

# TRANSATLANTIC SUBJECTS: DIASPORA, IDENTITY(IES), AND CITIZENSHIP

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**Summary:** This paper aims to analyze the Portuguese Community of California from a historical perspective and take into account the conditions that have contributed to its growth and development. By studying the community's achievements and strengths the project aims to forecast a probable path of community relations and development into the foreseeable future.

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**Sumário:** O presente artigo tem por objectivo fazer uma análise da comunidade portuguesa da Califórnia numa perspectiva histórica levando em consideração as condições que deram um contributo para o seu crescimento e desenvolvimento. Através do estudo das suas realizações e da sua afirmação o projecto visa perspectivar tendências no quadro das relações da comunidade e do seu desenvolvimento numa visão prospectiva.

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**Palavras-chave:** Identidade, territorialização, relações intra e extra comunitárias.

Over the last few years I, along with other researchers and community members, have been looking at the Portuguese community of California from several perspectives. In my research I have particularly concentrated in projects that address identity construction, be it individual or collective, as well as, related cultural and sociological issues. This project attempts to widen the scope of previously conducted research and address some of the questions brought forth by said research. The Portuguese

community of California is the second largest Portuguese community in the Americas (only surpassed by the Portuguese community residing in Brazil) and one of the oldest. In reality, there are actually two Portuguese communities one consisting of the decedents of immigrants entering the state from the early 1800's to the end of the second decade of the 1900's and the other of immigrants arriving from the late 1950's to the early 1970's. As is well know, Portuguese started to arrive in the territory during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and according to the Sixteenth Census of the United States<sup>1</sup> in 1850<sup>2</sup> there were already 177 Portuguese living in California. During the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the number of Portuguese continued to grow and by 1920 the number of Portuguese living in the State had grown to 33,409. This steady growth was interrupted by the implementation of the 1917 literacy requirement law,<sup>3</sup> which mandated

that all immigrants over the age of 16 entering the United States had to be literate in their own language. Since at that time Portugal's illiteracy rate was around 29%<sup>4</sup> the number of Portuguese entering the state came down to a screeching halt, and the growth of the community was mostly due to growth from within rather than from new immigrant influx. Nearly fifty years would pass until the aging community would be revitalized by a new wave of immigration from Portugal, particularly from the archipelago of the Azores.

The volcanic eruption of Capelinhos in the Island of Faial, resulted in a lift of the restrictions that had been keeping the Portuguese from immigrating to the United States, and between the late fifties and the early seventies the state received tens of thousands of Portuguese, originating predominantly from the central group of the Azorean Archipelago.<sup>5</sup> After 1974, due to changes in US emigration laws compiled with government changes

<sup>1</sup> Donal Warrin and Geofferey Gomes, *Land as far as the eye can see*.

<sup>2</sup> Year in which California entered into the Union with the status of statehood.

<sup>3</sup> According to this emigration law all males over sixteen had to be literate in their own language.

<sup>4</sup> Ana Bela Nunes, "Education and Economic Grown in Portugal: A Single Regression Approach". <http://www.repository.utl.pt/bit>

[stream/10400.5/1013/1/EDUCATION%20AND%20ECONOMIC%20GROWTH.pdf](http://www.repository.utl.pt/bitstream/10400.5/1013/1/EDUCATION%20AND%20ECONOMIC%20GROWTH.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The eruption of the Capelinhos Volcano in the Island of Faial, Azores, was the catalyst for the massive exodus from the Archipelago to the United States in general, and California in particular. The dimension of the disaster was such, that in its aftermath the United States Government approved changes in immigration law that allowed

in Portugal<sup>6</sup> the flow of Portuguese immigrants into California was once again interrupted. In actuality, for all intents and purposes, other than family reunion cases, immigration from Portugal into California ceased. As such, the second wave of Portuguese immigration has now been in the United States almost as long as their predecessors had been in the state without receiving in-flow of new immigrants from the homeland. As a matter of fact, the new immigrants that arrived from the late 50's to the early 70's<sup>7</sup> took over many of the organizations and societies founded by their predecessors which were beginning to go into decline. Additionally, they fortified the aging community and established many other community organizations that brought visibility and vitality to the Portuguese community as a whole. Another extremely important factor that must be taken into account when

