

The Right to Represent, Reproduce, and Refuse: Memory, Photography, and Postcolonial Ekphrasis in the Work of Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida¹

ABSTRACT: By employing Gabriele Rippl's edited collection *Handbook of Intermediality* (2015), which aims at developing a theoretical framework for Intermedial Studies within the Anglophone context, this article proposes to explore examples of postcolonial ekphrasis and word-image configurations across the works of Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida. This includes her novel *Esse Cabelo* (2015) and the *crónica* "Pérola sem rapariga." The article proposes to establish a dialogue between memory, photography, and postcolonial ekphrasis within the Lusophone context. I argue that Almeida as an Afrodescendant woman writer, employs intermedial references to inscribe new forms of representations of Black women's bodies and attribute agency to Black women, both past and present. By doing so, she counteracts the official historical narrative, which continues to silence the memory of Africans and Afrodescendants in Europe.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonial ekphrasis; memory; photography; Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida; Afrodescendant literature

RESUMO: Partindo da coleção *Handbook of Intermediality* (2015), editada por Gabriele Rippl, que pretende construir um quadro metodológico para os Estudos de intermedialidade, centrando-se no contexto anglófono, este artigo propõe explorar exemplos da écfrase pós-colonial e da combinação imagem-texto nas obras literárias de Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida. Tal inclui o seu romance *Esse Cabelo* (2015) e a *crónica* "Pérola sem rapariga." O artigo pretende estabelecer um diálogo entre a memória, a fotografia e a écfrase pós-colonial no contexto lusófono, alegando que como uma escritora afrodescendente, Almeida usa referências intermediais para inscrever novas formas de representação do corpo da mulher negra e para dar visibilidade às mulheres negras, tanto passada como presente. Dessa forma, ela vai contra o discurso histórico oficial que até hoje continua a silenciar a memória dos Africanos e dos Afrodescendentes na Europa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: éctrase pós-colonial; memória; fotografia; Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida; literatura afrodescendente

Introduction

Afrodescendant writer Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida was born in Luanda, Angola, in 1982, to an Angolan mother and a Portuguese father, both journalists. She migrated to Lisbon, Portugal, at the age of three, where she was raised by her paternal grandparents. Thus, Almeida did not form part of the initial wave of postcolonial migration of Africans and their descendants that characterized the late 1970s following the independence of Lusophone Africa in 1975 (Sanches 122). In fact, she migrated during an interim period, which preceded Portugal's accession to the European Economic Community (ECC) in 1986. As Bernd Reiter underlines, membership in the ECC would be significant both for the way in which Portugal projected itself as a nation, breaking away from its self-identification as an expansive empire and instead presenting itself as a white European nation-state, and for its future migratory patterns (101-102). In Lisbon, Almeida spent most of her childhood and teenage years growing up on the outskirts of the city in the middle-class neighborhood of Oeiras, apart from a few trips to Luanda to visit her mother. It is in this way that her background contrasts with the typical situation of African migrants and their offspring who originated from Portuguese-speaking countries such as Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. These migrants who constituted part of the first wave of post-colonial migration and who, as Manuela Ribeiro Sanches highlights, arrived in Portugal fleeing war and poverty, to continue to live in Lisbon's underprivileged *bairros* on the outskirts of the city (122). Additionally, it also distinguishes her from the wave of economic migrants, which consisted mostly of Eastern Europeans, who arrived following Portugal's entry to the European Union.²

In the same vein as Sanches, Portuguese journalist Joana Gorjão Henriques, in her book *Racismo no País dos Brancos Costumes* (2018), underlines the persisting marginalization of Africans and Afrodescendants in Portuguese society; however, she extends the debate beyond housing, and includes their struggle for jobs, education, and even justice and citizenship (14). She aims to disrupt the persisting myth that Portugal is a non-racist country, highlighting the lack of Black subjects in positions of power; this includes areas such as the political

sphere, the media, the executive administrations of large business corporations, academia, and, finally, literature (11). Moreover, regardless of the desire of the Portuguese elite to present Portugal as a white European nation-state following decolonization, Henriques indicates that the presence of Africans and Afrodescendants in Portugal dates to the fifteenth century (19). That said, the fact that their presence in Europe is noted in centuries, rather than a specific year (whereas the supposed “discovery” of African states and populations by European explorers is carefully chartered with specific dates), likewise testifies to the persistent marginalization of the historic memory of Black people in Europe in the twenty-first century.³

