

## **THE PORTUGUESE IN VENEZUELA: A CONTINUOUS PRESENCE**

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**RESUMO**

Desde a época colonial que os portugueses fazem parte da história da Venezuela e continuam a ser um dos grupos mais importantes do mosaico nacional. Utilizando uma abordagem simultaneamente histórica e antropológica, os autores tentam demonstrar como a comunidade de origem lusitana constitui um bom exemplo de integração na sociedade venezuelana.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Emigração; Venezuela; Judeus; Portugueses; Associações étnicas

**ABSTRACT**

The Portuguese have played a formative role in the history of Venezuela since the colonial period. They are also one of the largest and most prominent immigrant groups in the present. This article will examine Portuguese immigration in both historical and ethnographic perspectives to show how their presence in Venezuela has been characterized by continuous and seamless integration. In doing so, we will reveal important continuities between the ease of Portuguese adaptation into Venezuelan society in both the past and the present.

**KEYWORDS**

Emigration; Venezuela; Jews; Portuguese; Ethnic Organizations

The Portuguese are one of the most active immigrant groups around the world. Their presence is visible in everywhere from Brazil to Canada, not to mention France and South Africa. They have also acted as a major colonial force in the world with colonies in Africa and Asia. In the Americas, their presence has been seen as both a colonial power in Brazil and as a major immigrant group in countries like the United States, Canada, and Venezuela. As Baganha writes, "migratory pressure, was, in Portugal, an endemic phenomenon rooted in an extremely biased redistribution of resources among its people" (52). This article will examine the Portuguese presence in Venezuela. Venezuela is a country that has historically known pro-immigration policies as a result of its low population density and economic considerations (Magnus and Morner). This article will take a historical and ethnographic approach and document some important continuities between patterns of past and current immigration.

## IMMIGRATION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Social scientists were always interested in immigration even if it was not a major area of study. Not until the 1950s, however, did social scientists finally begin to pay serious analytic attention to processes of migration. This interest was a reaction to vast social change. One of the great demographic shifts in human history was occurring: the large scale movement of people from rural to urban areas. Initial studies documented processes of migration internal to national borders. Social scientists eventually turned to the question of immigration across borders. These studies coincided with what has been called "the new immigration". The "new immigration" beginning in the 1960s and 1970s was considered different from the great wave of immigration in the late 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> centuries. That period witnessed a transatlantic migration of peoples largely from European countries to the Americas. This was partially a result of the abolition of slavery that necessitated the recruitment of a new work force.

Older models of immigration were predicated on the idea of assimilation. This assimilation was predicated on a permanent rupture of ties between immigrants and their home countries. On the other hand, the new immigration was seen to be a product of a contemporary globalizing world that is simultaneously increasingly interconnected and delocalized. Although initially seen through the lens of global systems and political economy theories, immigration came to be theorized around the emerging concept of transnationalism. Transnationalism as a general theoretical concept emphasizes flows of peoples, goods, and capital across borders and the gradual diminishment of the nation-state as the predominant model of social and political organization. For transnational theorists, borders and boundaries are fluid and permeable. Works emphasizing transnational perspectives examine how, rather than break ties with their countries of origin, immigrants continue maintaining and cultivating links to their homeland. Some of these ties are imaginative. The employment of the concept of diaspora emphasizes the way in which a homeland is actively imagined and recreated by immigrant communities.

Critics of transnationalism have argued that none of this is new. Distinguishing new from older patterns of immigration presupposes an artificial break rather than continuities. They argue that people have always been transnational. Maintaining ties with one's homeland is not recent. New technologies – communication technologies, in particular - have only made the maintenance of these ties easier. People can also travel back and forth between countries with greater ease.

