

Introduction: The Sword and the Shovel¹

Tribute to António Hespanha

We would like to dedicate this special issue to António Hespanha, who passed away in July 2019. Professor Hespanha was one of the most important and original figures of not only Portuguese historiography but also Portuguese culture in a broader sense. His teachings in the fields of legal history and the history of the Portuguese Empire have been paramount in the shaping of our collective identity. Professor Hespanha kindly agreed to do an interview for this special issue. We honor his memory by publishing it here and dedicating the entire issue to his legacy.

The Portuguese have shown themselves for ages a restless and roving people; enterprising in spirit, and adventurous in their habits, we have already seen them, along with the Spaniards, exploring and visiting this country; behold them now again, but in a different capacity. Formerly they came to be masters; now they were satisfied to be servants and laborers. Formerly they came with the sword and the spear; now they were to wield the shovel and the cutlass.²

—Henry Dalton

The epigraph is from Henry Dalton's 1855 *History of British Guiana*. In it, he refers to the large contingents of Portuguese who landed on Guyanese soil, beginning in the 1830s and continuing until the end of the century. Over the course of almost seventy years, an estimated 40,000 Portuguese, mostly from Madeira, arrived in Demerara, a river city in what was then a British colony (Ferreira, J. 2006; Menezes 1986). As Cristiana Bastos notes (2018b), this number is much higher than the number of Portuguese in the Portuguese African colonies at that time.

The highlight of the Dalton quotation appears in the last sentence. With his metaphorical reference to “the sword” and “the shovel,” Dalton highlights the duality, or ambiguity, of Portuguese ocean crossings throughout time. On the one hand, there were Portuguese who acted as agents of colonialism; they came bearing a sword and took territorial, political, and economic control of native, indigenous, and other local populations. On the other hand, there were

Portuguese who came prepared to wield a shovel, most of them poor migrants and laborers, often forcibly displaced, who joined the working ranks in unknown places and unfamiliar contexts.

Portuguese historiography, cultural studies, and social sciences have generally paid much more attention to the ocean crossings of the sword than to those of the shovel. In this issue, we turn the equation around and take a critical look at ocean crossings of the shovel, in line with Bastos's (2018a, 2018b, 2019) suggestions to reframe its role in Portuguese historiography. As she explains, "the identification of the Portuguese as intrepid sailors crossing oceans and bridging the world has been central to a historical narrative that merges sea travel, trade, conquest, knowledge, empire and nation." However, in many circumstances, "sailing overseas was a way to escape poverty, abuse, oppression, misery and distress" (2018b, 66). The paths of such travelers had little, if anything, to do with an imperial strategy.

The Sword

Until recently, the mainstream historiography of Portugal was very much a hagiography of the seas, which were treated as an avatar of bravery that metonymically translated into a certain stereotype of Portuguese identity. Within it, the maritime trope was systematically encoded as the place where the Portuguese fabricated themselves as agents of exploration, discovery, globalization, and cutting-edge science. In Portuguese culture (in a broad sense), the seas were a calling that the Portuguese ought to answer, one capable of pulling them from a state of relative insignificance in the grand theater of European politics toward an emancipation of the being and a full realization of a long-lost inner identity.

Consider Tim Cresswell's (2006) differentiation between movement and mobility. In his view, movement is mobility exempted from social meaning and relations of power, whereas mobility is its opposite: a dislocation or movement constrained by and embedded in meaning and contexts of power. Cresswell has built on this notion to theorize on what he calls the "production of mobilities": the meanings that have been ascribed to ideas and practices of movement in different cultural and historical contexts. He has used that theory as a basis for exploring how these meanings and narratives have affected the lives of people within these contexts.

As a performance of mobility, the practice of crossing the oceans lauds the grandeur of the Portuguese and their capacity to build an inclusive empire that was the forerunner of globalization, international trade, scientific exploration,

and cultural exchange. As a mobility of empowerment, of self-representation, such crossings constructed a maritime trope as an enterprise of becoming. In the words of Eduardo Lourenço (1990), they produced the conception of Portugal as a “nation-ship” of civilization. The idea of sailing, itself a performance of mobility, was codified and produced as a movement of national glory. Since the nineteenth century, this has been deeply rooted in the history of Portuguese nationalism.

Since the construction of Portuguese national identity, the seas have been systematically mobilized as the place where the Portuguese found their vocation, their realization, and their place in the world. The ocean—most notably the Atlantic—has been treated as a fundamental aspect of Portuguese culture, of Portugueseness, of being Portuguese. We see this in the writings of Oliveira Martins (the nineteenth century), Jaime Cortesão (the first half of the twentieth century), and Eduardo Lourenço (the second half of the twentieth century), among many others. We see this in the neo-Manueline style, an architectonic trend of the 1800s that lauded the maritime “discoveries” of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—even if art historians have showed that the relation between the original Manueline and the theme of the seas is, at best, marginal (Pereira 1990). We see this later in the works of Gilberto Freyre (1953), who coined the idea of luso-tropicalism, wherein the oceans were metaphorized as bridges of cultures, milieus of hybridization, the passageway of the lethargic or passive colonizer. We see this in the rhetorics of the *Estado Novo* and the grand Exposition of the Portuguese World of 1940, symbolically located between the Jerónimos Monastery, the Tower of Belem, and the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos*, all celebrating the maritime grandeur of the nation.³

