

CASTRO, Paul Melo e (ed.). *Colonial and Post-colonial Goan Literature in Portuguese. Woven Palms*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019.¹

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This volume, as with many publications emerging from the Project “Pensando Goa” brings to the public eye, and hopefully to university classrooms, an indication of the expanse of literary writing in Portuguese from twentieth-century Goa. The anthology of critical essays in English by twelve contributors discusses literature published predominantly from the early to the late twentieth century until after the integration of Goa with the Indian republic, in 1961. Thus, the terms colonial and post-colonial that appear in the title are strictly a reference to political chronology. As the introduction and subsequent essays elaborate, many of these stories, written originally in Portuguese, may not have had as many Goan readers as we might anticipate though several of them appeared in local publications. Since Portuguese was an administrative and literary language among a restricted elite, and displaced summarily after integration, the later twentieth century saw a declining readership. Regrettably it has also meant that most of these texts were not in circulation after their initial publication and did not form the object of literary discussion. The translations of some of these works, often by the editor of this volume, Paul Melo e Castro, has meant that in recent years, novels and short stories as well as critical material are now available in English. The editor’s contribution to this volume, as the translator of many

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of its essays, and a co-writer of some of them, is significant and accompanies his individual work.

Hélder Garmes' and Melo e Castro's initial essay offers a carefully argued defense of the category of Goan literature in Portuguese that pries it away from the twentieth century appellation of "Indo-Portuguese" literature. This category, they emphasize, subsumed literary writing by Goans as a marginal presence within a literary universe with the metropole at its centre. Other essays such as Duarte Drumond Braga's, indicate that the Estado Novo's renewal of an imperial imaginary from the 1930s emphasized the unity and therefore the appropriation of cultural expression into an imperial whole, though a more diffuse use of the term Indo-Portuguese can possibly be traced earlier as well. Garmes and Castro note the polysemic value of Portuguese language and literary writing in Goa, and of the social worlds envisioned in it. Their comparison with the place of English in independent India, foregrounds the different fate of Portuguese after annexation by India.

The introduction references Vimala Devi and Manuel Seabra's *A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa* (1971), as "the keystone upon which all contemporary research on this archive is built (p. 5)" and several essays draw on texts authored by both or one of these writers. A broad methodological discussion of this volume would be a useful addition to the numerous citations of its sections in individual essays. Braga's account of the reception of Vimala Devi's book of poems, *Súria*, as "*literatura ultramarina*", is a substantial contribution towards this as he delineates the fashioning of cultural concepts that would legitimize the "renovation of imperial ideology at a point when the empire found itself beset (p. 117)". This complemented the material and contextual reliance of Devi's writing on the Portuguese literary market as Braga describes it, in the years following Goa's annexation. Garmes and Castro also focus on the conditions of textual production when they cite the Brazilian critic António Candido's distinction between a literary system (links between writers, works and public and a consciousness of this system) and literary manifestations. They suggest that with the relatively small print sphere, "no Goan literary system formed during colonialism (p. 25)". It is uncertain how useful this national boundary is to construct an image of print circulation in Portuguese. Further, those who wrote in Portuguese were acutely aware of the possibilities of these spheres of publicity, which also had

an impact on facets other than literary texts, as Cabral de Oliveira's essay on the legal sphere suggests.

Braga reads Devi's affirmation of hybridity against the Brazilian sociologist, Gilberto Freyre's theorization of luso-tropicality, a concept that converged with the regime's cultural agenda. This brings a much-needed critical perspective from which to understand representations of the twentieth century. He notes how the inclusion of Devi's poems in anthologies of the time smoothed away ambivalences so that the experience of exile voiced in the poems converged with the mourning of loss of Goa as a territory. Braga's encounter with Devi's exoticising of Goan women agriculturalists sees his analysis delve into the familiar conundrum of whether the Catholic elite is "culturally European" or "Portuguese" (p. 131) while simultaneously belonging, as Devi does, he notes, to a local landowning family. Devi's economic status enables an exoticising gaze, but rather than conceiving of members of the elite only as *possessing* either/or Indian/European identities, it is also useful to see them as a group produced at the intersection of various discourses of power, a location that subordinated them to some hierarchies while enabling erotic racial epithets such as "Vénus Drávidas (p. 125)" to designate bodies that were in all likelihood also subordinated by caste.

