

Book Review

Aidoo, Lamonte, and Daniel F. Silva, editors. *Lusophone African Short Stories and Poetry after Independence: Decolonial Destinies*. Anthem Press, 2021.

For too long, debates in the field of Lusophone African studies tried to stay independent from the ideas of race or racism. Partly, this may have been a response to the fact that a great number of the prominent authors from Angola, Mozambique, or Cabo Verde were, and still are, doing their business within the Portuguese literary industry, both in material and affective terms: They publish their books in Portugal, with Portuguese publishers, and they sell them to a Portuguese audience—the kind of audience that had been instructed over the course of nearly five decades to make its self-image consistent with the New State claim that Portugal was historically a non-racist society. Also, it is worth saying, many of these celebrated authors are white, or mixed, which implicitly vouches for the idea—formulated by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre—that the Portuguese colonial structure was particularly prone to offer the colonized peoples of Africa the perks of a pluricontinental, multiracial, and mild-mannered environment. But, in recent years, this power dynamic has shifted, and we now have texts available that examine the cultural production of Portuguese-speaking Africa against the backdrop of a decolonial standpoint. The anthology *Lusophone African Short Stories and Poetry after Independence: Decolonial Destinies* is just such an example.

The collection was edited by Lamonte Aidoo (Duke University) and Daniel F. Silva (Middlebury College), who were also responsible for the selection, translation, and paratexts. This is the latest contribution of two authors who have, over the last few years, enriched the academic conversation both individually and jointly with some of the most interesting critical approaches to the intersections of race, gender, and class in the Lusophone African and Brazilian contexts. Comprising a selection of short stories and poems, *Lusophone African Short Stories and Poetry after Independence* covers twenty-five writers from five Portuguese-speaking African countries. The volume starts off with a comprehensive introduction to the context of the anticolonial struggle in

Lusophone Africa. Then, it divides into five geopolitical parts—Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé e Príncipe. Each part, in turn, is subdivided into five chapters, each featuring one author, properly introduced by a concise yet informative and remarkably well-crafted biobibliographical note. At the end, we find a useful appendix with a supplementary list of readings.

This anthology is an attempt to unsettle the kinds of ideas that usually decide who or what of the Portuguese-speaking African literary scene gets to be translated and be the subject of scholarly attention. To that end, it brings together authors that have long been considered canonical and authors that have barely received critical attention, let alone been translated. According to the editors, the works included in the volume share a common thread, since all can be placed “within a long, yet fraught and fragmented, history of power (and resistance to it); one that encompasses the overlapping of settler colonialism, racializing processes, structures and cultures of white supremacy, the African slave trade, ethnic genocide, racialized and gendered divisions of labor, systematic seizure of markets, and late capitalist and neo-colonial interventions” (7). This book was designed to weld together the claims that this set of works was important to challenging Portuguese national imperialism back in the day and that it can also be read in the context of the struggle for collective futures in the global south.

As to its merits, some remarks are in order. First, I want to praise the sheer quality of the translations. Aidoo and Silva did a great job rendering the texts into English, carrying through the style, the voice, and the intention of the originals. Also, one of the major strengths of this volume is that it is eminently political and holds to it from cover to cover. Its theoretical framework is explicitly and deeply grounded in the disciplinary matrix of decolonial studies, which operates as its key epistemological underpinning. Its purpose is to show how Lusophone African authors grasp the experience of coloniality and engage in decolonial interventions. This argument is made particularly eloquent and convincing in the final paragraphs of the introduction, where the editors make a relevant distinction between white African writers and non-white African writers with regard to reception by metropolitan audiences. Re-situating the most pervasive concepts and contexts of Lusophone African cultures, the introduction is a *tour de force* that paves the way for an audience not familiarized with these cultural and political spheres. Besides detailing the curatorial criteria, it situates Lusophone African literatures in the

global context of the anticolonial struggle. It offers a comprehensive assessment of Portuguese colonial endeavors and a condensed outline of literary history in Lusophone Africa. Both narratives put a twist on previous ones by examining them through the lenses of the anticolonial struggle and emphasizing how the encounter with these authors may contribute to ongoing critical debates and modes of engagement concerning coloniality.

Two critiques could be made: First, some of the ideas developed in the introduction stem from a dense theorization that broadens the history of Portuguese imperialism so much that it ends up smothering the object that it is attempting to mediate. This is what happens, for instance, when the interaction with the Arab world during the Middle Ages is reduced to the dynamics of racialization. While this revisionist stance is seemingly self-evident within this theoretical framework, it does not quite consider the complexity of historical facts, notably that the genesis of Portugal was the result of a political project, not an ethnic formation, and that ethnic/racial arguments only entered public discourse in the late nineteenth century. Second, despite bringing these literatures into the realm of internationalism, the geopolitical criteria followed by the editors strike me as a concession to the epistemic privilege of national literatures. Nonetheless, these are minor issues. Aidoo and Silva, reasonably enough, would likely respond to these points by saying that they reflect the nature of the anthology and support the political and cultural import of this book, as well as its implicit theory.

Overall, *Lusophone African Short Stories and Poetry after Independence* constitutes a timely and significant addition to the fields of Lusophone African Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Ethnic Studies. It fills a lacuna and offers a broader audience an insight into a wide set of cultural and literary experiences that were not available in English until now, contributing in several ways to the task of reimagining power and cultural interactions across the transatlantic world. It will be useful for instructors and researchers alike. In short, it is the kind of book anyone interested in Lusophone African literatures should keep on their shelf.

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