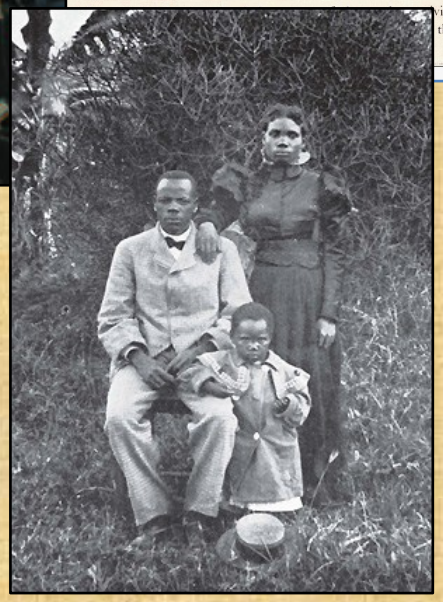
Nervous Conditions: Gender, Power, Resistance

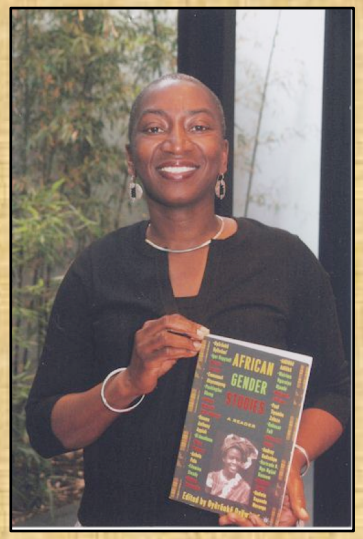
Colonial Discourse

Colonial Subjectivities

- Binary oppositions
- White/West as Modern
- Performance of roles
  - Orwell
- Mimicry and Ambivalence
  - The same but not quite/white



Nervous Conditions: Gender, Power, Resistance



Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí is a Nigerian academic whose primary intervention in feminist and postcolonial studies has been to challenge the application of 'Western' frames and models on to the analysis of African cultures and societies, foregrounding African perspectives and epistemologies. She is an Associate Professor at Stony Brook University, in the USA.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty was born in Mumbai, India in 1955 and studied in Nigeria, England and then the United States. She published "Under Western Eyes" as a graduate student, and it quickly became a key text in postcolonial studies and 'third wave feminism'. She is a Professor at Syracuse University in the USA.

Colonial Patriarchy

Patriarchy – 1) the structural, systematic and historical domination and exploitation of women by men; 2) the supposedly "proper" relations between men and women, women and women, men and men, that privileges the role and labour of men as having a greater value or significance than that of women – i.e. public sphere privileged over the domestic; waged labour privileged over unwaged.

Subject-Position: The idea that our individual identity is determined, regulated and reproduced as a structure of relationships (students, citizens, parents, women, aboriginal, etc)

Agency: refers to the capacity to act.

Performativity – refers to the process by which identities are enacted through repeated performance rather than inherently possessed or inhabited. Racial, gender, or sex roles are produced within an ideologically determined social "script"

Colonialism enforces gender binary and patriarchy(Oyěwùmí) Colonialism as a bio-logic (race/sex) – Gender inequality is colonial

- African ”women” experience colonial racism *and* colonial patriarchy (122)
- In Yoruba, there are no nouns for “man” and “woman; These English (cultural) concepts cannot be translated: ana-female/ana-male refer to difference in terms of sex (anatomical) (**124)**
- Colonial exclusion of “women” from political/judicial spheres (123-4)
  - Yorùbá pre-contact governance NOT gender-determined; Ìbàdàn ceded to British in treaty signed by Lanlatu (anafemale chief)
- Church run colonial education “lifted” boys into into wage-labour (clerks, pastors) and trained girls (helpmates, wives) (129)
  - By 1947, girls comprised only 25% of students in British colonial Yorùbáland – British attribute this to Yorùbá patriarchy, but….
- Post-Independence second-class status is rooted in the colonial categorization of “woman”; contrast with Western narrative that colonialism protected or helped African “women”

