



## Family Conflicts in Anthony Barcellos' *Land of Milk and Money*

Conflitos familiares em *Land of Milk and Money* de Anthony Barcellos

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** ANTHONY BARCELLOS, *LAND OF MILK AND MONEY*, OS PORTUGUESES E A INDÚSTRIA DOS LACTICÍNIOS NA CALIFÓRNIA, LITERATURA LUSO-AMERICANA.

**KEYWORDS:** ANTHONY BARCELLOS, *LAND OF MILK AND MONEY*, THE PORTUGUESE AND THE DAIRY INDUSTRY IN CALIFORNIA, PORTUGUESE AMERICAN LITERATURE.

In a book review titled, “California, or God’s Country”, Vamberto Freitas has shown that most of Anthony Barcellos’ novel, *Land of Milk and Money* (2012) revolves around the biblical passage featuring Cain and Abel – but within the contemporary context of family feuds and greed in the Portuguese diaspora in California. “It is a universal portrait of greed and feigned love”, writes Freitas, “an almost biblical retelling of the oldest of human themes, brother against brother, clan against clan: there is nothing like the dividing up of property and money to reveal all our venom and envy and, once again, the greed that drives the world of business and prosperity”. Barcellos’ novel tells the story of the Francisco family, Portuguese immigrants from the Azores, who settle on a dairy farm in California’s Central Valley. Their plans to eventually return to the Old Country fall by the wayside as their success grows and their American lives take root. The legacy of one generation becomes a point of contention as the members of the next generation begin to compete to inherit and control their heritage, which includes herds of cattle and tracts of farm land.

The death of Teresa Francisco, the family's matriarch, sets off a string of battles (both personal and legal) between brothers, spouses, in-laws, and cousins. A courtroom confrontation over Teresa's will is at center stage as the contending factions discover that the old lady had plans of her own for securing her legacy.

This essay aims at highlighting this saga, which covers a few generations of this immigrant family, while showing the gradual, but inexorable, assimilation of Old World traditions into a new and overwhelming culture. Like many other similar stories, this one is no exception. Paulo and Teresa, the patriarch and matriarch of the dynasty remain throughout their lives more Portuguese than American. These issues will be dealt with at length, but my next step is to provide a short biographical sketch of the author and the structure of this novel.

*Land of Milk and Money* marks Anthony Barcellos' début as a novelist. In this riveting piece of writing, the author has tapped from his own experiences and connoisseurship of his own family's dairy farm activities and livelihood. He is currently on the faculty of American River College, in California, where he has been teaching Mathematics since 1987. In 2014, Barcellos was awarded the 2014 American River College Patrons Chair Award. His most recent book, *A Stroll through Calculus: A Guide for the Merely Curious*, seeks to explain the basic concepts of calculus to anyone with the slightest grasp of basic algebra. Anthony Barcellos grew up speaking Portuguese on his grandparents' farm in Porterville, a small town located in central California (Tulare County). While he still retains some grasp of the Portuguese language, he is clearly a third-generation American of Portuguese descent.

Alice Clemente would have certainly referred to him as a "Redeemer". This epithet applies to the children or grandchildren of immigrants or hyphenated-Americans as is the case with Barcellos, who writes in English, even if he often sprinkles this novel with a few words in Portuguese, a technique Holly E. Martin refers to as "code-switching" or a "bilingual use of language" or "switching" between two languages to "create a desired aesthetic effect" (Martin, 2011, p. 154). As for Barcellos belonging to the "Redeeming" generation, Alice Clemente notes that these include "the grandchildren who seek to reclaim their ethnicity at the same time that they retain their place in the dominant society" as opposed to their grandparents or the original immigrant who, "more often than not, retains linguistic, cultural and affective ties to the country of origin even while struggling to become established in the new land" or even the second generation, the children of the first, "who often deny their ethnic roots in an effort to merge finally into the mainstream" (Clemente, 2000, p. 25). On this particular issue, Barcellos has noted that:

