

Reviews

Arenas, Fernando. *Lusophone Africa: Beyond Independence*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Is it possible to account for the specificity of Lusophone Africa in the context of globalization and postcolonialism without relegating it to the “margins”? *Lusophone Africa: Beyond Independence* offers a thoughtful critical intervention on this topic by discussing the entanglement of each of the five Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa within a global condition of cross-cultural symbolic and material exchanges. This is done by reflecting on literature but also cinema and popular music, two vastly understudied fields of cultural production in these countries. The result is a highly nuanced, stimulating account of Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Guinea-Bissau, not only on an individual level, but also in relation to one another, as well as to other African regions, to reigning or emerging global economic powers such as Brazil, the United States, and China, and to global networks and flows of power.

For the academic reader already familiar with the field of Lusophone Africa, the book provides a multidimensional panoramic view of the complex transactions, interdependences and asymmetries between the five countries under discussion. This kind of reader is most likely to appreciate the illuminating analysis of the highly complex Lusophone South Atlantic geopolitics from the early nineteenth century onwards, which is done by drawing on key historical moments, such as Brazilian independence, the profitable slave trade, the continued weakening of Portuguese imperial power, and the competing alliances among Angolans in relation to Portugal and Brazil. But there is also plenty for the general reader who may not be entirely familiar with the histories and cultures of what is often referred to as “Portuguese-speaking Africa.” Lively and stimulating throughout, the analysis of these countries’ position on the geopolitical map of contemporary global forces is grounded in clear, concise introductory overviews of how Africa, Brazil, and Portugal have been tangled up from colonial times to the postcolonial present. Perhaps a stronger emphasis

on São Tomean and Guinean histories and cultures might have been helpful to the reader. In general, *Lusophone Africa* places more emphasis on Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique, while dedicating significantly less attention to São Tomé and Príncipe and Guinea-Bissau.

The four chapters in the book are transparently connected, and each one works well on its own. Chapter one offers a very well chosen set of coordinates to interpret the material covered in the ensuing chapters. It is also the most challenging in its clear but complex exploration of the ideological nexus between colonialism, racism, and Lusotropicalism, which, according to the author, will haunt the deliberations and transactions within the Lusophone community for years to come.

Chapter two sets the stage for an original discussion of the link between globalization, the world-music industry, and contemporary Cape Verdean music. Its key message is that the globalization of Cape Verdean music through Cesária Évora is a paradigmatic case of successful global/ local synergies. Arenas offers an overview of the cultural, geopolitical, and socioeconomic elements that have shaped the formation of the Cape Verdean society, with an emphasis on the diasporic condition intrinsic to the development of the nation and on Kriolu as one of the primary cultural products of Cape Verde. After spelling out the epistemological, geopolitical, economic, and cultural layers of the category “world music,” the chapter draws on the central figure of Cesária Évora, but also on promising younger voices such as Lura, Tcheka, Mayra Andrade, and Carmen Souza, arguing compellingly for the importance of studying popular music as a privileged site for the exploration of national identity and culture.

Chapter three turns its focus to film and to specific film directors such as Flora Gomes and Licínio Azevedo, providing a critical review of films that take place in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Angola. These are discussed against a historical background of cinema evolution in sub-Saharan Africa.

The final chapter privileges Angolan literature. It addresses a number of Angolan fictional works published between 2000 and 2006 by Pepetela, Manuel Rui, and Ondjaki, whose works creatively address the aftermath of colonialism and civil war, social justice, reconstruction, and democratization. Of note is the chapter’s emphasis on the role of “affect” in the relationship between postcolonial subjects and the experience of Portuguese colonialism.

On a general level, this volume could be read in the context of the debate around the impact of African postcolonial cultural production in the global marketplace. *Lusophone Africa* builds on earlier critiques of the term “postcolonial” (Dirlik, Mbembe), defending that “postcolonial theory” and “theories of globalization” are not mutually exclusive discursive domains, since they focus on interrelated phenomena. Arenas’s book constitutes a very important step toward successfully overcoming the critical misgivings expressed in studies such as Graham Huggan’s *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (Routledge, 2001), which interprets the processes of globalization from a postcolonial viewpoint, while further reinforcing the reification of Africa through its focus on the Anglophone West. For this very reason, it is regrettable that *Lusophone Africa* only implicitly acknowledges the role of gender and sexual difference in its analysis of the postcolonial condition and the effects of globalization. When discussing the work of Lura, for example, Arenas notes how her Cape Verdean identity is “a deeply constructed one” and adds that her “charisma, sensuousness and good looks” (84) are appealing to a global audience. However, the implied relationship between music, gender, nationality, and globalization is left largely untouched. In this respect, *Lusophone Africa* mirrors the tendency in current scholarly inquiry into patterns of global flow by neglecting case-study articulations of gender and sexual difference through the lens of globalization and postcolonialism. Because these factors are always implied but never directly addressed and theorised, they end up acting as a synonym for the “local” and the “feminine,” instead of signifying as politically meaningful variables that may account for more subtle, market-mediated patriarchal histories within patterns of global flow. The addition of this topic in a second edition of this otherwise excellent volume would be extremely welcome.

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