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## Orlanda Amarílis: Cape Verdean Immigrants, Imperial Memories and Gender Dynamics

### Abstract

This article presents an introduction to the literature of Cape Verde and its women authors. Then, it specifically focuses on the works of Cape Verdean woman writer Orlanda Amarílis (1924-2014), who wrote about Cape Verdean immigrants living in Western cities. Gender issues are equally addressed through the representation of the greater exposure of women to poverty, violence and abuse, both in their own country and as immigrants. In her writing, Orlanda Amarílis also explores the split identity of the immigrant, in transit between ‘home’ and ‘host country’, highlighting the marginalised status of the immigrant community as a minority culture. Several short stories are analysed as exemplary case studies. The discussion aims at presenting several coherent thematic lines in the works of this Cape Verdean writer, herself an immigrant in Portugal. The aspects of her works most explored in this analysis concern her accounts of immigrants’ experiences, the writer’s reflections on gender issues and her anti-colonial discourse.

The small archipelago of Cape Verde has long established itself as home to a lively cultural scene in terms of both literature and music. In fact, the first solid literary movement in the set of African literatures in Portuguese was built around the literary journal *Claridade* (1936), a modern, innovative project with an impressive quality considering the available resources and the relative isolation of the archipelago at the time. As for music, the *morna*<sup>1</sup> is well established as a particular musical genre that has achieved great international popularity.

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<sup>1</sup> “Morna” is the most emblematic musical genre from Cape Verde. It consolidated between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It tends to have a slow

The *Claridade* generation set the example and encouraged local writers to represent life in the archipelago, turning to their local reality as a worthy literary subject. This “territorialisation” of writing was a key turning point in the consolidation of a truly local/national literature in the archipelago, beyond the influence of Portuguese and European literatures as aesthetic and philosophical references. At the time (1936), Cape Verde was a Portuguese colony, and like all the literatures born under a colonial regime, it took some time until local writers found a voice of their own, exploring subject matters and literary forms beyond the initial imitative drive, which had been based on colonial influences conveyed to students through formal education.

The magazine *Certeza* (1944) appeared barely ten years after *Claridade*, and this time, women collaborators were included in its pages (there were no women authors in *Claridade*). This paper is about a writer, Orlanda Amarílis (1924-2014), who started publishing her texts in *Certeza*, when she was a young author. This detail is important because it stands as evidence of the writer’s initial involvement with the local literature of Cape Verde and its intellectual milieu. Orlanda Amarílis is one of the three main women writers in the Cape Verdean literature, together with Dina Salústio (1941-) and Vera Duarte (1952-). Orlanda Amarílis was the elder of the three, and, after her writer’s debut in Cape Verde, she lived most of her adult life as an immigrant, in Lisbon.

Orlanda Amarílis belongs to the generation of writers that witnessed the struggle for the liberation of the five African colonies Portugal held at the time. In tune with the times, there is an implicit anti-colonial discourse in her writing, but, as Amarílis only published her collections of short stories after the independence struggle, her writing does not reveal

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rhythm and it includes lyrics, as it is sung by a solo singer accompanied by a set of instruments such as guitar and violin. Cesária Évora was the most famous interpreter of mornas, and she was quite famous in Portugal and France. Mornas are usually sung in “Crioulo”, the language of Cape Verde (together with Portuguese), but, in the past, they were sung in Portuguese as well. Currently, there is dissention among Cape Verdean musicians as some want to keep the tradition “pure”, while others want creative freedom to adapt *mornas* to contemporary taste and global influences (see Nogueira 2013, and Monteiro 2013).

the propaganda urgency of the militant writer apparent in the works of many other authors of the 1950s and 1960s from the Portuguese-speaking African territories.

In 1945, Orlanda Amarílis married Manuel Ferreira (a Portuguese scholar and writer who was among the first to acknowledge and promote the study of African literatures in the Portuguese academy) and because of her husband's military career they moved to Goa, which was a Portuguese colony. India gained independent from the British Raj in 1947, when Orlanda Amarílis was living in the small Goan enclave. It is reasonable to conclude that neither Orlanda Amarílis nor her husband could have been indifferent to the political events around them, especially because Goa's integration in India came to be regarded as an example to future liberation movements: if India could be free from Portugal, so could other colonies around the world. But Portuguese decolonisation would be a hard, violent process.<sup>2</sup>

During the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Portugal lived under a fascist dictatorship ruled by Salazar (Estado Novo, 1933-1974). Salazar considered the Portugal's colonial dimension essential to the country's economic survival, and at a moment in time when several nations were rethinking their colonial dynamics (in part as a consequence of World War II), he opted instead for repressive colonial policies, including war.<sup>3</sup> Thus, throughout the 1960s, Portugal waged three "colonial wars" – as they were called from a metropolitan perspective. These were, in fact, the "liberation wars" of Angola (1961-1974), Guiné-Bissau (1963-1974) and Mozambique (1964-1974), wars that only ended with the revolution known as The Carnation Revolution, in 1974, which overthrew the Portuguese dictatorship, establishing a democratic regime.

During the 60s and early 70s, political allegiance to the independence movements had been violently repressed in the two archipelagos under Portuguese rule (Cape Verde and S. Tomé and Príncipe), but there was no war there. Initially, Cape Verde joined efforts with Guiné-Bissau, under the leadership of revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral. Cabral's project was to make the two territories a unique nation

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<sup>2</sup> For the historical background see Oliveira (2020).

<sup>3</sup> For complementary sources on the historical background (in Portuguese) see Pinto (2001); see also Rosas/Machaqueiro/Oliveira (2015).

consisting of a continental part and the ten islands of the archipelago. However, after independence, in 1975, separate independence processes took place, and the two territories became different nations.

