

Bethencourt, Francisco (Ed.). *Inequality in the Portuguese-Speaking World: Global and Historical Perspectives*. Sussex Academic Press, 2018, 294 pp. ISBN: 978-1-84519-846-6

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The first observation to be made about the very interesting book edited by Francisco Bethencourt (Charles Boxer Professor at King's College, London) concerns its title. Those expecting *Inequality in the Portuguese-Speaking World: Global and Historical Perspectives* to be a sort of handbook on the topic of inequality within the indicated cultural area, both historically and in the present, will be disappointed. They will not be disappointed by the contents of the book, however, which are of great value. They will only be disappointed if they expect to find a systematic approach to the topic of inequality. Particular attention should be paid to the noun “perspectives” in the subtitle, rather than to the general expression of the title, for it describes quite well the nature of the book—readers will find in it a series of essays on quite diverse aspects of inequality, i.e. various personal “perspectives” on very different issues that, in one way or another, are connected with inequality. Of course, as mentioned by the editor in the introduction, the topic of inequality is extremely vast, covering not only the more conventional aspect of “inequality of income and assets,” but also “other issues of historical inequality, particularly the divide between free and slave labour, ethnic groups, gender and generation” (7). This means that it is possible to deal with quite a wide range of topics under the general heading of inequality and that is precisely what this work does.

The book is divided into three main parts: “Part I – Modern Social Inequality” essentially deals with issues of income inequality, sometimes using a broad array of descriptive statistical data in Brazil (through the chapter by Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, “Race and Inequality in Brazil: A Deep Shadow,” and the one by Celia Lessa Kerstenetzky, “Inequality and Redistribution: Welfare State Development in Brazil?”) and in Portugal (Carlos Farinha Rodrigues, “Inequality of Income in Portugal;” Tiago Fernandes, “Organizational Sources of Social Resilience and Progressive Governance: Portugal during and after Austerity (2008-2015);” and Pedro Ramos Pinto, “The *Estado Novo* and the Making of Portugal's Unequal Modernity”). “Part II – Postcolonial Identities” deals with a wide variety of mostly cultural

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topics in Brazil (Laurent Vidal, “The *Slow Men*: Daily Rhythms and Social Inequalities in Nineteenth-Century Brazil;” and Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho, “Inequalities in Brazilian Literature—*Muita Saúva e Pouca Saúde, os Males da Literatura Brasileira são*”), in Mozambique (Hilary Owen, “The Garden of So Many Men? Women, Equality and Liberation in Mozambican Cinema”), and in Angola and Mozambique together (Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, “Inequalities, in Other Words: Literary Portrayals of the Cities of Luanda and Maputo”). “Part III – The Colonial Period” deals with an equally varied number of social topics, ranging from slavery and freedom in Brazil (Laura de Mello e Souza, “Inequality, Difference, and Violence: The Brazilian Case in Historical Perspective”) to the various dimensions of social inequality in the Portuguese empire (Francisco Bethencourt, “Social Inequality in the Portuguese Empire”), to aspects of micro-history that are able to expose diverse aspects of inequality in the Portuguese empire, in this case in early twentieth-century Angola (Filipa Lowndes Vicente and Inês Vieira Gomes, “Inequalities on Trial: Conflict, Violence and Dissent in the Making of Colonial Angola (1907-1920)”) and, finally, to the implementation of developmental and welfare policies by the Portuguese authorities during the final decades of the Portuguese African Empire (Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, “Managing Inequalities: Welfare Colonialism in the Portuguese Empire since the 1940s”). All of this is further supplemented with a preface by the editors of the series “The Portuguese-Speaking World: Its History, Politics and Culture” (published by Sussex Academic Press)—António Costa Pinto, Onésimo T. Almeida, and Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo—plus an introduction by the editor of the book.

All chapters are high-quality pieces of research that fully merit close reading and discussion. Precisely because of this, we are sometimes left asking for more. For instance, in Part I, income inequality is analyzed in only two countries (Brazil and Portugal), but readers would certainly appreciate similar efforts for the remaining Portuguese-speaking countries (Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde, East Timor, and even Macao—not an independent country but a special region of China that has passed through one of the most spectacular episodes of economic growth in recent years). Looking at such cases would be extremely useful, as practically all of them are counted among the most unequal countries in the world.

Sometimes we have the feeling that the authors could have gone a little deeper in their analyses. For instance, Farinha Rodrigues’ chapter, a highly valuable and thoroughly researched quantitative and comparative essay, presents various indicators of income inequality in Portugal and other European countries and reaches the conclusion that

inequality has been gradually declining in Portugal (even when it had to pass through the most serious crisis since the 1920s, between 2008 and 2015) in contrast to most of Europe. Such a rare and positive evolution seems to merit an explanation. Readers would have been grateful if Rodrigues had applied his considerable skills in trying to find one.

