

Book Review

Ferreira, Ana Paula. *Women Writing Portuguese Colonialism in Africa.* Liverpool UP, 2020.

Women Writing Portuguese Colonialism in Africa is a vanguard study that “traces the response of women writers, journalists, and activists to the colonization, the anti-colonial opposition, and the decolonization of African territories ruled by Portugal in the period ensuing from the Berlin Conference 1884–1885” (4). Using over a century’s worth of texts written by and about women in the context of Portuguese colonialism, this book provides both depth and breadth of knowledge that fills an important gap in colonial cultural studies: how to “construct a memory of a past that is systematically occluded by the gender politics that continue to dominate the ways in which Portuguese colonialism in Africa is evoked—or, rather, silenced in name of the colonial father” (11). Most importantly, this book focuses not only on the “what”—namely, women writing Portuguese colonialism—but also on the all-important why: why is the image or role of the woman so crucial to understanding Portuguese colonialism as a whole?

A renowned scholar of decolonial studies of Lusophone literature and cultures who has also published widely on the themes of women, feminisms, and Late Empire, Ana Paula Ferreira uses a broad body of literary artifacts in this book to skillfully weave a very complex narrative that shaped and was shaped by significant periods of Portuguese colonialism in a way yet unseen in present cultural studies on the subject. Each chapter in this book is meticulously and conscientiously constructed through a process of radical contextualization in which “literary works as well as other cultural products are treated as assumed entry points into a context,” which is then woven into a “story [that] is intimated in discontinuous and non-causal ways by the analysis of stories that women write about Portuguese colonialism in Africa and its aftermath” (3). Furthermore, each chapter has several sub-parts, all of which are organized by linking major chronological periods with corresponding events or ideologies.

The first chapter, “Women’s Education, Nation and Late Empire,” provides a detailed overview of the role of women in Portuguese society during the latter half of the nineteenth century by focusing on the societal impacts evidenced by Eça de Queirós, Ramalho Ortigão, and Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho, among others, on the lack of education for women and its cultural and political consequences. Chapter 2, “Colonial Literature and Women: Variations on a Theme” focuses on how women and idealized perceptions of women influenced colonial propaganda and discourse, portraying women as “good homemakers” and the “regenerated, eugenic Portuguese wife-mother” (53). The predominant analyses in these chapters focus on several key works of women writers Guilhermina de Azeredo and Maria Archer, who both had first-hand experience living in African colonies before returning to write in mainland Portugal. The third chapter, “‘Making Empire Respectable’: Between Miscegenation and Lusotropicalism,” explores the works of three women authors—Maria Lamas, Maria Archer, and Maria da Graça Freire—to show how these works were used to simultaneously propagate miscegenation (specifically, “convincing families to emigrate and develop African colonies meant for settlement”) and also challenge fundamental aspects of Lusotropicalism (80).

Chapter 4, “The Coloniality of Gender and the Colonial War,” centers its principal argument on how the seminal work *New Portuguese Letters* by the “three Marias”—Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta, and Maria Velho da Costa—exposes a complex, gendered power matrix where “everyone may be involved in supporting the colonial war out there in the Portuguese African colonies by the degree to which, closer to home and more intimately, they are involved in the host of varying and moving relations of inequality in society” (119). Ferreira uses real-life cultural artifacts collected during this wartime period to show the power of literature in capturing, personalizing, and contextualizing the intimate details of everyday life. This showcases how women helped shape the evolving colonial ideology that continued to perpetuate the Colonial Wars. Finally, in Chapter 5, “Lusotropicalist Entanglements in the Post-Colonial Metropole,” Ferreira “examines the entanglement of post-empire Lusotropicalism and racism, calling specific attention to its radically gendered and sexualized underpinnings” (143). Again, she uses three literary texts by three women authors—Maria Teresa Horta, Maria Velho da Costa, and Lídia Jorge—to propel her argument that the culture of memory that predominantly defined

this post-colonial period was rife with issues of conscious forgetfulness, racism, and often conflicting gendered norms as both the African ex-colonies and Portugal grappled with their new identities as separate nations.

This study adds significant depth to the field of Portuguese colonial studies and is a seminal text for a wide range of scholars, due to its carefully gathered and analyzed data sources. It adds much-needed context to a still predominantly male-structured view of Portuguese colonialism and fills a void in women's and feminist studies as well by focusing very consciously on Portuguese women writing Portuguese colonialism.

Rebecca Jones-Kellogg

United States Military Academy at West Point