

Darlene Sadlier. *The Portuguese-Speaking Diaspora: Seven Centuries of Literature and the Arts*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016. 286 pp. Paperback. ISBN 9781477311486

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As its subtitle indicates, Sadlier's *The Portuguese-Speaking Diaspora* covers a vast temporal span. Wheeling through literature and the visual arts, hopping back and forth between the canon and the margins, her book is no less geographically wide-ranging in its choice of objects of analysis. Fittingly, or problematically, the notion of diaspora it invokes is equally diffuse however. The author far exceeds any idea of diaspora calqued on ideas of the ancestral Jewish experience (e.g. lack of assimilation in places of reception, post-historical myths of homeland and homecoming, ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity within situations of minority discrimination) and draws instead on the etymological roots of the word in the Greek for 'dispersal'. The dispersive movements giving rise to the cultural forms Sadlier discusses turn out to be equally disparate, ranging from the so-called voyages of discovery to economic migration to colonial students coming to study in the metropole, at which point the term diaspora arguably loses any critical specificity beyond a notion of long-haul travel.

Despite this breadth of scope, or perhaps because of it, appearing less frequently here are the average individuals who feature prominently (albeit as statistics) in other recent works nominally on the same subject, such as *Imperial Migrations: Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World* (eds. Éric Morier-Grenoud and Michel Cahen, 2012) or *Emigration and the Sea: An Alternative History of Portugal and the Portuguese* (Malyn Newitt, 2015). An interest in the sort of diaspora discussed in these volumes might have led Sadlier to more memorialistic writings by unsung or anonymous authors. The fact that this kind of autobiographical literature does not appear at all seems telling. My impression is that the use of diaspora in Sadlier's title bespeaks a desire to discuss examples of literature, art, and material culture arising in the wake of empire without recourse to an invidious colonial framework that might split any notion of a Portuguese-Speaking World, a concept of particular appeal to lusitanists. The danger is that, while Sadlier does raise and endorse a variety of cultural works that challenge imperial ideology, her exclusive focus on the imperial map over regional emplacements risks implicitly underwriting the types of discourse that preserve lusotropicalism under a

contemporary guise. Perhaps ‘Portuguese-Speaking Diasporas’ in the plural might have been a happier title.

In terms of what Sadlier covers, there is much in her work that is informative for the neophyte and thought provoking for experts in the texts and artefacts she discusses. The general tack of studying not just Portuguese migration and cultural production, but the countermovements of American, African and Asian subjects that arose in the multipolar and asymmetrical space of the Portuguese empire is extremely fruitful, firing connections and opening new angles. I, for one, cannot think of any other similarly ambitious single-authored work of Lusophone cultural studies. Yet, for me it was from this very comparatist approach that problems arose: just how can we do justice to such variety in a single work. Given the theme of this issue of *InterDISCIPLINARY Studies of Portuguese Diaspora Studies*, I shall focus here on the strand of Portuguese Indian experience in Sadlier’s global network to exemplify my impressions. If her volume gives an inspirational sense of what can be opened up by including production about South Asia into discussions based in the broad field of Portuguese Studies, it also indicates the significant issues and difficulties that arise in the attempt. At heart, here we have the thorny question of the macro versus the micro in scholarship. In Sadlier’s case, an impressive broadness of canvas means that on occasion the critical paint gets spread a little thin. Her conspectus establishes parallels and comparisons that have the potential to suggest fresh avenues of inquiry—and so is to be welcomed on that alone—but at the cost of generalisations and errors that a narrower, deeper focus might have avoided.

The many qualities of *The Portuguese-Speaking Diaspora* are best experienced at first-hand, so I leave and encourage readers to do just that. Here, I limit myself to looking at Sadlier’s work against the backdrop of the Portuguese presence in South Asia, the context of which is unfamiliar to most lusitanists (particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and so needs more a more careful contextualisation than well-trodden disciplinary fields. Perhaps in doing so I answer my own implied question about the appropriate focal range of academic inquiry: maybe it is in the movement between the broad camera pan of work like Sadlier’s and the nit-picking zoom of a review like mine that a balance between the micro and the macro is in fact established.