Whichever perspective one adopts, the basic questions for social scientists remain the same: what circumstances make people leave their homes and what happens to them after they leave. This study will focus on the latter. Answering this forces one to address the question of identity. How do individuals and communities maintain their cultural identities post-immigration while adapting to their new surroundings? This is a question that persists over time, involving second and third generations (and beyond). This requires an examination of a community's cultural practices that are designed to maintain and reproduce itself through time. How do immigrant communities adopt to their new country while simultaneously remaining culturally distinct? This often involves a complex process of negotiation that leads to the formation of hybrid identities. Such studies can examine how linguistic practices are maintained and disseminated, either informally in the home or formally through schools. Formal organizations often play a vital role, whether social clubs, support groups or community and religious centers. The main ethnographic focus is public and visible manifestations of the community's presence – historical neighborhoods, festivals, and maintenance of distinctive cultural traditions. In this regard, the Portuguese are notable. On one hand, as we shall show, their integration into Venezuelan society has been relatively unproblematic and they have largely followed a pattern of assimilation, effortlessly dissolving into the local population. On the other hand, as the ethnographic portion of this study will show, the Portuguese have structures in place that are organized around the maintenance of a Portuguese community and a Luso-Venezolano identity.

## THE PORTUGUESE PRESENCE IN VENEZUELA

“Mientras tanto conformémonos con advertir que la circunstancia de que un Estado de la República se llame Portuguesa, no es más que el testimonio de la intensa intervención de los portugueses en la formación de Venezuela”. (Acosta Saignes 45)

Acosta Saignes, in his classic study *Historia de los Portugueses en Venezuela* (1959) highlights the integral role the Portuguese have played in the history of Venezuela. A scattered and disperse presence has been documented since the 1600s. Although this presence became more evident at the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the first Portuguese arrived in Venezuela with the Spanish conquerors. Today, their presence is evident not only in the population but also in the geography. The fact that Venezuela has a state named Portuguesa as well as a river of the same name indicates the deep and profound Portuguese presence in the northern region of the South America continent. What is known today as Venezuela was sighted by Christopher Columbus, a “tierra firme” that was part of the same cultural complex for the Spanish colonizers as the Caribbean. In Venezuela, the indigenous population was a small and scattered presence (Tanner) unable to pose great resistance to European domination. The small-scale organization and fragility of social cohesion of indigenous peoples made it easy during the initial stage of the Spanish conquest of soldiers and missionaries.

By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the Portuguese were primarily common sailors but arguably more adventurous than their leaders. Even the navigator of an early expedition, Juan Vizcaíno, was Portuguese although his name today appears strange. This indicates that during peninsular history of that moment, an insufficient linguistic differentiation existed between Portuguese and Spanish. This facilitated a vocabulary dilution that in the case of Venezuela occurred extensively with old country Portuguese in Venezuela, as described by Angel Rosenblat (*Buenas y malas palabras en el castellano de Venezuela*). This indifferentionation with

respect to Portuguese migrations to South America increased after the unification of 1580 a time where, according to testimonies, "in Seville and Madrid, there were streets in which no other language was spoken than Portuguese".(Acosta Saignes 18)

The 16<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the establishment of the Portuguese in the New Kingdom of Granada, now allies with the conquering Spaniards but also economic and strategic competitors. One can say that Portugal was involved in every major moment of the Spanish conquest and its subsequent colonization of this part of the world. Their involvement often seemed more pleasing to the local Spanish rulers than the court in Madrid, who during much of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century issued royal "cédulas" against the presence of Portuguese in their New World territories. In 1515, in the midst of a maritime rivalry that the Treaty of Tordesillas failed to subside, the Spanish crown decided to ban the presence of Portuguese in Spanish ships. Restrictions and prohibitions like this ensued but never really managed to achieve their goal; either because local Spanish governments asked for the mercy of the Crown in recruiting or negotiating with Portuguese who would be useful to them or because the Portuguese themselves had a dauntless adventurous spirit and an irrepressible tendency towards trade and commerce that resulted in their penetration and installation in these "tierra firme" territories.

