

Mozambique in Transition in the Narratives of Lília Momplé

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Abstract. Without over-dramatizing and without sentimentalizing, Lília Momplé has managed to portray a multi-layered portrait of Mozambique and its people through the enormous strains and upheavals of its history over the last seventy years. Above all her texts foreground a wide range of Mozambican characters intent on preserving not only their families and their country, but also their own self-respect. It is Momplé's concerns about education and learning from the past, as well as her portrayals of women that will be discussed in the course of this paper, after an overview of her work and her stylistic tendencies.

Eu própria, Lília Momplé, escrevo sobre tudo o que me tem impressionado,
no dia-a-dia, ao longo da vida.

Lília Momplé¹

Unlike the sad fables of Luís Bernardo Honwana, the horror of the testimonials collected by Lina Magaia, or the sweeping tragedy of Paulina Chiziane's epic novels, unlike the magical realism and wordplay of the internationally known Mia Couto, Lília Momplé's stories describe Mozambique's history and the traumatic experiences of her countrymen and women without explicit criticism or excessive lyricism but instead by presenting facts and events and describing her characters with subtle touches that emphasize their tragic situation.² Her eye for detail, turns of phrase and sensitivity to emotion combine in her depiction of characters who represent a wide variety of

participants in the country's long and painful transition from Portuguese colonial territory to independent state. Although they deal largely with the same topics—the Mozambican struggle, and Mozambicans' struggles, for identity under different regimes—her works differ from those of her contemporaries in their apparent objectiveness and simplicity yet their powerful emotive human force.³

Momplé has published three books to date: two collections of short stories and a novella, all of which deal with the reality of Mozambican life.⁴ Her stories have won recognition in the form of prizes, not only within Mozambique (the story "Caniço" won first prize in the literary contest marking the centenary of the capital city Maputo) but abroad ("Celina's Party" ["O Baile de Celina" (OCV)] was runner-up in the 2001 Caine prize for African literature, along with a story by Mia Couto), and her work has appeared in anthologies of Mozambican literature, African literature and African literature by women.⁵ *Neighbours*, her novella, was translated into English in 2001.⁶ She has lived in Lisbon, London, São Paulo and Bahia, returning definitively to Mozambique in the early 1970s to work in the Ministério de Cultura.⁷ As well as being Secretary General of the Associação de Escritores Moçambicanos, Momplé has also represented her country as a member of UNESCO.

This role as "ambassador" for her country and spokesperson for her craft as a writer is paralleled in the allegories woven through her fiction, whereby characters can be seen to embody their sex, class, racial group, regional identity, and position in the family unit, as well as symbolizing Mozambique itself on many occasions. Since colonial literature began, conquered lands have been described in terminology that refers to the female body, penetration and domination of it, and paternalistic patriarchal control and occupation of it by the invader. In Momplé's works several characters, (and, by extension, her country) are raped and/or murdered by the colonizers (Suhura, "Ninguém Matou Suhura" [NMS]; the hotel staff in "O Último Pesadelo" [NMS]), mutilated or killed by RENAMO rebels (characters in *Os Olhos da Cobra Verde* and *Neighbours*), or exploited and humiliated during the neo-colonialism of the 1980s (the teacher, "Stress"; Ana Maria and Lola, "Um Canto Para Morrer" [OCV]). Once tended and nourished by its inhabitants, the country is abused by successive waves of oppressors, including its own inhabitants. Momplé's stories lament this self-destructive betrayal of the motherland, "tão duramente libertado do jugo colonial" (OCV 54), and the damage to future development of its citizens who need to fight against the threat of "recolonização."⁸

The breadth of historical and subjective experience and geographical and social type covered in Momplé's stories is impressive. She writes about Mozambique in the 1930s and 40s under the colonial yoke of Portuguese rule; in the 1960s and 70s during the fight for independence, finally gained on 25 June 1975. Furthermore, she also sets stories during the period when the FRELIMO government was under constant threat of RENAMO guerrilla action and destabilization by South African terrorists. The sixteen-year-long so-called civil war was fuelled by FRELIMO's anti-*apartheid* stance and sympathy towards the ANC, including the harboring of ANC members. It is this latest period that most concerns the author (although she does identify the roots of some problems further back in time through flashbacks and tracing family trees) because it was then that the socio-cultural organization of her country was effectively ruined.⁹ Her most recently published stories deal with Mozambican society immediately after a peace agreement was signed in Rome between FRELIMO and RENAMO in 1992, ushering in a new era of hope and relative stability.