Since I grew up in a Portuguese-speaking environment and was steeped in Portuguese language and culture, I've never been out of touch with my ethnicity and therefore hesitate to assert that I needed to "reclaim" it. However, it's certainly true that writing my novel gave me the opportunity to revisit the years when I lived more within a Portuguese immigrant culture and less in the dominant cultural environment of America. In that sense, "reclamation" may be appropriate. (E-mail to the author 8 Sept. 2015)

In a colonial context, however, the ecstasy experienced by the oppressed, argues Frantz Fanon, when rediscovering his cultural roots can be transposed to this "redeeming" generation in a multicultural society as in the United States. In the particular case of the "oppressed" who was imposed an alien language, culture, and values as was the case with French colonialism in Africa and elsewhere, he or she "goes into ecstasies over each rediscovery. The wonder is permanent. Having formerly emigrated from his culture, the native today explores it with ardor. It is a continual honeymoon. Formerly inferiorized, he is now in a state of grace.... The sense of the past is rediscovered, the worship of ancestors resumed" (Fanon, 1988, pp. 41-43). Seen from this perspective, for the author of *Land of Milk and Money* writing may have functioned as some sort of cultural "honeymoon".

As for its structure, this is a story with multiple time frames. In the preface to this novel, Barcellos tells his readers that he wrote *Land of Milk and Money* in "the same way [he] created [his] tree house. The trial scenes framing the structure occur in chronological order at regular intervals beginning each major division throughout the book, while flashbacks to other incidents in the lives of the principals are woven about them, finally knotted together in the resolution of the family battle". In a book review on *Land of Milk and Money*, written by the writer Julian Silva, the "extended family", he notes, is the "battleground" where Anthony Barcellos'

combatants are four generations of the large Francisco family and their Salazar cousins. The novel opens on the battlefield itself with a trial in which the Salazar branch of the family challenges the authenticity of matriarch Teresa Francisco's will. The trial, which begins each major section of the novel, is the chronological spine that holds the complex – and far from linear – plot together and, until the characters themselves take on a life of their own, keeps the reader interested with that age-old question: what happens next? The author helpfully presents us with a family tree as his frontispiece and the reader will, at least at first, need to refer to it many times, for the chapters that follow treat time haphazardly, sometimes skipping decades and generations between any two chapters, in what at first seems random choices, though a subtle pattern later appears. (Silva, 2011)

After reading this novel, my immediate reaction was to write to the author to tell him that it was a splendid contribution to this emerging field of Portuguese-American studies and an invaluable fictional representation of the Portuguese contribution to California's dairy industry. In my view, it is the best fictional work to date on this theme, the process of acculturation, assimilation, the erosion of Portuguese "ethnic signs" (William Boelhower), etc. Not even the references writer Katherine Vaz makes to these matters in *Saudade* (1994) and *Fado & Other Stories* (1997) or *Sixty Acres and a Barn* (2005), by Alfred Lewis, have such depth. Like his predecessors, Barcellos fictionalized one of the most lucrative activities the Portuguese from many decades ago ever engaged in in the United States – the dairy industry – and, hence, confirms Leo Pap's contention that "it was the dairy industry more than gardening that produced the relative wealth of California's Portuguese ethnics" (Pap, 1981, p.144). Around 1915, notes Pap, the Azorean settlers there "owned about half of all the dairy land in the San Joaquin Valley, and together with compatriots in coastal areas were then producing well over half of all the milk, cream, and butter (but not cheese) in California" (Pap, 1981, p. 145). Moreover, writes Pap, in "the early 1930s the Portuguese in California were estimated to control 60 to 70 percent of the state's dairy industry" (Pap, 1981, p. 145).

