

## 30. Gender and the Circulation of African Lusophone Literature into the Portuguese Literary System

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When literary works travel from one geographical and linguistic literary circuit into another they, just like migrants, need to cross border controls in the form of literary and cultural gatekeepers and/or mediators (e.g. literary critique and consecration, publishing houses, translators, agents, book fairs etc.), which all affect their chance to make the journey. In addition to market conditions, literary circulation also encompasses various literary, cultural and socio-political processes, both regarding the source culture and the target culture, such as an author's access to subjective and literary agency in a society, geopolitical conditions, choice of source language and literary genre. Furthermore, the writer's nationality, gender and ethnicity are features that will condition their commodity value and influence the probability of their literature reaching a wider circulation.

The aim of this chapter is to map out the importance of gender as a mediating category in the circulation of literature, by the example of the migration of Mozambican literature (written in Portuguese) into the contemporary Portuguese book market. As such, it will outline some possible theoretical, methodological and gender political starting points for examining how the

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contemporary Portuguese literary community conceptualise and incorporate Mozambican literature into an imagined literary lusophone system.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, I will address how gender and ethnicity differences can function as mediating categories in the circulation processes of this literature.

The mapping that follows departs from the assumptions that, on one hand, a worldly directionality (desire)<sup>2</sup> is detectable in both the field of contemporary Portuguese literary criticism, as well as in the book market to inclusively conceptualise (by its parts) Luso-Brazilian-African literatures into a wider world literature in Portuguese. As such, it could be argued that the Portuguese literary community is expected to open up to inclusively incorporate also the vernacular specificities (for example, national languages, orality and rural culture) of African lusophone literature into its literary system. On the other hand, the intertwined gender and geopolitical power relations still imbedded in the lusophone literary system are of course problematic, considering that the contemporary idea of a lusophone community (*lusofonia*) is rooted in a common colonial historical past.

The theoretical and methodological framework for this mapping is informed by a combination of recent studies interested

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<sup>1</sup> Constituted by a contemporary body of literary works by internationally well-established authors Mia Couto and Paulina Chiziane from Mozambique, published in Portugal in 1990–2016. The date range is determined by the publication period of these authors, in Mozambique as well as in the Portuguese book market.

<sup>2</sup> This reflexion on a “worldly directionality and desire” is inspired by, and adopted from, Mariano Siskind’s concept “deseo del mundo” [desire for the world], which he derived from the writings of (Brazilian) Latin American authors of the nineteenth century. Siskind detected in this literature a universal tendency and directionality – “cosmopolitan desires” – which he argues is a common epistemological structure for literatures situated in, and written from, global peripheries. Although Siskind’s concept is constructed upon literary text production, it is perfectly transportable for explaining a similar directionality towards the world held in the Portuguese scholarly field of world literature and the book market. See Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 3.

in world literature and how literature travels between different literary systems (e.g. Damrosch, Mani, Buescu, addressed below), as well as by lusophone gender and postcolonial studies (e.g. Almeida, Owen, Martins, addressed below).

This latter perspective is important to this essay's parallel theoretical objective to contest the gender-blind readings that most of these paradigmatic studies in world literature thus far has fostered.

The absence of an implemented gender analysis in the area of world literature studies (so far) and its consequences could be analysed through various approaches.<sup>3</sup> This is a broad issue that has to be addressed in another article, though it could be concluded that the disinterest seems to have been mutual; literary gender scholars have also shown little interest (so far) in engaging with the concept of world literature. This is probably due to a scepticism towards the accumulated outcome of these studies. A fear that they would (again) be creating, and only be concerned with, a super canon (of mostly male writers from national canons) on a global scale, remitting historically marginalised literature (for example, of women authors) to the margins. The last decades' revitalisation of the research area of world literature studies has developed along different strands, and my interest here is not so much to criticise and point out problems following the lack of a gender perspective but rather to map out some points of relevance and usefulness that an integrated gender and ethnicity perspective can provide to these studies. Especially interesting, in this sense, is the recent study of Venkat B. Mani, *Recoding World Literature*, which, although not fostering an explicit gender perspective, nevertheless integrates a power perspective that opens up a theoretical framework for it. Mani conceptualises world literature as *bibliomigrancy*: "the physical and virtual migration of literature as books from one part of the world to another", works of literature that travel beyond their linguistic and cultural origins

