

Francisco Cota Fagundes, Irene Maria F. Blayer, Teresa F. Alves, and Teresa Cid. *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora – Piecing Things Together*. New York: Peter Lang, 2011.

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The collection of essays *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora – Piecing Things Together* is organized with a clear aim of being inclusive of the diversity of approaches that may contribute to this area of studies, and in the final product this diversity can be assessed from a variety of perspectives. The organization of the book into three main parts, “Reading literary identities within and without borders”; “Constructing/Constructed extra-literary identities home and abroad”; and “Literary ethnic voices from the North American diaspora and beyond: interview, essays, short story, poetry,” is symptomatic of those same perspectives. But the variety of specific topics dealt with is visible beyond this three-part structure. The volume discusses diverse literatures and authorships, from Luso-American and Luso-Canadian authors, such as Alfred Lewis, Anthony de Sa, and Frank Gaspar, to Portuguese authors who developed a substantial part of their work when living abroad, namely Jorge de Sena, or other authors of Portuguese heritage, such as Brian Castro. At the same time, and naturally reflecting the spread of the Portuguese diaspora, the essays address the Portuguese presence in areas such as North America, Asia, Brazil or South Africa, and ultimately those who eventually returned to Portugal after years of living

abroad. The diversity of focus is perceived not only in terms of the geographic spaces alluded to, but also in terms of the periods of time addressed, given that the studies analyze the diasporic trajectories of the Portuguese in different centuries, and more specifically in a timeframe that roughly ranges from the move of the Portuguese Crown to Rio de Janeiro to the end of the twentieth century. Finally, the diversity of approaches in *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora* is evident also in the sense that the literary, non-literary and testimonial texts included contribute to characterizing displaced diasporic identities of members of different social classes, from laborers to farmers, from Portuguese late colonial middle class in Angola, to the Portuguese courtiers in Rio de Janeiro. In itself the structure of the book and its methodology are representative of the social and political turmoil the Portuguese experienced in the last two centuries and specifically from the last phase of Napoleonic invasions to the third quarter of the twentieth century.

The first part of the collection of essays is dedicated specifically to the representation of the Portuguese diaspora in literary works. In the first essay of the collection, “António Gedeão and Jorge de Sena: Myth, Tradition and Diaspora,” Christopher Damien Aretta suggests that the poetry of both authors “encompasses the condition of exile” (3) regardless of the very different geographic, temporal and social references of both authors’ texts. Francisco Cota Fagundes, on the other hand, presents what seems to consist of the first analysis ever of *Senhor Antone: A Tale of the Portuguese Colony*, a collection of “tales divided into sections” (18) by William Birge. As Cota Fagundes demonstrates, the eighteen stories have the striking characteristic of being all centered exclusively on Portuguese characters who are usually presented in a highly stereotypical manner. This fact is all the more surprising, according to the essayist, since the “Dedication,” “Preface” and “Introduction” try to present the Portuguese community in a completely different and in fact opposite light than that which is given in the plots (20 and 33).

The depiction of the American Dream in the works by Alfred Lewis is studied in detail by Frank F. Sousa. The researcher documents a trajectory that starts with an initial full-fledged adhesion to the American Dream, in the novels *Home is an Island* and *Sixty Acres and a Barn*, and ends with the ultimate disappointment with that ideal, as portrayed in the poem written in

Portuguese “Saudades da Terra.” According to Sousa, the American Dream – that of “making it” in the United States (39) – is for Lewis largely associated with the mitigation of a number of desires, including the accomplishment of economic independence and eventual prosperity through hard work and, more notably, even the “sexual fulfillment” (38) promised by a society at first glance less conservative with regard to women’s movements than the Portuguese one. Frank F. Sousa in fact sees *Sixty Acres* as a “paean to American capitalism” (41), a “song of the immigrant who yearns for success in America and is ambitious enough to make the sacrifice to achieve financial independence by establishing a business” (41). By contrast, “Saudades da terra” is here described as a “bittersweet song of the exile ... an elegy to loss and absence” (43), feelings resulting from the subject’s disappointment with his unfulfilled expectations with regard to life in the United States and with what is presented as a previously almost worshipped materialism. As Frank F. Sousa has it, it is not so much that the American Dream is in this late poem rejected but rather that the poem questions a “limited view of the American Dream” (45), one that was previously based solely on materialistic values and neglected the realm of emotional and affective fulfillment.

