

**Wenona Giles**

**Portuguese Women in Toronto. Gender, Immigration, and Nationalism.**

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, xiv + 161pp.

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This splendid book weaves together several overlapping themes: (1) the pattern of Portuguese migration during 1967-82 (when the Portuguese ranked fourth among all immigrants to Canada); (2) the relationship of Canadian and Portuguese nationalisms to migration, citizenship and, in the Canadian case, multicultural policies; (3) life histories derived from qualitative interviews conducted by the author with first- and second-generation Portuguese immigrants in Toronto, the Canadian city with the largest share of Portuguese immigrants; (4) the internal heterogeneity of the immigrant group classified as 'Portuguese'; (5) gender and generational relations and politics inside and outside Portuguese households; and (6) the varied senses of 'home' for Portuguese immigrants.

Giles situates the actual experiences of Portuguese migrants in the broader contexts of the global economy and specific national migration policies. These include the labour-market-oriented Canadian immigration policies, especially the Canadian Immigration Act of 1967 and the Federal Multiculturalism policy of 1971, and migration and citizenship policies adopted in the aftermath of the Portuguese social democratic revolution of 1974. Giles argues that the Portuguese post-revolutionary state actively promoted emigration, by extending Portuguese citizenship rights, including the right to vote in Portuguese elections, to all emigrants living abroad. Giles usefully points out that such a globally oriented state nationalism requires a delicate balance between "encouraging emigrants to remain elsewhere, in order to remit needed infusions of foreign capital" and "ensuring emigres' continued allegiance and ties to Portugal in order to secure the endurance of these remittances." The author also notes that "like other forms of nationalism", Portuguese nationalism has "less to offer to women economically and politically than men" (p.113).

Conflating Canadian and Portuguese nationalisms with migration and citizenship policies limits the scope of Giles' analysis of nationalism, but it works well for her critique of Canadian immigration and multicultural policies. She is particularly critical of the strong gender bias of labour-market oriented immigration policies, which have tended to define women as dependants of men, and not as wage workers. The second and fourth chapters of the book, entitled "Where Have All the Women Gone?" and "Working Lives", present convincing evidence that irrespective of immigration status, most of the Portuguese women who immigrated to Canada during 1967-82 joined the labour force soon after their arrival in Canada. However, with Third-World levels of formal education (only 3-7 years of schooling), especially for those from the rural Azores, no or low fluency in English, and inability to access language and skill training opportunities available to male migrants, these first generation female migrants found work only in low-paying unskilled jobs in manufacturing, office or hospital cleaning, and domestic service. The industrial restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s led to huge job losses, forcing many of the women interviewed for the study to work long hours at two or more jobs to make ends meet. Giles notes that Statistics Canada data provide information "for only one of the jobs at any one time", thus missing a large slice of working-class reality. She thus rightly

points out that “qualitative data give a much expanded portrait of the working lives of both generations.”

Giles is also critical of Canadian multicultural policies, which are seen as promoting a homogenous ethnic identity of ‘Portuguese’, while ignoring differences based social class, gender, age, generation, and regional origin. Additional specific variables which internally stratify the Portuguese in Toronto include conditions of entry to Canada (with their strong gender bias), kinship networks in Portugal and Canada (with their interwoven class and regional differences between those from the Portuguese mainland and the rural Azores), possession of land and other immobile capital in Portugal, the politics of gender and generational relations in Portuguese households in Toronto (with first generation women often wanting to preserve traditional gender relations, thus coming into conflict with their daughters), and the various divisions, solidarities and struggles of the female immigrants in their various Toronto workplaces.

Overlapping class, regional and gender differences are also reflected in patterns of remittances and return migration which, as we noted, Giles regards as an important indicator of Portuguese nationalism. Azoreans in Toronto are sending back remittances and returning ‘home’ less frequently than those from the Portuguese mainland. Moreover, despite their classification as immigrant “dependants”, Giles found women to have played a major role in deciding whether, how, and where to emigrate and/or re-emigrate. More women than men have refused to return to Portugal, with Azorean women most likely to want to remain in Canada.

Second-generation Portuguese women are fluent in English and much better educated than their mothers. Although the educational attainment is significant and growing, it lags behind the levels achieved by non-immigrant anglophone women of the same social class and age cohort Giles also studied. She attributes this relative failure to inconsistent support for educational attainment by parents or spouses, and to a strong value placed by the second-generation on traditional family ties and their Portuguese identity. While both the Canadian-born anglophone women and the second-generation Portuguese women revealed intergenerational conflicts, the Portuguese women were much more likely to remain in the parental home, or to return to it after a temporary absence. Thus the processes by which individuals construct their ethnic and cultural identities, and the ways in which they tend to prioritize the various components of those identities (as Portuguese, working-class, married, and/or Canadian) are significant, because they have consequences for educational and job strategies, definitions of ‘home’, recognition of particular forms of racism, patriarchy, and class inequality, and the adoption of various modes of resistance.

This well written study is highly recommended for anyone interested in the experiences of first- and second generation Portuguese immigrants in Toronto, Canadian and Portuguese state policies, and the complexity of diasporic identity construction based on various intersections among class, gender, ethnicity, nationalism, racism, region, age, generation, family and kinship networks, and modes of resistance.

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The author of six books and numerous articles, Alena Heitlinger has published widely on feminist, demographic, health, employment and child care issues in East Central Europe, Canada, U.K. and Australia. Her most recent book is her edited collection *Émigré Feminism: Transnational Perspectives* (University of Toronto Press, 1999) [click here for CJS Online review]. Her current research project is on the formation of Czech and Slovak Jewish identity of the postwar generation, among both who stayed and who emigrated after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. She has also reviewed William C. Cockerham, *Health and Social Change in Russia and Eastern Europe* (1999) for *CJS Online*.

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