Orlanda Amarílis was in a complex position in the middle of all this political turmoil. She was a migrant, travelling to many places as she followed her husband's initial career. At the same time, as I will demonstrate through an analysis of her writing, she was a keen, sensitive observer, and a politically aware individual, who took in what she learned from her many visits to different countries, including other Portuguese colonies. All along, she remained in touch with her Cape Verdean identity, representing Cape Verdean society in her writing and expressing through choice of themes and character construction her own post-colonial awareness, as she criticised the failures and wrongs of the Portuguese administration.

Considering the background of biographical and historical elements mentioned above, I suggest three fundamental topics to understand her collections of short stories: a) immigrants and their status as second-rate citizens; b) immigration and women's vulnerability to abuse c) colonial practices and their legacy of poverty and humiliation. Orlanda Amarílis writes about these topics to expose them and make the reader more aware of social problems affecting migrant communities and their relations to host nations.

Concerning the latter topic, I would like to highlight that her writing is committed to resistance against colonialism in subtle ways that may elude a reader not familiar with the Portuguese/Cape Verdean colonial context. Note that, in a country where people died of hunger, during the dictatorship, the press could not publish anything but celebratory pieces of news, aligned with a nationalist rhetoric and praising order or routine. There was tight censorship, both in metropolitan Portugal and in all its colonies, and since the press was controlled, it was literature that carried through the function of the press, denouncing abusive political practices and state indifference towards the living conditions of the colonised subjects (see Cruz 2011). In this context, the constant reference to poverty in many of Orlanda Amarílis' short stories about Cape Verde is a rebellious gesture. She is not simply negatively representating her homeland, nor is she simply justifying the intense drive to emigrate

when you grow up in desolate islands. Rather, she is exposing the lack of alternatives the colonial policies offered to the Cape Verdean population.

The depiction of poverty also justifies emigration. As can currently be seen with the massive numbers of African citizens risking their lives to try for a “better future” in Europe – often sailing in precarious boats across the Mediterranean – Cape Verdeans were, and still are, driven to migration because of scarcity. The representation of this scarcity is, in the context of her works, a justification to “go away”, and live somewhere else. Consequently, when reading Amarilis’ short stories, European/metropolitan publics are confronted with what I would phrase as a moral duty to be more welcoming to communities in diaspora who are living among mainstream European national cultures. Thus, through her literary writing as a form of minority discourse (see Taborda da Silva/Ferreira Cury (2011), Orlanda Amarilis reveals critical perceptions of centre/mainstream societies as surveyed from the periphery (expressing a migrant, minority, diaspora point of view). This feature amounts to one aspect of her work, keeping it relevant, updated and even urgent.

Probably as a reflection of her own condition as a migrant, Orlanda Amarilis’ short stories often address the dual position of immigrants living in a host nation: on the one hand, they live away from their own motherland, always remembering “home” as the affective place where they feel they belong. On the other hand, they live their everyday life in a western metropolis, either as outsiders “in transit” (until they retire to the island), or, enveloped by their own community, as a minority social cell on the margins of a dominant, mainstream culture. However, isolation within the diaspora community never brings with it a positive solution in the universe of this writer’s stories, precisely because the community is only relevant to her characters as a protective shield when they feel marginalised by the host nation where they live. Following up on this last point, it is both meaningful and depressing that a narrative line connecting several of Amarilis’ short stories on immigrants is the focus on a “moment of truth”, when the self-deceiving pleasures of feeling at home in one’s host society are exposed as mere illusion. Consequently, I argue there is, in her writing, an ideological and ethical

commitment to invite reflection on several socio-political topics related to the living conditions and experiences of migrant citizens.

From the point of view of character construction, the opposition between home and host nation is an essential structural axis to understanding immigrants' internal life in terms of thoughts and emotions. However, there is a collective parallel to the expression of individual (character) consciousness regarding this theme. Emigration is a fundamental dimension in the collective identity of island societies, an identity known to have consolidated as a collateral consequence of sea routes connecting islands to continents, supporting the mobility of people and goods. It is thus impossible to think the literature of Cape Verde without considering emigration themes as a constitutive element in the formation of the Cape Verdean collective identity.

Another point I want to address in the introduction to the short stories to be discussed below concerns the overlapping of gender issues with migrant writing in the works by Orlanda Amarílis. To begin with, most of the protagonists in her short stories are women. Through these women characters, the author discusses gender issues such as women's social roles in a country of emigrants (where, quite often, mothers have to raise a family alone), the social expectations of migrant women, or the enhanced possibility of abuse women face through the complex articulation of economic male power in contrast to the social position of poor young women looking for social integration or social mobility.

## 1. Orlanda Amarílis and Benjamin's "Chronotope"

As a Cape Verdean emigrant who finally settled in Lisbon, Amarílis often writes about her life back at the archipelago. Whenever she does so, she is in what I call the "memory mode", as the narratives that take place in the setting of the archipelago frequently (but not exclusively) deal with young women or children, as if life "back home" could only be evoked by recalling a previous stage of her life. Indeed, when remembering Cape Verde, her texts represent a small-town, old-fashioned world, where everybody knows everyone else. Likewise, social activities and described events seem to report back to the 1950s or 1960s, when Cape Verde was still a colony.

By contrast, when Amarílis writes of immigration and immigrants' experiences in Lisbon, she writes "of the present time", representing experiences that do not recede into the past, to her youth in the archipelago. Thus, I argue that different time periods are connected to different spatial references in her work, and this polarity between different times and spaces increases the readers' pleasure and interest by avoiding repetition or monotony, as the stories alternate between different landscapes and different time periods. I will discuss instances of this place/ time duality below, when analysing some of her short stories. Maybe the concept of "chronotope" by Bakhtin is useful here. In "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1981: 84-85), Benjamin defines the chronotope as the "(...) the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (ibid.: 84). In the short stories by Orlanda Amarílis, you have the "Cape Verdean chronotope", which I am defining as "past time, set in the islands, memory mode, colonial times" in contrast to the "adult experience of immigration", which is a narrative chronotope related to "contemporaneity (even if narrated in the past tense), modernity, city life, immigrants' experiences, host nation". These are two distinctive universes, two worlds, repeatedly addressed in different short stories.

