European migration to Africa and the coloniality of knowledge: the Portuguese in Maputo

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ABSTRACT
This article is about people living in the Global South who in their daily interactions cross what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls ‘the abyssal line’. It portrays encounters between Portuguese migrants and Mozambican locals in the capital city of Maputo. The article specifically focuses on their interactions at workplaces and highlights the narratives through which they talk about and practise the transfer of knowledge taking place between them. An absolute fundament in these processes is the coloniality of knowledge or the epistemic dimension of (post)colonial domination. As the author demonstrates, both parties have naturalised the coloniality of knowledge, which implies that Portuguese migrants tend to see it as their inherent and natural right and duty to lecture and train the Mozambicans they work with. The Portuguese’s epistemological approach is intimately tied to their understanding of Mozambicans as human beings – or, in other words, the coloniality of knowledge goes hand in hand with the coloniality of being, or the existential dimension of (post)colonial domination. The author’s analysis revolves around the attitudes of the Portuguese, as described by themselves, but the article ends with a representation of Mozambican discursive attempts to unsettle Portuguese dominant positions and thereby resist the coloniality of being.

Introduction

Following the end of historical colonialism, the abyssal line persists as colonialism of power, of knowledge, of being, and goes on distinguishing metropolitan sociability from colonial sociability. These two worlds, however radically different, coexist in our postcolonial societies, both in the geographical global North and in the geographical global South. Some social groups experience the abyssal line while crossing between the two worlds in their everyday life. (Santos 2018, 22)

This article is about people living in the Global South, who in their daily interactions cross what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls ‘the abyssal line’. It portrays encounters between Mozambican locals and Portuguese migrants in the capital city of Maputo. It particularly focuses on their interactions in workplaces and on how they talk about and practise the
transfer of knowledge taking place between them. As is the case for any migrant, the Portuguese too need to learn about social, political and cultural conditions in the new country and at their particular workplace. Yet lingering postcolonial understandings of superiority, civilisation and education often prevent them from listening to and taking advice from people in the former colony.

An absolute fundament in these processes is the ‘coloniality of knowledge’ or the epistemic dimension of (post)colonial domination (Mignolo 2005; Quijano 2007). As I will demonstrate, both parties have naturalised the coloniality of knowledge. In empirical terms, this implies that Portuguese migrants tend to see it as their inherent and natural right and duty to lecture and train the Mozambicans they work with. Many adopt a paternalistic and educational attitude aimed at instilling new practices, skills and manners, ie a new habitus, among Mozambican co-workers. This attitude, in turn, is strongly connected to the colonial ‘civilising mission’ and its continuity into postcolonial times. In contrast, Mozambicans often find it inconceivable that they should transfer knowledge to their Portuguese colleagues and bosses. The idea of informing and advising the Portuguese ex-colonisers appears intrinsically foreign. Yet many of the Portuguese are struggling with their integration into the Mozambican society. Their lack of social networks and poor understanding of cultural ideas and practices negatively influence their ability to exercise their professional capacity fully. Thus, there is an imminent need for a transfer of knowledge against the tide of the coloniality of knowledge.

In the following section, I explore the Portuguese migrants’ understandings of the transfer of knowledge, skills and manners, and, to a lesser extent, the Mozambican perspective. This article focuses on the Portuguese’s approach to knowledge transfer, which, as I will make clear, is underpinned by their attitudes towards their Mozambican colleagues and employees. Thus, their epistemological approach is intimately tied to their understanding of Mozambicans as human beings – or, in other words, the coloniality of knowledge goes hand in hand with the coloniality of being, or the existential dimension of (post)colonial domination. I concentrate on the attitudes of the Portuguese, as described by themselves, but I end the article with a representation of Mozambican discursive attempts to unsettle Portuguese dominant positions and thereby also resist the coloniality of being. In doing so, I demonstrate that the concepts of coloniality of knowledge/being serve well to emphasise different aspects of contemporary postcolonial processes of knowledge transfer.

This article explores both content and form in relation to transfer of knowledge. It analyses not only Portuguese imaginaries about what the Mozambicans need to learn, but also their ideas about how they should transmit this knowledge. Many of the Portuguese informants dwelled at length on their posture as teachers – that is, on how to instruct Mozambicans in the best way. Their lecturing posture can be described as a form of postcolonial performativity. Seemingly, it was important to many of the Portuguese to perform as a person who was knowledgeable about how to reform the other. This kind of performativity was highly valued in the Portuguese community and linked to personal status. Thus, many Portuguese took pride in being knowledgeable about ‘how to handle Mozambicans’, which obviously is a highly objectifying and stereotyping position. Moreover, the knowledge transfer is embedded in specific social relations of labour. These relations frame the (lack of) reciprocity between Portuguese and Mozambicans in Maputo, and they clearly build on colonial continuities.
In the following section, I provide a background to the new wave of Portuguese migration to Mozambique and present my ethnographic material. In relation to that, I discuss my own positionality and reflect on its potential impact on my data and analysis. After that follows a discussion of coloniality of knowledge/being and a note on the contribution of this article in relation to previous research and theorisation.

