From the Top of the Racial Pyramid in Hawai‘i: Demonizing the Hawaiian Portuguese in Elvira Osorio Roll’s Fiction

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Abstract. This essay reassesses Crèvecoeur’s theory of assimilation—the melting-pot—turned “melting-love” via Israel Zangwill and Sollors as a means to eradicate racism in America. It also analyzes the ways in which the representations of the Portuguese in American fiction were shaped by social Darwinist discourse, as well as how Elvira Osorio Roll in her novels, Background: A Novel of Hawaii and Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes, draws from this type of racial discourse in her own representation of the Portuguese in Hawai‘i.

Keywords: Portuguese in Hawaii, Elvira Osorio Roll, racism, prejudice

When elaborating on Crèvecoeur’s melting pot theory in his discussion of theories of assimilation in the United States of America in Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture, Werner Sollors notes that a “marital union or a love relationship across boundaries that are considered significant, and often in defiance of parental desires and old descent antagonisms, is what constitutes melting-pot love” (72). This framework can be applied to two novels written by Elvira Osorio Roll, an American writer of Portuguese descent: Background: A Novel of Hawaii and Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes, published in 1964, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and ethnic awareness in America. In these novels, the narratives end with the marriage of a couple who believe in the powers of love and melting to eradicate racial prejudice from Hawai‘i. Moreover, the author, too, chose “melting-pot love” for her own
fulfilment with an Anglo man. Both works of fiction draw from late nineteenth-century social Darwinist discourse and America’s fear of hybridity and miscegenation to justify mainstream prejudice and paranoia when attempting to maintain racial purity while demonizing Otherness—the Portuguese immigrants, in particular.

Given Hawai’i’s pattern of ethnic settlement—most migrants who came from Asian cultures that were too foreign and strange for acceptance by the xenophobic American mainstream—the Portuguese in Hawai’i were affected by a unique ethnic mix that subjected them to racial stereotyping. Moreover, their work in the sugarcane plantations was perceived by haoles as inappropriate for Caucasians. In the haoles’ view, it was labor reserved for those with darker complexions. Since the Portuguese engaged in this type of work, they were subsequently seen as swarthy and stigmatized by this reality. This essay will, therefore, delve into the sociological reasons why the Portuguese were never acknowledged as haoles even though they fought unsuccessfully for a number of decades to achieve this status (Geschwender, Caroll-Seguin, and Brill).

A forerunner of critically acclaimed contemporary American authors of Portuguese descent such as Katherine Vaz and Frank Gaspar, Elvira Osorio Roll can be regarded as one of the very first—if not the first—truly Portuguese American author who wrote in English about the problems affecting Portuguese Americans in an American setting. Writing in 1978, at a time when voices such as the ones just alluded to and others were yet to emerge, Francis M. Rogers rightly considered Hawai’i’s Kohala Breezes as “the single most important piece of United States-Portuguese ethnic literature” (417). Elvira Osorio Roll, he further noted, is “the first to devote herself to peculiarly American problems. She has no desire to return to a distant Sion. Rather, she wishes to improve the quality of life here in Babylon by focusing on a serious problem crying for a solution: ethnic prejudice” (416). Unlike older voices, such as Guilherme Silveira da Glória, Arthur Vieira Ávila, and Father José Reinaldo Matos, who wrote about their immigrant experience, their nostalgia for the old country and longing to return there (Silva, Representations), Roll’s fiction can be seen as a cornerstone in Portuguese American writing in the sense that she eschewed such an approach. Not even Alfred Lewis’s Home Is an Island, published by Random House in 1951, qualifies as a representative Portuguese American text since this fictionalized autobiographical work deals with life in the Azores prior to Lewis’s emigration to the United States.
In this paper, I reassess Crèvecoeur’s theory of assimilation—the melting-pot—turned “melting-love” via Israel Zangwill and Sollors as a means to eradicate racism in America. I then analyze the ways in which the representations of the Portuguese in American fiction were shaped by social Darwinist discourse and how Roll draws from it in her own representation of the Portuguese in Hawai’i. In addition, I draw on current postcolonial theories in order to increase our understanding of the social power dynamics being played out in Hawai’i. This assessment will be followed by a sociological discussion postulated by Andrew Lind and Romanzo Adams as to whether Hawai’i is, in fact, a “melting pot” and a “racial laboratory,” where hybridity is strongly encouraged or, instead, if there is no such thing as a multicultural paradise in Hawai’i.

Roll’s fiction draws from these theories when she attempts to focus on her ethnic background, her family’s story of emigration to Hawaii, and how it fits into an overall pattern of immigration. She also explores how the Portuguese were stigmatized and demonized by prevailing theories of race, such as social Darwinism and biological hybridity, as well as how some of Elvira Osorio Roll’s fictional characters rebelled against racial norms. Although we are in the presence of two literary works, their literary merits are somewhat clouded by the texts’ sociological strengths.

Crèvecoeur, the Melting Pot, and Israel Zangwill
Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813), known as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, was born in France, and emigrated to Canada where he joined the Canadian militia in 1758 during the last of the French and Indian wars. He moved to New York in 1759, travelled extensively in Pennsylvania and New York, and settled with his American wife in Orange County, N.Y. Letters From an American Farmer was published in 1782, and it is mostly renowned for his postulation of the melting pot theory. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the metaphor of a melting pot was used to describe the fusion of different nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures. This blending would bring about a new, virtuous community, and it was connected to utopian visions of the emergence of an American “new man.” Letter III, “What is an American?” attempts to answer his own question, “What then is the American, this new man?” In his view, the American is the one who “leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.
He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma mater. Here, individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world” (69–70).

Crèvecoeur, circa the 1770s and 1780s, had not necessarily developed a full-blown “theory” of racial/ethnic assimilation, but his writings—elaborated upon by writers like Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) and others—has developed into the more popularized notion of the “melting pot.” Zangwill’s play, The Melting Pot (1908), was instrumental in popularizing the idea of the melting pot. Furthermore, it has been strongly revived owing to current scholarship on hybridity and mestizaje, as propounded by Gloria Anzaldúa in Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza. As we shall see ahead, Roll’s fiction is clearly a forerunner of such a debate.

