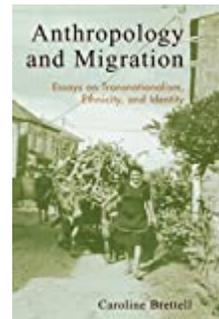




Caroline Brettell. *Anthropology and Migration: Essays on Transnationalism, Ethnicity and Identity.* Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2003. xxi + 239 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7591-0320-7; \$82.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7591-0319-1.



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Gendered Migration from the Bottom Up

Anthropologist Caroline Brettell has been writing on the Portuguese diaspora since 1977, and in the course of her research has focused on the themes of gender, ethnicity, the importance of place, the roles played by return migration and the meanings attached by migrants to their own stories. This book is a collection of essays published at various times over the 1979-1996 period and is split into four thematic sections: "Situating the Anthropological Perspective," "Return Migration, Transmigrants and Transnationalism," "Cities, Immigrant Communities and Ethnic Identity" and "Gender and Migration." Each section contains two or three essays and is prefaced by short introductory pieces placing them in context.

Brettell's approach is laid out in the first introductory essay. "An anthropological approach to migration should emphasize both structure and agency; it should look at macro-social contextual issues, micro-level strategies and decision-making, and the meso-level relational structure within which individuals operate. It needs to articulate both people and process" (p. 7).

In "Migration Stories," Brettell posits that much can be learned about migration from individual stories, since

migration is as much a cultural as a material phenomenon. This is a challenging methodological manifesto to comply with, and one that might raise eyebrows among world systems analysts for example. The distinction between the material and cultural, or structure and agency, emerges as being as salient in anthropology as in sociology, as does the need to bear in mind that actors do not necessarily or very often see the bigger picture, or become aware of the multiple process that set down parameters to their choices. Yet, on the evidence of this collection, the author has managed, just about, to maintain a balance between the two dimensions referred to. The tools utilized range from engaging with the personal narratives of contemporary migrant women in "Migration Stories," through historical archive work on a Northern Portuguese village in "Emigration and Household Structure in a Northern Portuguese Parish, 1850-1920," to an analysis of the Portuguese ideology of return migration in "Emigrar para Voltar," and a consummate blending of research instruments in "Women are Migrants Too."

The specificity of the Portuguese case is forcefully argued from the outset. "The emigrant," she maintains, is

a “core symbol,” in Portuguese culture, metamorphosing from the *navegador* to the *emigrante* via the *colono* to reflect the changing phases in the country’s history (p. 16). Moving on to the topic of return migration, Brettell highlights the functional uses of migration. The Portuguese migrants she interviews, “view the host society as a detoured route to social mobility and social prestige within their own society” (p. 72).

While later essays introduce more (and sometimes gendered) ambivalence about return, the theme that strikes me as a reader more familiar with work on Irish and Caribbean emigration is the implied high actual level of return and implementation of the planned return, presumably (going by the date) even before Portugal’s economy recovered to the point where it became a net importer of labor.

Although women migrants are now receiving much more attention than they did in the 1970s and 1980s, Brettell’s work from this period assumes a pioneering character. She conceptualizes women as individual workers with their own agendas, rather than docile, one-dimensional appendages to male labor migrants. Arguing this case in contemporary migration studies might seem redundant, yet writers such as Eleanore Kofman, Jacqueline Andall and Annie Phizacklea, for example, have all recently urged their colleagues to do what Brettell was already doing in the 1980s.[1] She provides nuanced studies elucidating some of the criteria required to answer the question of whether life as a migrant is better or worse for women than in the country of origin. Portuguese women, she maintains, have a long experience of separation and shared decision-making, which may contrast with the experiences of other groups and reduce the gap in autonomy (if not in material gain) between their lives in Portugal and in their host societies.

The author’s emphasis in the collection is on anthropology’s unique set of criteria for studying migration, but she might be pleasantly surprised to see how much some methodologies within sociology, to just cite my own discipline, overlap with hers. Reading Brettell alongside Breda Gray’s recent work on Irish women in the United Kingdom is a rewarding exercise, not only because of the clear parallels between Portugal and Ireland as mass exporters of people, but also in the way women’s voices can be dealt with so adeptly and placed at the center of an intellectual endeavor in which the tensions between structure and agency become so immediate.[2]

Last but not least, Portugal, as Brettell points out, is now a country of net immigration. The countries of new

migration in Europe—Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Italy and Greece—are on the agenda for research as places in transition between two ways of life, the country of emigrants and the country of immigrants, each with their own sets of problems to solve. Add to this the fact that they are all experiencing continued emigration at the same time as both return migration and new immigration, and Brettell’s work becomes even more interesting in its provision of insights into the process of return migration in the European context, an area that has produced ludicrously little published work so far.

While this is a fine book overall, I have one principal criticism. This is to do with an overarching view. Maybe it is partly a sociologist’s unhealthy taste for theories, but I feel there was an opportunity here to do something extra in the conclusion. The introduction is concise and well-focused, yet the separation of the three levels of analysis contained in it raises questions about the relationships between them. While to some extent this emerges implicitly from particular essays, the collection could really have benefited from a more heavyweight attempt to draw this out and tie up the loose ends. The outlining of a multi-dimensional methodological mission statement in the introduction could have been satisfyingly responded to by a “with-the-benefit-of-hindsight” concluding essay. However, the excellent and engaging fieldwork is not supported by a concluding essay of corresponding breadth, scope or quality. This is particularly disappointing given the topicality of “transnationalism” as a research paradigm that has recently thrown up a large-scale project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the United Kingdom. Some of its findings are summarized by that program’s Director, Steven Vertovec, and others in a special edition of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. [3] There is plenty over the twenty-seven years since the author’s first publication to have got her teeth into, and it makes me wonder whether she is planning the review that suggests itself from the back-to-back reading of these articles. If she does get round to that project, it might be a seminal piece.

Notes

[1]. E. Kofman, “Family-Related Migration: A Critical Review of European Studies,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 2 (2002): pp. 243-262; Jacqueline Andall, “Introduction” in *Ethnicity and Gender in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Jacqueline Andall (Oxford: Berg, 2003); A. Phizacklea, “Gendered Actors in Migration,” in Andall, *Ethnicity and Gender*, pp. 23-37.

[2]. B. Gray, *Women and Migration* (London: Pal-

grave, 2004).

[3]. Steven Vertovec, "Transnationalism and Iden-

tity," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27, no. 4 (2001), pp. 573-582.

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