

The Impact of Sr Mary Noel Menezes' Work on
Lusophone Studies in Guyana and the Caribbean

Inaugural Prof Mary Noel Menezes Distinguished Lecture, University of Guyana
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Sr Mary Noel Menezes, RSM, DipEd Hons, BA, MA, PhD, AA, Order of Roraima is Academic and Administrator, in Ministry, Service and Leadership, and is a recognised National Guyanese and Regional Caribbean and South American Treasure. It is my pleasure and privilege to be invited to deliver this Inaugural Prof Mary Noel Menezes Distinguished Lecture, and I wish to thank the University of Guyana (UG) for this honour.

Recognised by her peers in the Caribbean region and beyond, Sr Menezes is a towering figure of excellence. Academic accolades have come in from Bridget Brereton, Ian Robertson and Barbara Lalla of the University of the West Indies (UWI), St Augustine, among many others. Here I would like to quote what these three colleagues have said.

Her fellow historian, also Professor Emerita, Bridget Brereton describes Sr Menezes as “a distinguished historian, educator, a true institution builder at the University of Guyana and founder of the high quality MA in Guyanese and West Indian History at UG, a champion of the underprivileged of her country, with tremendous concern for the abandoned or socially neglected sectors of the Guyanese people, a woman of faith and action.”

Her countryman, linguist Professor Ian Robertson notes, “Held in high regard because of her firm, quiet guidance, Sr Menezes is a careful and meticulous researcher, and a careful and caring teacher who supported her students. She was responsible for the repatriation of documents held in repositories and archives in Britain and the Netherlands. These materials formed a critical mass of data for graduate work in Guyanese history at the University of Guyana.”

Linguist and Professor Emerita Barbara Lalla (former Public Orator of the UWI, St Augustine who delivered the citation for Sr Menezes) describes Sister as “An eminent historian, a constructive administrator, an institution builder, a devoted religious, and a selfless and effective humanitarian... who has rendered phenomenal humanitarian service. Sister Menezes confirms in her daily routine proposition by Khalil Gibran that work is love made visible.”

So again, I am grateful, honoured and humbled to be here for such an auspicious occasion, and I would like to consider myself her disciple of sorts. Today, I hope to do justice to the impact of Sr Mary Noel Menezes' life and work.

My focus here will be an illumination of the contributions of Sr Mary Noel Menezes, a celebration of her excellence in research, particularly on the Portuguese of Guyana and her contribution to Caribbean Lusophone Studies, the inspiration drawn from her work by myself and others, and further applications of her work.

1. Areas of Expertise and Sr Menezes' Contributions

Both a historiographer and historian, the applications of Sr Menezes are many, wide and deep. She has contributed to History and Historiography, Amerindian Studies, Heritage Studies, Portuguese Diasporic and Lusophone Studies, Ibero-Atlantic Studies, Ethnic Studies and Relations, Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, Genealogy and Culinary Heritage. I will touch on some of these as they apply to her expertise in Lusophone Studies.

Sr Menezes, the historiographer, has developed history as an academic discipline, and the research methodologies of the discipline, at the University of Guyana and beyond, as noted by Prof Ian Robertson above.

As historian, Sr Menezes is internationally known both for her pioneering work on the 19th century history of Amerindians in Guyana and she stands out as the original and leading authority on the Portuguese of Guyana, and by extension all of the English-official Caribbean. With four (4) books and numerous articles, lectures and more on Guyanese Amerindians, her works now standing among the Guyana Classics. She has shown successive generations of scholars the way forward by laying a clear and careful foundation for Guyana's rich indigenous past and present.

In the Lusophone world, particularly the Luso-Atlantic world, Sr Menezes is the expert in and academic authority on all matters Guyanese Portuguese or Luso-Guyanese, from the 19th to the 20th centuries, with a focus on immigration, labour, entrepreneurship, socio-economic development and culture.

