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REEL TO REEL

Alex

Directed by Teresa
Villaverde Cabral

An ambitious first feature by Portuguese director Teresa Villaverde Cabral, *Alex* (Le Cinematographe, 15 Vandam Street; opens March 27) describes the effects of the Salazar dictatorship's African colonial war on a young boy, his mother, and his father. Told through the boy's eyes, the film breaks into two parts. In the first, mother and son try to maintain their daily routine while anxiously awaiting the father's return—or the news of his death. In the second, the father returns but things go from bad to worse. The father has not only witnessed, but partic-

ipated in, atrocities during the war. Confessing does not alleviate his guilt. Unable to accept his son's or his wife's love, he becomes increasingly alienated and violent. In her despair, the mother sees only two possibilities for the boy and herself—abandonment or death.

Expressively photographed by the ubiquitous Elfi Mikesch, *Alex* is distinguished by its mix of lyricism and social realism. Tere Roby's fiercely intelligent and desperately desirous performance as Manuela, the wife and mother, carries the film. Ricardo Colares as Alex and Joaquim de Almeida as the father manage to be both intense and understated. Because of the somewhat shambling narra-

tive structure and stretches when the direction seems more dutiful than inspired, *Alex* delivers a kind of delayed gratification. The connections it makes between political history and personal experience are never so powerful as after the final fade. —Amy Taubin