Against this backdrop, it could be argued that Almeida’s distinct background (middle-class family upbringing and a PhD in Literary Theory) has to some extent allowed her to overcome the marginalization faced by the majority of Afrodescendants. She became one of the first Afrodescendant women novelists of her generation in Portugal when she published *Esse Cabelo* in 2015.⁴ In short, the novel tells the story of narrator-protagonist Mila, who embarks on a journey of self-discovery; Mila’s afro hair is employed as a trope to uncover the memories of her childhood and adolescent years and to delve deeper into her family’s past which spans across the Portuguese-speaking world (Portugal, Mozambique and Angola). Although *Esse Cabelo* is most often read as a work of autobiographical fiction, literary scholar Bianca Mafra Gonçalves rightly warns us that simply relegating the novel to the genre of autobiographical fiction constitutes a simplistic or superficial reading of the text (44-45).⁵ Instead, for Gonçalves the book occupies a supposedly “impossible” space between autobiography and essay (42). Yet, while bearing in mind Gonçalves’s criticisms, it is equally futile to ignore the obvious connections between Almeida and narrator-protagonist Mila, which the author herself has acknowledged in interviews (Almeida, “Eu mesma”). For instance, like Almeida, Mila is born in Luanda, Angola, to an Angolan mother and a Portuguese father and moves to Portugal at the age of three in 1985 to live with her paternal grandparents, namely, Manuel and Lúcia. Moreover, most of Mila’s childhood is based in the neighborhood Oeiras. Hence, there is no denying that Almeida’s life and that of her narrator-protagonist Mila are, to adopt the words of historian Marianne Hirsch, “shaped by exile, emigration and relocation” from the very outset (xi). In fact, this is one of the most prominent parallels between the author and narrator-protagonist. Hirsch, speaking from her own perspective as the child of a Holocaust survivor, states that in families impacted

by such upheaval “photographs provide perhaps even more than usual some illusion of continuity over time and space” (xi). This affirmation by Hirsch may help explain the motif of photography that runs through Almeida’s debut novel *Esse Cabelo* and online *crônicas*. In the novel this most often takes the form of verbal descriptions of photographs, otherwise known as ekphrasis. In contemporary society, ekphrasis is a literary device typically used to describe a visual image; however, it was traditionally only used in relation to high art.

In this article, I intend to establish a dialogue between memory, photography, and postcolonial ekphrasis within the Portuguese-speaking world. The article will be divided into two parts: the first section deals with the presence of postcolonial ekphrastic passages in *Esse Cabelo* within the context of Mila’s personal life, particularly the family photo album; the second section explores the ethics of representation surrounding Black women’s bodies through the material reproduction of photos and their associated postcolonial ekphrastic descriptions, also known as word-image configurations. I have specifically chosen to explore the *crônica* “Pérola sem rapariga” (Jan. 2016), published in the online newspaper *Observador*.⁶ In this *crônica* Almeida physically alters a photograph from the colonial archive of an enslaved Brazilian woman, who appears naked from the waist up.

Although Almeida employs postcolonial ekphrasis and word-image configurations in other *crônicas*, this study has been limited to the aforementioned selection for two reasons.⁷ First, it allows the reader to understand how the bodies of Black women were depicted in Brazil, a Portuguese colony, from 1500 until the official abolition of slavery in 1888. Second, it enables a comparison with the former colonial metropole in the postcolonial moment, demonstrating how colonial attitudes impact the present and the ways in which contemporary and innovative literary production by Afrodescendants speak back to othering portrayals of Black women’s bodies. In addition, this division of the article into two sections, creates a dialogue between the role of photography in the familial setting, which is to construct the past, and in the public space, where images of Black women from past to present are readily available and subjected to a persisting colonial gaze. However, prior to engaging with the selected ekphrastic passages and word-image configurations, I present a theoretical framework, mainly drawing upon Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory (including subsequent adaptations of the theory in the Portuguese colonial and postcolonial contexts) and Gabriele Rippl’s edited collection *Handbook of Intermediality*, which situates postcolonial ekphrasis within the emerging field of Intermediality Studies.

Intermediality, Intermedial References, and Postcolonial Ekphrasis

According to Gabriele Rippl, the concept of “Intermediality” generally refers to the combining or juxtaposition of different forms of media, and the rise of studies into intermediality is indicative of the digital age (1-2). Notwithstanding the fact that the *Handbook of Intermediality* focuses specifically on the Anglophone context, the collection has two aims that are relevant to the argument of this article. First, the collection endeavors to develop a theoretical basis for intermediality and applies this to examples in Anglophone literatures (Rippl 1). The strong theoretical focus allows the collection to be adapted to other geographical contexts, such as the Portuguese-speaking world. Second, it aspires to develop a link between ekphrasis (as a specific example of intermediality) and postcolonial literatures (Rippl 15).

