Cape Verdean and Mozambican Women's Literature: Liberating the National and Seizing the Intimate

Isabel Fêo P. B. Rodrigues and Kathleen Sheldon

Abstract: In Mozambique and Cape Verde, writing in Portuguese by African women has directly engaged political reconstruction by denouncing colonial oppression and embracing national freedom. This article addresses the recent history of Lusophone African women's fiction, which has been pivotal in inscribing the intimate arena of sexuality and motherhood into power relations and has also revealed ways in which the domain of violence intersects with private lives. By focusing on two novels that exemplify this trend, this article demonstrates links between the political and the intimate. It also shows how Lusophone African authors contribute to healing social conflict through their narratives, and draws some conclusions about gender relations in the Lusophone African experience and across the continent.

Résumé: Au Mozambique et au Cap Vert, les écrits de femmes africaines en langue portugaise ont participé directement à la reconstruction politique en dénonçant l'oppression coloniale et en adoptant les principes de liberté nationale. Cet article aborde l'évolution historique récente des romans d'écrivaines africaines de langue portugaise, qui ont été essentiels pour introduire les domaines privés de la sexualité et de la maternité dans l'arène publique des relations de pouvoir, et pour révéler les

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Introduction: From National Bodies to Intimate Worlds

Recent fiction by African women writing in Portuguese has introduced themes that demonstrate the interconnection of national identities and personal stories of marriage, sexuality, and madness. In this article we will discuss two novels, *A Louca de Serrano* (The Mad Woman of Serrano) by the Cape Verdean author Dina Salústio (1998) and *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* (Niketche: A Story of Polygamy) by the Mozambican novelist Paulina Chiziane (2002). These two novels indicate a new direction in Lusophone African fiction, though the authors build on a history of several decades of publications by African women that have addressed a range of political issues affecting women in the Portuguese-speaking nations of Africa. In the space we have available, we will focus on Cape Verde and Mozambique, two nations that share little beyond their common language and a history of Portuguese colonization.

African literature has been pivotal in addressing political dissent, exposing the legacy of colonialism, and challenging distorted Western images of the continent. By means of their writing, internationally recognized authors such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have dismantled European blindness regarding Africa and "restored African dignity" to its people through the printed word (see Nnolim 2006). Likewise, acclaimed female African writers such as Mariama Bâ, Buchi Emecheta, and Ama Ata Aidoo have narrated their political engagement without ignoring the bitterness of their private lives, exposing specific African conceptions of womanhood and describing women's negotiations of their multiple roles within and across shifting social boundaries. In their writings they have depicted the power dynamics of their societies and the intricacies of kinship, motherhood, and wifehood, all of which have been deeply politicized and destabilized in colonial and postcolonial ideologies.

African women's fiction has been pivotal in inscribing the intimate arena of sexuality and motherhood into power relations. In the past, African women were often absent from the world of print, leading scholars to cast them as "muted" or "silent" vis-à-vis a male-dominated discourse (Ardener 1975). Silence, however, must be articulated with specific social, economic, and political structures that ensnare human suffering. Within such contexts, women are neither mute nor silent but are too often "unheard" (Farmer 1999:82). Similarly, women's purported silence is not necessarily indicative of passivity, but may be used strategically as a political weapon to withdraw from participation in a colonial or postcolonial rhetoric of subjugation. Their writing, therefore, can intentionally subvert preconceived colonial boundaries between orality and literacy and the implicit connotation that the latter is more evolved than the former.[1]

Fiction is an avenue that allows women to address the disjuncture between their private lives and the social structures that have often rendered them silent. Through fiction, women have found the freedom to make

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the social realities of their lives accessible to audiences outside their own countries. African female writers have done much to cast away their presumed silence in a world of print still dominated by colonial and masculine forms of control. They have also pointed out that masculinity rests on specific forms of silence aimed at maintaining social control. As Dina Salústio writes, "being male implie[s] despising intimate questions" and not voicing one's "inner thoughts" (1998:95). A socially accepted idea of masculinity has required a script without words, in which silence about personal issues is a protection against social sanctions and blame.

Writing in Portuguese has sometimes been a barrier to reaching a wider audience in a world increasingly dominated by the English language. Despite the growing body of published works by African women in Portuguese, the internationalization of their work through translation remains limited. As with other postcolonial situations, the intersections between gender, power, and language continue to foster a dominant discourse (see Foucault 1980). Fluency in the former colonizer's language remains associated with male dominance, and its appropriation in published form is still an essential tool to gain political legitimacy and social capital (see Bourdieu 1977, 1991). The situation for girls and women is exacerbated when international aid organizations, as is often the case, impose curricular reforms in local schools based on European languages and models to the detriment of local African literary production (Mompl é 1999:33).

Although Lusophone African literatures emerged before Anglophone and Francophone literatures, they remain neglected outside of the Portuguese-speaking nations.[2] The lack of availability of Portuguese authors' works in English, the restricted circulation of their books, and the limitations imposed by the politics of translation continue to render Lusophone writers, and women in particular, invisible. In this article we hope to bring to the forefront African literature written in Portuguese that has been by and large ignored in scholarly discussions on African feminism and womanism. These writings demonstrate that Lusophone African women have much in common with women throughout Africa and that larger comparative frameworks that cut across linguistic and former colonial boundaries are vital to understanding both local and transnational forces that enmesh daily lives.

