



RECENSÃO

Gilberto Freyre:
Novas Leituras do Outro Lado do Atlântico,
de Marcos Cardão e Cláudia Castelo (eds.),
por Malcolm K. McNee

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Gilberto Freyre: Novas Leituras do Outro Lado do Atlântico builds upon a trajectory of publications over the last roughly two decades seeking to recast critical engagement with the vast work and legacies of Gilberto Freyre in ways that might break up and move beyond the fossilized polarization between, in the words of the volume's organizers, historians Marcos Cardão and Cláudia Castelo, "condenações sumárias" and "apologias complacentes" (9). The presumption among these recent studies is that Freyre is still worth reading and thinking with – and against – as a source of productive interpellation with a number of vital contemporary issues, debates, and fields of study in and beyond the Afro-Luso-Brazilian realms his work sought to represent and theorize. With this general reassessment largely and not surprisingly centered in Brazil, the unique conceptualization and contribution of this particular volume of essays, with its origins in the 2011 colloquium, *Identidades, Hibridismos e Tropicalismos: Leituras Pós-coloniais de Gilberto Freyre*, hosted at the Universidade Lusófona in Lisbon, is its creation of a locus of engagement in/from Portugal, where Freyre's work, the organizers propose, paradoxically stands as both highly formative and largely unknown. All but

one of the contributors included in the volume is a scholar based in Portugal, and though their treatments often range well beyond these parameters, the volume as a whole favors reflection on Freyre's work as it touches upon Portuguese history, identity, and politics, and on the history of the circulation and reception of Freyre's ideas in Portugal. Each individual contributor was assigned one of Freyre's books as the starting point for their essay, and in the interest of generating genuinely new readings and interpretations, most of the contributors are not specialists in Freyre's work nor were they previously familiar with the specific text they were assigned. Also structuring the volume is a pluridisciplinary perspective, composed through its inclusion of scholars of a variety of disciplinary formations, including history, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and art history. The result, with eleven essays, an introduction, and a postface by the British historian Peter Burke, who proposes points of convergence between Freyre and post-colonial theorists, is a very useful and thoughtfully organized, multi-perspectival survey of Freyre's vast *oeuvre*, excavating an impressive diversity of topics as well as highlighting some consistent methodological, ideological, and

stylistic features. With essays that include brief synopses or critical overviews of specific books, including iconic titles such as *Casa-grande & Senzala* (1933) and *Ordem e Progresso* (1959), relatively understudied works such as *Arte, Ciência, e Trópico* (1962) and *Como e porque Sou e não Sou Sociólogo* (1968), and obscure late publications including *Rurbanização* (1982) and *Modos de Homem & Modas de Mulher* (1986), the volume as a whole will prove to be valuable both for those who have already substantially grappled with Freyre's writing and its legacies as well as for those seeking out the most compelling starting points and orientations for their own explorations.

In their introduction, Cardão and Castelo explain the conceptualization of their volume as an attempt to address a near absence of studies of Freyre's work in Portugal. As they argue, the indifference is paradoxical given the prolonged and close relationship Freyre sustained with Portuguese intellectual circles as well as the fact that so much of his work, while most immediately concerned with the formation of Brazil, is focused on aspects of Portuguese history and culture. They then very helpfully narrate a brief history of Freyre's many stays in Portugal as well as the reception of his work, including the selective and nationalist appropriation of his "Luso-tropicalist" theories by the Portuguese Estado Novo, the topic of Castelo's pioneering 1998 book, "*O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo*": *O Luso-tropicalismo e a Ideologia Colonial Portuguesa (1933-1961)*. They also forcefully state, as a contemporary framing

and inspiration for their volume, the persistence of Luso-tropicalism in contemporary, post-colonial Portugal, "tanto no âmbito do discurso político como do senso comum", 'travestido' de lusofonia..." (16). This is certainly a compelling and important basis for a rereading of Freyre, and it is very well substantiated in the majority of the essays that follow.