After receiving her PhD in London in 1973, after becoming the first female president of the (then 10-year old) Association of Caribbean Historians (ACH) in 1978, and after being promoted as the first Professor of History at the University of Guyana in 1980, Sr Menezes received a Government of India scholarship to teach at Universities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Poona in 1982. It was in India, where Portuguese Goa is located, that Sr

Menezes' research interests in the Portuguese of Guyana were sparked, and her research set in motion.

The term Lusophone means "Portuguese-speaking" (either as native speakers or learners), and is derived from *lus-*, from Lusitania, the Latin name for a geographical area corresponding roughly to the modern Portuguese Republic, and *-phone*, meaning "speaking" (viz *Anglophone* for English-speakers, *Francophone* for French-speakers, and *Hispanophone* for Spanish-speakers).

Lusophony or the Lusosphere are terms sometimes to refer to the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), a community of nations linked to Portugal and the Portuguese language, either historically or by choice. The Lusophone world covers the Portuguese Empire to the Portuguese-speaking Diaspora(s), the latter made up of both Portuguese and Brazilians. Lusophone Studies focus on literary, historical, and critical texts, in Portuguese and other languages, about major cultural/social/historical movements, cultural production, and major figures and debates in the Lusophone World.

Sr Menezes is recognised as the expert on the Portuguese of Guyana and by extension, the (English-official) Caribbean. Most references to the Portuguese in the Caribbean and Guyana have briefly looked at the social and economic position of Portuguese labourers and small merchants in the Caribbean, with some reference to social issues of power, prestige and position. Few have examined in detail the origins and outcomes of historical factors (such as slavery, emancipation and racism) affecting the Portuguese across Guyana and the Caribbean.

Before Sr Menezes' first article on the Portuguese of Guyana in 1984, there were only two theses and two articles devoted entirely to the Portuguese of Guyana by contemporary historians (1965, 1975 and 1977). Keith O. Laurence authored an article on "The Establishment of the Portuguese Community in British Guiana" in *The Jamaica Historical Review* V (November 1965): 50–74, having written about "Immigration into Trinidad and British Guiana 1834–1871" in 1958, his 2 volume PhD dissertation at the University of Cambridge, which led to the publication of his 1971 book *Immigration into the West Indies in the Nineteenth Century*. In 1975, Brian L. Moore wrote the article on "The Social Impact of Portuguese Immigration into British Guiana after Emancipation" in *A Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*. Michael Wagner, wrote his PhD (McGill, also in 1975) on "Structural Pluralism and the Portuguese in Nineteenth Century British Guiana: A Study in Historical Geography," and Khaleel Mohamed's 1977 MA thesis on "Planter Patronage of and Creole Response to the Portuguese Immigrants in British Guiana 1835–1856" was researched and written right here at the University of Guyana.

Before Sr Menezes, no scholar had examined the ethno-cultural history of any Portuguese community in Guyana or the English-speaking Americas outside of North America. Sr

Menezes' pioneering work remains the benchmark and reference point for any case study of other minority Portuguese communities in the English-official Caribbean and elsewhere. Within Portuguese communities across the Caribbean, Sr Menezes' work has developed understanding, raised consciousness and self-esteem, and inspired new generations to work towards the completion of our historical and ethno-cultural puzzles. In short, as a Luso-descendant and as a scholar, Sr Menezes has given a voice to Portuguese communities across the region, especially the smaller ones, transcending and uniting eras, and dealing effectively with issues of identity and heritage.

Even while raising profiles and inspiring pride, Sr Menezes' work maintains professional historical distance, perspective and balance. She has not omitted negative details from Colonial Office records and other records and testimonies casting the first Portuguese immigrants in a negative light. She has also not been afraid to tell the positive truths about socio-economic successes and ethnic core values (family, religious, social). Her work provides the basis for further studies on intra- and inter-ethnic relations and much more. The following list provides an overview of Sr Mary Noel Menezes' body of work in Luso-Guyanese Studies, including her two books (1984 and 1996), and numerous articles:

- "Some Preliminary thoughts on Portuguese Emigration from Madeira to British Guiana", *Kyk-Over-Al* 30 (December 1984): 43–46.
- *Scenes from the History of the Portuguese in Guyana*, London, 1986.
- "Music in Portuguese Life in British Guiana", *Kyk-Over-Al* 39 (December 1988): 65–75.
- "Portuguese Drama in Nineteenth Century British Guiana", *Kyk-Over-Al* 40 (December 1989): 66–71.
- "A sociedade portuguesa de beneficiência na Guiana Britânica", *Atlântico*, Nº 15, (1988): 210–216.
- "Os portugueses da Madeira e o estabelecimento da igreja católica na Guiana Britânica", *Atlântico*, Nº 15 (1988): 217–219.
- "The Madeiran Portuguese and the establishment of the Catholic Church in British Guiana, 1835–98." In *After the crossing: Immigrants and minorities in Caribbean Creole society*, edited by Howard Johnson, London: F. Cass, 1988.
- "The Winged Impulse. The Madeiran Portuguese in Guyana: An Economic Social-Culture Perspective," I Colóquio Internacional de História da Madeira, Funchal, DRAC., 1989, vol II, pp. 1322–1335. Published in the *Guyana Historical Journal* 1 (1989): 17–33.
- "The First Twenty-Five Years of Madeiran Emigration to British Guiana 1835-1860", II Colóquio Internacional de História da Madeira, Funchal, CNDP, 1990, pp. 415–440.
- *The Portuguese of Guyana: A Study in Culture and Conflict*, London, 1994.
- The Madeiran Portuguese Woman in Guyanese Society 1830–1930. In *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Post-emancipation Social and Cultural History*,

edited by Bridget M. Brereton and Kevin A. Yelvington. Kingston: UWI Press, 1999. 159–173, and

- *Stabroek News* and other newspaper and online articles and lectures.

On visits to Portugal, Sr Menezes carried out research in libraries in Lisbon, in the Regional Archives of Madeira, met colleagues, presented papers at conferences, learned Portuguese, and inspired new generations of students there. Some of her work is still available in leading Madeiran bookshops.

2. An Overview of Luso-Guyanese and Luso-Caribbean History

As a highly trained and professional historian coming from a Luso-Guyanese background, Sr Menezes was ideally placed to begin to showcase the contributions of the Portuguese of her own nation, paving the way for others to follow in English-official Caribbean space.

A brief overview of the Portuguese of the Caribbean will show the place of the Portuguese of Guyana in the region's history. Although the Portuguese of Guyana were seen as separate from other Euro-Guyanese, from an outside perspective Madeirans and Luso-Guyanese clearly belonged to the Euro-Creole minority, forming a clear majority within that minority. On the other hand, the Portuguese of St. Vincent only formed a substantial minority within a Euro-Creole minority, and the Portuguese of Trinidad formed a very small minority within a minority.

Before the Portuguese Madeira Islanders came in the 19th century, in the post-emancipation (19th century) period, there were the pre-emancipation Portuguese slave traders (15th century), and Portuguese/Sephardic Jews (17th century). The Madeirans were not the navigators or the slave traders of earlier times. The Madeirans came to Guyana and the Caribbean as indentured and contract labourers, religious refugees, economic emigrants, and small scale entrepreneurs, also known more generally as shopkeepers of rumshops, small groceries and dry goods stores.