Momplé's stories are poignant chronicles of life under a series of brutal oppressive systems or in perilous and precarious situations: colonial (and subsequently neo-colonial) rule, traditional patriarchal tribal customs, the continuous threat of rebel attack, the struggle to combat natural disasters. She focuses not on leaders, politicians, or key historical figures in Mozambican history, but on humble people—often country folk, often women—caught in the crossfire and bearing the brunt of racism, oppression and violence. Thus she highlights the fact that each person who died at the hands of *sipaíos*, murdered by *matchangas*, blown up by mines, or burnt alive, was an individual with their own life and their own history, emotions, and motivations, extending the emotional dimension of the text by the use of flashbacks.

Momplé places a strong emphasis on the reality behind her fiction: these terrible things did take place, as testimonial accounts and histories of the country prove.¹⁰ In the afterword to *Ninguém Matou Suhura* the author explains: "Estes contos são baseados em factos verídicos, embora os locais e as datas nem sempre correspondem à realidade" (V). In the short introduction to *Neighbours*, she claims that the book was "inspirado em factos reais" (5).¹¹ There are no framing authorial asides in *Os Olhos da Cobra Verde*, maybe because the stories speak for themselves, but instead an epigraph that sums up Momplé's wider project of learning from suffering and transforming anguish into energy for positive ends: "Feliz do povo que sabe transformar o sofrimento e o desespero em arte e amor" (5).

In the preface to her first collection of stories, Luís Bernardo Honwana confirms that the author is tapping her people's collective grief, alluding to events and details that fellow Mozambicans will recognize all too clearly:

Efectivamente, Lília Momplé conduz-nos a um passado que é próximo à experiência da generalidade dos moçambicanos de hoje não só porque é recente como até, e mais importantemente, porque constitui um dos pontos de referência do processo moçambicano [...] convidando o leitor à reanálise do nosso quotidiano. (NMS, i)

In a perceptive essay on the story "Stress" (OCV), Phillip Rothwell suggests that Momplé attributes to her characters the symptoms of melancholia in order to signal a betrayal of and by the mother country whereby globalization brings with it a loss of identity.¹² I feel that by appealing to a common grief and a shared past in which they were unable to envisage life "sem o pano de fundo da guerra omnipresente" (OCV 33) she is offering Mozambicans a channel for their traumatic memories and inviting them to participate in a multiple exorcism.¹³ By expressing the attitudes and impulses behind characters' actions she attempts to explain why such things may have happened and praises the resourcefulness and perseverance of those who survived.

Ana Maria Martinho describes Momplé's technique as approaching the journalistic or documentary, noting the author's tendency to emblemize:

Este princípio coloca o escritor como figura que, entre o poder e o povo, garante a transmissão de um vínculo com o passado ao mesmo tempo que retira efemeridade aos acontecimentos relatados. E é precisamente nessa medida que os textos de Lília Momplé se afastam da crónica: não fazem o comentário datado ou pouco definido de episódios reais; não são explicitamente críticos ou só sobre costumes. São, antes, como o conto, narrativas aplicáveis a parcelas do universo, susceptíveis de generalizações *exemplares*.¹⁴

Although used illustratively, the characters do not lose their individuality.¹⁵ On the contrary, in several stories the author analyses the points of view of several protagonists to provide a balanced picture of a particular situation. This is most obvious in "Ninguém Matou Suhura" (NMS), which is divided into three parts: *O dia do Senhor Administrador*, *O dia de Suhura* and *O Fim*

do Dia (which is also the end of *Suhura*). The first two sections record the actions of the eponymous characters up to the moment they meet, and the last describes their encounter and its fateful consequences. This device allows the narrator to compare and contrast the lifestyles and attitudes of the narcissistic, opportunist *Administrador* and the innocent peasant girl *Suhura*. Their living conditions, food, and daily customs are juxtaposed for implicitly critical effect and the halfway house where they meet represents the site of relations between the sexes and races. *Suhura's* refusal to succumb to the *Administrador's* demands can only end in tragedy and erasure, counteracted by the defiant use of her name in the title of the story and the whole collection.