A recurrent issue in *The Portuguese-Speaking Diaspora* is terminology. Sadlier often uses terms in reference to Indian peoples and cultural forms that would, at best, be unfamiliar from a Goan or South Asian standpoint, and at worst obfuscatory. For instance, she refers to South Asians as East Indians, most likely to distinguish them from Amerindians (whom Sadlier refers to as Indians, perhaps in deference to Brazilian usage since, to me at least, the term seems to be generally avoided today). In ethnography today, however, the label “East Indian” is applied to Roman Catholics from Bombay and Maharashtra, whose ancestors converted to the religion when Portugal still held its former “Província do Norte” (Bombay being gifted to the British in 1661 and the rest lost to the Marathas in 1739). In simple terms, in today’s India, East Indians are western

seaboard Catholics who are neither Goans nor descended from Goans. Rather than referring to South Asians as a whole the term 'East Indians' normally refers to a tiny and very specific subset of the population. Though a question of incidental detail, it shows the difficulty of linking largely disconnected fields and establishing a common vocabulary to discuss the New World and the 'East Indies' together. Another similar difficulty arises with Sadlier's frequent use of the word 'Hindi' to refer to South Asian subjects. Besides taking a glossonym for a demonym, it also risks reinforcing the problematic idea of India as essentially Hindu, an ideological construction that has bedevilled the equitable insertion of Portuguese India into the imaginary of the wider Indian nation.

Other problems arise: Laxmanrao Sardessai's surname is misspelt as Sardessi; Gilberto Freyre is described as calling for Goa's independence (when his rather different suggestion was that Goa had all the conditions to be autonomous); Orlando da Costa's *O Signo da Ira* is said to be set in 'a remote peasant community in Goa's interior', when it in fact takes place just outside the territory's second city of Margão; Vimala Devi is described as leaving her homeland just before the Indian takeover, when in fact she moved to Portugal in the 1950s. Given the fraught and *sui generis* right of Goans to reacquire Portuguese citizenship, Sadlier rather muddies the waters by talking of 'Goan citizens' and making the puzzling statement that, post-1961, when the Portuguese prisoners of war interned by the victorious Indians were repatriated to Europe, 'Portuguese citizenship was issued to all those remaining in the former province'. In fact, Goans were already Portuguese citizens pre-1961 and did not lose their right to that status after the engrossment of the territory to the Indian Union, on the Portuguese side at least. It is this fact that has led to one of the anomalous aspects of the contemporary Portuguese diaspora, the large body of migrants of Indian origin with Portuguese passports who exercise their right to live in the European Union. It is estimated that some 20,000 Goans with Portuguese citizenship live in the UK alone, a community particularly nervous about the position of EU migrants post-Brexit given that India prohibits dual citizenship, and that, by and large, they have little personal connection to Portugal beyond their documentation.

In terms of literary analysis, Sadlier provides a reading of several recent works that take Portuguese India as their theme, focusing in most depth on José Eduardo Agualusa's *Um Estranho em Goa* of 2000. Agualusa is to all intents and purposes *incontornável* in this sort of multipolar discussion of the Lusophone world, so his presence is unsurprising. One reason for Agualusa's popularity of Agualusa, not least on university syllabi, is the way in which his novels seem designed to embody 'lusophony'. Works like *Nação Crioula* or *O Ano em que Zumbi Tomou o Rio* were born as ready-made set texts on Afro-Luso-Brazilian relations and the circulation of bodies and identities across what Vale de Almeida terms 'the Earth-coloured sea'. Yet, Agualusa's *Um Estranho em Goa* is a far less accomplished work, though perhaps all the more interesting for its weaknesses. In contrast to the abovementioned Agualusa novels, it shows all the difficulty of incorporating Goa into any shared contemporary Lusophone imaginative space and so indicates

clearly Agualusa's understanding of the stakes in any transnational Lusophone space. Both his work and the critical response to it shows how notions and commonplaces arising from the Atlantic triangle of Lusophony are an awkward fit for Goa, a difference which could be productive if sufficiently acknowledged and understood but rarely is.

What Sadlier has to say exemplifies a lot of the discussion around this novel and perhaps a certain trap that exists for unwary Western critics of postcolonial fiction. Whatever *Um Estranho em Goa*'s qualities as a work of metafiction engaging other texts by the author, it is obvious that the novel-cum-travelogue was written by precisely the referent of the title: an outsider with no real knowledge of Goa's society, culture or history. To Agualusa's credit, he—or his alter ego in the novel—never pretends the contrary, openly admitting his tourist status. Most readings of *Um Estranho em Goa*, however take Agualusa's casual fictionalisations as authoritative commentary on a socio-political reality, as does Sadlier here. Western critics of postcolonial cultural production must be careful to ascertain the knowledge the author actually possesses and without simply endorsing claims for its purchase on some essentialised truth. If Sadlier sees Agualusa's work envisioning of "the possibility of new communities and relationships that breakdown conventional boundaries and assumptions", then there is a certain paradox in that, in Goa, the author seems to have found little beyond what he was looking for (which, even then, he embroiders to suit his own outlook, much as the Portuguese travellers of old encountered phantasmagoria of their own desires rather than any Other, as Sadlier argues in another section of her book). Just to give an example, while it makes for wry fiction, it really is not plausible that Agualusa met a Goan Catholic taxi driver called Salazar who, not speaking a word of Portuguese, not even knowing who his namesake was, would then declare himself to be an admirer of Xanana Gusmão (who, practically unknown in Goa, led East Timor to an independence which stands for Salazar the Taxi Driver [and, it would seem, Agualusa] in negative comparison to Goa's current political status). Generally, *Um Estranho em Goa* says more about Agualusa's investment in a certain idea of Lusophony than it says about Goa. Of course, novels are not beholden to reality (neither, perhaps, are travelogues); rather it is we as critics who should read figures like Salazar as fictional symbols, embodying desires, attitudes and ideas, and not automatically assume any kind of sociological plausibility.

