

Nísia Floresta, by Nastassja Pugliese - Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 53 p.

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Nísia Floresta is a unique contribution to any field that, for different reasons, aims at recovering the works and legacies of intellectual women obliterated from the (widely Anglo-European) canonical record. Canonical records happen to be the result of historiographical operations, decisions historians of an epoch make about who shall and what shall not figure as benchmark authors and problems in the compendia with which we transfer and cultivate philosophical knowledge. Nastassja Pugliese's concise and original presentation of Nísia Floresta, the philosophical underpinnings of her writings, travels and cultural achievements in Latin American territory bring geopolitical and philosophical diversity to the collection *Elements in Women in the History of Philosophy* – at present still a predominantly Anglo European assemblage of female authors.

Aware of the need to contextualize her presentation of the Brazilian philosopher, Pugliese opens the book portraying the historical and geopolitical milieu in which Dionísia Gonçalves Pinto grew as Nísia Floresta Brasileira Augusta (at times only Nísia Floresta, at others Brasileira Augusta). The book is well structured and the historic-philosophical arguments adduced in favour of the author's interpretations are sound and convincing.

In the second section, Pugliese addresses one Floresta's role and place in the Brazilian intellectual history: the historical quarrel over the authorship of the (allegedly) first feminist book published in Brazil – *Direitos das Mulheres e as Injustiças dos Homens*, published by a young Nísia Floresta in 1832. Making good use of the best bibliography about this Brazilian translational *querelle*, the author unravels the threads connecting the book, and the fate of Floresta's reception in the literary circles of her time, to the name of Mary Wollstonecraft. Between the second and third sections, Pugliese shows how a British pamphlet written by an anonymous Sophia in 1739 (*Women not inferior to man*) was published in France in 1876 under the title *Droits des femmes et l'Injustice des Hommes*, misattributed to Misstriss Godwin (Wollstonecraft's married name) by the French editor, and translated from French into Portuguese by young Floresta as a translation of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). The precision of Pugliese's approach to this rather intricate history of translations, misattributions of authorship and hermeneutical challenges, projects a better set of lights on the processes of mystification and demystification of Floresta as the "Brazilian Wollstonecraft". Another consequence of Pugliese's revision of the quarrel about the authorship of *Direitos* is a more accurate historical view of the reception of Wollstonecraft's ideas in South America. At the same time, it portrays the institutional framework in which *Direitos* appeared (of legislative discussions on the educational rights and curriculum design in Imperial Brazil). Pugliese gives Floresta what is rightfully hers: the authorship of the "Dedication", a prelude to the translation of Sophia.

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In the following sections, the reader is introduced to some original features of Floresta's works, first in terms of the themes and problems she was interested in (the horrors of the Brazilian slave trade and the slavery culture, the rights of black and indigenous peoples and, mainly, theoretical and practical problems with and about women's education). Subsections 3.1 to 3.4 show Floresta's stylistic choices as an author of many literary forms (epic poems, educational novels, chronicles etc..) as well as the strong practical appeal of Floresta's writings. Pugliese is successful in showing the philosophical and pedagogical importance of Floresta's criticism of the colonialist cultural patterns that prevented Brazilian society, by then recently freed from the institutional tutelage of Portugal, from progressing towards an effective intellectual and civilisational emancipation.

The fourth part of the book marks a move towards more specific issues, starting with Floresta's ideas on the equality of men and women. The emphasis here is not only on the philosophical ideas that make Floresta an author of her own but mainly on the nuances of her dialogue with different philosophical doctrines and the illustrious philosophical methods – especially the practical Cartesianism applied to her reflections on women's rights, a methodological heritage that came to Floresta precisely by way of the Sophia pamphlet that she had earlier translated, a text largely built on Poulain de la Barre's *L'Égalité des Deux Sexes*.

Pugliese brings her own originality as a historian to the fore in the fifth section. Via a careful analysis of Floresta's chosen texts, the author scrutinizes the subliminal operation of an interpretative principle throughout Floresta's writings, a principle she dubbed "The Colonialist Principle". For Pugliese, Floresta's reflections on the situation of black enslaved people, indigenous peoples and women in Brazil are unified by their submission to the authority of tyrants, who arbitrarily oppress these groups on a variety of levels. This is the occasion for the author to deepen the examination of a fundamental thesis of Floresta's *Opúsculo humanitário*, namely, that the civilizational index of a nation is measured by the quality of its women's access to an adequate, egalitarian education. For Floresta, the overcoming of the Brazilian educational colonial, retrograde and degrading situation for blacks, indigenous people and women, depends as much on the comparative criticism to which he dedicated her entire life (Floresta's travel diaries are an unexplored source of ethnographical evidence for many of her ideas on the education of women, for they contain detailed descriptions of care practices – from breastfeeding to the way girls are expected to dress and be educated) as on a positive, curricular and pedagogical agenda. This is precisely the subject of the sixth part of the book.

Among the numerous Florestine reflections on education, Pugliese chose to analyse, in the sixth part of the book, those on the essential role of physical health in the moral development of children and the twin need to stimulate intellectual emancipation as conditions for a real liberation from the oppressiveness of colonial corsets. The content of this section also shows the organic connections between Floresta's philosophical ideas and her pedagogical practices – after all, the philosopher was also the creator and director of a long-running school for girls in the city of Rio de Janeiro (the school operated for some 17 years and was also run by her son while Floresta travelled through Europe with her daughter). The *Colegio Augusto's* curriculum was audacious, including much more than the domestic arts normally taught to Brazilian girls who were privileged enough to have some access to formal education: it included elementary knowledge of arithmetic, foreign languages (Greek, Latin, Italian and French), as well as geography

and history. Reading these pages, it becomes evident that Floresta's pedagogical-philosophical perspective is, on the one hand, a valuable source of historical knowledge about the philosophy made in the territories colonised by Western Europe countries. On the other hand, a source of inspiration for the field of decolonial pedagogies, so fashionable (because more than necessary) nowadays. It is also worth noting that this part of the book illustrates its good general structure, for in making explicit the conceptual relations between the forms of education (as illustration and as a form of moral dignity) in Floresta's thought, by means of her original interpretation key (the Colonialist Principle) Pugliese shows how the Brazilian philosopher exercises the Cartesianism once called "logical feminism". Contrary to some accepted criticism of Modernity and Cartesian ideas, it is precisely the mind-body dualism that allows philosophers like Nísia Floresta (and Marie de Gournay before her, to name but one) to argue for equal rights between the sexes, since the differences between males and females of the human species are merely physical, not intellectual.

The seventh and final step in this journey of discovery of Nísia Floresta's philosophy consists of a broader reflection on the allocation, or possible allocations, of her work in the canonical narratives we have inherited. The incipient nature of such reflections is justified given the aims of the collection in which the book is published. However, in the interest of doing justice to the anticolonialist spirit of this elementary work, it is worth to mention Paulo Margutti's efforts to locate Floresta's philosophical thought within the historical stratifications he suggests as a chronology of Brazilian philosophy. I refer to what Margutti calls the Enlightenment Rupture (that occurred from 1808 to 1870) and the Spiritualist Eclecticism (from 1844 to 1870) (MARGUTTI, 2020). These are valuable historiographical efforts aimed at drawing a sharper picture of the scenario in which the august Brazilian philosopher was born and within which to frame the Florestine studies to come.

References

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