

**Library Resource Statement:**

I began my research process by reading and studying seven different novels written by postcolonial, postmodern, Portuguese-speaking authors, including authors such as Antonio Lobo Antunes, Maria Cardoso, and Jose Eduardo Agualusa. For three of these seven novels, I conducted surface-level research using library databases such as *Project Muse* and *Gale Cengage Literature Resource Center*, two databases I refer to often for my research regarding literature and the humanities. I also used Kanopy through the library's website to access a film titled *Waste Land* as part of my surface-level research. Artstor, a database recommended to me by my capstone professor, was also extremely helpful during the beginning stages of my research. Through this database, I was able to study Portuguese artists such as Paula Rego to capture the ways in which women's bodies transition from a state of silence to a state of agency in lusophone nations. These primary research steps helped to narrow down on which novel and author I wanted to conduct extensive research, and the library's resources were essential during this process. Ultimately, I chose Antonio Lobo Antunes's *Os Cus de Judas*, translated into English as *The Land at the End of the World*.

My overall topic, postcolonial, postmodern, lusophone literature was chosen by my professor, Dr. Sharon L. Allen, as these literary genres are within his areas of expertise. My specific topic for this paper, being the ways in which postmodern, postcolonial, lusophone literature presents, discusses, and critiques war trauma in colonized African nations stemmed from my interest in postcolonial literary theory and black feminism that I had studied in a previous class called Sex/Gender Literary Theory with Dr. Milo Obourn. I did consult with Dr. Allen during the process of narrowing the focus of my research paper.

The library was essential to my research and writing process, in that at least seventy five percent of my sources for this essay were found through the library databases. As stated above, *Gale Cengage Literature Resource Center* and *Sage Journals* were extremely useful for this paper, especially when it came to literary resources that dealt with text analysis and sources that provided background information on the author I had been studying. JSTOR was more helpful when I needed historical sources that specifically discussed postcolonialism and war trauma. Furthermore, our capstone class spent multiple days in the Kiefer room, and these days were specifically devoted to research for our essays. We consulted Mrs. Jennifer Kegler during these days in the Kiefer room, and she assisted in the processes of finding reliable resources, using effective search terms in the databases, and choosing relevant sources, all important research strategies that are essential to effective research. A different professor had also encouraged me to email Logan Rath for any trouble with citations in my paper.

To narrow my resources down to those I planned to cite in my paper and those I planned to consult, I followed a few steps. In the beginning of my research process, I chose only to consult sources that dealt with Brazil and Brazilian authors and artists and chose to cite those that discussed Portugal, Angola, and authors within these cultural contexts. I chose to cite theorists in psychoanalysis and black feminism to demonstrate my understanding of these branches of theory

and how they apply them to postcolonial war trauma. My secondary text, *Plantation Memories*, by Grada Kilomba, was a text I chose to cite briefly and consult throughout the entirety of my essay because of Kilomba's contribution to black feminism and the effects of postcolonialism on the black body and psyche. Sources that spoke directly about war trauma, Antonio Lobo Antunes, and his novel, *Os Cus de Judas*, were directly cited, while sources that specifically dealt with the violation of black women's bodies, such as Pamela Scully's essay (cited below), were only consulted, as this was not the sole purpose of my essay.

**Additional Information:**

I would like to thank you for considering my essay for this contest. This research essay was something I worked on over the course of three and a half months, as it was my final undergraduate research project. Conducting research on postcolonial, postmodern, contemporary lusophone literature was difficult, as this is not a common area of study, but the library and its resources made it an easier process.

