

# Silent Women in Mozambican Writer L íia Mompl é's Short Stories\*

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**Abstract**—L íia Mompl é a Mozambican author, portrays the coexistence between black and white men and women in her works. By contesting the colonial legacy, the author contributes to the subaltern's voice. In this paper, we discuss how black characters, women in particular, in the short story collection *No One Killed Suhura*, are oppressed by colonialist societies. This text addresses the violence of social, racial, and sexual inequalities and the power relations established between colonizers and colonized during the twentieth century in Mozambique. We will see that some of the literary strategies used include the omniscient focus of the narrator, the relationship between history and literature, and irony.

**Index Terms**—*Ningu n Matou Suhura* [No One Killed Suhura], short stories, women, (post-) colonial, irony

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the short story collection *No One Killed Suhura* (1988), the first book by Mozambican writer L íia Mompl é and highlights the power relations established between colonizers and colonized, with emphasis on female characters. L íia Maria Clara Carri re Mompl é was born on the Island of Mozambique in 1935 and studied Social Work in Lisbon, Portugal. Since 1964, she lived in several countries, including England, Mozambique, and Brazil. In 1981, L íia Mompl é returned to Mozambique and became the secretary-general of the Mozambican Writers' Association, a position she held until 2001. Apart from *No One Killed Suhura*, she also wrote the novel *Neighbours* (1995) and the collection of short stories *Os Olhos da Cobra Verde* [The Eyes of the Green Snake] (1997).

In 2001, the writer won the Caine Prize for Writers of Africa with the short story "Celina's Prom", the Novelistic Prize (Jo o Dias) in the Maputo Centennial Literary Contest with the short story "Cani ", and in 2011, the Jos  Craveirinha's Literature Prize. *No One Killed Suhura* is composed of the stories "It Happened in Saua-Saua", "Cani ", "Celina's Prom", "No One Killed Suhura", and "The Last Nightmare", which respectively describe stories from 1935, 1945, 1950 and 1970, and 1974 – periods of colonial times in Mozambique (the first four stories) and in Angola (the last story). Corruption, ambition, misery, hunger, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender were themes in the construction of the Mozambican narrative at that time, as synthesized by Silva (2017, p. 15). For authors like L íia Mompl é writing is a tool to denounce a time marked by the subalternity of the African and, in particular, of women. Thus, as the Mozambican writer Lu  Bernardo Honwana notes in the preface to *No One Killed Suhura*, it is a book of "stories that illustrate history" (Mompl é 1988, p. I) about a period of "colonial aggression". Using a "classicizing austerity", L íia Mompl é presents the "narration of suffering", contributing to the construction of literature with testimonial value (Mompl é 1988, p. II).

In her works, L íia Mompl é explores the traditional roles of women and the expectations that accompany them in society, along with the difficulties they face. However, as D z-Szmidt (2014, p. 183) reminds us, in interviews, L íia Mompl é confesses her social concern, but does not identify herself as a feminist. In her works, she tends to emphasize issues related to race, class, gender, color differences, and ethnic origin. As Ferreira (2020, p. 70) reminds us regarding the writing of female authors on colonialism:

Since the early 1990s, critics pursuing the question of gender in colonial discourse have called attention to how women writers tend to represent colonized lands and subjects as well as colonial power relations in complex ways (...). While women may draw on basically the same conventions and tropes as men do, their positioning themselves in relation to dominant discourses of femininity (...) would explain enunciations of irony, non-mastery and, above all, a measure of sympathy or sentimental identification with colonized 'others', affording moments of self-revelation (...).

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## II. CAN THE SUBORDINATE SPEAK?

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's article, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), challenges both imperialist colonial discourse and male-centered discourse. In her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" also published in 1985, Spivak argues that women in emerging countries face double oppression: androcentrism or phallogocentrism (male centralism) and white supremacy. The term "subaltern" originates from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (written between 1926 and 1937), where he refers to the rural labor force and the proletariat. Spivak expands this definition to refer to social groups with lower social status. In subsequent writings, such as *In Other Words* and *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, "subaltern" is used to describe groups that lack a voice or cannot express themselves. Spivak concludes that subalterns cannot speak, thus rendering them subaltern. Postcolonial gender studies continue to pay attention to women as the "subaltern".

In Lúcia Moplé's short stories, the female Mozambican characters are oppressed by the colonists, i.e., the whites, while also adhering to the traditions of the local patriarchy. These women react to their oppression through silence.