examining the relationship of the second wave of immigration is that their connection to the homeland remained much closer than that of those who came in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This stronger bond is mostly due to two factors – family immigration and technological advancements. When an immigrant of the first wave left the Azores the possibility of his/her return wasn't more than a feeble dream. Particularly for those setting off to California, surviving the trip, which entailed both an oceanic and a continental land mass crossing was in itself an uncertainty. Another factor was the great distance between California and the Azores, compiled with difficulty of communication (the only means available was via mail, which at that time was mostly transported over land and sea) was relatively expensive, slow and somewhat inefficient, not to mention the added difficulty of written communication

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thousands of Azoreans to immigrate legally to the US. The number of people applying was enormous and the US Consul in the Azores opened a field office in the Island of Faial to process all the applicants.

<sup>6</sup> The Portuguese Revolution of April 25, 1974 toppled the 46 year old totalitarian regime known as “The Estado Novo” and established a new Democratic State in Portugal with a multi-party system that resulted in the eventual entry of Portugal into the European Union and brought forth social and economic development to the country.

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<sup>7</sup> Mostly between 1958 and 1974. For all good purposes immigration from Portugal stopped in 1974 mostly due to changes in US immigration law, but also due to political changes in Portugal. In April 1974 the Flower Revolution brought down Portugal's 48 year long dictatorship and began to pave the way to Portugal's democratization and subsequent inclusion into the European Union, which brought economic prosperity to the country thus minimizing the immigration pull.

to which many of the immigrants as well as their families in the homeland did not have access, thus being forced to engage the services of literate family and friends. As such, the process was difficult and painstaking and the average turnaround time for communications was 3 to 4 months. Finally, although some of the early immigration from Portugal to the United States was family immigration, the bulk was single immigration of both males and females. It was previously believed that the majority of the women who came to America in that early immigration group did so with their spouses or other relatives, mostly parents, in a family setting. Recent research has shown that there were in fact a considerable number of single women who made the crossing alone or in groups of women bound to California in search of a better future. And, most of these single men and women ended up forging new family structures in California, since they were often from different islands further dispersed their relationships with their own places of birth. Many, if not most, never returned to their homeland and never saw any of the family members left behind, except for those who followed them in the immigration adventure. The latest wave of immigration, in part due to the catastrophic event that opened the doors to America to Portuguese emigration, namely the Capelinhos eruptions, consisted in the most part of families, in many cases entire extended families from the same small village, thus facilitating the maintenance of the bonds between each other and their homeland. By the late 1950's aviation was the mean of transportation between the Azores and the United States, thus drastically decreased the travel time and consequently decreasing the perceived distance between the place of origin and that of settlement. Furthermore, due to their large number, closeness of relation and cluster settlement, the process of reterritorialization developed by these immigrants was impressive. However, as I have defended in previous presentations, factors such as the aging of the community without new immigrant flow, families moving out of areas traditionally with high concentration of Portuguese, which results in a decreased participation in community life and further increases integration into US society and with other ethnic communities, are bringing forth questions about the future of the Portuguese community in California. Gone are the days when a large number, if not the majority of the community members could not communicate in English, and felt alienated from US society at large. Today's Portuguese Communities in the United States and in particular

that of California, are fully integrated in their respective communities, and although many cities in California<sup>8</sup> have a rather large number of Portuguese, predominantly Portuguese neighborhoods are difficult to find in any of those cities. The aging of the Portuguese Community is bringing about a shift in the agencies that act as depositories of memory. Over the last century the Portuguese have established organizations and constructed buildings to house these organizations throughout the State of California. These halls, headquarters, and churches served not only as gathering spaces for the community, but also as memory depositories, for they housed memorabilia from the homeland, as well as of the community's trajectory since arriving in the US. For more than one century these spaces have been vibrant centers of the Portuguese community that allowed free flow of memory from one generation to the other, but as the executive boards that administer these organizations age, some are questioning who will carry the community into the next 100 years. The aim of my research is to consider the present paradigms of the Portuguese community and explore the possible renewal of the

community from within, by engaging its youth and entrusting them with continued development of the community. I further intend to consider how integration into American society and trans-ethnic relationships can transform the community and to what extent that transformation will affect the inter-community structure and its reterritorialization process, as well as the community's relationship with Portugal.