**Analysing the recent Portuguese migration to Mozambique**

In 1973, two years before the independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa, about 190,000 Portuguese settlers lived in Mozambique (Castelo 2007, 143). In demographic terms, this represented the height of Portuguese settler colonialism in Mozambique. Soon thereafter, in 1974–1975, the majority of these settlers returned to Portugal, often in an unplanned way, and many of them experienced their return as a traumatic event. A deep economic crisis and a civil war ravaged Mozambique in the following decades, and few Portuguese imagined a future in the country. In the mid-2000s, however, the scenario changed again. When the North Atlantic financial crisis hit Portugal in 2008, there had been a sustained economic growth in Mozambique for more than a decade. In addition, it had gradually become clear that Mozambique was endowed with vast extractable natural resources, such as coal and natural gas (Orre and Rønning 2017). The macro-economic growth and investment craze was even stronger in another former colony, namely Angola, and the majority of the Portuguese migrants heading for Africa went to that country, but for various reasons such as historical family ties and negative images of life in Angola, a substantial number instead chose to go to Mozambique. Arguably, this is the first time in postcolonial history that substantial numbers of migrants from a European ex-colonial power have been seeking a better life in African former colonies. Statistics on the number of Portuguese migrants in Mozambique are highly unreliable, but in 2015 the Portuguese Consul General in Maputo estimated that about 25,000 Portuguese lived in the country (Diario de Notícias 2015), and the Portuguese deputy Prime Minister spoke of 3000 Portuguese companies on the Mozambican market (Jornal de Negócios 2015). This represents a significant increase since 2007, when the Mozambican census recorded 4000 Portuguese migrants (Raimundo 2017). Some of the recent migrants had lived as children in Mozambique before 1975, but many are newcomers to the country.

In 2016, the positive macro-economic development in Mozambique ended abruptly when the Mozambican government admitted that it had secretly taken out huge international loans. Gradually, it became clear that three state-owned companies had hidden loans worth more than US$2 billion, and that part of the money had benefitted private interests closely linked to President Guebuza. As a consequence of this, international donors suspended their support and Mozambique defaulted on its unsustainable international debt. The economic growth slowed down considerably (Orre and Rønning 2017), and at the time of writing this article in 2019, the negative influence of these so-called *dividas ocultas*, or ‘hidden loans’, was still manifest.

When the economic growth in Mozambique decreased, some of the Portuguese migrants returned to Portugal. Portuguese interlocutors in Maputo used to tell me that those who had come to Mozambique in search of lucrative investments with fast returns had left the country. The Portuguese I met in 2018 and 2019 normally had permanent employment or ran a small- or medium-sized company that did not depend heavily on economic
conjunctures. Most of them had been in the country for 4–10 years. The fact that it was
common among the Portuguese to own or manage a company implied that they often
related to Mozambicans as subordinates. Accordingly, the hierarchical relationship between
the two parties was substantiated not only by epistemological and ontological colonial
continuities on a more abstract level, but also by how coloniality had transformed into dif-
ferent positions on the labour market. Yet there were some exceptions to the pattern of the
Portuguese as bosses. For instance, there were Portuguese employed in banking who worked
together with qualified Mozambicans and related to them in a less hierarchical way.

This article builds on ethnographic material collected in 2018 and 2019, mainly through
semi-structured interviews (in total 39 interviews), but also through spontaneous conver-
sations and intermittent participant observation. As many of the Portuguese run or manage
cafés and restaurants, I have spent much time at these establishments, looking at people
and talking to employees and customers. I was also invited by both Portuguese and
Mozambicans to participate at different social gatherings, such as dinners and parties. The
majority of my interviewees performed either as Mozambican or as Portuguese, but a couple
of them enacted a mixed identity. The performance of identity was evident both in the way
people spoke – that is, with a European or Mozambican Portuguese accent – and in how
they talked about ‘us’ and ‘them’. To be categorised as mixed (by oneself and others) is an
ambiguous position, and people in this category generally took great care in explaining
their personal and family backgrounds to me.

My position as a middle-aged female white Swede both facilitated and obstructed my
contacts with the different interlocutors. To many Portuguese, I was a fellow European who
supposedly shared their understanding of the alleged problems linked to working with
Mozambican staff. However, I was clearly another kind of European than themselves. Many
Portuguese are aware of the existence of what Elsa Peralta and Lars Jensen (Peralta and
Jensen 2017) call a ‘domestic Northern European orientalism’, or the fact that representatives
of Northern Europe sometimes (still) project Southern Europe as a space characterised by
lack of responsibility, productivity and rationality (Peralta and Jensen 2017). Partly because
of this, some Portuguese informants were slightly suspicious about my reading of them and
weighed their words carefully, at least at the beginning of our conversations. At the same
time, however, many Portuguese saw it as their duty to teach me about Mozambique and
Mozambicans. In doing this, they relied on their personal experience of living in the country,
sometimes for many years, and this attitude was clearly beneficial in terms of data collection.
In many of the interviews, I could just lean back and listen when they told me about their
ideas in relation to working with Mozambicans. Also, Mozambican interlocutors saw me as
another kind of European – that is, not a Portuguese. To some this implied that they felt free
to talk about what they saw as Portuguese racism, arrogance and bad language. Yet others
were afraid of talking badly about their Portuguese bosses, as they feared I would give them
away to those people. Mozambican interlocutors often talked more freely when the interview
did not take place at their workplace, and particularly when they talked about an employ-
ment that had terminated. Consequently, I avoided interviewing Mozambicans at their job.
I also tried to make clear that although I am white and European, I did not side with the
Portuguese. This often opened up lengthy conversations, in which Mozambican interlocutors
expressed strong feelings of frustration.

