ANTI-BLACK AGENCIES: MARIA ARCHER'S COLONIALIST FEMINISM

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Abstract: This essay critically explores the colonialist racial and gender politics of Portuguese writer Maria Archer (1899-1982), specifically in her book *Brasil, fronteira da África* (1963). Though she is often remembered within the scholarly and canonizing circles of Portuguese literature for her contributions to an emerging national women's literature in the 20th century, a substantial part of both her literary work and essayistic non-fiction regarding the roles of women in society and cultural production is profoundly informed by what we may consider her colonialist feminism — a vindication and articulation of women's agency (specifically white metropolitan women) grounded in colonial endeavor. In such works, African colonial space and colonized bodies provide the discursive and epistemic sites in relation to which the historical agency of European women is imagined and exercised.

Keywords: Colonial Feminism, European Feminism, Anti-Blackness, Maria Archer, Portuguese Colonialism.

Resumo: Este ensaio visa uma abordagem crítica em relação aos discursos raciais e de género presentes na obra da escritora portuguesa, Maria Archer (1899-1982), particularmente o seu livro *Brasil, fronteira da África* (1963). Embora seja lembrada dentro dos circuitos académicos e literários portugueses como figura duma emergente literatura feminina do século 20, uma porção considerável da sua obra (literária e ensaística) acerca dos papéis da mulher na sociedade e na produção cultural revelam um forte penhor do que podemos designar "feminismo colonialista" — uma reivindicação e articulação de agência feminina (especificamente para mulheres da metrópole imperial) enraizada em esforço colonial. Em tais obras, o espaço colonial africano e os corpos colonizados do território fornecem locais discursivos e epistêmicos sobre os quais a agência feminista europeia é imaginada e exercida.

Palavras-chave: Feminismo Colonial, Feminismo Europeu, Anti-Negro, Maria Archer, Colonialismo Português.

Archer's Life and Recovery as Portuguese Feminist Figure

Maria Emília Archer Eyrolles Baltasar Moreira, better known by her penname, Maria Archer, was born on January 4, 1899 in Lisbon to parents from the Alentejo region of Portugal. Her father was notably an agent of the Portuguese empire, working in different positions of the Portuguese Colonial Bank in colonial Mozambique, Portuguese Guinea (present-day Guinea-Bissau), and Angola. As a result, she followed her father's relocations alongside her mother and siblings, residing in Mozambique between 1910 and 1914, and Portuguese Guinea between 1916 and 1921. At that point, her father was relocated back to Portugal, and Archer married Portuguese colonial banker Alberto Teixeira Passos and moved back to Mozambique, residing in Ibo until 1926 when Passos was relocated to Faro in the Algarve region of Portugal. In 1931, Archer and Passos divorced and she moved to Angola to reside with her parents. It was during this time that she initiated her literary

career by writing crime fiction and became one of the few Portuguese women of the time who were able to achieve financial independence solely through her literary production. At this time, she was residing in Portugal once again and was able to forge a literary career and reputation among some literati elites, although occupying a marginal space in the male-dominated world of literary production.

Significant portions of her literary oeuvre address the subordinate social roles ascribed to women in Portugal, particularly members of Portugal's rural peasantry, during the long-lasting right-wing dictatorship of António Oliveira Salazar (1928-1968), proceeded by Marcello Caetano until the military coup of 1974 which ended both the dictatorship and the Portuguese overseas empire. In the late 1930s, her literary works were censored by the regime, and she, herself, became an object of political policing, especially after she joined the Movimento de Unidade Democrática [Movement of Democratic Unity] in 1945. Censorship meant that she was no longer able to live off of her literary work and sought political exile in Brazil in 1954 where she resided until 1977 when she returned to Portugal. Before and after her exile to Brazil, Archer's work and political positions made her part of an incipient yet marginal formation of a Portuguese women's literature, and has led to her being seen as a representative of a particular feminist expression at the intersection with colonialism.