The Portuguese in American Fiction Shaped by Social Darwinist Discourse

Richard Hofstadter’s Social Darwinism in American Thought is, perhaps, one of the most comprehensive studies on social Darwinism. The volume discusses how this ideology was so well entrenched in the American mind at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. While several ethnic groups are featured in this study, what really interests me here is the Portuguese, and how American literature voiced such a rhetoric towards them. This fin de siècle racial prejudice that swept through American letters, culture, and society is evinced in the fiction of Frank Norris, The Octopus (1901) and Jack London’s The Valley of the Moon (1913). Owing to their class and Anglo-Saxon background, these writers absorbed the bigoted ideology of white supremacy prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century. Norris and London apply a social Darwinist worldview to their portrayals of Azorean farmers, whom they observed in the fields of California. In Roll’s novels, we also witness how this discourse was quite entrenched in Hawai’i during the twentieth century. In 1898, during the Spanish-American war, a time when America was flexing its muscles while looking for new frontiers abroad, the prevailing racial ideology also influenced the subsequent colonization process of Hawai’i. In the fiction of Norris and London, Anglo-Saxons are seen occupying the top of the racial pyramid and the paisanos, Mexicans, Portuguese, and other ethnic minorities are all located at its very bottom. In fact, the Native-born persons were at the very bottom of this racial hierarchy, but both
London and Norris do not address their plight. This worldview would eventually start to collapse during the Civil Rights Movement, and the fiction of Roll and other writers of her generation endeavored to topple its very remnants.

**On the Road toward Whiteness**

*Background: A Novel of Hawaii* and *Hawaii's Kohala Breezes* invite an exploration of the concepts of “race” versus “ethnicity,” and more specifically their role and meaning in contemporary ethnic studies discourse. The work of Matthew Frye Jacobson, for example, in *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1998) is a case in point, for it discusses how “immigrant ethnics”—such as the Irish, Italians, Armenians, and Portuguese—eventually became accepted as “white.” In general, “racial tension” in the United States has often been characterized as being a dichotomy of “white versus black.” Matters of ethnicity (relating to language, culture, religion) certainly overlap with issues of race (relating more often to perceived skin color, hair type, facial features).

Writing on issues dealing with race and ethnicity, Jacobson rightly notes that “Caucasians are not born … they are somehow made. It’s just a question of who does the making” (3). In the particular case of Jews and their claims over whiteness in the United States in the past, Jacobson argues that their whiteness is intimately related to the racial odysseys of myriad other groups—the Irish, Armenians, Italians, Poles, Syrians, Greeks, Ruthenians, Sicilians, Finns, and a host of others—who came ashore in the United States as “free white persons” under the terms of reigning naturalization laws, yet whose racial credentials were not equivalent to those of the Anglo-Saxon “old stock” who laid proprietary claim to the nation’s founding documents and hence to its stewardship. All of these groups became Caucasian only over time…. (3–4)

Even if the Portuguese are hardly ever alluded to in this seminal work, they also had to wait to qualify for admission into this Caucasian club. In this “contest over whiteness,” the original Anglo-Saxon settlers set the pattern and dictated who did or did not qualify. With the English attempting to assert or contrast their whiteness with blacks (especially Southern black slaves), the issue of racial categorization became paramount once the Irish began to arrive by the thousands on American shores. Initially seen by Anglo nativists as blacks, they also had to make their way through a racial *via dolorosa* so as to become white over time—a point Noel Ignatiev makes in his study, *How the Irish Became White*. This “contest over whiteness,” notes Jacobson, especially “its definition, its
internal hierarchies, its proper boundaries, and its rightful claimants—has been critical to American culture throughout the nation’s history, and it has been a fairly untidy affair” (5). While the Irish forced nativists to reconsider who qualified for this whiteness, the Portuguese and other southern Europeans arriving in the mainland and even in the territory of Hawai‘i at the turn of the twentieth century were affected by on-going changes in the “social construction” of race in what Jacobson views as “the history of whiteness in the United States” (7). Initially, as per the Naturalization Act of 1790, citizenship was limited to “free white persons” who were fit for self-government, but “beginning with the massive influx of highly undesirable but nonetheless ‘white’ persons from Ireland, whiteness was subject to new interpretations. The period of mass European immigration, from the 1840s until the passage of the restrictive immigration Acts of 1921 (Quota Act) and 1924 (National Origins Act), witnessed a fracturing of whiteness into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined white races” (7). The Portuguese, mostly Madeirans, Azoreans, and possibly some Cape Verdeans immigrating to Hawai‘i between the 1870s and 1880s and the early 1910s, were undoubtedly affected by these sociological and racial trends (Santos 12–13; Felix and Senecal 17–53). Even if the Portuguese in Hawai‘i were from the outset seen as white and Caucasian, they did not qualify for the privileges afforded to the haoles.

Demographics and the Social Situation of the Portuguese in Hawai‘i

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Hawai‘i was and was not necessarily “American.” Although it was annexed as a territory in 1898, the demographics of the islands certainly made them much different from the Eastern seaboard (where Crèvecoeur eventually settled) and even the American West. The Portuguese came to Hawai‘i to work for their own economic improvement, but, in return, they were also important to the well-being of this state. Most Portuguese immigrants became permanent settlers, with the exception of those few who, after finishing their customary three-year contract could not acquire land to rent or purchase (Felix and Senecal 112). As soon as possible, they wished to be self-reliant farmers and resume their former agricultural practices acquired back home even if the produce was now slightly different (sugar and pineapples). While their large families were instrumental in populating the territory of Hawai‘i, they found no major obstacles in their path of assimilation into the dominant culture. The children quickly learned English,
and their Catholicism was not seen as a problem, unlike in the mainland, especially in New England, where Catholics were often the target of the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1800s and during the first decades of the 1900s. In Hawai‘i, Portuguese workers had to adjust to a new life among peoples from other latitudes, for example, the Chinese laborers who preferred to own their own businesses, or the ‘hospitable’ natives of Hawai‘i, or even the thousands of Japanese workers who also worked hard but preferred to improve their education so as to become engineers and sugar boilers (Felix and Senecal 57–58). Compared to these two Asian peoples, the Chinese and Japanese, the Portuguese were not as concerned with improving their education, which, through time, backfired on them as they lagged behind economically (Geschwender et al. 518; Felix and Senecal 113). During the first decades after arriving in Hawai‘i, they tried very hard to be accepted as haoles, but their swarthy skin and their low levels of literacy made it even more difficult for them to qualify as haoles (Felix and Senecal 111). As a population with low levels of education and unsuitable job skills, they were ill prepared to cope with the economic changes after World War II as Hawai‘i was getting ready to become a major US tourist destination (Geschwender et al. 518; Felix and Senecal 115). The Portuguese had often worked their way up the plantation social hierarchy to become luna or foremen, but, by and large, they were rarely considered to be whites on par with the planters themselves.

