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The postcolonial politics of post-national citizenship in Portugal

Review by David Kerr

Verde, Let's Go: Creole Rappers and Citizenship in Portugal

by Derek Pardue

University of Illinois Press, 2015

Cape Verde, Let's Go addresses the postcolonial politics of citizenship in Portugal through the lens of Creole rap. It examines how Creole challenges what it means to be Portuguese and shapes notions of identity and belonging. The unique historical interactions between Portugal and Cape Verdeans, as well as the subsequent creation of Creole identities, provides the central empirical framework for this book. Pardue argues for a Creole identity distinct from one-dimensional notions of hybridity and mixing. Instead, for Pardue, Creole identity encompasses history, alterity and power. Drawing on a range of theories from a variety of academic disciplines the book is ambitious in scope. Speaking to issues of both “theoretical conclusions and policy deliverables” (37) it examines the materiality of labour and housing as well as the poetics of creative expression. Crucial to the book's multiple arguments is the conception that citizenship emerges from a set of practices and social relationships and not solely from a set of legal rights administered by the state. To address these issues Pardue engages with a diverse range of texts from the lyrics of Kriolu rap, the text of novels and the work of African intellectuals. Engaging critical debates about contemporary forms of citizenship, Pardue's book raises important questions about how citizenship is conceptualised and how creative expression can be used to examine wider ideas of European intercultural citizenship. It addresses the vital issue of whether Creole citizenship offers a viable model for a contemporary mode of post-national citizenship.

A major argument in the book is that the creative use of Cape Verdean Creole, a language that emerged through the encounter between West Africans and the Portuguese colonial powers, interrupts grand

state narratives of *luso* inclusion and conviviality. This notion of a unique *luso* relationship between metropolitan centre and colonial periphery has historically been employed by the Portuguese state to address colonialism and its legacy. *Lusotropicalism* a concept coined by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre and adopted by the colonial state of Portuguese dictator Salazar, posited a distinctive empathetic Portuguese imperialism based upon racial mixing as a key component of Portuguese national character. After the fall of the dictatorship, *Lusofonia*, a term that seeks to incorporate the heterogeneity of populations that constitute contemporary Portugal based on a common language and the Creole mixing of European modernity and African culture, has been invoked by the Portuguese state. State immigration, housing and labour policies directed towards migrants of African origin in Portugal contrast with these inclusive *luso* narratives have been, as this book shows, rather more exclusionary. Pardue argues that Creole rap disrupts these narratives through its evocation of histories of migration, labour and race. In so doing, Kriolu rap constructs “alternative subject positions and linguistic-cultural communities in relation to *tuga* and, thus, dislodge conventional notions of what it is to be Portuguese at phenomenological and narrative levels” (92).

The use of Kriolu is a means for asserting claims to both space and place. It acts as a mode through which to attribute meaning to place and to manage the migratory experience and what Pardue terms dis(em)placement, that is, managing the significance of multiple places. The *Kriolu* language has, he suggests, become a medium which carries Cape Verdian history. Articulations of place and time, of migration, of Lisbon’s poorer neighbourhoods and of Cape Verde form an important unit for analysing the meaning of Creole citizenship. The poetics, linguistic ingenuity and narrative of Kriolu rap do identity work, organising experience and giving meaning to place. Engaging with the linguistics of expression, the book argues that patterns of repetition create sedimentation establishing structures within linguistic expression. As such these Kriolu linguistic structures are articulations of the Cape Verdian migrant experience. The relationship between space such as the impoverished neighbourhoods in which Kriolu rappers live and the multiple temporalities of colonialism, migration and the future are interrogated through the Bakhtinian concept of the Creole chronotope. Using the concept of the chronotope the book explores how *Kriolu* shapes not only language but space, it is through Kriolu rap that the space of Lisbon occupied by Kriolu rappers is made and takes on flesh. State discourses and policies shape legal entitlements to citizenship and the material space of the city itself. Kriolu is a mean through which both citizenship and space are challenged and rearticulated by Cape Verdian migrants. Language and expressive culture are important elements of the participation and belonging in society, a

key facet of the conception of citizenship employed in this book. Creole rap is a medium through which the question of citizenship is performed. With migration, citizenship and belonging central questions in Europe, Pardue makes a bold argument for Creole citizenship as a contemporary mode of post-national citizenship, participation and belonging. Central to the argument of this book is the conception of Cape Verdian Creole experience of migrancy as an “episteme, a paradigm of being that is central to identity formation in the contemporary world” (27).

Speaking to both scholars and policy makers, the book proposes Creole citizenship as a model for the history of encounters and the politics of difference. Arguing for the encounter as a new mode of viewing citizenship, in which Kriolu is not Portuguese nor Cape Verdian, but created through the encounter. A Creole citizenship situated at the intersection, in Portugal rather than of Portugal. The book engages with a diverse range of sources, theoretical debates and policy questions. Central to the book are arguments about citizenship rather than detailed ethnographic exploration of the means of production and circulation of popular music. Ethnographic vignettes of Kriolu rap production and performance serve to illustrate the overarching arguments of the book rather than providing an ethnographically deep and detailed account of Kriolu raps production. The debates to which this book contributes are largely those on migration, contemporary modes of belonging and citizenship, rather than debates in hip-hop or popular music studies.

David Kerr is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Johannesburg currently working on Street Life, Urban Performance and Masculinity in Dar es Salaam. He completed his thesis entitled ‘Performing the Self: Rappers, Urban Space and Identity in Dar es Salaam’ under the supervision of Professor Karin Barber at the University of Birmingham in 2014 and has published in *The Journal of African Media Studies*, *Journal of African Cultural Studies* and has an article forthcoming in *Suomen Antropologi* – journal of the Finish anthropological society..



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