We need not travel further into the past than twenty years ago to unearth one of the most renowned examples of the seas as a celebration of Portuguese identity: the Lisbon World Exposition, known as EXPO 98 (Sieber 2001). Portugal’s biggest public event since the Carnation Revolution of 1974, it was a celebration of Portuguese modernity and identity, a moment of nationalism for the world to see. Its entire iconography was based on the empire, the seas, and their capacity to help humankind build a world of globalization and intercultural prosperity. The Lisbon Oceanarium, the largest indoor aquarium in Europe, was built on site. The mascot was a wave. The streets of the exposition were named after Portuguese sailors of the so-called “discoveries.” The largest arena was known as the Atlantic Pavilion. It was, in short, a celebration of the Portuguese with swords in their hands (Ferreira, C. 2006; Martins 2016).

The Shovel

The problem is that focusing on the notion of sailing as a cultural production contained within a nationalist rhetoric has pushed colonialism and slavery into the background. Discussions of colonialism and slavery were swept under the rug. The imagining of the maritime trope as an enterprise of becoming and Portugal as a nation-ship of civilization (Lourenço 1990) obliterated many other visions of the seas. First and foremost, it obliterated many attempts to come to terms with a colonial and slaver past. The replication of this trope through time silenced views of the seas as a place of exploitation, colonialism, suffering, killing and racism—this topic is analyzed in the interviews in this issue. Second, it has also overlooked other paths and trajectories in and within the lusophone world, other alternative ocean crossings, such as those in which the Portuguese were themselves the underdogs, targets of brutality in a world of persecutory labor and precarious living conditions.

The essays and papers in this special issue explore these other lusophone crossings—those involving the shovel and the cutlass, to return to Dalton’s expression, in detriment of those of the sword—with the hope of showing new ways of understanding the performance of ocean crossing in the lusophone world that do not make an apologetic view of the seas and sailing, but rather one that reveals new understandings of labor, racialization, poverty, and despair (Bastos 2018b). The various papers, some more strongly than others, are in dialogue with this and have been included precisely for their attention to lesser visible ocean crossings in the lusophone world.

The issue kicks off with two special essays. The first is by Malyn Newitt, which aims to show an alternative history of the Portuguese at sea (see Newitt 2015). The essay’s opening sentence sets the tone for the focus of the analysis: “there is another story to set alongside the grand narrative of the discoveries and the founding of Portugal’s worldwide maritime empire.” Newitt puts in perspective the history of Portuguese migration through the seas, by sharing examples set in Hawai’i, the Caribbean, and parts of Asia.

The other essay in the “Special Essays” section is by Kevin Brown. Brown focuses his analysis on the British Empire and the coolie trade from India and China. Many parallels can be drawn from his analysis for the Portuguese reality, but most importantly Brown shows how the Portuguese in the outpost of Macau were very much involved in this trade and how they contributed to a world marked by indentured servitude and labor.

The articles that follow help to deepen these topics. My paper “Sailors and Whalers” addresses the mobility of Portuguese whalers in the nineteenth century. It attempts to show that there were many Portuguese who joined the sailing ranks of whaling ships throughout the 1800s, mostly those from Madeira and the Azores. These men converged in the city that lit the world (a reference to how whale oil was primarily used as a source of lighting), New Bedford, Massachusetts, and from there ventured out into other parts of North America and the Pacific. In doing so, they created paths of migration for many other Portuguese that followed into New England, Hawai‘i, and California.

Nicholas B. Miller’s “Crossing Seas and Labels” focuses on the sea journeys of Portuguese labor migrants into Hawai‘i. Miller emphasizes how the Portuguese arrived in British vessels under Hawaiian contracts, which complexified the various social and economic categories in place. The Portuguese were neither enslaved Africans, nor indentured Asians, nor exactly free migrants bounded to North America. This exploration of the Portuguese bearing the shovel is important to show that there are many realities that fall in-between pre-established categories, often with intricate social processes in terms of differentiation, hierarchizing, and even racialization.

Miguel Moniz’s analysis in “The Day of Portugal, Social Exclusion, and Imagined Mobilities” centers on migratory experiences in New England in the first part of the twentieth century. The article deals with processes of racialization of labor migrants from the Portuguese islands, using data from public events, such as the annual Day of Portugal and others. Moniz shows how the Portuguese were able to use these events to lift themselves socially and politically, aiming at aspirational equality: “Annual celebrations of Portugal and Portuguese migrant communities known as the Day of Portugal take place in New England as part of longitudinal responses to the racialization of migrant labor and attempts among settler communities of these workers to achieve socio-economic mobility” (Moniz, this issue).