A similar effect, whereby the environment explicitly reflects social inequality, is used in "Caniço" (NMS) where *Naftal*, the central character, works for a white family and travels from his shack in the slums to a smart neighborhood every day:

Apesar da hora matinal, o [seu] bairro já apresenta um aspecto desolador. O sol é ainda fraco mas já fustiga as palhotas indefesas [...]. Moscas invadem as ruelas de areia solta, zumbindo à volta dos montes de lixo espalhados por toda a parte. [...] Um cheiro a miséria envolve todo o bairro. [...] A cidade se transforma gradualmente à medida que os bairros dos negros vão ficando para trás. [...] Ao aglomerado de palhotas de caniço, seguem-se os casinhotos de madeira e zinco dos mulatos e indianos, de mistura com modestas casas de alvenaria. [...] Finalmente, nos bairros onde só residem colonos, erguem-se apenas prédios e vivendas de alvenaria, ladeando ruas e avenidas verdejantes. E o suave aroma dos jardins e das acácias em flor vai substituindo o cheiro da miséria. (26-7)¹⁶

The injustice of the situation is underlined by the fact that *Naftal* has to do the shopping and buy goods his family could never afford: "um regalo para os olhos e um tormento para a alma" (27). Furthermore, he has to water all the beautifully decorative but useless plants in the garden, while his family cannot cultivate enough food to live on. In the face of the cruel irony toiling hard for only a pittance, and even more unjustly, of being wrongly accused of stealing and actually being punished, *Naftal* has become used to gritting his teeth and accepting that "Tudo faz parte do destino dos negros" (26). His unbearable situation as presented in the story is more than enough reason for the bitterness of the black Mozambicans and justification for their passionate fight for independence.

The use of multiple points of view is clearest in *Neighbours*, in which the lives of a small number of characters interlink on one night in central Maputo, in May, in the mid-1980s. At the climax of the novel, all the protagonists are involved in an armed raid on a flat in the Avenida Emília Daússe—either as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses. The structure of the text, whose chapters relate the events happening simultaneously in three different households in Maputo at 7 p.m., 9 p.m., 11 p.m., 1 a.m. and 8 a.m., match the jigsaw-like fitting together of stories that comprise Momplé's works as a whole. It provides tension and dimension, explaining the motivations and beliefs of each character, as well as capturing their philosophy of life; setting them all out before the reader in equal measure and inviting comparisons. As a microcosm of this technique, the five very different men in the gang preparing for the raid are analyzed one by one to show how they have reached the current state of affairs and why they are prepared to kill innocent people. The reactions of each of them to Mena, their beautiful mulatta hostess, are described. All of them find her attractive, except the evil, aloof South African Boer, for whom she “*não passa de uma sombra, alguém que existe apenas para servir os brancos*” (N 88). When Momplé does not show the alternative perspective(s), it is because that perspective is obvious. This is usually the case with stereotypical characters like the racist Portuguese colonials of “*O Último Pesadelo*” (NMS), or the stubborn husband and father figures.

This democratic voicing of those involved fits in with the portrayals of individuals, challenging the stereotypes common in African literature. For example, not all the white characters are paternalistic racist rapists and bullies (although most of them are), notable exceptions being Eugénio (“*O Último Pesadelo*” [NMS]) and Alberto Cereja (“*Era uma Outra Guerra*” [OCV]). Not all the colonial wives are idle, vain and narrow-minded like those in “*Caniço*” (NMS) and “*Ninguém Matou Suhura*” (NMS); some, like Ana Maria (“*Um Canto Para Morrer*” [OCV]), Dona Florinda (N) and Assunção (“*Era uma Outra Guerra*” [OCV]), love their adopted country and try to help its people.¹⁷ Not all the African wives are submissive workers and mothers, not all the African husbands stray after other women, not all the women are young and beautiful but have other valuable qualities instead.¹⁸ Therefore Salimo, the RENAMO soldier who returns to his family in “*Xirove*,” hoping to be greeted as a prodigal son but instead having to face a humiliating ritual of cleansing of sin, gets a brief chance to explain why he colluded in atrocities against his countrymen. He does have the excuse of having been

snatched from his village when still a child, and having been inculcated with anti-government ideology. When challenged by his outraged brother, Salimo stammers out his reasons, as he must have been taught: “Mas [...] era preciso [matar e roubar] para termos agora a democracia, acabar com as aldeias comunais, as guias de marcha” (OCV 73). Their aged mother realizes that he is not able to articulate any further: “Só lamentava [ela] que Salimo não estivesse ainda preparado para corresponder com igual franqueza e tentasse, a todo o custo, justificar as atrocidades praticadas em nome de ideias que ele próprio não devia compreender” (OCV 74). Salimo recognizes his estrangement from family and community and leaves home once again, significantly without completing the ceremony that would grant him reintegration as well as symbolic forgiveness.