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Debra A. Castillo, "Gender and Sexuality in World Literature", in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen et al. (London: Routledge, 2012), 393–403. See also the essay by Katarina Leppänen in this volume.

and are recoded with new meanings in the target culture.<sup>4</sup> Mani's perspective allows for acknowledging literature's important role of representing collective memory and ways of imagining and understanding the world, alongside the importance of the dimension of political and institutional power at the core of the literary circulation process:

world literature as a literary catalog of the world is far from a neutral, alphabetically organized bibliography of masterpieces translated into world languages. Translations of literary works into other languages and their circulation and reception beyond cultural and national origins do not happen in a historical, socio-cultural, or political vacuum.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to this, all literature is created, read, studied, interpreted, translated and marketed in communities and societies which are always historically and culturally situated, they are also, to a higher or lesser degree, organised and structured according to different social (hierarchical) categories. Therefore, a gender and ethnicity perspective on the processes of literature's circulation, translation and reception is relevant when investigating socio-political and geopolitical conditions of who gets translated and why. Depending on the general condition and social status of women in different societies and literary establishments, there could be many a *glass ceiling* to break through on the path to worldwide circulation of their literature. In Mozambique, Portuguese was established as the official language after independence in 1975, creating a literacy and democracy problem when a high rate of the population, especially women, could not read or write in Portuguese. In her study on Mozambican women writers, Hilary Owen points to several political and material paths responsible for the exclusion of women's experiences in the national literary discourse and, as a consequence, in the formation of the new Mozambican national identity:

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<sup>4</sup> Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 10–11.

<sup>5</sup> Mani, *Recoding World Literature*, 12.

Women's lack of access both to the Portuguese language as the means through which culture nationhood came to be imagined, and to written language as the means of its dissemination, were relevant factors in delimiting women's self-identification through nationhood as a narrated process.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to this marginalisation through the lack of access to the Portuguese language, there is the symbolic exclusion through various symbolic rhetorical figurations of African women in national and male literary discourses, representing a sexualised exotic and/or nostalgic image of Mother Africa. According to Owen, this "feminine fetish image [was] equally available to colonial and anticolonial nationalism" in Mozambique which further hampered women's access to literary and political agency and subjectivity.<sup>7</sup> These are some examples of how one's accessibility to literary agency can be restricted by a gender identity, which further affects the ability for the literary experience of women to circulate, or even to be written in the first place.

### **Towards an Inclusive World Literature in Portuguese**

Recent Portuguese and lusophone literary studies, aspiring to revitalise the research area of literary history and criticism, expresses a worldly directionality of situating literature written in Portuguese into a wider world literary system. Mainly this is being done by broadening the scope of literary studies by moving away from conceptualising literature and authors within an exclusively national framework, instead, suggesting that all national literatures written in Portuguese should be studied in a comparative manner in a global network of cultural exchange that could be conceptualised as "worlding literatures in Portuguese".<sup>8</sup> Likewise, a newly published collection of essays on rethinking literary history writing suggests: "[i]nstead of privileging the writing of the

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<sup>6</sup> Hilary Owen, *Mother Africa, Father Marx: Women's Writing of Mozambique, 1948–2002* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Owen, *Mother Africa, Father Marx*, 21–25.

<sup>8</sup> Helena Buescu, "Worlding Literatures in Portuguese", *1616: Anuario de Literatura Comparada*, 3 (2013): 19–31.

national literary history of Portugal, or Brazil, or of Mozambique, or of Angola, and so forth and so on, we should privilege the study of the interrelations and crossings that constitute the lusophone predicament”.<sup>9</sup> However, in spite of the discernible aspiration, on a global scale, of being more inclusive, using sophisticated theoretical tools to advocate for the diversity and plurality of literatures in Portuguese, a gender consciousness is not yet part of the theoretical framework in any of these studies.