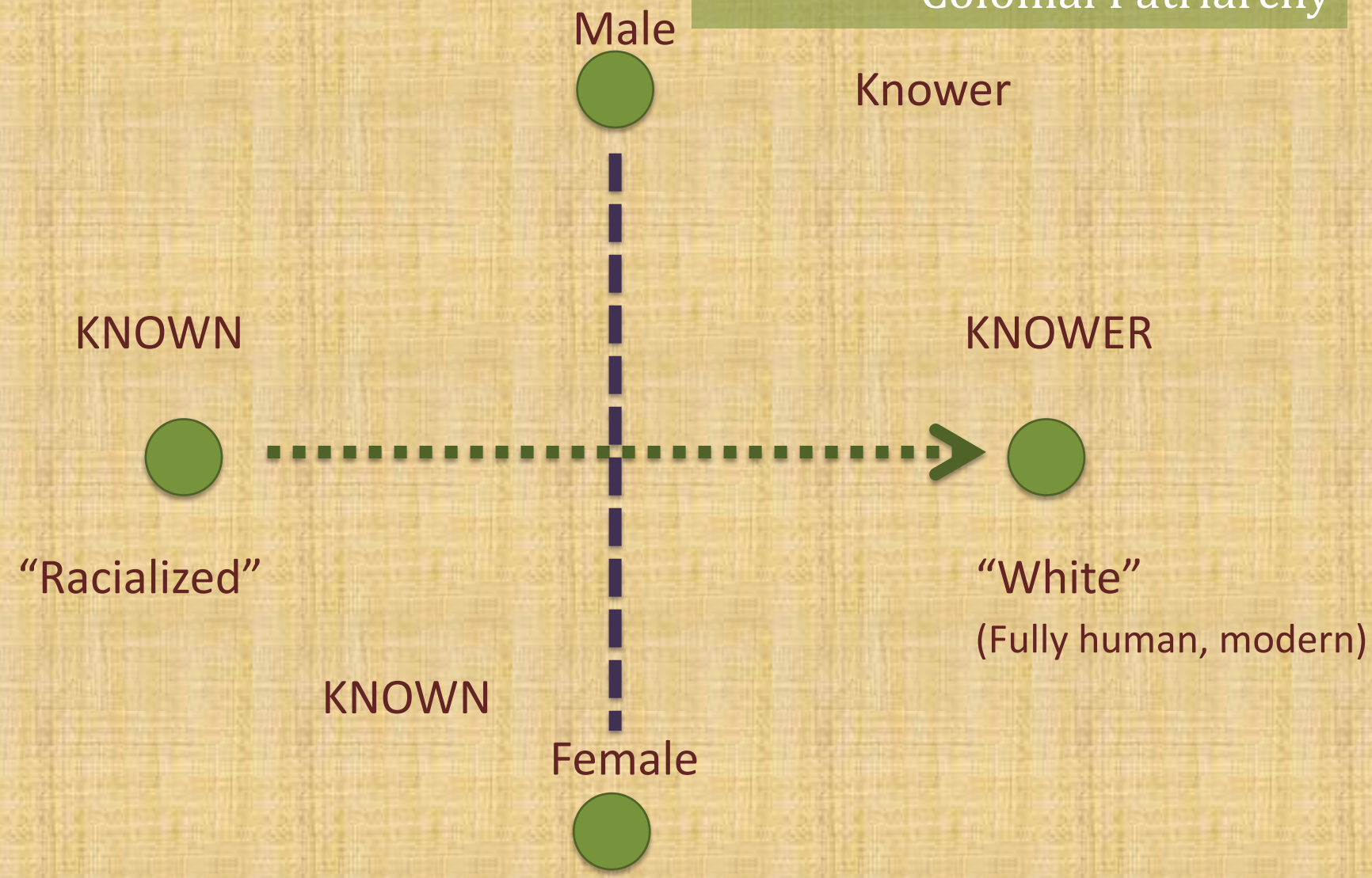
Colonial Patriarchy

"Non-White"