I hope you consider my essay as a finalist for this contest. I am an English literature major with an adolescent education certification intent. (grades 5-12 in English education and 7-12 in special education), and I plan to use this money for my future classroom library. As you all know, several schools in the U.S. are underfunded, and the students are the ones to suffer from this. Therefore, I think it is important that my students have constant access to books at their fingertips, and any amount of money helps. I would also like to inform you that I have been chosen by Dr. Allen as one of the three students to present their undergraduate research during SUNY Brockport's Scholar's Day in the spring of 2020. I was chosen as one of the students to represent the English department because of this essay. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

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 Dr. Allen  
 ENG 472.01  
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**Exploration or Exploitation? Wombs, Warriors, and Women in António  
 Lobo Antunes's *Os Cus de Judas***

**Abstract:** Using postmodern technique, Portuguese author António Lobo Antunes forces his readers to stare into the soul of colonialism's horrid truths within the context of the Angolan War of Independence. Antunes writes to challenge the connections between war, heroism, and nationalism, while deconstructing the binary between *colonist* and *colonized*. This essay argues that Antunes's narrator in *Os Cus de Judas* asks the reader to see the ways in which war acts as a paradox to masculinity and threatens one's male identity. To further this argument, this essay examines Antunes's use of postmodern tropes within his colonialist critique, focusing specifically on his vulgar and grotesque discourse surrounding sex and sexual dominance with both white bodies and bodies of color, as well as erotic bodily discourse surrounding descriptions of geographic space belonging to both the colonized and colonizer. This essay demonstrates that these postmodern tropes all serve as ways for Antunes's narrator to reassert his masculine identity that has been threatened by imperialism even though, ultimately, his attempts are unsuccessful. In his efforts to achieve remasculinization, the narrator is also working to recover his colonial identity, ultimately becoming deprived of both by the conclusion of the novel, resulting in an existential crisis.

Before postcolonial literature became its own field of study, there was little critical scholarly discourse on the ways in which imperialism adversely affected the *colonizer*; rather, the *colonized* had occupied the center of discussion around this genre of literature. Within recent decades, however, several postmodern, post-colonialist authors have begun to deconstruct this absolute binary juxtaposition between *colonist* and *colonized*, native and "Other," exploring ways in which imperialism initiates *de*-identification with the self and the native country for both.

Within the context of the Angolan War of Independence (1961-1974), Portuguese author, Antonio Lobo Antunes, dives headfirst into this hazardous territory in his postcolonial works, specifically *Os Cus de Judas*, translated into English as *South of Nowhere* or *The Land at the End of the World*. Using postmodern technique, Antunes forces his readers to stare into the soul of colonialism's horrid truths, challenging the connections between war, heroism, and nationalism. This essay argues that Antunes's narrator in *Os Cus de Judas* demands that the reader sees the

ways in which war acts as a paradox to conventional cultural conceptualizations of masculinity and threatens one's male identity. To further this argument, this essay examines Antunes's use of postmodern tropes within his colonialist critique, focusing specifically on his vulgar and grotesque discourse surrounding sex and sexual dominance with both white bodies and bodies of color, as well as erotic bodily discourse surrounding descriptions of geographic space belonging to both the colonized and colonizer. These postmodern tropes shed light on ways Antunes's narrator attempts to reassert his masculine identity that has been threatened by imperialism even though, ultimately, his attempts are unsuccessful.

### **Colonial Trauma and Masculine Identity - "At least the war will make a man out of him."**

Antunes's narrator opens the novel with the quote above, in which his aunt claims, "At least the war will make a man out of him" (26). Speaking to a silent white female interlocutor at a bar in Lisbon for the entirety of the novel, the narrator admits his aunt's remark haunted him throughout his childhood and even into adulthood: "This vigorous prophecy," he explains, "uttered through my childhood and adolescence by false teeth of indisputable authority, continued to be delivered in strident tones at the canasta tables..." (26). Interestingly, the narrator never becomes a soldier; he becomes a military doctor, but not by his own free will. Readers familiar with Antunes's life are aware that *Os Cus de Judas*, and several of his other works, are semi-autobiographical. While Antunes wanted to become a writer, his father convinced him that a technical course would better prepare him for life; therefore, he specialized in psychology because he thought it was the technical branch of study most similar to literature (Gonçalves 1). Almost immediately after traveling to London to carry out his practice, he was recalled to Portugal to serve in the army during the colonial war in Angola (Gonçalves 1). Antunes's own unwillingness to serve in any aspect of the military is overwhelmingly present throughout the entirety of the novel.