In this story about assimilation, Paul and Teresa Francisco, the old-timers, are the ones who uphold Old World values and ways in America. In the chapter, "March 1940" – Dear Dairy," we learn about Paulo "Chico" Candido Francisco and his sons' efforts to level their new parcel of land and that it would, in the long-run, bear good crops when cultivated. When he bought his land, it did not have much water, but upon completion of the irrigation project, California's Central Valley would be fertile. When he and his sons "made the field bloom with alfalfa or oats, they would harvest a bounty that would fatten up his herd and produce gallon upon gallon of creamy milk" (Barcellos, 2012, p. 8). Surprisingly, cotton is also grown here. Julian Silva has noted that "much of Mr. Barcellos' encyclopedic knowledge of dairy farming one suspects comes from personal experience, but even more of it must come from serious research. Every tool or machine employed in the sowing, raising or harvesting of crops is described in loving, complex detail, as is the nurture, handling and transportation of the cows themselves". On this point, Barcellos notes that "it was more a matter of having been an eyewitness to many aspects of farming" (E-mail to the author 8 Sept. 2015). His youngest son, Paulinho Francisco, "had grown up in California and spoke English like a native. He helped his father communicate with the survey team" (Barcellos, 2012, p. 9). As a hyphenated American, Paulinho provides the transition between both the Old and New Worlds at the level of communication since he is fluent in both the Portuguese and English languages. It was, therefore, thanks to this family translator that his

father, Chico, “discovered that state and federal authorities really were serious about the irrigation projects that people kept talking about” (Barcellos, 2012, p. 9). In just a few years and with a promising future ahead, Chico believed there was no returning back to the Old Country much to his wife’s grief:

Chico thought about his family with deeply mixed emotions as he drove home.

He knew that his wife Teresa missed the Old Country and had marked the ten-year anniversary of their arrival in the United States with ill-concealed anguish.

Hadn’t the original plan called for ten years of hard work in the land of milk and honey, followed by a triumphant return to the Azores? (Barcellos, 2012, p. 9)

Twelve years had already “elapsed and their future was looking both brighter and more American” (Barcellos, 2012, p. 10). With his daughter Fatima already having a beau whom she looked forward to marrying someday, she clearly would not want to return to the Azores. Chico began wondering if it “would help or hurt the situation if he announced that the Azores were no longer home” (Barcellos, 2012, p. 10).

In contrast, in the chapter “June 1943- Chico Is a Citizen”, we learn that his wife Teresa would remain loyal to her Portuguese ancestry and nationality. After declaring on oath that he renounced his former Portuguese citizenship, thinking to himself, “*Adeus, Portugal! Goodbye, Portugal*” (Barcellos, 2012, p. 116), for Teresa, this “was too much” (Barcellos, 2012, p. 117). Even if it was a hassle for her dealing with bureaucracy every year, she renewed her alien resident status without complaining. This, we learn, in the chapter, “June 1983, The Expert Testifies”, which focuses on finding evidence regarding Teresa’s signature. She had signed several wills, which some of her grandchildren were disputing in court, but her signature on her INS papers (alien residence) would become an invaluable piece of evidence: “Mrs. Francisco never became a citizen. She had permanent resident alien status. Every year she was required to file a form with the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The INS files must have over fifty authentic Teresa Francisco signatures on file”, says Mr. Bowman, the family attorney, in court. Teresa never ceases to yearn for her island of birth and her relatives there. By refusing to learn the English language, this will force her children and grandchildren to continue speaking in Portuguese to her, but “ever more rudimentarily”, notes Julian Silva, “until by the fourth generation the old language has been almost completely subsumed by American English, though some ancient customs, such as the festival celebrating the Feast of the Pentecost, continue to be observed”.

Even if Teresa had come to the realization that there was no going back, she would try to mold those around her according to her beliefs and ancestral culture. Such had been the case with her grandson Paul, an educated and promising young man, whom she hoped to give to the church as a priest. As a devout Catholic and parent, she felt it was her duty to “sacrifice” one of her grandsons for the Church. In the chapter titled, “December 1959 – Want to be a Priest”, Teresa, who had “ten grandsons among the Francisco and Salazar families thus far...was looking for the one who might be sacrificed as a tithe to the Church” (Barcellos, 2012, p. 67). Moreover, Paul was “already showing signs of being a standoffish loner. If it came down to a matter of being willing to spend long hours at one’s desk studying Latin and theology, Teresa could imagine Paul at that task much more easily than Tony” (Barcellos, 2012, p. 68). It is quite possible that Paul may have been modelled on the author of this novel considering that he does not fulfil his grandmother’s expectations but, instead, aims at pursuing higher education. We further learn about his interest in Mathematics in the chapter, “September 1969: Paul Gets a Calculus Book”, which supports such a view. In addition, Paul is very fond of his godmother Fatima, his *madrinha*, who dies of cancer, and Barcellos has also written this novel “In memory of my *madrinha*”.

