperial chronometric reordering situate the crypt’s inhabitant as “a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but *as* dead, one we are willing to keep, as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living” (xxi). The specter, as a clandestine entity *vis-à-vis* the imperial forum where the exceptional narratives of the past reside, must be continuously relegated to the inner crypt. This signification location, or non-location, is as Derrida argues, “the haunt of a host of ghosts, and the *dramatic* contradiction of a desire” (xxiii), in this case the paradox of inscribing an imperial history without the violent means by which domination was achieved and sustained over land, bodies, and markets. This gets to the heart of Derrida’s characterization of the crypt as “a tale of a tale, of its progress, its obstacles, its delays, its

interruptions, its discoveries all along a labyrinth” (xxiii). The outer crypt – in its historicizing fictional function – resignifies the movements, the fictions of the inner crypt – the lies that structure colonial power i.e. the intertwined fantasies of whiteness and colonial otherness that dictate exploitation and societal compartmentalization.

With the passing of time, the outer crypt becomes more ubiquitously reproduced across Portuguese post-imperial society, including other former colonists, to whom Figueiredo does not spare a scathing accusation:

Mas parece que isto era só na minha família, esses cabrões, porque segundo vim a constatar, muitos anos mais tarde, os outros brancos que lá estiveram nunca praticaram o colun..., o colonis..., o colonialismo, ou lá o que era. Eram todos bonzinhos com os pretos, pagavam-lhes bem, tratavam-nos melhor, e deixaram muitas saudades. (49)

Such an outer crypt began taking shape, of course, before decolonization, before the end of Portugal’s overseas presence. Figueiredo’s play with the word *colonialismo* reverts back to Salazar’s renaming of Portugal’s imperial project and narrative from a civilizing mission to an intercontinental nation. The term *colony* was substituted for *overseas province*. Decades later, Salazar’s own paternal voice – toward the nation – continues to shape the crypt of Portuguese imperialism through the perpetual foreclosure of the terms *colony*, *colonialism*, and their derivatives. The barred terms naturally destabilize the narrativization of the past – they are to remain in the inner crypt, the domain of Figueiredo’s father. They point to the unspeakable presence that was to be made absent at the level of the outer crypt. In the realm of Portuguese nationhood, or its Arendtian

forum, these signifiers and their exploitative and exclusionary connotations, can nonetheless intrude into the present, as they do for Figueiredo.

This embodies the *haunting* that speaks to a relationship between a subject and the crypt – along with its specters – as a particular signifying chain to which the subject is bonded. “To be haunted,” Avery Gordon argues, “is to be tied to historical and social effects” (190). More specifically, haunting is “a process that links an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and a biography” (19). It is through the father that Figueiredo is inextricably tied to the social effects of the inner crypt, the reality of everyday colonial life that has been rewritten decades after decolonization. The specter of the father binds her to the inner crypt and its ghostly signifiers that compose colonialism’s field of meaning.

### **The Omniscience of the Paternal Specter**

Figueiredo’s memoir is more than a denunciation of the quotidian atrocities of Portuguese colonialism embodied in the problematic paternal figure. The father was, after all, an instrument for something larger – the reproduction of colonial power and its system of differences. She exposes the inner crypt by retracing her placement into the physical and discursive space of the colony, namely its racial discourse and underpinnings.

Era absolutamente necessário ensinar os pretos a trabalhar, para o seu próprio bem. Para evoluírem através do reconhecimento do valor do trabalho. Trabalhando, poderiam ganhar dinheiro, e com o dinheiro poderiam prosperar, desde que prosperassem como negros. Poderiam deixar de ter uma palhota e

construir uma casa de cimento com telhado de zinco. Poderiam calçar sapatos e mandar os filhos à escola para aprender ofícios que fossem úteis aos brancos. Havia muito a fazer pelo homem negro, cuja natureza animal deveria ser anulada – para seu bem. (Figueiredo 51)

While the epistemic discourse and violence of a European civilizing mission was removed from Portugal's imperial narrative at the time of Figueiredo's childhood, it continued to inform interactions between black natives and white colonists. The paternalism of colonial discourse was, of course, most strongly conveyed to young Isabela by the paternal figure himself.