*No One Killed Suhura* begins with "It Happened in Saua-Saua" and ends with "The Last Nightmare". In both narratives, the central character is male, and the theme centers on the extreme violence of colonialism that leads to death. In the first short story, the main character, Saua-Saua, ends his life to escape the suffering of the Plantation, a punishment given by the Portuguese to black peasants who did not pay their taxes. Although slavery was officially abolished in 1869 in what was considered the entire Portuguese territory at the time, forms of "slavery" and forced labor continued to exist throughout the 20th century, according to Silva (2019, p. 44), with the British drawing attention to it. Forced labor on plantations in São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique, and Angola, and the conditions of recruitment and treatment of servants and contractors for the coffee and cocoa plantations are examples of such practices.

Title II of the "Colonial Act" protected the rights of indigenous people, prohibiting their exploitation. However, article 20 provided: "The State can only compel the natives to work in public works of general interest to the community, in occupations whose results belong to them, in execution of judicial decisions of a penal nature, or to comply with tax obligations"<sup>1</sup> (Ministry of Colonies, 1930, p. 1310). A discretionary state that forced tax payments on those who were not given the conditions for production would easily find conditions to apply this article, as witnessed by the story of Mussa Racua in the short story "It Happened in Saua-Saua". In summary:

From 1899 until 1961, when the Angolan war of liberation broke out, Portuguese colonial legislation always allowed various forms of forced labor (with or without a formal "contract"), which did not apply to Portuguese citizens but only to those classified by law as "natives". Slavery was still prevalent, and free labor was only established by the 1961 legislation, which abolished the "Statute of the Indians" and made everyone "citizens". However, the colonial system was unprepared for the economic impact of the end of labor discrimination, and a "Rural Labor Code" was established. Despite its name, this code also applied to urban centers, for instance, to construction workers who were previously considered "indigenous". This legal subterfuge allowed these workers to continue being paid by wage scales that were lower than those of "citizens" (...) (Neto, 2017, p. 113).

"It Happened in Saua-Saua" is set in 1935, after the publication of the "Colonial Act" (1930). In this sense, Mussa Racua, his wife Maiassa, and their friends, such as Abudo, are nothing more than "natives", who have internalized their inferiority and impotence, as Abudo states: "The colonist is the boss" (Moplé 1988, p. 11). Mozambican writer Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, in an interview with Henriques (2016, p. 187), adds: "The black-white relationship has always been to look down on the white man".

All the stories take place in Mozambique, mainly in Lourenço Marques, now Maputo, or Moçambique Island, except for the last one, which occurs in Gabela and Luanda (Angola), in 1974. In four of the narratives, the characters for whom the heterodiegetic and omniscient narrator shows sympathy are black. In the last chapter, the main character who reaps the narrator's empathy is Eugénio, a white man. Along with Manuela from "No One Killed Suhura", these are the only white characters who are not indifferent to the suffering of black people and treat them with humanity. Eugénio watches helplessly as guests of the hotel where he lives in Gabela slaughter black employees. The next day, he leaves for Luanda, as a way to physically and psychologically distance himself from the experience that will traumatize him forever. The end of this narrative (and the end of the collection) seems to open up hope: "Outside, the first rays of sunlight begin to break through the night" (Moplé 1988, p. 82). We are on the eve of the independence of Angola and Mozambique, and there are reasons for hope.

Apart from the ending, the book is permeated by a sense of hopelessness. With the exception of "Celina's Prom," all the stories deal with death. In "It Happened in Saua-Saua", Mussa Racua commits suicide because he lacks only a sack of rice to pay the tax to the Administrator, choosing death over forced labor in the white-owned sisal plantations. In "Caniço"<sup>2</sup>, Naftal's father, a worker in the Johannesburg mines, dies of tuberculosis, and his daughter Aidinha falls ill with the same ailment. Suhura is the fatal victim of the Administrator in the eponymous story "No One Killed Suhura". The highest peak of deaths is reached in the final story, under the incredulous and helpless gaze of Eugénio. The whites, representatives of the colonialism machine with social and economic status imbued with power, contribute to these

<sup>1</sup> All translations into English are our responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> "Caniço" is a type of informal settlement (similar to slum).