Like much African writing, Lusophone African women's writing was first informed by the political project of national liberation, which in many cases was followed by postcolonial conflict. Recently, female writers have turned inward, traversing a new terrain where the realm of intimacy entwines with political empowerment. As shown in the two novels we have selected, new women's writing helps construct a connection between the political and the intimate, and through these narratives Lusophone women contribute to healing social fractures and disarming conflict. Their fiction also helps us generalize about gender relations in the Lusophone African experience and across the continent.

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We discussed women's writing about gender relations more broadly in an earlier article on women in the social sciences, and in the course of that project we were energized by the important fiction African women were producing in Portuguese (see Sheldon & Rodrigues 2008). As presented in that article, many Lusophone women are politically active as party leaders, educators, and government officials working on multiple fronts, from human rights to women's rights. By writing about political issues, they establish a public presence and gain recognition in their own societies. Many of those same women have written and published poetry, short stories, and novels, developing a distinctive voice that combines literature and politics. Through fiction they have integrated the realities of daily life with broader political realities. We argue that a more truthful history can unfold through fiction, where the intimate is inseparable from the political.

The entire continent has witnessed a growing body of literature by women that has stimulated new directions in feminist analysis and generated significant insights into gender issues in the Americas and in the African and African American diasporas.[3] Writers such as Alice Walker (1983) highlight the specificity of black women's history as it is marked by post-slavery, segregation, and racism. In recognizing the long history of white scholars' appropriation of the black experience, many African American feminist scholars argue for the necessity of a separate epistemology that is situated outside of white control.[4] Their interventions reveal that black women are not arguing against the general conception of feminism per se, but against the primacy of patriarchy. As Chandra Mohanty (1991) argues, in the context of a world system dominated by the West, Third World women and women of color in general have often been cast as subordinate to monolithic notions of patriarchy. One result of this reductive vision is the production of an equally reductive imaginary about Third World women as primarily defined by their oppression.

Paralleling the African American critique of feminism, in the African context women writers and literary critics have proposed an African womanism as a more integrated feminist approach that empowers African women with the ability to name and signify their own perceptions of their situation. Womanism proposes to focus on social change and cohesion, considering power and its disguises not in dichotomous terms, but in relative terms.[5] In the womanist tradition, the personal is political and the political is personal. To believe otherwise is possible but often illusory (and some would argue that this is true not only in Africa). Nombuso Dlamini, for example, discusses her mother's work as a teacher and political activist as exemplifying the Zulu concept of *ubufazi*, which conveys both "formal gender politics" and "interpersonal politics," and which she translates as *womanism* (2001:79–80). Feminism in Lusophone Africa often entails not only a struggle for equity with men, but also a struggle within a matrix of structural violence that traverses individual lives on multiple levels. Thus, to challenge patriarchy is seen as part of a larger struggle that intersects with

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the multiple forms of subjugation that continue to mark daily life in Africa despite thirty-five years of independence.

Close attention to women's writing in Africa has revealed that the plight of women as portrayed in their narratives is not limited to female individuality in opposition to male domination, but is organically entwined with the whole social fabric. Their womanism moves beyond gender dichotomies to embrace "African women's collective grouping, and positive bonding" (Kolawole 1997:27). As romantic as it may sound, this solidarity has strong historical roots in Africa and has been a key approach to survival in situations of conflict, displacement, and scarcity.

Lusophone African literature by women partakes of this engagement, whereby the body politic can no longer be dissociated from the body intimate. Intimacy becomes the locus of a confluence of struggles and debates that remain unresolved in the postindependence present. In the novels analyzed here, fiction brings the reader close to hidden truths about women's condition in postcolonial Africa. Especially in regard to the urban milieu of Cape Verde and Mozambique, women's fiction exposes the normalization of social deception as justified by the ideologies of either modernity or tradition, but always resulting in the corrosion of the social fabric.

In our discussion below we present the historical progression from a politically centered literature—in which intimacy was discursively peripheral or muted by the primacy of writing about the nation during the liberation struggle and immediately after independence—to literature written and published later in the postcolonial era that incorporates people's intimate lives. Given the impossibility of accounting for the entire experience of Lusophone Africa, we will focus on women's writing in Cape Verde and Mozambique, painting in broad strokes their political engagement. We then shift to a more in-depth examination of the novels by Salústio and Chiziane that illustrate the intimate turn. In our perspective, these contemporary writers share much of the womanism that characterizes recent literary developments by African women writers—from the intimate to the political, from the sexual to the transcendental, and from the normative to the transgressive.

Political Engagement: Denouncing Colonial Oppression and Embracing Freedom

A primary goal of this article is to contribute to a broader discussion about female Lusophone writers who have been by and large ignored in a predominantly Anglophone scholarship about Africa.[6] In both Cape Verde and Mozambique, women's writings have denounced colonial oppression and embraced a newly gained national freedom. Similarly, in both countries (and elsewhere in Lusophone Africa) it is evident that women were engaged with the revolutionary cause either through straightforward party politics or discursively, as female bodies became metaphors for the newly

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independent nations.[7] Female writers were directly engaged in the political reconstruction of their countries through their involvement with the educational system, women's rights, and party organizations. We distinguish this initial period as an era when building a national identity intersected with constructing a national literature.