Many of these essays are descriptive, often necessary with works that are not in public circulation. The volume is also made accessible with lengthy quotes from the original Portuguese painstakingly translated into English. Among the interesting approaches offered by contributors is Sandra Ataíde Lobo's essay on Francisco João da Costa, which reads the colourful enough biography of the turn-of-the-century satirical author, against the persona of his alias, GIP, expanding what we know about one of the most stimulating novelists. Lobo suggests (in this excellent translation) that we see GIP, (da Costa's pen-name) as a "quasi-heteronym (p. 57)", reminiscent of Pessoa's designated names, since da Costa endowed this figure with attributes and biographical details that were sometimes shared with his own and sometimes not. Da Costa "took for granted that his authorship was an open secret", states Lobo, but in allowing GIP his own life experiences, destabilized his authorial identity. Everton Machado's study of the 1866 novel, *Os Brahmanes*, also works as an account of nineteenth century writing, in a volume otherwise focused on the twentieth century. Several of the essays account for the multi-lingual reality of Goa and bracket their observations with the awareness that these languages may intrude into or be indexically refe-

renced in Portuguese literature, as the introduction notes. Machado's juxtaposition of Francisco Luis Gomes' difficult novel with European liberalism and with the contemporary Bengali writer Bankim Chandra Chatterjee brings this moment into dialogue with developments in British India. Joanna Passos similarly makes an unexpected comparison between the poems of Eunice de Souza and Vimala Devi, offering an interesting reading of one of de Souza's poems. The differences between the two poets may draw more from their formal and political stances towards modernity and difference than their identities as "Indian" or "Goan" and the comparison would not have suffered by focusing less on their affinities than their differences. Passos notes this as she states, "(B)y contrast, Eunice de Souza's lucid and problematizing attitude reveals an obsession with unsettled issues, a determined refusal of solace (p.157)". K. David Jackson's reading of Goan poetic work as a reversal of Lopes Mendes' scientific expedition to Goa is less persuasive as the grounds for the bold counterpoint are only briefly elaborated.

In relation to the short stories by José da Silva Coelho, which depict the vicissitudes of the life of the informally-trained advocate in Goa, the *provisionário*, Luís Cabral de Oliveira unfolds how the Goan legal system was structurally subordinated to the metropolitan one. This enjoyable essay reveals the makeshift arrangements that were the scaffolding to train those who would staff legal offices in the absence of state institutions. Coelho "painted a vivid fresco of legal life in Goa in the 1920s (p. 100)", revealing how social ladders were scaled and class origins of *provisionários* revealed through clothing, bodies, speech and smells. In a sensitive reading of Coelho's satire, Oliveira asks, "It is common knowledge that one method of undermining an aspiration is to deride it. Is not derision what Silva Coelho was trying to achieve by representing non- elite Goan *provisionários* in his *Contos Regionais* ? (p. 113)".

In an individually authored essay, Melo e Castro reads across the perceptions of the central figures in stories by the late twentieth century writer Epitácio Pais. Castro notes that agrarian life is not depicted through nostalgic desire for a life left behind, but through the tenant farmers, the *mundcars* of the *bhatkar/mundcar* conflict that shapes much writing from the region. Thus, in one story, agrarian decline is attributed to the brutish adoption of mechanization, while in another, the oppression of the *mundcar* is depicted through denigrating epithets heard and internalized, including the "belittling kindness" of a paternalistic dean

of a university who addresses the protagonist Munu as “the most prominent paradigm of the backward classes (p. 212)”.

An essay that hints at layered social contradictions precariously assimilated into novelistic form is Eufemiano Miranda and Melo e Castro’s discussion of Agostinho Fernandes’s *Bodki*, which they describe as an anomaly. *Bodki*, published in 1962, is unusual they state, both for having been written by a Catholic doctor and because it represents the rarely discussed population of the New Conquests, in the district of Quepém. The apparent privileging of the discourse of scientific rationality (through the figure of the doctor) is not an opposition of Indian and western medicine, they argue, because “the narrator is vying with local beliefs explicitly tied to the supernatural rather than any learned version of ayurvedic lore (p.187)”. While other essays in the volume find in the Goan Catholic, a personification of European culture, *Bodki* disables this binary as the Catholic inhabitants are equally susceptible to local supernatural beliefs. Thus, the fissures between a “High” or urbane Catholic tradition and a rural one are revealed as Fernando, the protagonist, is dismissive of those who are “merely Catholic in name” as they worship Hindu icons alongside Christian ones, and even more dismissive of those who have turned the “essence” of Hinduism into a burlesque practice. The essay perceptively points out that though a Christianized subject is gestured to as the apex of the social hierarchy in the novel, not even the narrator occupies this privileged position: “The division between the Catholic doctor from the Old Conquests and the denizens of the New Conquests is *not* [italics mine] mirrored in the attitude of the narrative voice to a putative metropolitan readership, implicitly assuming a similarity on their part to the protagonist. (p. 171)”. While there is no mistaking the hierarchy between the urban and the rural, and between Catholicism and Hinduism, these hierarchies are “radically” destabilized as the essay notes, by disallowing the reader the comfort of a single subject position privileged over all others. Though the protagonist “Fernando installs himself unproblematically into the superior hierarchical position”, the authors note, he “does not come from the traditional Catholic elite (as was the case with the author too); his father still labours in the fields and his sister works as a seamstress...” In fact one of the notes to the essay holds a key to understanding some of the dissonances in the novel: “rather than autobiography, *Bodki* ...is a sort of alternative history (p. 251)”. The perspicacious comment, “Paradoxically, alongside a flattening of Otherness exists an indefinability of

selfhood”, can be said to encapsulate the shifting locus of narrative authority in works of the time.