Note that I am not claiming that Amarílis' short stories are autobiographical, nor is that notion useful here. True, one can say that she surely uses memories from her childhood and youth in Cape Verde. But her personal experiences are not the relevant frame in which to understand her writing. Quite the contrary. Hers is a committed writing, and lived experience may be important as far as it can stand for a more general issue, an exemplary experience, shedding light on Cape Verdean society, essentially, a society deeply dependent on emigration. Moreover, as she narrates immigrants' experiences in western metropolitan cities as instances of "second-rate citizenship", Orlanda Amarílis also exposes ongoing forms of exploitation targeting immigrants, as if colonial practices related to the abusive use of another nation's workforce are dislocated from a colonial setting to the poor neighbourhoods of western cities where underpaid immigrants live.

The repeated reference to the two chronotopes mentioned above gradually makes the reader more familiar with the two most represented

alternative universes (Cape Verde and the western city Cape Verdeans have emigrated to). In terms of narrative construction, to “re-use” time/place references is an efficient and economic strategy, which, in fact, cannot be dissociated from Orlanda Amarílis’ choice of literary genre: the short story. Her literary works comprise three anthologies of short stories. Although each short story can be read as an isolated unit, a set of thematic lines connects each individual short story (a fragment) to the whole of the book, conferring a stronger impact to the set. Imagine, for example, that her short stories are an album of Cape Verdean memories. In this case, one short story would be the adequate textual equivalent of a single photograph from an album, illustrating a moment, a topical scene. Only when the album is seen as a whole – that is to say, when all the stories in the collection are taken as an ensemble – do the assembled fragments articulate a more complex story.

Secondly, if you isolate the group of short stories on emigrants’ experiences as a distinctive thematic set, the plurality of angles gradually introduced by each short story also composes a complex, multi-layered representation of migrants’ social marginalization and vulnerability. In both cases, the short story seems an efficient choice to pursue the subject matters Amarílis chose to address, presenting more than one perspective on the discussed issues.

Orlanda Amarílis published three collections of short stories: *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa*, 1974, (almost ten years later) *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (1983) and *A Casa dos Mastros*, published in 1989. There are clear thematic and formal affinities between the first two collections of stories, *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa* and *Ilhéu dos Pássaros*, while the last collection, *A Casa dos Mastros*, strikes as a different project. In fact, *A Casa dos Mastros* is mostly devoted to ghosts, the supernatural and the fantastic while previously, in her first two anthologies, instances of this kind of fantastic writing could only be found in one or two stories. I would suggest this change in her work can be taken as an experimental turn towards the fantastic, although she later opted to steer her writing career to children’s stories, of which she published three collections as well. However, I am not dealing with this later dimension of



her work.<sup>4</sup> Still, the writer's dedication to children resonated in Cape Verde, and in 2017, a literary award under her name was established to acknowledge writers of children's stories. Currently, the future of the award is unclear.

Beyond the three established collections of short stories and her celebrated contribution to children's literature, Orlanda Amarílis also published a few isolated stories included in collective anthologies, and some of her works have been translated into English and German.

## 2. *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa* (1974): Emigrants' Stories

Cais do Sodré is the name of a train station in Lisbon, and Salamansa is the name of a fishing village in the island of S. Vicente, Cape Verde. Between these two places lies an emigration route from Cape Verde to Portugal. Not only were the Cape Verdeans the most visible immigrant community in Portugal in the 1990s (nowadays replaced by the Brazilian community), but emigration was, and still is, a significant social feature in Cape Verdean society, where, typically, most families are brought up by the mother while the father is away working somewhere else. According to Pedro Góis, "(...) *uma componente emigratória de tal modo continuada e consistente [que] resultou no facto de Cabo Verde ser hoje um dos (poucos) países cuja população emigrada excede a população residente*" [The emigrant flow is so continuous and consistent that, as a consequence, Cape Verde is nowadays one of the (few) countries whose emigrated population exceeds the resident population; 2006: 25]. Góis refers to numbers: for 517,518 Cape-Verdean emigrants living abroad in 1998, there were 438,380 residents (census from 2000). These numbers illustrate objectively the importance of emigration for Cape Verdean society. Consequently, the fact that Orlanda Amarílis chose to write extensively about emigrants seems an adequate representation of the Cape Verdean nation and its core dynamics. In fact, the set of emigrant communities spread throughout the world is called,

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<sup>4</sup> See *Folha a Folha* (Page by Page, 1987) with Alberta Menéres; *Facécias e Peripécias* (Jokes and Adventures, 1990); *Tartaruguinha* (Little Turtle, 1997).

among Cape Verdeans, the “11<sup>th</sup> island”, evoking the presence/absence of a significant number of citizens away from their homeland.

In the universe of the three collections of short stories written by Amarilis, *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa* (1974) is the one where emigrants’ stories are the most important topic. The collection comprises seven short stories, five of which are related to emigration. “Cais-do-Sodré” (Amarilis 1974: 9-21), “Nina” (ibid.: 25-31) and “Desencanto” (ibid.: 53-64) are about emigrants’ experiences in Lisbon. “Esmola de Merca” (ibid.: 67-87) is about the reception of charity goods sent from America by the Cape Verdean emigrant community, and “Salamansa” (ibid.: 115-124) evokes a youth affair of a respectable family man who, in his older years, wonders what happened to his former lover (it turns out she had emigrated to S. Tomé and Príncipe, and is, thus, definitely lost to him).

The other two stories in the collection are “Rolando de Nha Concha” (ibid.: 33-50), which belongs to the fantastic, supernatural trend in Amarilis’ writing (the protagonist gradually realizes he is witnessing his own funeral), and “Pôr do Sol” (ibid.: 91-111), about corruption in Cape Verdean society.