For Lacan, the father, or rather, the Name-of-the-Father is the signifier through which the subject identifies with a symbolic order or field of meaning. The father's role in the symbolic is to mediate between the desire of the subject/offspring and the discursive fabric of social organization. In Lacan's words, the "true function of the father is to fundamentally unite (and not set in opposition) a desire and the Law" (*Écrits* 698). For Lacan, the father is always synonymous with the symbolic order. It is the father that intervenes in the imaginary relationship between child and mother by enunciating and enforcing the symbolic order and its social relations. There is, in Lacan's theorization, a hint of spectrality concerning the father's role *vis-à-vis* the subject. Firstly, his presence destabilizes the pre-oedipal imaginary, ultimately reordering the terms by which the subject relates to the outside world. More importantly for Lacan, the father as signifier and function in the realm of meaning takes precedence over the father as person. As Peter Guy further underscores the spectrality of Lacan's elaboration of the father, "paternal power is linguistic rather than corporeal [...] The name of the father is an epitaph,

destined to outlive the dissolution of the flesh and Lacan insists that death inheres in language as a whole, where every vocable enfolds a void” (42). From her placement into colonial ideology to her reaction toward the outer crypt of the Portuguese imperial narrative, Figueiredo’s father is the constant haunting presence in her life – ever-present and interventive even in death. The father is, for her, equivalent to colonialism – its praxis of power, and of course its language as symbolic realm where such power resides over its real void.

The father’s colonial actions – categorizing, compartmentalizing, and castigating the bodies that occupy colonial space – follow her and make themselves present in her own actions. In one vignette from the past, young Isabela accompanies her father to the city’s shanties (*caniços*) to seek an employee that did not show up for work that day. Inside her father’s truck,

eu ia atrás, voando sobre o solo vermelho, espreitando pelos recortes no muro de caniço atrás do qual se escondia a vida dos negros, essa vida dos que eram da minha terra, mas que não podiam ser como eu. Eram pretos. Era esse o crime. Ser preto. Depois o meu pai encontrava o lugar, é aqui que mora o Ernesto?

[...] O meu pai gritava lá dentro, e aos safanões trazia-o para fora, atordoados ambos. Segunda, vais trabalhar, ouviste? Segunda, estás nas bombas às sete. Vais trabalhar para a tua mulher e para os teus filhos, cabrão preguiçoso. Queres fazer o quê da vida? Safanão. Soco. E a mulher e os filhos e o bairro todo, e eu, estávamos ali, imóveis, paralisados de medo do branco. (52-53)

The actions of Figueiredo’s father can be found at the core of her experience of Empire’s crypt. He carries out colonialism “on the ground,” reproducing imperial power by



exercising physical, epistemic, and significational power over othered bodies while preserving imperial fantasies of whiteness. As much as she wishes to separate her father from colonial power and violence, she cannot. Father and colonialism are not too separate entities, but rather supplements to one another.

Her father's words and actions inevitably inform her own within colonial society and especially its racial structure. His ubiquitous presence, even in absence, regulates and oversees her relationship with the colonized. It is no surprise, then, that the entry following that of her father's assault on Ernesto begins with her confession:

Nunca tinha batido em ninguém, mas dei-lhe uma bofetada, porque ela me irritou, porque não concordou comigo, porque eu é que sabia e mandava e estava certa, porque ela tinha dito uma mentira, porque me tinha roubado uma borracha, sei lá por que lhe dei a maldita bofetada!

Mas dei-lha, [...] Era a Marília.

Foi premeditado. Tinha pensado antes, se ela voltar a irritar-me, bato-lhe.

Podia perfeita e impunemente bater-lhe. Era mulata. (55)

The hypothetical reasons she gives for her actions are all references to those used by her father in his interactions with his employees of color – control over knowledge, the colonial construction of truth, anxiety over private property, disavowal of the colonist's desire. Her actions and perpetrated violence, like those of her father, are of course sanctioned by the law, meanwhile: “Era mulata e não podia bater-me” (55).

The haunting presence of Figueiredo's father, before and after death, underscores the spectrality of the specular image that Isabela understands to be her father – the Lacanian *imago* of false identitarian totality assumed by the subject in the mirror stage. In

this regard, the events of the mirror stage are not limited to one particular moment. Rather, subjectivation – the formation of the ego – is a constantly repeated process guided by the persistent specters of ideal ego and interpellator. For Figueiredo, the father is the intersection of both. On the one hand, in occupying the paternal function *vis-à-vis* Isabela's psychic existence, he formulates her desire in accordance with the Law of colonial relations. On the other, in carrying out the paternalistic project of European occupation, he must embody the ideals of western subjective totality and the underpinnings of western universality – heteronormative masculine whiteness.