Reinaldo Silva makes a summary of the plots and characteristics of the main Portuguese-American autobiographies and systematizes the main differences in these texts written by male or by female authors. As Silva sees it, most Portuguese-American autobiographies reflect historical characteristics of the Luso-American society in that those authored by men often deal with explicit forms of physical or psychological violence associated with the experience of affirmation in a foreign space, whereas those authored by women may both contemplate equally intense situations or rather choose to document and sometimes exalt values associated with domesticity and family. Also delving into the autobiographical genre, David Brookshaw refers to its particular relevance to the diasporic identities, and discusses in detail Brian Castro’s *Shanghai Dancing*. Brookshaw presents this autobiography to the reader and highlights the importance in it of the notion of hybridization, given the author’s Portuguese and Asian background consistently dealt with in the story. The study moreover proposes a symbolic reading of individuals and events depicted that allegorically emphasizes hybrid identities in this

fictionalized autobiography that, according to Brookshaw, has as its main undertones the feelings of disinheritance and nostalgia.

Two other essays by Albert Braz and Teresa F. A. Alves address respectively the works by two successful Portuguese heritage writers, Anthony de Sa and Frank Gaspar. Braz discusses some of the main characteristics of Sa's *Barnacle Love*, and emphasizes the author's remarkable case of success of a Portuguese descendant in the Canadian literary field, measureable by editorial accomplishments and in the fact that he received the Giller prize. According to Braz, a substantial part of this success can be explained by Sa's sense of character building and by the fact that "De Sa explores the immigrant experience from a Canadian perspective" and therefore "locates his work in the mainstream of Canadian culture" (73). Teresa F. A. Alves, on the other hand, presents her stimulating reading of Frank Gaspar's poetry that underlines the value of the daily experiences which become impregnated by a sense of sublimity. In that sense Alves includes the poet in a tradition that encompasses authors such as Dickinson, Whitman, and Ginsberg. The study traces some of Gaspar's main literary influences or affinities with the authors mentioned, as well some intertextual dialogues with other great books. Finally, Teresa Alves identifies affinities between the language of Gaspar's poetry and Fernando Pessoa's semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares's texts.

Part II of *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora* analyzes characteristics of the Portuguese diaspora by studying a number of other narratives and/or indicators of other types, namely illustration, cinema, socio-economic data and language use. In "Home Away from Home" Memory Holloway addresses the presence of the Portuguese Crown in Brazil from the perspective of a diasporic community that, as any other – and arguably even more so given the social status of the individuals at stake –, attempts to preserve in the tropics an identity that had been essentially formed in the other side of the Atlantic. This is done by incorporating into its new social context the prior and newly displaced customs, social hierarchies, and even dress codes. For this purpose, Holloway focuses largely on the watercolors and illustrations by Jean Baptiste Debret, a witness to the movements of the Portuguese Crown in Brazil who had himself the particularity of presenting a doubly foreign gaze, being a foreigner both to the Portuguese sphere and to the South-American space.

Also addressing the same geographic area, Carolyn Overhoff Ferreira discusses the cinematic representation of the different cycles of Portuguese migrations to Brazil, by studying some of the co-productions developed with the support of the Protocolo Luso-Brasileiro de Co-Produção Cinematográfica, namely the feature films *Desmundo*, *Palavra e Utopia*, *Diário do Novo Mundo* and *A Selva*. Noting the significant differences in the proposals of each movie, namely with regard to their historical accuracy or with the quality of the adaptations of the original literary works, when such adaptations took place, Overhoff Ferreira notes that the films choose not to problematize the role of the colonizer and prefer to present under a “positive light” (123) these migration cycles, be it by focusing on a “utopian transnational identity” or by displaying specific characters who refuse to obey the colonial structures of power. Although for the researcher the very existence of Luso-Brazilian co-productions is in itself something to value, since in time these may allow to deflate hegemonic and stereotypical views between both countries, her study clarifies that judging by the sample of movies analyzed such an opportunity to reflect and hypothetically change the existing stereotypical identitarian discourses is still far from being accomplished (123).