Thus, power relations were at play at many levels during our conversations. In another
way, power also imbued the main theme of the interviews, namely the transfer of knowledge.
An ‘epistemological disequilibrium’ (Burman 2012, 105) underpins the coloniality of knowledge, or the epistemic dimension of the hierarchical relationship that still characterises Portuguese–Mozambican interaction in postcolonial Maputo. The conceptualisation of this dimension is the objective of the next section.

**The coloniality of knowledge**

As widely observed, a fundamental element in European colonialism was the civilising mission and the ensuing hegemonic export of European knowledge, worldviews and norms. The colonial masters saw these as absolute truths and as representing the highest evolutionary stage in the development of humankind. The civilising mission functioned as rationale for invasion, colonialism and brutal terror. To civilise ‘the primitives’ constituted ‘the white man’s burden’, but also his prerogative.

As we all know, the coloniality of knowledge persists. ‘Coloniality’ refers to relations of power that developed out of colonialism and are still maintained in myriad ways. As Walter Mignolo remarks, ‘as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday’ (Mignolo 2005, 244). This epistemic hegemony constitutes a fundamental element in the ongoing production of global injustice. In the space of the Global North, the knowledge of the others, the ex-colonised, is produced as non-existent or irrelevant, while the dominant knowledge of the North is naturalised and, thereby, in a sense invisible. It is naturalised because the knowledge of the Global North is supposedly universal and independent of context. Consequently, ‘[t]his hegemonic notion of knowledge production … sets up interpretative frames that make it difficult to think outside of these frames’ (Burman 2012, 106). This implies that the ongoing epistemic colonisation is difficult to criticise (Meneses 2008, 5). There is a challenge in deconstructing a naturalised form of knowledge against a putatively non-existent form of knowledge.

Sousa Santos talks about the silencing of the knowledge of the (ex-)colonised as an ‘epistemicide’ (Santos 2018, 9), and argues that it is premised upon an abyssal line separating the metropolitan ex-colonisers’ societies from the former colonial societies. According to him, ‘metropolitan forms of sociability’ determine what is valid, normal or ethical. To be on the other side of the abyssal line, on the colonial side, means ‘being prevented by dominant knowledge from representing the world as one’s own and in one’s owns terms’ (Santos 2018, 6). The Eurocentric epistemological North is constructed as ‘the only source of valid knowledge, no matter where, in geographic terms, that knowledge is produced’ (Santos 2018, 6). In relation to the present case, this observation about the irrelevance of the spatial dimension of the knowledge production is significant. As I will show, both Portuguese and Mozambicans construe the knowledge of the Portuguese as superior even with regard to social processes and everyday workplace problems played out in Mozambique.

The coloniality of knowledge works in tandem with what Nelson Maldonado-Torres discusses as ‘the coloniality of being’. According to him, dehumanisation and invisibility are the primary elements of the coloniality of being. ‘What is invisible about the person of colour is its very humanity’ (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 257). Dominant ways of knowing in the Global North actively produce the inferiority of the other, and this condition precludes a reciprocal exchange of knowledge. The ex-colonised are ‘subjects deemed incapable of producing valid knowledge due to their subhuman condition or nature’ (Santos 2018, 2). Certain groups of people are constructed as ‘non-existent, invisible, radically inferior, or radically dangerous
— in sum, as discardable or threatening’ (Santos 2018, 25). This subhuman condition, characterising the other, implies that ‘no equivalence or reciprocity is imaginable since they are not fully human’ (Santos 2018, 21). Also, among people in the Global North, there are social differences and power inequalities. Yet, according to Sousa Santos, these do not do away with basic reciprocity and equivalence. Thus, he uses the concept of the abyssal line to mark the radical difference in being between ex-colonisers and ex-colonised.

Accordingly, the (ex-)colonial other is constructed as ignorant, primitive, inferior, local or unproductive, yet it is important to know him/her. This knowing underpinned colonial domination and was transferred to the colonised people, who were persuaded to know themselves as subordinate to Europeans (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 1). According to Anibal Quijano, this had the following consequences for the (ex-)colonised:

They only can be ‘objects’ of knowledge or/and of domination practices. From that perspective, the relation between European culture and the other cultures was established and has been maintained, as a relation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’. It blocked, therefore, every relation of communication, of interchange of knowledge and of modes of producing knowledge between the cultures. (Quijano 2007, 174)

As I will demonstrate, this blockage plays a fundamental role in relation to the integration of the Portuguese migrants and their exchange of knowledge, skills and values with the Mozambicans they work with.

In relation to previous research, this article expands the use of the concepts of coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being into migration studies. The concept of coloniality originates from a Latin American tradition of decolonial studies, advanced for instance by Anibal Quijano, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Walter Mignolo. During the last decade, the concept and its many specifications (coloniality of power/knowledge/being/truth/freedom etc.) has gained an influence widely beyond this tradition. Yet it is still mainly applied in critical theory and with regard to a Latin American context. In this article, I discuss coloniality with regard to a substantive flow of migrants from a former European colonial power to a former African colony, which is a new historical turn. From an analytical point of view, I demonstrate that the concept of coloniality and its relation to knowledge and being is helpful for disentangling different aspects of the transfer of knowledge between the ex-colonisers and the ex-colonised. In particular, it helps me to see that although both parties have naturalised the coloniality of knowledge, there is an emerging resistance against the coloniality of being among many Mozambicans. As I will make clear, Mozambican interlocutors may quietly accept the hegemonic status of Portuguese knowledge, but they express a right to be treated as full human beings. This insight, in turn, makes me question the totality of the abyssal line, which seems to be inherent to Sousa Santos’ (2018) argument.