In an intriguing sociological analysis of the Portuguese in Hawaii, titled “The Portuguese and Haoles of Hawaii: Implications for the Origin of Ethnicity,” James Geschwender, Rita Carroll-Seguin, and Howard Brill showed that “Hawaii has a unique two-tiered system of racial/ethnic classification in which an initial distinction is made between ‘Haole’ and ‘Local’—roughly Caucasian and Other” (515). In these scholars’ view, “Portuguese-Americans constitute an anomaly in that they are Locals despite their European extraction. The historical process that brought this about illuminates the origin of ethnicity” (515). While the haoles were capitalists who owned the plantations and equipment, the Portuguese were seen as locals who simply had their labor to offer. This distinction immediately set the dynamics between these two European peoples—as these scholars rightly point out when stating that “Europeans moving into nonincorporated areas encountered peoples who differed in technology, military power, state formation, cultural practices, and physical characteristics. This provided both exploitative opportunities and the grounds for a mutually reinforcing, justifying rationale in the form of racist
ideology” (515). As Locals, the Portuguese in Hawaii constituted a “category of peoples who were created and shaped by Hawaii’s agricultural history. They differed in national origins, but all originated in peripheral societies and served as plantation labor. The shared plantation experience shaped the labelling, categorization, social evaluation, identity, and subsequent history of Locals” (516). Much of the ethnic bashing or racially-charged situations directed at Portuguese Americans, which we witness in both novels by Roll, were motivated by what were perceived to be their low levels of educational attainment. Since during the first decades of the twentieth century, people of European ancestries in the United States were still divided into inferior and superior races, racism, undoubtedly, remained a factor in how the Portuguese were racially perceived. Geschwender, Seguin, and Brill have noted that by “the outbreak of World War II, Portuguese-Americans still had not gained acceptance as Haoles or made significant socioeconomic advances. Scholars have suggested that their lack of upward mobility resulted partly from lack of investment in education” (518). In The Portuguese in Hawaii, John Henry Felix and Peter F. Senecal also note that the Portuguese had “no crazy ideas about becoming lawyers, doctors, or engineers,” unlike most Asian peoples (Chinese and Japanese) and that a survey in 1910 showed that of all the groups in Hawaii, the Portuguese spent the least amount of their income on education. From these data, Felix and Senegal deduced that Portuguese immigrants “had come from the Madeiras and Azores with no tradition or respect for education or intellectual achievement” (113). “Perhaps,” write these scholars, “they were not accepted as haoles because of their swarthy skin or perhaps because approximately three quarters of the Portuguese immigrants had been illiterate peasants” (111). The Portuguese came to be accepted as “whites” and Europeans but not necessarily as haoles.

**Hawai’i—A Genuine “Melting Pot” and “Racial Laboratory”?**

By the 1920s and 1930s in Hawai’i, sociologists, such as Romanzo Adams and Andrew Lind, saw the islands as a kind of “melting pot” and “racial laboratory. Adams was the first scholar of island race relations who advocated Hawai’i as a locale of tolerance, equality, and harmony. An assimilationist, Adams pictured Hawai’i as a “racial melting pot.” Unfortunately, Adams was mistaken because ethnic groups would not really lose their distinct identities. Andrew W. Lind and even Bernhard L. Hormann were followers of Adams who also viewed Hawai’i as a racial paradise.
Some scholars have questioned the extent to which Hawai‘i was a racial paradise. Paul Spickard, in his analysis of issues of “hybridity,” discusses the creation of an Asian American identity after the late 1960s, noting that up till then it was the Chinese in Hawai‘i who mixed with native Hawaiians. “To be sure,” notes Spickard, “there was some mixing between Chinese and other island groups—Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, and some Haoles (whites). But Chinese Hawaiians in this period had negative images of Koreans and Filipinos, and resentments against Japanese born of generations of conflict between their ancestral nations” (15). John Chock Rosa, in turn, resorts to mainstream national magazines of the 1990s, including a fall 1993 issue of *Time* magazine on “The New Face of America” to compare assimilation in the 1990s with the 1920s and 1930s. Rosa is particularly interested in examining “how in the 1920s and 1930s the Territory of Hawaii came to be seen as a testing ground for the mixing of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Whites.” In addition, he focuses “specifically on early popular and scholarly accounts about Hawai‘i” so as to “explore how these have contributed to the image of Hawai‘i as a racial paradise where intermarriage and mixed race people live and flourish.” Unfortunately, he has come to the conclusion that the “comments in the 1990s on the increase in interracial marriages and children of mixed race show how the dialogue on matters of mixed race has changed very little” (53). In “The Coming of the Neo-Hawaiian American Race: Nationalism and Metaphors of the Melting Pot in Popular Accounts of Mixed-Race Individuals,” Rosa revisits the arguments on Hawai‘i as a kind of racial laboratory, a racial paradise, a model for multi-ethnic communities of older theorists such as Robert E. Park (from the Chicago School of Sociology), Lind, and Sidney Gulick. Rosa acknowledges that their views on this “Golden Man” that was emerging in Hawai‘i were to a large extent still held by more contemporary scholars. Rosa notes that “Captain James Cook’s arrival in the islands in 1778 had hastened and radically altered social development in Hawai‘i,” but

Park and Lind hoped that the archipelago’s remoteness in the middle of the Pacific would continue to serve as a buffer against the transmission of racial prejudice and other Old World social ills. Hawai‘i was a perfect testing ground for social experimentation.” (51)

