

Ferreira, Jo-Anne S. *The Portuguese of Trinidad and Tobago: Portrait of an Ethnic Minority*. Revised Edition. University of the West Indies Press, 2018, 168 pp. ISBN: 9789766406608

Nicholas B. Miller¹

Portuguese emigration has become a focal point of recent historical attention. By expanding horizons beyond empire, scholars have increasingly reconfigured Portuguese migration history as a global story with complex location- and time-specific characteristics. In this process, largely ignored communities beyond the conventionally understood Lusophone world are coming into the limelight. In Anglophone scholarship, Malyn Newitt's *Emigration and the Sea* (2015) reframed the history of Portugal itself as migration history, analyzing in equal measure the migration of Portuguese people to global sites within and beyond former Portuguese colonial rule. This shift has likewise been informed by a more critical understanding of the malleability of national, ethnic or racial categories in different historical contexts. The late António Manuel Hespanha put the identity construction of Portuguese mestizo communities across the early modern maritime world front and center in his *Filhos da Terra* (2019), analyzing the modern and contemporary afterlives of the social, economic and cultural rewards provided by Portuguese status. Long persisting the demise of effective Portuguese maritime power, Portuguese-ness, as understood by these communities, provided and continues to offer a structuring local identity often perplexing to contemporary observers from elsewhere, including Portugal itself.

The history of Portuguese emigration thus has become increasingly understood as highly variegated, defined by individuals' navigation through diverse constellations of political power and the power of labels. One of the more curious dimensions of this story, discussed in Newitt's overview, is the indentured emigration of tens of thousands of Portuguese subjects, principally from the Atlantic islands, to the Caribbean and Hawai'i during the nineteenth century. In exchange for passage, migrants bound themselves, in principle voluntarily, to two to five years of labor in the destination site, usually though not exclusively on sugar plantations. The history of these laborers is of great interest for comparative scholarship on race, as these migrants constituted the great majority of

¹ Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Portugal. ERC AdG 695573 *The Colour of Labour: The Racialized Lives of Migrants*. E-Mail: nbmiller@ics.ulisboa.pt

indentured Europeans during this time period, and were long perceived in several locations as something other than white, as constituting a category of their own, alongside various other groups associated with labor migration, including Africans, Chinese, and, most prominently, South Asians. The history of these communities is also of note for assessing the relative importance (or not) of formal empire as a container for migration during the long nineteenth century. As Cristiana Bastos takes as a starting observation in her European Research Council project *The Colour of Labour: The Racialized Lives of Migrants* (ERC AdG 695573), there were, by century's end, more Portuguese people living in either British Guiana or Hawai'i than in Angola and Mozambique combined.

These new directions in research build upon a significant body of case studies researched during the second half of the twentieth century, usually written through the perspective of (minority) ethnic history. For the context of Trinidad, Jo-Anne S. Ferreira's contribution from 1994 was and remains the landmark study, complementing the work of Mary Noel Menezes for Guyana. The republication of her study last year in an affordable trade paperback by the University of West Indies Press is thus to be welcomed. While marketed as a revised edition, the main change is a new preface authored by venerable Caribbean historian Bridget Bereton, who situates its importance within the ethnic history of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean more broadly. Given that the original version has become difficult to obtain, this is hardly a demerit, as the book continues to provide unrivaled access to archival and oral historical material relating to the emigration of Portuguese contract laborers, and their subsequent settlement and integration in Trinidad. Further, the research bibliography at the end of the book has been brought up to date, including newer writings on the subject by Miguel Vale de Almeida, Ferreira Fernandes, Michèle Levy, António de Vasconcelos Nogueira, Luis Ritto, Vítor Teixeira, as well as Ferreira herself.