Reflecting upon Irina O. Rajesky’s theory of intermediality, Rippl categorizes the types of intermediality; this article will focus specifically on intermedial references, including the visual descriptions of works of art, i.e., ekphrasis (10-12). In the opening essay of the collection, James Hefferman, who had in the early 1990s expanded the meaning of ekphrasis to go beyond the classical meaning of a literary description of high art, reaffirms that in the twenty-first century ekphrasis is simply “the verbal representation of visual representation,” adding that the definition is more dynamic than ever before (48). Rippl highlights how the emergence of ekphrasis was embedded within the Renaissance discussion of the *paragone*, that is, the competitive tension between the medium of visual art and the written word (4). For Birgit Neumann, this *paragone* remains in contemporary intermedial productions and yields a transformative potential in postcolonial literatures, a body of works concerned with the rupturing of hierarchies and the problematization of binary structures and cultural homogeneity (513-14). Similarly, Rippl believes that the future of intermediality lies in the under-researched presence of ekphrasis in postcolonial literatures, identifying the Anglophone world as the source of a wealth of examples (15). Considering this, postcolonial ekphrasis and word-image configurations potentially speak to and counteract what Paul Gilroy identifies as the emergence of new kinds of visual cultures as a result of technological advancements, which he believes “re-incarnate” racial differences in innovative ways and on a global scale (xii). This article intends to add to this debate by focusing on ekphrasis in literature written in Portuguese and specifically those produced by a contemporary Afrodescendant woman writer.

Memory, Photography, and Black Women in the Private and Public Spheres

Although the presence of ekphrasis in postcolonial literatures written in Portuguese has not yet been the focus of scholarly attention, Portuguese historian Filipa Lowndes Vicente published an article in 2018 on the visual representations of bodies of Black women in the Portuguese colonial archive. In her analysis, Vicente highlights that photographs of Black women across the archive, most commonly taken by men, are racialized and sexualized (16). Both hair and breasts are at the center of the erotic lens, and these images are readily accessible for audiences of all ages to see, a fact that continues to expose the bodies of Black women to a colonial gaze (20). Moreover, Vicente expresses uncertainty as to whether the reproduction of such photographs, alongside a critical theoretical discussion in universities or museums, is enough to decolonize the archive (22, 38). Thus, she brings to the fore the question of who holds the right to reproduce these photos and in what context. This places her work in direct dialogue with sociologist Sheila Khan's question: Who is responsible for a postcolonial education? (44). For Khan, it belongs to those who claim the civic responsibility of engaging with a critical, interventional, and open discussion of memory and postmemory (48). Postmemory, originally conceptualized by Hirsch, "characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (22). Such "traumatic" experiences are not limited to the Holocaust, but also include populations affected by colonization, as has been demonstrated through the development of postmemory in the collection *Geometrias da Memória*, edited by António Sousa Ribeiro and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro.⁸ Thus, postmemory is indicative of the experiences of many Afrodescendants and *retornados*, such as Almeida, who were born in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and who currently reside in Portugal. It is in this context that viewing the novel as strictly autobiographical becomes problematic. Almeida, in addition to acknowledging the similar life trajectory that she and Mila have taken, also acknowledges that, despite the novel initially being a product of her own "inquietação," she came to realize that such "inquietações" were not just personal to her (Almeida, "Eu mesma"). Instead, she notes that the book is in fact a culmination of emotions and intuitions that she noticed in people "próximas e afastadas, desconhecidas ou não, com uma história semelhante ou diferente" to her own (Almeida, "Eu

mesma”). From this it is possible to extrapolate that Almeida does not just recount elements of her own story in *Esse Cabelo*, but part of the story of a generation.

Despite Vicente’s concern with the perpetuation of violence through the reproduction of photographs in the public space, she nevertheless highlights the power of “counter-narrative photographic practices and uses” which problematize the subjugation and sexualization of Black women and work to inscribe new “possibilities of subjectivity and agency” (41-42). She cites examples from the African American context such as Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), who managed to use photography as a tool of power (40). Truth, after freeing herself from her master, became an abolitionist and a gifted orator, selling *cartes-de-visite* of herself to make a living. Nevertheless, Vicente also highlights the fact that images, in which Black women had freely consented to be photographed, faced limited circulation, remaining within the private sphere (40-41). This indicates a dichotomy between the function of photography in the public and private spheres, particularly in a colonial context, and how it has impacted the historical memory of Black women. As we have seen, from Hirsch’s perspective, in families dispersed by migration, the family photo album successfully documents the past and is viewed as a positive tool (xi). In contrast, African-American writer bell hooks characterizes photography as a source of oppression in an essay on the role of photography in Black family life; because her father’s eye was behind the camera throughout her childhood hooks had always associated photography with patriarchy (391). However, many scholars acknowledge that in the public sphere, photography, which developed in the colonial context of the nineteenth century, as a tool of power to document ethnographies of free and enslaved Africans and Afrodescendants, is complicit in representing Black subjects as inferior and that it reinforced supposedly scientific or biological racial differences.⁹ It is this dichotomy between the function of photography in the public and private spheres that will be discussed across the analysis of Almeida’s selected works.

