

Female migration in the Cape Verde islands: From islandness to transnationalism

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Abstract: Following island studies scholars' suggestion to think "with the archipelago" in order to denaturalize and de-territorialize the object of study and grant more attention to decolonization processes and mobilities, this paper uses a gender perspective and multi-sited ethnographic research to explore changes in Cape Verdean identity perception related to islandness and migration issues. The tension between 'openness' and 'closure' is significant in the case of Cape Verde, where the relationship between the island and islanders represents a condition of being in the world. The sea opens to the outside, but it also closes off and imprisons islanders within the borders of the island. Before the 1970s, when most Cape Verdean migrants were men, inside/outside boundaries were played out as gender boundaries along the male/female opposition: external/internal, *Terra Longe* (the outside world)/*Terra Mamaizinha* (the motherland), danger/security. On the isle of Santo Antão, however, this has been changing with the gradual feminization of emigration to Europe. This shift has revolutionized the previous sense of home, giving rise to a new form of transnational female family that connects places of immigration and places of origin while also reorienting Cape Verdean female belonging from insular to transnational.

Keywords: migration, gender, multi-sited ethnography, collaborative research, Cape Verdean identity, island studies

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Introduction

Following the call by island studies scholars to think "with the archipelago" (Pugh, 2013) in order to denaturalize and de-territorialize the object of study and grant more attention to forms of mobility, in this paper I address changes in perceptions of Cape Verdean identity related to islandness and migration issues from a gender perspective, using multi-sited ethnographic research (Marcus, 1995).

Specifically, my main research question is: how have perceptions of the island's identity changed with the feminization of Cape Verdean transnational migration, with a particular focus on the island of Santo Antão? And has there been a specific change in female belonging? I will demonstrate that female migration has indeed profoundly changed identity and female

belonging, overturning insularity from a feeling of isolation to a component in a new transnational identity.

After having clarified my theoretical approach and presented my research site and methods, I delve into this issue by first analysing multiple aspects of the debate on Cape Verdean identity including colonialism, decolonization, and the African/European dilemma. I then examine Cape Verdeans' feeling of insularity, their 'idiosyncrasy', and how this is syncretically resolved in their Creole identity. I explore the hybrid nature of this Cape Verdean Creole identity, how women have favoured and mediated such creolity, and the way it has come to represent a crucial aspect of the development of gender identity. Finally, I focus on Cape Verdean female migration and the renegotiation of gender boundaries, perceptions of identity, and the feeling of insularity that these entail on the island of Santo Antão.

I conducted my research on Santo Antão and, while the more general theoretical considerations on insularity, hybridity, and syncretic identity apply throughout Cape Verde, in my focus on changes in female identity, the findings that lead me to address the question of departure refer mainly to this island. However, as I was able to ascertain by spending time with Cape Verdean communities in Rome, the considerations I pose can be extended at least to the islands of Barlavento (which I visited frequently, and especially São Vicente, where I lived for the last three months of my fieldwork).

The end of the great narratives of modernity and consequent crisis in social scientific representation led to a rethinking of the figure of the anthropologist and the ethnographic relationship (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Anthropological reflection came to focus on crucial issues such as the non-neutrality of the anthropologist and power inequalities in the observer/observed relationship (stemming from gender, class, and ethnicity), the anthropologist as a "positioned subject" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 19), the multiple identities individual ethnographers assume in the course of field research (Kondo, 1986), empathy (Pussetti, 2005), and the dialogical relationship (Tedlock, 1979; Tedlock & Mannheim, 1995) as primary tools of anthropological knowledge-formation. With the reflexive and postmodernist turn, scholars ceased thinking of other societies as timeless units relegated to isolated spaces, exotic societies devoid of history and immersed in an eternal present, thus occupying a different space-time dimension than that of the researcher (Fabian, 2001; Matera, 2017). The discipline sought to move beyond what anthropologist Vincenzo Matera (2017, p. 9, author's translation) calls "a strategic temporalization of diversity, a temporal and spatial caging that feeds an imaginary of the other as if out of time in an isolated and forgotten space." As Matera (2017) has pointed out, "we are all contemporaries" and live immersed in simultaneity. As many scholars of islands have noted, islands, by virtue of their conformation, have been crystallized even more firmly in this vision of an exotic, authentic, uncontaminated, and distant elsewhere. Matera (2017, p. 12, author's translation) reminds us that "it is the story in which we are all immersed, so-called modern and primitive, civilized and wild, exotic and familiar, all within the great temporal frame of simultaneity." Ethnographers themselves must restore the contemporaneity of the ethnographic encounter, breaking up the chronotype and bringing the temporal dimension back into the study of cultural diversity (Matera, 2017). However, the search for isolated, uncontaminated, and exotic societies remains such a powerful impulse that, as anthropologist Adriano Favole (2015) has noted, some tourist agencies organize 'human safaris' promising to bring tourists into contact with wild and exotic tribes.

My theoretical approach is situated at the nexus between new studies of islands and reflexive anthropology, both of which have rethought and reconfigured the study of time and space by focusing on the spatial turn and denaturalization of space in a way that highlights connections and interconnections in a world of archipelagos (Pugh, 2013). If the ocean is seen not as barrier that isolates but as a set of roads connecting different islands, the result is a “sea of islands” (Hau’ofa, 1994). Islands are isolated only if they are closed off; otherwise, they operate as hubs for a network of connections, part of an expanding archipelago. It was colonialism that created linguistic, political, customary, and cultural barriers, and the European continental imaginary that defined islands in terms of isolation. “Smallness is a state of mind,” wrote Epeli Hau’ofa (1994, p. 152; see also Favole, 2018, pp. 106–107). Colonialism has suppressed ‘escape routes’ by relegating many island peoples to a condition of isolation. The decolonial project in Island Studies consists in de-essentializing and dismantling Western stereotypes about islands. With globalization and transnational migration, many people have continued the “enlargement of their world” because “no man (and no culture) is an island” (Favole, 2018, p. 108, author’s translation). Indeed, Favole (2018, p. 109, author’s translation) has argued that “we are not islands in a remote sea, but a sea of islands and archipelagos in extension.”