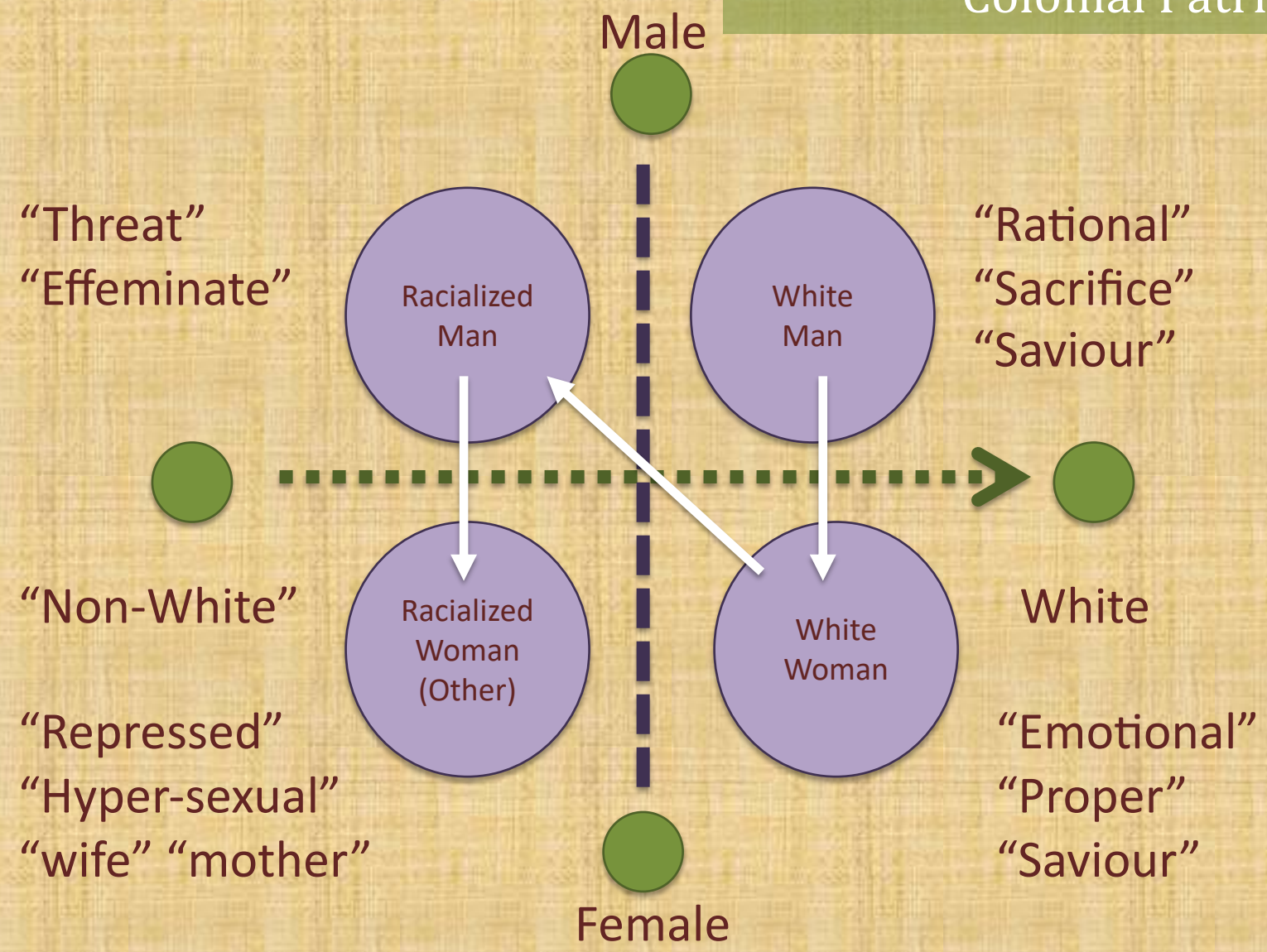
"White"
(fully human)
(modern)

"As long as the black man is among his own he has no occasion to experience being through others…" (Fanon)

