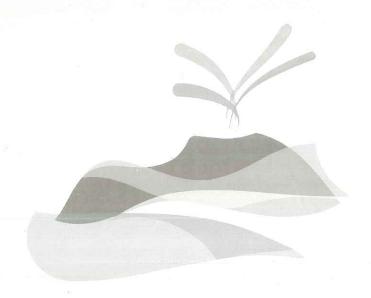
# CAPELINHOS A Volcano of Synergies



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# CAPELINHOS A Volcano of Synergies

Azorean Emigration to America



COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

This publication includes a DVD with a color video clip, Vulcão dos Capelinhos, produced by António R. Furtado (back inside cover)

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# **Twelve**

# Confronting the Migrant Challenge: Professional, Linguistic, Social, and Cultural Obstacles to Integration

Miguel Moniz

There are many stories that migrants tell about their arrival in their new home, such stories often helping those who have left behind families and friends and all they have ever known to make sense of what can be a strange and alien cultural environment. Such narratives, in their telling, can reflect the reality of migrant experiences. They can, just as likely, provide an alternate history through which the hardships of the present and past are given a more hopeful countenance.

Among Azorean and other Lusophone migrants settling in North America, these narratives are often told in soulful glances toward all that was left behind, which can often obscure the less than idyllic conditions that necessitated and encouraged migration in the first place. These romantic visions can gloss over the adversity and tribulations of the lived-in present as well, as stories laud the new

migrant home as a glamorized paradise, a place where all dreams come true and nothing is ever wrong, a bounty of opportunity. In understanding why these stories are told as they are, one recognizes psychological factors in how humans confront the tragedy of loss of place and loss of loved ones left behind, or one might look for economic determinants through which survival necessitates an active and affirmative connection to one's homeland and those from it. Literary flourishing in the form of both poetics and criticism also offer insight in their understanding of Azorean and Portuguese migration, casting these stories as revelatory of the particulars of the human experience.

For Azorean and other Lusophone migrants these narratives have tended toward an idealization of the dream unrealized rather than providing migrants with a hard-look picture at the world as it truly exists. But where does that world truly exist?



Constructing a typical and intricate Portuguese-style stone sidewalk. (Courtesy of Expresso das Nove newspaper archives)

To be certain, in recent years, various texts treating the Lusophone communities, in both the social sciences and literature, have adopted a more critical approach to the difficulties of migrant integration. One may look at the wistful and often tragic melancholy of some of Frank Gaspar's poetry, or the soul-searching autobiography of a hardscrabble migrant's life penned by Frank Fagundes, to see the



Young Manuel Fernando Neto on one of his first jobs in the United States, working at a butcher shop. (Courtesy of Manuel F. Neto)

change, as each fingers into the darker corners of the migrant experience. Aside from these examples, however, the norm among Azorean characterizations of their own communities has been to tell Algeresque success stories, such as those of Alfred Lewis, Charles Peters, or Laurinda Almeida. Even in Fagundes's incisive and revelatory autobiography, the difficulties of the migrant's struggle come to an eventual triumphant end.

There is, however, another side of the Portuguese migrant story that does not make it into the narratives told by the literate in the tales of their lives in America. As studies old and new suggest, images of luscious *festas* and barrels of money waiting for those who are willing to work hard obscure the fact that life for the newly arrived migrants was a struggle in which the only questions about the hardships to be faced would be how many and of what kind.

Indeed, non-Portuguese studying the communities, even during the historical period, have been less celebratory in their treatment and early on exposed what would be recurrent problems. Donald Taft, for example, in a study from the 1920s, points to a wide range of problems confronted by Azorean migrants, including high rates of infant death, high arrest rates, low literacy rates, and low levels of educational achievement. Although Taft should be excoriated for his racist conclusions that these problems were genetically determined given the high percentage of "Negroid blood" among the local residents migrating from São Miguel, he cannot be faulted for his sound data collection that identified the issues in the first place. It is unfortunate that he placed the blame on a genetic predisposition to social problems, rather than accurately concluding that the culprits causing high infant mortality rates, low education, and a host of other social problems he presents were the result of a pervasive social marginalization confronted by the newly arrived migrants and the low paying, long-hour, sweat-shop factory positions they held, along with the concomitant horrors of the living and working conditions that such jobs created.