At independence in 1975, Lusophone Africa witnessed illiteracy rates ranging from 80 percent in Cape Verde to greater than 90 percent in other territories. Despite these numbers, historically many women wrote sporadically in local newspapers, pamphlets, and periodicals, finding an audience for their poetry, short stories, and chronicles. For instance, in Angola before independence, Alda Lara (1993), Maria Eugénia Neto (1989), and Lília da Fonseca (1958) became known for their poetry and short stories, still heavily marked by a colonial view but reflecting a female experience. Likewise, Maria Helena Spencer's short stories (2005) reflected a colonial outlook but provided valuable detail on Cape Verdean daily life through the turbulent periods of famine during the 1950s and 1960s. Since women wrote infrequently and in dispersed journals, many more occasional papers, stories, and poems must be extricated from local newspapers and pamphlets before the extent of female writing in Portuguese during colonial times can be assessed accurately. In the context of widespread illiteracy, these women enjoyed a social position of relative privilege in the Portuguese colonial system.

The development of the anticolonial movements and liberation wars in the 1960s provided fertile ground for political engagement. Writing was strategically tied to denouncing colonialism and all forms of exploitation. One of the best known early Lusophone poets was Noémia da Sousa, who was active during the initial years of the anticolonial struggle in Mozambique. She published her first poem, "O Irmão Negro," at age nineteen in the local literary magazine *Mocidade*. She soon began working for the political organization the African Association, where she was responsible for reviving their newspaper, *O Brado Africano*, and worked with the renowned Mozambican poet José Craveirinha. She wrote several well-received and much anthologized poems during those years, though after 1951 she no longer wrote poetry, with the exception of a commemorative poem following the death of Mozambique's president Samora Machel in 1986. One of the most cited is a poem about migrant workers in South Africa's gold and diamond mines, "Magaiça," which concludes, "Youth and health, / the lost illusions / which will shine like stars /on some Lady's neck in some City's night" (Dickinson 1972:45–46).

da Sousa's writings epitomize this early engagement with political liberation, and her popularity suggests that she was appreciated for her cries for freedom, as with these closing lines from "The Poem of João": "who can take the multitude and lock it in a cage?" (Dickinson 1972:70–74). In 1951, to escape the vigilance of the Portuguese secret police, she moved to Portugal, where she met her husband, Gaspar Soares. They later moved to France, where she worked as a journalist. She returned to Portugal, where

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she remained until her death in 2002.[8] Her experience was different from that of most of the writers discussed here, as her poems were widely translated and reprinted, allowing her to reach a transnational audience that identified with her universal call to freedom and anticolonial mobilization.

From another generation but equally engaged in political activism is Lina Magaia, a Mozambican journalist, political activist, and member of parliament, who is best known for a collection of short stories that brought attention to the atrocities of the war with Renamo in the 1980s and the impact of that war on ordinary Mozambicans (Magaia 1988). The novel *Neighbours*, by the Mozambican writer Lília Momplé (1995, 2001), also centers on events during the 1980s war; the title refers to the proximity of South Africa and its role in encouraging war with Mozambique. Momplé has also published short story collections in which she addresses women's issues in Mozambique and portrays Mozambican women as fighters who work in diverse ways to improve their position in society (1988, 1997).

In the short story "O baile de Celina" (1988), Momplé focuses on the anomalous position of mulattas, women of mixed race in colonial Mozambique. The story is set in 1950 and stresses the ambiguous racial category; while Celina's mother has worked to improve her daughter's opportunities, believing that schooling will be a path to success, colonial social expectations thwart her efforts. The "baile," or banquet, of the title is part of the local secondary school's graduation festivities, but at the last minute Celina is told that she cannot attend because she is a young woman of color and her classmates, with one exception, are white. Her mother has sewn a beautiful white lace-trimmed dress for her to wear to the ceremony; in the final scene of the story Celina destroys the dress by cutting it into narrow strips. While the main characters are all female, the primary theme concerns racism and colonialism. Her approach is suggested by the epigraph to *Os olhos da cobra verde* (1997): "Happy are the people who know how to transform suffering and despair into art and love."[9]

In contrast to the authors of politicized narratives in which writing about liberation is the raison d'être, the Mozambican novelist Paulina Chiziane is renowned for turning her attention to love, sexuality, and intimacy in general from a woman's perspective. Her approach offers a counterweight to the sometimes mythic idea of Mozambican women as heroines of the struggle; she indicates that the reality is both more prosaic and more empowering. In *Balada de amor ao vento* (1990) and *Niketche* (2002), for instance, she addresses the problems of polygamy. While the first work is set during the colonial era, *Niketche* (discussed in greater detail below) is a modern fable of the many wives of one man who find each other and come together to force their husband to treat them properly. As a work of historical fiction, a predominant theme is violence and the atrocities of the 1980s war with Renamo in Mozambique.[10] These Mozambican authors have navigated the difficult terrain of exposing the brutal realities of conflict in a society that has not fully recovered from the scars of internal war. The search for nation-

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al unity after a decade of displacement, death, and dispossession dominates their fiction.

Although Cape Verde did not suffer from the direct effects of a liberation war, which was fought on Guinean soil, the islands experienced a different kind of violence during the colonial years, a violence that was without weapons and therefore veiled. Famines devastated the archipelago periodically, leaving a visible marker in the writings of the Claridade literary movement of the 1930s–1960s. Although during colonial times many Cape Verdean women wrote poetry, short stories, and essays, they were mainly invisible in the Claridade, a movement that was profoundly influenced by Brazilian neorealism and is often considered the kernel of a distinct national Cape Verdean literature.[11] In *Claridade*, a periodical published from 1936 to 1960, authors denounced the poverty of the islands, its chronic devastating famines, and the impact of voluntary and forced migration. Migration as a marker of Cape Verdean insular identity was often tied to the dual desire to leave while wanting to stay.[12] Intimacy and sexuality were largely absent in the construction of the fictional characters, who were typically portrayed as caged by abandonment, isolation, and silence against an arid landscape. One could argue that during the Claridade period, insularity and the unreliable natural surroundings dominated narrative construction while characters' inner worlds were subsumed in the landscape.

