

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

**WENONA GILES, *Portuguese Women in Toronto: Gender, Immigration, and Nationalism*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press. 2002, ix-xiv + 137p.**

*Portuguese Women in Toronto* contributes to the academic literature in a number of areas. It encompasses not only issues of ethnicity and gender, but also the experience and structures of migration (at both micro- and macro-levels), and the ideologies and complexities associated with nationalism. However, Wenona Giles' research also touches on a variety of other fields including multiculturalism, racialization, labour, education, class (including working-class identity), and the family (including intergenerational relations).

Drawing upon sixty interviews with both first- and second-generation Portuguese- Canadian women and community workers in the Toronto area, Giles offers a variety of case studies, tables and statistics to illustrate aspects of the subject group members' life histories, occupational distributions, income and educational attainment levels. The mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence is complementary, allowing for a multi-dimensional understanding of the material.

Giles' critique of Canadian immigration policy and particularly her claims about state policies on multiculturalism are provocative, but somewhat problematic. She needs to provide more evidence to substantiate her claims that these policies actively seek to negatively 'control' and 'manipulate' immigrant peoples, specifically the Portuguese, in such a way as to exclude them from full citizenship and opportunity. Undoubtedly, she makes many legitimate claims about ways in which women have been disadvantaged by structural weaknesses in these policies (e.g., seeing women as 'dependants' and non-workers, thereby creating barriers to language and skills training). As Giles herself relates, the unusual diasporic and citizenship policies of Portugal towards emigrants, as well as periods of political upheaval in the 1970s may explain the rise and decline of Portuguese immigration into Canada. It would be helpful to the reader to have a historical look into the developments in multiculturalism and immigration policy, though certainly this information is available elsewhere.

In terms of the long-term experiences of Portuguese women living in Canada, Giles seems in some ways to be unduly pessimistic. For example, her commentary underplays the educational gains made by second-

generation Portuguese-Canadian women. Sometimes the problems or inequities Giles attributes most strongly to ethnicity or discrimination really appear to be rather a question of class, generation, age, language or time in Canada, although she does discuss educational streaming, income, education or occupational level, attainment and opportunities. Her comparison of Portuguese women with the experiences of working-class Anglophone women is far too brief to shed much light.

It is very important that Giles argues for cultural heterogeneity and rails against essentialism. She is correct in her critique that multiculturalism may be partly at fault for the homogenization of ethnic categories and arguments over cultural "authenticity." At the same time,

she herself uses (or perhaps is forced to use) a cultural label/overarching category for her subject group. She speaks of a Portuguese "community" and the importance of immigration and community networks, but simultaneously questions their existence or value. She does draw out an important regional distinction between immigrants from the Azores and the Portuguese mainland. I would be interested to find out more about class differentials between these Portuguese immigrants.

Giles argues that, alternately, ethnic identity may be "limiting" but also a medium of "resistance." Unfortunately, slightly submerged in the text is yet another important line of thought, that is that ethnicity may also be a source of resources and value, both tangible and personal. Giles perhaps over-emphasizes the extent to which Portuguese immigrants and their descendants are specifically marginalized and separate from the rest of Canadian civil society.

Giles has enriched the literature on immigrant women by including so much material on the importance of the working lives of the women. Giles' research is also positive in recognizing global notions of immigrant labour and the capitalist economy. An even deeper consideration of the women as workers, both paid and unpaid, and in both the public and private sphere, would be fascinating. The addition of historical material on unions and the involvement of immigrant, migrant and other "marginalized" groups in the labour movement, could only add to Giles' discussion. It would also be helpful to have more contextual material on Toronto, to help ascertain the elements of the subject groups' experiences.

Giles has indeed written a thought-provoking and far-ranging study of Portuguese women in Canada. Again, one is struck by the multi-faceted nature of the research and the close attention she pays to her subjects' lived experience in all arenas of daily life. *Portuguese Women in Toronto*

certainly encourages further enthusiastic exploration by both scholars and others into the experiences of the Portuguese and many other immigrant groups.

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