In contrast, the second and third generations exhibit little or no interest in the Old Country or what it represents. On occasion, some of Chico’s and Teresa’s children or grandchildren speak some Portuguese or display a few ethnic signs on special occasions involving festivities or family gatherings, but often, some of them do not necessarily know what they mean. They engage in these rituals because it is merely a custom, a tradition – like asking for their grandmother’s blessing, attending the Pentecost feast, or eating certain sweets or meals. In “May 1947 – Boys meet Girls”, we learn how the two Avila sisters, Odile and Odette, met Paulinho and Candido at the Pentecost feast. The “Avila girls were dressed in long pink gowns because they had been attendants to the Queen of the Pentecost *feita*. They had marched in the parade, attended the High Mass, dined on *sopas* at the long trestle tables in the Holy Ghost hall”, but it seems that what they really wanted was to wander freely and “check out the other young people in attendance” (Barcellos, 2012, p. 30). Whether they actually knew or understood the religious and cultural meanings of this event we, as readers, do not know, but the narrator immediately provides the reader with the following information:

Many Portuguese families traveled for miles to attend Pentecost celebrations in various towns. The Holy Ghost was revered in the Azores as the special guardian of its nine islands, and most of the Portuguese immigrants in California were islanders. The characteristically Azorean celebration of

the Festa do Divino Espírito Santo had become an indispensable part of maintaining the immigrant community's unity and identification with the homeland. (Barcellos, 2012, p.30)

Perhaps, this is what this feast meant for the older generations, but for the younger ones, the more Americanized, it "was also a meat market" (Barcellos, 2012, p. 30). The parents of this younger generation tried to "herd" their "unattached sons and daughters... to the annual *festas* in hopes of finding ethnically and religiously suitable partners" (Barcellos, 2012, p. 30). The next generation, that is, Mary Carmen, the daughter of Paulinho (Teresa's granddaughter), is dating a young man from the mainstream, Gerry Chamberlain, and he has come to the ranch to meet her family. She takes him to visit her grandmother and asks her for her blessing. Afterwards, they taste the deep-fried *filhoses* "dusted with sugar and cinnamon" (Barcellos, 2012, p. 73). As I have shown elsewhere, in most emergent contemporary American ethnic fictions food is a means for ethnic identity and cultural preservation – and Portuguese American literature is no exception. Afterwards, they move on to meeting other family members, with Gerry feeling a bit out of place, an outsider, and the target of her family's comments on his being "really pale" or ghost white (Barcellos, 2012, p. 76). Mary Carmen and her brother Paul try to explain what this peculiar whiteness means in Portuguese to Gerry, but their dad, Paulinho, says Paul, "was only three when he came over here. He's a perfect example of California Portagee, although his Portuguese is a lot stronger than yours or mine" (Barcellos, 2012, p. 76). This is an ongoing generational pattern in the Portuguese diaspora (or with any other ethnicity), that is, the gradual death of this ancestral language that takes place in this huge Crèvecoeurian cauldron. This is an issue the Portuguese-American poet Jorge de Sena has written about à propos his own children. In the poem "Noções de Linguística", while Sena observes his own children speaking in English – and not Portuguese – as they play with one another, somewhere out there in the Portuguese diaspora the Portuguese language and culture die and/or fade away on a daily basis. In my view, this panoramic novel featuring four generations of mostly Americans of Portuguese extraction clearly fleshes out this Senian predicament quite well as well as the clashes among them. This is further displayed in one more chapter of this novel, namely in "October 1976 – The Democratic Process", especially when Paul tries to explain, in Portuguese, the backgrounds of a few political candidates to his grandfather. He tries his best despite his linguistic limitations. In the meantime,

Teresa was still watching the laborious process and began to feel a twinge of sympathy for her grandson. As a rule, she and Chico had never corrected their grandchildren's grammar or vocabulary errors when they spoke Portuguese.