The Cape Verdean author Orlanda Amarílis, however, broke with this tradition when she published a collection of short stories, *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa* (1974), and later *Ilhéu dos passaros* (1983) and *A Casa dos Mastros* (1989). Despite being thematically rooted in the island's migratory tradition, her characters do not experience migration as a panacea for poverty and famine; rather their lives in Lisbon are fractured and often lonely. Specifically, as Ellen Sapega points out, Amarílis's female characters circulate through the metropolis confronting "deeply rooted patterns of patriarchal control, a control which has exercised an enormous power on the imagining and construction of Cape Verdean identity" (2004:47). Her work gives voice to the racial and sexist obstacles Cape Verdeans confront in their efforts to integrate into Portuguese society.[13]

Uniquely satirical and rooted in the islands' reality, Fátima Bettencourt is best known for her short stories in *Semear em pó* (1994) and essays published in the Cape Verdean press, which have been gathered into one volume, *Um certo olhar* (2001). Recently she has published *Mar, caminho adubado de esperança* (2006), a collection of short stories about migration and Cape Verdean communities in the diaspora. In her essays she provides critical detail to expose class asymmetries, the neocolonial rhetoric of development, and the cycle of poverty. As with other female writers of her generation, she also has held leadership positions in the Cape Verdean Women's Organization (OMCV), and she has produced several radio shows for Rádio Educativa.

Among the better known writers outside Cape Verde is the jurist Vera Duarte, who has advocated for legislation to protect women's labor and fam-

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ily rights in publications in the Cape Verdean and international press. She is the director of the National Commission on Human and Civil Rights of Cape Verde (CNDHC), a member of the African Human Rights Commission, and of OMCV. Beyond the field of law and justice, her poetry has also gained recognition for uniquely portraying women as socially liberated agents capable of commanding their lives and passions. Her verse is noted for blending poetry and prose and for departing from formal Portuguese styles in her *Amanhã a madrugada* (1993) and *Arquipelago da paixão* (2001). Her novel, *A candidata* (2004), received the 2003 Sonangol Prize for literature. The novel tells the life history of a woman who joined the anticolonial resistance organization, the African Party for the Independence of Guiné-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), achieved a university education in Europe despite multiple barriers, and was able to reconcile party, family, and professional activity.

Ondina Ferreira, a former minister of education and culture, has published several articles on Cape Verdean literature under the pseudonym Camila Mont-Rond. She also recently published her first novel, *Amor na ilha e outras paragens* (2001). The novel exposes the daily life of a decaying landed class on Fogo Island abiding by tradition and the patriarchal principles of honor and shame. The landed elite collapsed when migrants returning from America brought other avenues for upward economic mobility. Her writing details the role of extended families in controlling women's sexuality before marriage, while men commonly had children before and outside marriage. As with Duarte's work, Ferreira's writing reflects important postcolonial transitions and the opening of opportunities, particularly for educated women who have had access to higher education abroad.

An emerging genre in Cape Verdean literature by women is children's literature based on oral histories and traditional storytelling. Female educators such as Hermínia Ferreira (2000, 2003), Fátima Bettencourt (1996), Margarida Brito (1991), and Dina Salústio (1998) have recaptured disappearing fables, oral narratives, and musical traditions voiced in Cape Verdean Creole and have published these materials in Portuguese. Similar initiatives have taken place across the islands with Maria Paula Monteiro Fernandes's collection of stories from Santo Antão Island (1998) and the work of Ivone Ramos (sister of Orlanda Amarílis), whose writing reflects her childhood on Santiago, São Nicolau, and São Vicente Islands (1990, 2000). While these works are written in Portuguese, they narrate an oral realm for the most part lived and transmitted in Creole.

Dina Salústio, whose novel we examine below, is the author of a short story collection, *Mornas eram as noites* (1994), in which she portrays the hardships faced by single mothers, street children, abandoned women, and prostitutes. Her writing opens a window into a world of violence that is perennially silenced through political inertia and cultural codes of honor and shame. Sexual violence disproportionately affects poor women and girls, often when they are too young to fully assess the magnitude and consequences of their experience. Salústio's short stories express the wish "to

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silence once and for all the barking of those who persecute our girls surreptitiously in the quiet of night" and the hope that these villains will be "torn apart by the hands of abandoned mothers . . . [who will] sink them in the pitiless tears of all the abandoned children" (1994:35). Salústio is one of the founders of the OMCV and its periodical, *Mudjer.* She advocates for women's rights and has also produced a study on violence against women sponsored by the Institute for the Feminine Condition (2001). Although she is one of the least known writers outside Cape Verde (and perhaps even within Cape Verde), her work represents a thematic and stylistic shift worth exploring in detail.

Women's fiction writing in both Mozambique and Cape Verde, as elsewhere in Africa, has played a transforming role in highlighting gender-based violence, exposing inequality within marriage and across the nation, and restoring women as protagonists of pleasure and sexuality. Despite the authors' age differences, their writings reflect the collective consciousness of a generation of people who lived through anticolonial political resistance, witnessed postcolonial conflict (in the case of Mozambique), and have been thoroughly involved in the party politics and the political life of their respective countries. Thematically, Salústio and Chiziane's writings depict the intimate lives of those who commonly are silenced and marginalized. The novels discussed below, *A louca do Serrano* (The Mad Woman of Serrano, 1998) and *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* (Niketche: A Story of Polygamy, 2002) focus on this inner world of human emotions.