The very next entry after recalling her act against Marília highlights this additional aspect of the father's spectral psychic presence. In other words, in the span of three entries, Figueiredo traces the father's reproduction of colonial meaning and power, his placement of her desire within it, and his own identitarian performance for the Portuguese imperial project. Figueiredo recalls spending time eating piri piri, challenging herself to show no weakness against the pepper's spiciness. The ultimate goal was to “ser forte como o meu pai. Ser forte como o meu pai desejava que fosse” (57). These two short sentences succinctly convey the haunting centrality of the father in the psychic dwelling of colonial life. The father is thus always a multiple ghost – self and desire, ideal ego and interpellator, in one specter.

The father's repeated apparition – constitutive of subjectivation – always enunciates a colonial narrative, a field of meaning and set of knowledge that resides in the inner crypt of the imperial past. Interpellation into the symbolic realm of meaning is much more than a “hailing” (Althusser 171). It is a moment of narration in which the interpellating agent re-narrates the field of power, now with the interpellated subject in it.

This re-narration, though, is not confined to one particular moment. It is a haunting reoccurrence driven by her father's actions: the beating of Ernesto, the daily distribution of work amongst his employees, his political conversations with fellow colonists, etc.

Although the aforementioned space of colonist women gathering is one in which colonial categorization of bodies and genitalia is carried out, and the white female body is surveyed, it is nonetheless the father that administers the disciplinary consequences of the categorization. Isabela learns of her racialized genitalia through the female public space and debate, but it is her father that physically imposes the categories by disciplining the body accordingly. Reflecting on her romantic feelings for the son of a black neighbor, Figueiredo recalls her fears:

Se eu estivesse grávida do preto, o meu pai podia matar-me, se quisesse. Podia espancar-me até ao aviltamento, até não ter conserto. Podia expulsar-me de casa e eu não seria jamais uma mulher aceite por ninguém. Havia de ser a mulher dos pretos. E eu tinha medo do meu pai. Desse poder do meu pai. (43-44)

The interpellational agency of white colonial paternalism implies such executive power. Through it, the father not only places the subject – Isabela – into meaning, but he also retains the power to decide where she will reside within colonial meaning. Paternal power over the home is, of course, tied to the paternalistic power over colonial space, conferring to the father the ability to marginalize Isabela's body from both intertwined spheres of life – the private and the public. He enforces the order of the home and the racial/sexual taxonomies of the colony.

Contrary to the Lusotropical narrative of interracial love, the union whether public or private, carried damning consequences for the white female body that it did not for the

white male – as her father’s sexual liaisons with colonized women underscored. As a colonial marker of whiteness under the rules and regulations of the white patriarchal gaze, white colonist womanhood was to be isolated from sexual pleasure – especially interracial sex – at all costs. The white colonial female body was thus produced to be an instrument and index of colonial power. Sexual pleasure was to be solely a phallogentric practice of white imperial masculinity. Female sexual enjoyment, on the other hand, was potentially fatal to the reproduction of imperial power, from the bourgeois colonial microcosm of family life to the ideological superstructure of Empire.

Figueiredo’s father takes up the mandate of producing colonist womanhood throughout her youth. She notably recalls a particular episode related to her pre-adolescent sexual curiosity, thus prefacing the memoir entry: “Foder. Essa descoberta tornou-se algo que me envergonhava e desejava. Tinha os tais sete ou oito anos” (29). While playing in a close-by abandoned construction site with a white neighbor close in age, Luisinho, they agree to “jogar a foder” (29) in the house under construction.

