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### **Shedding Light on Azorean Culture: From the Perspective of Azorean Writers**

In the past few decades, the Azorean community has had the opportunity for their “stories” to be heard through the works of unique Azorean writers and poets. These writers have shed light on the struggles of immigration, Azorean identity, and the challenges of living on an archipelago that originates from a volcano. This essay will explore what it means to be an Azorean based on the insightful works of Vitorino Nemésio, Dias De Melo, Emanuel Melo, and Anthony De Sa. The themes of immigration, identity, and the archipelago will also be explored.

#### **Vitorino Nemésio**

The first Azorean writer to become famous is Vitorino Nemésio, who was born in 1901 on Terceira Island. His most popular work is a story entitled *Stormy Isles—An Azorean Tale* which takes the reader through the struggles of living in a traditional family during a time of class structures. He coined the term “Açorianidade” or “Azoreaness” or which reflects the Azorean mentality. Many of his works demonstrate how the formation of the Azorean mentality was due to the island’s geographical location and physical characteristics. These factors include a dimension of insularity, isolation, and social strangulation. His works also demonstrate why Azoreans have a deep-rooted culture which is a result of living in isolation away from the rest of the world. His reflection about “Azoreaness” shows that Azoreans are unique from mainland Portuguese, as they struggled with many obstacles such as volcanoes, earthquakes, drought, and famine. These factors have shaped their character to be resilient and hard-working. His works give the reader a better understanding of what it means to be an Azorean, the formation of their character, and how the islands have shaped who they are.

#### **Dias De Melo**

Born in Pico island, Dias De Melo is one of the most popular Azorean writers. His most popular publication was in 1988 entitled *Dark Stones*. This story takes the reader through the journey of whaling as an Azorean trying to make a living. His works have been known to show the ills of society and the

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political problems that have occurred on the island. Professor Maria Dodman (Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016 guest lecture) explained that Dias De Melo was very left wing and was a political figure on the island. Through his works the reader is given the opportunity to understand the many issues that occurred on the island including: social class systems, oppression, and the daily struggles of living on an isolated island. Despite the island's beautiful features, there were many issues on the island that De Melo spoke about which gives the reader a better sense of the Azorean history. From both Dias De Melo and Vitorino Nemésio, it is made clear why many Azoreans chose to leave the archipelago based on the many challenges they encountered both physically and socially. For example, in *Dark Stones* we witness the struggles of making a living, since the island is surrounded by a vast amount of water. This story shows the dangers of whaling and how families lost their loved ones during these extraneous jobs.

### **Emanuel Melo**

Emanuel Melo is a current writer from the twenty-first century, who sheds light on the struggles of immigration and identity. One of his significant works is entitled *Avo Lives Alone*, which describes the isolated realities that many older immigrants from the Azores had to live through. Since many families were housed throughout Canada and the USA when they came to find a new life, many were separated from families and now found themselves alone and isolated. Melo explained how the same instances occur in the Azores, as he visited many of his mother's friends who lived alone in the Azores. From this story we can see the resilience and the will power to keep going despite being alone. It is clear there are similarities between the "Azoreaness" that Vitorino Nemésio described, and the experiences of Avo on the island that Emanuel Melo discusses. Throughout his work, Melo gives the reader a better understanding of the personal struggles of living on an island and what it means to be an older Azorean woman. His work shows us that the archipelago is a mentally challenging place to live, since it is so separated from the rest of the world.

### **Anthony De Sa**

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The last significant writer is Anthony De Sa, who was born in Toronto. His parents immigrated during the massive wave of immigration in 1953. One of his most famous works, entitled *Barnacle Love*, sheds light on the experiences of growing up in Toronto in a traditional Portuguese family. From his presentation and story, he outlines the experiences of immigration and the struggles of identity. He explained that his father, likely many other Portuguese families, wanted to embrace being Canadian. However, he was told to only speak English in his home, even though he was brought up by his grandmother. He explained how when he was in Canada he felt ashamed of his heritage and wanted to become “anglicized.” One very significant piece learned from his presentation was this “revitalization” of the Azorean heritage. He experienced a time of identity struggles, but later embraced his Azorean roots. This narrative speaks volumes about the Azorean culture and archipelago. This seems to be a reoccurring theme from many Azorean writers. They returned to Azorean roots after spending many years in North America. From his story, entitled *Urban Angel*, we see how the festivals and bands bring the Portuguese community together. There is a close bond between the Azorean people who moved to Toronto. This relates back to the idea of “Azoreaness” from Vitorino Nemésio. Despite all the challenges and struggles with identity and immigration, the Azorean’s still stick together or come back “home” at some point in their lives. This speaks volumes about the people of the Azores, the value of culture, and the strong bond and appreciation for community.

Overall, in looking to the words of Vitorino Nemésio, Dias De Melo, Emanuel Melo, and Anthony De Sa, the world has been invited to experience the life of an Azorean. These writers have shed light on the personal experiences of immigration, identity, and living on the island, all of which help us to understand what it means to be an Azorean.