Turning Inward: Madness and Deception in A Louca de Serrano

Island-based identity, insularity, and migration have until recently been three key elements in Cape Verdean literature (Mariano 1991). Dina Salústio departs from these tropes in *A louca de Serrano* (1998), portraying instead a boundless inner world of interdependencies where characters search for truth against a world of commonly accepted social fabrications. Deception is found in both rural and urban life as the protagonists seek to understand each others' intimate secrets and in the process find silence, solitude, and suffering. In spite of overt patriarchal authority, women command the magical world of the past as well as the fertility and reproduction of the present in a small rural village, named Serrano after a madwoman who had cursed its inhabitants for committing unspeakable crimes. Implicitly, sexual violence underpins the history of Serrano as well as the village named after her. Only when her "curse" and suffering subside will the villagers be set free. Her curse entails her own death every thirty-three years, as she must be born again cyclically until the day she herself is set free. During one of her cyclical apparitions the author explains that

> death is not a valid source for suffering, the only real suffering is that of living a life that is not destined for us, just as she [Serrano] had to live her

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> own cursed life ever since one man interrupted her flight...during a night of New Moon, while she was on the way to her true home. (1998:33)

Silence permeates the narrative as the main characters search internally for their true selves. Serrano periodically appears in the village to remind everyone of their cowardly conformity and to denounce past crimes. It is through the voice of the madwoman that the narrative unfolds in time and space.

In *A louca de Serrano* characters are not defined in relation to the Cape Verdean rural environment as in realist Claridade writing. Even contemporary Cape Verdean authors mostly circumscribe their narratives within Lusophone spaces; the well-known Germano Almeida, for instance, makes Cape Verde (particularly the islands of São Vicente, Santiago, and Boavista) the center of his plots, with his characters typically moving among Cape Verde, Luanda, Lisbon, and lately Brazil (Almeida 2001, 2004, 2006). *A louca de Serrano*, by contrast, is characterized by spacial and temporal indeterminacy; Salústio transcends all boundaries of geography and historicity by giving primacy to the characters' inner worlds rather than to their territorial location or moment in time. For some characters time represents many centuries, while for others it is but a few decades. For the madwoman of Serrano time is cyclical and fantastic:

> It was never proven, but the Mad Woman of Serrano, the woman who died and was resurrected every thirty-three years, born in an unknown place and from an unknown mother, inherited the memory, the face, and destiny of a preceding woman, [and] said that the humiliation of Serrano villagers derived from their having received a body but not a head. (1998:96)

Salústio does invoke the islands realistically when her characters produce eucalyptus infusions, till the soil with reverent patience, and walk across urban plazas as one walks in Cape Verdean urban spaces. But Serrano is also a mythic village with a mountain that contains the village's dead ancestors along with their secrets and in which place names are associated with the characters' personalities and emotions. There is an enchanted stream and soil that supports lemon and orange trees—quite unlike the terrain of the real Cape Verde. And in striking contrast with most examples of the Cape Verdean literary tradition, the natural world is animated with feeling. The local stream weeps because of social wrongdoings that were silenced, the mountain roars with the dead ancestors, and the wind and ocean resonate with the cries of pain. Nature manifests the village curse, which cannot be terminated until Serrano, the madwoman, is liberated. In this sense the narrative produces a new cartography based on characters' suppressed emotions and shaped especially by disordered gender relations, which are the focus of the plot. As seen through a womanist lens, Serrano embodies the suffering of all women in the village who have not had the

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courage to confront unspeakable acts or to name the source of the villagers' tragedy. Her liberation is dependent upon other women's liberation.

Through the madwoman, history unfolds as she reveals the village curse and explains the source of the villagers' silence. The Serranese can speak only about occurrences witnessed within the village border because the rest of the world, including their own capital, is for them a foreign land, "a estrangeiro." Similarly, they are incapable of expressing passion, of naming feelings, or of articulating their inner selves, and silence dominates daily life. Men in particular "despis[e] intimate questions," fearing to expose their inner thoughts to "criticism" and the specter of social "crucifixion" (1998:95). The Serranese do not laugh, they do not kiss, and they do not caress. All such emotional expressions, particularly across gender lines, are considered superfluous, the kind of behavior expressed by urbanites or foreigners but not by the villagers.

Just as silence ensnares social life in Serrano, sexuality takes place in an emotional void. Men are sexually initiated at age fourteen by the village midwife, who retains the knowledge and secret about the vital medicine used to combat the village's affliction of infertility. The midwife also attends to the married females, instructing all of them, after three years of childless marriage attributed to their "dryness," to consult a "pharmacist" downtown. The nature of the urban pharmaceutical "cure" is really the closely guarded female secret that pregnancy can be achieved only by having sex with urban men, devoid of any emotional attachments. As children are born who have no physical resemblance to their fathers, the entire village silences all suspicions, and masculine pride is socially and publicly saved. Some come to suspect that visits to the pharmacist may imply other acts, but suspicions are silenced and neither women nor men publicly acknowledge the true source of village reproduction. Ironically, it is through women's deception that village patriarchy is literally reproduced and the pretense of male virility is preserved. When women return pregnant from their visits to town they demand "frequent sex with their husbands, indeed, . . . one of the few instances when women demanded anything" at all (63–64). Men "observe the mechanism of their male sexuality" and brag about their sexual prowess among themselves (1998:63). Implicitly, Salústio unmasks the complicity of women in their own subjugation. Thus Serrano is dominated not by a monolithic conception of patriarchy, but by a crystallized deception maintained by both women and men.