Within the scholarly and canonizing circles of Portuguese literature she is memorialized for her contributions to an emerging national feminist literature in the 20th century (second-wave, if we follow US-centric feminist historiographies). In recent years, there has been renewed interest in her life and work with graduate theses, conferences, journal articles, and the publication of biographies and collections looking to recover or carve out for her a prominent place in Portuguese literature and cultural history. The recovery of her work arguably began, or at least became visible to some degree, with the publication of a critical anthology of Portuguese women's short stories of the 1940s, edited by US-based scholar of Portuguese literature, Ana Paula Ferreira, and published by acclaimed literary press, Caminho, in 2000. In her introduction to the collection, Ferreira points out that despite some critical, yet highly gendered and thus exclusionary, acclaim during the 1940s from male literary critics, Archer's oeuvre had since "ca[ído] no esquecimento" ["fallen into oblivion"] (*A urgência* 31). Ferreira's volume not only reintroduces readerships to Archer through the publication of two of her notable short stories, but also sheds light on the critical reception of her work, how it was categorized within and by the patriarchal mechanisms of literary canonization, and its wider reception in Portuguese society under Salazar's New State regime.

Similarly, her work and biographical trajectory have been celebrated by women's organizations and feminist activists in Portugal. For instance, the Espinho-based organization, "Mulher Migrante: Associação de Estudo, Cooperação, e Solidariedade" ["Migrant Woman: Association for Study, Cooperation, and Solidarity"] focusing on migrant women's rights in Portugal organized a series of conferences on Archer throughout 2011 and 2012. These featured the collaboration of Archer's great niece, Olga Archer Moreira, who has mobilized public attention to Archer (both nationally and locally in Almodôvar, Alentejo from where her family hails) and helped shape the dominant narrative surrounding her work as a key contribution to national feminist movements and histories. From the conferences featuring scholars, local politicians, and even former Prime Minister and President Mário Soares, came the publication of *Vida e Obra de Maria Archer: Uma Portuguesa da Diáspora* [*Life and Work of Maria Archer: A Portuguese Woman of the Diaspora*] in 2012. Two years later, Guilherme Bordeira, a former political official turned biographer, published *Acerca de Maria Archer* [*On Maria Archer*] (2014), through notable trade press Edições Vieira da Silva, with the goal of "contribuir para que a escritora, a cidadã e a mulher retornem à nossa memória, de onde nunca deveriam ter saído" ["contributing so that the writer, the citizen,

and the woman return to our memory, from where they should have never left"] (Bordeira, 2014, 15).

A substantial part of both her literary work and essayistic non-fiction regarding the roles of women in society and cultural production is profoundly informed by what we may consider her colonialist feminism — a vindication and articulation of women's agency (specifically white metropolitan women) grounded in colonial endeavor. In such works, African colonial space and colonized bodies provide the sites in relation to which the historical agency of European women is exercised. This essay will thus look to complicate Archer's place in contemporary Portuguese historiographies of feminist action by interrogating her complicities in Portuguese empire and its patriarchal modus operandi. In this regard, I hope to contribute to a postcolonial feminist critique of Portuguese feminist archives by pinpointing how particular metropolitan feminist voices have reproduced imperialist systems of representation and subjugation of colonized women. To this end, I shall focus specifically on her essay, "Presença da mulher na paisagem social da África portuguesa" ["Woman's Presence in the Social Landscape of Portuguese Africa"], published in 1963 in her collection *Brasil, fronteira da África* [*Brasil, border of Africa*], where she most emphatically situates white womanhood and limited notions of gender equality in opposition to Black women's bodies and positionality in racial capital. This essay is merely one example of her extensive corpus of texts on pertaining to modes of colonization in Africa and imperial fantasies of African spaces and bodies, and drawing on her nostalgia of colonial life. Other works by Archer along these lines span decades of production across genres, from novels and memoires to essays, including *África selvagem* [*Wild Africa*] of 1935, *Sertanejos* [*Backland Dwellers*] of 1936, *Ninho de bárbaros* [*Nest of Barbarians*] of 1936, *Viagem à roda de África* [*Voyage around Africa*] of 1938, *Terras onde se fala português* [*Lands Where Portuguese is Spoken*] of 1957, and *África sem luz* [*Africa Without Light*] of 1962. What sets "Presença" apart, moreover, is its prescriptions for Portuguese colonization through imperial patriarchal gendered/racialized divisions of labor and sexual economies.