From a methodological point of view, this decolonializing stance calls for the co-construction of data and collaborative research. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that “the analysis of narratives needs a ‘double vision’ that oscillates between narrator and protagonist” (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 288) in that the objects of social analysis are also subjects who analyse, and their perceptions must be considered with the same seriousness with which we evaluate our own. Interpretation is, therefore, always multi-directional and multi-perspectival. It follows that, to compensate for the asymmetry of power between the researcher and their interlocutors, ethnographic analysis must be co-constructed, polyphonic, and dialogic (Clemente, 2007, 2013).

Setting off from the theories developed by Hau’ofa (1994), I focus on decolonizing the representations of islands — representations that, as mentioned above, represent a critical reference point in the decolonization movement (Grydehøj, 2018). The Cape Verde islands’ colonial past has weighed heavily on their history, often intertwining in the construction of a dominant masculinity. In view of this point, I propose to also de-patriarcalize such representations, introducing a gender perspective to interpret processes of Cape Verdean mobility and identity construction.

I carried out my multi-sited ethnographic research from 2001 to 2003 in Ponta do Sol, a small fishing village on Santo Antão island in the Cape Verde archipelago, and from 2003 to 2005 in Italy. The Cape Verde islands are divided into two groups, Sotavento and Barlavento, and were uninhabited until the 15th century when they were colonized by the Portuguese to be used as an outpost for slaves taken from various parts of West Africa and as a stopover between Africa and South America. Cape Verde became an independent republic in 1975. The island of Santo Antão, part of the Barlavento group, has approximately 47,000 inhabitants and three municipalities (Porto Novo, Paul, and Riberira Grande); its economy is mainly based on fishing and agriculture, but tourism is also becoming increasingly important. Finally, remittances from migrants undoubtedly represent a fundamental source of income for the island.

According to data from the World Bank (2021), remittances as a percentage of GNP accounted for 28% in Cape Verde at the beginning of the 1980s, gradually declining to 8% in 2010 before rising to 12–13% in the following decade. This decline is due not to a decrease in the scope of remittances but rather to domestic economic development that has made this component of the economy smaller in percentage terms even while remaining considerable in absolute value.

During my fieldwork, I conducted more than 100 qualitative interviews with men and women from different social classes, ages, and lifestyle groups. The interviews were all conducted in Creole and then translated by me into English. I also collected four life histories from women of different generations and carried out participant observation at many social events such as festivities and informal gatherings. I developed dialogical relationships with the people I interviewed, adopting collaborative research approaches and co-constructing the ethnographic data while constantly taking into account my different positions in the fieldwork context (Rosaldo, 1989). For example, I was variously seen as a woman, foreigner, student, young person, tourist, Italian, friend, white person, stranger, Western European, familiar person/daughter, sister, or niece, and as an intermediary for interacting with relatives who had migrated to Italy.

Before proceeding, I would like to clarify the use of the term ‘Cape Verdean’ to refer to the islands and archipelago: ‘Cape Verde’ and ‘Cape Verdean’ are generally used to refer to the nation archipelago, while individual islands or island groups are indicated with their names (e.g., Santo Antão, the Barlavento islands). However, it was not always easy to distinguish between island and archipelago in the speech of Santo Antão residents, as my interlocutors often seemed to use ‘Cape Verdean’ indistinctly. That is, they used ‘Cape Verde’ to speak of both their own island and the nation-archipelago. In some interviews the distinction is clear, however, such as in Jorge's illuminating statement: “I am Cape Verdean, but my land is Santo Antão.”

More African or more European? The debate on Cape Verdean identity, a brief excursus

The sea has always been seen as the great protagonist of Cape Verdean identity. In fact, this identity has been described and analysed first and foremost through its islandness. The relationship between the island and the islander is seen as a particular condition of being in the world: in Cape Verde, the sea renders islanders open to the outside but, at the same time, it also encloses and imprisons them within the limits of the islands (Bettencourt, 1998). They experience a condition of being pulled in opposite directions, with a desire to remain on the island coexisting with a desire to stay away (V. Duarte, 1994). In this framing, the sea is the space/border that separates, attracts, and also frightens in that, as we will see, the world beyond the archipelago or *Terra Longe* is considered a dangerous, frightening place.

At the same time, forms of membership have also been performed in other spheres in the colonial and post-colonial periods. As island scholars rightly point out, it is important to take into account both island-to-island relations as well as relationships between the network of islands and each individual island, recognizing the archipelago as modelling a “world in process” (Stratford et al., 2011, p. 121): “Archipelagos are fluid cultural processes, sites of abstract and material relations of movement and rest, dependent on changing conditions of

articulation or connections” (Stratford et al., 2011, p. 122). Identification with the mainland in the Cape Verdean case has been two-fold, linked to the two parts of the archipelago: mainly connecting with Europe in the case of the Barlavento islands, and with Africa for the Sotavento Islands. Africa has represented a node of identification for the entire nation, however, especially in the post-colonial period and as a symbol of liberation.