Antunes's narrator claims this "vigorous prophecy" was "uttered...by false teeth," demanding the reader see that the war did *not* "make a man out of him"; rather, that it did the exact opposite. Of course, the narrator's aunts were not alone in this theory; historians had debated the degree to which war represented a step towards "remasculinization" for years – a process by which traditional constructions of masculinity are bolstered and strongly redefined by an event (Crouthamel 60). However, after the conclusion of the World Wars, historians and doctors were fully aware that the brutality of modern warfare tested traditional gender norms and boundaries of the military man (Crouthamel 60), and Antunes certainly asks the reader to see this as well. As previously discussed, his medical militaristic position was involuntary, and he makes this especially clear in the text. It is impossible to ignore one of the most striking aspects of the narrative, that the narrator (and Antunes himself), is *not* a war surgeon; he is a psychiatrist recalled to take on this surgical position for which he is extremely unqualified (Gonçalves 2), and he deliberately expresses his insecurities about being responsible for injured soldiers. When speaking to his interlocutor, the narrator describes a time in which a lieutenant had called for his presence, exclaiming, "Doctor, you're needed," and the narrator then explains, "He [Corporal Paula] died in combat the newspaper says but this is what it really means to die you sons-of-bitches, I helped them to die with my useless drugs and their eyes were protesting protesting they didn't understand and they were protesting" (120). To the narrator, his drugs are useless because he does not know how to save the corporal's life; to the narrator, he *causes* death. He does not prevent it.

Shortly after this description, the narrator tells his interlocutor that the experience of war is so horrid that soldiers would rather have him *provide* illness than *prevent* it, in hopes that they can escape their traumatic, militaristic lives. He says, "the giant lieutenant turned to me, touched my arm, and begged in a voice that was suddenly a child's voice, Doctor, fix me up with some

illness before I explode right here in the street from all the shit inside me” (141). Identifying as a doctor is, of course, inherently masculine, and this aspect of the narrator’s masculine identity is challenged (1) because he is unqualified and, therefore, cannot fulfill his medical purpose in the war, and (2) because the soldiers deliberately *ask* him to “fix” them up with an illness rather than fix them up with health; therefore, he could not perform his medical duty even if he *was* qualified.

The narrator’s masculine identities as husband and father are also challenged by the war. His wife divorces him because of his consistent absence from the home and his inability to successfully reintegrate into familial life after returning from war, a common concern among neurologists that work with former veterans (Crouthamel 68). The narrator describes the trauma of the situation to his interlocutor, saying “I got married, you see, four months before I left for Angola...and after a few brief weekend encounters, during which we made love, inventing a kind of desperate tenderness full of anxiety of imminent separation...we said goodbye in the rain...” (84). He admits he only had “a few brief weekend encounters” with his wife because he left for Angola four months after his wedding and could rarely visit home. The description becomes even more traumatic when he explains his relationship (or lack thereof) with his daughter: “And now, six thousand miles away, my daughter, the fruit of my sperm, whose slow subterranean growth beneath the skin of her mother’s belly I did not witness, suddenly burst into the communications hut...congratulations from the battalion” (84-85). The narrator could not be present for his daughter’s birth and, therefore, had to hear it from his fellow troops. This becomes even more traumatic than his divorce as he realizes he will not be able to redeem himself for his past “mistakes,” “defects,” and “faults” in raising her (85). Eventually, his title as father is completely stripped from him, as he refers to his daughter as a mechanical toy after several years of separation

have passed (157). Colonial War trauma has deprived the narrator of his three culturally determined masculine identifiers--that of doctor, husband, and father.

**“We are, therefore, in a condition to go over to that bed and make love...” - Reasserting Masculine Identity through Sex and Sexual Dominance**

Towards the beginning of the novel, the narrator explicitly tells the reader that “the perfect definition of the perfect Portuguese male” is one who “spits and boasts about his sexual prowess” (35), and the reader witnesses the narrator doing just that specifically through his use of animalistic, violent, and grotesque discourse around his descriptions of sexual intercourse with his white female interlocutor. Throughout the novel, hegemonic masculinity is constructed specifically in relationship to women (Walther 60), and the power that comes from this toxic masculine identity is obtained through a reassertion of the phallus – something that can only be reaffirmed through the act of sexual intercourse and can never be transferred to the woman, the object of the narrator’s desire (Lacan 576-577). The narrator’s appetite for phallic power is especially prominent – and problematic – in that his female interlocutor is silenced *because* of this desire, a desire that exists specifically within a colonial context that threatens masculine identity and sexuality.