As I said above, the stories connected to youth memories are set in Cape Verde (“Esmola de Merca” and “Salamansa”) in the “memory mode”, while the stories set in Lisbon are narrated as if they were happening in the present tense, even if they imply reflective flash-backs.<sup>5</sup> The chronotope for narratives set in Lisbon represents a society in a hurry, in transit, where immigrants move as they go about their everyday life. Meaningfully, immigrants’ stories are often set in a train station, or even on a boat, crossing the river. It seems commuting is a way of life, and, in my opinion, this is an adequate spatial metaphor for those that live (moving) between two worlds: their homeland in the islands, and their host city. Lisbon represents the “here” and “now” of a rushed, work routine, while “home”, the archipelago, is a place mostly revisited through memory, “then” and “far away”. Note, however, that, as Jane

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<sup>5</sup> The fantastic stories as “Rolando de Nha Concha” are set outside of this scheme, because they work under a different logic. Spirits are supposed to transcend time/space referents. And in fact, the focus of the story is internal, that is to say, psychological, as the ghost becomes self-aware.

Tutikian (1999) points out, both of these dimensions have to be simultaneously omnipresent in the works by migrant writers as they are writing from a position of exile, precisely in-between “here” and “there”.

Elisa Silva (2014) also discusses the collection *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa* as a reflection on the effects of the emigration experience in the subjectivity of the migrant individual. Silva reads the short stories as instances of the influence of space and dislocation in the construction of one’s sense of identity. For the migrant subject, “homeland” is lived through memory, from far away, while the feeling of belonging to a minority culture (in relation to the host country’s majority/mainstream community) creates in the migrant subject another sphere of estrangement in relation to the country where he/ she lives. In this way, the emigrant shares a condition of emotional dislocation with the figure of the exile. Both are living “here”, in the host country where they live their everyday life, but constantly remembering “there”, the place where they feel they belong, where their family and forefathers come from and where their community traditions (food, festivities, family connections, music), as identity markers, originated from. We will see an example of the internal division felt by an immigrant character in the analysis of the short story “Cais-do-Sodré”, a few paragraphs below. I shall return to this point.

If, according to Silva, dislocation across distinct geographies constantly (re)shapes the subjectivity of the individual in transit, then, migrant characters are always oscillating between becoming a new person (changed by absorbing the experience of living abroad) and falling back into one’s old, “homeland” self, a static self-image, evoked when returning to one’s family and the familiar places. But this latter, reassuring sense of self is a fallacy because the subject changes irrevocably. The emigrants who return on holiday to Cape Verde are no long the same subjects who left their island years before, at the beginning of their emigration adventures. Through the years, gains in experience and knowledge will always imply a loss of innocence (and hope), and those returning are changed people.

In her analysis of the collection *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa*, Claudia Pazos-Alonso (2005) explored the narratives of migration from Cape Verde to Lisbon. According to her, the marginalization of immigrants in terms of race and gender (and, I would add, social class) in the

short stories by Amarilis represents a metropolitan social universe that undoes the credibility of the lusotropical myth, as conceived by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987), and amply appropriated by the Portuguese dictatorship as a form of nationalist propaganda. “Lusotropicalism” was a (pseudo-)descriptive concept used to promote the idea that an easy co-existence thrived between colonised peoples and the Portuguese administration, in all Portuguese overseas provinces. Reality was very different, either in the colonies or with regards to the reception of immigrants in Lisbon, as Orlanda Amarilis’ short stories show. According to Pazos-Alonso:

Amarilis’s protagonists experience a metaphorical dislocation which shakes the very roots of their identity, when, in spite of their superficial apparent integration into the daily life of the capital of the Empire, outward racial markers as well as less prominent gendered differences may suddenly determine their ultimate confinement to an inferior status as a second class citizen, leading to an acute feeling of cultural estrangement. Complete integration, seldom portrayed as a realistic possibility, is however simultaneously presented as less than desirable, because its pre-requisite would be the blanket adoption of a ‘white’ dominant point of view. (Pazos-Alonso 2005: 47)

There are two important arguments in this paragraph that interest me: First, the idea that the integration of the migrant subject, even if functional, is superficial and apparent, and, second, the perception, by Pazos-Alonso, that Orlanda Amarilis skilfully represented a moment of “revelation” in her texts, when the migrant subject is suddenly confronted with his/her own social marginalization by a small, everyday gesture that assigns him/her a position as a second-class citizen. Note that the forms of social violence considered by Pazos-Alonso are small everyday gestures, that can be extremely cruel, like pretending not to know someone (as it happens in the short story “Nina”), feeling uncomfortable when meeting other, lower-class, fellow Cape Verdeans (“Cais-do-Sodré”), or, discovering oneself as a coveted sexual object on racial/exoticizing terms, as will be seen below when the short story *Desencanto* is analysed. Pazos-Alonso concludes her analysis by highlighting the complicity of the local bourgeois elite with the colonizer’s perspective, indulging in its own privilege, mindless of social concerns.

On the other hand, I do not endorse Pazos-Alonso's perception that complete integration would imply a denial of cultural difference, or a certain denial of one's own personal history (the principle that, in Pazos-Alonso view, makes full integration less than desirable). Is thinking and acting according to a "white dominant point of view" the best immigrant citizens can hope for if they want to integrate? I do not read this line of thinking in any of Amarilis' stories. It is not immigrants that have to change or disguise who they are. It is the Eurocentric, nationalist frame of mind, often equated with mainstream thinking, which has to change. Writing stories that expose the wrong moral ground on which Eurocentric views are being upheld is Orlanda Amarilis's contribution to bring about this change. In this way, she is using the power of literature to improve public awareness of the problems immigrants face.