Cape Verdean origins and identity issues have been and still are at the centre of an intense debate involving multiple different positions. To understand this debate, it must first be noted that much of the discussion stems from Cape Verdeans’ efforts to define their national identity as part of a process that began well before the country’s 1975 independence and has continued in the post-colonial period. In Cape Verde, as in most colonial countries, the relationship between politics and identity is so strong that the story of national identity goes hand in hand with the story of the end of colonialism. The key question posed by intellectuals, scholars, and writers has been, “Is Cape Verde more Africa or more Europe?” — and there are various perspectives on this question.

Under Portuguese colonialism, Cape Verdeans enjoyed a unique status with respect to other Africans in that neither the Portuguese nor other Africans perceived Cape Verde locals as Africans; for their part, Cape Verdeans perceived themselves as ‘pseudo-Portuguese’, the intermediaries used by the Portuguese to operate in other colonies. The much-debated question of Cape Verdeans’ Africanity or Europeanisation is thus deeply intertwined with the issue of national independence as well as political developments. At the same time, the movement revolving around the periodical *Claridade*, published in multiple issues between the 1930s and 1960s, manifested a new interest in Cape Verdean culture and language. As writer Manuel Veiga (1994) has suggested, the *claridosos* movement attempted to carry out a cultural operation of decolonizing the local environment and Cape Verdeanizing the archipelago even before the advent of political independence. It can be argued that Cape Verde’s cultural independence preceded its national sovereignty and that a sentiment of nationality heralded the legal recognition of the nation. However, the *Claridade* movement still suffered from a marked Portuguese influence, with the African component of Cape Verdean culture seen as folkloric and marginal in a predominantly European context. Novelist and essayist Gabriel Mariano (1959) offered a contrasting perspective, one that remains key for many scholars dealing with issues of identity in Cape Verde today: the idea that Cape Verdean culture is a new, original product created not by the Portuguese, but by Creole. The independence movement ended up revaluing the African component of Cape Verde thanks in part to the innovative ideas of its leader, Amílcar Cabral, who viewed the recognition of Africanity as the basis for national liberation (M. Duarte, 1999). In this new political context, literature came to play a militant role: breaking with *Claridade*’s ‘evazionist’ themes, art was used to pursue socio-political objectives, and artists became the ‘new’ men in the transformed and, finally, liberated society. In the words of the poet Ovídio Martins (1973), poetry came to mean feeling the ‘future-present’.

Insularity, Cape Verdean idiosyncrasy, and Creole identity

Identity continues to be a much-debated issue but, since national independence, the tendency has been to build an identity that is autonomous from both African and European ones. Of particular interest is the vision proposed by mainly female writers and intellectuals such as

Fatima Bettencourt and Vera Duarte: a vision of idiosyncrasy in which insularity is understood not as closure but as a dialectic between antinomies.

According to Duarte (1994), Cape Verdean identity revolves around eclecticism, precariousness, and a lack of solid secular roots. While, on one hand, these elements might render such an identity less solid, on the other hand, they make Cape Verdeans citizens of the world. She suggests that being Cape Verdean involves continuously overcoming a series of antinomies: lord-slave, white-black, colonizer-colonized. This antagonistic feeling with its antinomies, this idiosyncrasy and way of being and living, this ongoing drama of hoping for rain while living with drought, the perversion of the colonial administration, dreaming of America and emigration, an ever-present hope for tomorrow and feeling of “wanting to stay away even while wanting to stay close” (V. Duarte, 1994, p. 14, author’s translation): all of this, according to Duarte, characterizes being Cape Verdean.

Many writers, Cape Verdean and foreign alike, have also highlighted the importance of the sea and associated condition of insularity as a constitutive part of the identity of Cape Verdeans, and it is the relationship between island and islander that defines their way of being in the world. As mentioned above, Bettencourt (1998) explores the way the sea both renders islanders open to the outside world and, simultaneously, closes and traps them on the islands. There is, thus, a feeling of imprisonment and desire to escape. In ‘Insularité, évasion et résistance’, Dina Salustio (1998) likewise points to the sea as the great protagonist of Cape Verdean identity, showing how the idea of seabound insularity as existential and emotional survival, as a way of living life, runs through Cape Verdean literature. She cites various ways of writing about the sea, such as Barbosa’s framing of the drama of the sea as a source of isolation from the rest of the world but also as a love affair with the surrounding scenery. The “sea rises immense and infinite, dictating direction, tracing routes, revealing distances, marking silence” (Salustio, 1998, p. 33, author’s translation).

These authors thus favour a vision of Cape Verdean-ness as an autonomous, original, unique identity; the protagonist of a historical process different than that characterizing any of the other Lusophone, enslaved countries. Indeed, most scholars agree in framing the kind of Creole identity found in Cape Verde as the new and original fruit of continuous processes of renegotiation (see Giuffrè, 2007).

While contemporary Cape Verdean intellectuals’ reflections on identity find a solution to the antinomy of dual African and European belonging in the synthesis represented by a new and original way of being Creole, in Santo Antão specifically such belonging seems to represent an ongoing dilemma among both intellectuals and ordinary people. In people’s speech, the question still appears rather delicate and, in some ways, unresolved. This antinomy or dilemma appears to be a constitutive element of people’s belonging, providing a key pivot point around which perceptions of identity revolve. I did not observe gender differences in this area, however, as men and women seem to share substantially the same vision. My research participants immediately highlighted the historical birth of Cape Verde and policies of the Portuguese government, the contrast between Santo Antão and the more-African island of Santiago, and insularity. In almost all of the interviews, my interlocutors had a hard time defining themselves: ethnic identity still seems to represent a painful issue, characterized by a tension between being and not being (“We are Europeans but we are not”, “We are not Africans, but we are”) in which dual belonging is also dual non-belonging. This theme of

duality and hard-to-define belonging clearly surfaces in Marianna's words (Note: all informants' names are pseudonyms):