Different historical periods of course presented Azorean and other Lusophone migrants with different challenges as they attempted to integrate into their new home. Independent of time period, all migrants had to fight against the inevitable social marginalization that they faced. In addition to recurrent social marginalization, and in spite of differences in specific historical and local circumstances, the migrants also had to face a few other recognizable major factors. It is certain that although some of these problems have shown marked improvement, as popular awareness has increased both within and outside the communities, and as politicians, academics, teachers, health care officials, and the like have assisted in addressing specific areas of concern, many of the problems remain, a fact that has promoted recent examinations in an attempt to characterize the relevant issues.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, a number of major areas can be identified that have historically confronted the Azorean migrants and their descendants as they have attempted to integrate into their new lives. Certainly these difficulties are not the only reality they have faced. Indeed, that Azorean and other Lusophone migrants have creatively, optimistically, and resolutely been able to integrate into their new social and cultural milieu, despite these difficulties, is under no dispute. The Lusophone migrants have been nothing if not resilient and tenacious in their desire to carve a rich life for themselves, no matter where they may land



nor what they may confront. These remarks are merely intended to point to some of the challenges that many have encountered along the way, while not ignoring the many for whom the dream story of migration has been lived more as a nightmare.

In assembling these notes it is important to point out that the conditions listed below should not be seen as comprehensive, nor as separate problems, but rather each and every one has a certain connection to the others. Educational difficulties, poverty, lack of adequate health care, drug abuse, and the like are not problems that drop out of the sky; they have a cumulative and causal relation. Further, an individual migrant encounters a range of issues specific to him or her, and this commentary should not be perceived as arguing for an essentialized identity of the diverse individuals who have come to America in different time periods, from different islands, and from varying socioeconomic circumstances, although they do share a common historical, economic, and cultural link to the archipelago left behind, whether forgotten or reencountered.

# **Poverty and Living Conditions**

Lost in the hubbub of narratives extolling conditions of great economic opportunity, are social conditions, especially among urban populations, that find Lusophone migrants in America living among the poorest communities of the cites and regions in which they reside. Although a close-knit Portuguese community life that finds socialization and economic and political adaptation taking place within cohesive social networks is well documented, the daily struggle of economic adaptation among families in which wage earners often must work multiple jobs in order to survive, causes a number of problems for not only those in the labor force, but for their families as well. The high number of migrant-owned businesses is usually offered as evidence of Portuguese ingenuity and entrepreneurial prowess, but there is another story, which reflects the difficulties faced, rather than merely the successes gained. One impetus for many migrants to start their own businesses has been that few job skills and a low-education level have prohibited them from finding higher-paying jobs in companies owned by others. During Salazarera migration, the overwhelming majority of migrants from the Azores had no more than a fourth grade education (when they even had that), which, compounded by a lack of English-language skills and the frequently expressed prejudices of many non-Portuguese employers, did not provide the migrants with the opportunity for more than manual labor positions and service sector employment, which seemed to be the only jobs outside of the community available to them. Migrants finding work with other migrants, including family members, have had a greater advantage in their ability to demonstrate positive

skills leading to advancement and higher earnings within the companies for which they work or, as has been frequently the case, in starting

their own businesses.

Many migrants have been limited in their wage-earning potential by work on assembly lines, in custodial jobs, in laundry rooms, behind cafeteria counters, and in other arduous manual labor positions. Although widely lauded by employers and their communities with the left-handed compliment that they are "hard and dependable workers," migrants remained employed in jobs that provided little room for advancement and even less room for increased wages. The attitude also perpetuates an abuse of the Azorean work ethic in which the "hard work-



Shore whalers' improvised meal at the Porto do Comprido, Capelo, Faial. (Courtesy of Manuel Goulart collection)

ing and dependable" laborer is often exploited, because he or she will accept lower wages for more work, will not complain about unfair jobs, and will not say No when managers and bosses ask them to do work that lies outside the domain of their responsibility.