Within existing scholarship pertaining to Archer's impact on Portuguese literature, her works are seen largely as important contributions to the development of literary production by women, or what some scholars have called "women's literature" in Portugal, with few allusions to the profound racism and racialized gender politics at the heart of much of her oeuvre. In her biographical note on Archer in the aforementioned anthology of short stories, for instance, Ferreira mentions some of Archer's colonialist writings and contributions to the state supported ethnographic journal *Cadernos Coloniais*, though without further considering the impact of the racial and gendered discourses of such texts for the public memory and reckoning with Archer's life and literature. Rather, despite Archer's complicities in empire and the Portuguese colonial project, Ferreira underscores the "arrojo com que se move na sociedade do seu tempo como mulher livre e de ideias avançadas, arrojo que se estende a uma obra de ficção denunciando a dependência social, económica, espiritual, e sexual femininas" (Ferreira, 2000, 277). It is important to note here, though, that Ferreira, in other scholarly works, does grapple with imperial notions of white womanhood that were deployed by New State propaganda in its development and dissemination of late imperial Portugueseness (1996), as well as the colonial legacies of racialized womanhood in contemporary Portuguese society (2014).

What follows in this essay, therefore, is an interrogation of how her "progressive ideas" are not only limited to white European women, but how these are built on global imperial epistemes and economies of racial/gendered order of bodies and capital. By taking her oeuvre as a whole, rather than compartmentalizing her colonialist writings from her metropolitan feminist work, we may problematize Archer's literary legacy through a renewed critical race and postcolonial feminist lens, while also acknowledging the need to uncover and foreground the modes of racial violence and exploitation of the Portuguese imperial past at a historical moment in which exceptionalist

narratives of said past continue to be prevalent in the structuring of a national public sphere. A critical reassessment and decolonial resignification of national archives (literary and otherwise) is particularly urgent as racial violence and Portuguese imperial complicity in global racial capitalism continue to be erased by public figures including President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa's denial of Portugal's role in the Atlantic Slave Trade (Ames 2018) even as Black bodies are executed by state and popular racism (as in the 2020 murder of actor Bruno Candé by a former colonial soldier in broad daylight on a busy street in Lisbon).

The Anti-Black Tenets of Archer's Feminism

The reluctance to engage Archer's colonialist texts represents a particularly crucial omission from her legacy and how her brand of feminism is remembered. In this regard, recovering this significant part of her work provides a more holistic sense of how she conveyed the plights of women under a right-wing fascist state and how she looked to combat these by articulating a claim to white female agency through colonial modes of racialized and gendered alterity. Despite her opposition to António Salazar's New State regime, Archer wrote and viewed the world from a profoundly imperialist perspective and indeed subscribed to the Portuguese imperial project. Like other Portuguese travel writers, colonial officials, and anthropologists, several of her works were published in the government-supported periodical *Cadernos Coloniais* and contributed to Portuguese imperialist ideologies — the tenants of which she very much identified with.

Her life and work also provide significant insight into the intersection of gender and empire. Archer's views on race, women, and empire were greatly influenced by her position at the heart of Portuguese colonialism. Her tracing of women's agency in the colonial setting does not represent significant shifts in patriarchally-ascribed gender roles within the gendered division of colonialist practices. In other words, her stance on women's roles does not destabilize the discursive fabric of white patriarchal power and the hegemony of masculinity therein, but rather augments this fabric by subscribing to its gendering and ordering of bodies. The role she envisages for women within the colonizing process is largely synchronized with the racialized and gendered order of colonial society, in other words.

In many ways, Archer's reflections on the role of white women in colonial society hinge on the positioning of white cisgendered femininity as the universalist archetype of womanhood, while colonized women are sites of both horror and sympathy to be saved from "native" patriarchal systems supposedly more brutal than western ones.