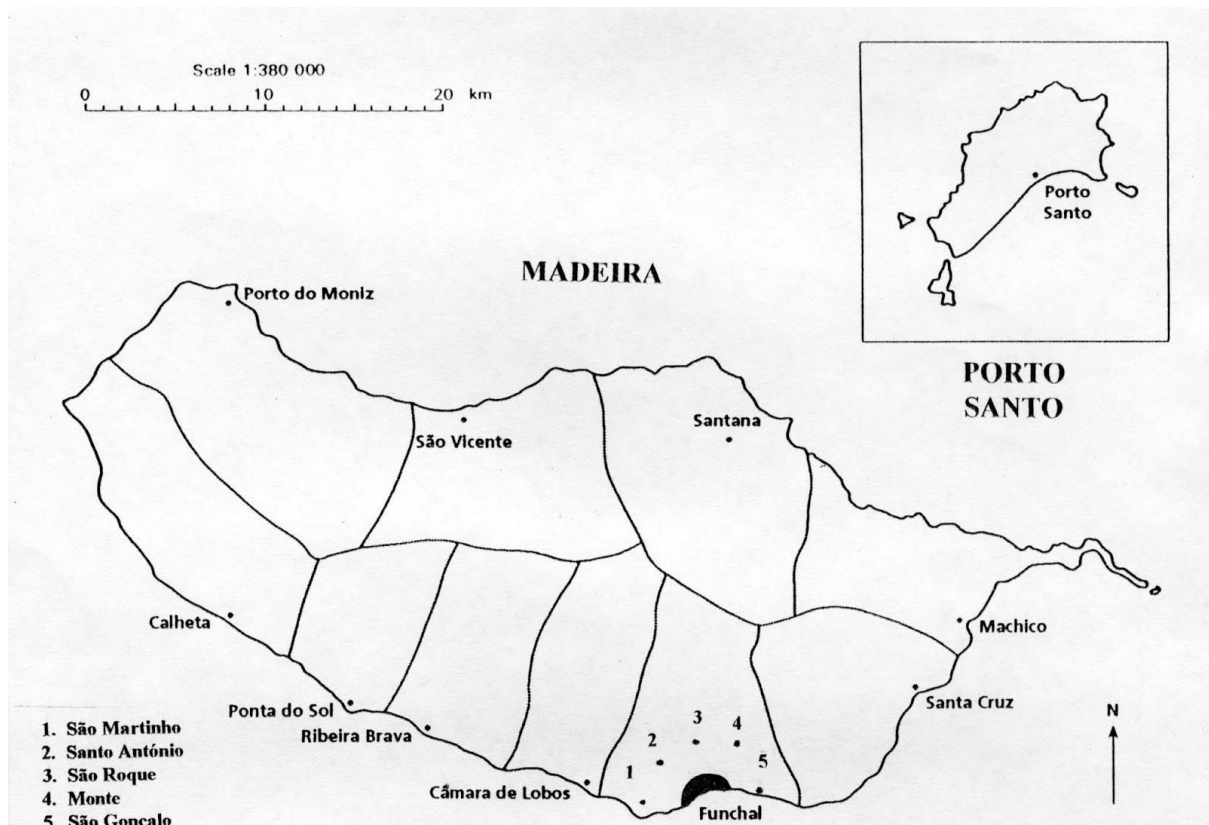
Nineteenth century Madeiran Portuguese emigration actually started with Trinidad in 1834 with (paralegal) immigration to Trinidad from the Azores in July of that year, followed by shiploads of Madeirans in 1834 and 1835 (others had gone to then colonial British Trinidad as early as 1630, no doubt because of the centuries-old relationship between England and Portugal, the westernmost European states, namely, the 1373 alliance between Britain and Portugal, and the 1386 Treaty of Windsor.

Pull factors included promise of economic self-betterment (sometimes grossly exaggerated by Madeiran *aliciadores*), and religious freedom. Later, family and village chain migration were the pull factors involved in bringing Madeirans to Guyana and the Caribbean. In 1807, following the abolition of the slave trade, and then full emancipation in 1834 and onwards,

there was an increasing desire for European labour in post-emancipation British colonial societies in Guyana and the Caribbean.

From the Portuguese perspective, Madeira, an Atlantic island archipelago of 120,000 people in 1835, was often referred to as 'overcrowded'. Push factors included socio-economic problems including, inter alia, a slump in the wine market of the 1840s, resultant and increasing unemployment among agricultural workers, religious strife in 1844–46 (Catholics vs. Protestants).

The size of Madeira is seen in a brief comparison with Guyana and Caribbean territories. Madeira is 801 km² (about half of Guadeloupe, a little bigger than Dominica), while Guyana is 214,970 km², and Trinidad is 4,828 km². Of the main territories to receive Portuguese from Madeira, St Vincent, and Antigua are the smallest and smaller than Madeira itself, 389 km² and 281 km², respectively.