Diana Simões’s article “A Diáspora como Base da Identidade Cabo-Verdiana em Ilhéu dos Pássaros, de Orlanda Amarílis, e Chiquinho, de Baltasar Lopes” shifts the analysis to Cabo Verde, highlighting a different facet of the lusophone world. Simões argues that Cabo Verdean migration can be seen as an escape from the physical conditions and geographical positioning of the archipelago, added to the lesser conditions of living and continuous hard labor. She then moves on to explore representations of the Cabo Verdean diaspora, showing how these are fundamentally linked to the seas. Simões does this through an interesting

exploration of the works of Baltasar Lopes and Orlanda Amarílis, two Cabo Verdean writers. In doing so, she provides a fresh look at representations of the ocean contained within the lusophone world, ones that do not adhere to the stereotypical Portuguese-sword binomial.

Finally, in “The Maritime Micro-Gestures in Elizabeth Bishop’s Brazil Poems and Translations,” Magdalena Edward examines the writings of Elizabeth Bishop, a controversial author who was recently lauded as the main honoree of the 2019 edition of the famous International Literary Fair of Paraty (FLIP), which sparked anger amongst many Brazilians because it is generally known that Bishop supported the military coup of 1964 (which installed a militarized, dictatorial regime). Edwards’ analysis is focused on what the author calls maritime gestures, creating a water imagery of Bishop’s writings. The article offers a fascinating reading of Bishop’s poetic use of the sea and connected bodies of water, showing a different (and more literary) facet of lusophone waters.

The issue closes with transcriptions of interviews with António Hespanha, Cristiana Bastos, Joacine Katar Moreira, Miguel Vale de Almeida, and Pedro Schacht Pereira, who discuss the importance of ocean crossings in Portuguese culture and consider how certain visions of the seas have contributed to the dynamics of racialization and segregation in Portuguese society. This topic is explored in order, once again, to challenge the more traditional visions of the seas as places of grandeur and braveness.

Conclusion

Much study and creative imagining of the Portuguese on the high seas have focused on the sword and, as a result, on whiteness.⁴ Portuguese historiography has reinforced this line, for good or ill. Conservative historians continue to privilege the deeds of the Portuguese and the fabrication of a civilizing empire. Progressive historians have, naturally, questioned this, but did so whilst still focusing their works on the Portuguese under the Portuguese Empire, and not exactly beyond it. Which means that the Portuguese under analysis remained those of the sword. Whilst they have challenged assumptions of the Portuguese as civilizing agents and “good colonizers,” trying to stop the naturalization of luso-tropicalism, these historians have still focused on the mobilities, the movements, and the ocean crossings of the sword.

Little has been written, at least from the perspective of Portuguese and lusophone mainstream historiography, about the other mobilities, the other seas, the other places in which the Portuguese were seen as underdogs, as nonwhite

laborers, as a disposable workforce. In this issue, this is what we aim for: we aim to give voice and analyze a number of alternative trajectories and paths, certain “ocean crossings” that are hardly the subject of enquiry of mainstream historiography and that have seldom been the target of identity when “Portuguese” and “the seas” are put in the same sentence. The articles and essays in this issue are focused on achieving this. Some do it more incisively and others less so, though these still provide fresh perspectives on dimensions of ocean crossings that are not self-centered on white, sword-handling Portuguese men.

NOTES

1. This article results from research conducted within the project “The Colour of Labour- The Racialized Lives of Migrants”, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme (Advanced Grant No 695573 - PI Cristiana Bastos), hosted by the University of Lisbon/ Universidade de Lisboa, Instituto de Ciências Sociais. I am grateful for the invitation to serve as guest editor of this special issue of *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies*. I do so in my role as a team member in the European Research Commission’s (ERC) Colour of Labour project. It is my goal to use my role as guest editor to create a conversation around the project’s core concerns as outlined by Principal Investigator (PI) Cristiana Bastos. Colour, which has received funding from the ERC under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, focuses on the coproduction of racialization and labor. Some of its tracks examine the lusophone world beyond the Portuguese Empire, studying how the Portuguese were often racialized through the types of labor they performed. The essays in this special issue contribute to these explorations by addressing informal, less obvious, and often veiled ocean crossings within the lusophone world.

2. I was first introduced to Dalton by Marcelo Moura Mello in his presentation at the Mobile Labor Symposium, held at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, March 2019. Marcelo is a colleague and team-member of the Colour of Labour project. Portuguese migration to British Guyana in the nineteenth century is the central axis of ERC Colour of Labour.

3. The *Padrão dos Descobrimentos* (Monument to the Discoveries) was erected temporarily in 1940 for the Grand Exhibition. The current monument, built in 1960, is a replica of the original.

4. Innovative perspectives have surfaced in the recent years. Some scholars have argued that this idea may be a naturalization of certain historic projections rather than the actual experiences of Portuguese sailors and migrants, who had to thread their way carefully amid pre-established social, cultural, and racial hierarchies. See, for instance, António Hespanha’s *Filhos da Terra* (2019).

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