On the battlefield as well as in settlements, agriculture and trade, the Portuguese will stake out a place across South America outside the borders of Brazil, where their establishment continued to be developed and consolidated. In the New Kingdom of Granada, the Portuguese Sebastian Cabrera Bello, in 1528, presented a plan of colonization to the Governor Garcia Lerma of the Provinces of Santa Marta and Venezuela, to establish twenty-five Portuguese married couples and another twenty-five Portuguese bachelors there. He pledged to carry seeds of wheat, rye, barley and pastel, but the settlement plan also included craftsmen, including masons, bricklayers, carpenters and blacksmith. Little is known of the success of the plan, but it was more daring than that of Bartolomé de las Casas, who failed in Costa de Paria or the "Capitulaciones" of Welser (1528) and Federman, in which Portuguese also participated (cf. Acosta Saignes 28-29). In 1532 Portuguese take part in the epic and dramatic conquest of the Orinoco by Diego Ordás as Juan de Castellanos documents in his *Elegias*, in which he praises the bravery of the Portuguese António Fernandes, a soldier from Herrera, in fierce fighting against the indigenous.

A Portuguese was still the lieutenant governor of Venezuela in 1542 by virtue of the absence of the titular Bishop Bastidas called Diego de Boisa. From what Luis Alberto Sucre said, he was a man of bad instincts who enslaved many Jirajaras Indian rebels who fled to Honduras, avoiding punishment for their crimes. Behaviors like these, however, were largely the exception. The historical records document people primarily interested in trade, agriculture and the mining of gold and diamonds, helping therefore in clearing lands and founding of new towns. In 1557, there are Portuguese who participate in expeditions prior to the founding of Caracas. In 1558, in recognition of the dedicated cooperation of Cortés Richo, Francisco Fajardo renamed the village of El Valle he founded as El Valle de Cortés Richo.

As these examples show, during this formative period in the colonial economic system, numerous Portuguese, or Gallego-Portuguese to be more precise, were already active in Venezuelan life. According to Gomez (166), many Portuguese signed up "for the expeditions of António Sedeño, Alonso de Herrera, Diego de Losada and others". Among the mass of

anonymous colonists, some Portuguese became foundational figures in the history of Venezuela. Among these, the most well-known and important is, without a doubt, Juan Fernández de León. As Hermano Nectario Maria writes (13), “he was born around the year 1543 in Villanueva de Portimão in the the province of the Algarves in the southern most part of Portugal, to a family that enjoined a high social position and an enviable fortune”. Although his name was clearly hispanized, Juan Fernández de León would arrive at the port of Borburata at the age of twenty with seven slaves in his property; their sale led to the beginning of his important military and civic career in Venezuela. This Portuguese from the Algarves was one of the founders of the city of Santiago de León, later renamed Caracas after the native population who had lived there and had been conquered by the expedition of Diego de Losada (cf. Nectario María 16-18). The extent of Juan Fernández de León’s influence on the early history of Iberian colonization of Venezuela cannot be underestimated - from discovering gold deposits to creating the first urban areas to the defense and administration of cities like the final one he established, Guanare (1591) (1), later capital of the Portuguese state. His descendents also helped to shape the independent Venezuelan state. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, his granddaughter married an ancestor of Simón Bolívar (cf. Nectario Maria 49), founder of Venezuela in 1811 and one of the great liberators of Latin America from Spanish colonialism.

The Portuguese presence in Venezuela did not please everyone, especially the Spanish aristocracy who felt it threatening to their political and economic prerogatives. For this reason, a new “cédula” in 1562 tried to end commercial relations that Portuguese vessels traveling to the Caribbean had with the Canary Islands. Not satisfied with this measure, the Spanish court adopted a new “cédula” the same year to order the closure of the waters of the Caribbean to Portuguese traders Benito Rodriguez and Simón Pinelo and, in the future, to all Portuguese and foreigners residing less than ten years in “tierra firme”. Drastic and restrictive measures continued to be taken by the Spanish crown. A cédula from 1568 declared many Portuguese and “gitanos” were harmful in the region to the “good and peace of the law and of the neighbors and the inhabitants of it” (Acosta Saignes 35) and that all measures should be taken so that they would be expelled.