Colonial Patriarchy

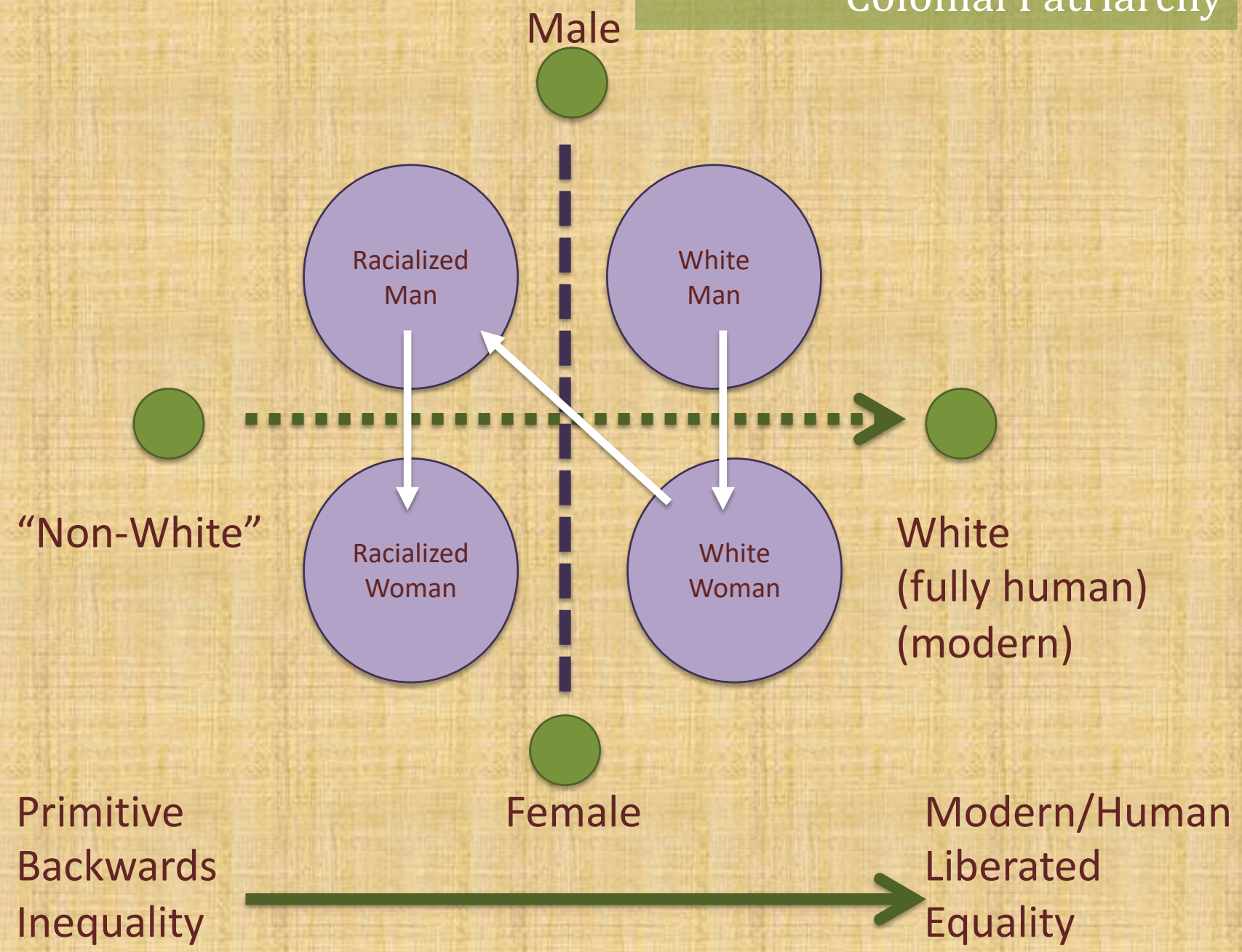


Colonial Patriarchy



Biologic of Colonialism – 4 categories of colonial hierarchy (Oyěwùmí 122)

Colonial Patriarchy



The Idea of the "Third World Woman" – a Mohanty

"the feminist writings I analyze discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'Third World Woman' – an image which appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse" (260; see 261)

- Cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy male dom. (260)
- Reductive and homogeneous notion of "Third World Difference" (260)
- To homogenize/systematize the oppression of women (262) is an act of power (260)
- Western Fem: The "average third world woman" against the ideal of the liberated Western woman as norm/model (261);
- **woman as always already constituted or "natural"**
  - Importance of contexts (262; e.g. mothering 263);
  - Male/Female produced within social relations (262)

The Idea of the "Third World Woman"

