

**THREE WOMAN POETS FROM  
MOZAMBIQUE**

Luís Rafael  
(Translation and notes)

**GLÓRIA de SANT'ANNA (1925 - 2009)**

- *Distância* (1951)
- *Música Ausente* (1954)
- *Livro de Água* (1961)
- *Poemas do Tempo Agreste* (1964)
- *Um Denso Azul Silêncio* (1965)
- *Desde que o Mundo* (1972)
- *Amaranto* (1988) — collected poems, 1951-1983
- *Não Eram Aves Marinhas* (1988)
- *Solamplo* (2000) — collected poems, 1961-1975
- *Algures no Tempo* (2005)
- *Trinado para a Noite que Avança* (2009)

Widely regarded by some as representing one of the highest achievements in Mozambican lyricism, Glória de Sant'Anna's work is ignored—*delenda gloria*—by many others. Six of her poetry collections were published in Mozambique. The silence which surrounds this poet seems to reflect more on the ideological and racial preconceptions of the Mozambican canon-makers (many of whom are not Mozambican) than on considerations of her unique achievement, which is not generally denied. The Portuguese likewise tend to treat her work with a similar silence, a refusal to engage in, rather a dismissal of, her work; the suggestion is that she cannot be placed within that tradition either. The poet is however held in high esteem by the Mozambican poets themselves and the lineage initiated by Glória de Sant'Anna is today one of the dominant traditions in Mozambican lyricism. A school teacher for most of her life, she worked in Porto Amélia (now called Pemba) and Vila Pery (now Chimoio). Glória de Sant'Anna, retired for many years now, lived in Óvar, Portugal.

**NOÉMIA de SOUSA (1926 - 2002)**

- *Sangue Negro* (2001)

Rightly considered one of Africa's greatest women poets, Noémia de Sousa published her first poems in 1948, when she was 22. Her almost total poetic output was written in the following three years, and she did not write again until 1988, when she composed a poem on the death of Samora Machel. In 1951 she went on holiday to Lisbon and stayed. Later she moved to Paris. She returned to Portugal after the 1974 Revolution. She did not—as it has been claimed—stop writing because she married a Portuguese man. (The poet was married to a Mozambican who, like her, happened to have been a Portuguese national because he had been born in a Portuguese colony.) According to Noémia de Sousa she never really stopped writing; she was a journalist and the writing she produced after she moved to Europe was of a different nature. Her powerful poetic work, which influenced a whole generation of writers and poets, remained uncollected for almost fifty years: *Sangue Negro* came out in 2001. She died in Lisbon.

**ANA MAFALDA LEITE (1956 - )**

- *Em Sombra Acesa* (1984)
- *Canções de Alba* (1989)
- *Mariscando Luas* (1992) — with Luís Carlos Patraquim & Roberto Chichorro
- *Rosas da China* (2000)
- *Passaporte do Coração* (2002)
- *Livro das Encantações* (2005)

One of those poets that canon-makers find easier to ignore than to categorize, Ana Mafalda Leite cannot be placed too firmly within either the Mozambican or Portuguese poetic traditions. It is probably more advisable to see her as belonging to both traditions, enriching both with her highly original gift. She did her schooling in Lourenço Marques (Maputo) and completed her university training in Lisbon. A teacher of Lusophone African literature—she is a professor at the University of Lisbon—her work attests also to a self-reflexive poetic reworking of that tradition.

**a mulher que ri à vida e à morte**  
**—1991**

Para lá daquela curva  
os espíritos ancestrais me esperam

Breve, muito breve  
tomarei o meu lugar entre os antepassados

À terra deixarei os despojos do meu corpo inútil  
as unhas córneas de todos os labores  
este invólucro sulcado pela aranha dos dias

Enquanto não falo com a voz do nyanga  
cada aurora é uma vitória  
saúdo-a com o riso irreverente do meu secreto triunfo

Oyo, oyo, vida!