The problem is that... our culture is very strange and we put together things that many times, later, we no longer know how to locate. We claim that we are in Africa, we claim that we are in Europe, but we not in either Europe or Africa [...]. Here the crazy thing is that people often say: "Ah não eu não sou africana" ("I'm not African"), but we know where we are located, we know our origins, we know our culture, we know our history and how we were born, so I'm African, I'm on the African coast; I am closer to the African continent, I am black. And yet if I go and see my origins, I have no African origins; I have European origins. If I go through my past, if I go to see my father, my mother, their origins, and all these things, even though I'm black and have a lot of African, I have a mixture of colors because there was a mixing of colors [...]. When a Cape Verdean is born he is African, he is European, he is American, it is not known, he is a mixture, a mixture [...] because the Cape Verdean loves what is best... he loves what is best, he loves to live well and all that... but we are like this, culturally, and sometimes people find it difficult to situate themselves, to define themselves. (Author's translation)

Creolity is proudly claimed as a sign of Cape Verdean creativity; its ability to metabolize the legacies and influences of various cultures to produce something new while in turn influencing the source cultures. At some moments, however, this idea of Creole mixing almost appeared to be held up as consolation for the impossibility of belonging, an impossibility which is experienced as the inevitable result of insularity. The theme of insularity strongly permeates all the interviews: people feel linked to their own island firstly and to larger Cape Verde secondly. First of all, my research participants identified as being from Santo Antão. As Jorge told me:

The people of Santo Antão are very proud, we really like our land and then, it's an island, people love islands, it's a universe. I don't want to say we only have sea, it is a characteristic of the island, personally I can't love São Vicente as I love Santo Antão, that would be impossible, my land is Santo Antão. I am Cape Verdean, but my land is Santo Antão. I mean, this is a sense that is different from a continental country with a continent but not for me, my continent is my island, you understand, me for my island... (Author's translation)

While, on a discursive level, the two concepts often intertwine, Jorge's interview clearly illustrates the difference between belonging to the archipelago-nation ("I am Cape Verdean") and to one's own island ("my land is Santo Antão"). Here, insularity is experienced not in terms of exclusion or separation from the world, but of being a world unto itself, the only world islanders love and feel part of. This two-fold significance of insularity, of 'creolity', is also emblematic of that 'Cape Verdean idiosyncrasy' that Duarte (1994) and Bettencourt (1998) identify. This theme of idiosyncrasy arises in many of my interviews, together with the idea of a contrast between Santo Antão and Santiago (Sotavento's most important island and the one closest to Africa, both geographically and culturally) and between the Barlavento and

Sotavento islands more generally. This contrast seems to help people perceive and define their own identity in that the antinomy between belonging to Africa or Europe is resolved by distinguishing between African Cape Verde islands and European ones.

Of the Barlavento islands, Santo Antão is considered the farthest from Africa and most European of all, even though the issue is contradictory, and, in the end, people often have an awareness of being both. As Antonio told me:

Perhaps if we were integrated into the continent... if we were not insular... with a language other than the European or African ones... [from] Creole a different man was born, the mestizo man, with his own different culture. We cannot deny the European and African contributions. (Author's translation)

Another aspect that emerges from many interviews is the multiplicity of cultures and peoples that have influenced the formation of Creole identity, both directly with their presence and indirectly through what Cape Verdean emigrants have made their own and transferred to their homeland. Creole is credited with the ability to not only incorporate various elements, but also to always glean the most desirable parts of other cultures. As Marianna states:

People think of Creole as having the capacity to not only incorporate the various inputs, making them 'Cape Verdean', but also to always take the 'best' from other cultures. What I see is that, year after year, things change because of this acculturation that we have had especially after the beginning of emigration towards Europe, America, Africa... We go and bring things back and we always take what we think is best; what we don't think is good, we leave it there. That is the way we are made. (Author's translation)

The hybrid nature of Creole Cape Verdean identity

As the accounts of my research participants show, Santo Antão people's identification seems to follow Signorelli's (1986) theory of concentric circles to some extent: 1) when confronted with others from the same island, local identity prevails (fellow villagers often linked by family ties); 2) when confronted with the islands of Barlavento, the regional identity of the individual island prevails; 3) when confronted with the island of Sotavento, identity by area of origin prevails (Barlavento vs Sotavento islands); 4) when confronted with the outside world (Europe - Africa - America), national identity prevails.

As outlined above, the inhabitants of Santo Antão represent themselves among Cape Verdeans by self-identifying with Europe and in opposition to Santiago, which is identified instead as African. The feeling of superiority with respect to the people of Santiago contains an implicit value judgment (Europe as superior to Africa). However, when confronted with Europe, Cape Verdeans see themselves as opposed to Europeans as a specific and compact group, suggesting that this opposition has created a new and unique way of being in the world: the Creole way, developed by re-formulating and re-negotiating elements borrowed from different cultures, both African and European.