Beyond financial considerations, such jobs can also be nightmares of industrial dehumanization. Spending day after day for decades at the same work station in a factory, placing the same kind of pocket on the same kind of shirt, for example, can have a deleterious effect on the psyche. Hard labor construction jobs, even when adequate healthcare is available (and it is not likely to be) leave workers with life-long pain, as years of physical abuse take a debilitating toll on the body.

There are other consequences as well, such that settlement patterns into poorer residential areas bring one into a daily existence of first-hand exposure to a range of social problems scarcely present in life in the wealthy suburbs.



Community gathering to watch a folk performance in New England. (Courtesy of the Portuguese Times archives)

# Socio-Cultural Adaptation

A related issue that has impeded social integration of Azorean migrants upon their arrival in America has been the varying degree of difficulty in adapting culturally to the new environment. The importance of Azorean community life, which finds communities converging for socio-religious purposes, coming together to find and work jointly in jobs, or socializing with one another in community-wide secular social events, reflects more than the close-knit and familial nature of the communities. There is a counterpart in the sharing of community life—be it by necessity or choice—that finds migrants segregated from similar social networks in the broader community, because marginalization can leave migrants struggling to adapt to what is an alien social environment. The obstacles have been the same for most migrant groups for whom social codes of comportment vary greatly from those of the pre-migrant context, and for whom the struggle to survive is compounded by living in a milieu in which one does not speak the predominant language of expression.

Indeed, unable to speak English, many migrants are left outside the course and flow of daily life, as something as ordinary as reading a newspaper or conversing with the butcher is an impossibility. This is less of a problem of course if one reads only the Portuguese-language press, shops only at Portuguese stores, and works with Portuguese co-workers. Again, what creates and encourages on the one hand a close-knit, warm, and mutually beneficial migrant community, on the other hand can result in continued social exclusion from the region in which one lives.

The language issue exists at a greater level than merely a migrant's ability to communicate. In some cases poor English language skills reflect a lack of education in either language. For migrants who arrived during the *Estado Novo* and earlier, lack of English language skills only compounded frequent illiteracy in their native tongue. In one study, it was demonstrated that Portuguese job advancement in a non-Portuguese-owned corporation was virtually nil, in large measure as a result of the lack of English language skills, which both prohibited workers from doing other jobs and created a prejudice in the false impression among those doing the hiring that the Portuguese were not capable of doing the jobs.<sup>2</sup>



Different cultural codes of conduct can also leave migrants struggling to navigate such taken-forgranted facets of daily life as going to the bank or the supermarket. How an individual migrant attempts to cope with the differences in social codes of comportment can make post-migration social integration difficult and often result in migrants choosing to spend more time within the confines of their own family unit and migrant network, thereby limiting the possibility of creating a broader community with non-migrants. In this, again, is the logic of Portuguese-owned and -operated businesses, which in part provide marginalized populations with an oasis in which the logic of pre-migration social organization can exist in the migrant context.

Migrant issues and cultural practices around healthcare offer a revelatory example pointing to the difficulties confronted by migrants in navigating the cultural codes of their new social milieu. The problem was particularly acute in earlier periods when there was nary a Portuguese-speaking worker at hospitals—never mind nurses or doctors. Certainly a migrant attempting to describe pain and symptoms to a healthcare provider is prohibitively difficult when a common language is not spoken, but there are other problems, as well, revealing the difficulties that can be encountered as a result of distinct cultural codes of comportment. The intensive care ward of an American hospital, for example, operates under a cultural presumption in the management of death that allows only one or two people to enter a patient's room at a time. Hospitals are not equipped to handle the dozens of members of a Portuguese family who come to visit with the sick and dying, from brothers, sisters, and children down to great-grandchildren. They will be barred from visiting their sick relative's room en masse and made to remain in waiting rooms, which they then overflow. In recent years, hospitals have become more sensitive to these and related issues, but over the long-haul of the Portuguese migrant experience in America, this has simply

not been the case.