Unlike all other villagers, Gremiana has the daring to fall in love with a village man, Valentino, and to share sexual pleasure. When Gremiana faces village pressure to visit the "pharmacist," she responds by denouncing the fiction of male virility. She is motivated to break the socially accepted silence when she discovers her husband bragging about his sexual abilities to other village men in the local bar, thus betraying their intimacy and animalizing her own sexuality. Gremiana reveals the true pharmaceutical source of village fertility and is stoned to death, an act witnessed silently by

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all of the other women who are incapable of telling the truth, of breaking out of their emotional solitude, or exposing their complicity in the fiction of male virility that has been spun generation after generation.

The only character besides Gremiana who has the courage to experience real emotion and thereby stand up for truth is Jerónimo, a young sensitive man who is the one villager able to transcend monolithic conceptions of patriarchy. Unlike the other village males Jerónimo acknowledges his own infertility and is capable of emotional expression. He also has the courage to fall in love. Just as his wife is about to consult a pharmacist their life is changed by the appearance of Genoveva, an upper-class teenager from town and the only survivor of a plane crash that occurred near the village. Jerónimo finds Genoveva in a state of trauma, unable to speak, narrate facts, or remember her own identity. With affection he cares for her wounds and protects her from intrusive villagers, although their relationship is not sexual. Thus it is with surprise that Jerónimo learns that Genoveva is pregnant. She gives birth to a girl, Filipa, and in order to protect Genoveva and avoid intrigue, Jerónimo feigns paternity.

The community is destabilized by a birth that occurred without the midwife's or pharmacist's intervention. Soon after her daughter is born, Genoveva, still traumatized and not knowing her own identity, wanders away from the village, abandoning Filipa to Jerónimo and to the other villagers. In time, Genoveva reconstitutes her life in town and starts her own family. Her world becomes dissociated from the village as her bourgeois family tries to "delete" her past through psychiatric cures. Similarly, Filipa grows up emotionally homeless and disconnected from all her surroundings with the exception of her relationship with her nonbiological father and the madwoman Serrano, whom she befriends. But when Filipa falls ill, the village remedies have no effect on her, and Jerónimo is forced to leave her with a priest who takes her to Genoveva and her family in town.

In town, another world of deception unfolds. Filipa's biological family, the San Martins, are prosperous and respected and her grandmother, Genoveva's mother, fears that her acceptance by the family will undermine her own social status and the psychological health of Genoveva. As a result, Filipa remains outside the San Martin circle away from her biological mother, constrained by another kind of silence, which is imposed by the urban bourgeois lifestyle. Throughout her life away from Serrano, Filipa longs for Jerónimo, the only person who was capable of giving her affection. Around her thirty-third birthday, after going through a divorce, she decides to reconstruct her past for the sake of her own liberation and that of her own daughter.

Through the search for her real identity, Filipa learns that Serrano was flooded by a collapsed dam, which forced the relocation of the entire village. Those who had stayed were drowned as the flooding waters pushed them into the ocean. In a final diluvium, the author discloses that for those who made it out, leaving and traveling far from home, of "crossing the

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ocean, of emigrating, and escaping" had always been their private dream, "even by air if necessary. Where to, is something that no one knew" (192). Despite the villagers' apparent intransigence, the ocean metaphor of Cape Verdean literature makes its appearance here, as a permanent point of departure and return for voyages that are both real and imagined. The most distant of all voyages, however, remains that between men and women. Stripping away the conformity and deception that characterizes the emotionless connections between males and females, Salústio reveals the unbridgeable distance that separates those who experience promixity without intimacy.

Once the secret past is revealed, the curse of Serrano ends and real emotional ties become possible. Jerónimo is able to relocate to town, where he works as a mechanic and improbably, during one rainy day, encounters Genoveva. Filipa, finally reunited with Jerónimo, is liberated at last from her feeling of homelessness, and the madwoman Serrano, who had accompanied her all her life, is also set free. The liberation of all of the Serronese women follows in due course, for madness, as Serrano had explained, is a state of mind in which we find refuge from emotional pain. With normal relations of sexuality and reproduction restored, the villagers overcome the curse of infertility, reject the restrictions of isolated village life, and surmount their tragic past.

A Community of Women in Mozambique

In Paulina Chiziane's novel *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* (2002), a polygamous marriage is a metaphor for modern Mozambican politics and society.[14] The story focuses on the five wives of the same man, who find each other and overcome initial jealousies to join together and confront their shared husband. They go on to support one another as they all find their way to financial and psychological independence once they leave him.

Chiziane's narrative is highly symbolic, as the husband, Tony, is a well-to-do police official whose character metonymically represents the Mozambican government. Each of the five wives embodies a different region of Mozambique, divided between north and south: Rami, a Changaan from Maputo, and Julieta from Inhambane, are southerners, while the three northerners are Luísa, a Sena from Zambézia, Saly, a Makonde from Cabo Delgado, and Mauá Saulé, a Macua from Nampula. The story is narrated by Rami, the first wife and the only one who was married in a Christian church; she is the only truly legal wife in the eyes of the church and the state. The women refer to Tony as the "national husband" (*marido nacional*), as he is the one who unites the disparate regions through marriage to various women (Schmidt 2006).