When looking at her works as a whole, the range of characters represent the multicultural mixture of Mozambican society both racial (European Portuguese and South African whites, Indians, Mauritians, as well as *mestiços*), regional (from the northern interior, the coastal regions, the Ilha de Moçambique and Maputo; from both inner city and shanty town) and political (FRELIMO sympathizers, those who uphold the Portuguese regime, RENAMO rebels, South African terrorists). She depicts characters of all ages, male and female. If the early stories allow for simple structuralist analysis based on the contrast of behaviors in women and men, blacks and whites, colonials and freedom fighters, this becomes more complicated in the later stories.

In fact, the characters can be seen as parts in the jigsaw of Mozambican society and the sum of Momplé's work seen as a series of interlinking segments. Frustrated Naftal (“Caniço” [NMS]) could grow up to be a revengeful FRELIMO guerrilla in another story. Salimo in “Xirove” (OCV) could have been responsible for the murder of Januário's parents in *Neighbours* or the teacher's grandfather in “Stress” (OCV). Someone just like Januário could have taught Alima “O Sonho de Alima” (OCV). Many of those who drift to the cities in the wake of rural atrocities could be displaced members of Vovó Facache's scattered family (“Os Olhos da Cobra Verde” [OCV]).

This impression is strengthened upon consideration of Momplé's first and most bitter collection of stories: *Ninguém Matou Suhura*. They make explicit reference to the political situation, favoring FRELIMO actions, and mentioning the harmful effects of Portuguese propaganda. The stories in this collection are dated not according to when they were written but as a subheading indicating the historical and geographical context: Junho de 1935 (the year

Momplé was born); Lourenço Marques, Dezembro de 1945; Lourenço Marques, Dezembro de 1950; Ilha de Moçambique, Novembro de 1970; Luanda, Abril de 1974. Over almost forty years, the author seems to be saying, nothing changed in terms of the colonizers' attitudes towards the colonized in the major cities of Lusophone Africa. The passing of time is also conveyed through the presentation of several generations of one family and the stunted or truncated futures of the younger characters (Naftal, Aidinha, Celina, Suhura) who are prevented from getting an education (in the Western sense of instruction and qualifications) or from achieving equal social status to their white counterparts. In the same collection, the racial situation is shown to be unbearably oppressive for black Mozambicans, yet the revolution is only glimpsed as rumors and distant reports of terrorist activity. This hearsay mars the otherwise comfortable lifestyle of the white colonials. *Neighbours* is clearly set in Maputo in the mid-1980s, right in the middle of the South African destabilization campaign. The stories of *Os Olhos da Cobra Verde* show the consequences of the Acordo Geral de Paz, which should guarantee future peace. It brings liberation to some but tragedy to others in practical as well as psychological terms, due to the large numbers of refugees and landless, and the struggle to find accommodation and rebuild villages.

The reactions of Momplé's characters to the systems of oppression are varied. Some succumb to death or violence as a way out: violence directed against themselves (Mussa Racua, "Aconteceu em Saua-Saua" [NMS]), against others (the teacher, "Stress" [OCV]; Atumane, "Xirove" [OCV]); or against objects (Celina, "O Baile de Celina," [NMS]). However, the overwhelming response is a numb acceptance that matches the powerlessness of the common people, living in a constant state of shock. Wrongly punished Naftal "caminha como um sonâmbulo, sem consciência de si próprio. [...] não quer nada, não deseja nada, não tem vontade de nada" (NMS 30, 31); Celina, not allowed to attend her school's party for final-year students because of her mixed blood, "move-se numa semi-inconsciência de pesadelo" (NMS 46); Suhura, summoned to meet the lecherous Administrador, does so because "não há outra saída [...] não vale a pena resistir. [...] caminha sem ver, indiferente a tudo que não seja o medo incontrolável do que a espera" (NMS 68).¹⁹