Map 1: Map of Madeira Island

During the 1840s to 1860s, figures for legal migration average 716 persons a year, which translates into thousands of Madeirans leaving their island home for the Americas and beyond. Nineteenth century Portuguese emigration (including the not uncommon clandestine emigration) ultimately rose to 14% of the local resident population in Madeira.

Guyana alone accounted for 70% of all Portuguese migration to the British Caribbean, official and unofficial, and by 1861, there were 21,811 Portuguese citizens in then British Guiana. Ultimately, approximately 40,000 emigrants came to Guyana. There was some retro-migration, as some immigrants maintained close ties with Madeira.

After Guyana, Trinidad became the single most important destination for Madeiran migrants, according the Portuguese a place in the national census until 1960, and then again in the most recent census. Officially speaking, of all the territories, Trinidad was the least successful. However, over 4,000 Portuguese (official and unofficial migrants) went to Trinidad up to 1975, including 900 between 1900 and 1950, and an uncounted number of Luso-Guyanese.

Gov. A.H. Gordon to Secretary of State Lord Granville, 24 May 1869 (Secret). CO 295/247 (PRO, London) penned the following colourful insights:

“The Portuguese are numerically not unimportant but are neither wealthy nor influential being chiefly small shopkeepers and gardeners. Entirely destitute of all political views or objects, they would cheerfully submit to any changes which did not interfere with their making and hoarding money, but they would never take a single step to carry such changes into effect.”

The year 1835 saw the beginning of Madeiran Portuguese migration to Guyana, and Madeirans began to go to St. Vincent in 1845. In 1846, Madeiran migration to Trinidad was renewed after the first migrations of 1834–1835, taking some 2,000 economic emigrants and religious refugees to that territory. The following table summarises the early years of official migration of Madeirans to Guyana, St Vincent and Trinidad in the mid-19th century. Antigua is also included but up to 1870. Other English-official territories include Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts, and the British Virgin Islands, but figures for these territories are less certain.

Territory	Years of official migration	Numbers
Guyana	1835–1846	12,000+
St. Vincent	1845–1850	2,102
Antigua	1846–1870	2,500
Trinidad	1846–1847	1,298

Table 1: Estimates of Madeiran immigrants to the English-official Caribbean and Guyana in the 19th century

Madeiran emigration also took place to non-English-official territories, including Guadeloupe and Martinique, as below, and later on to Suriname, and in the 20th century to Curaçao, and Venezuela.

Territory	Years of official migration	Numbers
Guadeloupe	1854	186
Martinique	1849	45

Table 2: Estimates of Madeiran immigrants to two French-official territories

Sephardim (Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking Jews) also went to Curaçao, contributing to the development of Papiamentu/o, one of only two regional Creole languages to achieve national and official status. Sephardim also went to Jamaica, Barbados and Tobago.

In her explorations of the Portuguese in Guyana, Sr Menezes highlights their history, and their culinary and linguistic contributions to Guyana, and other cultural contributions. Portuguese culinary contributions include *bolo de mel* (Madeiran molasses/treacle cake made at Christmas), *bacalhau* (salted cod or saltfish), *broas* (biscuits), *cuscus* (grain), *espetada* (Madeiran beef kebabs), the Christmas garlic pork (*carne vinha d'alhos*), *malassadas* and *sonhos* (pre-Lenten sweet floats), *milho frito* (fried cornmeal), and *sopa de feijão* (bean soup), and a variety of other soups.

Some examples of linguistic contributions include *ole-yard* meaning “evil eye” (from *olhado*), and *cabruku* probably from the Portuguese *caboclo* meaning “copper-coloured” (cf. noted Guyanese lexicographer Richard Allsopp’s 1996 *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*). Both Menezes and Allsopp note the preceding contributions of the Madeirans (food and other).