Once Rami learns about the other wives, she initiates the events of the story by approaching each of them in turn. At first they are angry to learn about the existence of so many others, but then they decide jointly on a course of action. Rami, learning the stories of how each woman sought

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safety by marrying Tony following experiences of "deception, prostitution, poverty, and rape," gains a greater appreciation of the variety of women's experiences in Mozambique (Owen 2007:201). She has an illuminating discussion with Luísa concerning the nature of marriage and male–female relations. Luísa explains why she is willing to share Tony, noting that "I know that I will never be Tony's real wife, for that you would live each day [together]. A bit of love here, a smile there, like a chicken eating its feed, grain by grain. . . . Lacking a good rain, a little shower will do." She continues, "Those women who sell their bodies are women like us, Rami." When Rami protests, saying, "No, I am not like them, I cannot be like them," Luísa responds, "You suffer the same as them. You suffer more than they do. You are a wife on paper, but you are the loneliest of women" (84).

Confronting Tony at a public celebration, Rami forces him to acknowledge his wives in a formal way, pay bridewealth for them, and give them and their children a recognized (though still only quasi-legal) place in society. The wives then begin to meet to make decisions about their next steps, forming a kind of local democracy as a counter to official government political entities. Though they do not always agree, they come to see that Tony's authority is based in his economic power. Rami and another wife sell clothes in the market and use their income to help the others develop financial independence. The women form a *xitique*, a local form of a revolving credit society, funding each wife in turn as she embarks on a new venture designed to end her dependence on the mutual husband.

Chiziane connects the increasing social independence the women find to new shared knowledge of female sexuality. Rami, from the south, learns about matrilineal traditions of the north, where girls' initiation rites include passing along knowledge about women's bodies, allowing them greater ease with their sexuality and the possibility of pleasure. Although Chiziane generally uses ellipses (. . .) rather than naming women's genitalia, she allows the otherwise open discussion of women's sexuality to become an expression of female empowerment in the novel.

The marriage ends when Tony seeks to expand his control over women beyond the borders of Mozambique, faking his death when he goes to Paris and finds Gaby, his sixth wife. Tony's family falls for the ruse, and believing Tony to be dead, they descend on Rami's house to lay claim to her goods, following the tradition in patrilineal southern Mozambique in which all material belongings revert to the husband's family upon his death. The demands of the family include the expectation that Rami will acquiesce to a relationship with her brother-in-law, as the custom of widow inheritance can include the arrival of a deceased husband's brother to demand his rights to marry the widow. Often this practice is abused, and brothers-in-law have been known to demand sex with the widow without following through with the more permanent obligations to care for her and allow her continued access to her home and fields. In *Niketche*, Tony's brother, fittingly named Levy, demands his leviratic right to take Rami as his own wife. But in an

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ironic turn of events, the experience proves educational for Rami, as Levy is far more sexually skilled than Tony was, and Rami and Levy discover enjoyment together. When Tony reappears he finds his own brother has made him a cuckold.

The five wives then leave the troubled polygamous marriage to forge fresh relationships with a variety of men. The new partners, who each represent a vast improvement over the shared husband, further allow Chiziane to focus on women's sexuality and the potential for female sexual pleasure. But the new relationships continue the political allegory as well, as the new husbands include a wealthy Portuguese man, a defrocked Italian priest, a reformed wife-beater, and a younger African man, each standing in for a demographic sector of Mozambican society. It appears that Rami will remain with Levy as his second wife, as she has become pregnant from their night of passion. The book ends with Tony's descent into hell: "He didn't fall, but flew into the abyss, straight to the heart of the desert, to the fire without end" (332).

Paulina Chiziane herself embodies the possibilities of postcolonial Mozambique. She was born in 1955 in the southern province of Gaza. Her mother was a peasant woman who never learned to read, and her father was a self-employed tailor who refused to work for the white Portuguese. Her father insisted that the family speak Chope, their local language, and avoid speaking Portuguese in their home. Chiziane attended a school for African children where she "learned to write in the dirt underneath a tree" (Chabal 1994:292–93). She emphasizes the importance of orality in her storytelling, remembering her maternal grandmother as a renowned raconteur and crediting women as sources for her stories (Chabal 1994:297–98). While she writes in Portuguese, she deliberately incorporates a variety of words from the myriad local languages in Mozambique, providing a glossary in *Niketche* to aid readers. As she describes her writing, "I do not want to write in Portuguese, I am not interested in being a writer of the Portuguese language, I am interested in being an African writer of Portuguese expression" (quoted in Chabal 1994:300).[15]

Chiziane's emphasis on women's condition in Mozambican society can certainly be interpreted as rooted in a womanist perspective, though she has not used that term herself. In *Niketche* the women form a collective based on local practices of sharing and community, exactly the kind of cooperation discussed in Kolawole's writings about African womanism (1997). Chiziane has written about the difficult situation of women, and has wondered, "By writing more books every day, am I contributing to the development of women and of society? Sometimes I think no. Sometimes I think yes" (1994:18). That comment came at an early stage in her writing career; with *Niketche,* a later novel, she is clearly making a positive statement about the possibilities for women's organization and development in Mozambican society.