This “cédula” did not have the desired effect as the Portuguese continued to flow into diverse parts of Venezuela and blending in with already established groups. In truth, three years after the “cédula” of 1568, Governor Mazariegos said that when he arrived in the port of the island of Curaçau in 1570, he found a Portuguese caudillo. In a similar vein, in 1575 Mazariegos had to intervene to prevent the inhabitants of the island from continuing to deal with Portuguese ships that at the time controlled commerce in all of the Caribbean, struggling with the Spanish for commercial sea routes. Portuguese vessels, better skilled in the art of navigation, competed not only with the Spanish but also the French, the Belgians and the English, especially in the business of the exchange of leathers for pearls and spices in which Venezuela and more specifically, Margarita Island were rich. In the end, many Portuguese became naturalized residents of Venezuela by the decision of the Governor of the Province of Venezuela granting natural status to all residents who inhabited there at least ten years. They were already fully integrated. The only evidence of their Portugueseness would be names and nicknames that were so prevalent that they almost appeared to be Spanish. This prefigures what we would witness four centuries later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the perfect acculturation of the Portuguese in Venezuela.

The royal “cédulas” against the Portuguese were weakened in the last decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time in which Juan Fernández de León was one of the most powerful and important persons in the area. At this time, there was a constant arrival of slave ships that enhanced rivalries with Spanish residents. In 1598, we find in Venezuela, a significant number of Portuguese, safe from any signs that their entrance in the country was without authorization of the peninsular government. The strategy of the Spanish crown eventually shifted as they began to administer fines as “compuestos” so that those who entered the country illegally could pay to legalize their status. This occurred at around the same time that the crown in 1595 permitted Spanish slave ships to carry as many as two Portuguese as heads of sales and as many sailors as considered necessary. The presence of Portuguese to Venezuela was, however, limited to areas close to the water but throughout the region. Some like Fernández de León and companions founded the province of Espíritu Santo de Guanaguanare and discovered the mines of San Juan, Plantilla, and Tiznados and others like the Araújo family penetrated the Venezuelan region of the Andes where in Trujillo, they created the Bairro de Araújas.

The large inflow of Portuguese at this time in Latin America was mainly due to the exodus of Portuguese Jews, a consequence of the alliance between Portuguese King D. Manuel I and Catholic Queen Isabel of Castilla and King Fernando of Aragon. Their edict of March 30, 1492 expelling the Jews from Spain was welcomed by D. João II whom, by the way, had organized the finances of the Portuguese kingdom and had given precious aid in anticipation of great discoveries (1). This was the condition for his marriage with the daughter of Isabel and Fernando, who were obstinate in their persecution of Jews. As a result, Portuguese Jews were granted great ease of travel to Portuguese possessions overseas, mainly for Brazil from where they passed for some countries of the American continent, from Mexico, Panama, The Dutch Guyana, Peru, Chile, Argentina, the United States and, also, Venezuela. In 1507, D. Manuel I signed the edict that made it possible for “marranos” (Jews who were forced to become Christians) to freely leave the country with the immunities that D. João II had already granted to them in 1497. These immunities were renewed in 1512 which provoked a second massive wave of Jewish exodus for Latin America. This exodus so greatly affected the Portuguese economy that it closed its overseas possessions to the Jews in 1531, having followed Spain in establishing the Inquisition.

The 17<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed therefore the same migratory movement of the previous century with Jews seeing the American continent as its “Promised land”. D. João IV of Portugal, establishing by royal ordinance of 1649, the Companhia Geral de Comércio for the business of slave trafficking with Brazil, authorized Jews as shareholders, thereby creating a new ease for their establishment there and in other Latin American countries. From the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and it can be said without exaggeration, that the South American commercial networks were dominated by the Portuguese, in large numbers descendants of the “marranos”. Their commercial and economic power was so great throughout Latin America that if Spanish voices of protest against the situation were raised, they could end up in the arms of the Inquisition (2).

In Venezuela, our focus here, the Portuguese presence was particularly of note, as is seen from the first census of foreigners that was ordered by Governor Sancho de Alquiza in 1607 Top of Form (cf. Acosta Saignes 49-51). In eight Venezuelan populations, there were 125 foreigners, of which 92% were Portuguese. In cities such as Guanaguanare, Trujillo and Valencia, all of the foreigners were Portuguese. In Caracas, of 46 foreigners on the census, 41

were Portuguese with two Genoveses, two Germans and a Moroccan (cf. Oliveira 56). Also of note is the range of professions of the censured Portuguese: from carpenters, farmers, soldiers, blacksmiths, encomendeiros, priests, clergymen, miners, shoemakers, tailors, silversmiths, servants, clerks, and students, doctors and surgeons. These were all Portuguese whose names for this time were perfectly Venezuelanized.