Eu estava por baixo e podia ver a abertura já existente onde se situariam as janelas. E, num ápice de segundo, apercebo-me da figura do meu pai, oh, meu Deus, o meu pai, estou a vê-lo ainda hoje, debruçado nesse vago, com os antebraços pousados no tijolo, olhando para baixo, observando a cena, apercebendo-se da situação e desaparecendo rapidamente. Percebi tudo [...] Segundos antes da pancada, tinha já a certeza absoluta que foder era proibidíssimo. (30)

This particular memory captures the father’s spectral being as a gaze. Even before the father deals a punitive blow, Isabela fully comprehends the sexual prohibition explicit in

the very presence and surveillance of her father. This comprehension, one that genders her within the imperial field of meaning, is inevitably traumatic to the point that it continues to haunt her “ainda hoje.” This moment from her childhood – for her, a primordial scene of the father’s intervention in her sexual desire – ultimately provides an image to the father’s interpellational gaze. This embodiment of a gaze into a traumatic image-apparition is inevitably a product of the racial and gender configuration of colonial society. The colonial patriarchal system, bestowing the power of surveillance and enforcement of the Law upon the paternal figure provides him nearly boundless spatial access – from the colonial home and its surroundings occupied by the family to the city’s outskirts occupied by the colonized subaltern.

Through the power conferred to him by the imperial field of meaning and power, the father also becomes an object of desire – not only as ideal ego, the specular image of colonist identity, but as the incestuous object of desire for Isabel. This has more to do, however, with the father’s role as ego-ideal than as specular image. As the interpellator and surveyor of her identity and performativity as white colonist woman, her existence as gendered subject within the symbolic realm is dependent on the father’s appraisal and acceptance – love – for her. Figueiredo notably reminisces over the joy she felt in his presence during their frequent leisure outings:

Eu gostava da sua presença, de passear com ele a pé, por onde quer que fosse, de mão dada [...]

Sentia-me uma pessoa. Sentia-me uma mulher. A sua alma-gêmea.

Não houve nenhum homem capaz de me resgatar como ele, de me quebrar, de me dar vida só por existir. Só por estar ali, sorrir-me, dar-me valor.

Dar-me a mão. Pegar em mim. Escutar-me. (81)

The love she feels emanating from her father in these moments – and their corresponding filial pleasure – can be translated as the reconsolidation of her nascent womanhood. Her subjective totality becomes contingent on the reassuring presence of the father – he who oversees her desire. In desiring to be whole within the colonial field of meaning, she desires her father's presence. As the paternal signifier, he has, throughout her life, posited himself as the only person capable of validating the desire he, himself, engendered for her – to be a woman in the imperial field of meaning.

### **Displacing the Father**

The father oversees her placement into womanhood, and her sexuality as one of the performative components of it. It is through her transgressions *vis-à-vis* the demands of colonial gender politics, however, that she is introduced to sexual pleasure. Aside from her pre-adolescent episode with Luisinho, Figueiredo recalls her sleep-overs at the house of a fellow colonist family and her homoerotic friendship with their daughter Domingas.

A Domingas foi quem me masturbou pela primeira vez. Logo pela manhã, com a banheira cheia de água morna, estendeu a sua perna entre as minhas, e procurou, com o pé, a entrada da minha vulva, que esfregou devagar, fitando-me trocista e rindo-se. Sabia-a toda. E eu fitei-a, e ri-me, e deixei-me ficar a olhar para ela, rindo e gozando, igualmente.

Quis tomar banho com a Domingas a vida inteira, mas depois veio o 7 de Setembro, os revoltados partiram a banheira, e tivemos de negar-nos esses prazeres tão higiênicos e marginais. (94)

Isabela's relationship with Domingas, breaking "the regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality" (Butler 12), introduces her not only to the female body, but to the sexual pleasure of her own body. Although Figueiredo does not frame this experience as a direct transgression versus the father's impositions of heteronormativity and sexual propriety, it nonetheless reveals the limits of his mandate. Against the colonial imperative of producing white femininity as divorced from sexual pleasure – *vis-à-vis* colonial fantasy of the lascivious woman of color – Isabela is taught to masturbate; shifting the colonist female body from Empire's instrument of reproduction to the instrument of her own pleasure. In this regard, it displaces the father's desire – as well as that of Empire – over her own body.

It is interesting, then, that this period of Isabela's pre-adolescence coincides with the final days of Portuguese colonial presence in Mozambique. Figueiredo interlaces this intimate memory with allusions to the historic date of the Lusaka Accord – September 7, 1974 – formally transferring sovereignty of Mozambique from Portugal to FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique). The agreement triggered the mass exodus of colonists; some returning to Portugal, other seeking to live under white rule in neighboring apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia. The centrality of her father's desire over her subjective existence is dislocated as his excessive power within colonial reality draws to an end.