### 3. Immigrants' Experiences in Lisbon

The short story "Cais-do-Sodré" (the first in the collection with the same title) is about a casual encounter in a train station (in fact, the title of the story is the name of a famous train station in Lisbon). Andresa, a well-to-do emigrant<sup>6</sup>, recognizes a possible fellow countrywoman waiting for a train:

You know, I was looking at you because I immediately realized you were my fellow countrywoman", continued Andresa, looking and smiling at the lean figure sitting by her side.<sup>7</sup> (Amarilis 1974: 9; my translation)

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<sup>6</sup> In case the reader feels confused, I would like to make explicit that my working definitions of "emigrant" and "immigrant" depend on spatial reference. When I refer to Cape Verdeans who left their homeland, they are an "emigrant". For those who stay in the islands, those who leave are emigrants. For European authorities and for the host nations receiving them, those very same people are "immigrants", the ones who came from abroad to live in European cities.

<sup>7</sup> "Sabe, eu estava a olhar para si porque vi logo ser gente da minha terra", continuou Andresa, olhando e sorrindo para a figura seca de carnes sentada a seu lado" (Amarilis 1974: 9).

The introduction to the short story is partially misleading because it creates in the reader expectations of communal solidarity among emigrants in Lisbon. But it is not clearly so. Time, distance and, possibly, class, may castrate this initial communal drive. That is what happens to Andresa. After the warm-hearted impulse to establish contact with someone from the same community, disappointment and confusion make her go back on her initial impulse. Internally, Andresa criticizes herself for continuing to talk to people she can no longer relate to:

Recently this has been happening to her. She sees a fellow Cape Verdean, and she feels the necessity to talk to him/her, establishing a shared connection to remember her own people, her homeland. Then, after contact is established, she feels disappointed. Something does not feel right inside. She does not feel any affinity with the people she left fifteen years ago. People are not the same.<sup>8</sup> (Amarilis 1974: 16; my translation)

Apparently, as pointed out above in reference to Elisa Silva's work, the experience of emigration can cause an estrangement from one's own identity references, a confusing and uncomfortable sensation. However, I think there is more to this story than the sensitive representation of the fragmented identity of the migrant subject (important as that aim already is). Amarilis also manages to represent social class as a barrier that may cut across communal solidarity. That is why, in spite of longing for her homeland – which ignites the impulse to warm up at the sight of any other Cape Verdean – the well-to-do Andresa does not like to identify with the simple, plain woman in front of her. She decides to leave her and goes to the station cafeteria, to sit next to a British woman (I think the detail is a symbolical choice to identify with the western world, denying part of one's biography). In the end, the story contradicts this assimilationist impulse because the main character, Andresa, changes her mind, again. She gives up her pretentious behavior and goes back to sitting next to the poor Cape Verdean woman who was

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<sup>8</sup> “De há um tempo para cá acontece-lhe isto. Vê um patricio, sente necessidade de lhe falar, de estabelecer uma ponte para lhe recordar a sua gente, a sua terra. Entretanto, feito o contacto, o desencanto começa a apoderar-se dela. Qualquer coisa bem no íntimo lho faz sentir. Não tem afinidade nenhuma com as pessoas de há quinze anos atrás. Não são as mesmas” (Amarilis 1974: 16).

already in the train. Andresa decides she will join the poor Cape Verdean, at least for a part of the trip, to offer some company and solidarity until their paths go separate ways.

My analysis of the short story confirms both Elisa Silva and Claudia Pazos-Alonso's readings, but I also think there is a further exemplary/pedagogic dimension to this text, as there is something to be learned from Andresa's hesitation and her final choices: the feeling of communal identification proved stronger than social barriers or the appeal of assimilating into Portuguese society.

Another important idea explored in this narrative concerns the dual internal life of migrants, trying to hold on to their memories of "home", while both "home" and the subject are processes in constant change, complicating the ability of the migrant subject to reconnect to his/her own roots. In the story "Cais-do-Sodré", it is clear that Andresa realizes she has changed on account of the years spent living in Lisbon, as has Cape Verde ("People are not the same").

A second short story dealing with emigration experiences in Lisbon is *Nina*, a narrative about the beautiful, blue-eyed Nina, who pretends she does not recognize her old Cape Verdean friend out of sheer racist prejudice. The two used to be quite close since the narrator, a young man, had once rented a room at her aunt's apartment. He then saw her growing up, from the time she wore plaits to her first nights out, drinking and flirting. They were good party companions, laughing and enjoying their youth, but no love affair ensued. As Nina once coldly told the narrator: "aborrecia-a a ideia de um dia vir a ter filhos de cor" [she was displeased with the idea of having "coloured" kids; 1974: 29]. Apparently, the narrator did not take that comment seriously. At the time it may have seemed immature, a careless mimicry of current stereotypes. The point is that, years later, when he calls her at the train station as their paths accidentally cross, the male narrator is not expecting her distant reaction, her denial of their past complicity. Only after she goes away, does he remember the comment, and, this time, he takes it for what it was, a racist, marginalizing comment that reminds the narrator he is not as integrated as he thought he was. He feels naïve, and Nina, the elegant Nina he smiled at, is just a cold stranger ("glacial"), who moves away "(...) e não ouve, ou finge não ouvir" [without listening to him, or pretending not to listen; *ibid.*: 25).

Each of the two stories above represent a different angle of the complex experiences lived by emigrants in their host country, showing the ways these experiences affect them. So far, Amarílis addressed the longing for feeling as if one were in one's own community, the need to resist the pressure to assimilate, the danger of losing one's affective connections to the homeland, and the dismay felt by those who have to face racism, especially from unexpected corners.

#### 4. Gender Violence and Emigration

The short story "Desencanto", included in the collection *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa*, adds a new angle to Amarílis' immigrants' stories as its plot overlaps gender issues with the minority/marginal position of the immigrant. In "Desencanto", set in Lisbon, a beautiful Cape Verdean girl is commuting to her job in the early morning. As she travels, she is pensive, musing over her failed affairs and mediocre jobs. She feels disappointed, and she is not sure that her emigration adventure has been worthwhile. As she was feeling sad and tired, she noticed a man eyeing her. New possibilities and new hopes suddenly materialize, but her expectations are soon shattered. As they leave the boat, the girl overhears the comment of another man to her admirer: "Malandro, estás a fazer-te prá mulata" [you naughty boy, you are flirting with the *mulata*; Amarílis 1974: 64]. In Portuguese, "mulata" means of mixed ascendancy,<sup>9</sup> and it has a current, sensual (sexy) connotation in the masculine imagination. This short comment speaks volumes in terms of gender relations, and its connotation is an insult to the girl's dignity, reducing her to a sexual object on display, worth competing for. At the same time, there is a racist note in this particular comment because the first signifier for her identification/ definition lies in the colour of her skin.