Over the last decade several studies and projects have aimed at gathering and recording oral histories and memoirs, both individual and collective. Organizations as the Portuguese Historical Museum of San Jose, the Portuguese Historical Society of Sacramento, the Portuguese Heritage Publications, and the Portuguese Oral History project of the University of California, Berkeley, have sponsored projects that collected and published materials that contribute to the construction of a comprehensive and thorough account of the Portuguese presence in California and neighboring states from the early settlers to date. Although much remains to be done in this regard, and there is still a way to go until the Portuguese community and scholars in the field

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<sup>8</sup> It is possible to find Portuguese Communities throughout California from Eureka to San Diego, but the largest communities

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can be found in the Sacramento Valley, the Santa Clara Valley, as well as the Northern and Southern San Joaquin Valley.

have gathered sufficient information to support the claim for inclusion of the history of the Portuguese community and its contribution to the growth and development of the State of California into the official History of this State, the time has come for us to also look at the present makeup and dynamics of the community and forecast its future composition. To this end, we have begun to gather information both through interviews and via distribution of surveys that aim to identify the relationship of second, third and fourth generation Portuguese with the Portuguese community, with Portugal and Portuguese culture, life and politics. There are

three main questions that drive our research, and will allow us to formulate a better informed diagnosis once the data is gathered and analyzed:

- How are the relations between the descendants of the first wave of Portuguese immigrants and the immigrants of the second wave negotiated?
- How are the relations between the immigrants of the second wave and American society as a whole negotiated?
- How can the community rejuvenate itself from within rather than from new immigrant influx?

#### DATA COLLECTIONS AND SURVEY

The survey “Growing up Portuguese in California” was specifically assembled to address those questions, both directly and indirectly and was distributed at community events and electronically to different sectors of the Portuguese community:

#### GROWING UP PORTUGUESE IN CALIFORNIA

What is your gender? Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

If you were born outside of the United States, at what age did you come to the US? \_\_\_\_\_

Where was your mother born? \_\_\_\_\_

At what age did she come to the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

If she was born in the United States, where were her parents born?

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

Where was your father born? \_\_\_\_\_

At what age did he come to the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

If he was born in the United States, where were his parents born?

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

Do you speak Portuguese? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever taken Portuguese classes? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, where and for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

Do your parents speak Portuguese?

Father \_\_\_\_\_ Mother \_\_\_\_\_

If the answer is no, who were the last family members to speak Portuguese?

Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

Where have you lived most of your life?

Since childhood did you participate in Portuguese Community functions? \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please list the functions and activities connected to the Portuguese community in which you participated as a child (up to 13 years of age) and indicate your age(s) at the time \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please list the functions and activities connected to the Portuguese Community in which you participated as a teenager (up to 20 years of age) and indicate your age(s) at the time \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please list the functions and activities connected to the Portuguese Community in which you participated as an adult, indicate your age(s) at the time, and if you currently still involved in that activity \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
What is your highest level of education? \_\_\_\_\_

Are still continuing your education or do you plan to continue in the future?

\_\_\_\_\_  
As far as professional activity, do you consider yourself?

A laborer \_\_\_\_\_

Clerk \_\_\_\_\_

Professional \_\_\_\_\_

Administrator \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

What religion do you consider yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you actively participate in that religion? \_\_\_\_\_

In what form? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your legal status? Single \_\_\_ Married \_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have children? \_\_\_\_\_

How many and what ages? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you raising them participating in events and activities of the Portuguese Community?