A shift to inclusively categorise Portuguese, Brazilian and Lusof African literatures into its own linguistic “world literature in Portuguese”, could give these (by its parts) peripheral literatures a stronger platform and visibility, both in cultural as well as economical terms, in a global landscape. On the other hand, the idea of defining cultural expressions from Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea Bissau and East Timor into a lusophone community is not new. In this sense, the idea of founding a cultural community on its historical roots of linguistic and cultural (colonial) affinities go way back and has historically and situationally expressed itself in many different forms and served different political interests.<sup>10</sup> The current idea of a lusophone community (*lusofonia*), based on common

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<sup>9</sup> João Cezar de Castro Rocha, introduction to “*Literary Histories in Portuguese*”, *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies* 26 (2014): 2.

<sup>10</sup> It is not possible here to address the various ideas (cultural theories) that resemble the current meaning of *lusofonia*. Some, though, are of great importance for this kind of study, and this points at gender issues as crucial for its constitution, such as the ideas of Gilberto Freyre’s *lusotropicalism*, being a theory of a specific (national) identity for people colonised by Portugal. These ideas continue to influence and take various forms in the identity formation of Portuguese-speaking postcolonial societies. At its core is the idea of the Portuguese colonisers’ racial mixing with the colonised as a token for their more “humane” approach to the colonised. An idea of miscegenation that in the reality played itself out in an (violent) unequal (racist) sexual relation between the white male coloniser and the black colonised woman. See, e.g. Miguel Vale de Almeida, *An Earth-Colored Sea: “Race” Culture, and the Politics of Identity in the Postcolonial Portuguese-speaking World*. (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004).

historical, linguistic and cultural foundations is promoted by cultural and political institutions in Portuguese-speaking countries.<sup>11</sup>

However, several gender and postcolonial studies have drawn the attention to the importance of decolonising (racially and sexually) the notion of *lusofonia*, on the basis that it still maintains reminiscences of its hierarchical (colonial) power structure.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, many of the writers from Mozambique and Angola have contested the label of being a “lusophone writer” or writing “lusophone literature”, among them, Paulina Chiziane and Mia Couto. The latter approaches and problematises the question of *lusofonia* through the idea of embracing cultural inclusion and linguistic diversity: “For the lusophone project to be relevant in Mozambique, it must support the defence of other Mozambican cultures”. (“Para que o projeto da lusofonia funcione em Moçambique, ele deve apoiar a defesa de outras culturas moçambicanas”).<sup>13</sup> It is then important from an ethical perspective to problematise *lusofonia*, in gender and geopolitical terms, and recognise that it often is implemented with cultural indifference in the hegemonic Portuguese literary community.<sup>14</sup>

As David Damrosch has pointed out, when literary works cross borders it “involves shifting relations both of literary history and cultural power. Works rarely cross borders on the basis of full equality”.<sup>15</sup> This is even more intricate when considering the circulation of works within a limited (although widespread globally)

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<sup>11</sup> See CPLP, Comunidade dos Países da língua Portuguesa homepage: <https://www.cplp.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g. Almeida, *An Earth-Colored Sea*; Ana Margarida Martins, *Magic Stones and Flying Snakes: Gender and the Postcolonial Exotic in the Work of Paulina Chiziane and Lídia Jorge* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), 6; Alfredo Margarido, *A Lusofonia e os Lusófonos: Novos Mitos Portugueses* (Lisboa: Edições Universitárias Lusófonas, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Mia Couto, “Luso-Afonias – A Lusofonia entre Viagens e Crimes”, in *E se Obama Fosse Africano: Interinvenções* (Alfragide: Editorial Caminho, 2009), 194.

<sup>14</sup> What complicates the use of “lusophone” even further is that it is also used as an adjective, in a neutral manner, to designate all African literatures written in Portuguese for practical reasons, not having to name all the countries in referring to them.