The Family Album as a Window to the Past and Present in *Esse Cabelo* (2015)

Esse Cabelo is a novel replete with postcolonial ekphrastic passages of photographs of Mila and her family members from family albums. The examples of postcolonial ekphrasis, which appear unaccompanied by images, form part of Mila’s journey of self-discovery. The presence of photographs or postcolonial ekphrastic descriptions in *Esse Cabelo* has not previously been discussed by

literary scholars. However, Almeida has acknowledged in an interview that she had originally planned to structure the book in the form of a family photo album (Almeida, “Eu mesma”). In a 2015 interview with journalist Marta Lança she states: “Comecei por imaginar escrever um livro com a estrutura de um álbum de fotografias de família: imagens que podem ou não ter sido captadas, que podem ou não ter existido,” while also highlighting that she believes that family albums and how they are organized or utilized determines our perception of childhood, particularly our lapses in memory (Almeida, “Eu mesma”). Through Almeida’s tactful allusions to the existence or non-existence of photographs, which formed part of the early inception of the novel, the author brings to the fore a debate about the presence of the real and fictional in *Esse Cabelo*. Moreover, by discussing how the family photo album can alter how we view the past, the author may allude to her own uncertainty about which memories exactly are real or fictionalized due to her own inability to fully recall her childhood. However, this interpretation may fall into the trap of being a simplistic autobiographical reading of the novel; the author does not give any direct indication in the interview (for instance, by employing a personal pronoun) that the family album she discusses is in fact her own. In this same interview, Almeida also acknowledges that during the process of writing *Esse Cabelo* the trope of hair became the central focus (Almeida, “Eu mesma”). Nonetheless, I argue that photographs remain a recurrent motif and are employed to understand both the past and present, as is implicit in the following quote:

Tenho diante de mim fotografias de família antigas que folheio à procura de sentidos, ligações, uma explicação para tudo. As explicações que procuramos são, por vezes, um bando nunca avistado. (Almeida, *Esse Cabelo* 58)

Mila’s need to find an answer in the family photo album is reminiscent of Hirsch’s search for continuity in photographs. Moreover, the trope of hair and photography are often dealt with simultaneously. In fact, when viewing the photographs of her childhood or models in magazines at the hairdressers, Mila focuses on the subjects’ hairstyles. This is exemplified in the following quote:

Fotografaram-me para um novo passaporte verde, em que surjo com um grande buraco nos dentes da frente. Não me lembro da juba do dia seguinte, mas ostentei-a decerto com orgulho. (Almeida, *Esse Cabelo* 50)

In this short example of ekphrasis, the author emphasizes the mnemonic function of the photograph as Mila is unable to remember the state of her hair the following day. Therefore, although the photograph successfully documents one of the few positive interactions Mila has with her hair, Almeida employs ekphrasis to show how photography merely captures a temporary state. It does not necessarily represent Mila's everyday reality. Moreover, since the focus is on hair, it brings us back to Vicente's comments on Black women's hair being at the center of the erotic gaze in colonial photographs that circulated publicly. For Mila, however, her hair plays a different role in the context of her family album. It signifies racial difference, which sets her apart from her paternal white Portuguese family, who are responsible for most of her upbringing (her mother remains in Angola, and is therefore absent during most of her childhood, except for intermittent visits during the summer). Additionally, this is the second reference to a passport photo in the novel and although the ekphrasis is clearly fixed on Mila's physical appearance, the description of the passport is also noteworthy.¹⁰ The fact that the passport is "novo" could indicate that her previous passport has expired, and she is thus renewing it. However, because this second photo is taken in Portugal, after her departure from Angola, it may suggest that this is her application for Portuguese citizenship. The color "verde" is indicative of the Green Book in America, a travel guide which indicated places that were deemed safe for Africans and Afrodescendants in twentieth century America, during a time of deep racial tension. This brings to the fore some of the issues that Afrodescendant populations face, as identified by Henriques and Reiter, namely, citizenship and highlights their continued marginalization in the twenty-first century.

The focus on the physical attributes or appearance of women continues throughout *Esse Cabelo* and goes beyond Mila's hair. This is evident in the longest and most vivid description of a family photograph (traditionally known as *enargetic* ekphrasis) of Mila's stepmother or "mãe portuguesa," who in contrast to Mila's persistently absent birth mother, is presented with admiration, and as the driving force behind Mila's childhood memories:

A noiva dançou em mini-saia; deixou-se fotografar bebendo um café num balcão com o desprendimento e a propriedade de uma estrela: sabia-se linda e assim a achávamos... Neste balanço, em que a beleza e a liberdade são mutuamente dependentes, a minha mãe portuguesa, o olho por detrás de quase

de todas as fotografias deste álbum, teve o lugar de zeladora da liberdade necessária para fazer de mim uma pessoa e, enfim, a paciência para a minha entretanto eclodida timidez em deixar-me fotografar...Não existe álbum sem fotógrafo e, mesmo quando não existem nem um nem outro, o que conhecemos da infância são os olhos que nos viram, nos fixaram, nos atuaram, nos amaram. (Almeida, *Esse Cabelo* 118-19)