As quoted above, the narrator tells his interlocutor, “We are, therefore, in a condition to go over to that bed and make love,” not leaving her any room to reject his sexual proposal, and then continues by saying they must make love “as insipid as that frozen fish we ate in the restaurant, whose one eye fixed us with the dying glassy glare of an octogenarian among the faded green of the lettuce” (156). The narrator’s simile comparing sex with the interlocutor to a dead fish demonstrates his use of grotesque sexual language and imagery to replicate his experience at war through his intimate relationships with women (Crouthamel 74). The narrator continues this

description by saying, “My tongue is a piece of sponge curled around your teeth and swollen with the oily foam of our mingled saliva...” (156). Antunes’s excremental discourse on the inner saliva becoming an outer substance to intimately exchange in this passage acts as “an escape from the cruel social reality of being haunted by colonial trauma and loneliness into the cold comforts of self-satisfaction and self-indulgence” (Etsy 45) that he finds within sexual intercourse. The narrator also fears his interlocutor will leave him and expresses, “Your body slips away from mine just as, after taking six downers, our own limbs escape us, break free, adopt the sinuous, boneless gestures of octopuses...you’re a sardine can to which I don’t have the key” (96). Once again, intimacy with the female interlocutor is described in animalistic terms, being grotesquely compared to octopuses and sardines. Antunes uses the trope of excremental language in this example as well, imagining that their limbs will escape their bodies during intercourse. Excremental discourse in this passage may be used to “diffuse the shame” (Etsy 35) within the narrator’s doubt that his interlocutor will reject his sexually intimate gestures. Sex with the narrator’s female interlocutor is almost always described in animalistic, excremental terms because of his desire to reassert masculine dominance. However, these attempts often fail because his previous experiences at war affect his ability to sexually perform (Crouthamel 62).

The narrator’s desire to reassert his threatened masculine identity through sex and sexual dominance becomes even more unsettling when he discusses his sexual affairs with Sofia, an Angolan washerwoman. Female black sexuality in non-Western populations is a hypersexualized object of desire among white European males, acting simultaneously as the “enticing” wild body and the “dangerous” threatening body to colonial worlds (Walther 48). Antunes perpetuates the use of this archetypal image of the third world Black woman by describing sexual intimacy with Sofia using extremely pornographic and exotic language. Immediately after Sofia is verbally

introduced to the reader and white interlocutor, he says he misses the “lovely smell” of her hair (163), which is extremely problematic within the third world context, especially when considering the racist symbolism of black women’s hair: a symbol of primitivity, disorder, inferiority, and uncivilization (Kilomba 75). He continues by expressing how he misses her “belly pressed against” his, constituting one of the many instances in which Antunes incorporates what Joshua Etsy calls “belly politics” (23). He then admits he misses the “forest” of her “black thighs” (Antunes 164), placing her body into the primitive wilderness, the black woman’s “natural environment” (Walther 51). He then laments, “I miss your bed where I could take my long European rest with eight centuries of stone *infantas* on your shoulders” (164), an example of the third world woman providing the European male with a private place – both the home and the bed – to recuperate from the stresses of the colonial outside, the public world (Walther 55). He continues by explaining how he misses her “sun-warm vagina” in which he could anchor his “embarrassingly tender feelings” (164); the body of the third world woman is reduced to a sexual organ and, therefore, objectified (Walther 60). The narrator even admits that he needed her “tattooed pubis, the string beads tight around” her waist, and her “long, hard feet” (168). This lengthy, dehumanizing description of the narrator’s sexual intimacy with Sofia is extremely pornographic in that she is seen only as parts of a body rather than a whole body: as the belly, the thighs, the vagina, the feet, the waist, etc. – never “the woman.”