The truth is that this buffer in Hawaii was rather porous and racial prejudice did, in fact, make its way into the Hawaiian Islands as Elvira Osorio Roll has shown in her novels and as some of the aforementioned theorists have
maintained as well. She responds to and elaborates on race issues in both novels while fictionalizing them in an entertaining manner. Her work might have been influenced by what was happening elsewhere, in another supposed “racial paradise,” also believed to be a “racial laboratory” at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth-century—Brazil.1

Interracial marriage has often been touted as proof that racial harmony can exist, but one must keep in mind that this utopian vision also has a range of critics, running back for more than a century. Briefly, Maria P. P. Root and Naomi Zack take a more critical take on interracial marriage. In The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier, Root challenges current theoretical and political conceptualizations of race using the multicultural experience of individuals as a tool for examining these and other questions. In Race and Mixed Race, Zack analyzes the ‘one drop’ rule, a construct of race that emerged during slavery, arguing that this philosophy persists today even though there have never been ‘pure’ races, and most American blacks have ‘white’ genes. Exploring the existential problems of mixed race identity, she points out how the bi-racial system in the USA generates a special racial alienation for many Americans. Ironically suggesting we include ‘gray’ in our racial vocabulary, Zack concludes in this book that any racial identity is an expression of bad faith.

Jonathan Y. Okamura’s Ethnicity and Inequality in Hawai‘i (2008) also adds fuel to the on-going critique of Hawai‘i as a multicultural paradise. His main point—and scholarly reason for writing Ethnicity and Inequality in Hawai‘i—is to “provide an analysis of how ethnic inequality is maintained in Hawai‘i.” He argues that “ethnicity, as the dominant organizing principle of social relations in Hawai‘i society, structures inequality among ethnic groups in various institutional domains, such as education and the economy” (4).

The Characters in Roll's Fiction as Placeholders for Conventional Racist and Anti-racist Arguments Concerning Racial Purity and Hybridity in Hawai‘i

Issues ranging from Portuguese demographics to racial and multicultural theories in Hawai‘i bear on my analysis of Roll’s fiction since we cannot fully understand the predicament of this immigrant group in a much wider ethnic context without the above lengthy preliminary analysis. As both novels show, Portuguese immigrants were confronted with a strong Asian presence and were aware that in Hawai‘i the fastest way to be accepted by the Anglo mainstream was through marriage. While initially attempting to mingle with Caucasians—
and yet subject to racial stereotyping and demonized as dark, hybrid people—for some time the Portuguese resisted melting with Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants. Such was the case with Elvira Osorio Roll, formerly a schoolteacher for ten years in Hawaiian public schools. In 1911, Francis M. Rogers notes: “She married Professor Albert T. Roll, who subsequently changed his profession from teacher to medical doctor” (417). Okamura has noted that even if Portuguese Americans resisted wider combinations of racial intermarriage in the past, nowadays this is no longer true (32). As we shall see, *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes*, a fictionalized, semi-autobiographical work attempts to flesh out this real melting-love story since it often echoes the author’s and her family’s immigrant background. The story of the Damus family in *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes* tells us the saga of Portuguese emigrants who sailed to Hawaii to work in the sugarcane industry (mostly from Madeira and the Azores with a sprinkling of continentals), their settlement and often difficult adaptation to this new social reality, in a process that paralleled the life story of the author’s own family. About the Roll family’s story of immigration, Rogers tells us that Mrs. Roll was born in Honolulu in 1888, in the days of the monarchy, that is, prior to the U.S. annexation of 1898. Her father, a well-educated businessman, had been born in eastern Continental Portugal. Her mother had come from a village on the south coast of Madeira a little west of the birthplace of John Dos Passos’s paternal grandfather. (Be it remembered that, although Yankee whaleships with Portuguese crewmen stopped in the Hawaiian Islands throughout the nineteenth century, mass Portuguese immigration began only in 1878 with the arrival of the first shipload of contract laborers and their families from Madeira to work the sugar plantations.) (416)

Mr. Osorio initially settled in Honolulu on Oahu, but he later moved to the island of Hawai‘i, first to the Kohala district and then to Hilo, on the eastern side. He fathered thirteen children, three sons and ten daughters. Coming from a typical, late nineteenth-century Portuguese immigrant family, where men had more educational opportunities than women, it is amazing how Elvira, a talented young woman, managed to pursue an education. Judging from the author’s date of birth, her parents—possibly represented by the fictional Damus family in *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes*—had left Portugal during the initial phase of Portuguese emigration to Hawai‘i. Although there had been previous Portuguese contact with Hawai‘i, Leo Pap notes that Dr. William Hillebrand, who was living at the time in Funchal, may have sped up this process. Hillebrand acted as Hawai‘i’s agent, assisting the Hawaiian government
by investigating the possibility of solving Hawai‘i’s labor and population problems by encouraging the immigration of Portuguese from Madeira. In 1877, Pap notes, he happened to be staying in Madeira to study subtropical flora, and he enthusiastically confirmed to his Hawaiian contacts that that overpopulated island, climatically so similar to Hawaii, might indeed be an ideal source of plantation labor. Somewhere along the line official Hawaiian interest also focused on the island of São Miguel, in the eastern Azores. Government-sponsored solicitation of contract laborers for the Hawaiian plantations was promptly undertaken, both in Madeira and in São Miguel. (74)

The mass movements of emigrants from Madeira and the Azores, notes Fernando dos Santos in Os Portugueses no Hawaii, began in 1878 when the German steamboat Priscilla arrived in Hawai‘i with 180 Madeirans, 60 of whom were children. The second boat, the Ravenscrag, arrived the following year, transporting 419 Madeirans, 176 of these being children. In 1880, The High Flyer transported 337 passengers from São Miguel. The last boat to set anchor on Hawaiian shores, on 4 June 1913, was the Ascot, carrying 1283 Portuguese passengers both from the islands and the continent. This last shipload marked the end of the Portuguese emigration to Hawai‘i. During this period, which had lasted for thirty-five years, the total of 29 boats arriving there discharged more than 24,000 immigrants on these Pacific islands (13). Writing in 1996, Santos notes that the total population of Hawai‘i listed in its 1990 census included 1,108,229 inhabitants and that only 57,125 persons had declared their Portuguese ancestry (11). Compared to other ethnic groups such as the Chinese, the Portuguese usually emigrated with their families, and this bond allowed for greater social stability, a condition which worked to their advantage when they were hired to work in the sugarcane plantations.

While Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes thoroughly fictionalizes these demographic and cultural realities concerning the Portuguese presence in Hawai‘i, Background: A Novel of Hawaii only “incidentally treats of the Portuguese ethnic group,” notes Rogers (417). The former is a novel where social prejudice and class distinctions in Hawaiian society are discussed and manifested through Mrs. Adam’s disapproval of her daughter Bernice’s boyfriend, Hal Brenton. Mrs. Adams and her circle of female acolytes, who occasionally gather at the local country club or their family parlor for tea, often discuss class issues, social prestige, and etiquette as well as the contamination of Hawaii by the low-bred, common immigrants. While the Brentons are hard-working, honest people of
Irish descent, whose ancestors came to Hawai‘i in a whaling ship, in the 1700s during Kamehameha’s reign, the Adamses were of Anglo stock and had bought a lot of land in Hawai‘i at a few cents a foot. Although Mrs. Adams comes from a very low lineage, and her great-grandfather had murdered a neighbor back in the Old World, she and her Anglo friends consider themselves the legitimate custodians of the land. Even if her own husband, her sister Lois, and Judge Rolfe have skeletons in their own closets and are the people these women associate with, they, nonetheless, love to denigrate and pass judgment on ethnic minorities. In addition, Mrs. Adams tries to exorcise her own dubious background while pretending it is quite refined when she sides with Mrs. Rolfe. The latter believes in heredity, a late nineteenth-century theory originating in Darwinian ideology and later propounded more forcefully by Émile Zola and the Naturalists. The story ends with Hal and Bernice, representatives of a younger and more open-minded generation, rejecting this worldview while criticizing class and social prejudice. They promise to build a society based on hard work, self-reliance, and good values. They intimately believe, that their union will enhance Hawai‘i’s propensity to establish a racial paradise while eradicating class and racial prejudice since the Irish (represented by Hal) had been stigmatized as blacks.

*Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes* also deals with racial issues, prejudice, and assimilation but within the context of melting-love involving Infelice, an American girl of Portuguese extraction and a young Anglo man, Jack Walker. Infelice, possibly a pun on *infeliz*, will eventually overcome her feelings of unhappiness as the novel progresses and she learns to defy racial ostracism. Both protagonists experience antagonism from each family—especially the young man’s—but the novel ends with the couple defying racism, social prejudice, and Jack reasserting Infelice’s whiteness, telling her that she is “immaculately white through and through” (239). Practically untouched by scholarly analyses, it might prove useful to apply to *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes* the contemporary discourse on hybridity and postcolonialism since this novel begs such an approach. Rogers’s comments in 1978 need to be updated since this discourse bears on our understanding of issues of class, race, and ethnicity in Roll’s fiction.

The novel traces the early years of Infelice in the intimacy of her private sphere, centered on her Portuguese home and family to her gradual immersion in the public realm represented by school, her greater command of the English language, her graduation and, finally, her profession as a teacher.
Instead of marrying Paul Navarro, a gentleman and refined lawyer of Portuguese descent, she prefers Jack even if she has to put up with his virulent racism. In this piece of ethnic fiction, Roll often sprinkles her narrative with Portuguese words or phrases (even if not always spelled correctly) and comes across as a rather good connoisseur of Portuguese culture. As we shall see, Infelice often resorts to her mother’s aristocratic background and other historical episodes to assert her superiority, especially when the Walkers or other Anglos use the “p-word” that she abhors so much, “Poregee,” a racial slur that leaves her spiritually wounded. In both works, *Background: A Novel of Hawaii* and *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes*, the group of gossiping Anglo women enjoy using this slur quite often to assert their superiority, when, in the end, they come across as vulgar, parochial, and bigots. Unable to see the mote in their own eyes, they have to be reminded that other ethnic minorities, such as the Portuguese, also have their own glorious past, their heroes, navigators, or just simply the musical contributions their immigrants brought to Hawaii, namely the ukulele.

In *Background*, Mrs. Small, a Portuguese woman, is denigrated during an episode at the local club house where Mrs. Rolfe is hosting a bridge party with her friends. Presumably, Mrs. Small—as the author herself—married a “‘Nordic’ man so as to acquire an English-sounding surname” to avoid being stigmatized (Pap 227; Felix and Senecal 114). This marital choice was ineffective as the following quote suggests when during their conversation, Mrs. Lambert says:

“Ah, there is Mrs. Small: She’s such a quiet little thing. Too bad. She must feel like a fish out of water in our crowd. So demure and then—she being—a foreigner—I mean—a Portuguese—not of our kind....”

Mrs. Lambert’s justification on why she uses a rhetoric of exclusion toward ethnic *parvenus* to her circle is not left with impunity. Another woman reacts like this:

“But, Mrs. Lambert, Mrs. Small is no more a foreigner than you or I. She’s an American of Portuguese and Spanish ancestry. Their ancestors have been here longer than yours or mine, since 17—.”

“You don’t say! But we are white, haoles, and Portuguese can’t be classed as white.”

“Oh, yes they can. They belong to the Caucasian race, same as we do.”

“Oh! I knew it was something like that. Pshaw! Back home in England,” explained Mrs. Jennings with an audible click of her false teeth, “we consider this bally
American mixture just terrible, makes it a race of mongrels, mixed breeds. I can hardly get used to it.”
“... You should go back to England, Mrs. Jennings, if America is too much for you to tolerate.” (170–71)

As illustrated earlier, Jacobson has noted in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* that the “contest over whiteness” in American culture “throughout the nation’s history ... has been a fairly untidy affair” (5). Mrs. Jennings’s behavior substantiates Jacobson’s point. Most of the gossipers in the novel are bigots, and they are the by-product of a society that has conditioned them to react to Otherness in such a way. Mrs. Lambert also substantiates Matthew Frye Jacobson’s position when he claims that the “eye that sees is not a mere physical organ but a means of perception conditioned by the tradition in which its possessor has been reared” (10). This conversation also suggests that from the outset, America had problems with difference and Otherness. Homi Bhabha’s insight on the dominant culture’s “colonial gaze” in *The Location of Culture* can be easily applied to the Portuguese who immigrated to the United States after the middle of the nineteenth century. As aforementioned, this “gaze” appears in a few fictional works written by mainstream American authors (for example, Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* or Jack London’s *The Valley of the Moon*, and so on) or in some earlier ethnic fiction by Portuguese American writers where the Portuguese characters are subjected to this same gaze, as were other Southern Europeans like the Italians, the Irish, and Jews.