The same thing happens with Tiago Fernandes' extremely interesting chapter. Fernandes begins more or less where Rodrigues stops: he notes that the growth of inequality and poverty in Portugal was small (close to non-existent, in fact) during the years of crisis and the period of intervention by the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank, the so-called Troika, between 2011 and 2014. According to Fernandes, the explanation for this behavior of inequality lies in the fact that "the impact of austerity was contained and eventually reversed by a shared commitment to wider, progressive coalition-building among disparate social movements and between these and centre-left and radical-left political parties," and that such "commitment is an organizational legacy of the long cycle of political protest from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s – the phases of liberalization of the previous authoritarian regime and of democratic transition that constituted the Portuguese Carnation Revolution" (81-82). The argument is not only interesting, but also possibly true. However, in order to have more clout, it should deal with at least two additional issues. One is comparative: is this sort of political alignment so specifically Portuguese as to explain the country's differential path in terms of inequality? The second is historical, impinging on the nature of the Portuguese Carnation Revolution: the establishment of democracy following the revolution was founded upon the destruction of the coalition highlighted by Fernandes; the basis of Portuguese democracy lies precisely in the creation of a center-left/center-right coalition favorable to liberal democracy as an alternative to the one presented by Fernandes. The question is, therefore, why was the "progressive coalition-building" dormant for decades and why was it revived only in the second decade of the twenty-first century? Something that leads us to two final questions: what if the coalition breaks down again in the future? And what are the causes of this on-again, off-again relationship?

While Fernandes seeks to explain the recent low growth in inequality, Pedro Ramos Pinto tries to explain its high structural level and attributes this, in large part, to the nature of the corporatist "welfare" institutions of the *Estado Novo*, the Portuguese authoritarian regime that lasted from the 1930s to the 1970s. Once more, the argument is an interesting one, and it also rings true. But, again, some further demonstrations seem necessary in order to establish its veracity. Two further dimensions should certainly be explored. One relates to

comparisons: Portugal was not the only country to have corporatist welfare institutions in the postwar period, so how does the Portuguese case compare with other countries? The second dimension once again relates to the Portuguese revolution of the mid-1970s. In 1975 and 1976, the political economy of the *Estado Novo* was completely destroyed by both a massive increase in real wages (and an equally massive decline in profits) and by one of the largest programs of nationalization ever implemented in Western Europe: the owners of the business groups that had been at the origin of the previous inequality were stripped of their assets and were not allowed to reprivatize them until the 1990s, due to constitutional norms. As far as we know (thanks to the works of Jordi Guilera and Fernando Alvaredo), income inequality in Portugal did, in fact, decline in the 1970s and became perhaps the lowest in Western Europe; but then, in the 1980s and 1990s, it grew so fast as to become one of the highest. The institutions of the *Estado Novo* might help to explain this, but some specific causes arising from the political economy and social structure of the newly-implemented Portuguese democratic regime must have played a fundamental role as well. What is more, we need to deal with the intriguing fact (presented by Guilera) that inequality in Portugal was at the low end of the spectrum of inequality in Europe during the *Estado Novo* period and switched to its high end during democracy.

There is no room in a review of this kind to analyze in detail all the contributions in the book, as they are so diverse. But some deserve to be highlighted. Francisco Bethencourt's own contribution is a systematic approach to the main issues concerning inequality in the Portuguese Empire, based on the premise "that social inequality drove the imperial system from beginning to end," but also noting, in quite a relevant manner, that such a system "cannot be conceived of exclusively as a top-down enterprise [...]. Negotiation and compromise between ethnic and social groups of different origins and with different agencies must be introduced into the picture" (193). This chapter seems to be a good basis for a future work of greater breadth.

Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho's contribution presents a valuable discussion of the "colonial syndrome" (133) of Brazilian modernist literature. Going through some of the most relevant literary works of the period, Carvalho points to the "dilemma" of this "peripheral literature" (132-133). It must either regard the country as some sort of "exotic" entity under European eyes, or stress its many sources of inequality: "It is no surprise, then, that the novelist Jorge Amado has been universally designated the quintessential Brazilian writer. His poor but happy characters, and colourful scenes with sexy *mulattas* and powerful landowners

have populated the imagination of readers everywhere. [...] Yet rarely in Amado's fiction do we find evidence of Brazil's complicated past" (132).

The chapter by Filipa Lowndes Vicente and Inês Vieira Gomes demonstrates the capacity of certain historical sources to capture the functioning of social inequality almost at the level of everyday life. In this case, the authors explore the proceedings of a judicial process where different ethnic and social groups, as well as genders, interact in a quite revealing manner of the contradictions, tensions, negotiations, and compromises of colonial life.

The chapters discussed or highlighted above do not, in any way, exhaust the contents of this book. All the chapters are worth reading, and the combination of all of them provides an excellent addition to the literature on inequality in the Portuguese-speaking world.