Regardless of the colonial status of these women (one belonging to the colonial space and one belonging to the colonized space), all female bodies that the narrator sexually encounters are fetishized, in that they become both objects of affection and hostility (Freud 4). The narrator admits to his interlocuter,

My whole body was begging me for the peace that can be found only in the serene bodies of women, in the curve of the woman's shoulders in which I could rest my despair and fear, in that tenderness devoid of sarcasm, in that sweet generosity, as welcoming as a cradle to my male anxiety, the hate-laden anxiety of a man alone with the unbearable weight of my own death on my back. (167)

To the narrator, the female body is both something serene and fearful, something generous and anxiety-inducing, something tender and hate-laden; the female body is both an object of phallic desire *and* a hideous reminder of his threatened masculine identity.

**“Zambia consisted of a nipple of dusty red earth...” – Reasserting Masculine Identity within the Virgin Territory**

The act of conquering in the European colonial context was not only about sexual intercourse with women, particularly colonized women, but about sexual intercourse with the land (Walther 49). Europeans often described non-Western lands as “virgin territories,” territories meant to be travelled, ruled, and exploited by the white western man (Walther 49). Within this geographic intercourse came the blending of conquest and enjoyment, power and pleasure, and a desire from domination (Walther 49). Antunes insists his audience see this reading through his excessive use of erotic bodily discourse to characterize his interactions with the geographic spaces of both the colonizer and the colonized. The narrator describes his first impression of Luanda in which he says, “Thin white birds dissolved into the palm trees around the bay or into the wooden houses far off on Luanda island, thick with trees and insects, where whores, worn out by heartless men from Lisbon, went to drink one last glass of champagne soda...” (34). He immediately relates the island of Luanda to Angolan whores who are exhausted from having sexual intercourse with “heartless” men. The land only has meaning to the narrator in that it is occupied by black prostitutes. The narrator also describes the frontier of Zambia as consisting “of a nipple of dusty

red earth between two desolate plains” (51). He only assigns meaning to the south African territory by describing it as an erotic female body part that he is there to conquer. He is partaking in literal sexual intercourse with the colonized women, and, at the same time, metaphorically fucking the colonized land in his reassertion of white masculine dominance.

Not only does the narrator describe the land of the colonized erotically but the land of the mother country as well. Near the beginning of the novel, the narrator proposes that he and his interlocutor “come together...in acts of sexual coitus as sad as Lisbon nights” (21). Lisbon is a space of sadness and colonial shame for the narrator, which precisely describes his emotions towards the drunken, meaningless sexual intercourse he has with the random women he meets at bars. He also describes Portugal as a “shithole” of a country (100); within this context, “shit” becomes a sign of the present’s failures (Etsy 41), specifically the failures of Portuguese colonialist culture. The narrator even compares Lisbon to a nudist beach, characterizing the city “as devoid of mystery as a nudist beach, where the all-revealing sun brutally exposes flaccid buttocks and flat, shadowless breasts...” (124). He sees the sun as something that exposes the shameful of Portuguese colonialism, which the narrator substitutes for women’s “buttocks” and breasts. The significance of these passages lies in the gendering of geography; to satisfy his “geographic appetite,” the narrator must feminize the territory to make it conquerable (Madureira 22-24) and reassert his threatened masculinity.

### **Conclusion: Exploration or Exploitation? Wombs, Warriors, and Women Inside the “Asshole of the World”**

In his attempts to reassert his masculine identity, the narrator is also attempting to reassert his colonial identity that is being threatened by Portugal’s failing colonialist structure, in that everything he encounters is something to be penetrated, violated, and raped. Therefore, these two distinct identities, that of the ideal military man and the white colonizer, cannot be separated.

To thoroughly examine the relationship between these two identities, it must be acknowledged that the narrator's relationships with women in the text are ruled by silence (Paula Martine 67). These women, both the interlocutor and Sofia, only exist and have meaning in so far as they are written, troped, and penetrated (Madureira 22). The white interlocutor's purpose is merely to serve as an object of confession, a figurative sponge to absorb the narrator's linguistic vomit, a meaningless, empty figure to penetrate and fill with the narrator's shameful semen – a series of violent acts centered around male dominance; and, it becomes even more unsettling in the portrayal of Sofia's character.