If the 17<sup>th</sup> Century was one of relatively peaceful expansion of the number of Portuguese in Venezuela, the 18<sup>th</sup> century was very difficult for these first Portuguese of the South American diaspora. The constant disputes in this part of the world between Portugal and Spain for the establishment of borders, each interpreting differently the Papal Brief of Alexander VI and the famous Treaty of Tordesillas, created warlike tensions. Soon, in the beginning of the century, in 1704, Felipe V forwarded a royal "cédula" ordering the confiscation of goods for all resident Portuguese in Hispanic America and declaring war on Portugal.

Some Portuguese, in fact, had their goods confiscated but they had not been frightened and they continued to deal at the margins of the law, whether in slaves from the Orinoco or income-producing products of the time. A half a century later, their fearless and tenacious reputation led to the royal Spanish order to allow them to join the army, although no more than twelve in each battalion. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, in 1787, the backup secretary of the Governor of the Province of Maracaibo was the Portuguese Diego Melo. Even more significant, by this time navigation documents of boats that arrived in Venezuelan ports were written in Portuguese.

These historic successes of the Portuguese did not prevent, however, minor surveillance and animosity from the authorities and Spanish inhabitants, continually bothered with the Portuguese economic influence not only in Venezuela but throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, where many were slaves, among them a woman named Maria Cruz Gomes who in 1819 was identified as a slave dealer. 19<sup>th</sup> Century consolidates the presence of the Portuguese in the colonial phase of Venezuelan history. Many Portuguese fought on the side of the Independence struggle on the side of Francisco Miranda and Simón Bolívar. Some distinguished themselves with their heroic actions like Paulo Jorge whose loyalty to Miranda led him to the scaffold. Portugal, meanwhile, would be perspicacious in being the first government of the world to recognize the calls for independence in Latin America.

Independence resulted in a new wave in migration of Portuguese to Latin America in general and to Venezuela in particular. This wave of emigration came in large part from the region of Madeira that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would supply thousands of people that will make a large contribution to the social and economic development of this important Caribbean country.

This mass emigration from Madeira was a result of economic difficulties at home. At the same time, Venezuela was seen to be an important destination as a result of its wealth of natural resources. From the earliest stages of colonialism, a relationship existed between immigration and resources. Gold was the initial attraction for the Spanish colonial establishment in Venezuela. Groups of colonists arrived from some of the most diverse regions of the Iberian Peninsula – Galicia, Estremadura, Basque Country and also Portugal. Gold fever however was fleeting as European settlements strategically located on the coast or the edges of great waterways like the Orinoco River became involved in agricultural production and commerce with the exterior, notably Spain. Land exploration and commerce development

was the reason for increasing urbanization with the foundation of five settlements between 1500-1550 - Cubagua, Cumaná, Borburata, Coro, El Tocuyo (Tanner).

Venezuela had to wait for the appearance of oil in order to turn once again into a promised land luring an extraordinary migrant movement. The first oil wells were discovered in 1865 and subsequently monopolized by a small Venezuelan company in the state of Tachira. The monopoly lasted until 1913 when Royal Dutch Shell acquired important oil concessions that covered practically one third of Venezuela. Changes in the global economy after World War II led to increased economic development in Venezuela as a result of increasing demand for oil. The oil industry and its consequential dominance of the Venezuelan economy lured a new generation of immigrants. As Kritz writes, "The impact of immigration on the Venezuelan labor force was considerable by the end of the 1950s. Although the foreign-born population constituted only 7 percent of the total population in 1961, because of age selectivity 14.4 percent of the labor force was foreign-born".(Kritz 528) In Caracas, these numbers were even higher. The Portuguese comprise an important sector of this modern immigrant group (a large number of whom work in the oil industry), an analysis of whom comprises the object of this work.