Allsopp also notes other mainly lexical contributions from Portuguese, not from the Madeirans, but from earlier Portuguese strata in the Caribbean—these words find themselves in English and in English Creoles throughout the region. Their provenance and existence clearly speak to a different era of Portuguese migration, the era of Portuguese power versus the Madeiran Portuguese peasantry:

- *bagasse* (< Port. *bagaço*)
- *balangene* (< Port. *beringela*)
- *caca* (< Port. *caca*)
- *creole* (< Port. *criado, criadulo, crioulo/a*)
- *mustee* (< Port. *mestiço*)
- *molasses* (< Port. *melaço*)
- *mulatto* (< Port. *mulato*)
- *pickney* (< Port. *pequenino*)
- *sabi* (< Port. *sabe, saber*)

According to Sr Menezes, there were a number of Portuguese Cultural Arms in then British Guiana, including the following:

- Portuguese Amateurs or Portuguese Amateur Dramatic Group/Club (1854–1902), who performed in Portuguese and English;
- Primeiro de Dezembro Philharmonic Band (1876–c.1920);
- Estudantina Restauração de Demerara String Band (1892), later Tuna União Recreativa Portuguesa (1898–1900), and
- Arthur Goveia's orchestra (1920–1930s).

Portuguese Newspapers in British Guiana included these:

- *The Watchman: A Voz Portuguesa* (1872);
- *A Liberdade* (1879);
- *O Portuguez* (1880);
- *Lusitano* (1891);
- *Chrônica Semanal* (1891), and
- *A União Portuguesa* (1899).

Most recently, the English language *A Voz do Português* appeared in 2013, with contributions and input from Sr Menezes herself.

Portuguese Associations in British Guiana include Portuguese Benevolent Society (1875), later the Portuguese Benevolent Fraternity Society (1887), the Dona Maria Pia Society (1887), the Associação Portuguesa de Auxílio Mútuo Beneficência (1913), and the Asylo de Mendicidade. Other Portuguese institutions included the Portuguese School (1888), the Portuguese Club (1924), and the Sacred Heart R.C. Church. The Guyanese Portuguese also contributed to the development of Brickdam, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, as briefly shown in the Guyana Heritage Society's publication, *From Ashes to Ferro-Concrete: A History of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception 1924–2014*, authored by Dr. Joanne Collins-Gonsalves, friend of Sr Menezes, and who gained her PhD in Luso-Guyanese history at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine.

Owing to a combination of Portuguese successes and suspected (and sometimes confirmed) Portuguese dishonesty, anti-Portuguese feeling rose in Guyana and St Vincent, leading to the Angel Gabriel and Vox Populi Riots in those territories, respectively. Other territories did not experience anti-Portuguese violence. Ethnocultural clubs were ultimately not allowed to persist in Guyana, generally speaking, unlike the case of Trinidad which had two Portuguese societies (an association and a club). In part due to ethnic tensions, a number of Portuguese (Luso-Guyanese) left in numbers, in a sense another mass emigration, but now to English-speaking North America and Great Britain.

The Portuguese of British Guiana (specifically Demerara) were so well-known to Madeirans that works of fiction have been written about the *Demeraristas*, as they were known. Álvaro de Azevedo (1824–1898) also wrote *A Família do Demerarista* (a 1859 play). In 2002, Helena Marques' published her novel *Os Íbis Vermelhos da Guiana* (in Portuguese). The novel spans two centuries and tells the fictional story of Simão who was disowned by his family in Madeira, and finds a new life in distant British Guiana and raises a family that can call his own, including Anne, the great-granddaughter of Simão, who is the one to trace the scattered roots of the family.

3. Inspiring Luso-Caribbean Studies

The following works on Luso-Caribbean History have all been inspired by Sr Menezes' own work, in addition to all of my own work (primarily my 1994 book and 1999 PhD thesis):

- Cabral, Anna Isabel. "The rise of the Portuguese retailer in 19th century British Guiana". M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1995.
- Ciski, Robert. "The Vincentian Portuguese: A Study in Ethnic Group Adaptation." Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1979. Ann Arbor, MI.: University Microfilms.
- Collins-Gonsalves, Joanne. "Aspects of the History of the Portuguese of Guyana". Ph.D. diss., The University of the West Indies, 2014.
- Lowes-Benjamin, Susan. "The Peculiar Class: The Formation, Collapse, and Reformation of the Middle Class in Antigua, West Indies, 1834–1940". Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1994.
- Marirea Mudd, Patricia. *Portuguese Bermudians 1849–1949*. Louisville, KY: Historical Research Publishers, 1992.
- Ribeiro, João Adriano. *A emigração de madeirenses para as Ilhas de São Vicente nas Antilhas*. Funchal: Editorial Calcamar, 2006.