The Portuguese of Trinidad and Tobago remains defined by its origin as a study commissioned as part of a series of national ethnic business histories during the 1990s. The first chapter provides the historical backdrop to the origins of a Portuguese community in the country from indentured migration, followed by a series of thematic chapters on the community's local integration in terms of business, race, religion, culture and language. An important strength of the book is the detailed, primary source-rich discussion of the 4-year period that saw the indentured emigration of some 1,300 Madeirans in the early 1840s, along with a smaller migration of Madeiran Protestants, numbering around 300. Ferreira also discusses sustained voluntary migration to Trinidad, networked through family and professional connections well into the twentieth century. As the book proceeds, one learns

of growing tensions in community life between more recent arrivals and “creoles” (Trinidad-born descendants of Madeirans), and the roles of assimilation and out-marriage in the community’s decline. Ferreira did not mince words about the prospects for the continued maintenance of a self-consciously identifying Portuguese community in the islands in 1994; her words remain unchanged in the 2018 edition. A chapter on culture concludes, “Like Portuguese music, songs, dances, dress and festivals, the majority of their cuisine has all but disappeared, limited only to the memories of the relative few” (91); a chapter on language notes, “Portuguese as a heritage language in Trinidad and Tobago has become entirely obsolete, with no hopes of revitalization” (103).

A quarter century after the pronouncement of these eulogies, it may be well to reconsider the object of study at play in Ferreira’s text. As noted by Bereton in the epilogue, a central question in the work is how “the Portuguese community in Trinidad” should be defined (xiv). In light of recent turns in scholarship on Portuguese emigration, we might here consider a more inclusive approach. Rather than pursuing the teleological question of the community’s decline as a concrete entity, we could instead track the divergent lives and paths taken by different generations of Portuguese migrants and their descendants as part of navigating changing social milieus in Trinidad. This would be an approach focusing on the constitutive interplay of Portuguese migrants and descendants with other people in the local web of categories and hierarchies during and after British colonial rule. In other words, we could pursue a critical history of the process by which, as Ferreira notes, those who married out to non-white groups became excluded from the self-ascribed Portuguese community, with their children integrated into other, larger ethnic groups. From a comparative perspective, it is curious though indicative that this occurred coincident to the elevation of Lusotropicalism as Portuguese state discourse in the mid twentieth century. Rather than a history of the disaggregation of a community based on putatively discrete ethnic characteristics, we would rather have a compelling account of the intergenerational social integration of a population locally appraised as of Europe, but not white. This would help us recover the experience of the descendants of these migrants beyond the reproduction of categorical position, significant if, as Ferreira contends, the main legacy of Portuguese migration today is the abundance of Portuguese surnames in the country.

As far as feasible through a re-inquiry of the primary sources identified by Ferreira, future work could pose the questions of racialization and the formation of mestizo identities. For instance, what was the legacy of the circa 200 Cape Verdeans that Ferreira mentions, in passing, as arriving on contracts of indenture in the 1850s? Was there a retention of

Portuguese status claims among the descendants of these migrants? If so, how did this configure understandings of Portugueseness in late nineteenth-century Trinidad, and appraisals of intermarriage among the self-defined Portuguese community in the twentieth century? The objective here would be to situate for comparative reflection the curious simultaneity of high rates of intermarriage and the strong local salience of racial and ethnic categorization: witnessed for instance in the typology of status offered in Ferreira's listing of her oral historical informants (137-39), including Category C, "Luso-Trinidadians (Portuguese Creoles with Two Portuguese Grandparents)" (139-39). Shifting the focus away from those claiming a monopoly of identity to a more expansive notion of diaspora, we would gain new insights not merely into the legacy of the descendants of Portuguese migrants in Trinidad, but moreover, the construction of pluralist identities across the Caribbean and Hawai'i. This wider diasporic lens could serve as the basis for understanding particularities of racialization, intermarriage and multiculturalism for the context of Trinidad and elsewhere. The second edition of Ferreira's landmark study provides crucial empirical insights for this type of research, and well deserves the renewed circulation that its republication will permit.