## **Conclusion: the Specter's Persistence**

Figueiredo's relationship with the specter of the father and the crypt of Empire also reveals her entrapment within the contradictions of colonial discourse, especially regarding gender performance and sexuality. These are particularly tied to the omniscience of the father as both ideal ego and ego-ideal. She reads him, at different times, at both levels of identification: imaginary and symbolic. The former pertains to identification with the ideal ego, the specular image of desired identitarian totality while the latter relates to the ego-ideal, thus implying identification "with the very place *from where* we are being observed" (Žižek 116). In other words, she is stranded between following the father's masculine specular presence – evidenced in her desire to be "forte como o meu pai" – and following what her father wants her to be: a woman in the colony. The excessive power of the father ultimately leads to his excessive, seeable and intangible presence, one that produces confusion and anxiety for the subject he seeks to interpellate. At the end of colonial reality, the imperial interpellation of Isabela slips out of the father's hands as she is sent to Portugal to become one more returnee and her father is imprisoned by FRELIMO forces for three years before his return to the metropolis.

Like colonial discourse, though, her father's gaze is never completely eradicated. It continues its omniscient spectral being after the Portuguese colonial project, and continues to follow her intersubjective life even after his death. Inevitably, the father's specter affects how she relates to the past, although she "não conseguia ver o mundo pelos seus olhos" ("Isto é a sério" 23). Her interview, from which the last quote was taken, reveals that she felt she was betraying her father by not sharing his views: "Uso o



vocábulo traição muitas vezes ao longo do livro, porque sempre me senti sua traidora” (23). This would suggest that imperial interpellation – undertaken by her father – eventually broke down. At one point, beginning arguably at the moment of decolonization starting with the Lusaka Accord, Isabela refuses to read the imperial field of meaning as her father had presented it to her. The father’s desire to situate his offspring within a particular symbolic realm hinges on the offspring’s interpretation of it – one that must be in sync with that of the father. This then contributes to her painful inability to rid herself of the father’s ghost, which always carries a supplement of the past, in this case, the symbolic realm of late Portuguese colonial settlement that, in refusing the father, she also refused.

In the same interview, Figueiredo suggests that one of the main objectives in writing the memoir was to confess her father’s sins: “ele não se confessou antes de morrer, e eu quero realizar essa confissão em seu nome” (“Isto é a sério” 24). This seems to be the only way to exorcise his ghost – essentially rewriting the father by placing the inner crypt of Empire (of which he was keeper) into the outer crypt of the contemporary public sphere. If it is through the father that she relates to the Portuguese imperial crypt – rather than through Camões, Lusotropical tropes, and odes to the discoveries – the post-imperial nation must now also deal with the father’s specter as he “re-bites” (de Certeau) outer crypt. In keeping with Derrida’s ethical formulation of spectrality, Figueiredo’s own ethical project *vis-à-vis* the colonial past consists of staging the father’s specter in the public space of metropolitan readership. By way of the memoir, Figueiredo is, in the words of Avery Gordon, “writing with the ghosts” (7). Although the specter cannot be eliminated, it can be shared.

She inserts the father into a present in which “the postmodern, late-capitalist, postcolonial world represses and projects its ghosts in similar intensities” (Gordon 12). The present is thus a ground of contestation regarding the past, a power struggle for historicization. Resignifying the past becomes a political project along the entire spectrum of power (from local to global), serving the interests of the present, whether they are emancipatory or conservative. Figueiredo’s sharing of the specter acts against “forgetting, which is not something passive, a loss, but an action directed against the past” (de Certeau, *Heterologies* 3). Following de Certeau’s argument, the specter of the father is “the mnemonic trace, the return of what was forgotten, in other words, an action by a past that is now forced to disguise itself” (*Heterologies* 3-4). As we have seen, the father’s specter represents a series of actions, utterances, and apparatuses that have been erased from public memory by an ongoing exceptionalist interpretation of history. It is through this series, though, that the material conditions are fostered for such a narrative and its enunciating power. In this regard, Figueiredo’s memoir seeks to recover not only what is strategically forgotten by imperial power, but how imperial power is (re)produced.

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