nefarious outcomes. In the first four stories, these powerful figures are highlighted and criticized by the ironic eye of the narrator. In “It Happened in Saua-Saua” and “No One Killed Suhura”, the focus is on the Administrator, in “Cani ɔ” on the boss (and the mistress), and in “Celina’s Prom” on the Dean. All these characters are nameless, referred to by their profession, thus emphasizing their representation of arbitrary power by metonymy. The dehumanization to which administrators and bosses are subjected in these short stories is evident in their attitudes and dialogues. As the narrator writes about the administrator of “It Happened in Saua-Saua”: “The dramas of the blacks do not interest him [the administrator], or rather, they irritate him” (Momplé 1988, p. 17). After learning of Mussa Racua’s suicide, he worries only about getting the six sacks of rice from his harvest, venting with impatient rage: “These dogs, as soon as they smell work, they always get into trouble. They either run away or commit suicide. Damned breed!” (Momplé 1988, p. 18). The cinematic view that the omniscient narrator presents us with of the scene highlights the ruthlessness and dehumanization of the administrator, which is in line with the attitude of the character with the same social status in “No One Killed Suhura”. After the death of the young black woman caused by the fight, they both had at the time of her rape, he notes, “The black woman's bastard died!” (Momplé 1988, p. 71).

The attitude of disrespect for the suffering of others is also present in Naftal’s boss. Upon learning that the woman’s gold watch had already been found and that neither Naftal nor the cook had stolen it, he dismisses the information and responds to the woman: “Oh dear, let me rest. Besides, it’s a bad principle. The complaint is already there, we can’t go back. Let them [at the police station] catch them. It’s because they steal so many times and are not caught. Let’s have dinner, it’s already time” (Momplé 1988, p. 29). Similarly, the police officer’s comment, “Big monkeys! (...) They really have the face of thieves” (Momplé 1988, p. 30), shows the disregard for human life. In all these situations, the narrator zooms in critically on the colonizers, much like Prospero with his Caliban. The narrative highlights the “insensitivity to the pain and suffering of others” (Salgado, 2018, p. 165).

Irony is present in the narrator’s perspective, which, for example, contrasts its description of reality with the Administrator’s self-image in “Nobody Killed Suhura”. When the character looks in the mirror, he is not displeased with himself, but the narrator deconstructs his self-image: “His face also seems acceptable to him he doesn’t even notice the flabby bags around his eyes and the double chin that has been developing for years, making him look vaguely like a frog” (Momplé 1988, p. 49). The narrator uses irony to contrast the Administrator’s self-image and external image, portraying him as an animal, which was often done by whites in relation to blacks, as seen earlier. By ironic and, consequently, undermining the Administrator’s virile image, the narrator highlights the signs of decay and aging, which the Administrator cannot see in himself.

This irony also falls on humble or financially ruined white characters who, upon arriving in Mozambique, transform themselves. This is the case with Catarino da Silva, Benjamim Castelo, and lawyer Bordalo Monteiro in “Celina’s Prom”. For example, the first character, coming from a village in the region of “Beira Alta”, Portugal, with only “his face and courage” (Momplé 1988, p. 36), becomes a millionaire “through trickery and the rampant exploitation of black labor, forcibly herded by colonial authorities” (Momplé 1988, p. 36). The lawyer, in turn, was a “dignified representative of Portugal’s ruined nobility” (Momplé 1988, p. 36). The irony is constructed by the adjectives used (“dignified” in this case) and, throughout the work, by the established contrasts: oppressor–oppressed; poor white Portuguese–rich white Portuguese–poor African black, due to the unscrupulous exploitation of natives.

### III. WOMEN IN SILENCE I: PROSTITUTION AS A FLEETING ESCAPE

The second story, “Cani ɔ”, depicts the life of the protagonist, Naftal, and his family living in a hut in Lourenço Marques, which is now known as Maputo, the capital, in 1945. The short story is divided into two parts. The first part presents Naftal’s family, and in an analepsis, the story of his father and older sister is narrated through the protagonist’s memories. The second part narrates one of Naftal’s days, including his work for a white boss.

The narrator portrays the environment in which Naftal lives in great detail. The hut is simple, dirty, cramped, and stuffy with little furniture, and he lives with four other brothers and his mother. This cramped and poor living space is recurrently depicted in these short stories, including “It Happened in Saua-Saua” and “No One Killed Suhura”.

After his father’s death, Naftal assumed the responsibility of supporting the family. He feels the weight of being practically the head of a family of six people, as stated by Momplé (1988, p. 21). Every morning, when he wakes up and sees his brothers still sleeping, he thinks that they “will grow up, have to wake up at dawn like me, work like me without Sundays or holidays, and have nothing like me” (Momplé 1988, p. 26). This condition of life seems deterministic and connected to his family for generations, with no escape for anyone in the family. One day, Aidinha suddenly disappeared and became a prostitute, refusing to return home due to the misery and hopelessness she felt. The omniscient narrator comments “she is sick of misery and that being black, she has no other way to get rid of it” (Momplé 1988, p. 24). However, tuberculosis forces her to return home.