Mila's declared admiration for her stepmother through positive nouns such as "estrela," "beleza," "liberdade," and "paciência" counteracts the typical Western narrative of the evil stepmother, as represented in the story of Cinderella. The picture depicts a family wedding; in it, a white European woman is confined to the family environment and the subject of the photo is clothed. Notably, Mila feels the need to confirm that the onlookers at the wedding or those who have access to the family photo album agree that the bride was correct in thinking she was "linda," through the plural form of the verb *achar*. This highlights the plurality of gazes directed at the subject in a photograph, which go beyond that of the photographer. Moreover, the repetition of the verb *deixar* with the change of the subject pronoun from "deixou-se fotografar" to "deixar-me fotografar" highlights the fact that the white Portuguese woman has given her consent and Mila has acquired the agency to carry out the physical act of taking the photo. This suggests a level of female companionship in the act of photography and deviates from the photographs in the colonial archive, which Vicente notes are normally taken by and remain in the possession of men (16). By assigning Mila the power of representation, Almeida places her as an active agent rather than a passive subject of the photo. However, the author suggests that much like her ability to mediate the description of a real or imagined photograph in the form of postcolonial ekphrasis (which undoubtedly affects our viewing of an image) childhood memories are also mediated. Although they are lived memories, we do not necessarily remember specific moments; such episodes are normally recounted to us by an adult, transforming them into a form of postmemory. For Mila, it is her stepmother who mediates such memories, as she is the eye behind all the photographs. However, in the form of postmemory, it is Almeida, through Mila's postcolonial ekphrasis of real or imagined photographs, who documents such memories and reproduces them to a wider public in the written form of a novel.

In *Esse Cabelo*, the description of photographs of Mila and her respective family members are never accompanied by the reproduction of those photographs.

Given the similar life trajectories of both author and narrator mentioned previously, coupled with Almeida's interview which creates ambiguity surrounding the existence of photographs, the reader is led to further question whether the descriptions, which are at times described in meticulous detail, are based on photographs of real-life events. Moreover, when compared to examples of Almeida's online *crônicas*, in which ekphrastic descriptions form part of word-image configurations, the reader is left to question the reason for not including photographs in the novel.¹¹ Almeida's decision to exclude photographs of Mila's family, which seems broadly similar to her own, parallels Hirsch's analysis of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, in which she argues that Barthes' decision not to reproduce photos of his mother shows that we do not form part of the "familial network"; our gaze as readers is excluded (2). In this way, the power of representation lies with the writer, Almeida. She employs ekphrasis to create tension between what is fact and what is fiction, thus forcing the reader into the *paragone* of visual and textual representations. Our perspective is therefore entirely influenced not only by Mila's description of the photograph, but also by her emotional reaction to it. In the first quotation, regardless of whether these memories are autobiographical or not, the postcolonial ekphrasis reveals the true impact that the open racialization and sexualization of Black women in the public realm has on a young child, as depicted through the relationship Mila has with her afro hair in photographs. In the second photograph, Mila, as a child, carries out the physical act of taking the photo, while her stepmother guides her lapses in memory. This suggests that the documenting of memory and the story behind it is reconstructed in a joint effort. By presenting a consensual relationship of power between photographer and the object/subject of the photo, Almeida subtly counteracts the patriarchal, colonial gaze.

Obstructing the Colonial Gaze of the Nineteenth Century *Carte-de-visite* in "Pérola sem rapariga"

When analyzing the material reproduction of the *carte-de-visite* in Almeida's *crônica* "Pérola sem rapariga," it is important to consider the social constructions of race and gender, as well as class in the representation of Black women's bodies. The *carte-de-visite* was a type of photograph invented and patented by André Disdéri. Beatriz Jaguaribe and Maurício Lissvosky note that it became particularly popular in Brazil among middle-class families during the 1860s due to its low cost (75). According to Jaguaribe and Lissvosky, Disdéri claimed that

the *carte-de-visite* was a successful portrait because it was the result of a “photographic pact between the photographer and the person being depicted”; the portrait itself should reveal the “distinct character” of the individual, and the models were able to choose their own material props (75-77).