<sup>15</sup> Damrosch, *What Is World Literature*, 24.

linguistic community founded on a common colonial historical past. The centre/periphery within the lusophone system, in economic and cultural terms, is as prevalent as in any other linguistic system rooted in the colonial enterprise. However, as Jean-Marc Moura concludes when comparing the francophone literary system with the lusophone literary system, the latter appears to be “poly-centric”. That is, while the francophone system is organised through one centre (France) the lusophone contains two centres (Portugal and Brazil). Still, according to Moura, this also means that Brazilian authors do not need to be recognised in Portugal and vice-versa for their wider consecration and circulation. African authors, however, are still dependent on being recognised in one of these two centres to enable their dissemination into a world market through translation.<sup>16</sup>

For various historical, political and socio-economic reasons, the main market for African literatures written in Portuguese have until recently exclusively been the Portuguese book market, although lately the Brazilian book market also shows a rapidly increasing interest in this literature. There is then a relation of dependency between the dissemination of this African literature and the lusophone literary system, much like the one Moura concludes in relation to the francophone situation that the “institutional system facilitates the circulation of writers and works within the French-speaking world”.<sup>17</sup> Portugal’s cultural institutions, like Camões give financial support for publishing translations of Portuguese as well as African literature written in Portuguese into other languages. The “lusophone literary system”, that is, the current institutional character of the Portuguese-speaking literary community, can then be said to still incorporate a cultural inequality. It remains to be seen if a methodological shift towards

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<sup>16</sup> Jean-Marc Moura, “French-Language Writing and the Francophone Literary System”, *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 14, no. 1 (2010): 31.

<sup>17</sup> Moura, Francophone Literary System, 31. See also, Ellen Sapega, “Que mundo? Apontamentos sobre a recepção e a circulação da literatura e cultura caboverdianas”, in *Literaturas Insulares: Leituras e Escritas de Cabo Verde e São Tomé e Príncipe*, ed. Margarida C. Ribeiro et al. (Porto: Afrontamento, 2011), 107.

to conceptualise and read this literature in the framework of a “world literature written in Portuguese” have a potential for harbouring a more inclusive and egalitarian approach.

### Short Notes on Gender and Commodification Processes

The format of this text does not allow for a gender-critical approach to the variety of disciplinary theoretical frameworks engaged in explaining how literature circulates across borders. However, as noted, a gender- and ethnicity-critical perspective has not been prevalent in the most influential studies in, for example, those of literary sociology conducted by Gisèle Sapiro and Gérard Genette.<sup>18</sup> In the analysis that follows, the aim is to provide some examples of how gender and ethnicity function as mediating categories in the commodification processes of Mozambican literature.

Shifting the attention to the Portuguese literary book market and its marketing strategies, the same worldly directionality as observed before to conceptualise literatures written in Portuguese into a common entity can be detected. Entering a book store in Lisbon in 2017 shows an increased tendency of reorganising the categorisation of literatures written in the Portuguese language. From being organised by nationality, Portuguese, Brazilian, Luso-African literature, these literatures can now be found indiscriminately by author, in alphabetic order under “Literatura Lusófona”.<sup>19</sup> The largest publishing house in Portugal of African literature in Portuguese, Caminho, is also undergoing a change in relation to its packaging of this literature. Until very recently, it was organised in a special book series, which by name signalled

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<sup>18</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, “The Sociology of Translation”, in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. Sandra Bermann et al. (Blackwell: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2014), 82–94. Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> This is a general observation, conducted in 2017, that still contains some varieties. For example, the high prestige Livraria Bertrand and Livraria Buchholz still maintain the distinction between national (Portuguese) and foreign literature written in Portuguese (as lusophone), whereas more recently established book stores, like FNAC Portugal and Pó dos Livros and others organise all literature written in Portuguese as lusophone literature.

its geo-marginal status: “Outras margens” (Other margins), and a uniform blue book cover containing an African design or artwork. Today the African authors published by Caminho could be considered more integrated in the Portuguese literary system by no longer being published in a separate series. Nevertheless, the new and recent designs on the book covers of Mia Couto’s and Paulina Chiziane’s novels still contain images transmitting a strong ethnic and gendered identity of “africanness”.

This recent development in the packaging of literature on the Portuguese book market consists of giving each author a specially designed theme on their covers, which makes it easy for the reader to quickly identify a book and connect it with a specific author. This development towards an “individualised” book cover is not exclusive to African authors, rather it is ruled by the general increased predicament of brand thinking in the publishing industry. Authors have to work on, or at least be marketed (by the publisher) as, an exclusive brand, enhanced through representation in social media, at literary book fairs etc. This “branding”, in turn, seems to be conducted by an excavation (although superficial) of the singularity and specificity of an authorship. In Couto’s and Chiziane’s cases, this is achieved by emphasising vernacular elements, such as the geographical and local affiliation of the authors, as well as their gender identity.