Among those most directly engaged with the parameters set out by Cardão and Castelo is Cristiana Basto's essay, "*Aventura e Rotina: um livro de meio de percurso revisitado*," examining Freyre's 1953 book recounting and theorizing upon his extended travels to Portugal, its African colonies, and Goa between 1951 and 1952, considered as key to the consolidation of his Lusophile convictions and the expansion beyond Brazil, into a broader universe, of his belief in the "benefícios da influência e colonização portuguesa" (37). Bastos suggests compelling comparisons between Freyre's travelogue and, from the same period, Lévi-Strauss's *Triste Tropicque*, with its "olhar distante, não envolvido, não implicado, desdenhando o fervilhar da vida, precisamente onde Freyre mais se mostra apaixonado..." (39). She also notes the structuring influence of Rudyard Kipling's vision of the irreconcilable difference between East and West, against which Freyre argues, in the words of Bastos, "orientes e ocidentais encontram-se em tudo o que é português" (39). Also closely adhering to the initial parameters of the volume is Luís Cunha's contribution, "O Luso no trópico, ou porque não pode Olinda Ser Olanda," which

examines the complex and often contradictory notions of Portuguese colonial exceptionalism contained in Freyre's Luso-tropicalism. Cunha, while revealing the inconsistencies and dangers in Freyre's imagining of a Luso-tropical community, also complicates easy conflations with the current narrative of Luso-fonia, asserting ways in which they seem largely irreconcilable. Yet, he warns, "Em ambas as situações existe a tentação de essencialismo, ou seja, de propor uma visão integrada e conciliadora, capaz de apagar o dissenso" (76).

A fair number of the essays, while compelling and substantial in their readings and interpretations of Freyre's work, range well beyond the "Portuguese" thematic parameters proposed by the volume organizers or touch upon them only obliquely. This is by no means a shortcoming to these essays or to the volume as a whole. Rather it highlights the fuller range of Freyre's interests, his stylistic and methodological peculiarities, and his location within Brazilian and a more broadly transnational 20th-century intellectual history. A particularly original contribution in this sense is Cardão's "Novas modas nos trópicos: os brasileirismos que Gilberto Freyre criou", which reads Freyre's engagement with fashion and clothing against that of his contemporary, Roland Barthes, smartly drawing a sharp contrast between their respective approaches: "Enquanto Barthes empreendeu uma análise sistêmica com vista a desconstruir os sentidos da moda; Freyre ocupou-se em produzir mitologias nacionais, sustentando que

existiam modas *inconfundivelmente* brasileiras" (161). Other essays in this vein include Nuno Domingos's "Uma sociedade vista do campo de futebol", the only essay inspired not by a single book but a trajectory of Freyre's writing about soccer and sport between the 1920s and the 1980s, and Marta Vilar Rosales' "As casas de Freyre: arquitetura e cotidiano doméstico na estruturação da identidade brasileira," which examines his 1979 book, *Oh de Casa! Em Torno da Casa Brasileira e de sua Projecção sobre um Tipo Nacional de Homem*.

Among the salient points drawn across a good handful of the contributions to the volume, including Diogo Ramada Curto's "*Casa-grande & Senzala*: quatro constatações em torno da intenções do autor", Manuela Ribeiro Sanches's "Misturar alhos com bugalhos: ensaísmo, representação e cultura. Ensaio em torno de ensaios", and Carlos Vieira Faria's "*Como e porque Sou e Não Sou Sociólogo: Esboço do Pensamento do Jovem Freyre*", is the curious challenge Freyre's writing and thought presents in terms of genre and form, its remarkable combinations of or vacillations between scientific and literary modes and discourses. Faria quotes Freyre, "O que principalmente sou? Creio que escrito. Escritor literário. O sociólogo, o antropológico, o historiador, o cientista social, o possível pensador são em mim ancilares do escritor" (98), and, as Curto advises, "falham o alvo as abordagens da obra de Freyre que privilegiam sua formação acadêmica ou suas leituras ditas científicas, não atendendo à importância que nele tiveram

as artes e a literatura” (27). Though the point is given substance in these essays, and comments on the impressionism and unapologetic embrace of poetic versus objective truths in his essayistic writing become a leitmotif throughout, this underscores one potential shortcoming to the volume, the absence, among the social scientists and historians, of a literary scholar. This seems a lost opportunity given the volume’s admirable interdisciplinary objectives, and Freyre’s own two “semi-novels” and attempts at literary criticism might have provided fascinating bases for a complex interrogation of the tensions around fictionality in his work at large. Additionally, notes on the contributors would have been a

helpful addition to the volume. They are described in the introduction only very broadly by their disciplinary affiliation. These are, however, very minor shortcomings to an otherwise fascinating and valuable panorama of new critical engagements with Freyre’s work and the long shadows it casts across decades and across oceans.

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