> Muito raramente, e só em casos de realeza ou feitiçaria, a mulher indígena influi na vida política do seu povo. A lei consuetudinária, único direito dos negros selvagens, poucos privilégios concede à mulher. Dá-lhe a posse dos filhos do casal, direito natural de todas as fêmeas do ramo dos mamíferos, direito provindo dos antigos cultos totêmicos e seus ditames de sucessão uterina, e permite-lhe que, em solteira, pratique a liberdade amorosa. Após o casamento torna-se propriedade do marido, objeto de uso exclusivo do marido. [...]
> Se praticar adultério sem avisar o marido e sem lhe facilitar o recebimento da multa devida pelo cúmplice, a negra selvagem pode ser severamente punida. [...]
> Solteira ou casada, a negra selvagem é submetida à mais absoluta obediência ao chefe da família. A sua grei considera-a tão pobre de inteligência que só a julga apta para o trabalho doméstico e a lavoura. (Archer, 1963, 130)

In this respect, her work shares many commonalities with a long tradition of white western feminist writings on Black and Brown women that feature heavily in both colonialist and western

anti-colonial thought. These have helped render the "production of the 'Third World Woman' as a singular monolithic subject" (333) as theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty underscored decades ago in her seminal critique of western feminism — "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." As Mohanty importantly points out, this is a dual operation in which the codification non-white and non-western bodies as such produces the very claims to westernness and whiteness of the writing subject: "I am attempting to draw attention to the similar effects of various textual strategies used by particular writers that codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western" (Mohanty, 1984, 334) and in the process, serving to "limit the possibility of coalitions among (usually White) Western feminists and working class and feminists of color around the world" (Mohanty, 1984, 334).

Through this paradigm of feminist thought, the struggles, bodies, and experiences of non-white women have been distorted and signified into the discursive terrains of Empire, with feminist agency imagined through access to the material life of whiteness. Archer's work is profoundly entrenched in the epistemes of whiteness and the West and their patriarchal underpinnings, with white men and masculinity as central historical protagonists. For Archer, moreover, as I shall examine further ahead, African women are sites through which she imagines European, specifically, Portuguese women as key contributors to complex processes of white supremacy-building as the economic and epistemic structures of optimal colonization. It is in this respect that her reflections on empire, Portuguese colonial settlement, and racial/ gendered divisions of labor intermesh with certain particularities of late Portuguese colonial discourses and exceptionalist narratives.

Colonist Womanhood and Prescriptions for Portuguese Colonization in Africa

Archer's essay, though published in the 1960s, draws largely on her time residing in different locales of Portugal's colonial empire in Africa during the 1910s and 30s. She frames her essay by decrying a deficit of Portuguese colonization in its continental African colonies, notably in constant contrast with the Portuguese colonial project in Brazil of previous centuries, which she upholds as a sort of colonial standard in its formation of a colonial society and order that has survived political independence:

> Terras com 5 séculos de ocupação portuguesa e ainda sem clima moral e cultural definido. Não avultam como províncias ocupadas por brancos dispostos a viver e morrer, a deixar herdeiros e eternidade no solo prolongado em continuidade pátria. Brancos que parecem da mesma etnia e cultura dos que, com terra americana, novos hábitos, novas condições sociais, economia diferente, gastaram uma vida genuinamente brasileira, diversa da que recebiam nas naus e caravelas. A simbiose da terra e do homem, a civilização regional, são fenómenos desconhecidos das grandes colónias africanas de Portugal. (Archer, 1963, 122)

Archer laments the perceived lack of a deeper rooting of a white Portuguese population that can establish the material and metaphysical conditions of colonization and racial capitalism, from where colonial intergenerational wealth could emerge. She also underscores a "lack" of miscegenation, which for her represents a particularly productive mechanism of colonization, evocative of exceptionalist narratives of Portuguese imperialism at the time of publication.

> Até na mestiçagem de humanos não há fundas marcas em qualquer das duas grandes colónias portuguesas da África [Angola and Mozambique]. Mestiços em número muito limitado, sem influência no ambiente social. Nas povoações sertanejas a multidão bantu conserva a pureza negra, nas cidades e vilas há alguns mestiços em

vários graus de mistura de sangue; mas gente sem características regionais, sem originalidade cultural. (Archer, 1963, 123)