## **ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY OF VENEZUELA IN THE PRESENT**

In the present, the Portuguese community of Venezuela is currently estimated at 400,000 people. Main areas of settlement are in the metropolitan area of Caracas (Federal District and State of Miranda), Valencia, Maracay, Barquisimeto, San Juan de los Moros, San Cristóbal, Maracaibo, Cumaná, Puerto Ordaz, Ciudad Bolívar and Margarita Island. According to Jorge Arroteia (37-40), the largest numbers emigrated from the Autonomous Region of Madeira, followed by the districts of Aveiro and Porto. Caracas is center to the greatest concentration of Portuguese and their descendents; although there even more than elsewhere immigrants from Madeira dominate. A specific Portuguese neighborhood in the city does not exist, like in South Africa, as we have observed in another work (Da Rosa e Trigo). Absence of an ethnic enclave is the first indication of a process of social integration of the community. It is evidence that the cultural and linguistic affinity of the receiving society has facilitated a process of mixing and "venezuelanization" of the community. This stands in contrast with other emigrant destinations where the community has been more conservative in maintaining visible signs of its Portugueseness.

The rapidity and ease with which members manage the Spanish language has swiftly broken the resistances and psychological inhibitions that the community could have had as a response to its assimilation into Venezuelan society. The Portuguese language co-exists harmoniously with Venezuelan speech. This is to such an extent that Spanish even surpasses Portuguese in conversations among members of the community. Individuals lose their habit of speaking Portuguese out of a lack of need as Spanish becomes the language of spontaneous everyday speech. This structural and lexical contamination of Spanish can lead to the loss of Portuguese speech.

The language of the host country allows for rapid social integration, enhanced by the mixing of Portuguese phenotypes that leads to a blurring of languages. This, however, does not mean that the community makes no effort to protect and preserve its cultural forms. With

almost perfect Venezuelan socialization, the Portuguese community does not feel the need to publicly display its cultural authenticity and specificity. It maintains its identity through secular and religious associations and in individual behaviors visible in private spaces reserved for Portuguese socialization.

### Family Organization

In the study "Los Portugueses en Venezuela," Dalia Romero notes a difference in male and female Portuguese when it comes to forming a family. A vast majority of marriages formed by Portuguese young men in the 1980s were with Venezuelan women. The author contrasts this with young Portuguese women, the majority of whom continue to marry within their own community (Romero 24). The conclusion drawn by Dalia Romero from her research is a gap in social integration between Portuguese men and women, who are seen to hold more closely to the values of Portuguese endogamy. We can accept this conclusion but, however, we should note that this endogamous reality will certainly be altered by the second generation of the community when it comprises the base of family organization. This occurs by virtue of the force of diverse and powerful new factors of socialization for the second generation "*venezueliza-se*".

The shift of the "Portuguese house" from a typically rural setting to an urban space inevitably generates disturbances in the value systems of the immigrant. However, despite being born in the heart of a family structure dominated by a traditional patriarchy, the second generation will benefit in the near future both economically and from the personal and social growth provided by the new "Venezuela house". The rigidity of the educational model is subsequently broken, and the familial and social liberalization of morals that follows allows for more integrative behaviors. Schooling and the consequential increase in the cultural level of the second generation do not necessarily lead to a process of socialization where Portugueseness has no importance. The homeland remains an important geographic reference point with affective connotations but is always losing to the Venezuelan "world" that is lived in and inhabited (4).

The endogamy that Dalia Romero considers indication of the conservation of cultural values cannot be understood in absolute terms. Even endogamous marriages of the second generation will be a union of people who have become bicultural to varying degrees. The second generation will have a new philosophy of life that moves them away from the taboos transmitted to them by a family and educational monoculture. There is already less severity by which the Portuguese are able to keep one's social relations strictly within the spaces identified by Portuguese community life. This means that the ethical and aesthetic values of the second generation cannot be identical to their predecessors.