A large part of the contained frustration of these sleepwalking characters concerns the bitter irony that hard work brings no rewards but only further hardships. The waste of life and potential is excruciatingly tragic. Enthusiastic, optimistic characters like Léia and Januário (N), who want to

build a new Mozambique, are murdered in a terrorist attack. Others, because of their race or sex, are restricted access to an education, which could provide them a better future. Momplé's positive presentation of teachers and keen learners is an encouragement to her readers to improve their prospects and also their self-respect through education. This backfires for Celina, whose mother's life becomes a quest to ensure that her daughter never suffers like her but achieves "um mínimo de aceitação por parte dos senhores da terra, ou seja, os colonos" (NMS 41), a mission which entails the best education available to mixed-race children and a process of assimilation to the Portuguese language and way of life. D. Violante insists: "Estude filha! Só a instrução pode apagar a nossa cor" (42), but her sacrifices are in vain because racism is too deeply rooted for her daughter to be welcomed into white society.²⁰

In later stories, set after Independence, the results are more encouraging. Alima, in "O Sonho de Alima" (OCV), is determined to study in order to "levantar o véu que encerra um mundo de infinitos horizontes" (45), experiencing "momentos de plenitude e triunfo" upon receiving her fourth grade certificate. Her case demonstrates the obstacles faced by African women wanting an access to education because she is hindered firstly by her father's beliefs and then by her husband's:

Na sua infância e juventude o facto de ser Negro condenava [o pai de Alima] de antemão a permanecer analfabeto. E, mesmo quando, devido ao avanço da guerra de libertação, foi permitido aos seus filhos estudar, jamais sentiu curiosidade em saber o que eles aprendiam naqueles complicados livros, escritos em português, língua que nunca dominou. Quanto à mãe de Alima, o estudo sempre lhe causou uma espécie de temor porque se lhe afigurava pertencer a um universo do qual, por razões várias, fora sempre excluída. (41)

Again, the mother's thwarted life is not to be repeated by the daughter. Alima's husband, although willing to go against tradition for her by not taking another wife in order to produce the children Alima cannot have, becomes "louco de ciúme e furor machista" (42) when she insists on taking evening classes. Another character, Muntaz (N), challenges tradition by effectively choosing university instead of marriage and children. She does so to the despair of her mother, Narguiss, who "como uma 'verdadeira mulher,' quer dizer, dentro de casa e no quintal [...]. Jamais frequentou a escola [...]. Aprendeu, sim, a cozinhar primorosamente com o supremo objectivo de agradar ao

homem que um dia a escolhesse” (74). Nevertheless, her training proved unsuccessful in perpetuating either of her marriages, both to unfaithful rogues.

Luckily, there are teachers like Januário (N), who take a real pride and satisfaction in their work, even considering that remuneration is minimal. His zest stems from his love of reading, and it is infectious:

O seu entusiasmo não podia deixar de se transmitir aos alunos. Estes são, na sua maioria, homens e mulheres ensonados por um dia inteiro de trabalho, cronicamente insaciados pela monotonia da ushua e do repolho diários, abatidos pela perspectiva de ter que regressar a pé às suas suburbanas casas onde nada os espera, além das preocupações do dia seguinte. Apesar disso, Januário consegue levá-los a maravilhar-se com a oculta lógica da gramática, o ritmo de um verso ou a beleza de uma frase, despertando-lhes o gosto de dominar uma lingual que não beberam no leite das suas mães.

Estes pequenos sucessos acordaram nele a iniciativa criadora, adormecida por anos de trabalho rotineiro, o que lhe permite desenvolver métodos de ensino verdadeiramente originais. (N 80)

Januário's positive outlook in spite of the traumas he has suffered and the day-to-day hardship he endures is a sign that people's resistance and strength will triumph. Love between husband and wife, maternal devotion, and the support provided by networks of family and friends are seen as powerful forces. The bleakness of *Neighbours* is countered by the fact that Mena acts to save others and manages to save herself from an abusive marriage. She reclaims her independence and takes her first steps into “um novo e imprevisível destino” (N 105).²¹ Female characters in particular are seen to represent the future because woman has always been, in Momplé's words, “a principal difusora e transmissora de valores culturais, tradições e ritos [...], de usos e costumes [...], formas de arte.”²² The author's determined, forward-thinking *moçambicanas* are important for developing a feminist consciousness in her readers, as a scholar of African literature declares:

The study of images [...] represents the first realization that something is wrong [...]. Beyond that it becomes a challenge to established male writers to recognize distortions just as it is for racist writers to recognize and correct racial caricatures. For women writers the “woman as victim” character performs a political function,

directly stimulating empathetic identification in the readers and in a sense challenging them to change. [...] A positive image, then, is one that is in tune with African historical realities and does not stereotype or limit women into postures of dependence or submergence. Instead it searches for more accurate portrayals and ones which suggest the possibility of transcendence. [...] Included here is also making visible the “invisible woman,” or audible, the mute, voiceless woman, the woman who exists only as tangential to man and his problems.²³

Such positive models help to counteract the negative self-image that centuries of racial and patriarchal oppression have fostered, the conviction of “a inferioridade da sua própria raça” (NMS 44) or, more dangerously, the hatred for one’s own race that constant abuse promotes in Aidinha (“Caniço” [NMS 24]) and Romu (N 65-8).

Momplé does use her female characters to refer to the traditions, rituals, and beliefs with which African women have had to contend as well as fighting against colonial oppression: lack of education, *lobolo* (“bride price”), polygyny, serial infidelity, the favoring of sons, initiation rites involving genital mutilation, abusive husbands, expectations linked to marriage and child-bearing. She creates women who stand up for themselves, even if it means flouting convention: Manuela, the Administrador’s daughter (“Ninguém Matou Suhura” [NMS]), shocks and shames her parents by declaring that she would consider marrying a black man. Likewise, financially independent tia Mariamo (“Os Olhos da Cobra Verde” [OCV]) “decidiu ficar solteira” (OCV 28), in spite of having children by several men. Facache, Mariamo’s niece, admires her courage and learns from her “o espírito independente e lutador e a firme convicção de que, na vida, é preciso contar com as próprias forças” (28). This strength enables her to start up and run her own successful business.

The stories of *Os Olhos da Cobra Verde* refer back to the days of struggle for independence but focus mostly on the problems of reconstructing the country, denouncing the administrative chaos and corruption and the disillusionment of those who had been euphoric and optimistic. Nevertheless, the green snake in the story that gives its name to the collection is a sign of good luck and good news. These later stories illustrate Momplé’s championing of those who stand up for their rights and their self-respect even against the odds. Most survive, but casualties are inevitable. Although melancholic, Momplé’s narratives are also an encouragement not to admit defeat, a rallying cry that raises consciousness and boosts confidence. She always includes

characters committed to building a better future for their country, with energy and optimism, who maintain their dignity in the face of overwhelming discrimination and humiliation.

Notes

¹ Lília Momplé, "A Mulher Escritora e o Cânone – Aproximação e Ruptura," 32.

² Luís Bernardo Honwana, *Nós Matámos o Cão-Tinhoso*; Lina Magaia, *Dumba Nenque, Run for Your Life: Peasant Tales of Tragedy in Mozambique* and *Delehta: Pulos na Vida*; Paulina Chiziane, e.g., *Balada de Amor ao Vento* and *Ventos do Apocalipse*; Mía Couto, e.g., *Vozes Anoiçadas* and *Cada Homem é uma Raça*.

³ Nelson Saúte, "Identidades em literatura (Espaço público, literature e identidade)." See also Fátima Mendonça, "Literatura Moçambicana: o que é isso?"; and Nelson Saúte, *As Mãos dos Pretos: Antologia do Conto Moçambicano*.

⁴ Lília Momplé, *Ninguém Matou Suhura; Neighbours; Os Olhos da Cobra Verde*. For convenience, references to these editions will be made in the texts and the titles abbreviated to NMS, N and OCV respectively.

⁵ "Stress," in *Opening Spaces: An Anthology of Contemporary African Women's Writing*, ed. Yvonne Vera; "Celina's Banquet," in *The Picador Book of African Stories*, ed. Stephen Gray; "Stress," in *As Mãos dos Pretos: Antologia do Conto Moçambicano*, ed. Nelson Saúte.

⁶ *Neighbours: The Story of a Murder*.