The logical companion piece to "Desencanto" is another short story, "Thonon-les-Bains", from Orlanda Amarílis' second collection of short stories *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (1983). "Thonon-les-Bains" (ibid.: 11-27) is

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<sup>9</sup> Etymologically, in Portuguese and Spanish, the word described the progeny of a horse and a donkey. It was then adapted to refer to mixed-race children, acquiring an insulting connotation through the animalization of the people thus described.



about Gabriel, an immigrant in France, and his sister Piedade, recently arrived from Cape Verde. As soon as Gabriel sent word that he had found a job for his sister, Piedade joined him, and she adapted well. Then, she found a French boyfriend, much older and very quiet, but a convenient choice. Everything is turning out beyond the best hopes the family envisaged. In Cape Verde, neighbours are envious, and Gabriel and Piedade's mother is proud of her children's achievements. One day, during a party thrown by some of her Cape Verdean friends, immigrants like herself, Piedade flirts with a young Cape Verdean. Jean, the French boyfriend, sees their cultural complicity, their shared codes, which he does not know. He decides to leave the party, and Piedade, surprised and despondent, dutifully follows him. On the way out, there is a bathroom at the end of the corridor. Jean quietly locks himself with Piedade in the bathroom and slits her throat, leaving her dead, on the floor. He escapes through the bathroom window. What triggered Jean's murdering jealousy? It is worth quoting the dance scene that aroused Jean's anger:

Jean felt uncomfortable, a total stranger to the strong taste of garlic and onion. He managed to eat his fish though, and he drank the spicy broth, and then he just stood there, his plate in his hand, watching his girlfriend and her friends moving to and fro around the room, serving food and clearing plates and left overs.

[...] They mixed American music with samba and 'coladeiras'.<sup>10</sup> Whirling dancers took the floor.

[...] Piedade, euphoric as never seen before, grabbed a towel and tied it around her hips, sensually swinging them. Mochinho [a young Cape Verdean man] flirted with Piedade.<sup>11</sup> (Amarílis 1983: 22; my translation)

There is a crescendo in this narrative episode, from feeling culturally excluded to sexual competition. Jean cannot accept that his private, exotic, sex object has a life beyond his control, a culture he cannot

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<sup>10</sup> A genre of Cape Verdean music with a strong, fast rhythm.

<sup>11</sup> "Jean sentia-se desconfortado, nada habituado ao sabor forte a alho e cebola. Comeu o peixe como pôde, sorveu o caldo picante e deixou-se ficar com o prato na mão a ver o vaivém da namorada e das amigas a servirem este, a levarem o prato daquele. [...] Entremearam música americana com sambinhas e coladeiras. Foi um rodopio sem parar. [...] Piedade, numa euforia nunca vista, agarrou uma toalha de rosto, atou-a abaixo da cintura e rebolou as ancas. Mochinho não largava Piedade" (Amarílis 1983: 22).

understand, a more suitable partner he cannot upstage. My point here is that there is a racist edge to Jean's sexism, and it is the display of Piedade's momentary escape from her assigned place as inferior and dependent - in both cultural and gender terms - that is the real motive for her murder, as a form of punishment.

The reader follows Gabriel's efforts to provide a decent funeral to Piedade, and the painful task of writing home telling of the sad news.

As a consequence of that crime, the police extradited the immigrants involved in the party under the accusation of them being troublemakers. Gabriel's silence is the most dramatic twist in the plot. He says nothing because he knows that an immigrant cannot accuse a French citizen. Were they legal immigrants? If Piedade never existed officially, is there a murder enquiry? In the story, Gabriel and his friend are expelled from France under the accusation of being troublemakers, and that will be the end of Piedade's murder as far as French authorities are concerned. But Gabriel has other plans: he emigrates to Switzerland, just across the border from "Thonon-les-Bains", and he starts looking for Jean... If he finds him, Piedade will be avenged. The irony in this sad story is that the ones who are accused of being "troublemakers" by the French law, are, in fact, the victims of this violence: Piedade was murdered and Gabriel is broken hearted and has lost his job and life prospects. Who is the legal system protecting? The European murderer.

Another topic for reflection, suggested by the plot, concerns the seduction of older, European men by younger women they recognize as vulnerable (outside of law's protection, isolated from mainstream society, poor). I think this murder story, by Orlanda Amarílis, makes a powerful point about the vulnerability of women immigrants, invisible to European law.

Contrary to what one might think from the story analysed in the last paragraphs, women are seldom victims in Amarílis' stories. They are instead resourceful survivors. For example, in "Salamansa", the last story in the collection *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa*, a middle-aged man strolls through his big house remembering Linda, a prostitute he had met many years before and with whom he had fallen in love. She was his first love, and their affair lasted for years, even after he got married to a convenient wife. Then, one day, during one of his visits to Linda, they argue because she is drunk and he had just seen the sailor boys

leaving her house. The fight becomes violent, physical, and they break up after that night. But Linda's sarcastic screams still ring in his ears ("you only rule over me, here", she said, displaying her sex). Salamansa is a small village, where everybody knows everybody. Fired by this memory, the man enquires about Linda among the maids. He then discovers that she has emigrated to S. Tomé and Príncipe in an attempt to improve her living conditions. Even this little piece of information shows Linda's agency and initiative, and it is the well-to-do protagonist who feels left behind.

