

Book Review

Sousa, Sandra. *Ficções do Outro: Império, Raça e Subjectividade do Moçambique Colonial*. Lisbon: Esfera do Caos, 2015. Print.

Benefiting from a short but incisive and perspicacious preface by Leonor Simas-Almeida, *Ficções do Outro* is an important contribution to one of the most dynamic fields of Portuguese contemporary historiography, the one focused on the imperial and colonial pasts and their legacies. *Ficções do Outro* is another example of the high-quality research on the peoples and cultures of Portuguese-speaking countries and diasporas taking place outside Portugal and Lusophone countries, a process to which the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at Brown University, where the research behind this book was developed, has contributed significantly.

Side by side with excellent works on colonial photography (e.g. the volume edited by Filipa Lowndes Vicente, *O Império da Visão*, Edições 70), on popular culture (e.g. the research of Nuno Domingos, for instance *Futebol e colonialismo*, published by Imprensa de Ciências Sociais; and Marcos Cardão, *Fado Tropical*, published by Unipop), literature (e.g. the numerous contributions by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro), music (e.g. the research of Marissa J. Moorman) or cinema (e.g. Maria Carmo Piçarra's *Azuis Ultramarinos*, published by Edições 70), this book demonstrates the need to develop our understanding of the emergence and transformation of imperial and colonial cultures—their idioms and practices, their protagonists and institutional arrangements—and promote assessments that explore their intersections with political, social, and economic contexts and processes.

Clearly written and based on close reading, evading unnecessary jargon and inconsequential “theoretical” digressions, *Ficções do Outro* offers precise and solid arguments, which derive from original empirical research. It demonstrates the advantages of the historical contextualization of colonial literary production. At the same time, it reveals the benefits that one can obtain from using literary analysis as an instrument of historical interrogation and understanding. As a

consequence, Sandra Sousa's book invites the reader to ponder new and fruitful ways to articulate forms of enquiry frequently depicted as antagonistic or mutually exclusive: one focused on the social and economic spaces of cultural production, the other focused, more or less exclusively, on literary idioms and devices, methods and techniques.

Literary works in colonial contexts played an active role in the establishment, codification and dissemination of imperial social imaginaries (at the metropolises and within colonial societies), while being also crucial to the historical formation and categorization of racial identities and differences. The politics of difference within imperial formations were partially constrained, shaped or reinforced by modalities of literacy production. The understanding of these modalities requires a political, contextualized analysis of its production and circulation, its reception and uses. This literature necessarily questions established assumptions between literature and imperial and colonial politics; it necessarily promotes arguments about the politics of the literary—the institutional and ideological instrumental use of the literary—its historical uses and, of course, about the limits of such exercises.

Regarding this last aspect, the author is particularly apt in showing how the efforts, more or less organized and intentional, that aimed to institutionally vulgarize Lusotropical justifications were not successful in determining the content of the works analyzed in this research. These works are full of critical reflections about issues such as miscegenation, and gender, social and racial differentiation, for instance. In many senses, Lusotropicalism is overrated as a political, ideological, and historical phenomenon. *Ficções do Outro* offers several examples of the ways in which the relationships between the political and the literary evade operations of over-simplification, even in contexts characterized by cultures of authoritarianism and by deeply institutionalized modalities of ideological control, where propaganda is accompanied by censorship. In her analysis of award-winning authors and literary works connected to the contests of colonial literature promoted by the *Agência Geral das Colónias*—arguably the key institution that coordinated imperial and colonial propaganda (two different realities that need to be properly studied, and compared)—Sousa provides a rich observatory of these issues.

As the author notes, the literary works under appreciation offer scarce aesthetic rewards (with some exceptions: for instance, *Cacimbo* by Eduardo

Paixão). But they nonetheless constitute a fertile universe of examples of how the political, the historical, the ideological and, of course, the literary intersect and condition each other.

Ficções do Outro paves the way for new research. For instance, studies focused on the comparison between the engagements of the political and the literary in diverse imperial formations, and multiple colonial outposts, are needed. These engagements were, in an important sense, local, being determined by local political, sociocultural and economic conditions. A comparative assessment of colonial literature, of the historical production, promotion, reception and uses of literary works in colonial situations, is a crucial endeavor in our efforts to understand the (trans)formation of imperial and colonial cultures, and their relevance in the definition of related political, economic and social projects. It would also be fundamental to compare the literary works sponsored and promoted by the empire-state and those that formed alternative imperial and colonial narratives and histories. For instance, how was the colonial literary field organized from a cultural and economic point of view? Rodrigues Júnior's 1953 and 1962 analysis regarding the overseas literary fields (187-92), which pointed to the lack of editors as a major issue, could have been further explored, for example. Another interesting, underexplored topic relates to the plurality of colonial literatures coexisting in the colonial situation. Did these alternative colonial literatures dialogue in any way? How and why did they diverge in relation to political, social, economic and literary contexts?

These are some of the issues that could have been investigated more in this book, which could also benefit from a more systematic engagement with the recent vibrant historiography focused on the realities (and representations) of the so-called third Portuguese empire. Notwithstanding these remarks, *Ficções do Outro* is an excellent scholarly work that must be critically addressed by students, professors, and researchers.

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