However, Jaguaribe and Lissvosky also inform us that when the Azorean photographer Christiano Júnior began to take *cartes-de-visite* of enslaved individuals in Rio his photos did not comply with the “photographic pact”; the background was no longer adorned with traditional bourgeois furnishings, and enslaved people were depicted carrying out activities from their daily lives (77-79). This exemplifies how photography strove to represent reality, and thus entered the debate of the *paragone*, alongside literature (Straub 159-160). The *carte-de-visite* analyzed by Almeida, which she encountered on the online portal *Brasíliana Fotográfica*, depicts an enslaved Brazilian woman, and was taken by the nineteenth century German photographer Alberto Henschel (1826-1882).¹² Sven Schuster and Alejandra Buenaventura argue that Henschel’s portraits are different from Júnior’s in their depiction of enslaved individuals with backgrounds of exotic fruits or wearing fictitious “African” attire in order to appeal to a European audience interested in exoticism (82). Paradoxically, however, they also argue that Henschel respected the individuality of the models and did not reduce them to mere objects (82). This would suggest that his photographs were closer to the photographic pact envisaged by Disdéri. Nevertheless, Henschel, like Júnior, did not document the names of his models. Jaguaribe and Lissvosky argue that this is because at the time those who were enslaved were not seen as “citizens” but rather “objects” (79). This resonates with the aforementioned work of Henriques, in which the Afrodescendants in Portugal continue to be denied access to full citizenship rights (14). Yet, the word-image configurations that Almeida presents to her reader contest the claims made by Schuster and Buenaventura regarding Henschel’s respectful attitude toward his chosen models and support Jaguaribe and Lissvosky’s argument by demonstrating how Black women were objectified in colonial photography. The section will first deal with the materially reproduced photograph of the enslaved woman before analyzing the ekphrasis that accompanies it.

In “Pérola sem rapariga,” the photo of the enslaved Brazilian woman that Almeida presents to us is surrounded by a black permanent marker, a red pencil, and scissors.¹³ On a closer look at the *carte-de-visite*, it becomes apparent that the lips of the model have been colored with the red pencil and that the dress she is

wearing has been added with permanent marker, as indicated by the gaps left in the coloring below the woman's breasts. Initially, it was unclear to me who had edited the photo. Then, on reading another *crónica* published by Almeida, in which she makes an 'apelo' for editing photos, it became evident that Almeida is responsible (Almeida, "O apelo da colagem"). The alteration of the photo is confirmed by comparison to the original photograph taken by Henschel in which the woman appears nude from the waist up, wearing only an earring and a bracelet.¹⁴ The original photo was also printed in the then traditional sepia style, whereas the edited version is shown in black and white (apart from the splash of red on the woman's lips). Moreover, the border with Henschel's name and the place the photo was taken have been removed. Through these alterations made by Almeida the photo has been completely displaced from the era in which it was produced. This allows the photo to be removed from the reality it was originally intended to document and opens up the possibility of inscribing the image of the enslaved woman with new stories and subjectivities.

Considering the differences between the two photos, it is important to highlight what Almeida leaves available to the gaze of the reader. Almeida encourages the reader to find the original photo by directly citing the *Brasíliana Fotográfica* online portal. Yet, by not reproducing the original nude photo of the enslaved Brazilian woman, she avoids being complicit in what Vicente labels as the perpetuation of violence and racism and thus prevents the reproduction of the colonial gaze (22). This is particularly relevant given that this *crónica* is published in an online newspaper and can therefore reach a wider audience. It thus has the potential to disrupt the continued marginalization and misrepresentation of Africans and Afrodescendants in the media. The act of editing this photo can be seen as a "counter-narrative photographic practice," as described by Vicente and serves to contest the official discourse of memory, a discourse that continues to marginalize Black subjects in the postcolonial moment (41).

Almeida's edited photograph resonates with the work of South African artist and art historian, Nomusa Makhubu. In her "Self-Portrait" series, Makhubu mixes photographs of herself with historical photographs of other Black subjects in an attempt to obstruct the colonial gaze. In an interview with Claire Counihan, Makhubu states that her editing, which consists of mixing photographs and changing the title of the original photo, questions the supposed truth represented in the photograph (314). Almeida's work mimics this practice not by superimposing historical photographs, but through the physical act of

drawing over the photo and by attempting to “legendar” the photograph of the enslaved Brazilian with her own life (Almeida, “Pérola sem rapariga”). In addition to editing the photograph, Almeida, like Makhubu, edits the original caption of the photograph. On the online portal, the caption appears as *Mulher negra da Bahia*, whereas Almeida refers to the enslaved women as “A nua da Bahia” (Henschel; Almeida “Pérola sem rapariga”). Almeida thus focuses on the sexualization of the enslaved women in the photograph, while the portal’s title focuses on her race. This, arguably, contradicts her edited photograph, in which the model now appears clothed, again bringing literature and photography into the *paragone* debate, in a fight for the power of representation.