One empirical consequence of the coloniality of knowledge is that both Portuguese and Mozambicans tend to view the transfer of knowledge as intrinsically unidirectional. Workplace hierarchies buttress these tendencies, as these hierarchies in many ways play out as a continuity of colonial labour relations. As in colonial times (see Åkesson 2018) the Portuguese act as bosses, they earn many times more than their Mozambican employees and their attitudes towards their employees often oscillate between distrust and paternalistic familiarity. These labour relations frame the space of knowledge transfer, and I will discuss them in the next section.
Employers, employees and the abyssal line

Many Portuguese in Maputo run small- or medium-scale enterprises. Often these are restaurants, cafés or smaller specialised companies in the construction sector. In the last category there are consultancy companies offering expertise in engineering and quality control; specialised building companies carrying out, for instance, electric installations; and companies providing imported building material. Both Mozambicans and Portuguese tend to see hotelaria (hotels and restaurants) as well as construction as sectors of Portuguese expertise. The social relationship between Portuguese employers and Mozambican employees has its roots in colonial times, and generally is still characterised by ‘abyssal’ (Santos 2018) power inequalities precluding any form of social equivalence between the two. However, as some of my interlocutors remarked, relations between Mozambican business owners belonging to the national elite and their employees sometimes are similar in kind. Postcolonial continuities and the influence of the globalising power inequalities driven by neoliberal capitalism are obviously not limited to the relationship between Portuguese bosses and Mozambican employees.

Unsurprisingly, the salary is of paramount importance for the Mozambican workers who struggle to keep up basic living conditions for their families in Maputo’s deeply unequal social and economic landscape (see eg Roque, Mucavele, and Noronha 2016). By far the most common complaint among Mozambican employees was that although they had a job, they were not able to live a decent life and improve their family’s dire economic conditions. In most interviews with Mozambicans, it also became clear that their salary was a sensitive issue. Very understandably, many were ashamed to give me the details of how little they earned, and some described it as reflecting a degradation of their human worth. My position as a privileged white European probably exacerbated this feeling. Salaries seldom exceeded the minimum wage level defined by the Mozambican state, which in the construction sector, for instance, is about 6000 Meticais (94 USD) per month. According to the same state regulations, an employee has to work six days and in total 48 hours per week in order to obtain this meagre income.

As Morten Nielsen (2012) argues, the salary reflects the objectified relationship between employer and employee. On the Portuguese side, many described the low salaries as mirroring the supposedly bad performance of the Mozambican employees. From the Mozambicans’ perspective, it reflected the Portuguese’s total depreciation of them, or, in another discursive register, the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007). To many Mozambican workers, their low salary implied that it was unimaginable to establish a reciprocal relationship with their employer. To them, their salary indicated that their employer did not recognise them as human beings, and consequently, it was out of the question for them to engage in a social relationship with their employer. One consequence of the objectification of the relationship into an inhuman salary was that the both parties tended to relate to each other in stereotypical and essentialising ways. This kind of attitude was obvious, for instance when a Portuguese entrepreneur talked about his employees: ‘If we promote them and give them more money that is the end. They believe they are bosses and destroy everything. They have not learnt to save money; they live for today’.

In many Portuguese enterprises, the number of employees was surprisingly high. This was obvious in cafés and restaurants where waiters hung around in every corner, waiting for customers to attend. Portuguese employers argued that the bad performance of the
Mozambican workers made this necessary. Often, they would hint at our common European background and state something like 'you know, if you hire one person in Europe for doing a certain job, you have to hire three here'. Another reason was of course the low salaries, which made it possible to have numerous employees. In a toxic way, employers tended to hire numerous employees, paying them as little as possible and expecting them to perform badly. This pattern reinforced the objectification and invisibility of the Mozambican employee.

Yet a certain familiarity sometimes spanned the 'abyssal line' (Santos 2018) separating Portuguese employers and Mozambican employees. It was generally a highly hierarchical relationship characterised by Portuguese paternalism and Mozambican submission, but the parties recognised each other and the roles they were supposed to play. The recognition was built not on any form of equality, but on a long colonial history of dominance and suffering. Moreover, there was not a total lack of reciprocity, which according to Sousa Santos, characterises the abyssal line. Both parties tried to get something from the other, which implies that there was an element of negative reciprocity (Sahlins 1972) based on a great social distance.

The element of familiarity was especially obvious in smaller companies where interaction between the boss and the workers was more intense. Portuguese employers enjoyed talking about employees who had worked for them many years, and they were often eager to tell me about their expertise in leading and directing Mozambicans. To them, I was an outsider in the Lusophone African world, whom they were happy to guide. Many told me that they saw it as a source of pride never to dismiss an employee. They interpreted a dismissal as exposure to utter destitution and saw it as their moral duty to avoid that. Another and more pragmatic reason was that firing somebody could bring about negative reactions from the Ministry of Labour, and 'problems' with state authorities was something Portuguese migrants tried to avoid at all costs. Many Portuguese employers also talked about how they supported their employees 'when in need'. This often signified economic support when there was illness or death in the family, and sometimes support for children's schooling. In addition, some employers occasionally provided their workers with a cabaz ('basket') containing basic foodstuffs. There was never any sort of agreement between the parties regarding this kind of support. Rather, it was something that the employees hoped for and some Portuguese employers felt was their duty. Employers ‘helping’ their employees often described their actions in terms of benevolence and righteousness, and they expected their employees to be thankful and loyal. Others, however, complained about Mozambican employees expecting to receive food or other forms of support and argued that it was not their responsibility to provide their employees with anything except a salary.