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Restoring Women's Lives and the Social Fabric

In literature, female bodies have often been seen as political metaphors for a nation in the process of becoming, where womanhood typically enshrines fertility, motherhood, and oral tradition. In more recent stories, female protagonists search for meaningful relationships, for command over their own lives, for truthfulness, and for pleasure. Writers now portray women as sexual agents searching for uncomfortable truths that bring an end to social incoherence, exposing the disjuncture between their private lives and changing social structures. The allegory of kinship and family, region and nation is not a subtle one in Chiziane's hands. Nonetheless, her novel focuses on women's histories and choices, allowing women the center stage as they leave an oppressive marriage by carrying on a new democratic form of family discussion and as they emerge into happier times based on economic and sexual independence. In other words, Chiziane inscribes agency in the actions of her female characters as they dismantle their social "suppression" and "objectification" (Afolabi 2003).

Dina Salústio's narrative speaks similarly about the unspoken world of inner deception, violence, and disjuncture between men and women. The emotional void that disrupts her characters' sense of home permeates the narrative. Both authors represent women with the power to build history anew from the inside out. Insofar as these relationships constitute the fabric of life, both authors force readers to interrogate the extent to which the reproduction of any society is founded on tacitly accepted deception. The novels suggest that women, not only in Cape Verde and Mozambique but in general, are the main agents in restoring truth, for they control the knowledge of sexual reproduction and socialization. It is from this vantage point that social life is possible and worthwhile, or else history will be a cyclical reenactment of unfulfilled selves cursed to perpetually search for home.

Through fiction a new womanism emerges with female agency as the principal mechanism of social cohesion. This approach is a major departure from earlier Lusophone African literature in which sexuality and intimacy were either ignored or entwined with male agency. The terrain of intimacy is not devoid of conflict and pain, but harbors many gendered silences on which social life is maintained and reproduced by both men and women across differentiated social strata. In these writings female protagonists are in command of their financial independence and search to restore truthfulness to history. They do so by strategizing allegiances in which emotional and consanguine kinship, motherhood, and female solidarity are key avenues to survival. These notions of family differ from Western epistemologies of the nuclear family, and this approach to gender relations allows us to connect the stories by women writers from Lusophone Africa with those of women writers from the rest of the continent.[16]

Cross-culturally, women have written poetry and fiction in a variety of forms that range from the public to the private realms, from subtle irony

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to explicit critique, from silent strategies to explicit denunciations (see Gal 1991). Lila Abu-Lughod's study of the Bedouin of Egypt's Western Desert shows how young women perform improvised poetry in intimate spaces to communicate their vulnerability and dissent from prevailing Bedouin ideology (1986). Throughout the Black Atlantic music and fiction have been essential to verbalizing African agency against colonial oppression (see Gilroy 1993). Particularly in countries undergoing conflict or recovering from postwar fractions, as Aili Mari Tripp (2000) points out, women have worked across social divisions and boundaries in order to restore peace and assure survival. In a postcolonial and postconflict environment where the world of intimacy has been systematically violated, fiction provides a restorative encounter between the intimate and the political.

In the Lusophone context, where the colonial past is profoundly present, writing remains combative, no longer part of an anticolonial struggle but newly regenerative, as authors seek to write themselves and their societies out of neocolonial relics, corruption, and conflict (see Niyi Afolabi 2002). According to the Nigerian scholar and womanist writer Chikwenye Ogunyemi, "We must be always conscious of that outside world." Furthermore, we should not forget that given the different positions of privilege, "most feminists of all categories outside Africa unwittingly gain from the global arrangements" (Arndt 2000:721). In seeking to promote reconciliation and solidarity, African womanism reflects a female strategy designed to enable women to cope with hardship and overcome tremendous social fissures. In the novels discussed here, female characters work together to end the secrets of madness and infertility, of polygamy and oppression, and to bring sexual and emotional freedom to both women and men in their communities, whether in an imaginary Cape Verdean village or for an overarching idea of the Mozambican nation.

Both Salústio and Chiziane connect the body politic with the body intimate. They show that intimacy is inseparable from the struggles that remain unresolved as their characters search for home in the postcolonial present. It is from the vantage point of restoring intimate lives that the entire social fabric can be healed from a history of conflict and violence. Their fiction brings us closer to the truth by denouncing the generalized acceptance of gender relations devoid of true emotional bonds. As presented in these novels, women's intimate lives, as seen in their relationships, their sexuality, and the important female-centered bonds they cultivate, all contribute to forging a future of greater openness and equality for both men and women.

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Notes

1. See Gal (1991); Hale (2006).
2. See Afolabi (2001); Ferreira (1976); Moser (1989).
3. See Arndt (2000); Emenyonu (2004); Hudson-Weems (1993); Oyewumi (1997, 2000).
4. See Collins (1990); Phillips and McCaskill (1995).
5. See Nnaemeka (1996); Nwajiaku (2004); Ogunyemi (1985, 1995).
6. An exception is the useful discussion in Passos (2008).
7. See Fonseca (1999); Owen (2007).
8. Her poems are available in English translation in Dickinson (1972); also see Elder (1995).
9. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from the Portuguese are the authors'.
10. See Campos (2004); Williams (2004); Owen (2003, 2007).
11. See Brookshaw (1996); Chabal (1996); Sapega (2004).
12. See Silveira (1963); Mariano (1991).
13. Ana Martinho has written a study of Amarílis's work (1993), and has also edited two collections that include important writings by female Lusophone African writers (1994, 1999).
14. See Campos (2004) and Owen (2004) for provocative analyses of this novel.
15. See also Hamilton (2003); Owen (2003).
16. On the epistemologies of the nuclear family, see Collins (1998, 1999); Oyewumi (2000).

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