

# Book Review

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**Morier-Genoud, Eric, and Michel Cahen, eds.** *Imperial Migrations. Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.

Migration is such a prominent feature of the modern world that studies investigating its many forms and flows are very welcome. Eric Morier-Genoud and Michel Cahen have assembled an impressive series of essays on migration within the Lusophone world, one which will certainly be read with great interest. A word of explanation, however, is necessary. Portuguese emigration began in the fifteenth century and by the seventeenth century there were numerous “Portuguese” communities established across the world from Brazil to China. In the nineteenth century, there was large-scale emigration to the Caribbean, Hawaii, and Brazil, and in the twentieth century to North and South America and to northern Europe. However, this book does not cover this story, apart from an invaluable bibliographical essay by Edward Alpers and Molly Ball that surveys the history of Portuguese migration. Instead, this collection of papers is fairly narrowly focused on migrations within Portuguese imperial territory in the twentieth century. This is useful in itself. The chapter by Claudia Castello, for example, introduces an Anglophone readership to the important conclusions of her study of Portuguese settlement in Africa, while Alexander Keese employs his deep knowledge of the colonial archives to describe the role of Cabo Verdians in Portugal’s colonial administration. There is also a useful essay by Clive Glaser on the different groups of Portuguese who have settled in South Africa.

The essays on Chinese, Goans, Ismailis, and Swiss are of specialist interest, though the editors valiantly try to embed them in a wider discussion about “social and autonomous Portuguese imperial space.” The main point of these papers seems to be that various ethnic groups, which were not Portuguese, migrated to and from and within the Portuguese empire.

There are two other major essays. Isabel Henriques’s paper was not presented at the original conference but has been added to the published proceedings. It is

a very impassioned essay that is mainly devoted to illustrating the intensity of racial hostility in twentieth-century Portuguese culture. It reads as an attempt to destroy the arguments of Lusotropical idealists who claimed that the Portuguese empire was built on foundations of racial harmony. This is a dated argument that likely does not need to be made any longer within the scholarly community. It would have been more interesting if Henriques had enlarged on the nature of the African community in Portugal and on her interesting observation that its continued existence as a community with a clearly defined identity ceased after the abolition of slavery removed its separate legal status.

Michel Cahen's chapter originally appeared in French in 2007. It is concerned with deconstructing the ideas that led to the creation of the CPLP—the organization of Lusophone states that came into being in 1996—and to critique the idea that there is any worldwide Lusophone Community. This essay is, in fact, not so much an academic analysis as a strong expression of the writer's personal opinions about the way that Portugal and the Portuguese have adjusted to the post-imperial era. The 1998 Expo in particular attracts the author's contempt because it did not have a pavilion “dedicated to slavery and the slave trade” (299). He goes on to criticize Portugal's policy towards Angola and Timor, to uncover and denounce the sinister persistence of Lusotropicalist ideas and language in political discourse and the popular imagination, and to pour scorn on the whole idea of a Lusophone community and a Lusophone culture—his chapter begins by claiming that “such a culture does not exist” (297). Michel Cahen's contribution to the study of the Lusophone world has been outstanding, not least through editing the pioneering journal *Lusotopie*, but in this chapter a general contempt for Portugal and things Portuguese is scarcely concealed.

The editors have struggled to give the volume coherence through an introduction that examines the nature of Portuguese imperialism and the concept of diaspora. These discussions will certainly be read with interest even though they do not claim to be breaking much new ground. More baffling is their attempt to use the papers to discuss an issue variously described as the “social area of migration,” “social space of migration,” and the “social and autonomous Portuguese imperial space distinct from the formal empire” (22). After reading this introduction a number of times, I am still unclear what these phrases mean or why they are important. As for the conclusion that “there was no autonomous space of migration” but that the Portuguese empire “gave birth to a kind of path

dependency which created autonomy for a social space of migration after the empires collapsed” (22), I leave it to the reader to decide what this may mean.

One final point: we are told that the Portuguese were the “last to decolonize (in 1975)” (1) and that “no settler colonization has succeeded in the long term in the modern period” (18). The scholarly community, elegantly represented in this collection by the doyen of decolonization historians, John Darwin, conducts its arguments on the rise and fall of empires without any reference to Russia and the Soviet Union, though the Russian empire was among the first to be established in the sixteenth century and was definitely the last empire to decolonize, leaving numerous “settler” communities behind in Europe and Central Asia.

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