Several essays in the book detail how the adaptation of conventional literary techniques allow questions of gender and kinship that are not immediately visible in official writing to be represented. Cielo G. Festino cites short story critic, Ricardo Piglia’s argument that there are sometimes two stories within a text, one narrated and the other present through its implications. Festino suggests that Vimala Devi’s narratives in *Monção* are simultaneously about migration and about the experience of being left behind. By incorporating both, these stories speak of the transformation that occurred as families were split and women grew “a heart of steel (p. 151)”. Similarly, M. Filomena de Brito Gomes Rodrigues’ discussion of Orlando da Costa’s play, *Sem flores nem coroas*, speaks of how it negotiates familial and filial relations through the values attached to land. The presence of an illegitimate child in the household changes the significance of his mother’s inheritance, a sign of how kinship and property seep into intimate and familial relations. Emotional states are conveyed through metaphors of light as in Festino’s essay, which depicts the transformation of a woman in the house of her in-laws, as “a shadow flitting between the members of the joint family (p.150)”. Rodrigues notes that the authoritarian father grows hysterical and then embittered as the play proceeds, while “(O)nly Rosenda the ayah maintains her emotional equilibrium when faced with the historic possibilities the future (p. 194)”.

The presence of women is thus never dissociated from the economy of kinship relations and these stories indicate how this structures the flow of emotions. Edith Noronha Melo e Furtado’s overview introduces a pantheon of women writers, which will hopefully enable closer studies of their work in the future. This includes Helena Fonseca e Costa’s “Crusoesque tales of adventure (p. 224)” as well as Maria Elsa da Rocha’s short stories published forty-four years after the liberation of Goa, which draw from oral legacy. Rocha’s narratives feature the “*crioula*” (or *poskem* in Konkani, as in the eponymous subject of Wendell Rodricks’ book of 2017), usually orphans or less fortunate children, who occupied an ambiguous position within families, positioned above paid servants, but without the privileges of legitimate children who would inherit. Her stories also feature regions like Banda, Sawantwadi, and Belgaum that are linked to the economic and social life of Goa, but are not privileged as narrative spaces, for the reason

that “Goans resented and looked down upon those who arrived across the Western Ghats, the mountain range abutting Goa, and were employed by Goans in menial jobs (p. 227)”. Thus region and kinship appear as relations that are embedded in social desire and domestic power.

Despite the vivid appearance of transgressive sexuality as a structuring force in the novels (such as *Bodki* and *Os Brahmanes*) discussed in the book, the anthology fights shy of drawing on studies of gender, caste and colonialism. Though across these literary works, a sister disappears without a trace (p. 209), a father sings “an obscene song about his wife, wiggling his naked body, his sex covered by a triangle of red cloth (p. 205)”, and “Esnilda is caught off guard by a wild passion for the bangle vendor, an outsider (p. 228)”, issues of gender are strictly contained only to the mention of such incidents, as when a narrative is said to be linked “to the perceived danger of unbridled female desire” (p. 174). The potential for engagement with literary criticism on gender and its intersection with colonialism and caste is striking in the case of Devi’s fiction that sexualizes (and racializes, as suggested earlier) lower caste female bodies: “Her blouse had shrunk, leaving her breasts unconstrained...In her grace, in all the melody of her expression, she was still a typical example of her caste! (p.151)”.

The difference of Goan literature is identified through socio-economic contexts. The “deviations from European standards” in the novel *Bodki* for instance are said to be “an attempt to Goanise, or even Indianise, the novel form (p. 33)”. Formalism contains the variable literary manifestations of race, gender, and caste within a universalist definition of literature that makes the assumptions about society and language underlying its categories invisible. The avoidance of approaches that address literary representations of these issues is not without consequences. The essay on the novel *Bodki* states that the novel “contains little of what we might call post-colonialism, understood as a critical investigation of colonial discourse or opposition to colonial practices. (p. 179)”. This restricted description is puzzling as postcolonial studies has focused almost to a fault on literary representation.

Though the essay on *Bodki* cites Arif Dirlik who warned against adopting a simple opposition of Europe and its others, at times this opposition is portrayed as a reflection of social reality. The Indian/European and *indica/dourada* cultural binary is mechanistically applied to represent the Lusophone Goan Catholic elite as the embodiment of the colonizer, or Goan literature is found wanting when

it does not exhibit a simple opposition between European and Indian culture. Thus, the essay on the novel *Os Brahmanes* says, regrettably, that the novel recommends a “solution to the wrongs of colonialism as even more thorough colonization (p. 6)”, and reads this as a mirror of the identity of its upper caste Catholic author. Brazilian and Latin American postcolonial theories are possibly better able to address racial politics of the kind that existed but were indirectly expressed in Goa. They indicate how the colonial/indigenous binary existed alongside cultural elements that had European origins but were transformed, as they were inhabited by colonial societies. Aside from these questions, this is a substantive contribution toward opening up a century of literary writing from Goa.