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**Robbins, Sarah and Ann Ellis Pullen. *Nellie Arnott's Writings on Angola, 1905-1913: Missionary Narratives Linking Africa and America*. Parlor Press, 2011. Print.**

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*Nellie Arnott's Writing on Angola, 1905-1913: Missionary Narratives Linking Africa and America*, by authors Sarah Robbins and Ann Ellis Pullen, frames and showcases the public writings of one Protestant American Christian missionary, Nellie Arnott. Arnott wrote as she worked in what was then Portuguese-controlled, Catholic, Angola. Angola had been colonized by the Portuguese since the seventeenth century and remained so until a civil war that lasted from 1975 until 2002. In a series of introductory chapters, the authors provide a range of informational and theoretical interdisciplinary tools so readers can best engage with Arnott's round-robin circulated missionary letters, scrapbook entries, and articles for missionary magazines written exclusively by women missionaries for American women readers. Among these tools for reading Arnott's work the authors lay out are: the layered contexts of Arnott's far-flung audiences for the several genres she used to mediate her experience, Arnott's personal history as a devout, forward-thinking young woman and later a California wife and mother, and most ambitiously, the complicated power structures shaping discourse and language use among a range of stakeholders in colonized Angola where missionaries like Arnott also taught in the native language, Umbundu, among a group known as the Ovimbundu. The authors furthermore identify the "discursive gaps" that characterize Arnott's writing, and her shifting "authorial authority" as she inevitably used and resisted the tropes for writing home assigned to her by the US female-run missionary movement then coined, "Women's Work for Women." In doing so, Robbins and Pullen essentially curate an archive of the range of genres Arnott used to mediate her experience as a missionary, which is a largely unique structure for a historical case study.

Pullen and Robbins argue convincingly that Arnott's "self-positioning," marking her mercurial and even controversial "authorial authority," makes this case study most compelling. At the same time, the texts Arnott used to mediate her missionary career don't translate necessarily to a more universal and/ or more secular audience, when considering that, as the authors put it, "Arnott was...a liminal figure in a fluid space"(xxvii). As one result, Arnott's "writing reflects inconsistent self-positioning" as she wrote about the Angolan

landscape, customs among the Ovimbundu that both delighted and repulsed her, and also about the work of her Protestant colleagues, subjects for which her lens was constantly shifting with her evolving perspective (xxvii). Arnott wrote in order to manage her experience, but writing was also assigned to her as a member of a vast system of female professionals who produced a range of genres, including print and multi-modal. These were circulated for the unabashedly espoused purpose of empire building, inspired by a complex set of ideologies and resulting in some predictably mixed and immeasurable results. The profundity of Arnott's experience working and writing about her mission work is also inevitably "lost in translation," but the arrangement and care she took to lovingly preserve and arrange the texts she produced about Angola during and after her missionary career punctuates American archeologist James Deetz's argument that when examining history we can't always rely on what people report is true to determine their values, but rather the arrangement of the things they've left behind (260).

Arnott's case study and the methods Robbins and Pullen develop to better understand female missionary authors during their heyday in American culture is important to scholars of writing and to scholars of feminist rhetorics. Most obviously, this history can circumvent some troubling and proliferating presentism among scholars who study global encounters, and transnational discourse, in today's "contact zones" (Pratt). As Robbins and Pullen point out, "Globalization is hardly a new phenomenon...writers like Arnott were early practitioners of global communications bound up with both nation-enhancing and transnational social goals" (xxxii). The history of Angola is particularly understudied in part because longtime civil unrest has made the country a dangerous, if at the least intimidating, one to visit. Many of the secondary sources about the country are written in Portuguese, a language which is far afield for many scholars, and especially scholars of Composition and Rhetoric who, until recently, have focused their case studies primarily within the contexts of American culture. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the US woman-run missionary movement itself is understudied as a site for studying the consumption and production of female-authored texts. In its flourishing years between the Civil War and World War I, US women's missionary work was mediated by the prolific publishing of magazines and newsletters that was an empire unto itself. For example, the Congregational women's missionary board, which was an arm of the missionary board that supported Arnott's work in Angola, published the magazine *Mission Studies*, for which Arnott was a frequent contributor.