In line with the notions of ‘helping’, Portuguese bosses often demonstrated a parental attitude towards their employees. This was especially the case with middle-aged and elder employers. Dona Fatima, a woman in her sixties running a café decorated in typical Portuguese style and offering traditional Portuguese pastry, proudly told me that her employees called her mãe (mother). Our conversation took place within hearing distance of some of her employees and she mixed statements of what she described as their uneducated manners, general carelessness and unreliability with descriptions of the gifts she had bought for them when she visited South Africa. She also proudly mentioned that a female waiter recently had baptised a newborn baby after her. In many ways, Dona Fatima's attitude
was suggestive of the mother of a teenager who complained about her children’s laziness and sloppy behaviour yet carried a strong affection for them.

Performance of ‘joking relationships’ was often also part of the attitude displayed by Portuguese employers towards their Mozambican employees. The British anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown long ago defined a ‘joking relationship’ as ‘a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in return is required to take no offence’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 195). This fits squarely with the behaviour of some Portuguese bosses. As an example, a middle-aged restaurant owner who had lived many years in Mozambique introduced me to his employees in a familiar way and asked one of them to serve us coffee. There were no spoons when the coffee arrived, which induced the owner to joke about threatening to kill the waiter. The waiter laughed and the owner repeated the same joke three times, in my eyes probably because he wanted to be sure that I had understood how familiar he was with his employees. As many Portuguese perceived me as quite ignorant about conditions in Mozambique, some were over-explicit in their efforts to make me understand ‘how to deal with Mozambicans’.

The tendency towards forms of paternalistic familiarity often co-existed with displays of distrust. Many Portuguese employers nurtured the idea that they always had to be present and control their employees. Some stated that it was necessary to constantly supervise their employees’ work as they never learnt to do it well, but the most common reason was the perceived need to control the flow of money and prevent thefts. At restaurants, the Portuguese owner was often standing behind a counter placed at the back of the locale, carefully watching the Mozambican waiters’ movements and the payments they received. At some establishments, the waiters had to walk up to the owner every time they received money from a customer and present the bill and the cash. At other restaurants, there was seemingly a somewhat higher degree of trust between the boss and the employees, and waiters could enter the payment directly into the cash register.

The risk of thefts was something most Portuguese bosses dwelled on, and they described the risk of robberies as a perennial part of their business activities. Many talked in a stereotypical way about thefts as ‘part of the Mozambican culture’, while some presented a more nuanced view. For instance, they would explain that robberies occurred because their employees needed to support their family and that it was not a question of deliberately wanting to hurt the company for which they worked. One Portuguese employer added that Mozambicans sometimes interpret it as a lack of enterprise to avoid stealing at one’s workplace when one has a chance to do so. Often, Portuguese business owners met the risk of thefts with control measures and high levels of suspicion towards their employees. Indeed, there seemed to be a vicious circle of low salaries, thefts and control. Others tried to induce their employees to spy on each other, and some set up a system of delegated accountability, and made Mozambican supervisors economically and personally responsible for thefts occurring within their area of responsibility. Yet there were also some Portuguese employers who linked the risk of thefts to the low salaries and set up different schemes in order to gain their employees’ loyalty. As one company owner in the construction sector said in a characteristically paternal way, ‘They never ask me for anything, I know what they need. I set up conditions, so they don’t miss anything, and in this way, I avoid thefts’.

Thus, the continuity of the coloniality of labour relations was obvious at workplaces in Maputo. In the following sections, I will discuss what this implied in terms of transfer of
knowledge. What kinds of practices, skills and manners did the Portuguese try to instil among the Mozambicans they worked with?

**The civilising mission**

The Portuguese's paternalistic position, which I describe above, was strongly associated with the civilising mission. The dominant, authoritarian and naturalised paternalistic position has its roots in implicit ideas about the need and duty to reform the subaltern. There was a strong educative element in their knowledge transfer, which turned it into a form of teaching. The content of their education resonated with the concept of civilising as famously defined by Norbert Elias. In his work, civilising refers to ‘culturally specific norms of proper and cultivated behaviour, which evolve through changing power relations and process of integration between social groups yet contribute to cultural distinctions and social hierarchies’ (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017, 3). Elias has been criticised for reflecting an evolutionist, Europe-centred view. Yet, I agree with Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv that Elias’s focus on human hierarchies and power relations affords his definition of civilising with an analytical potential.

The inculcation of new and better manners played a key role when I interviewed Portuguese bosses. When I asked Dona Fatima, the café owner mentioned above, what she had taught the waitresses she employed, she answered:

> They need to learn everything. In particular rules. Rules about hygiene, good manners, respect. They need to learn how to attend to people. To say ‘please’, ‘mister’ and ‘thank you very much’. They don’t know most of what they need to know. They need to learn how to behave. For instance, if they use a cell phone, they will immediately destroy it. I have to tell them not to wear flip-flops at work, but instead sandals. They start to work early in life, and they know nothing.