Another issue is a generational divide that found and still finds the cultural codes of comportment forged in small rural villages in the Azores, which themselves have much changed in the intervening years, meeting with great resistance among the American-born generation. What is considered appropriate social behavior among the children of migrants who have been socialized in America may not match up with the worldview of their parents. Of course this is the case among any generation of parents and children, but the issues have been amplified in the Azorean migrant case



Large Azorean immigrant family in Massachussets. (Courtesy of the Portuguese Times archives)

over the century as the worldview of Azorean-born parents, especially those who migrated during the Estado Novo, or from small, socially conservative and deeply religious villages, has been at odds with their more liberally raised children, who came of age in America, went to American schools, and have been inculcated with local, post-migrant codes of comportment. Dating, recreation, and socialization with friends are all areas of contention, leading to pressures in family life that did not exist in the pre-migration context.

There are, to be certain, many benefits in the inter-generational divide, such as how the children of migrants often help their parents learn English and navigate the alien nature of the same cultural codes that lead to contention in other contexts. Even when beneficial, however, the potential for conflict still exists, as some migrant parents may feel beholden to and helpless with the very children whom they feel they should protect.

#### Education

The emergence of bilingual education in the public schools did much to assist migrant social integration, at least for those who were fortunate to have participated in the programs as they emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. But a lack of general education among the largely small-scale agriculturalists who came to America worked against social integration. Certainly the children of migrants had greater educational opportunities, especially given that they grew up speaking English and were able to be go to school until the twelfth grade. But even for the children of migrants, familial pressures to work in



Portuguese educators march in New England, advocating bilingual programs. (Courtesy of the *Portuguese Times* archives)

family businesses and enter the wage labor market as soon as possible led many to forego higher education, which they may otherwise have been inclined to pursue.

Although the situation has certainly shown improvement in recent years, this complex is part of a culture that has historically devalued, and continues to devalue, higher education as an end in and of itself, placing value on education only in so much as it is able to increase wage-earning potential. Other factors continue to be an issue, as migrant parents often reject a child's desire to go away to college, insisting that he or she live at home and continue to work. In this case, children may go to university, but are deprived of the richness of the experience, or attend universities that may not be their first choice or may not provide them with the intellectual challenges they may otherwise have had.

# Social Marginalization, Social Exclusion, and Discrimination

A significant factor in the lack of social interaction outside the community has historically been discriminatory and even racist attitudes on the part of many in the non-migrant population, who cast the Portuguese in broad stereotype and in ugly characterization as the undesirable "Other." Racist treatment of the Portuguese is nothing new, and includes a range of comportment against the group, including job and housing discrimination, negative attitudes toward socialization, rejection of the Portuguese as potential marriage or dating partners, and a perception of the community as backwards and negative. A number of documents chronicle external discrimination against the Portuguese, including issues around, for example, the Big Dan's rape trial, in which the wider Portuguese community was cast in grotesque caricature by local media as thugs and sympathetic to abuse of women (Almeida 1996), or more broadly, discrimination encountered by the Portuguese as a result of their non-white and outsider classification in America (Harney 1990, Pap 1981, Moniz 2008). The history of the Portuguese struggle against such marginalization led, in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, to the Portuguese being classified for a time a federally protected minority, and finds them at present given protection as a minority group in a number of states, for the purposes of business loans and hiring practices.

For some Portuguese, one outcome of this prejudice was to reject the Portuguese community, identity, and cultural practices in an attempt to avoid such discrimination. One can point to a tragic turn of circumstances through which an individual feels the only way to avoid discrimination is to reject personal association with a stigmatized ethnic group to which they would otherwise belong. The other outcome that has provided communities with far more possibilities, however, has been to embrace that identity. The outcome of the intervening years offers evidence that many have charted a course by which they attempt to integrate their personal desires and inclinations within the broader patterns and cultural practices of the communities and contexts in which they reside.