As Michel Lesourd (1995) notes, Cape Verde is at the centre of multiple flows, human ones (tourism, migration), cultural, economic, physical, and flows of solidarity, business, and

proximity to Europe. As such, “it is naturally multicultural, capable of capturing external influences and enhancing them” (Lesourd, 1995, p. 482, author’s translation). If ‘mobility’ and ‘the practice of confrontation’ are the elements capable of ‘producing identity perception’, Cape Verdeans (who originated from the encounter between different African ethnic groups and Portuguese colonizers) seem to have been accustomed to renegotiating their own identity from the outset. This identity has thus always been characterized by hybridism. Indeed, Cape Verdeans crossed ‘borders’, first as slaves, then as intermediaries for the other Portuguese colonies, then as sailors, and, finally, as migrants. Today, they mix with tourists, foreigners, and the products of globalization. This condition of openness and continuous renegotiation, transformation, and comparison appears to be a constitutive part of the Cape Verdean identity, and I would argue that its hybrid nature constitutes and nourishes that capacity to respond to innovation that seems to be the determining characteristic of this culture. As has been noted in relation to Jamaican culture, apparently hybrid in all of its cultural manifestations and expressions (Hall, 1991), Cape Verde would seem to be the emblem of the new cosmopolitanism.

Thanks to this attitude, Cape Verdeans, mainly women, have also brought together tradition and modernity and local and global processes in a creative way, giving rise (as I will show) to new families and social configurations. In other areas, this hybridization and configurations of modernity adapted to the local context prove more problematic, as for instance Niko Besnier (2011) finds in relation to the Tonga islands. For Tongans, objects from the diaspora and bodies are the main agents of engagement with modernity. Although modernity and tradition, the global and the local are (at least unconsciously) continuously renegotiated by means of these agents through small daily gestures, business transactions, and everyday activities, Tongans consider modernity and tradition two separate realities, relating respectively to the global and the local. While they are eager to appear modern and cosmopolitan, at the same time they are also anxious to show themselves respectful of tradition lest they be misjudged, thereby inhabiting a “delicate balance, an undefined project, that constantly requires close monitoring of the feedback of others, both the local community and the diaspora” (Besnier, 2011, p. 236).

Hybridization must also be seen as a constitutive process of the cultures typical of colonial situations and paradigmatic of postcolonial identities. Cape Verde can be considered part of the Black Atlantic, understood as a set of “traveling cultures” (Clifford, 1992), the products of encounters, clashes, travels, mergers, and forms of resistance. This hybridizing attitude is also reflected in *morna* — indeed, this musical genre has been considered one of the strongest traits of Cape Verdean identity, reflecting its hybridism and malleable character; it represents continuity in terms of tradition, but with a generous dose of creativity. The *morna*, also a fusion of two cultures, is simply Cape Verdean music (Rodrigues, 1994).

As Godfrey Baldacchino (2008) argues, hybridity is the norm for islands, and the archipelago is the product of multiple spatial trajectories (Pugh, 2013; Walcott, 1974). As outlined above, Cape Verdean islanders have always perceived their national identity as fluid and changeable. As Favole notes (2018, p. 32, author’s translation), this Creole identity “represented an escape from identity crystals (‘white’, ‘Blacks’, ‘Hindus’, ‘Muslims’, ‘animists’) that fought and clashed and, in some ways, continue to clash.” This identity is built in concentric circles and as a network among groups of islands (Sopravento and Barlavento). Indeed, as I have shown, each island’s identity has historically been built according to a system

of opposition to and/or association with the other islands, while the identity of the Cape Verdean archipelago has likewise been built in opposition to dangerous *Terra Longe*.

The development of gender identity

The role of women in this process has been crucial by virtue of their ability to creolize external elements. Indeed, scholars have long spoken of Cape Verde as “islands of women” (Sobrero, 1998, p. 292, author’s translation). Before the archipelago gained independence, it was women who stayed on the islands in positions of domestic slavery while the men were taken abroad to be sold as slaves, acted as go-betweens for the other Portuguese colonies, or worked as sailors; occupations that kept them away from home for long periods (Giuffrè, 2007; Sobrero, 1998). Women (mostly on their own) therefore led the formation of Creole society thanks to their ability to mediate otherness: with foreigners, death, tourists, in the relationship between generations, in managing daily life, and in family organization (see Giuffrè, 2007).

Writer Toni Morrison (quoted in Gilroy, 1993, p. 221) has stated that, “in terms of confronting the problems of where the world is now, black women had to deal with post-modern problems in the nineteenth century and earlier.” Likewise, Cape Verdean women have been confronted with such problems since the discovery of Cape Verde; their identity seems to have arisen precisely as a point of tension between change and attachment to tradition.

The ability of women to creolize external elements has been an important element in the formation of the hybrid character of Cape Verdean identity. Hybridism, in turn, can help us understand the formation of new female identities and a new gender consciousness in Santo Antão. However, we must first understand how this new awareness of gender identity has been taking shape more generally since independence. While older women identify first of all as Cape Verdeans, in the other generations this identity currently seems to be conveyed primarily by a relationship of opposition towards men. This perception of gender identity as opposed to male domination is a recent phenomenon for the women of Ponta do Sol, but it nevertheless stems from a process of reflection that began with independence. This reflection has been nourished in large part by Amílcar Cabral’s innovative ideas, and he played a fundamental role not only in national liberation but also in women’s liberation. The process first manifested through women’s associations that fostered forms of female solidarity, and more recently as a literary movement (Giuffrè, 2007).

Despite the discrimination they faced, many women also played an important role in the struggle for liberation. One example is Bibina Cabral, who became famous for her *batuko*, a typical dance of the island of Santiago with markedly African influences. Initially, only women performed this dance, especially in association with *tabanka* music or for weddings or baptisms. With her *badiu* spirit (*badiu* refers to the language and inhabitants of the Cape Verde Island of Santiago), Cabral’s popular songs represented a fundamental reaction to male chauvinism and colonialism. Today, there is widespread discussion among women about the female condition: writers such as Vera Duarte, Yolanda Morazzo, Orlanda Amarilis, Maria Nunes, Fatima Bettencourt, Dina Salustio, and Leopoldina Barreto, to name just a few, all address the condition of women and gender discrimination in Cape Verde, sometimes with irony and sometimes in denunciation. This female intellectual reflection thus highlights and problematizes being a woman in all of its aspects.