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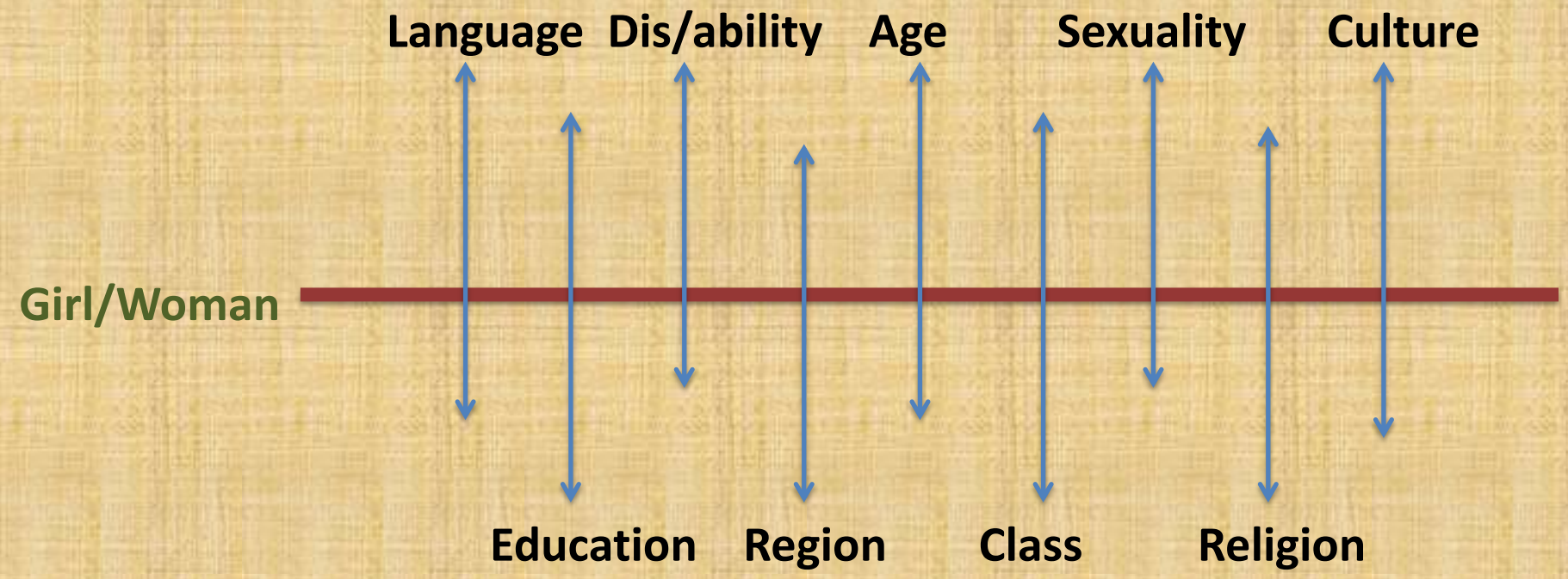
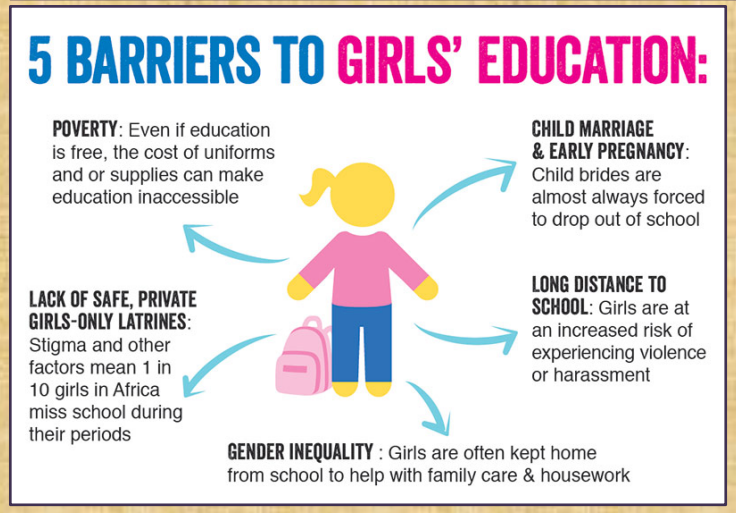
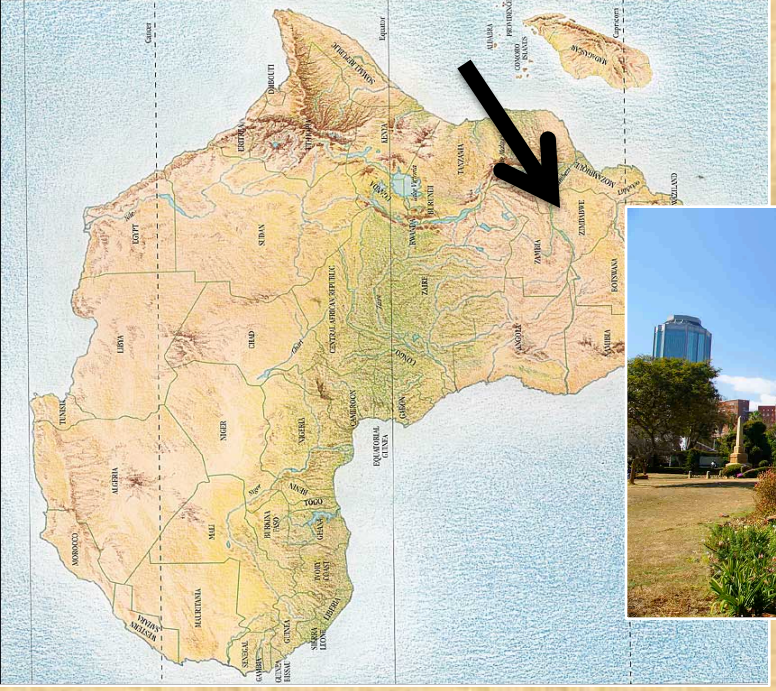