Whereas the references to the Portuguese in *Background: A Novel of Hawaii* are scarce, in *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes* the Portuguese are the center of attention. The ways in which they are viewed are far more intricate than in *Background*. Furthermore, *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes* explores issues that do not appear in other works by American writers of Portuguese descent, namely social division and class prejudice among the Portuguese immigrants who settled in Hawai’i. This omission is possibly due to the scarcity of fictional works about the Portuguese in Hawai’i. In *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes*, there is an obvious distinction between Infelice’s parents—especially her mother—and the majority of the contract laborers. Since her childhood, Infelice and her siblings were kept apart from the other Portuguese children. They were reared as if inside a bell jar, told not to associate with the children of these laborers, who worked in the sugarcane plantations. At the time, all the children of Portuguese immigrants in Hawai’i were raised in strict obedience of their parents while the girls were taught to be
suspicious of all young men and to be virtuous (Pap 126). Infelice is a case in point. Leo Pap has noted that courtships, at the time, were “severely chaperoned” (125), and Fernando Santos has also referred to the strict moral rules that had to be followed in such situations (27). Not only moral and religious values, Infelice also learns from her parents about other matters such as race and class. Once, when Infelice asks why some little boy cried in Portuguese for his mother in a tone of voice and accent different from her own, Infelice’s mother tells her that even if they are all immigrants, they belong to different social classes:

“They come from peasant stock. They are laborers, crude and ignorant’ … We were brought up differently. We all come from the same country, it is true; but, my dear, we do not come from the same class of people. These people came out here under contract to work in the fields. Your father came here to seek adventure, and he had to pay his and my passage to the captain of the big ship that brought us. Papae and I are educated, and our people are of the nobility as far back as the Romans.” (21)

Felix and Senecal have noted that of “the fourteen thousand Portuguese brought to the Hawaiian islands” very few “were willing to renew their labor contracts at the expiration of the original term” (37). They preferred to become small, independent ranchers so as to follow their true nature and escape the stigma associated with such “indenture” contracts.

Even these low-bred immigrants had some dignity, a perception Mrs. Ramus cannot grasp in the light of her “aristocratic” background. While we may be surprised at her attitude of looking down upon her countrymen, Mrs. Damus makes no effort to conceal her prejudice of Anglos, either. As a child, Infelice yearned to be accepted by the mainstream, and this goal meant having to learn the English language as quickly as possible since she and her siblings spoke Portuguese at home. She once asked her mother if her baby brother Julius, who was blond and had “large clear hazel eyes and rosy cheeks … was not English.” Her mother immediately replies: “‘Ugh!’… [she] had said disgustedly, her prejudice undisguised. ‘He is far superior to any English baby, Infelice. He is as beautiful as a Roman god’” (26). While she and her husband had planned to stay in Hawaii for three years, she realizes they have been living there much longer than they initially intended—eight years. She sees this as a personal failure in her own story of emigration and resents the fact that her children are gradually becoming acculturated. Her husband, Carlos, was of a different opinion since his business was thriving. She would persist,
nonetheless, in keeping her children away not only from the Anglos but also from the children of the other Portuguese laborers.

Most of the laborers Mrs. Damus abhorred worked for Mr. Walker, and they toiled like slaves: “The laborers feared him; but as much as they hated him, they did their work well, no matter what the physical cost, for woe to the man who disobeyed the least order from the _patrão_, the title they gave the boss,” but as soon as the Portuguese families ended their contracts, they left “Walker’s plantation and settled on others, where the managers were more tolerant and more human in their dealings” (67). Once, while reminiscing about their childhood days and their parents’ beliefs and attitudes, Infelice and her brother Christopher, now “genuine Americans” (74), recall the childhood stories they used to tell them:

“Do you recall how, when we were little, our father used to tell us about the heroic deeds of the Romans and the Celts, the earliest Aryan settlers in Europe? I used to picture myself as one of them, but always up there in the moving clouds. Father fired our imaginations because of his love for history. Then our mother would tell us about the Portuguese. How she emphasized that we belonged to the House of Braganza and Hapsburg, not the common run of Portuguese, such as the laborers are. Our mother was very proud of her race but she was intolerant of peasants. She had too much class distinction … she never allows the laborers to go beyond the line she has drawn between them and herself, and she makes them quite aware of that line. Our father was always more democratic, or should I say diplomatic?” (75)

The antagonism in this couple’s views on American society reinforces America’s rejection of aristocratic values and its endorsement of a democracy where the common people could make their way up the economic ladder by adhering to the Protestant work ethic. In the particular case of Hawai’i, the monarchy was toppled during the process of American annexation in 1898. Mrs. Damus was, thus, a fish out of water, scorned by the Anglos and classified as just another “Poregee.” Once during Infelice’s childhood, Jack Walker (her future husband) and his sister Nan tried to befriend her, but she could not communicate with them in English while trying to give them a bouquet of roses from her garden. Frustrated, Nan calls Infelice “You little Poregee! Poregee!” (44). Downcast, hurt, and crying, her mother tells her to stay away from these Anglo kids, telling her that they were coarse and insulting. To Mrs. Damus, this class and ethnic based slur meant “ignorance on their part. Unkindness and a self-centered spirit—rubbish—English” (45). These children had assimilated the racist discourse of the household where they had been reared.
Offended by such corrosive remarks, Infelice and her friend Paul Navarro try to seek comfort in each other by way of reasserting their pride in their ethnic background and the contributions of the Portuguese immigrants to Hawaiian music, namely the ukulele:

“I guess they would still be beating their gourds,” said Infelice with a laugh, in answer to Paul’s question.

“Well, that was one good thing the Portuguese gave them,” Paul informed.

“What?” asked Infelice.