However, most of the women of Santo Antão have fairly limited contact with either women's associations or female intellectuals and their work. They only benefit from this movement indirectly, for example through television programs or other mediated sites of discussion. Intellectual women thus have a rather indirect influence on my interlocutors' lives and ways of thinking. Nonetheless, the influence of this women's movement has contributed, albeit indirectly, to fostering a new awareness of their rights among the women of Santo Antão as well. In addition to relationships with tourists and the new models of femininity proposed by television, a decisive turning point in the renegotiation of gender relations and women's emancipation took place in the 1970s with the beginning of Cape Verdean women's emigration. This emigration has played a fundamental role in conveying new models of being a woman, thereby affirming an awareness of gender role inequality. Furthermore, female emigration, with all of its complex implications, has also deeply influenced the experience of insularity, in a certain sense overturning the prevailing vision of this condition and adding an important element to multi-faceted Cape Verdean identity, as we will see in the following sections.

***Terra Longe* and *Terra Mamaizinha*: Migration and gender boundaries**

As outlined above, insularity is an integral part of the existential condition of Cape Verdeans — of the idiosyncrasy that manifests in the dilemma between leaving and staying, between hopes and fears. In this ever-present relationship between the inside of the island and the world outside it, between *Terra Mamaizinha* (the motherland) and *Terra Longe* (the outside world), Cape Verdean culture has always taken into account the departure looming on its own horizon: from childhood, locals see their fathers and older people depart on the big ships from the port of Mindelo and begin to dream of leaving themselves (Sobrero, 2007, p. xvii). More than anything else, emigration has contributed to improving the quality of life for both migrants and their relatives left behind (Carling, 2003; Lesourd, 1995), and those who remain thus view it as a great opportunity and desire to be pursued.

Emigrating is a widespread dream. There are many expectations associated with *Terra Longe*, as it is often seen as a sort of mythical, prosperous, promised land where everyone lives a good life, works, and is happy. A series of new forms of economic and social power are associated with the act of mobility. As a result, people and objects from outside are granted an 'added power' (Giuffrè, 2007, 2010). Of course, there are also concrete reasons for this mythification of *Terra Longe*, the first of which is certainly the sizeable remittances sent by migrants to Cape Verde (Carling, 2003; Carreira, 1983; Lesourd, 1995).

The exterior environment grants prestige but, at the same time, is also perceived as posing many dangers and capable of contaminating those who experience it. After all, even *Terra Mamaizinha* is similarly viewed with a certain ambiguity: as the land that maintains Cape Verdeans in a state of apathy, preventing them from setting out to discover new worlds, but at the same time as Mother Earth, welcoming and reassuring. Even abroad, the image of the islands oscillates between "our beautiful islands" viewed as "paradise lost," and "the dry land" (Giuffrè, 2007, 2017) that forced them to leave in the first place.

In Cape Verde, this framing has been historically linked to the production of gender boundaries that cast the islands as feminine and reassuring and the exterior as masculine and dangerous. Travel, departure, or migration were the prerogative of men, while the image of

the islands or motherland was associated with women. Indeed, there is such a clear dichotomy between Sea/Earth vs. Man/Woman that the very image of the islands has taken on feminine characteristics (Sobrero, 1998). As Cape Verdean writer Baltasar Lopes (in Sobrero, 1998, p. 295, author's translation) states: "The sea is the destiny of men; the islands are the feelings, a feminine homeland, *Terra Mamaizinha*, the mountains in the interior, the deep *ribeiras*, are the breasts to hide in!"

In many of my interlocutors' accounts, social space in Santo Antão has 'traditionally' been profoundly divided between the masculine and feminine according to patterns quite similar to those identified by Pierre Bourdieu (1998) among the Berbers of Kabylia in Algeria. Examples of this opposition include land/sea, indoors (private)/outdoors (public), soft/hard, informal/formal, reality/dream, and staying/leaving. Work was also divided by gender: jobs considered 'less noble' or 'more domestic' — that is, related to everyday life — were reserved for women. Women used to sell fish caught by men, do the housework, raise the children, fetch water, and 'beat' corn with a *pilão* (mortar and pestle). They also performed informal jobs considered relatively inconsequential: for example, the women of Santo Antão engaged in a great deal of *negocio* or small-scale trade during the Romaria holidays (Giuffrè, 2017).

Everything relating to women was closely connected to a sense of home, *Terra Mamaizinha*; it was tied to a sense of reality and series of activities and practices related to everyday life. The house in particular was an exclusively feminine space in which women, often single mothers, made the decisions. The symbolism of boundaries as described by Mary Douglas (1979) played a significant role in Santo Antão, where female boundaries were represented by islandness, with *Terra Mamaizinha* considered 'home' in a broad sense while the sea, outdoors, and *Terra Longe* were the outside, masculine, and dangerous. The larger world abroad was considered extremely dangerous and contaminated, but it gave men a certain prestige: he who overcame dangers in *Terra Longe* returned triumphant yet somehow transformed. *Terra Longe* was portrayed as a dangerous place where the migrant becomes a quasi-hero who has to perform a sort of rite of passage in order to return home victorious.