Similar points could be made about Raquel Ochoa's *A Casa-Comboio*, which tackles interesting themes in terms of post-colonising the identity in/of Portugal, but fights shy of any engagement of the Indian nationalist position as regards Portuguese India and, problematically, relegates self-identifying Indian subjects to roles of mute animosity. On this note, it is a pity that Sadlier didn't turn her attention to Paulo Varela Gomes's recent *Era Uma Vez em Goa*, which in my opinion is the most accomplished (and subtly problematic) Portuguese novel on Portuguese India. As subjective as Agualusa or Ochoa or any piece of fiction, it is obviously—unlike Agualusa or Ochoa's work—based on a deep critical reflection on Goan reality both before and after the demise of Portuguese colonialism. It is

the work of an author who knew Goa intimately yet took pains to create a narrative voice that admits its limits and subjectivity (not to mention lack of interest in certain details). Given the presence of formally ambiguous films such as *A Última Vez que Vi Macau*, it seems a shame that Sadlier didn't extend her work on Portuguese India to works like *A Dama de Chandor* with its tricky politics of representation or even *Língua: Vidas em Português*, where elite Goan figures such as Mário de Miranda and Manohar Rao Sar Dessai can speak for themselves (regretfully the voice of the Goan subaltern is absent from Portuguese-language cultural production as it is from Lusophony itself). Perhaps it is unfair to criticise such an eclectic work for what it does *not* do, though of course critical selection always attributes importance and recognition. Already, though only among those who know nothing about the territory, Agualusa's novel has gained a certain reputation as a key fictional work on Goa when, in comparison to, say, Leopoldo da Rocha's little-known *Casa Grande e Outras Memórias de Um Velho Goês*, it presents a very shallow take on the territory. Yet—to repeat my critique of my criticism—it is equally true that the gaps in wide synoptic works like *The Portuguese-Speaking Diaspora* open spaces for further critical work, such as the present issue of IJPDS.

What Sadlier's work, with its tension between the Portuguese as diaspora and their language as dispersion, does achieve unquestionably is to make us reflect upon the place, if any, of Goa within what she calls 'the larger homeland of the Portuguese-speaking world'. While in general there is a danger that this semi-Pessoan bromide might shade over into a certain neo-lusotropicalism, in the particular case of Goa and Portuguese India we must take into account both the decline of Portuguese as a cultural or even spoken language today alongside a longstanding multilingualism, even in terms of cultural production. While vast in scope in her work, Sadlier's focus on Portuguese is, as regards Goa, in fact rather limiting.

In the end I find myself caught between commending Sadlier's impressively wide reach—there can be few works that range so confidently from Galaico-Portuguese verse to eighteenth-century painting to Afro-Brazilian letters—and feeling disquiet about the ideological implications of her critical perimeters, limits without which this book would be impossible. For those with an interest in cultural production arising from the former Portuguese territories in the East, it is inspirational to find a work that goes beyond Portugal, Brazil and the PALOPs to factor in discussions of five pockets of the First Portuguese Empire that survived into the twentieth century: Macau, East Timor, Goa, Damão and Diu. Only Dadr-Nagar-Aveli is missing, not having appeared in Portuguese-language literature, save as for the name of Mário Césariny's surrealist orchestra. Yet, perhaps, despite itself, what her work shows in a final analysis is that a unified Lusophone world does not exist and the different countries and territories that speak or spoke Portuguese are best tackled in their own regional contexts, an approach that would surely obviate the sort of factual errors I have discussed. Ultimately, in both its successes and its slips and omissions, Sadlier's work shows the productivity of a capacious scope, the necessity for in-depth research and the need for an ongoing, collective debate

that moves between breadth and depth to refine and extend this profitable object of study which, for want of a better term, I, like Sadlier, shall call the Portuguese-speaking diaspora.

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