Other instances of empowered emigrant women are "Requiem" (Amarilis 1983: 123-132) and "Luna Cohen" (ibid.: 47-64), two stories from the collection *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (ibid.) about a different kind of emigrant: the college student. They represent a post-independence Africa, exploring new opportunities and struggling to define its own future as a post-independence continent. The protagonist of "Requiem" is a young woman experiencing a writer's block. During the story, while partying in a bohemian Lisbon atmosphere, she gradually realises that her mistake is to write of things she does not know well. Instead of pursuing themes that do not seem to inspire her, this young writer realises she has to go back home, and write of her own Cape Verdean society. Only then will a creative path unfold. Metaphorically, what is at stake is an exercise in dis-assimilation, the self-checking exercise of the postcolonial writer, in the self-assertive process of un-learning some of the things a westernised formal education had taught her, and which were making her forget who she was and where she was coming from.

Note that I do not take this plot as an autobiographical note at all. Amarilis' writing is diversified. When she wants to write about Cape Verde she does so, but when she chooses to situate her narratives in other countries or societies she does so confidently. She is too mundane, too well travelled to express that kind of parochialism. I would rather take this narrative as a warning to other (younger) writers trying to find their own voice.

As for the short story "Luna Cohen" (which takes the name of its young female protagonist) it is about an academic researcher on a working visit to Ibadan, Nigeria. This narrative represents the new cosmopolitan African intelligentsia, who travels, discusses world politics and is well aware of the threat of neo-colonialism. As Luna Cohen notes:

It seemed she was already in Europe. The sound of an orchestra playing in one of the lounges reached them. It was a private party, a multinational company party, possibly a meeting of oil tycoons. Europe and imperialism were beyond that door. On this side, it was exploitation territory.<sup>12</sup>  
(Amarilis 1983: 62-63; my translation)

The above quote is a good example of Amarilis' political awareness, as well as evidence of her commitment to anti-colonial ideas. Colonialism has to be confronted in both its former traditional form and in its contemporary mutations, as transparent networks of power that hide politics behind economical manipulation through multinational companies. In this particular short story, Luna Cohen's growing awareness of neo-colonial formations has a specific target: Israel. As she listens to several colleagues talking about the formation of the state of Israel, the protagonist of the story wonders where the collective identity of Jewish Africans should lie. For herself, the question is crystal clear: she is first and foremost a Cape Verdean. But the perplexities of this particular character have wider reverberations concerning internal rivalries inside the African continent and the necessity to question blind allegiance to projects that may not offer the best solutions to manage the future of the continent. Moreover, the fact that the reader follows one young woman in the process of developing her own political literacy sets an important example to think feminine agency and the role of women in post-independence societies.

This last point is equally relevant in what concerns African literary voices. It is true that things are changing in how African literatures are being received among international audiences, and writers like Tsi Tsi Dangaremba, Yvonne Vera or Chimamanda Adichie, just as the Mozambican Paulina Chiziane and the Angolan Ana Paula Tavares, have conquered their place at the core of their own national canon. However, their success does not diminish the fact that, just like in many western literatures, for each of these feminine names there are several famous male writers. My contention is that with the limited time

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<sup>12</sup> "Parecia já estar na Europa. Até eles chegava o som de uma orquestra num dos salões. Era uma festa privada, uma festa de multinacionais, possivelmente um encontro de magnates de petróleo. A Europa e o imperialismo ficavam para além daquela porta. Deste lado era a exploração" (Amarilis 1983: 62-63).

awarded to an academic subject, quite often, syllabuses tend to select the three or four “main writers” from a specific country, and it just happens that the most successful women writers in that specific universe may not be among a representative “top five”. It was the impact of gender studies that introduced a discipline of enquiry regarding those writers who stayed “in the shadows”, acknowledging the specific contribution of women to modern African literatures as an important dimension of the culture they represent, and one that has to be acknowledged, disseminated and studied.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. The Postcolonial Perspective

There is another important dimension to the stories by Orlanda Amarílis which connects local politics, colonial memories and post-independence disappointment. This part of her work is mostly relevant for Postcolonial Studies in the Portuguese speaking world, and I am currently developing a project where Orlanda Amarílis’s work will be addressed in a comparative platform with other women writers from Portuguese speaking countries.<sup>14</sup>

In this paragraph I would like to discuss her short story “Esmola de Merca” (1974: 67-87) as an example of postcolonial writing. The general frame for interpreting the story has to evoke the effort put forward by the Estado Novo dictatorship (1933-1974) to hide from international awareness its disregard for the colonial citizens under its responsibility. “Esmola de Merca” is about the arrival of a ship with donations from Cape Verdean emigrants living in America (“Merca”). The main character of the story, Tinina, is a young woman who is invited to help, as

<sup>13</sup> Yet again, a writer such as Orlanda Amarílis, who has received wide critical acclaim, is out of print in Portugal. The last available editions are either from the 1980s (*Ilhéu dos Pássaros*) or 1990s (for *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa*). As I verified the references of papers published in Brazil, I was dismayed to find out that students refer back to the Portuguese editions they have in their libraries.

<sup>14</sup> I am part of the team researching the role of women artists – including writers and film makers – in civil resistance against the Portuguese and Brazilian dictatorships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (WOMANART project). As Portugal still held African colonies at the time, all contemporary anti-colonial writings produced by African women were forms of resistance against the Portuguese dictatorship (<http://ceh.ilch.uminho.pt/womanart/>).

a volunteer, in the distribution of goods to impoverished Cape Verdeans. The description of the women waiting to receive charity help is telling of their living conditions:

Most of the poor were dirty, old women, with deeply set eyes, and matted hair because of dust and lack of grooming, hidden underneath a worn-out scarf. Some of them clung to their walking sticks, walking the way from Ribeira Bota, dragging their bare, cracked feet until the yard of the house.<sup>15</sup> (Amarilis 1974: 75; my translation)

I consider this passage more than a sensitive and well-written description. It speaks volumes in terms of social criticism, and it implies a rebuke to whoever is politically responsible for these people. Secondly, note the gender reference to poverty. It is well established that women have a higher probability than men of becoming destitute in developing countries, especially because of their inferior access to education and jobs.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, through the thoughts of the character Titina, the reader can follow notes on the anti-colonial consciousness-raising embedded in Amarilis's writing:

'This is not a solution; it settles nothing', she thought, staring beyond her godmother who remained leaning on the bed, her elbows on the iron bedstead.