This ambiguous character of *Terra Longe* clearly manifests in the imaginary expressed by Santo Antão locals and, in particular, the version of a story about a lame horse, *A historia do cavalo de perna quebrada*, told to me by one of my research participants, Bibia. In this story, a boy decides to ride the "horse with the broken leg" against the advice of his father and others who warned him that this lame horse was taking people to the *Terra Longe*, a place populated by bad people who would catch and eat him. He went anyway and, after many dangerous and frightening incidents, managed to escape from the bad people and return home safe and sound, like a hero. This image of *Terra Longe* and its 'savage' inhabitants is a recurring theme in Cape Verdean literature and traditional tales, referring both to people from other places and those who break with conventions and norms (Giuffrè, 2017, 2010). It is this imaginary of foreign danger that fuels locals' tendency to attach such great power to the migrants — previously men — who manage to dominate *Terra Longe*. Home is strongly characterized by the presence of women, and historically it has been in the home itself that women were expected to find their space of identification.

Female migration and the feminization of *Terra Longe*

Independent female migration from Cape Verde has acquired growing importance since the 1970s (Carling, 2002) and has been directed towards Italy, Spain, and Portugal, in particular. Though mobility is a constitutive part of Cape Verdean society (Åkesson et al., 2012; Carling & Åkesson, 2009), female emigration had been a novelty previous to this shift. Before Cape Verdean independence, it was men who travelled, first as slaves, then as intermediaries to other Portuguese colonies, and finally as sailors who spent more time away than at home (Giuffrè, 2007; Sobrero, 1998). Apart from a period of forced migration to São Tomé (Carreira, 1977) and internal migration from island to island in which women played an important role (Carreira, 1983), women mainly stayed behind to manage their homes and raise children, having limited opportunities to work in the public sector, subsistence farming, or petty trade (Andall, 1999; Finan & Henderson, 1988; Giuffrè, 2007).

In Santo Antão, the transition from primarily male migration to primarily female migration has affected the community profoundly, producing changes in social and family dynamics. It has also radically changed both women's relationship with the outside world and the meaning of home/island, giving rise to a new, transnational model for the management of the matrifocal home that overturns the classic relationship between *Terra Mamaizinha* and *Terra Longe*. Because of migration, women have acquired new economic power and innovatory influence in their place of origin. Today, it is mostly female migrants who send home remittances, bring back gifts, and introduce new objects (appliances, electronics, clothes, and cosmetics), thus impacting local habits, tastes, fashions, and culture.

Contact with the outside world is currently handled mainly by women. As many of my interlocutors pointed out, it is thanks to migrant women that they are able to manage everyday life on the islands. For example, Vitoria said:

My sister, the one that I like, every time she comes to Cape Verde and then has to go back to Italy, we hug and cry a lot, because I really like her... They help me a lot because I don't buy any clothes myself. I get them all from Italy. They send me and my children everything. (Author's translation)

Female emigrants enjoy a power — that of mobility — that is denied to those who remain but nonetheless recognized by the community of origin. An individual's mobility also grants their island-based family a sort of prestige by extension, almost like an object of value in the eyes of their neighbors: even people who have no real personal accomplishments of note still symbolically earn dignity by brandishing the migratory success of a relative (Giuffrè, 2007). Now that travelling has become a female prerogative, with men emigrating much less and mainly remaining in their homeland, how does this sort of symbolic reversal of the male/female–outside/inside–home paradigm affect the way men and women interact and live their lives?

Women, no longer enclosed within the domestic confines of *Terra Mamaizinha*, undoubtedly acquire a number of rights and privileges thanks to their new mobility: new symbolic, economic, and social power. Their standing is increased by their knowledge of other parts of the world and ability to introduce objects and news from 'outside'. They also have the enormous satisfaction of successfully supporting their families and one day, perhaps,

being able to buy a house. Nearly all of the women who had remained on Santo Antão expressed having this desire, and one of them, Zinha, described it as follows:

My greatest dream, for example, is to get on a ship and ask God to give me a chance to buy a house, because all of my dreams are about buying a house... In every dream I have there's a house, all I want is a house, even a small one, but a house. (Author's translation)

Cape Verdean society has thus been intensely impacted by the transition from cyclical, temporary male migration to a new model based on women's permanent settlement abroad. While the new culture of female migration has led to a dichotomy between women who emigrate and women who remain, it has also created an all-female continuum between *Terra Mamaizinha* and *Terra Longe*, thereby renegotiating important aspects of familial and household organization. Female emigrants have been irreversibly transformed in some way by the migration process. However, the relationship between place of origin and 'abroad' is becoming more and more dialectical because of the increasing domestication of *Terra Longe* through its feminization.

Cape Verdean society is based on a matrifocal model in which filial ties are more important than marital ones and the mother-child dyad is the primary kinship system, with the mother as the head of the family. Mothers are responsible for managing the house and, above all, materially caring for children even when fathers are present (and they are more often wholly absent); while fathers may be seen as authoritative figures, they are not expected to support children economically (Åkesson et al., 2012; Giuffrè, 2007; Lobo, 2006).

On the island of Santo Antão, this social model has been strengthened by women's migration. It accentuates their matrifocality due to two important factors: on one hand, thanks to the migratory act itself and the remittances sent to their children and relatives, the families of migrating women grant them greater economic and decision-making power. These female emigrants assume the role of family head from a distance — a role that previously belonged to male migrants. On the other hand, the matrifocal model is also reinforced in the place of origin due to the fact that children are entrusted not to fathers, but to other female family members (usually grandmothers and aunts) or female friends or neighbours, with these women receiving and managing remittances from the children's mothers.