It is not possible to study Luso-Caribbean history without referencing Sr Menezes. Other non-Caribbean Lusophone Studies scholars have recognised Sr Menezes' work, namely,

- Rui Carita (Universidade da Madeira);

- Alberto Vieira (CEHA, Madeira);
- Nelly de Freitas (Sorbonne), and
- Kathleen J. Mundell de Calado (Universidade dos Açores)

A number of Master of Arts theses from the Universidade da Madeira have drawn inspiration from Sr Menezes' work:

- Maria Helena de Telo Filipe: "Literatura Madeirense e a emigração para as Caraíbas no século XIX";
- Vitor Paulo Freitas Teixeira: "Barcos da Madeira para as Antilhas (1840–1865)";
- Paulo Miguel Rodrigues: "A questão da emigração madeirense para as Caraíbas nas relações luso-britânicas (1835–1852)", and
- Leonilda Maria Pereira Gouveia: "A emigração da mulher madeirense para as Caraíbas (séc. XIX)".

Books by Higgs, Newitt, and Morier-Genoud and Cahen all contain important references to Sr Menezes' work. Newitt, noted historian of the Lusophone world, in Chapter 9 on the Caribbean, Canada and South America of the 2015 *Emigration and the Sea: An Alternative History of Portugal and the Portuguese* (Oxford UP) notes that "British Guiana received by far the largest influx of Portuguese from Madeira and their history has been lovingly recorded by Mary Noel Menezes" (173).

Edward A. Alpers with Molly Ball in their chapter on "Portuguese' Diasporas: A Survey of the Scholarly Literature" in the 2012 *Imperial Migrations: Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World* (by Eric Morier-Genoud and Michael Cahen mentioned above, Palgrave Macmillan) note that "Until recently, Portuguese communities in Latin America outside of Brazil were seriously neglected in the literature. After Brazil, the main Portuguese community in Latin America is in Venezuela," that is, outside of Sr Menezes' large body of work.

I was happy to hear that works in progress include an anthology of Sr Menezes' work and I very much look forward to this landmark publication.

4. Applications and Further Considerations

Thanks to Sr Menezes, Guyana and the Caribbean have found their place in the Lusophone and Ibero-American Atlantic. Her impact has been national, regional, and international, and she has shown that a group of non-English speakers comprising a distinct numerical minority could not only make their way out of poverty, but rise to lift up their ancestors' adopted nations.

As a pioneer, Sr Menezes has done for Luso-Caribbean history what Leo Pap and Francis M. Rogers have done for the USA, and Maria Beatriz Rocha-Trindade for France, inter alia. She has helped us all to understand Guyana and the Caribbean, and she has helped the English-official Caribbean understand Madeira in particular, and Portugal more generally.

There is further work to be undertaken, all of which must address and depend on Sr Menezes' contributions, and which can continue to depend on and expand upon the work of our pioneer, happily here present. Some crucial themes include the following:

- Understanding the Caribbean and the Guyanas;
- Intra-Territory Settlement Patterns;
- Inter-Territory Migrations and Networks;
- A Nona Ilha, a project coming out of Madeiran studying the history of the Madeiran diaspora, and
- A Biography of Sr Menezes

Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to discuss just some of the impact of Sr Menezes' work on Lusophone Studies, and I encourage everyone to read and re-read her works, and for young historians to take up the mantle and carry on her work. Thank you, Sr Menezes, *muito obrigada*, and thank you, UG. I hope we meet again, *se Deus quiser*, God willing.

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