“The ukulele, of course, I guess you know it was a man of our people, old Mr. D—, a talented musician in Honolulu, who really originated the ukulele … King Kalakaua was so fascinated by the sounds of the ukulele that he often sent for this man and a friend of his to play for him … They pleased the king. It was thus that a few Portuguese tunes found their way into the Hawaiian songs that are now so popular,” informed Paul. (107)

Within a spirit of ethnic revival of Hawaii’s Portuguese Americans, Felix and Senecal have stressed the role of the ukulele—an element of pride worth foregrounding even if only to remind Hawaiians of their contributions to American music and culture. In addition, it also brought these totally assimilated Americans together in their attempt at tracing and upholding their weak or long forgotten ethnic roots (125–27). In this chapter, Paul also tells her about his visit to Europe and how Portugal was such a clean country, a place where people treated each other with respect:

They still adhere to the courtesies of the Old World. They address visitors and others as ‘Your Excellency; Vossa Excelencia in Portuguese. I enjoyed it all very much. The cleanliness, food, and the flowers growing everywhere interested and pleased me. I felt like a king over there. I came back to Hawaii with greater respect for the Portuguese, and a broader knowledge of their history and geography. (108)

His re-visiting of Europe and exposure to Portuguese ways, culture, and refinement were like an epiphany to him because, in Hawaii, he had been trained to see his countrymen as low-bred laborers subject to the mainstream’s “colonial gaze.” Paul, however, is not blinded by ethnocentrism for he can also admire the beauty in other cultures and countries:

In speaking of Portugal, or any other country, one must be aware of three degrees—positive, comparative, and superlative. I also visited Scotland, and I was tremendously interested and impressed. I enjoyed the hospitality and friendliness. I found great similarity between the Scots and the Portuguese. (108–9)
As we shall see, the openness and worldliness of Infelice and Paul contrast with the parochialism and corrosive, racist comments of Mr. Walker and Mrs. Carter. One day, she asks Mr. Walker, Jack’s father, the reason for such animosity toward the Portuguese:

“Just why do you look down on the Portuguese? Is it because a few of them here are your laborers? You and your ancestors in Scotland were laborers, too. You came here to better yourself just as they have. I am a Caucasian just as you are, white—you know that. Here in the Islands you may be classified as a haole, which means foreigner. Haole is also the name the ancient Hawaiians gave one of their gods, the white pig, so I have been told. Ha-ha!” she laughed meaningly. (124)

Although Infelice is trying to snap back at Mr. Walker, a haole who owns land, the Portuguese are seen as subalterns (or locals as noted earlier), and this designation immediately puts them at an economic and social disadvantage. Even if the mainstream regarded southern Europeans as “not-quite-white” and “conditionally white” (Brodkin 60), Infelice viewed herself and Mr. Walker as being both whites, Caucasians. Their social backgrounds, however, are diametrically opposed:

“I have no time to educate you, but before I leave you I want to remind you that as far as race is concerned we may run parallel. But you can never begin to touch the Damuses where ancestry is concerned. My family is superior to yours; we are miles and miles apart. Your origin goes back to hovels with dirt floors and thatched roofs. My ancestors came from castles with marble halls. The blood of kings runs in our veins. We have a background of refinement and culture.” (124)

In her estimation, Mr. Walker is simply white trash. Infelice and her family, however, are the exception, not the norm, since Portuguese aristocrats are not reported to have emigrated to the United States—except, maybe, as I have argued in the essay, “From Political Refugee to Object of Sexual Desire: The Role of the ‘Young Portuguese Lady of Rank’ in Hawthorne’s ‘Drowne’s Wooden Image.’” In this story of 1846, the fictional “young Portuguese lady of rank,” who sought political asylum, also inaugurated Hawthorne’s gallery of “dark ladies” as noted by Leslie Fiedler (Silva “From Political Refugee” 128). Unsatisfied with all she has told him so far, she stresses his worthlessness and primitiveness:

“You look down on poor, ignorant Portuguese workers, the majority of whom are as honest as the day is long. They have spent all their energy working your plantation.
Their sweat and bent backs have put you where you are. You have acted like a tyrant toward them. You have tried to crush them with your prejudice, with your domineering attitude, and with your injustice. But the fact remains that voluntarily they make better American citizens than you ever will. You take advantage of foolish and weak women who work in your fields. Your amorous advances are well known. But I am not in the same category. How do the better class of Scottish people grade you? Not as anything particularly aristocratic, I hope. It would be stupid of me to judge the British by such as you. Chance and fate put you on your pedestal, but they may kick you over yet.” (125)

Jack Walker, now her fiancé, once regarded Otherness in much the same way as his father, but he is now a reformed man because of her insight. “I’m aware,” he says, “that you are my superior in every way” (131). Mrs. Carter’s cultural myopia, however, is far more pronounced, and she even prefers to remain in her state of blissful ignorance. When denigrating Infelice and her family during a tea party, Mrs. Carter ridicules all Portuguese people. She claims they do not have the habit of serving tea, but wine at their parties. To reciprocate her sarcasm, Infelice gives her a lecture on Anglo-Portuguese relations and how tea was introduced in England:

“Perhaps, Mrs. Carter, I can give you a little enlightenment as to how the fashion of serving afternoon tea first started. It really was one of my ancestors, back in the 1660’s, who set this delightful example”… “There was, in Portugal, a king—Alphonso the sixth—whose daughter was Catherine of Braganza. Our family dates back to the House of the Braganzas, and that is the reason I know its history so well. When the Infanta of Portugal, Catherine of Braganza, became the wife of Charles the Second, King of England, Ireland, and Scotland, she brought with her, as a dowry, Tangier and Bombay and also the fashion of serving tea. That was in 1662. She was a very prudent and virtuous princess as well as a sociable one. Being very fond of this amber beverage that was imported from the Far East, she saw to it that every afternoon her guests and the royal courtiers of her palatial domain were served tea by her ladies-in-waiting. So you see, I am afraid, Mrs. Carter, you will have to give that laurel to the Portuguese for their good taste in serving tea as well as drinking wine, instead of the Scots, who, I admit, show great wisdom in following the good example of a Portuguese princess.” (216)

Even if this excerpt is historically inaccurate in Infelice’s misnaming of the right monarch—Alphonse the sixth was Catherine’s brother and King John IV was her father—it attempts to dignify the contributions of the Portuguese to Anglo-Portuguese relations and culture while highlighting the parochial ways of Mrs. Carter and the WASP host culture in general.