Dona Fatima belongs to a generation who grew up when Portugal still was a colonial empire, and younger Portuguese sometimes describe this generation as ‘racist’ and ‘having a colonial attitude’ (Åkesson 2018). This suggests that her condescending attitude could, maybe, be explained by her generational belonging. Yet when I interviewed another female café owner called Sonia, who was in her thirties, her attitude resonated with Dona Fatima’s although she used other words. Sonia also saw it as her duty to teach her employees how to conduct themselves in a proper manner:

> I have taught my employees not to speak loudly or read newspapers in front of customers. I have also taught them not to speak dialect [ie indigenous Bantu languages] in front of a customer, it doesn't look good. They aren't allowed to talk about private things in front of the customer. They think I preach this only to annoy them, but Portuguese are very good at these things.

As is obvious in these two quotes, much of the Portuguese’s teaching was focussed on culturally specific norms of proper and cultivated behaviour. It centred on proper ways of speaking, dressing and moving – or, in Dona Fatima’s words, ‘they need to learn how to behave’. Both these examples are from the service sector, where arguably it is of importance to know how to behave in front of customers. Yet the same attitude of aspiring to instil good manners was evident also among Portuguese working in other sectors. One of them was a company owner in the construction sector, who mostly talked well about his employees and demonstrated a humble and open attitude with regard to his own
need to learn, as he phrased it, ‘cultural things’ from Mozambicans. Still, he saw it as his responsibility to teach his employees good manners, also with respect to their intimate life:

They like to have many women. We try to persuade them not to. I send employees to other provinces. When they travel, I tell them to use condom, we don’t want them to lose their virtue [desvirtuar]. With some we are successful, with others not. I want them to maintain a good mental health, so they can concentrate on their work.

As these examples show, many Portuguese saw it as their natural duty to civilise their Mozambican employees. The hegemonic position of their knowledge and values implied that Mozambicans also saw it as natural that the Portuguese taught them how to behave. Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony is useful for understanding this. Gramsci defined hegemony as the dominant class’s transmission of its own ideas and values so that they become common sense. In the Gramscian understanding of hegemony, relations of power are naturalised and thereby invisible. Thus, hegemony is not only an outcome of economic and political aspects of dominance; it also builds on symbolic elements and cultural negotiations. According to Gramsci, the dominated also participate in the construction of hegemony and thereby in the naturalisation of the relations of power (Schubert 2017). The coloniality of knowledge – and of being – rests on a hegemonic order, which implies that the (ex-)colonised embodies values of allegiance to the system of coloniality. This was apparent in the discourse of a Mozambican who talked about his first experiences as a waiter:

At my first job, I learnt the work of a waiter. Serve at a table, carry a tray and interact with white people. I grew up far from the white race and I saw them as totally different. I learnt how to speak, how to behave.

Thus, the hegemonic position of the civilising mission dominated much of the exchange of knowledge taking place between Portuguese migrants and Mozambicans. The drive to educate and reform Mozambican workers dominated the discourse of the Portuguese informants, and they spent much time discussing how to do this. To most of the Portuguese, it was self-evident that the Mozambicans had much to learn. The questions and uncertainties the Portuguese brought up were rather related to how they practised their role as educators.

**The posture as a teacher**

A desire to learn to know the other underpinned Portuguese’s ideas about how they should act when instructing their employees. They interwove discursive attempts to frame and clarify their role as teachers with descriptions of ‘how the Mozambicans are’. It was clear that ideas and practices related to education and reformation of Mozambican employees occupied a central place in the Portuguese’s thoughts as well as in their everyday professional activities. This became clear when I listened to conversations at different Portuguese social gatherings.

Many Portuguese informants nurtured the idea that it was necessary to repeat instructions and orders many times. Commonly, they underlined this by evoking images of endless repetitions. Some talked about repeating the same things every day, while others said something like ‘I repeat things ten times, and then I repeat it again’. Some talked about patience and the need to respect that their employees’ life experiences differed very much from their
own. These informants tended to link the perceived need for repetitions to their Mozambican' employees lack of previous contact with modernity, 'civilisation' and Northern norms and practices. Others made me understand that they had to say the same things over again because of inherent wants in their employees' character and their social environment. As a male entrepreneur in the construction sector said:

It is necessary to say the same things every day and every hour. They are disinterested in life, they work just because somebody has told them that they have to work, they don't work properly, they have no ambitions. This is because they know that tomorrow they may die, either because they are assaulted or in a traffic accident or by AIDS. They are basic persons in terms of culture and education. But there are of course some who are better than the average.

The idea that Mozambican employees' lack of ambitions had to do with their vulnerability and closeness to death was particular to this informant. Other interviewees blamed their employees' lack of character on, for example, rural upbringing or lack of schooling. What is typical in the above quote is rather his statement about 'basic persons' and the necessity to repeat. Moreover, his reflections on the reasons for the need to repeat everything are characteristic in the sense that they reflect the widespread desire to know the Mozambican other.