They didn't want to discourage them from continuing to use the family's original language. Teresa was now aware that at least some of her grown grandchildren had become self-conscious about speaking Portuguese no better than a youngster might. It was probably too late to do anything about it. (Barcellos, 2012, p. 272)

In addition to this linguistic loss, in this novel, some characters belonging to this third generation do not value their parents' or grandparents' efforts when they had to toil to create the economic conditions for survival and growth in California by purchasing land, painstakingly improving it through the years, purchasing equipment, etc. In the chapter, "May 1969 – Jojo Has a Wreck" – we witness Jojo, from the third generation, spoon-fed and spoiled, carelessly smashing equipment as opposed to the earlier generations who had to work real hard and save money to buy it.

With the death of both grandparents, most of the Francisco family is torn apart or divorced, as is the case with Candido ("Candy") and his wife Odile. During the course of the novel, Candido had an out-of-wedlock affair with Odile's best friend, Cynthia, and has learned that he will not be the one to manage the family's farm even if he is the oldest son. A bad manager and worker, Candido had taken advantage of his brother and sister. His nephew Henry ("Hank") would be the estate manager. In "June 1982- Henry Confronts Elvino", we learn that three Salazar boys had filed a lawsuit against their uncles Candido and Paulinho and their families regarding grandmother Teresa's will. The story ends with this once closely-knit family torn apart. Their disputes had to be settled in court in a rather nasty way and here, we witness, a few hired lawyers, the testimonies of signature specialists, along with a few chapters containing the customary American court scenes that are a trademark of some American fiction and film. At the end of this truly American story, the Azores and what it represented for this family had altogether eclipsed. This story also fleshes out America's current social debates on Otherness, sexual minorities, and homophobia through the characters of Ferdie Francisco, a homosexual, and his African-American lover, David Washington, when both attend Trey's and Lupita's (Mexican) wedding.

What really matters now is finding some family member who might be willing to carry the family legacy and business when most of the family is either dead, scattered or has pursued another career other than the family's dairy business (Paul through higher education or Paulinho fixing TVs). In "January 2006- Legacy" – the hope lies in Paulinho's grandson,

that is, Hank's son, for the baby's first word was neither "mama" or "dada". The boy's first word was 'cow'" (Barcellos, 2012, p. 324). When this boy becomes a grown man it is quite probable that he will have no Portuguese ethnic signs to display. In this sense, Julian Silva confirms my view of this novel as a story focusing on assimilation, a "saga covering many generations of an immigrant family" in which the "obvious objective is to show the gradual, but inexorable, assimilation of old world traditions into a new and overwhelming culture". This novel traces the gradual, that is, generational disappearance of one's country of origin to create what J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, in *Letters From and American Farmer* (1782) has postulated as this "new man", who is quintessentially American. Worth keeping in mind, nonetheless, is that with *Land of Milk and Money* we are given a truly unique and the most up-to-date fictional piece of writing about the role of the Portuguese in the California dairy industry.

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## RESUMO

*Land of Milk and Money* (2012), de Anthony Barcellos, gira em torno do trecho bíblico sobre Caim e Abel – embora adaptado ao contexto contemporâneo dos conflitos de família e de ganância na diáspora portuguesa na Califórnia, Estados Unidos da América. O presente ensaio propõe-se, por um lado, analisar esta saga, seguindo de muito perto as várias gerações da família Francisco, uma família de emigrantes, enquanto, por outro lado, pretende realçar o processo de assimilação gradual, embora inevitável, das suas tradições Açorianas por uma nova cultura dominante, a norte-americana.

## ABSTRACT

Anthony Barcellos' novel, *Land of Milk and Money* (2012) revolves around the biblical passage featuring Cain and Abel – but within the contemporary context of family feuds and greed in the Portuguese diaspora in California. This essay aims at highlighting this saga, which covers a few generations of the Francisco family, an immigrant family, while showing the gradual, but inexorable, assimilation of their Azorean traditions into a new and overwhelming American culture.