⁷ In a 1992 interview with Michel Laban she explains how the experience of travelling abroad was an extremely valuable experience, but that she can only write fiction successfully in Mozambique (in Laban, *Moçambique. Encontro com Escritores*).

⁸ Lília Momplé, in Laban, 588.

⁹ Momplé describes the situation in "A Mulher Escritora."

¹⁰ See, for example: Anabella Rodrigues, "Mozambican Women After the Revolution"; Stephanie Urdang, "Women in national liberation movements" and *And Still They Dance: Women, War, and the Struggle for Change in Mozambique*.

¹¹ Stephanie Urdang reports a similar attack that took place in Maputo on May 29th 1987 when Afrikaans-speaking terrorists broke into a flat across the hall from some South African exiles (*And Still They Dance*, 40). Momplé makes further comments on the testimonial nature of her writing in her interview with Michel Laban.

¹² Phillip Rothwell, "Momplé's Melancholia: Mourning for Mozambique."

¹³ Nelson Saúte identifies the cathartic nature of much Mozambican literature and its function as an "exorcismo dos demonios" that also attempts to "debelar os fantasmas nacionais": Prefácio, *As Mãos dos Pretos*, 18, 19.

¹⁴ Ana Maria Mão-de-Ferro Martinho, *Contos de África escritos por Mulheres*, 107-8.

¹⁵ This concept of "pluralism without hierarchy" is identified by Ana Teixeira as an Afrocentric concept particularly useful when analyzing Mozambican literature. Her insightful thesis, "Building a Bridge: Reconciling European and African World-Views in the Works of Contemporary Mozambican Women Writers," is one of the very few studies in English to deal with Mozambican women's writing.

¹⁶ Similar descriptions of the division of the city into zones according to social status (linked to race) and in particular the problems in supplying accommodation for refugees and landless citizens in Maputo are provided in the stories "Stress" and "Um Canto Para Morrer" (OCV).

¹⁷ On stereotypical white characters, see Mineke Schipper's comments: the men "are rapists (in Africa the colonial men took at will the local African women or children). Their rude behaviour is uncivilized, they steal (emptying Africa of its riches); they are lazy (Africans do all the work for them and are paid very little). [...] The image of the white man, just like its counterpart, consists of numerous observations that are indicative of mistrust and misunderstandings, dividing black from white. The most striking thing about the white characters in a number of African novels, in addition to their superiority complex, is that they exhibit pathological greed: they are eternally hungry for money, more property and more power. [...] The white colonial woman as a character in African novels rarely has a status of her own; she has no occupation and is totally dependent on her husband and his position. [...] The problem that seems to occupy much of her time is her appearance: her complexion, her figure, her clothes, her jewellery. [...] Another favourite pastime is exchanging critical comments on Africa and the Africans" (38-9, 51, 54).

¹⁸ On stereotypical images of women in African literature, see Deidre LaPin, "Women in African Literature"; and several of the essays in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, eds Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves.

¹⁹ This atmosphere was encountered by Stephanie Urdang on her fieldwork in Mozambique in the mid and late 1980s, in the book *And Still They Dance*. She noted a strange calmness in a village under the constant threat of bandit attack (52-3), and an "absence of expression" on the faces of women in a northern refugee camp, their eyes "empty of existence" (89).

²⁰ Another way out for black and mulatto women is sex—as prostitutes or the lovers of white men. Aidinha's resentment of the discrimination that limits her living a decent life leads her to become a prostitute: "farta da miséria, sendo negra, não tinha outro caminho. O ódio que a rapariga sentiu por toda a vida passada, abrangia a mãe também" (NMS 24). She can feel superior when white South Africans fight for her favors. Attractive mulatta Leonor ("O Baile de Celina" [NMS]), is proud of having seduced many white husbands away from their wives.

²¹ Momplé describes how Mena was a particularly "stubborn" character to write: "a princípio eu queria que fosse uma mulher sem carácter, que só pensava em coisas fúteis, e no fim é ela que faz com que se descubram os assassinos. Eu não queria que fosse aquela mulher, queria que o romance seguisse outro trilho. E ela não quis!" (in Laban, 586).

²² Lília Momplé, "A Mulher Escritora...", 31.

²³ Carole Boyce Davies, "Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism," 14-5.

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