Para lá daquel curva  
os espíritos ancestrais me esperam

**NOÉMIA de SOUSA (1926 - 2002)**

**The Woman who Laughs at Life and Death<sup>i</sup>  
—1991**

Out there beyond the swerve  
the ancestral spirits await me

Soon, very soon,  
I will take my place among my forebears

To the land I will leave the remnants of my useless body,  
the corneous nails of all efforts,  
this casing furrowed by the spider of time

Before I am called to speak with the voice of a *nyanga*\*  
each day is a victory  
I greet it with the irreverent laughter of my secret triumph

Oyo, oyo, life!

Out there beyond the swerve  
the ancestral spirits await me

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i Noémia de Sousa, "AMulher que Ri à Vida e à Morte", in *A Meu Ver*, ed. by Carlos Pinto Coelho (Lisboa: Pégaso Editores, 1992), p. 50.

\* *Shangaan*, a traditional healer or an ancestral spirit.

Luís Rafael (Trad.)

**GLÓRIA de SANT'ANNA (1925 - 2009)**

**EROTICA<sup>ii</sup>**

**—2004**

para o quinto livro de  
Ana Mafalda

soltaram-se os camelos

a káfila  
galopa sobre a areia  
de beiços estendidos

salta a carga

no ar há  
                    cardamomo benjoim  
                    pimenta e cânfora

transparentes kabayas  
volteiam  
sobre oiros e saris

                    canela despejada  
                    azzaferan

junto aos corpos unidos que se aflagam

soltaram-se os camelos

e tudo é poesia  
que se dilue no ar  
em aromas perdidos

---

ii Glória de Sant'Anna, "Erótica," *Algueres no Tempo* (Óvar: n.p, 2005), pp. 31-2.

EROTICA

*On the publication  
of Ana Mafalda's\* fifth book.*

the camels broke loose

the *kafila* †  
hurtles over the sand  
the mouths of the camels opened wide

the load topples over

the air's astir with  
                  cardamom  benzoin  
                  pepper and camphor

sheer *kabayas*‡  
swirl  
over the gold and the saris

                  dispersed cinnamon  
                  *za'faran*§

close to the enlaced bodies caressing each other

the camels broke loose

and poetry's everything  
that dissolves in the air  
in lost aromas

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\* Ana Mafalda Leite's fifth collection, *Passaporte do Coração* (2002). See, for example, "An Island Sails in My Soul."

† *Swahili*, caravan.

‡ *Malay*, sarongs.

§ *Arabic*, saffron.

Luís Rafael (Trad.)

aromas especiarias perfumes  
mãos dolentes

e os corpos unidos sobre a areia

e véus de seda  
                    kabayas

e os árabes  
os árabes e os búzios  
misturados

aos corpos já dolentes sobre a areia

soltaram-se os camelos

a káfila

                    galopa de beiços estendidos  
espumando

e a poesia

são corpos saciados sobre a areia

especiarias  
                    aromas  
gingibres e canela

sobre os corpos despídos pela areia

aroma spices fragrances  
doleful hands

and the bodies enlaced on the sand

the silk veils  
*kabayas*

and the Arabs  
the Arabs and the whelks  
have been joined

to the doleful bodies on the sand

the camels broke loose

the *kafila* hurtles

the mouths of the camels opened wide  
foaming

and poetry

is those bodies on the sand that have been satiated

spices  
                  aromas  
ginger and cinnamon

over the bodies made naked by the sand

Luís Rafael (Trad.)

**ANA MAFALDA LEITE (1956 - )**

**navega-me a alma uma ilha**

seu corpo é vestido  
de búzios e algas  
e deixa na areia  
rasto de prata

Gloria de Sant'Anna

navega-me a alma uma ilha  
o espírito antigo de um barco em viagem

penélope de m'siro enfeitada  
olha o minarete mais alto  
do horizonte

e medita sobre as ruínas do cais  
o porto ancorado do sonho

por entre os seus dedos deslizam

fios de missanga  
fios de prata  
fios de ouro

ourivesaria atenta do silencio

seu rosto voltado a oriente  
o linho enrolado no corpo  
navega-Ihe pelos dedos  
a demorada monção  
o súbito vento