The chronological narration begins with the introduction of the family story, and the narrator takes us through a day with Naftal. After getting up early, he goes to work in a luxurious villa. On this particular day, Naftal and the cook are taken to the police because the boss’s wife has lost a gold watch, and she is convinced that one of them is the thief. Eventually, the woman realizes that her daughter, Mila, had taken the watch to school. However, even after they find out who the culprit was, the bosses do nothing and do not ask for the release of the employees. They believe that “it is for the times that they steal and are not discovered” (Momplé 1988, p. 29). The boss minimizes the matter, seeing no

harm in the unjust punishment. Through Naftal, the narrator concludes that “Black is really a dog’s brother” (Momplé 1988, p. 27), pointing to the social animalization of black people.

At the end of the short story, Naftal drags his sore body home after the police assault, waiting for the next day.

There are two main themes explored in this short story: the persecution/exploitation of black people by colonialism, as expressed through the experiences of Naftal and his father; and the oppression of women by colonialism, as expressed through Aidinha and her mother. The narrator contrasts Naftal’s life with that of his employers, starting with the location of their homes:

Roses, Cape jasmine, lilies, dahlias, chrysanthemums, hydrangeas, agapanthus, crab-apples, Christ’s tears, anthuriums, gladioli... bloom here [in the bosses’ neighborhood]. Also growing are vines, such as golden rain and ever-bride, dwarf palms, ferns, and other rare plants, including a fossil with its splendid fire-colored pinecone (Momplé 1988, p. 27).

This description of a quiet, tidy, and aroma-filled neighborhood creates a stark contrast to the oppressive, dirty environment in which Naftal lives: “Flies invade the loose sandy alleys, buzzing around the piles of garbage scattered everywhere. (...) A smell of misery envelops the entire neighborhood” (Momplé 1988, p. 26).

In addition to unequal housing opportunities, black people are also denied equal access to social goods. Naftal decides to walk because he knows that, although the “machimbombo” [bus] is not full, the only two benches reserved for blacks are occupied.

Joaquim Chissano, former president of Mozambique (1986-2004), in the book *Vidas, lugares e tempos* [Lives, places and times] (2011), presents racism in Mozambique in the 1940s-1950s, when this story takes place (1945), as being worse than apartheid in South Africa, where the separation between whites and “natives” was visible by the neighborhoods in which they lived, access to the passbook (for black people) or the identity card (for white people), which contributed to segregation, and by the almost impossible access of blacks to education beyond elementary school. Later, starting in 1954, with the “Statute of the Indigenous”, “instead of three states (indigenous, assimilated and civilized), resulting from the contraposition in the 1929 Statute between indigenous and non-indigenous, there were now only and expressly two special statutes, indigenous and citizens” (Silva, 2019, p. 185).

As Spivak (2014) writes, the subaltern in emerging countries cannot speak. We can see that even if Naftal and the cook are not mute, they cannot defend themselves because they are subalterns and have no voice.

There are four female characters in this story: Aidinha, the mother, Mila, and an unnamed character soon to represent her class. Although their descriptions do not take up much space, we can see, again by contrast, the double oppression of black women.

Aidinha, faced with the death of her father, decides to become a prostitute as a way to escape poverty. When looking for her, the only sentences the mother utters throughout the story are simple and short, perhaps because she does not need to say much, or does not have the opportunity to speak, or does not know how to express her feelings in words. Faced with the fact that her daughter is prostituting herself, for example, the mother calms her anger and asks her daughter to come home with her. After the daughter refuses, the mother thinks hard, but in the end, she leaves without saying anything. She understood “that the deep hatred the girl seemed to feel for all her past life encompassed her, her mother, as well” (Momplé 1988, p. 24). The narrator shows us, in this direct way, how black women are oppressed and therefore unable to speak. The other example happens at the end of the story. Seeing the wounds on Naftal’s hands, the mother “stares him right in the eyes” (Momplé 1988, p. 30) and asks her son if he wants to eat. The mother is aware that she can do nothing for her son, her whole family is subordinate in a society that gives them no rights, no voice.

The other detail that deserves attention is the contrast between the daughter of Naftal’s boss and Aidinha: Aidinha and Mila are both young and live in the same town. Mila inherited her father’s vanity (Momplé 1988, p. 29); Aidinha inherited tuberculosis. Naftal inherited from his father a life of poverty and hard work; the two conditions appear deterministically correlated.