Within this subscription to the existing forms of patriarchal domination, Archer attributes the current deficiencies of Portuguese colonialism in Africa to the lack of white women within the civilizing process. For Archer, this process is one aligned with notions of Portuguese imperial exceptionalism at the time of publication (and after) that structured the narrative of Portuguese colonialism within the metropolis, namely as the colonial wars for independence began in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, from 1961 to 1974. She argues that women had a central role to play in the formation of Lusotropical societies, drawing on the widely circulated work of Brazilian sociologist and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre who popularized the term as a theorization of Portuguese colonialism as one that was less violent than those of other European powers and that made greater efforts toward miscegenation and cultural syncretism. While the large-scale development of Portuguese colonial settlement in continental Africa in the early 20th century was ideologically guided by a state subscription to "white man's burden" rhetoric for obscuring labor abuses, the end of World War II and the movement to decolonize Africa, Salazar and the New State propaganda machine turned to Freyre's theses of Lusotropicalism (Jerónimo 2015).

Freyre's vast and voluminous intellectual publications argued for a particular version of Brazilian history and social formation based on intimate and institutional relations between white/European slaveholders and enslaved bodies of African descent. Through a Boasian approach, his overarching argument traced the lack of institutionalized racial divisions in Brazil, and a supposed broader lack of racial violence in relation to the United States, to the colonial modi operandi of the Portuguese. More specifically, he postulated that the Portuguese were more adept at cultural contact and social formation in the tropics than other European empires due to their own ethnic formation following Germanic and Moorish occupations and geo-cultural proximity with northern Africa. To be sure, similar arguments had been made earlier by Portuguese and Brazilian intellectuals, but Freyre connected and built upon many of these, ultimately crystallizing them into a more expansive theory of cultural formation and civilization across Portuguese colonies and imperial spheres of influence he coined as Lusotropicalism.

The Portuguese state and other political elites publically decried and rejected Freyre's theories, favoring colonial rhetoric and policies of a civilizing mission based on Portuguese claims to whiteness. However, with the increasing international pressure to decolonize Africa in the late 1940s, the Portuguese state began to integrate Freyre's Lusotropicalist arguments into public political rhetoric in the 1950s, tying them into the state's rebranding of the empire as a pluricontinental and multiracial nation and its colonies as overseas provinces. In response to international claims of colonial exploitation and neglect, and to quell growing anti-colonial sentiment among its population, the state looked to extend access to health and education for its non-white subjects. Even as the wars for independence were well under way, Portuguese state officials publicly legitimized its protracted colonial project through Lusotropicalist arguments.

For both Freyre and Archer, Brazil was emblematic of this idealized body politic. Archer, however, saw white women as central to this creation and regulation of a multiracial society, whereas Freyre posits the sexual and labor relations between white men and female slaves at the core of Brazilian national formation. Archer's colonialist feminism is thus placed within Lusotropical narratives of Portuguese colonialism while also maintaining previous official Salazarist narratives of colonial legitimation on the international stage, utilizing the rhetoric of the white man's burden. Archer, in other words, makes a claim for a white woman's burden in colonial Lusophone Africa. In this regard, at the core of Archer's vision of a Lusotropical multiracial society,

one finds the tenants of white supremacy, Eurocentric cultural validity, and social organization formed by and for whites.

For Archer, the gendered agency of white women in the Portuguese colonization of Africa always operates in tandem with, but divergence from, the roles and duties ascribed to masculinity and its colonial formulation. Although she denounces the roles of servitude ascribed to women in this relation, she does little to displace the notions of gender difference that ideologically uphold such domination, and couches the role of white women in colonialism within this schema of patriarchal power. Arguing that "woman" is too "fraca para empunhar armas de guerra" ["too weak to take up arms"] (Archer, 1963, 128), she posits the role of women as producers of colonial culture within which the organization of colonial society could be embedded and reproduced through the teaching and inculcation of European norms, customs, and commodities of bourgeois life. As she argues, European women introduce into colonial life and safeguard, there, particular racial social relations while carrying a specific symbolic capital of European bourgeois cultural life. Archer's arguments are fundamentally grounded in patriarchally-sanctioned social roles and identitarian performances of womanhood centered on the domestic space, family life, and gendered consumption of commodities.

