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Millie Gone to Brazil

Femicide and Migration in Early 20th Century Barbados - Brazil

Elaine P. Rocha

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SERIES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Elaine P. Rocha



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Elaine Rocha's book explores the nature of intimate partner violence against black women, using the stories of two black Barbadian women who were brutally murdered in the early part of the twentieth century — one in Barbados and one in Brazil. Her sensitive and incisive historical analysis locates these stories in the intersections between gender and labour history and provides a grim reminder that black women in the Americas are still subjected to such acts of violence today.

Dr. Alan Cobley

Emeritus Professor of History,
The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill campus

About the author

Professor Elaine Rocha is a Brazilian-born, renowned historian who studies the interconnected histories of the African diaspora, especially regarding Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities in Brazil and the Atlantic world. Her work has been described as “important and innovative,” offering “pathbreaking contributions that span geographic regions and thematic areas.” Currently a full professor in the Department of History and Philosophy at The University of the West Indies, Barbados, Professor Rocha holds a PhD in Social History from the Universidade de São Paulo, and Masters in Cultural History from the University of Pretoria, and in History from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo. Over the course of her career, she has taught at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, across several institutions in Brazil, and at the University of the West Indies since 2007. Her publication record includes three monographs, six edited collections, 29 book chapters, and 24 peer-reviewed journal articles, along with conference presentations and journalistic essays and articles. She has also delivered special lectures and presented at conferences across Brazil, Barbados, South Africa, USA, Dominican Republic, Canada, Colombia, Peru, Trinidad, United Kingdom, Netherland, France, Portugal, and Mexico.

Summary

‘Millie Gone to Brazil’ is the title of one of the most popular folk songs in Barbados. Written in the early 20th century by an unknown author, the song has travelled with Barbadian migrants to Cuba, the United States of America, Canada and England. It tells the story of a young woman – Millie – killed by her lover, who claimed that she had left Barbados to go to Brazil. This book focuses on the killings of Millicent Gittens, murdered in Barbados in 1916 and of Christine Minggs, a Barbadian immigrant murdered in Brazil in 1924. As a backdrop to those crimes, it depicts the poverty and marginality among Black populations during the post-abolition period in Barbados and Brazil, emphasizing the low status of black women and their vulnerabilities. To understand the vulnerability of Black Barbadian women. At the turn of the 20th century, economic, social and political exclusion drove thousands of people to emigrate from the small islands of the Caribbean in search of a better life. Black immigrants, although much necessary labor force, faced discrimination and limited opportunities to improve their lives, for women, life was harder. Who speaks on behalf of the dead women? In criminal processes, they are the victim, the corpse, not a person. ‘Millie Gone to Brazil’ sheds some light on the anonymous lives of Black people from lower classes in Barbados and examines a not well-known migration path of West Indians to the rainforest region of Brazil. Women and men struggled to make a life in Barbados and in Brazil, working, loving, building families, facing conflicts. Some survived, some perished. Scraps of their stories were registered in the pages of newspapers, in police reports, in criminal processes, and in popular songs. Some of those stories are narrated in this book.

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