**An Island Sails in My Soul**<sup>iii</sup>

her body is clothed  
with whelks and seaweed  
and it leaves behind on the sand  
silver footprints

Glória de Sant'Anna

an island sails through my soul  
the ancient spirit of a voyaging ship

Penelope adorned with *m'siro*\*  
gazes upon the tallest minaret  
on the horizon

and on the wharf in ruins  
the moored harbour of dreams  
she ponders and thinks

through her fingers slide

strings with glass beads  
strings of silver  
strings of gold

the careful jewellery of silence

her face turned orient-wise  
the linen wrapped around her body  
the long-awaited monsoon  
the abrupt wind  
sail through her body

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iii Ana Mafalda Leite, "Navega-me a Alma uma Ilha," *Passaporte do Coração* (Lisboa: Quetzal Editores, 2002), pp. 37-40.

\* A white paste that women on the Island of Mozambique put on their faces as a sign of beauty.

Luís Rafael (Trad.)

porque tem as mãos juntas  
e desenha astrolábios  
diademas colares  
rosas de areia

porque tem as mãos juntas  
entre seus fios  
rosários de prata  
corais de sonho  
enfeites colares  
cresce os muitos braços  
os sábios guizos nos tornozelos dança

o linho ao vento seu corpo esguio  
no mar ondula infinito de azuis  
e perfuma o ar de múltiplas geografias

descobriu em si a amurada  
o cais

penélope de m'siro enfeitada  
seus cabelos refulgem estreias  
búzios peixes conchas pontilhadas

e lembram finas cordagens  
enlaçadas de algas

o rosto sextante  
as mãos navegando os fios de contas perladas  
as mãos soltando essas estranhas domésticas especiarias

de m'siro enfeitada  
penélope grava na areia  
os brilhos ourives as sedas as cabaias os linhos  
e tece seus fios seus cabelos seus seios  
na púrpura turbante azul indigo  
das índicas águas

o oriente começa no seu rosto de m'siro,  
açafraão, ébano e anil  
búzios ondulantes navegam o ritmo de suas ancas  
um barco no peito

for she holds her hands together  
and draws astrolabes  
diadems necklaces  
roses of sand

for she holds her hands together  
between her strings  
rosaries of silver  
corals of dreams  
ornaments necklaces  
she grows her many arms  
she dances the wise bells on her ankles

the wind-swept linen her slender body  
undulates with the sea of infinite blues  
and she perfumes the air with multiple geographies

she discovered the bulwark within herself  
the wharf

Penelope adorned with *m'siro*  
her hair is resplendent with stars  
whelks fish spotted seashells  
and it suggests fine cordage  
entwined with seaweed

her face a sextant  
her hands sailing through the pendants of pearly beads  
her hands setting loose these strange homely spices

adorned with *m'siro*  
Penelope records  
the sparkling jewellery the silk the *kabayas*<sup>□†</sup> the linen  
on the sand  
and she weaves her strings her hair her breasts  
inside the indigo-purple turban  
of the waters of the Indian Ocean

the orient begins with her face adorned with *m'siro*,  
saffron, ebony and anil  
undulating whelks sail to the rhythm of her loins  
her hands weave

Luís Rafael (Trad.)

por suas mãos tece

os fios de prata  
os fios de ouro  
os fios de sonho

rede  
no coração da água  
ancorada

não é por Ulisses que ela aguarda  
mas por um estranho destino

que o espírito das águas  
levando-a ao cimo das nuvens  
a oriente a ocidente  
no coração da ilha há séculos  
a encanta e a demora

a traz enamorada

a boat on her breast

the strings of silver  
the strings of gold  
the strings of dreams

fishing net  
in the heart of the moored  
water

it's not for Ulysses she awaits  
but for a strange destiny  
that the water spirit  
will take her higher still than the clouds  
eastwards westwards  
into the centuries-old heart of the island  
and enchant her and those lingering moments

will make her enamoured of him