Arnott wrote home from Angola at the fragile peak of the American women's missionary movement, which by 1915 included the participation of over three million women, nearly just as this work became less mainstream

as World War I wound down in 1918. Warmongering, death and destruction promoted by Western and Christian nations contradicted a key belief underpinning women's work for women: that conversion to Christianity "could promote social betterment as well as spiritual salvation" (Robert 272). The blatant hypocrisy of Christian nations also undercut the assumption among middle-class American women working for missions about the superiority of Western Christian culture. Nearly at the same time, the passage of the nineteenth amendment promised American women opportunities for work and mobility in their own country as it became less fashionable, as well as ostensibly less necessary, for career-minded young women to travel to non-western nations to pursue interesting work opportunities.

While giving readers a taste for the authorship opportunities afforded a young female missionary during this time period, the Congregational missionaries' presence in Ovimbundu-Angola at the turn of the twentieth century when Arnott joined their endeavor in 1905 also provides a better education about the contradictory role of missionaries as colonizers during the last heydays of the American female-run missionary movement. As agents of colonialism and ushers of modernity, missionaries have also, "sought to protect peoples from the excesses of government and others" (Burridge 5). The missionary compounds and schools Arnott helped to develop during this time period were erected in the same historical period when the Portuguese government solidified an aggressive restructuring of their power centers in Angola, which had begun in the 1880s. Previously, the Portuguese had limited their entanglement with their Angolan colony to the coasts when involved with the slave trade, and later with general international trade of commodities after the slave trade was abolished. Former elite native Angolan rulers were among the Protestant missionaries' first converts. Angolan citizens who were educated in the Western style, some whom were professionals, also looked toward the missionaries to educate them, and presumably their families, when the Portuguese placed restrictions on them (Wheeler and Pélissier 100). It could be argued therefore that the young girls boarding with Arnott, who were unselfconsciously taught skills and behavior that could be labeled as too-modern, too-sexist and too-Western, also gained a degree of agency when at the school. The arguable necessity and usefulness of this type of mission work is nevertheless difficult if impossible to fully prove without the direct inclusion of these young women's voices with and among those like Arnott's, which is a methodological and ideological problem inherent to scholarship foregrounding the Western missionary perspectives that Roberts and Pullen also address.

When more or less celebrating the writing of a missionary who had some role in the global enterprise of Western colonization, Robbins and Pullen take on a significant scholarly challenge. As American culture and the academy

have become more secular, declarations of faith, or discussions of faith, have been either marginalized or relegated to the private realm. Yet the public dimension of religion, as well as the sanctioned culture of the home, was also pivotal to the development of the turn-of-the-century woman's missionary movement, a phenomenon accentuated by Robbin and Pullen's choice to feature Arnott's public writing even though she kept a diary, which the authors discuss but don't share entries from. Arnott's position as a Christian, and her opinion about the role of Bible teaching when engaging with non-Western people, was also typical among her fellow Congregationalists during this time. As an evangelical Christian, Arnott was also a "premillennialist," meaning that she believed in the "Second Coming" of Christ who would judge the living and the dead, a view which rationalized and exalted the work of missionaries who made it their business, quite literally, to encourage and administrate mass conversion to Christianity among non-western people. So Arnott's faith, like that of her colleagues, was inevitably intertwined with her work as writer and a teacher. Within the constructs of the turn of twentieth-century feminist-evangelism, women were considered the best ushers of Christianity to non-Western people because of the perceived interplay between femininity, mothering and authentic emotion. Relatedly, missionaries learned and taught native languages not so they could better understand the culture of their constituents, though this was a byproduct of language translation, but because religious conversions in native languages were considered more genuine. Witnessing and writing about this conversion inevitably topped off this ambitious enterprise among female missionaries during this time period.