'It does not even amount to a provisional solution. The Cape Verdeans who emigrated to Lisbon also send second-hand clothes, shoes, dry bread. Gentlemen, they even send dry bread for islanders to dip it in water and mitigate hunger.'<sup>17</sup> (Ibid.: 70-71; my translation)

<sup>15</sup> "Na sua maioria eram mulheres velhas, andrajosas, de olhos encovados e cabelos engasgados pelo pó e falta de pente, escondido debaixo do lenço vincado de tanto uso. Parte delas viera arrimada ao seu pau de laranjeira, desde a Ribeira Bota, a arrastar os pés descalços e gretados até ao meio da morada" (Amarilis 1974: 75).

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF Press Release on girl's education and poverty eradication, see: [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_11986.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_11986.html).

<sup>17</sup> "Isto não vem remediar nada, pensou olhando para além da madrinha. Esta continuava encostada à cama, os cotovelos apoiados ainda no rebordo de ferro. Nem chega a ser um remendo, pensou ainda. Os patrícios de Lisboa também mandam roupas usadas, calçado, pão seco. Senhores, até mandam pão seco para a nossa gente amolecer em água e enganar a fome" (Amarilis 1974: 70-71).

After attending to the distribution of charity goods, Titina feels such a disgust for the poverty she saw that she leaves the charity site feeling sick. A last bitter note on the narrative is the Carnavalesque look of the people dressed up with whatever clothes they can assemble, as if they were “um fantoche de cores, um desgraçado palhaço de um circo sem nome” [a colorful puppet, a clown fallen from grace in a nameless circus; 1974: 87]. Symbolically, this kind of charity takes away people’s dignity.

Finally, and still thinking through postcolonial theory, I also would like to mention here a specific group of Amarilis’ fantastic stories, present in any of her collections for adults. In the case of the narratives set in Cape Verde, I think references to possession stories, rituals, old sayings or popular beliefs can be a means to assert Cape Verdean culture, promoting it internationally. The self-assertion of local cultures through literature is a well-established means to contribute to the “dis-assimilation” of Eurocentric discourses, upholding one’s heritage and history. These anti-colonial strategies go as far back as the *Négritude*<sup>18</sup> movement or the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>19</sup> The point here is that, as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o<sup>20</sup> pointed out, decolonisation still is an unfinished process, and nativism, if it stays wary of fundamentalist deviations, can be a productive strategy to recuperate local cultures, distorted (or even erased) by the impact of colonialism.

I believe that, in the case of Orlanda Amarilis’ works, the exploration of supernatural themes represents a genuine interest in reviving Cape Verdean mythologies and beliefs, traditions she knew from her childhood through the tales of old maids, such as the secondary characters she often mentions. In her first collection (*Cais-do-Sodré té*

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<sup>18</sup> See Césaire, A. (2004), *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris: Présence Africaine; Damas, L.G. (1947), *Poètes d’expression française [d’Afrique Noire, Madagascar, Réunion, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Indochine, Guyane] 1900–1945*, Paris: Seuil and Senghor, L.S. (1948), *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; Senghor (1964), *Liberté I, Négritude et humanisme*, Paris: Seuil.

<sup>19</sup> See Alain Locke (1925), *The New Negro*, New York: Touchestone. See also, Langston Hughes (1959), *Selected Poems by Langston Hughes*, New York: Vintage Classics Edition.

<sup>20</sup> See Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1981), *Decolonising the Mind, the Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: James Currey.

*Salamansa*, 1974), the unique short story that would belong to this category is “Rolando de Nha Concha”. As for the second collection (*Ilhéu dos Pássaros*, 1983), I would list, again, a single story: “Luísa Filha de Nica”. On the contrary, as I said above, the last collection, *A Casa dos Mastros* (1989) reveals a clear turn to the fantastic – either going back to Cape Verdean lore, as in “Bico-de-Lacre”, or exploring other fantastic references, such as urban gothic (say, for example, the short story “Laura”). The group of short stories that revives Cape Verdean popular beliefs and superstitions, I take as a means of cultural self-assertion, praising Cape Verde’s identity and heritage.

## 6. Final Remarks

The above discussion is aimed at presenting several coherent thematic lines in the short stories written by Orlanda Amarílis. In this way, the reader has been offered an insight into all her works (excluding the children’s stories). The aspects of her works that were most explored in this analysis were her accounts of immigrants’ experiences, the writer’s reflections on gender issues and her anti-colonial discourse.

I hope to have demonstrated that Orlanda Amarílis is a rich and talented writer who rightly deserves to be acknowledged as one of the main Cape Verdean writers, with a very contemporary work in what concerns the harsh problems migrant subjects face. Currently, I am afraid she may have lost some visibility in the Cape Verdean literary system, being a writer who lived away from Cape Verde. Amarílis started publishing her works in 1975, and she acquired visibility and acknowledgement during the 1980s. At that time, and for the ensuing decades, her work was an object of critical acclaim, and she also profited from the impact of gender studies, a research area that encouraged a greater research focus on women writers. Nevertheless, currently, she seems to have been overshadowed by big names in Cape Verdean literature, such as Arménio Vieira or Germano Almeida, both awarded the Camões Prize, the highest literary award in the Portuguese speaking universe. Promisingly, Orlanda Amarílis was recently celebrated in the



2019 edition of the literary festival of Sal, Cape Verde, for her “contribution to steer the development of prose writing in Cape Verde” (see Magalhães 9.6.2019).

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