## **Drug Abuse**

Most discussion of drug abuse in American popular discourse revolves around images of junkies huddled in the dark shooting smack and runny nose crack addicts in broken and abandoned buildings



getting high and looking for their next fix. To be certain, heroin and crack addiction have affected the Azorean and Portuguese migrant communities in significant numbers, and the issue of drug abuse can be directly linked to struggles against poverty and social exclusion.

Too often forgotten in discussions of migrant drug addiction, however, is the far more pervasive and deleterious (from a community-wide perspective) problem of alcoholism and the problems concomitant with it. One can point to a drastic difference between the cultural milieu in the Azores and Portugal , which frowns on public displays of drunkenness, and an American culture, which has gone so far as to even celebrate inebriation. One can point to the difficulties inherent in leaving behind all that one has known, of loss and emotional and physical hardship in the migrant context leading to increased unproductive uses of alcohol and other debilitating drugs. Whatever the reason, wide-spread alcoholism

and alcohol abuse has long been one of the dirty secrets of the Portuguese migrant communities. Problems with alcohol and other drug addictions extend beyond the individual addict, having a ripple effect that extends to families, friends, and loved ones. Migrant children and spouses suffer from the consequences of a loved one's addictions, when they are beat, neglected, and suffer themselves from the cyclical nature of genetic predisposition and social conditioning that ultimately lead to another generation of addiction.

A tragic consequence of drug addiction in the communities has been the effect on Azorean deportations. Over the course of the past decade, legal permanent residents of the United States and Canada have been forcibly removed from North America and deported to the Azores of their birth. Although Canadian and United States law vary in their specifics, in general terms, the statutes in both countries compel permanent residents who have committed what are considered to be "aggravated felonies" to be deported. In almost all cases, the deportable offense has been the direct result of drug use. Heroin and crack addiction, as well as addiction to other Class A drugs, can and frequently have resulted in deportation merely as a result of possession. Even when permanent resident migrants have been deported for theft or assault, one can almost always trace the crime back to drugs and alcohol, as the repatriated were either drunk at the time of the assault or looking for money for a fix when they committed the theft (Moniz 2004).



São Jorge quake in 1964. Just like a violent earthquake can destroy a home, drug use and other risky behaviors can easily destroy one's life. (Courtesy of the J.A. Freitas Library)

# Lack of Participation in the Political Process

Another area confronting migrant social integration has been the lack of migrant Azorean and other Lusophone participation in the political process, although there has been a substantial leap forward since the 1970s. The Portuguese have traditionally chosen to advocate for personal and economic power within the confines of their communities rather than participate in governmental politics. It has only been in recent years that they have demonstrated the kind of political awareness that has lead to group advocacy for political power. Even when politicians have paid attention to the Portuguese, including the dedication of funding for libraries and the like, it has often been the result of patrician political patronage designed to earn traditionally Democratic-leaning migrant votes right before elections. When politicians have demonstrated genuine concern for the problems of Azorean migrants and their families, such as the efforts of Senator Claiborne Pell and then Senator John F. Kennedy with the Azorean Relief Act, it is telling that the widespread Azorean voting block was beholden to non-Portuguese office hold-

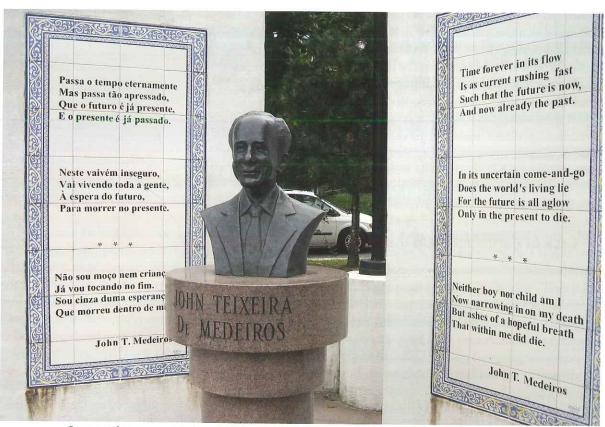
ers for support. Although the situation has recently improved at the state level in New England and reached the congressional level in California, it is a marvel, when one considers their overwhelming electoral majority in some geographic regions, that the Portuguese have either not run a greater number of strong candidates for public office or have failed to elect those who have run.