Another aspect that will contribute to a faster integration of the second generation into Venezuelan society is the lack of existence of what we could call "ethnic schools". In other countries with strong Portuguese emigration, these schools have had considerable effect in delaying and resisting socio-cultural assimilation. In Venezuela, there is an almost complete absence of a network of ethnic schools, not only for the Portuguese community but also for others. This proves what we had earlier intuited. The first generation did not feel its values to be threatened; for that reason they did not attempt to create mechanisms of preservation. This is also evidenced in the associations created by the Portuguese, especially in Caracas, where the bulk of the fieldwork for this essay was carried out.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

The degree of integration of the community and the subsequent cultural tranquility that is achieved went through moments of adaptation. Such manifestations do not constitute, however, the only cause so that the community organizes recreational and cultural associations, public project organizations, or creates professional associations. In truth, socio-cultural associations and events are also the product of an individual spirit of social affirmation, of expressive power of intercommunity, and in some cases, a display of economic success that emigration made possible. In short, these works that attempt to gain visibility within the host community represent a vindication of the negative image sometimes associated with the immigrant and the conquest of space in Venezuela society that gives evidence of an enterprising capacity that does not lose in comparison with national ones or with other European communities like the Italian and Spanish ones.

An incomplete observation limited to the consultation of documents from associations or radio and television shows or professional federations founded by Portuguese could lead to the conclusion that the Portuguese community in Venezuela exhibits a conservative and gregarious spirit that insulates its customs from the outside world. There is no doubt that in examining this evidence, we are in some form surprised by the number of organizations self-identified as Portuguese that now reach upwards of more than 60. Analyzed, however, by its charters and practice, we can verify that these charity organizations are predominantly Luso-Venezolanas, we can conclude that these organizations promote socio-cultural integration and mixing rather than preservation of the authenticity of Portuguese culture.

In the fieldwork that we carried out mainly in Caracas, where the most important social-cultural organizations of the community are located, such as the Centro Português, Associação Desportiva Luso-Venezuelana, Banco Plaza, and the Sociedade de Beneficência de Damas Portuguesas, we saw evidence of the Venezuelan environment and the spirit of cultural, social and generational symbiosis that are supported in their activities. In fact, the dynamics developed by the Portuguese community in all areas of social intervention, as documented by Anizza Freitez and Irene Casique and the already-cited studies of Dalia Romero, they attribute its secondary (second) role, like the Italian, in economic and social importance. We do not intend to make a comparative analysis of the three most important European communities in Venezuela here - the Italian, the Spaniard and the Portuguese; we just wish to highlight the importance that the Portuguese and its descendants practically dominate all sectors of food distribution, above all through the supermarket Central Madeirense de Caracas that also dominated baked goods since starting in the 1940s. They are increasingly gaining prominence in the financial sector – the Banco Plaza – established March 8, 1989 is the best example of this. They also dominated men's fashion, especially through the most famous dressmaker in the country, Alvaro Clemente or Clement, native of the Algarve. They also have monopolies in the distribution of periodicals and also are notable in carpentry, furniture, metal works, civil engineering and transportation.

## CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

Of the more than sixty institutional associations founded by Portuguese and still active in Venezuela, we will use as examples four that we had the opportunity to know in Caracas. The first of these associations that exemplify the enterprising spirit of the community is the

Centro Português. It was founded in 1958 by one of the first continental emigrants to arrive in Venezuela, Daniel Morais from Lisbon, and Manuel Oliveira from Vila do Conde, a man of great economic success and author of *Memórias e Autobiografia de um Emigrante desde 1946 a 1977*.

The Centro Português gained great prominence; at its peak in 1970, it reached its maximum limit of two thousand active shareholders. Its headquarters, prominently located on Avenida Luís de Camões, is impressive in its size and in the range and number of its activities. Combining a more purely recreational area with spaces for intellectual culture, the Centro Português is one of the most respected private clubs. It also raises questions in terms of its membership. Its social body – dominated by Portuguese of Madeiran ancestry - is not exclusive to those with origins from the Portuguese community. A visit to the Centro Português confirms how different it is from most other associations formed by Portuguese emigrants throughout the world. In truth, it has more aspects in common with a country club with its social life and sporting activities, with an emphasis on tennis and swimming.