If most Portuguese agreed on the necessity to repeat instructions and orders, there was less agreement on how to perform as an educator. Many informants were aware of the fact that their Mozambican employees and colleagues often saw them as arrogant, demanding and confrontational, and they were often interested in discussing this with me and inquiring into my view. Actually, 'arrogance' is a concept that often appears when Portuguese people talk critically about themselves (Åkesson 2018). Portuguese interviewees tended to describe their own arrogance in terms of being demanding and direct rather than being cold, rigid and haughty. Often, they described this attitude as a consequence of having to oversee Mozambicans who supposedly were not committed to their job. Yet many tried to handle the widespread criticism about their arrogance through making an effort to be less direct and softer in their manners. Others, and especially those who had been in Mozambique for a relatively short period, spoke with pride about their capability to give clear orders. One of them was a middle-aged male running a small construction company:

I differ [from Mozambicans] with regard to demands and fulfilment of rules. I demand. I'm assertive – 'it's like this and this and this'. I have authority to impose. When they try to sidestep … [he finishes the sentence by banging his fist on the table and then pointing straight forward with his full hand]. Here they often try a sidestep, the Mozambican never says no, he says 'yes, well, yes'. Mozambicans don't look at us, they don't answer, they don't make a decision. It always has to be the boss who makes the decisions.

Obviously, this informant was not bothered by people not looking at him, not answering him and not making any kind of decisions. Yet many other Portuguese were preoccupied by what they commonly phrased as ‘the Mozambicans never say no’. Many Portuguese felt that Mozambicans met their efforts of civilising and educating with an uncommitted 'yes' and a silent distancing, and they explained this in different ways. Some argued that it had to do with their employees pretending to please them, which implied that they said 'yes' even when they meant 'no'. Others displayed a view of Mozambicans as being very polite [educados]. These informants were often self-critical and compared the Mozambican
politeness with Portuguese ‘arrogance’ and argued that the latter functioned as a hindrance for transmission of knowledge and skills. Some would also praise Mozambicans for being ‘docile’, and underline that they themselves had learnt to wait and weigh their words more carefully. Yet others maintained that the supposed Mozambican inclination to avoid saying no had to do with their lack of knowledge and skills. According to these informants, their Mozambican employees said ‘yes’ even when they did not understand an instruction, simply because they did not comprehend that they did not understand.

Thus, an image emerges of a dysfunctional learning situation, where an arrogant Portuguese boss tries to give orders to an anonymous collective of Mozambican workers who either do not understand or do not pay attention. The ‘abyssal line’ separating them is apparent. As some of the more reflexive Portuguese informants noticed, this tended to lead to a passivity among Mozambican workers. Many Mozambicans became afraid of taking initiative and acting because then they would assume a responsibility. They were afraid of making mistakes and of becoming a target for critique. Some Portuguese bosses tried to counteract this by giving their workers independence and avoiding the act of controlling how they performed their tasks. Mozambicans, on their side, immediately noted such postures. As they were unusual and signalled a break with expected continuities, they could lead to some concern. As one Mozambican waiter said about his Portuguese supervisor, ‘In the beginning I was worried when he didn’t control my work’. Again, this can analytically be framed by Gramsci’s argument about the dominated participating in the construction of hegemonic relations of power.

**Unsettling the coloniality of being**

As seen from a conventional migration studies perspective, most of the Portuguese in Mozambique are quite badly integrated. Often, they do not conform to the social norms and cultural values that the Mozambican majority population see as fundamental for belonging to their society. Only a few Portuguese have acquired Mozambican nationality. In a European context, this would result in exclusion and downward mobility. Despite this, the epistemological and ontological dominance of the Global North implies that coloniality of knowledge continues to permeate the relations between the Portuguese migrants and the majority population.

Yet there is resistance. In a tacit way, many Mozambican interviewees tried to destabilise the hegemonic position of the former colonisers. As I will make clear, through a critique of the Portuguese’s behaviour they undermined their civilising project, which is fundamental for the coloniality of knowing and being. In the interviews, most Mozambicans seemingly felt free to air this kind of critique, although they repeatedly tried to make sure that I would not transmit their critique to their Portuguese bosses. Their discursive critique often touched upon their Portuguese bosses’ lack of educação, which in Portuguese primarily signifies politeness. In particular, they criticised the Portuguese’s way of talking.

Most of the Mozambicans I talked with associated ‘Portuguese’ with insults and bad language. This was in particular the case of Mozambicans working in construction or as waiters. In Mozambique, as well as in Angola (Åkesson 2018), construction sites and restaurants run by Portuguese are known for being workplaces where employees run the risk of being treated in an oppressive, and often racist, way. Testimonies about racist slurs and invectives are common. Informants who worked in construction and restaurants commonly assumed
that they would run the risk of being treated in a racist way by supervisors and/or customers, and when this was not the case, they would talk about that as a positive experience. Middle-class Mozambicans holding white-collar jobs talked less about open racism, but they still criticised their Portuguese colleagues’ lack of manners. This was the case, for instance, of a young woman working as an accountant in a Portuguese consultancy company:

The Portuguese are very demanding. When they do something wrong, they never admit it. It is always the other person who commits the errors. They don’t have good manners, they are halfway stupid. If I’m in doubt about something and ask them, they make me feel stupid, and then I regret I asked. I’ve contact with many Portuguese, and they all behave the same.

Lisa: Can you give me an example?
Yes, if I’m thinking about annulling something in the accounts and ask them if I should do it, they answer ‘Can’t you read the instructions?’.

Lisa: But when they treat you badly, can’t you answer back in the same way?
No, I don’t want to. I want to show them that this isn’t the way to talk.

As evident in this quote, the discourse on the Portuguese’s bad language and lack of manners sometimes afforded Mozambicans with a sense of moral superiority. Few would openly question the Portuguese’s knowledge and skills and their own subordinate position at the workplaces, but they would criticise the Portuguese’s lack of politeness and thereby of civilisation. In doing this, they defended their own integrity and right to inattention when their Portuguese bosses tried to order them around. Portuguese bosses, who in their efforts to transmit skills to their subordinates relied on endless repetitions, straightforwardness and a confrontational attitude, were by Mozambican informants constructed as badly educated and uncultured.