At the end of the short story, once again, the narrator describes Naftal’s compartment, dirty, stuffy, cramped. It is the same hut as at the beginning. Time and space appear, therefore, concentrated, starting from a poor and small hut, in just one day. Thus, the circularity of the chronotype is constructed, a metaphor for the repetition of his days and the irreversibility of his social and racial condition.

#### IV. WOMEN IN SILENCE II: AN UNEQUAL DANCE

In “Celina’s Prom”, the action takes place in Lourenço Marques, now Maputo, in 1950. In this short story, Celina’s mother dreams of changing the family’s destiny, particularly that of her daughter, through education. Thus, she imposes a strict study schedule and works tirelessly as a seamstress, so that her daughter can attend high school and present herself at the senior prom.

The narrative is divided into two parts. The first part focuses mainly on the family story of Celina’s mother, Violante. This part is inserted between the making of the dress and Celina’s ball. The second part centers on the impossibility, imposed by the Dean of Salazar High School (note the historical and ideological markup), of her attending the prom. Celina is a half-breed in a society where, according to the Dean, “we have to give time to time. The Governor General is coming, and people who are not used to living with people of color” (Momplé 1988, p. 45).

The first part of this short story introduces Ms. Violante, the daughter of the white Portuguese merchant Benjamin Castelo and his first wife, Muaziza, a black woman. Under the encouragement of his business partner Catarino da Silva, Benjamin treats his black partner badly, and one day she finally runs away from home with her daughter. He then marries a white society woman, Maria Adelaide. These two male characters represent the poor Portuguese who had left the “metropolis” and saw Africa as a way to become rich without scruples. Having achieved this, in order to be better accepted socially, they married a socially well-positioned white woman (the daughter of a lawyer, in the case of Catarino da Silva, and the daughter of the Captain of the Port, in the case of Benjamin Castelo). The white woman, in turn, was looking for a man with an economic situation that could reassure her about the future: “The girl [Maria Claudina, who marries Catarino da Silva] certainly followed the advice of her mother who, after what she had suffered with her husband’s poor family, considered a real blessing the marriage of her daughter with a man both plebeian and very rich” (Momplé 1988, p. 37).

Benjamin only tells Maria Adelaide that he has a daughter before he dies of illness in Portugal, where they had gone in search of a cure. She does not return to Mozambique and asks Catarino to deal with the inheritance issues, including Violante. As the narrator explains, ironically, the latter, despite already having a fortune, tries to get the most out of his friend’s property: “bribing the officials of Justice, managed to spoil the widow in everything he could, and the most crude way” (Momplé 1988, p. 40). Thus, Muaziza is called by Catarino to testify that Violante is not Benjamin’s daughter. Throughout the process, only Catarino intervenes. Through the narrator’s description, we can see that Muaziza, manipulated and misinformed, is in a “panic of losing her daughter forever” (Momplé 1988, p. 41). Muaziza, a black woman, does not have much ability to fight against the advice of Catarino da Silva, a strong and wealthy merchant, or even to think about the future consequences for her daughter. The influence of patriarchy, phallogocentrism, and white supremacy is deeply ingrained in her mind. The voice of men, the voice of whites, is the correct and authoritative voice.

For her part, Ms. Violante insists that Celina must receive an education because, in her opinion, “only education can erase our color” (Momplé 1988, p. 42), as “the more you study, the sooner you will be people” (Momplé 1988, p. 42). Ms. Violante herself thinks that people of color are not considered “people”. Her purpose in educating Celina is to make her a white person and to be accepted by society. Furthermore, Ms. Violante’s friends, Ms. Celeste and Ms. Leonor, who are both of mixed-race, are also “convinced of the inferiority of their own race” (Momplé 1988, p. 44). When the concept of racial discrimination is so deeply rooted in the minds of the colonized, education seems to be the only way to change the oppressive situation.

In the second part of the story, Celina is a voiceless character. She does not speak when preparing for the prom, when being called by the Dean, when being told that she cannot participate in the ball, when walking home, and when cutting her dress. Throughout the whole process, Celina remains silent. In the end, she cuts off her white dress, made by her mother, a symbol of purity and naivety, and her dream of rising in society.

