Notes de lecture

Maria Fernanda Afonso, *O conto moçambicano, escritas pós-coloniais*, Lisbon, Caminho, 2004, 495 p., ISBN 972-21-1634-7.

With Lusophone African studies gaining significant prominence in academe, this volume is a welcome addition to the field. It contributes a debate on short story writing in Mozambique within the framework of the country's internal tensions, social and political.

The book is divided into three sections. Part I, "O conto: espaços e linguagens", opens with a brief account of the emergence and evolution of the short story in Europe and South America, and then concentrates on an assessment of the propitious ground this genre enjoys in Africa, including Mozambique, a land where story telling is deeply rooted. Part II, "O conto moçambicano: as margens do texto", focuses on Lusophone short story production in Mozambique as a continuum in a hybrid combination of European and African elements, in which the former provide literary expression through which the latter's oral tradition is revisited and highlighted. Part III, "O conto moçambicano: memórias e discursos", looks at the Mozambican short story as a tool for cogitation on both colonial times and a post-independence experience marked by hope, disenchantment and search for national identity.

Two principal themes run through the different sections of the book. The first encapsulates the notion that narrative is at the core of the Mozambican way of life, with a didactic function. Mythical tales of primordial eras are the preferred means for the transmission of group heritage and values. The other main theme spanning the book's sections is articulated around the notion of the Portuguese presence and its European impact in an African context. It considers biological and cultural miscegenation. In addition to these two overarching themes, a number of other threads weave through the leading argument, as diverse as political unrest or the penetration of local popular speech into the Portuguese linguistic norm.

This volume is a commercial version of a doctoral dissertation. Despite skilful editorial work, there is a certain amount of repetition and redundancy, as often is the case in a text that was originated in another format. Notwithstanding, most pages make interesting reading, notably those on Mia Couto and Lília Momplé, amongst other writers. A particularly effective component is the reference section at the end of the book, where readers are offered a choice of trajectories. For example, one may track an itinerary through an index of authors or an index of topics. There is also an extensive classified bibliography, which provides a wealth of suggestions for additional reading on related issues. Overall, this is a unique contribution to Lusophone African studies, which also contains many pointers inviting scholars to pursue further the investigation of short story writing in Mozambique and its socio-cultural and political significance.

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