Which? \_\_\_\_\_

If you do not have children, if and when you do are you planning on raising them participating in events and activities of the Portuguese Community? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Which? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you consider yourself?

Portuguese \_\_\_\_\_

American \_\_\_\_\_

Portuguese-American \_\_\_\_\_

How do you display your Portuguese pride? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the colors of the Portuguese Flag? \_\_\_\_\_

When is the National day of Portugal? \_\_\_\_\_

Is Portugal a monarchy or a republic? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the name of the current President of Portugal? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the name of the current Prime-Minister of Portugal? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you listen to the Portuguese Radio? \_\_\_\_\_

What station? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have RTPi in your home? \_\_\_\_\_

For how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you receive the Portuguese newspaper in your home? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever visited Portugal? \_\_\_\_\_

What part of Portugal did you visit and when? \_\_\_\_\_

How important do you consider that participating in the Portuguese community has been to you and how has it contributed to your notion of self and community? \_\_\_\_\_

Please include any other comments you would like to make in regard to your experience in the Portuguese community of your area \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

For the purpose of data analysis respondents were divided into three main categories: The First Generation (those with one or both parents born in Portugal); The Second Generation (those with at least one grand-parent born in Portugal; and The Third Generation and Beyond (those with a great-grand parent or further born in Portugal).

Although further research remains to be conducted and data collecting is ongoing<sup>9</sup> and as new data is analyzed some of the results may change, most of the trends have remained fairly consistent throughout. The preliminary results for each of the categories are as follows:

### The First Generation

- 82% speak Portuguese to varying degree of proficiency.
- 100% actively and regularly participated in activities of the Portuguese community from childhood to adulthood.
- 100% of those with children are raising them to participate in

activities of the Portuguese community.

- 81% of those with children are trying to teach them Portuguese.
- 100% stated that participating in Portuguese community events gave them a sense of belonging and contributed to their perceived ethnic identity.
- 100% identified themselves as Portuguese-Americans

### The Second Generation

- 20% speak Portuguese to varying degrees of proficiency.
- 100% participated in Portuguese community activities – only 60% as adults, but 100% expressed a desire to be more involved in the community.
- 12% are trying to teach their children Portuguese, but it becomes problematic particularly if their spouse speaks a language other than English.
- 100% stated that participating in events of the Portuguese community contributed to their perceived ethnic identity.
- 100% identified themselves as Portuguese-Americans.

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<sup>9</sup> Over one thousand surveys were initially distributed; thus far 83 have been received and analyzed. The aim is to continue gathering data, until at least 500 surveys can be included in the study.

3<sup>rd</sup> Generation and beyond – To date there is only one respondent in this category:

- This person speaks “a little” Portuguese.

- Has been involved in organizations and events sponsored by the Portuguese Community all her life.
- She considers that Participating in Portuguese Community has been: “central to who I am as a person”.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Although it is too early in the research to draw conclusive conclusions, the trend that is surfacing is that participating in Community sponsored events and belonging to community organizations has had a major impact in the construction of self in most of those who have completed the survey. This seems to hold truth even in the third generation, in spite of limited language proficiency. As such, we can forecast that the community will continue strong for a few generations to come, although the main language of communication within the community may increasingly switch to English. Nonetheless, this last point also needs to be further explored under new language, and social hybridism politics for as stated by Professor António José Telo in the Opening Lecture of the Forum “Regionalismo e Organização Política” held at the University of the Azores in the Ponta

Delgada main Campus on January 6 and 7, 2011, Portuguese is the largest Atlantic language if we consider the dimension of the Territorial waters of all Portuguese Speaking Countries on both sides of the Atlantic. He further emphasized that the Archipelago of the Azores, from where the overwhelming majority of the Portuguese in California originate, lie precisely at the center of this Atlantic Lusophone space. As such, the significance of the dynamics between language and territorialization as markers of identity that define ethnic communities and their intrinsic relation with the homeland, as well as main-stream community integration seem to be central to any study that aims to trace the future development of the Portuguese Community in California, and will be the focus of our continuing research in this area.