Western Feminism as Colonial



White Men/Women Saving Brown Women from Brown Men - Spivak



Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in Bulawayo, Rhodesia in 1959. She spent her early years in England and also did some of her university education there. *Nervous Conditions* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Africa) in 1989 and quickly became a canonical work of postcolonial fiction. She published a sequel, *The Book of Not,* in 2006. She is a writer, film-maker, and activist. She currently lives in Harare, Zimbabwe.

A Very Brief History of Zimbabwe

- Khami, Great Zimbabwe (11-1500 CE) and Dhlo-Dhlo civilizations
- 16th-19th CE - Rozwi State – Allied Shona “Tribes”
- 1834 Ndebele invade – rule of Lobengula
- British South Africa Company – trade and treaties
- 1885 –Establishment of (Southern) Rhodesia
- 1896 – first Chimurenga (Revolt)
- development of white settler colony – British colony

A Very Brief History of Zimbabwe

- 1965/1970 Ian Smith declares Rhodesia a white settler Republic
- 1970-1980 ZANU & ZAPU - second Chimurenga
- 1980 Zimbabwe Independence; Robert Mugabe becomes PM
- 1998 gvt/paramilitary land seizures; economic turmoil
- 1999-2004 emergence of MDC – opposition party /strikes/demos
- 2009 ZANU PF lose parliament majority; power-sharing with MDC
- 2017 – Mugabe deposed by military, with mass popular support

Nyasha: The Body as Marker of Identity/Status and Site of Oppression

- **127, 129** Lucia had managed to keep herself plump in spite of her tribulations
- **92** Nyasha compliments Tambu on her body
- **93** Nyasha does not want to become fat – food and class
- 112-115 dance, decency, Nyasha fights back
- 135 Nyasha believes that angles more attractive than curves
- 189/90 anorexia – "decency"
- **201** desire to be svelt and sensuous
- **202** bulimia

Bio-logic… race and gender categories emanate from the physical aspects of human reality. (Oyewùmí)

Sexual-political subjects constituted within/by social relations (Mohanty)

"As I began to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro" (Fanon)

Babamukuru:

Upholding (Whose?) Patriarchy

- **88-9** Father-role and social expectations
- 115-8 Disciplining Nyasha – 'decency'
- **161** Tambu's praise for him
- 163, 168-9, 171 – Babamukuru demands that Tambu's parents marry and he punishes Tambu for refusing to attend the wedding
- 120 – Babamukuru's psychological struggle
- 204 Nyasha explains that it is not his 'fault'

- 134, 145 TETE GLADY'S STATUS
- 165 reduced my parents to mockery
- Whites 105/6
- Grandmother story of the wizards - **18**