

Book Review

Helgesson, Stefan. *Decolonisations of Literature: Critical Practice in Africa and Brazil after 1945*. Liverpool UP, 2022.

Melo, Anita de, Ludmylla Lima, and John T. Maddox IV, editors. *Literary Connections between South Africa and the Lusophone World*. Lexington Books, 2022.

Santos, Emanuelle Rodrigues dos. *The Late Postcolonial Condition: Twenty-First-Century Reconfigurations in the Literatures of Portuguese-Speaking Africa*. Peter Lang, 2025.

Waller, Thomas. *Genres of Transition: Literature and Economy in Portuguese-Speaking Southern Africa*. Liverpool UP, 2024.

In recent years, scholars have examined the literatures of Portuguese-speaking Africa as a distinct cultural field with transnational connections to Africa and the African diaspora, the Global South, and the Lusophone world. This scholarship coincides with a key inflection point in the history of Portuguese-speaking Africa: the fiftieth anniversary of the Carnation Revolution that ended Portugal's Estado Novo and its colonial rule in Africa. As Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe commemorate a half-century of independence, critics are perceptively analyzing the distinctive features of these national literatures in Portuguese. This review essay evaluates three monographs and one edited volume, published from 2022 to 2025, that illustrate the potential of transnational and transatlantic comparisons.

Published in 2022 by Liverpool University Press, *Decolonisations of Literature: Critical Practice in Africa and Brazil after 1945* by Stefan Helgesson, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and professor of literature at Stockholm University, builds on his earlier study of Anglophone and Lusophone literatures in the 2009 monograph *Transnationalism in Southern African Literature* and his collaborative work on world literature in the 2015 volume edited with Pieter

Vermeulen and the 2019 book cowritten with Mads Rosendahl Thomsen. This new monograph astutely expands geographically to examine Brazil as a critical influence in South and East Africa. With a theoretical lens that aims to address “the worlding of literature as a concept” in contexts of decolonization (4), Helgesson focuses on how critics in South Africa, Brazil, Senegal, and Kenya conceive of literature’s position vis-à-vis local practices and cosmopolitan influences in the second half of the twentieth century. After the first chapter’s discussion of the local turn in Anglophone South African criticism, the second chapter posits Antonio Candido’s dialectical approach to originality and external influence in Brazilian literature as a counterpoint to critical developments in Africa. The third chapter responds to what Helgesson identifies as Brazilian criticism’s failure to see the implications of *négritude* for Brazilian literature by focusing on Léopold Senghor’s contributions to a conception of literature rooted in Africa. The fourth and final chapter examines how Black African critics in Nairobi, namely Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, contribute to recognizing the modernity of the vernacular. Although the book does not feature Portuguese-speaking Africa among its case studies, Helgesson concludes by advancing decolonizations of literature as a framework with the potential to enrich analyses of literatures across the Global South and, more specifically, from Portuguese-speaking Africa.

Helgesson’s comparative work on South Africa and Portuguese-speaking contexts is a key reference in *Literary Connections between South Africa and the Lusophone Africa*, a 2022 volume published by Lexington Press. Edited by Anita de Melo, a senior lecturer in Portuguese at the University of Cape Town; Ludmylla Lima, an associate professor of literatures in Portuguese at UNILAB-Bahia; and John T. Maddox IV, a professor of Spanish and African American studies at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, this book consists of a brief introduction and an afterword authored by the coeditors and nine chapters from contributors at universities in Brazil, Italy, Mozambique, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These scholars embrace a Global South framework that employs what Boaventura de Sousa Santos terms “epistemologies of the south,” ranging from Achille Mbembe’s concept of sovereignty to Walter D. Mignolo’s “border thinking.” The chapters posit novel comparisons between South Africa and Angola, Brazil, Mozambique, or Portugal, yet, in their brevity, they offer more limited glosses of the complex historical and political interactions between these contexts. Fernando Pessoa, who spent his childhood in Durban, is the subject of

two chapters, receiving more attention than the other Lusophone examples of Angolan Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, Mozambicans Lília Momplé and João Paulo Borges Coelho, Brazilian Chico Buarque, Portuguese António Quadros, and Portuguese American Richard Zimler. Among South African writers, Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee is featured in three chapters that compare his work to the writings of Buarque, Borges Coelho, and Quadros. This slim volume is admirable in its efforts to bring South Africa into conversation with Lusophone literatures, but its comparisons vary in their value with the links between Mozambique and South Africa proving the most solid.