Unsurprisingly, expressions of moral superiority were especially strong when it came to racist insults and physical maltreatment. With regard to this kind of abuse, many Mozambicans demonstrated an emerging awareness of their rights. Many told a story about a Portuguese football coach whom the Minister of Labour had deported from the country because of his aggressiveness, and most were aware of the fact that their Portuguese bosses feared the rulings of the Ministry of Labour. Most Mozambicans knew that it was possible to launch official complaints to the Ministry of Labour about racist behaviour and maltreatment, and this gave them some comfort. However, the majority feared doing this, firstly because they were afraid of losing their job, and, secondly, because they were afraid that their boss had cultivated important connections to representatives of the Mozambican party-state. Yet there clearly existed an emerging sense among many of the Mozambicans I met that ‘today we know that we also have our rights’. Possibly, some felt encouraged to express such attitudes when talking with me, a non-Portuguese European, from a supposedly liberal country. In describing this emerging sense, one young woman told me that she had learnt about her rights by looking at Brazilian soap operas where the actors sometimes called a lawyer when they wanted to launch a complaint. ‘I can’t afford a lawyer’, she said, ‘but once when I worked at a supermarket there was somebody who did something wrong and then he tried to fire me. I went to the Association for Workers’ Rights, and the man at the supermarket had to ask me to forgive him.’ Thus, a tentative conclusion is that whereas the coloniality of knowledge
remains naturalised, there are Mozambicans who have started to question the coloniality of being.

Conclusions

This article demonstrates that coloniality of knowledge is a key term for understanding processes of knowledge transfer in North–South migration, in particular when migrants move from a metropolis to an ex-colony. Clearly, it takes more than inverted migration flows and shifting macro-economic conditions to do away with the epistemic hegemony and the naturalisation of the knowledge of the Global North. The Portuguese willingly act as teachers but are generally hesitant to take advice from Mozambicans and to admit that Mozambicans can be more competent with regard to certain issues. As the knowledge and skills of the ex-colonised continue to be produced as non-existent or irrelevant, most Mozambicans find it inconceivable that they should have anything valuable to impart to the Portuguese. Thus, both Portuguese and Mozambicans understand and practise the transfer of knowledge as unidirectional.

Workplace hierarchies that are continuous to colonial labour relations underpin the dominance of the epistemologies of the North. There is a remarkable continuity between the social relations of labour during the late colonial period and Portuguese–Mozambican relations at workplaces in the Maputo of today. Both in colonial times and in contemporary Maputo, many Portuguese had for the first time in their life an opportunity to manage the work of others. In both periods of time, some of those who experienced a rapid upward social mobility to positions of power in Mozambique reacted by treating their Mozambican subordinates in a denigrating way. Moreover, the fact that white Portuguese earned many times more than the Mozambicans they employed sustained the maintenance of ‘the abyssal line’ (Santos 2018). The salary objectified the relationship between employer and employee and created a lack of reciprocity between the two parties.

The absence of reciprocity was evident in the stereotypical images Portuguese and Mozambicans painted of each other. Frequently, Portuguese employers talked about their Mozambican subordinates as an anonymous collective that was both discardable and threatening. Suspicion and control often dominated their attitude towards their employees. The coloniality of being was manifest in their efforts to ‘know the other’, and they often characterised ‘the Mozambican’ in highly essentialised way. On the Mozambican side, people often talked about ‘the Portuguese’ as arrogant and unsociable, and in a subdued act of resistance remained silent and distant towards their Portuguese bosses.

With regard to transfer of knowledge and skills, the teaching of the Portuguese primarily focussed on instilling new and better manners among their Mozambican employees. There was a strong educative element, which in a nearly over-explicit way resonated with the colonial civilising mission. The behaviour of the Mozambican employees was at the centre of the Portuguese bosses’ attention, and they tried to reform it. Some were aware of their reputation of being ‘arrogant’ and tried to tone down their directness and avoid open control. Many, however, opted for orders and a repetition of ‘clear instructions’, which generally resulted in silence and inattention on the Mozambican side.

Arguably, these findings conform to well-known patterns of postcolonial domination, although the context of a comprehensive flow of European migrants to a former colony is new. Yet the article points to a small but discernible shift in power relations. When
Mozambicans talked to me and criticised their Portuguese supervisors and bosses, they focussed on their lack of manners, or civilisation. Thus, they paid back in the same kind. While they seldom questioned the knowledge and skills of the Portuguese, they were often critical of their bad language and rude behaviour. Mozambican informants repeatedly pointed out the lack of politeness among the Portuguese. Thus, while the coloniality of knowledge remained intact, there seemed to be an emerging reaction against the coloniality of being. Mozambican interlocutors did not accept what they saw as the questioning of their very humanity. In tacit ways, they protested against Portuguese positioning them as inferior, and they pointed out their former colonial master as uncivilised. In doing this, they simultaneously constructed themselves as bearers of civilisation and radically undermined the totality of the abyssal line.

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Note
1. Of course, there were exceptions to this. For instance, one Portuguese entrepreneur had specialised in hiring orphaned male adolescents and successfully supporting their professional and personal growth.

Notes on contributor
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