The experience of the Portuguese that migrated to South Africa during the process of decolonization of the former African Portuguese colonies, namely Angola, is analyzed by Pamila Gupta, who chooses to relay accounts of specific “life (hi)stories” (138) with the purpose of providing insights that may go unnoticed in a more quantitative approach. According to Gupta, the members of this social group that decided to remain in Africa typically self-identified both as Portuguese and African, the latter affiliation arguably being one of the main reasons not to return to the metropolis. As such, they likewise bore a “doubly diasporic” identity (137) in the sense that they chose or were led to a life of detachment from their two homelands, Portugal and Angola. The researcher notes particularly that in their narratives of integration in the new country, South Africa, her interviewees recurrently focused in what they perceived as the social pressure to “learn to be whites” (141) in the context of a society which was described by them as stricter than the Portuguese colonial regime with regard to racial segregation. As Gupta nonetheless notes, the daughter of one such migrant herself suggests that

the idea often heard in the Portuguese community according to which blacks were better treated by the Portuguese in Angola than in the Apartheid regime may well be a “convenient fiction” (150) that accompanies the narrative of integration of this migrant community. Perhaps a useful contribution to the researcher’s valuable arguments with regard to the Portuguese perception that they had to “learn to be white” would be that provided by Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s thorough analysis of the wide range of perceptions of the Portuguese as a race in different regions of the globe, which in fact stresses how this community frequently was not perceived as white (“Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Inter-Identity,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 39:2 [2002]).

Other studies in the second part of the volume focus on aspects of social integration of Portuguese heritage communities, as well as specific linguistic features associated with the Portuguese migrant communities in the United States. In a study dedicated to the transnational identities developed by second generation Luso-Canadians and Luso-French returnees to Portugal, João Sardinha systematizes some of these individuals’ shared experiences, namely those of looking for a home that may fulfill the sense of belonging not always obtained in the country of emigration of their parents, the surprise and often the disillusionment with aspects of life in Portugal that they were unaware of as seasonal visitors, and ultimately the feeling of constant “in-betweenness” (emphasis in the original, 159) that largely owes both to the allegiances developed in the country of emigration and often to being reminded of that status of returnees by other Portuguese citizens. The researcher moreover designates as “split-culture cocooning” the phenomenon of cultural segregation often experienced by returnees (170) given that the return heightens the identitarian characteristics acquired in the country of emigration of their parents. In another study dedicated to the professional integration of the Portuguese in the United States, researcher Glória de Sá notes that over the last 35 years self-employment in this community has progressively grown from “5% in 1970 to 15% in 2006” (183). Among other aspects, this article also notes that the main area of self-employment of Portuguese in the United States is currently in the area of construction.

Orquídea Ribeiro analyzes the representations of the Portuguese written

by authors working under the New Deal program Federal Writers' Project (FWP) and photographed for the Farmer Security Administration propaganda, which according to Ribeiro offered a completely new vision of the Portuguese community in the United States in the period in which they were created. As Ribeiro suggests, in their effort to affirm an integrated community that was part of a homogenous nation, a community which would furthermore value its American affiliation over the Portuguese one, both photographic and written accounts created under the edge of the New Deal programs contradict the most negative "stereotypes of the Portuguese found in the works of fiction by American writers of the same period" (133).