The title of the *crónica* “Pérola sem rapariga” is also noteworthy. It is intrinsically linked to the title of the famous seventeenth-century painting by Johannes Vermeer entitled *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. This painting depicts a white girl in exotic clothing; in addition to the eponymous pearl earring, she wears a bright blue and yellow turban. It is considered unusual in Vermeer’s *oeuvre*, which usually depicts women carrying out daily chores and in more traditional attire. In Almeida’s *crónica*, however, the title is an inversion of the Dutch painting, altering both subject and agency. From the outset, it places importance on the pearl earring, rather than the Black woman depicted. The focus on jewelry continues in Almeida’s short ekphrastic passage, while the enslaved individual is presented as lifeless and vacant: “Ela está longe de estar despida na imagem. Se não a descortino, é talvez porque não está lá. Apenas o brinco e a pulseira (emprestados?) reluzem no retrato” (“Pérola sem rapariga”). In Almeida’s reading, the only things that sparkle are the bracelet and the pearl earring. The adjective “sparkling,” which can also be used to describe a person’s eyes, is in this instance specifically used to focus on material possessions, which Almeida implies are both borrowed. This serves to highlight the social position of the enslaved woman, who would not have had the means to possess such jewelry. In Almeida’s ekphrastic representation this woman has been silenced and is devoid of individuality.

Almeida’s overall focus in the *crónica*, seems to be on the photographer’s motives, which is in direct contrast with the characterization of a consensual relationship between the subject and photographer in *Esse Cabelo*. Instead, a hierarchical power relation has been created, as reflected in the following questions Almeida poses: “Como terá Henschel mandado que se despisse? Quem lhe terá posto os brincos e a pulseira de contas? O que se terá seguido àquele momento?” (“Pérola sem rapariga”). Almeida’s carefully selected wording highlights the

uneven nature of the relationship and underlines the lack of agency attributed to the enslaved Brazilian women. First, the European colonial photographer is referred to by his surname, which suggests a level of formality and recognizes his importance as a historical figure. On the other hand, the enslaved Brazilian woman is addressed as “ela,” which again removes any sense of individuality. Moreover, Almeida underlines the enslaved woman’s lack of power in the relationship by implying that Henschel ordered her to get undressed. This eliminates the possibility of the model having chosen to undress for the photo and implies she had been forced into the situation. It is further insinuated that someone else has put the earring and bracelet on for her and that Henschel is likely to have taken advantage of the woman after the photography session. The experience of the enslaved Brazilian woman stands in stark contrast to the “liberdade” which Mila associates with photography in the private sphere (De Almeida, *Esse Cabelo* 118-19). In the imperial project, where photography was used as a colonial tool, the subject’s name was unimportant. Rather, subjects were often defined by their ethnographic category (e.g., “negra”) and by place of origin (Jaguaribe and Lissvosky 77). The failure to record the slave’s name, allows her to be silenced and forgotten, overshadowed by the male professional photographer. It counteracts any claims that Schuster and Buenaventura make regarding Henschel’s desire to preserve the individuality of the enslaved models (82). Akin to the way in which the memory of Africans and Afrodescendants in Europe has been historically marginalized from the Eurocentric hegemonic national narratives, given the vague charting of the African presence in Europe, the nameless enslaved woman is invisible in the written word. Almeida employs ekphrasis to denounce what Hirsch would refer to as the “traumatic events” of those that came before her (22). However, in this instance, Almeida’s postmemory delves deeper into the past and includes generations of colonized people before her, rather than only those who were impacted by the immediate history of the colonial wars in Africa.

Ultimately, neither the narrator nor the reader of the *crónica* knows exactly what happened on this specific occasion between Henschel and the unnamed enslaved woman. The insinuations made by the narrator regarding the photographer’s actions and the focus on the “nua” in the *crónica*’s title are representative of the sexual violence that many Black women have faced across the centuries. The “Nua da Bahia,” whose name and story we will never know, is a microcosm, representing the many other women who were subjugated and abused at the

hands of the colonial enterprise. This kind of artistic response, accompanied by ekphrastic descriptions of the Black enslaved woman, is shocking for the reader. This shock has the power to ignite change, and Almeida uses this potential to produce counter-narratives to the representations of Black women's bodies in the colonial archive (Vicente 41). In this way, she also assumes the role as post-colonial educator, as conceptualized by Khan, by presenting an open and critical dialogue on postmemory and the memory of Black women, which has been marginalized for centuries (48).

Conclusion

This article has analyzed the representations of Black women's bodies in the Portuguese-speaking world through the postcolonial ekphrasis and word-image configurations that are present in the work of the Afrodescendant Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida. In the private sphere, photographs, or the imagining of non-existent family photographs, act as a means of understanding the past and present and of distorting the line between fact and fiction. By returning to these photos later in life, the narrator expresses a desire to find a place of belonging, especially when the national narrative excludes her because of the color of her skin. Photography is presented as a contested medium, and this article has demonstrated its dual ability; it can be employed as a tool to subjugate, sexualize, and racialize women, particularly at the hands of the colonial enterprise, or to empower women. In the public sphere, Almeida tries to break the repetition of the past and the colonial gaze through her ekphrastic passages, word-image configurations, and by the editing of photos from the colonial archive. In the private sphere of the family photo album, photography can be employed to empower Afrodescendants, particularly when they hold the right to represent. A comparison of public and private spaces also reveals the effect that the sexualization and racialization of Black women's bodies in the public space have on a young, Afrodescendant woman growing up in a European nation that presents itself as white. Mila's response to her hair in photos is a direct product of the centuries of negative representations of Black women's bodies.