In this short story, Celina is the most silent female character and the one who best reflects Spivak’s conception of “the subaltern cannot speak”. Liu (2020) argues that the fate of the subaltern is usually the result of the combination of the will of authority and the social environment. In the system controlled by colonial centralism and male centralism, women’s voices have been excluded. The fate of the subalterns comes to an end under oppression. Celina gets rid of the fate of being black, but the shadow of skin color continues to haunt her. As Silva (2019, p. 169) reminds us, there was never any favoring of miscegenation from the legislation around the status of the indigenous. Miscegenation was always seen as a problem:

Concern about sexual union between European men and women of color was widespread in Europe, the Americas, and colonial Africa and Asia throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Since Ann Stoler (1995) and Anne McClintock (1995), numerous scholars have discussed how colonies and the metropole were intimately connected under the same fear of mixing between peoples identified by a host of racialized differences placed in a hierarchical order. Due to its supposed more common occurrence in Portuguese territories, miscegenation may be considered the symptom par excellence of Portuguese colonial weakness. Its representations point to a colonial deficit that only legitimate European wives could theoretically help overcome in the moral domain of home, combining affects and economics (Ferreira, 2020, p. 86).

Miscegenation in Portuguese Africa is not a peculiar issue, but rather a “transracial” problem (Xavier, 2008, p. 322), which is felt in all colonial power relations. This compels us to move away from the paternalistic view of Gilberto Freyre’s Lusotropicalism. Usually, subalterns are black people, and more often, black women. This short story, however, expands the range of subalterns to include anyone who is not white, regardless of gender. Celina’s colleague, a young Indian man, is also prohibited from attending the prom. Confronted with the voice of the Dean, a white man seen as an authoritative figure in society, people of color, the subalterns, have no right to speak and no choice but to obey.

#### V. WOMEN IN SILENCE III: THE INNOCENT SOCIETY

“No One Killed Suhura” is set on Mozambique Island in 1970 and recounts the story of an Administrator who rapes the young black girl Suhura, resulting in her death. The narrative is divided into three parts: “The Day of the Administrator”, “The Day of Suhura,” and “The End of the Day”. In reality, however, the day is just one, viewed from the perspectives of the perpetrator and the victim, culminating in their encounter. In the first part, we are presented with

the Administrator's day, including his family, work, and thoughts. The second part describes Suhura's family and their experiences on the same day, focusing on the thoughts of Suhura and her grandmother. The last part presents the encounter between the Administrator and Suhura, culminating in her death.

In this short story, the following female characters stand out: the Administrator's wife, the Administrator's eldest daughter Manuela, Ms. Júlia Sá Suhura's grandmother, and Suhura. The narrative begins with the start of the Administrator's day. As he wakes up, he looks at his wife, Ms. Maria Inácia, in the mirror. His wife is aging, and her flabbiness and lividity stand out. The husband "sees all this through the mirror with his usual tenderness and disgust" (Momplé 1988, p. 51). The mirror symbolizes purity, truth, and sincerity. It reflects men's true feelings and conscience. Although the Administrator is grateful to his wife for her complicity in the humiliation and cruelties against blacks during his attempt at social and economic ascension and tries to be considerate, seeing his wife neglected and aging in the mirror makes him uncomfortable. Faced with his wife's aging, the Administrator decides to have mistresses, believing that "marital fidelity is a duty exclusive to women, and most particularly to his wife" (Momplé 1988, p. 54). When confronted with her husband's infidelity, even though she is a white woman and the first lady, Ms. Maria Inácia is also a victim of patriarchal society and chooses to evade the issue by hiding and suffering in silence. She does not leave the house, nor does she get out of bed most of the time. It is from her bed that she makes phone calls and receives friends, only getting up when she eats and when her husband needs her for official situations. This way of life exposes a woman who, instead of facing patriarchal society or resolving her husband's disloyalty, prefers to hide at home and maintain a false sense of peace. The bed is a place of rest, which signifies safety, relaxation, and comfort, and it is where Ms. Maria finds her circle of comfort, where she feels secure and can speak. The white woman is also a subaltern, a victim of patriarchy and phallogocentrism.

In contrast, we have Suhura, a young, beautiful, black, and poor fifteen-year-old orphan who is illiterate and lives with her grandmother. The description of Suhura and her companions' happiness on the seashore catching seafood against the backdrop of a blue sky, the bright sea, and the free beach portrays nature as the generous mother, treating all her children equally, including the poor children, contrasts with the Administrator's wife's disgust at the doctor's suggestion to go to the beach and sunbathe.

Despite her difficult life, Suhura likes to smile, and her appearance attracts the attention of the Administrator. She is described as having "the intense luminosity", "the moist eyes", "the velvety skin", and "the spinner of sparkling teeth", with a body that is a perfect harmony (Momplé 1988, p. 54). The irony in the story comes from the fact that the Administrator only gains Suhura's virginity through force, and she dies at the end of the story. This suggests that beauty is something that cannot be possessed or controlled, and there is no power that can stop it.