Unwilling to yield or acknowledge Infelice’s superior argumentative skills, Mrs. Carter draws the customary racist card to assert her Anglo superiority. As
noted earlier, with social Darwinism so well entrenched in the American mind at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Mrs. Carter’s pride tells her she must assert her right to occupy the very top of the racial pyramid, while the Portuguese belonged at its very bottom. Such a view is also prevalent in other American canonical texts as, for example, in Frank Norris’ *The Octopus* (1901), a novel about ranching in California, where the Portuguese and Mexican farmers were depicted as the dregs of American society. Billy Roberts in Jack London’s *The Valley of the Moon* (1913) shares the same racist feelings towards the Portuguese in San Leandro, California. In *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes*, not only is this ungrateful woman a bigot, she is the mouthpiece for America’s fear of biological hybridity or miscegenation when alluding to the children Infelice and Jack Walker will have together while eating a meal prepared by Infelice, in this couple’s own house:

“You should have married your own kind, Infelice. Jack would have been so much happier in his own element. As it is, he’s really ostracized…. Maybe Jack doesn’t intend to raise a family. He knows how it would be. That would be rather unfortunate for all concerned. The poor little ones would have so much with which to contend, especially among the haole children. You know what I mean. When they start to go to school, they would be half-whites. And half-breeds, my dear, in Mexico, where there is so much of that misfortune, they grow up to be neither one thing nor the other. Usually the result, for the youngster, is tragic. You see, they would forever be reminded of the fact—half-white—.” (230)

Undoubtedly, this story dramatizes the fear expressed by *haoles* in biological hybridity in Hawai‘i, in particular, and in America as a whole. Moreover, it questions the view of Hawai‘i as a racial paradise. Nancy Bentley calls this the “continuing American fetish of race” (67) and Robert J. C. Young, in turn, an “obsession and paranoia about hybridity” (188). Mrs. Carter’s views are simply biased and hypocritical since nineteenth-century Southern white slaveholders repeatedly raped their strong, good-looking black female slaves. While these men denied their complicity in racial commixture, they mercilessly turned their own progeny into commodities that could be sold for cash to other slaveholders. On this issue, one need only recall the contributions of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and Harriet A. Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

With the Portuguese being the target of so much bigotry in Hawaii, *Hawaii’s Kohala Breezes* ends with an intriguing question: Is there a way out of this racist discourse, stereotyping, and ethnic bashing? For the younger,
newlywed generation there is in that Infelice and Jack will raise their children in a more tolerant and diverse environment. Furthermore, through trial and tribulation, in the end, the unhappy Infelice—as suggested by her name in Portuguese—manages to pull herself by her bootstraps and to transcend such a bigoted rhetoric and, ultimately, to project herself as worthy of emulation. For her, happiness lies in her ability to enter a “melting-love” relationship. Unfortunately, Mrs. Carter cannot deconstruct Infelice’s analogy or message when she compares America’s ethnic diversity to a cake: “What a delicious cake!” commented Mrs. Carter, who exposed her one great weakness by greedily eating the generous slice before her. “I am sure it must be a Portuguese recipe. I have never tasted anything like it. It has such a foreign flavor.”

“I am afraid I have to disappoint you once more. It really is an American cake. It is like the good old United States. You see, it takes many ingredients to make it. You know how many different people make up the American nation, people like you and you”—she pointed at each one—“and me, and thousands and thousands of others. Some are not very good by themselves, just like a few of the ingredients in this cake. There is baking powder. Without it the cake would have been flat. Some of the things by themselves taste terrible. Take vanilla extract. It bites just like some people, but I put it in for flavor. Oh, yes, I admit it takes quite a variety to make up Uncle Sam’s national cake, but he is an ingenious chef. He puts up with the undesirables that come from all over, and mixes them up with the desirable ones, and look what a noble race he has contrived!” (227–28)

By updating Crèvecoeur’s melting pot theory or Zangwill’s “crucible” through this analogy of the cake, Infelice is trying to get across to all the Mr. and Mrs. Carters throughout the United States that American society will be much richer if it creates the conditions for ethnic minorities to thrive through the endorsement of a nurturing discourse. Perhaps accepting others’ skills and insights is what bell hooks is referring to when she acknowledges the contributions of ethnic minorities to America’s diversity. “Within commodity culture,” she notes, “ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (21). With xenophobia being one of the dishes served by this culture in the past, America has, nonetheless, made huge strides in trying to eradicate it. Perhaps editors Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean are addressing this concept in The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak when they state that if “we can learn racism, we can unlearn it, and unlearn it precisely because our assumptions about race represent a closing down of creative possibility, a loss of other options, other knowledge” (4). In this allusion, Infelice is reasserting the need for Hawai’i to
travel the road of multiculturalism, hybridity, and to live up to the spirit of “Aloha” if it wishes to become a truly multicultural paradise.

Conscious that racial stigma was a barrier for further assimilation, the Portuguese plantation workers made an “effort to escape the low-prestige classification of ‘plantation laborer’” (Pap 227). This effort, Pap further argues, was motivated by the “increasing proportion of Oriental immigrant labor in the islands,” which “soon would carry about the same connotations as ‘non-white’ on the traditional mainland prestige scale” (227). Through these practices, a strong desire for upward mobility, melting-love assimilation, and further ethnic intermixture, Americans of Portuguese ancestry in Hawai‘i are the living proof of Crèvecoeur’s vision on racial harmony and assimilation in America. Today, the Portuguese in Hawai‘i have melted with other Caucasians, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and so on. In this sense, Elvira Osorio Roll’s novels elaborate on the earlier views of Hawai‘i as a “racial laboratory” noted at the outset of this essay. From a Portuguese American perspective, however, Roll’s fiction undoubtedly anticipates current debates on the benefits of hybridization in America and can be seen as a beacon signalling racial commixture as possibly the best means to achieve racial harmony in America.

Notes
1 It is not clear whether Gilberto Freyre’s analysis of issues related to racial identification in Casa grande e senzala (translated into English and published in United States in 1963, by Random House), had some impact on Roll’s work due to the proximity of dates for Roll’s publication of both novels and the translation of Freyre’s work.
2 To paraphrase Richard Rodriguez in Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez.

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