Southern Africa serves as the geographical frame of comparison in Thomas Waller's *Genres of Transition: Literature and Economy in Portuguese-Speaking Southern Africa*, published by Liverpool University Press in 2024. Currently a Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow at University College Dublin and the editor of *Roberto Schwarz and World Literature: Critical Essays* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2024), Waller draws on Schwarz's concept of misplaced ideas and the Warwick Research Collective's work on world literature in *Genres of Transition*. The first chapter describes the southern African world-system before laying out the book's central argument that spectral and dystopian turns in Mozambican and Angolan fiction, respectively, serve as irrealist markers of the neoliberal transitions since the 1980s. By relating developments in Mozambican and Angolan literature to broader literary trends, specifically the history of magical realism in Latin America, the second chapter frames the rejection of social realist aesthetics in these Portuguese-speaking contexts as what Michel Löwy describes as "critical irrealism." After defining his theoretical concepts and contextualizing the region's economic and literary history in the first two chapters, Waller dedicates the book's second half to literary examples. Chapter 3 analyzes the spectral turn in Mozambican short fiction by Mia Couto, Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, and Suleiman Cassamo of the late 1980s, and chapter 4 examines the dystopian themes in Angolan novels by Pepetela, Ondjaki, and José Eduardo Agualusa of the mid-1990s to mid-2010s. Waller effectively employs ideas from Marxist literary criticism in his close readings of Mozambican short stories and Angolan novels without falling into overly deterministic analyses. While the first chapter serves as an introduction, the book lacks a discrete conclusion or afterword, so it ends without synthesizing its overall claims and stakes. A more robust conclusion would allow Waller to acknowledge recent political and economic developments in

Mozambique and Angola while suggesting paths for future research that address the project's absence of female writers and its relatively narrow temporal focus.

The most recent monograph, Emanuelle Rodrigues dos Santos's 2025 *The Late Postcolonial Condition: Twenty-First-Century Reconfigurations in the Literatures of Portuguese-Speaking Africa* (Peter Lang), similarly engages with ideas from the Warwick Collective and other scholars on world literature and postcolonial studies. Rather than limit her comparison to two countries or contexts, Santos includes all five Portuguese-speaking African nations (Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe) in her analysis. While broadening her study's geographic frame, she limits her readings to one illustrative novel from each country published between 1998 and 2012. Santos's corpus consists of internationally recognized writers (Angolan José Eduardo Agualusa and Mozambican João Paulo Coelho Borges) and lesser-known ones (Cabo Verdean Evel Rocha, São Tomean Albertino Bragança, and Bissau-Guinean Filomena Embaló). After an introduction identifying the scope of her study and summarizing the selected novels, chapter 1 justifies postcolonial studies as an appropriate framework for reading twenty-first-century African literature in Portuguese. Chapter 2 opens with a reflection on the positionality of literary criticism before examining how these novels project distinct views of the postcolonial state in contrast to earlier literary works aligned with anticolonial nationalism. Chapter 3 depicts violence as pervasive in postcolonial Portuguese-speaking Africa by analyzing how these novels represent state violence, gender violence, and memories of violence. Chapter 4 begins by differentiating how wealth functions under socialism and neoliberalism before arguing that, whether belonging to the state or to private individuals, it is an unavoidable structural factor in these narratives. Each chapter of literary examples addresses all five novels, which enriches the comparative method but also results in minor repetitions as the novels are reintroduced in different analytical contexts. Santos offers an original analysis of the late postcolonial condition as specific to the nations that compose Portuguese-speaking Africa via her focus on literary representations of the state, violence, and wealth.

Read together, these three monographs and one edited volume speak to the importance of African literature and criticism to Lusophone and Global South studies. Complementing each other with distinct comparative frameworks, these books share the following methodological and theoretical concerns: an interest in

world literature and the world-literary system, a search for epistemologies and theories specific to the contexts, and a focus on contemporary literature and criticism. While recognizing the need to include works by and about women or other marginalized populations, these studies nevertheless privilege male authors and critics. Their comparative approaches pave the way for future research that uncovers regional connections or South-South ties during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; foregrounds the voices and experiences of women, queer communities, and other underrepresented people; and explores how literature grapples with pressing global issues such as climate crisis and forced migration. Overall, these studies point to the vitality of the literatures of Portuguese-speaking Africa and the region's centrality to understanding our past, present, and future.

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