Linguist David Silva characterizes the position of the Micaelense accent in the context of the Luso-American communities, noting that the "regular contact with the Micaelense community ... encourages the persistence of stereotyped and stigmatized speech forms, whereas contact with the larger Lusophone community encourages the adoption of standard variants, but at the expense of the Micaelense forms" (201). According to Silva, the two varieties of Portuguese – Micaelense and standard continental – "compete in the New World, with one possibly losing to the other" (201); still he suggests that the clearest markers of Micaelense that will likely survive are precisely the fronted vowels that most define that accent. Also addressing specific linguistic features associated with the Portuguese in an English-speaking context, George Monteiro presents to the reader a very thorough account of the use of the word "Portugee" in the English language, from its early version "Portingale" in the Victorian period to the end of the 20th century, as well as its evolution from mere geographic descriptor to ethnic slur. Monteiro's study is particularly engaging in that it provides an insight into the use of this word both in highly canonical works of Anglo-American literature and in popular culture media, namely television, from Shakespeare to Melville, from Dick Martin to Johnny Carson.

In the third section of the volume we find a group of testimonies as well as literary texts mostly by Luso-American and Luso-Canadian authors. The interview given by Charles Reis Felix to Francisco Cota Fagundes is particularly valuable due to the critical insights of Fagundes and the generosity of Felix's answers. In his questions Francisco Cota Fagundes highlights par-

ticularly Felix's skilful novelistic depiction of the period of adolescence, and takes up an inquiry upon the Portuguese-American nature of Felix's works, among other topics. As Felix sees it, being "a Portuguese-American writer is a double-edged sword" (224) in the sense that it has allowed for recognition of his works to be championed by the community of scholars dedicated to this field, while for Felix it is not the case that his works may always engage issues that pertain to the experience of being Portuguese or of Portuguese descent in the United States. In a particularly open testimony Anthony de Sa presents us with a reflection on the weight of the hyphen for the second generation of Portuguese-Canadians. The writer expresses his frank view according to which the first generation passes to their descendants the burden of their own success or more often the lack thereof, something which is essential to his own *Barnacle Love*. Putting it in the first person, Anthony de Sa states that "[s]adly, it became our reluctant inheritance – to carry out the unfulfilled dreams as the first generation of immigrants grieve lost hopes, dashed dreams" (256). The writer moreover provides first-hand insights into the life of the Luso-Canadian community in Toronto, namely with regard to the division "between the Azorean and those that came from the mainland" (257), and the main moments of political affirmation for this community.

This section also includes testimonies written by Alexandre Quintanilha, Julian Silva and Ana Cristina Alves. Alexandre Quintanilha's testimony draws the highly varied trajectories of both his family and that of Richard Zimler, which come to be described here as "Crossing Diasporas." The writer Julian Silva likewise presents the origins of his ancestors, a Portuguese family, recognizing that the family is always "the raw material out of which [the writer] fashions his fictions" (234). Finally, Ana Cristina Alves proposes a study that contrasts with most others in the volume, in the sense that it attempts to characterize "the notion of diaspora such as the Chinese describe it" (264).

The third section of the book also includes an important sample of six poems by Frank Gaspar that evidently go beyond a specific concern or desire to address issues related to the Portuguese diasporic experience. In so doing, the poems eloquently emphasize the universality of the issues addressed by humans regardless of their ethnicity or location in which they may be rooted

and certainly by those real or fictional individuals referred in this book. The first poem, "I Piece Things Together," from which the title of the volume draws, presents us with a lyrical subject that receives his multiple literary inputs and life stimuli from varied sources, all interconnected by the shared verb "to take": "I take milk and honey" ... "I can take a little / Blake and the Gospel of James" (259). The prosaic and the sublime are leveled by one same acceptance gesture, and both the erudite and the divine are seen in the smallest things that surprise the daily life: "I take a little whiskey and a little water" (259) ... "I take a little / white pill or two for the holy ghost" (260). The poem seeks the ultimate goal of identifying in the universe of this insomniac the elements that parallel an experience that stems from the most immediately observable and is felt to expand beyond it. It is when that is accomplished that the poet can truly state that the pieces are tied together (260).

A similar objective is in a way accomplished by the editors of *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora*, in the sense that the volume does not attempt to force a cohesive view of a single theme or even area of studies, but rather an heterogeneous group of accounts that may help better understand the mosaic of experiences of the Portuguese communities in the world, which the reader may choose to piece together or not. Judging by the variety of theoretical and critical inputs and the depth of most of the studies included in it, *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora* is very successful in fulfilling this goal.