> Certo é que as grandes linhas históricas da humanidade têm sido, inicialmente, traçadas pelos homens, mas é forçoso reconhecer que, na consolidação dessa obra, no afeiçoamento ecológico, na génese dos costumes, na criação do regionalismo, a interferência da mulher foi e é necessária, e que ela, e só ela é capaz de introduzir num País novo o equilíbrio entre o moral e o social, a polidez que suaviza o trato diário, a arte doméstica, a graça do luxo, as inutilidades de encantam a vida, enfim, os elementos que   transformam a terra selvagem em terra pátria e a consolidam pela alegria de viver. Grandes paradigmas, como as civilizações do Brasil e dos Estados Unidos, assentam o mérito da mulher como fator de consolidação social. (Archer, 1963, 129)

Archer's reflections on the role of white European women in the colonization process echo Ann Laura Stoler's critical diagnosis of European colonial projects and the domestic labor of white women toward the goal of establishing multi-generational bourgeois life in the colonized terrain:

> The arrival of large numbers of European women coincided with new bourgeois trappings and notions of privacy in colonial communities. And these, in turn, were accompanied by new distinctions based on race. European women supposedly required more metropolitan amenities than did men and more spacious surroundings for them. […]   Their psychological and physical constitutions were considered more fragile, demanding more servants for the chores they should be spared. In short, white women needed to be maintained at elevated standards of living, in insulated social spaces cushioned with the cultural artifacts of 'being European.' […] Segregationist standards were what women 'deserved' and, more importantly, what white male prestige required they maintain. (Stoler, 2002, 55)

Archer's understanding of the colonial role of white women, shared by the Estado Novo as reflected in its propagandistic mission to bring more families to the colonies (Castelo 2007), thus places women at the core of both Portugal's civilizing mission and its cementing of whiteness and white presence overseas. Moreover, for Archer, this racialized and gendered role tied to the maintenance of whiteness is not oppositional to, but rather, adjacent to the importance she places

on miscegenation and its sexual economy sanctioning the access of cisgendered white men to the bodies of African women.

In the context of Estado Novo Portugal and its late colonialist discourses, Ana Paula Ferreira illustrates and underscores how the regime's "'institutionalization of Portugueseness' could not have been achieved without the rhetorical involvement of womanhood and femininity as ideological signs, and of women and those deemed 'different' as socio-political subjects" (Ferreira, 1996, 134). Ferreira goes on to point out that "the Estado Novo relied on, and in turn generated, a consensual fictional poetics of womanhood and femininity encompassing heterogeneous spaces and peoples characterized as 'naturally' different" (Ferreira, 1996, 134). The Estado Novo's ensnarement of women into nationalist and imperial ideology subsequently carried a colonialist functionality, while maintaining a well-defined white patriarchal order based on a family structure by "contain[ing] women within the family unit — while at the same time colonizing all subjects of difference under the aegis of the greater national family" (Ferreira, 1996, 134).

Margarida Calafate Ribeiro's research on the role of women as agents of Estado Novo nationalist and colonialist discourses provides in-depth exploration on how this relationship was officially conveyed through the regime's different propaganda machines. One of these was the Movimento Nacional Feminino, which began as a grassroots women's group in support of Portugal's colonial wars in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. Ribeiro examines the ideological functions of the movement through (and beyond) its publications, noting "eram feitos apelos às mães portuguesas para que sacrificassem os seus filhos 'pela Nação,' nos jornais da época, nacionais e principalmente regionais, eram aplaudidas as mulheres que tinham muitos filhos e que os 'davam' para a defesa do ultramar português" (Ribeiro, 2012, 288). The movement's publications thus enunciate a Portuguese Nationalist maternal subject whose desire is circuited to that of the Estado Novo, while reinforcing patriarchally-ascribed gender roles, the concomitantly gendered division of labor, and the underlying rigid gender binary, now in the name of empire.