Not as large as the Centro Português but equally important for local community life is the center of the Asociación Deportiva Luso-Venezolana, founded in 1972. Article Eight of its Statute states the following:

“Article Eight: The official language of the Association is Spanish; on certain special days related to the traditions of the Portuguese Nation, like for example Portugal Day, the use of Portuguese is permitted”.

Self-described as Luso-Venezuelana, this association, both linguistically and in its charter, works towards the goals of social integration and acculturation. They collaborate with Gallegan and Asturian communities, who frequently use its infrastructure for sporting activities, mostly for football and swimming. The association also has a considerable range of cultural and recreational activities, hosting parties for “Noche de Brujas” (Halloween), do São João, de Nossa Senhora da Saúde, das Vindimas e do São Martinho. Beginning in 1987, shareholder clubs like the Centro Português and the Asociación Deportiva Luso-Venezolana earned starting in 1987 non-profit status that allows it to develop its estate (patrimony) and to maintain a high level of social services that are well-recognized Caracas life.

Another institution that pleasantly surprises us is the Sociedade de Beneficência de Damas Portuguesas, founded in 1969, thanks to the enthusiasm of the then Portuguese ambassador’s wife, Susana Meave Teixeira de Sampayo. The founding goals and nature of the organization stands out from the follow passage of its Statutes (Charter):

“it is a charitable association aimed to help and lend services to all kinds of people and especially to citizens of Portuguese nationality, destitute and those that find themselves in a difficult situation or affected by sickness or disability that impairs them from normal functions”.

These noteworthy intentions are carried out in practice. In the headquarters of the Sociedade de Beneficência, they have recently a well-equipped doctor’s office, where individuals and their families can be attended to for free; an area for the collection and distribution of clothing; and a scholarship area. But the Sociedade de Beneficência also works with other existing counterpart organizations in Venezuela; to mention one of relevance here, the Asociación de Beneficencia Portuguesa from Valencia.

Finally, a few brief observations about the Fundação Instituto Português de Cultura, whose motto – “For the enlargement of the Portuguese presence in Venezuela” fits well with its high purposes. Vigorously directed toward cultural activities –with special mention for literary conferences and colloquium, concerts, plastic arts exhibits, handicrafts, as well as screenings of Portuguese films. The Fundação Instituto Português de Cultura has reached its objectives, in spite of the enthusiasm and devotion of its promoters not always being recognized, people linked to diverse sectors of Caracas life, from University professors to industry to commerce to diplomatic core.

This foundation, provisionally housed in the Centro Português by one of its founders, the above mentioned Daniel Morais, a man of social and intellectual prestige in Caracas, has been without a doubt a reference point for the intellectual and cultural bridges between Portuguese and Venezuelans. Zealously pursued what is enshrined in its Acção projectada aos meios culturais de Venezuela (Cultural Projects for Venezuela): To create exchanges of artistic and literary values of Venezuela and Portugal in order to contribute to the mutual knowledge of the cultures of both countries” (fifth paragraph).

It is obvious that Portuguese community association life in Venezuela is not limited to the institutions of Caracas that we just finished discussing. This discussion is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, the intention is to demonstrate the existing harmony and symbiosis that exists between immigrant and host community. In reality, Venezuela was, is, and will continue to be a host community for Portuguese with whom they will continue to maintain a cultural, social, and economic dialogue. Baily, in distinguishing Latin American patterns of immigrant experience from the United States, finds a major difference in “the level of cultural distinction between the immigrants and the host societies” (282). In Latin America, the three major immigrant groups – Spanish, Italians and Portuguese shared similar cultures as well as linguistic similarities that allow for such a rapid and complete integration.

#### Notes.

(1) An extensive bibliography exists on this material. See for example, *Jews in Colonial Brazil*, by Arnold Wiznitzer (1960); *Los judíos en la Nueva España*, by Alfonso Toro (1932); *Los judíos en América: Sus actividades en los Virreinos de Nueva Castilla y Nueva Granada*, by Lucía García de Proodian (1966); or the important works of Seymour Liebman (1964, 1970, 1974 e 1982).

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