Stories of conversion authored by missionaries like Arnott are made even more complicated to fully understand and entirely interpret because these writers conflated conversion to Christianity with the adoption of rather nebulous, Western-style behavior among their constituents, behavior that is difficult for any reader to identify as particularly spiritual. For example, when writing about the work of a mission-sponsored boarding school for Ovimbundu girls in a 1911 article published in *Mission Studies*, Arnott outlined the advantages experienced by the young women under her care because they had been separated from their own families and presumably these families' homemaking habits—or lack thereof. The lives of the girls boarding at the mission had been improving, Arnott observed, because these young women were learning to "wash, iron, make baskets [and] pots and to sew aside from their regular schoolwork" (qtd in Robbins and Pullen 221). Similar claims and observations made by historical missionaries working in and writing from colonized countries might trouble contemporary, secular readers to the extent that this writing becomes mostly or nearly unreadable. However, the methods of conversion sponsored by Western missionaries encouraged a type of social justice

and a significant degree of efficacy among the Ovimbundu who were taught to read and write in their native language, but again as part of the ultimate goal of Christian conversion. In another *Mission Studies* article Arnott wrote, for example, about setting up technologies such as typewriters and a type of printing press so the Ovimbundu could better read and write in Umbundu (qtd in Roberts and Pullen 219). Umbundu-educated Angolans who were taught by Protestant evangelicals like Arnott were threatening to Portuguese stakeholders who went so far as to outlaw the writing of Umbundu a few years after Arnott left the country, through a decree passed in 1921.

Measuring just a few of the major factors shaping literacy instruction and the production of rhetoric by women for women, and by Arnott in particular, in the “contact zone” of just one colonized country suggests that any smug critique of women imperfectly transcending borders, if inevitably, is all too easy from our armchairs. Resisting presumptuous or snap judgments of subjects whose work seems too audacious, too politically incorrect, too conservative, or even too radical, is related to a scholarly dilemma I have written about at length when studying the writing of Arnott’s contemporary, Janette Miller, who arrived in Angola in 1910. Miller wrote the same type of texts, for the same magazines, and about as much as Arnott, if not more, during relatively the same time period in and from the same region of Angola, where the two women at times actually rubbed elbows. Like Arnott, Miller maintained her passion for missionary work throughout her lifetime and in fact stayed in Angola until her death in 1969, working for various missionary enterprises and eventually establishing her own mission that she co-ran with an African woman and a Portuguese woman. As Miller’s missionary work deepened, her engagement with her American audiences became more fragmented, particularly after World War II, as she wrote home less and shared even fewer personal details than she had in her earlier texts. The “discursive gaps” characterizing Miller’s discourse written in the latter part of her missionary career widened to the extent that I hadn’t the tools to create a cohesive and factual narrative about her overall career. That Arnott returned to the United States, and continued to mediate her texts post-career, are among Roberts and Pullen’s advantages as scholars studying female missionary work written in a colonial context. Arnott’s longstanding, lifetime meta-analysis of her own story allow Roberts and Pullen to ethically repackage it within a larger story of female missionary work that is vast, fragmented and to some degree untellable because of the lost or missing voices of its more marginalized participants.

Given that I am also a scholar of another Protestant female missionary working in Portuguese-controlled, historical Angola, Robbins and Pullen might be preaching to a too-small choir. Readers who are intimidated by postcolonial theory, who aren’t fascinated with layers of power shaping the political

landscape of early twentieth-century Angola, or who are inevitably turned off by religious subjects, might also find the do-it-yourself structure of this book too much work. That is, readers access Arnott's archive only after Robbins and Pullen set up significant and multiple framing of its contexts. Readers might also question why the book features only one missionary's writing after learning that three million American women were reportedly engaged in some kind of missionary work during Arnott's missionary career. I'd argue, however, that the arrangement of this book, featuring the nuanced particulars of one woman's writing shaped by complex layers of material and ideological power structures, is not only thorough and responsible scholarship, but downright necessary.

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