The new editions of Mia Couto’s novels are designed in a strong colour (different for each book) with a graphic figure (in black) of a person, fauna or item that unmistakably connotes to a masculine sphere of the rural vernacular (exotic) Africa. Equally, the new editions of Paulina Chiziane’s books display variations of a graphic pattern of a traditional African cloth, transmitting a traditional African women’s sphere. The new designs on these book covers then highlight the vernacular and gendered features of their literature at the expense of their possible universal and cosmopolitan qualities, but at the same time, present a more a universal stereotyped image of Africa than a specific “Mozambiqueness”. In this sense, there is still a resemblance with the stereotyped covers, criticised by scholars, of the Heinemann’s African Writers Series (launched in 1962), which are described by Venkat B. Mani as containing “a particular ‘packaging’ of a continent [...] invocations of

‘ethnicized’ art reminiscent of Gauguin’s Tahiti-period against a bright orange background!”<sup>20</sup>

A gender and ethnicity analysis is also important to understand the complexity of other strands of the commodification processes in how this literature crosses borders, and I will end this mapping by providing some examples related to the authorship of Paulina Chiziane.

Chiziane’s literary work has been acknowledged internationally for its political and ethical commitment in discussing several topics of recent Mozambican history (colonial war, post-independence and civil war), intrinsically connected to the issues of national identity and racial and gender relations. All her writing departs from an explicit women-centred focus, which, by its gendered perspective, has provided a powerful rethinking of the transformation processes of the political systems in Mozambique.<sup>21</sup> A gender-informed analysis is therefore called for when investigating how her literature is recoded when migrating into new literary circuits.

In Portugal, Chiziane’s work is heavily marketed as an authentic (exotified) African literature written by a woman. In an important study on Chiziane’s authorship, Ana Margarida Martins addresses the commodification process and reception of Chiziane’s work in Portugal and shows the importance of a gender perspective to grasp Chiziane’s agency in this process. Although Martins’s study draws heavily on Huggan’s theories of the “postcolonial exotic” and the “global market reader”, she nevertheless criticises his lack of gender approach and suggests that it takes away the women writers’ “agency over the commodification of their work” and “neglects the writers’ strategic ways of turning their often multiple marginal (in the West) and central (in their own countries)

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<sup>20</sup> B. Venkat Mani, “Bibliomigrancy: Book series and the Making of World Literature”, in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D’haen et al. (London: Routledge, 2012), 292. Mani’s chapter contains a thorough critique of the series.

<sup>21</sup> See Martins, *Magic Stones and Flying Snakes*; and Owen, *Mother Africa, Father Marx*.

identities to their own advantage in situated contexts”.<sup>22</sup> Martins’s gender-oriented reading of Chiziane’s authorship calls for an understanding of how *strategic exoticism* (which emphasises gender and African identity) can be in place as a strategy both by the market forces, as well as a writer’s strategy in the commodification process. An example of this double process can be seen in a quotation by Chiziane, included in the author’s presentation on all her book covers (regardless of edition): “They say that I am a novelist and that I was the first Mozambican woman to write a novel, but I say: I am a storyteller and not a novelist. ... I am inspired by the tales from the bonfire” (“Dizem que sou romancista e que fui a primeira mulher moçambicana a escrever um romance, mas eu afirmo: sou contadora de estórias e não romancista. ... Inspiro-me nos contos à volta da fogueira”).<sup>23</sup>

The aim of this chapter was to map out some reading paths that consider the importance of gender as a mediating category in the circulation of literature from one literary (national) circuit into another. By addressing different parts of this journey, with special attention to literacy and the accessibility to subjective and literary agency, both in writing and in the commodification processes, I have wanted to show examples of how a gender analysis can contribute to a deeper understanding of literature’s migration process.

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<sup>22</sup> Martins, *Magic Stones and Flying Snakes*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> On all book covers, for example, Paulina Chiziane, *O Sétimo Juramento*. (Lisboa: Caminho, 2000).

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