### The True Measure of Success

Absent in this litany of social problems confronting Azorean and other Lusophone migrants in their successful social integration over the course of the twentieth century and into the present, has been any discussion of what exactly "successful social integration" means. To be certain the definition of "success" is largely subjective. Is "successful integration" defined by how much money a migrant is able to make? how much political power he has? Is it not a mistake to measure success in such purely socioeconomic terms?

There is perhaps no easy answer to measuring "success" in terms of markers to characterize a broad and diverse ethnic group, given that the individuals that compose any social category are unique in their motivation and unique in their willingness and ability to create for themselves the life desired—recognizing that the life desired is subject to broad variability.

An example from a recent research project is revelatory. In conducting hundreds of interviews for a project examining a lack of Portuguese job advancement at one of New England's largest employers, I found a number of factors that militated against the migrants' ability to move beyond the entry level jobs many of them had held for upwards of thirty years. Foremost among the factors inhibiting advancement was a lack of language skills, accompanied by a lack of belief in their own abilities and a lack of support from those in supervisory positions (manifest, in its more benign effect, in the simple lack of encouragement, and in overt discrimination in its more insidious expression). One important factor recurred however in why some of the migrants had "failed" to advance to higher paid jobs with more responsibilities: They simply did not want that kind of job. I was told by numerous workers that they were content to come to work, not to have to think about what they did, get paid, and have only a minimum

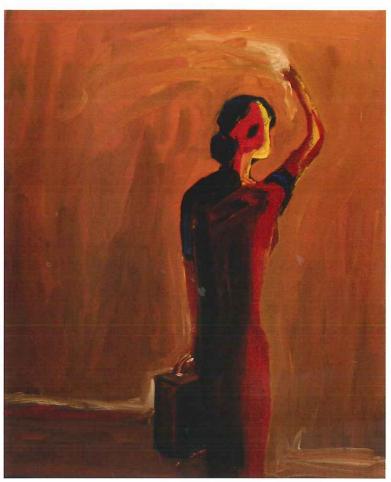


Statue and monument in honor of the popular poet and writer John Teixeira de Medeiros at the Fall River Heritage State Park. (Photo by Tony Goulart)



of responsibility over their own area, rather than worrying about what anyone else did. At the end of the day, one worker said, all he really cared about was having the time and the energy to work in his garden and spend time with his family, because working in his garden and spending time with family was what he truly enjoyed.

Such a comment should lead social theorists eager to seek out social "problems" among migrant communities (the writer of this piece most definitely included) to tread carefully when defining and attempting to understand "success." Success in social integration is highly variable, and it should be recognized that, for many migrants, the goal is not to achieve a measure of accomplishment as defined by the cultural logic of the America to which they have come, nor is it to reflect the migrant narratives of economic and social achievement as they are told in newspapers and books by neighbors and relatives. Their goal is rather to build the kind of life that they themselves truly desire. To be certain, it is important to recognize the systemic obstacles that impede the achievement of that desired life. But it is also certain that the definition of "successful integration" should come not from those of us who assess the obstacles, but rather from those who strive to attain the goal.



Mala de Sonhos (Suitcase of Dreams). Oil on canvas. Painting by João de Brito. "Ashes to Life" art exhibit.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See, as one example, Barrow 2002.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> I presented the conclusions to this 2005 applied anthropology project, conducted at one of New England's largest employers, to the board of the corporation commissioning the study. I am currently working on a version of the report for publication.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Lauck 1912, for example, points out how Scottish and English workers refused to allow the Portuguese to join trade groups or join in strikes, feeling that they had values that would be detrimental to successful arguments for increased wages. For other instances of social exclusion and discrimination, see also Rodrigues 1990, and Silvia 1976.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See Moniz 2008 for a discussion of the history of Portuguese minority status in America.

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