Black Women's Bodies as Site for European Feminist Agency

The role Archer ascribes to women, indeed, her construction of colonialist womanhood within the project of European and western expansion, implies a particular relationship of domination with and over African women. Archer articulates the civilizational capacities, supremacy, and colonial validity of European women in relation to the oppositional otherness of African women. As a result, it is over the elaborated alterity and subsequent suppression of African women that European women may lay claim to their historical agency. Towards this end, she articulates a racial hierarchy of women in colonial Africa grounded in imperial taxonomies of normativity and deviance as well as colorist spectrums thereof:

> Há três tipos básicos de mulher na África portuguesa — branca, a mestiça, a negra. Brancas de origem europeia e brancas nascidas em África; mestiças claras, médias, escuras; negras assimiladas e negras selvagens. Para traçar a presença feminina no mundo colonial português tenho que dividir estes três núcleos e estimá-los sob valorações económicas e culturais. (Archer, 1963, 129)

Through her optic, rural and "non-assimilated" African women constitute the most salient site of African abject otherness as well as the base of a Darwinist pyramid of human progress as composites of cultural backwardness, sexual deviance, and aesthetic abjection, thus representing the greatest impediment to the future of Portuguese civilization on the continent.

A grande massa feminina da África é ainda a da mulher indígena, a que vive, à lei da natureza, no estado selvagem, neolítico.

De aspecto, a mulher primitiva, adulta, é feia. Carnes flácidas, fortemente deformadas pelas maternidades, dentes irregulares. Só em núbil, quinze, vinte anos, ostenta uma linha esbelta, graça de estátua, avivada pelos seios pontudos. Pernas secas, de musculatura masculina, coxas magras, pés chatos, grandes ventres pregueados, seios como tetas de animal leiteiro, formam o fenótipo vulgar da negra sertaneja, antes mesmo dos trinta anos. E nenhuma compostura de vestuário, nenhum disfarce. (Archer, 1963, 129)

Archer's anthropological articulation of African women intermeshes signifiers of animality as a corporal rendering of epistemological primitiveness and those of horror/fantasy of binary gender non-conformity that enforce white western gender paradigms. In this regard, Archer's intervention vividly partakes in the existing system of gendered/racialized imperial representations of Black womanhood as a depleted and deviant version of European cisgendered femininity; a body and site of knowing (always at an articulated deficit vis-à-vis imperial knowledges) to be exploited sexually and economically. As such it is a site of extraction of racial capital and a designated corporality for elimination through assimilation or miscegenation — a locale for the sexual reproduction of anti-Blackness and white supremacy.

Within Archer's conception of colonialism as a political, economic, and cultural endeavor in which white European women are to participate, in their patriarchally-ascribed gender roles, their colonial actions target specifically Black African women. The role of white women in the colonial family structure — a central lack of Portuguese colonialism according to Archer's critique — is thus seen not only as a method of curtailing the sexual desire of white colonial men for colonized women of color, but also of policing the bodies of these women. The colonial agency of white women is, therefore, once again situated as contributing to the colonial apparatuses of domination elaborated by and at the service of patriarchal systems of power and representation.

One can thus argue that Archer posits white cisgender femininity — both corporal point of European normativity and societal mechanism of western power — as the glue that binds the anti-Blackness of miscegenation and the material continuities of white supremacy. Its role is to negotiate both, ensuring that the excesses of the former do not compromise the intergenerational sustainability of the latter as a social and economic project. In the process, colonial white womanhood must practice power over Black colonized women in various arenas of colonial societal life, both public and private — in the surveillance of domestic labor, the sexual regulation of Black women's bodies, and in rendering material the accumulation of colonial capital through the ordering of commodities and presentation of its own body in social spaces.

One can, therefore, expand this racial grounding of white women's colonial agency to Archer's broader and underlying universalist notions of womanhood that traverse her wider oeuvre. In assessing the chronology of her works, her colonialist writings largely antecede her fictional works, with these drawing largely from her years residing in colonial Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. In this regard, the colonial racial patriarchal order of colonial life represents a paradigm of power to which she not only subscribed, but that arguably informed her racial conceptualization of normative womanhood as a corporal, ontological, and epistemological subject. Furthermore, in taking a critical postcolonial approach to her oeuvre, her reclamations of agency and self-signification for metropolitan/white women is always implicitly or explicitly contingent upon a global system of racial and gendered divisions of labor and capital. Whether in the colonial setting or in metropolitan society, Archer's claims to white female agency and self-signification against patriarchal systems of dependency are imagined within a global colonial

spectrum of power and imperial system of extraction connecting colony and metropolis. These claims, in other words, are claims of access to the materialities of white privilege conferred through the systematic subjugation of colonized Black bodies, especially of Black women.

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