

**Duke, Dawn. *Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment: Toward a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008.**

Studies of the literature of women writers of African descent in the Americas have highlighted issues of objectification and subjectivity, silencing and voice, and individual development and collective mobilization within histories of colonialism, slavery and the African diaspora. Increasingly, while exploring these themes, scholars have noted the importance of poetry as the genre in which women writers of African descent have historically been the most productive. Such is the focus of Dawn Duke's study, which takes a comparative look at Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian women's poetic production in order to chart their development from written object to writing subject. By tracing the progression of the poetic voice and identifying common thematic approaches in the process of women's empowerment, Duke emphasizes what she terms a "woman-centered aesthetic" (11). The choice of Cuba and Brazil allows the author to draw on common textual approaches by women of African descent, as well as compare and contrast their responses to and engagement with social movements, national political discourses and black female activism in both countries, particularly during significant moments of political development. While Duke's study of the Brazilian case particularly highlights a close engagement with black activism and what she calls "a politicized aesthetic of Negritude" (14), the Cuban case examines the spaces where a black female agenda has developed and its navigation of the revolutionary discourse. As such, Duke's analysis complements comparative works like Jerome Branche's *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature* and anthologies like Miriam DeCosta-Willis's *Daughters of the Diaspora: Afro-Hispanic Writers*.

The study presents a history of the female poetic voice from colonial times to the present in three stages, through a timeline which chronologically maps important socio-histo-

ric and political moments impacting women of African descent in the Americas and their literary development from marginalized object to writing subject. The first stage focuses on complex gendered and racialized representations of black women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by male writers who represent the black female figure as voiceless, dependent, sexually promiscuous, and ultimately limited to three recurring models that determine her place in social and race relations: the tragic mulatta, the sensual mulatta and the black mammy. Duke's analysis of seminal texts ranging from *Francisco* (1839) to *Biografía de un Cimarrón* (1966) demonstrates the social and racial subordination of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian women in accordance with the ideological tenets of the time, and in this way it dialogues with Claudette Williams's *Charcoal and Cinnamon: The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature*.

The following chapter presents the second stage of "female literary voicing" (55) by analyzing the works of Afro-Brazilian writer Maria Firmina dos Reis and Afro-Cuban writer María Dámasa Jova Baró to demonstrate their contestation of social and economic hierarchies and their importance as precursors to the legacy of autonomy demonstrated in later literary texts discussed by Duke. As she notes, Dos Reis's still understudied novel *Ursula* (1859) counters Romantic prose representations of the subordinate black female by creating an African character who in subtle ways breaks out of the limiting representations of the enslaved women of the time and lays the foundation for "Afro-Brazilian female literary consciousness" (59) that would follow. Similarly, Duke emphasizes the ways in which Jova Baró's representations of gender issues (especially motherhood), nationalism, the motherland, and the social oppression of blacks break out of the objectifying representations of black and mulatta women in *negrista* verse.

Chapter Three's comparative studies of Nancy Morejón, Georgina Herrera and Excilia Saldaña further the articulation of a woman-centered poetics by emphasizing the complicated scenarios that affect Afro-Cuban female literary positio-

nality: relationship of the Afro-Cuban artists to the state, tensions of the personal and the political, the engagement with African legacy, and the role of Afro-Cuban women in the development of Cuban society. The second part of the chapter explores the existence of an Afro-Brazilian female poetics through the placement of more studied writers, like Miriam Alves, Conceição Evaristo and Carolina Maria de Jesus, alongside lesser-known authors like Geni Guimarães and Alva Rufino. By contrast with the Cuban case, Afro-Brazilian female poetic expression is tied to more overt critique of racial and gender marginalization and to social development of black activism, as evidenced by the creation of the journal *Cadernos Negros* and the organization Quilombhoje. In particular, Duke's analysis of the role of *Cadernos Negros* and black activist organizations for Afro-Brazilian women writers dialogues with Emanuelle Oliveira's book *Writing Identity: The Politics of Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literature*.

Chapter Four sets the foundation of a woman-centered poetics through a study of specific poems by Morejón, Herrera, Esmeralda Ribeiro, Rufino, Guimarães, Evaristo and Alves. This female-centered discourse has several important elements: an emphasis on empowerment, leadership and participation; a shift to a celebration of achievement and black women's sexuality in all aspects; positing the central role of the black female subject in narratives of national identity; and an invocation of and dialogue with African-born voices that emphasize purpose and resistance to oppression. These strategies are illustrated through careful analysis that includes the female journey to Afro-Cuban subject in Morejón's "Mujer negra" alongside Saldaña's lesser-known poem "La noche" and in dialogue with the poetic representations of historic Afro-Brazilian figure Luiza Mahin by Rufino and Alves.

While the linking of the Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian feminine poetics has set the stage for a crossing of national and linguistic boundaries from the start, in Chapter Five Duke expands the outward application of this counter-discourse to larger collectivities that include the Anglophone

## Reviews

Caribbean, as in Morejón's *Cuadernos de Grenada/Grenada Notebook*. The study further analyzes links to Africa in this poetics and places them alongside strategies that challenge hierarchical discourses of race, gender and the nation. Ultimately, Duke's articulation of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian women poets' shared strategies of empowerment, voice and subjectivity in dialogue with specific social, political and historical discourses contributes significantly to the understanding of Afro-Latin American women's literary production, contestation of literary silencing, and navigation of the personal and political dimensions of art.

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***Women in the Portuguese Colonial Empire: The Theatre of Shadows.* Ed. Clara Sarmiento. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.**

This collection of essays provides a useful multidisciplinary approach to the retrieval of women's voices and experiences in the history of Portuguese colonialism. The analysis of women's life histories and cultural interventions remains an ongoing priority for the study of Portugal's empire and this volume is certainly a welcome contribution to the field. Its methodological approaches cover social and cultural history, literary studies, law and anthropology. The majority of essays deal with Brazil, but there are also pieces on Portugal, Mozambique, Angola, Macau, East Timor and Goa. The book is subdivided into three discipline-based sections.

Part One, covering "Female Slavery," is the strongest and most cogent. These authors have drawn, in the main, on original archive-based research to bring new data to light and conduct insightful analyses which will facilitate further scholarship. Maria Ângela de Faria Grillo explores the Pernambucan press to render a moving account of female slave trading and maltreatment in the late nineteenth century. Daniela Buono Calainho uses Portuguese Inquisition records to review the practices and uses of witchcraft among black