RECENSÃO

The Lusophone World: The Evolution of Portuguese National Narratives, de Sarah Ashby, por Jason Fernandes

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EDIÇÃO E PROPRIEDADE
Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa. Av. Professor Aníbal de Bettencourt, 9
1600-189 Lisboa Portugal — analise.social@ics.ul.pt

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Jason Fernandes

Sarah Ashby's *The Lusophone World: The Evolution of Portuguese National Narratives* explores the evolution of Portugal's sense of identity and belonging within the context of this nation-state's association with two international institutions, the European Union (EU), and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP). Framed between an introduction and a conclusion, the book explores this theme over five chapters: the first "Life on the European Periphery" explores the implications of Portugal's joining the EU. It points to the complex processes within which Portugal acceded to the EU and effectively articulates how Portugal's European identity is far from stable, and indeed how accession to the EU was utilized to secure this end. Indeed, Ashby points out that accession to the EU allowed for the country to deal with the trauma of decolonization, allowing it not only to be part of something bigger, but also to affirm a European identity in line with that of the core EU states, an identity that until then had not been quite so clear. The second chapter "The Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries" offers

an introduction to the same international community that is sometimes seen as Portugal's attempt to mimic the international associations like the Commonwealth engendered by Britain and France after the formal end of colonialism. The subsequent chapter, "Portugal, Europe and the Lusophone World: Points of Intersection" explores the manner in which Portugal uses its dual identity as a member of both the EU and the CPL and more particularly explores the idea of Portugal as an intermediary between the EU and Portugal's former territories in Africa. If this chapter explores the points of intersection, the subsequent chapter explores the points of diversion, in particular looking at the frictions within the operation of the CPLP. The fifth chapter titled "Portuguese discourses of Modernity" highlights that modernity is not a stable concept but one that is "a sliding scale of progress" (p. 9) and questions the manner in which Portugal's center-periphery location intervenes in the manner in which the country sees itself as modern.

Even though presented as a work within the discipline of international relations and focusing on the operation of a nation-state within two different international organizations, Ashby's is a stimulating book that would be of interest to a wider audience, not least those interested in theorizing about the post-colonial politics of not just Portugal but its former territories as well. This is, in part, because of the methodology adopted by the book, which combines two "tracks" – the literary and that of international relations. This combination is quite refreshing and makes the book attractive to more than a single audience, allowing for more nuanced appreciation of post-colonial Portugal and the games that mark the politics of this period. Take, for example, the manner in which in the first chapter Ashby uses the Cape Verdean author Germano Almeida's novel *Eva* to explore the conundrums faced by the Cape Verdean elites in the aftermath of decolonization, or her reference to the essays of Eduardo Lourenço. Following critical post-colonial scholars such as Ana Paula Ferreira, Miguel Vale de Almeida, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, she points to the fact that in the aftermath of decolonization the peculiarities of Portugal's colonial practice, marked by a complex racial and cultural hierarchy, was replaced by a simplistic binary that left little or no room for miscegenated – whether culturally or racially – groups, and especially the upwardly mobile among these, in the new Portugal. Indeed, these groups were now seen as unwelcome in the new Portugal that sought to present itself as uncomplicatedly European.

A useful argument that Ashby forwards, and should be taken seriously by other scholars, is that "the most compelling aspect of the campaign against racism is the way that it was generally viewed as a tell-tale sign of modernization: an indication that Portugal now had the "privilege" to grapple with issues that other, advanced European democracies such as Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands had been grappling with for years" (p. 16). In other words the rhetoric of multiculturalism in

Portugal does not in fact work to bring about racial or postcolonial justice, on the contrary, it has served to operate as a whitening mechanism as the dubiously European Portuguese sought to mimic core EU states. This is not surprising given that Ashby points out that in Portugal, "European integration was a project with a strong teleological underpinning: reading through communications published during the 1990s about Portugal's Europeanization is like reading Francis Fukuyama's 'The End of History?,' substituting the words 'liberal democracy' for 'European integration.' "

The ongoing debates within Portugal, as to whether to include racial identity within the official census would do well to consider this insight given that it seems that a failure to consider the peculiar nature of Portuguese colonialism, the racial hierarchy, *and* the manner in which it has integrated into the EU could go well to cement the racial binary that has been under construction since entry into the EU. Indeed, it has often occurred to me when listening to some activists for racial justice that their strategy is to enforce the racial binary, rather than transcend it.

The peculiarity of Portugal's imperial history is also in evidence when Ashby discusses Portugal's relationship with the EU as well as the CPLP. The author points out that "no other post-imperial institutional network has quite embraced a rhetoric of hybridity to the extent that the CPLP has. Britain and France are more content to rest on their laurels as European powerhouses; a privileged position that Portugal does not enjoy. As a result, Portugal is attempting to carve out a niche for itself as an intercontinental interlocutor capable of initiating dialogue, orienting development initiatives, and generally facilitating constructive relations" (pp. 100-101).

It appears, however, that Portugal's desire to act as a bridge between the former African territories and the European markets may have in fact resulted from suggestions from the European Economic Community "*from the very beginning*" (p. 48) that Portugal might be a more valuable member in the EEC if it were capable of maintaining symbiotic relations with Lusophone African countries. If Portugal has sought to mimic the centrality that Britain and France play in their post-colonial associations, however, the book indicates that this is not to be, underlining not only the way in which these African states used the CPLP and Portugal as a portal to EU markets and European developmental aid (p. 50) but also the peripheral role that Portugal often plays in CPLP. It is these details, of how the former territories make use of the CPLP that confirms the insight that when the complexity of Portugal's imperial past is subsumed within a simplistic narrative that works with dominant post-colonial theory and EU practice to produce the discourse that recognizes Portuguese sins of colonialism it is not necessarily for the benefit of the formerly colonized but merely to affirm a hegemonic European identity for metropolitan Portugal.

These attempts at seeking a European identity mesh well with the efforts by Portuguese elites to use *Lusofonia* as a

way to ensure continuing cultural hegemony. While highlighting the reality that Portugal simply does not enjoy the position to assert this role, Ashby also makes the valuable observation that it is the "[f]ailure to recognize this leveling of the hierarchy of cultural influence and failure to recognize a post-colonial two-way street in which Portugal can be a receptor as well as an emanatory of *Lusofonia*" (p. 76) that ensures that the CPLP tends to be seen as a neocolonial institution.

It would be useful to conclude by pointing out that even this book's title draws attention to nationalist discourses, that is discourses *within* the nation, and suggests that "a nation defines *itself* in relation to the outside world" (p. 96: emphasis added) the entire work is populated by a discussion that demonstrates how nationalist discourses about citizenship are often determined by forces not merely within the nation-state but also from without, in this case the international system. For this reason, this book is a valuable resource not only for those who seek to study Portugal, but in fact the complex of states that the contemporary nation-state of Portugal interacts with. Supported by fine-grained statistics, this is the kind of work that we should rely on, or produce, when building post-colonial theory.

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Jason Fernandes » jason.k.fernandes@gmail.com » Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia, ISCTE-IUL » Avenida das Forças Armadas, Edifício ISCTE-IUL — 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal » https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5936-8817.