Sepoy, the administrator's messenger, objectifies Suhura and tries to convince her grandmother to let her meet the Administrator. He argues, "seeing her granddaughter, a black woman of no value, was wanted by the Administrator" (Momplé 1988, p. 67). However, the narrator ridicules Sepoy's argument through free indirect speech.

When Suhura is taken to Julia's house to meet the Administrator, she resists with her thin body and does not speak. The only voice we hear is her scream. Suhura and the Administrator represent two extremes of society: a white man from the ruling class and a poor, black girl who loses her voice in the face of authority. However, Suhura does not give up resisting and defends herself in her own way, saying "no" to the class that oppresses her. Although she emits a weak cry, it is all she can manage. Her death, like Mussa Racua's, is the only cry of liberation found.

The other female character that stands out in this short story and throughout the work is Manuela, the eldest daughter and, initially, the Administrator's favorite. However, this attention is not reciprocated, throwing her father "looks full of irony and barely disguised contempt" (Momplé 1988, p. 57). It is this irony that the Administrator also sees in Suhura and that triggers even greater violence in him: "irony that shines deep in Suhura's eyes reminds the Administrator of another look, the disturbing look of his daughter Manuela" (Momplé 1988, p. 70).

Manuela lives in a kind of silent rebellion. She is the only white female character in the collection who shows empathy for black and mixed-race people. As a teacher, she is at risk of being put under surveillance by the political police for treating all students equally. At the school where she works, "she treats the colored students, including the blacks, very well" (Momplé 1988, p. 59), which is not acceptable to the delegate of the "Portuguese Mocidade<sup>3</sup>", because the delegate, as a representative of the Salazar regime and colonialism, argues that allowing blacks to study at school is already "a great favor" (Momplé 1988, p. 59). Manuela states that she treats all the students the same, "because that is how it is fair" (Momplé 1988, p. 60). Her attitude challenges a racially unequal society, in which it is taboo to talk about black people's rights, because they are the subalterns, the thingified. In this patriarchal society, women are not supposed to express their opinions, especially if they are contrary to the instituted paradigms, because they are also subalterns, and the subaltern cannot speak. The narrator does not give her much opportunity to speak. He exploits mostly her attitudes and her silence. And it is her silence that bothers, especially her father, the closest representative of everything she disapproves of. According to Owen (1996, p. 219), "By projecting a mockingly inverted image of the Administrator's sexual connections across color boundaries, Manuela exceeds the ambiguities allowed within the colonial system and predicts its imminent collapse".

<sup>3</sup>"Portuguese mocidade" is a term that refers to an organization of youth people of Portugal during fascism period (1936-1974). The term is associated with the idea of national identity and pride and was used to promote the idea of a strong and proud Portuguese nation.

To her father, she becomes a “strange and difficult girl” (Momplé 1988, pp. 55-56) because she refuses to receive his gifts, nor accepts them with “tight lips and frowning expression” (Momplé 1988, p. 56). Manuela has sympathy for blacks, to the point that she cries when she hears their miserable experiences. She carries “black children on her lap” and has an “inordinate affection” for her black maid (Momplé 1988, p. 57), having publicly stated that she could marry a black man for love. For her mother, Manuela “shamed the whole family” because for her “a black is always a black” (Momplé 1988, pp. 57-58), which leaves no room for any compassion or social negotiation.

Ms. Júlia Sá although the narrator does not take time to describe her, is an important character. She is a mulatto woman who always has a room at the Administrator’s disposal for his sexual encounters. She is the one who often convinces and trains young black girls for the Administrator. Part of what happens to Suhura is her responsibility. She is a woman of color who, in order to survive, allies herself with the Sepoy. She is very frightened after Suhura’s death, Suhura’s grandmother is also an important female figure in the short story. When the Sepoy comes to her house and tells her to turn her granddaughter over to the Administrator, the grandmother is paralyzed, as described by the omniscient narrator:

(...) the grandmother was terribly frightened and was about to leave. (...) the afflicted grandmother stared at the Sepoy, as if asking for confirmation of such disturbing news. (...) the grandmother could no longer hear anything, lost between that hoarse and monotonous harangue of old Agira and the Sepoy’s terrible smile. How to explain to them – she despaired – how to explain to them that she did not wish such luck to her granddaughter (...) And how to keep silent, looking for arguments they could understand (...) (Momplé 1988, pp. 66-67).