Ideally Almeida's "counter-narrative photographic practices," as well as those of other Afrodescendants, will reach a level of circulation that gives them the visibility and the power to counteract new visual cultures, which, as Gilroy has highlighted, "re-incarnate" racial differences (Vicente 41, Gilroy xii). To overcome the othering portrayals of Afrodescendants and Africans, the right to represent

and reproduce photographs of Black women's bodies must lie with those who engage with a critical, interventional conversation on memory and postmemory, as Almeida has successfully done (Khan 48). The "photographic pact" between photographer and model should be a consensual agreement in which the model holds the right to consent or refuse (Jaguaribe and Lissvosky 75-77). Almeida's intermedial references of postcolonial ekphrasis and word-configurations are complex and layered, which provokes a level of ambiguity for the reader regarding the relationship between photographer and model, as well as fact and fiction. This forces the reader of both image and text to rethink the ethics of representation and the reproduction of colonial photographs, particularly in our increasingly digital world.

NOTES

1. Excerpts of this article originally formed part of my master's thesis entitled *Negotiating Diaspora in Female-Authored Writings of Postcolonial Iberia: A Comparison of Literary Works by Equatoguinean Ângela Nzambi and Angolan Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida* submitted in 2018 to Queen's University Belfast.

2. The situation of economic migrants and their daily life in Lisbon is represented in the documentary film *Lisboetas*, directed by Sérgio Tréfaut. It was awarded the prize for Best Portuguese Feature Film in the first edition of Indie Lisboa in 2004.

3. For instance, Angola was "discovered" in 1483.

4. More recently, Almeida has been joined by other novelists of Angolan descent in Portugal such as Kalaf Epalanga, who published *Os Brancos Também Sabem Dançar* (2017); Telma Tvon, author of *Um Preto Muito Português* (2017); and Yara Monteiro, author of *Essa Dama Bate Bué* (2018).

5. Many scholars read *Esse Cabelo* (2015) as a work of autobiographical fiction. The strongest advocate for an autobiographical reading of the novel is Vanessa Gatelli, who makes the claim that all the information she has located in interviews with the author "vão ao encontro da história narrada no livro." (3011-12). However, Milena Britto takes a more balanced view, claiming that: "Em certos momentos, a obra é um ensaio filosófico sobre o encontro das diferenças, em outros é uma ficcionalização do passado de seus avós, e em outros, ainda, suas próprias memórias" (216-17).

6. Between 2015-2018 Almeida regularly published *crônicas* through this online newspaper.

7. At the time of the submission of my master's thesis, Almeida had only published two books: *Esse Cabelo* (2015) and *Ajudar a Cair* (2017). This article does not explore the presence of postcolonial ekphrasis or word-image configurations in *Ajudar a Cair* (2017) or any subsequent book publications.

8. The collection *Geometrias da Memórias* was published as part of a series by the European Council Research Project MEMOIRS – *Filhos de Império e Pós-memórias Europeias*. This is a comparative research project that focuses on the memories of the descendants of those directly impacted by the decolonization of the former colonies of France, Belgium, and Portugal. One of the main aims of the project is to apply the term “postcolonial” not only to the former colonies, but also to Europe. See António Sousa Ribeiro and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro (2016).

9. For a discussion of the negative role of photography in the representation of the Back body in the colonial era, see Straub (2015); Makhubu (2016); and Vicente (2018).

10. The first reference to a passport photograph describes a photo that documents Mila’s departure from Angola to Portugal: “Trazia vestida uma camisola de lã amarela hoje reconhecível numa fotografia de passaporte em que impera um sorriso rasgado, próprio daquele desentendimento feliz quanto ao significando de se ser fotografado” (Almeida, *Esse Cabelo* 16).

11. For further examples of *crônicas* by Almeida that contain word-image configurations see “O apelo da colagem” (Jun. 2018); “Parto e resgate” (Mar. 2017) and “Uma fotografia com Mariam.” (Apr. 2018). However, this is not an exhaustive list.

12. Established in 2015, the portal digitally collates photographic collections related to Brazil from 1800-1930, in order to give visibility to documentary photography. See <http://brasilianafotografica.bn.br/>.

13. To view the photo edited by Almeida, which she entitles “A nua da Bahia,” see “Pérola sem rapariga” observador.pt/opiniao/perola-sem-rapariga/.

14. For direct access to Henschel’s original photo, see <https://brasilianafotografica.bn.gov.br/brasiliana/handle/20.500.12156.1/4502>.

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