While some scholars read the silence between the narrator and Sofia as a silence of mutual understanding and comprehension based on a possible relationship between the colonized and colonizer (Paula Martins 67), it still becomes problematic, regardless of the ways in which their intimacy is perceived, in that black women have a history of being invisible *from* a massive, overwhelming silence in the western world and its literature (Smith 20). Sofia, invisible without the light of her white male lover, only gains meaning in so far as she is penetrated, troped, and violated as well – penetrated and troped by the narrator and sexually violated by the Polícia de Vigilância e de Defesa do Estado (International Police for the Defense of the State). The narrator's *exploration* of Sofia's body within a masculine colonial context becomes an *exploitation* of the troped, third world black woman – one whose body is stereotyped, idealized, exoticized, and raped by the white, western, colonial, military man.

These same ideas apply to the narrator's interactions with the geographic space of both the colonized and colonizer, in that his *exploration* of the territories as a masculine figure ultimately become territories he *exploits* as a colonial figure. Although Antunes and his narrator offer critiques of Portuguese colonial culture as noted above, arguably acting as a progressive and

radical exploitation of his own destructive mother country, he problematically explores *and* exploits Angolan territory by characterizing the space as the “asshole of the world” – the literal meaning of the novel’s title, *Os Cus de Judas*. This characterization is not only in the title, but abundantly present within the text itself: The narrator and his fellow soldiers are “unexpected visitors” in the “asshole of the world” (56); they are “dying one by one in that asshole of the world” (117). Towards the beginning of the novel, the narrator has a desire to know which group of people “plunged” him “without warning into this asshole of the world full of red dust and sand” (54). Antunes’s use of the word “plunged” in this context is clearly intentional, drawing on the relationship between the toilet, the “asshole,” and all the “shit” in between. In colonial literature, “shit” is a crucial sign of “matter out of place” and the rejected native population (Etsy 30), and the toilet becomes a powerful symbol of technological and developmental superiority and intensifies the negative valence of shit (Etsy 29), thus emphasizing the narrator’s exploitation of the underprivileged, underdeveloped, third world, colonized space. Angola, the exploited “asshole of the world,” becomes a space of penetration and violation, a literal *hole* to rape, both acting as ways for the narrator to reassert his masculine *and* colonial identity. As Julia Garraio intriguingly argues, it is both a “violation and penetration of a foreign land by default of its population” and a “violation and penetration of one culture by imposition of another” (1563).

At the same time, the mother country is the narrator’s place to retire after Portugal’s colonial failure, the *womb* into which the narrator tries to return. When their empire begins to crumble, and the narrator realizes he is unsuccessful in his attempts to rape the colonized space, he then possesses an innate desire to fuck the mother country, to penetrate the mother’s womb, to engage in “sex as sad as Lisbon nights” and return to the “nudist beach” that is Portugal. The mother country becomes a Freudian womb the *womb* into which the narrator tries to return."and

penetrate when his masculine and colonial identities are threatened by the war; however, he realizes that “the fear of returning to his country” makes his “throat tighten,” and he knows he must learn to accept that he has “no place anywhere” now because he “went too far away for too long” to belong to any place in the world (201).

Therefore, the reason Antunes’s narrator is unsuccessful in reasserting his masculine identity is because, in doing so, he is attempting to reassert his colonial identity that has already been abolished because of Portugal’s failed colonial attempts during the war. This novel, then, becomes a narrative of displacement; a tragic story about identity crisis; a tale of existentialism. Antunes’s audience leaves the narrator “float[ing] between two countries,” in search “for an empty space in which” he “might drop the anchor,” a place he could lay his “shamefaced hope” (201). Without these two identities, without these two essential elements of the ideal Portuguese man, the narrator becomes displaced within every aspect of the world: the colonized territory, the motherland, and every living soul in between.

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