This is the narrator’s attempt to show that the speech and will of the grandmother, a poor, black woman seen as insignificant, are completely erased in colonial society. Even if the grandmother wants to protect her granddaughter, this society does not give her such opportunities and rights. As historian Benigna Zimba states in an interview with Henriques (2016, p. 210), the black woman, since the time of the slave trade, does not play the victim, sacrificing herself in silence so that her children and partner would be spared. When whipped, “the woman, when caught, ended up finding a way to cry inside. That way of crying remains to this day: she cries through her heart, she cries without bawling, she cries without saying a word”.

In the dialogue, the Sepoy speaks in the Macua language but introduces “now and then a phrase in Portuguese” to mark the distances between him and the blacks (Momplé 1988, p. 68). Here, in addition to skin color, language also becomes a tool for social class distinction. Those who speak Portuguese, the whites, have more rights and voice. Those who speak a local language, in this case, Macua, have no rights and no voice. Language is thus one more element of the stratifying relationship of colonialism. As Eduardo Quive (born 1991), a Mozambican poet and journalist, testifies to Henriques (2016, p. 187): “Color carried over into language. I come from a family in which when I spoke Xichangana they said: ‘You don’t speak dog language, the people’s language is Portuguese’. This is thus an issue that has extended over time beyond the visible tentacles of colonialism”.

At the end of this short story, the Sepoy takes Suhura’s body to her house. Faced with her granddaughter’s death, the grandmother, unmoving, is told to memorize, “No one killed Suhura!” (Momplé 1988, p. 72). It was all the members of the discriminatory society who killed her. No one is innocent. They all share in a social amnesia (Alós, 2011a, 2011b, 2016). This ending, by antithesis, highlights the tragic irony of the outcome that runs through the narratives of the work. The victim of this irony is sympathetic but fails, being thrust into an ominous outcome. This tragic irony develops “first, in ourselves, a sort of selfish prudence that immunizes us against any compromising exaltation and against the tearing apart of sentimental extremism” (Jank ǎ évitich, 1964, p. 32).

## VI. CONCLUSION

In *No One Killed Suhura*, Lídia Momplé demonstrates that literature can contribute to reexamining the history of colonialism in Mozambique and Portugal. However, there is still progress to be made in the relationship between history and literature. Ferreira (2020) notes that Portuguese historians have yet to fully explore how literary and artistic texts can aid in understanding the past and generating new historical knowledge. Nonetheless, this does not imply that colonial history is being perpetuated. Racism is not a current issue in Mozambique, as stated by Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa (Henriques, 2016). Nonetheless, the legacy of colonialism persists in the form of an inferiority complex.

Momplé employs an omniscient narrator to describe the psychological activities of her characters in these short stories, which are based on the dichotomy between the white/rich/oppressor and the black/poor/oppressed. Jones (2015) highlights that in *No One Killed Suhura* and other works by Momplé she has created a gynocentric counternarrative of Mozambican recent history, focusing on the exploitation and abuse of women during colonialism and their resourcefulness and perseverance in resisting imperial and neoimperial brutality.

Through these short stories, we see that women from the same social environment choose different forms of resistance to improve their lives. Aidinha attempts to escape poverty through prostitution, but ultimately fails. Celina and her mother seek to change their lives through education, yet face social ostracism. Suhura resists the injustice of her fate at the cost of her life. Owen (2008) argues that Momplé uses these examples to review colonialism from a gendered perspective.

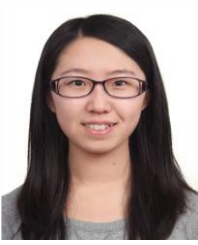
Momplé leaves us with a glimmer of hope through the character of Manuela, the Administrator's eldest daughter, who comes from a privileged background but sympathizes with the oppressed. Despite facing oppression from white settlers and patriarchy, Momplé links the short stories to Mozambican historical reality, underscoring the importance of Spivak's writing.

Liu (2020) draws attention to women who are silenced, represented, and described by others. In these cases, the voice of the subaltern disappears. Spivak (2014) concludes that the subaltern cannot speak because there is no value assigned to women in global priorities. However, Momplé's works give a voice to subalterns by exposing the contrast between reality and male domination, through tragic irony.

This collection echoes neorealism's attempt to give a voice to socially underprivileged characters, such as peasants (Mussa Racua and Abudo), servants (Naftal), workers (the seamstress Ms. Violante), and prostitutes (Ms. Júlia Sá and Aidinha). The narratives revolve around conflict that leads to tragedy, as tragedy is the attempt to reconcile two opposing poles (Xavier, 2007). Nevertheless, Momplé's work points towards a glimmer of hope on the eve of independence.

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