Some authors have called this new family organization the transnational triangle (Åkesson et al., 2012), a strongly matrifocal model revolving around biological mothers, surrogate mothers, and children. Many of my interlocutors spoke about a figure commonly called "grandma-mom." Nita, for example, shared:

My mother emigrated in 1974... I was three and a half... I grew up with my grandmother, she is my mother, and that is why I don't call my mother "mom" like my grandmother... I don't call her "grandma"... I still haven't found myself a grandma. (Author's translation)

This model has now evolved in a transnational direction, but it was already very common in Cape Verde even before the rise in female migration. Local examples of it can still be found in Santo Antão as well: here, many of my research participants were raised, for short

or longer periods, by *pais de criação* (foster parents) (Giuffrè, 2012, 2007), relatively wealthy people to whom the poorest families entrusted their children in a sort of informal adoption arrangement, to raise them and teach them a trade. For example, as one of my main interlocutors, Maria Giulia, told me during an interview:

I... when I was young, my life was like a novel, I did not grow up with my parents, but with old people... but old people who were worth it... they didn't send me to school, but they did raise me... so well that even now I can still use what they taught me, and they taught me domestic work, they taught me how to live with other people, that's why I pray for them every day, because they raised me. (Author's translation)

These surrogate mothers who receive and manage remittances take on responsibility for the children of migrants, always with the understanding that they must answer to the biological mother. In this matrifocal model, it is thus a woman, the head of the family at a distance, who sends money to another woman, a 'proxy', who acts as the local head of the family in a sort of hierarchical matrifocality. By raising these children, surrogate mothers also acquire substantial economic and decision-making power in the eyes of the community, becoming *de facto* family heads locally. Indeed, the impact of female migration on the women who stay behind goes beyond gratitude, admiration, and envy. In many cases, thanks to these remittances, the surrogates are able to support other members of their extended families as well. Moreover, as they become the primary stand-ins for the migrants, these women likewise take on a sort of reflected prestige stemming from the migrant mothers' mobility.

The meaning of the house in this new transnational space is thoroughly intertwined with motherhood and work along three axes: child, migrant mother, and surrogate mother. The boundary between inside and outside expands to include *Terra Longe* as well, as the outside world becomes an extension of the house. Santo Antão women's mental maps of the idea of home have changed radically. With the creation of this 'private diasporic sphere' (Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011) and extension of domesticity beyond the home, the space previously perceived as dangerous comes to be seen as domesticated or 'tamed' by the presence of women.

Terra Longe is also feminized and domesticated through the continuous flow of objects taking place in the matrifocal transnational domestic sphere. Similar to Ruba Salih's (2002) findings with Moroccan female migration in Italy, the flow of goods in Santo Antão is articulated by the concept of home. Cape Verdean women construct the spaces they inhabit through objects, and they use them to negotiate continuity between the place of origin and the place of migration. As Besnier (2011, p. 231) has noted, in diaspora contexts it is not only "the global that localizes but also the local that globalizes."

The resulting home is both an inhabited physical space and a symbolic conceptualization of belonging. As Salih (2002, p. 65) observes, "women experience home as a space constructed by the interaction and combination of goods symbolizing their double belonging." There are two processes through which this feminization takes place. In the first, 'the outside' is brought into migrant women's homes in a tamed form, serving as a sign of migratory success. Goods such as appliances and clothes flowing in from outside also visually mark the household's membership in the transnational sphere; they distinguish the homes of migrants and their relatives from other houses. In the migratory context, the house goes from

playing the role of intimate domestic space to playing the role of public space, a showcase for performing the migratory success of its owner through the exhibition of objects. It is common for such houses to be more or less constantly under construction, with modern bathrooms, appliances, televisions, and other amenities always being added. They stand empty except during summer visits by their migrant owners, but, in the meantime, they publicly represent the social status the women and their families have attained. Secondly, 'the inside' is exhibited in migrants' houses in the land of immigration. For example, when visiting my interlocutor's homes in Italy, I was struck by the many elements signaling their origins: posters and photographs of their island and family hanging on the walls, CDs of Cape Verdean music, and Cape Verdean food and sweets always on hand to be offered to guests.

In this expansion of *Terra Mamaizinha* to include *Terra Longe*, now tamed by women, the sea that once separated now becomes a continuum between the two lands: a bridge that joins up and enables new, transnational family structures.

Conclusion: From islandness to transnationalism

My research aimed to investigate changes in the insularity-characterising perceptions of Cape Verdean identity as a result of the feminization of transnational migration since the 1970s, viewed from a gender perspective. My questions were, how have perceptions of the island's identity changed with the feminization of Cape Verdean transnational migration, with particular focus on the island of Santo Antão? And has there been a specific change in female belonging? Engaging with these questions, I have shown that female migration has profoundly changed identity and female belonging, transforming insularity into a key component of a new transnational identity. I began by analysing the theoretical debate on Cape Verdean identity, taking in account the implications of decolonization and the political debate surrounding the question of whether Cape Verdeans are more European or more African. I then examined how the main element permeating Cape Verdean identity, insularity, is connected to the characteristic idiosyncrasy of this identity and how this idiosyncrasy, as well as the dilemma between European and African identity, is resolved in a new Creole identity strongly characterized by hybridism. As highlighted by local poets, writers, and intellectuals, this hybrid Creole identity has been largely forged by women acting as almost natural mediators in the various fields of private, symbolic, and social life. After a brief excursus into the development of gender identity, I then focused on the way feminine transnational migration has impacted perceptions of boundaries, specifically the relationship between *Terra Longe* and *Terra Mamahizina*: a boundary which in the past was characterized by a masculine/feminine dichotomy and feelings of insularity.

In conclusion, as women migrate more and more, *Terra Longe* has taken on feminine connotations and become an extension of the intimate home, *Terra Mamaizinha*. Migrant women's lives revolve around a transnational dimension, and they are looking after their entire families from a distance. These shifts, along with the new gender model that migration offers to the women who stay behind, all converge (albeit contradictorily) to render the place of origin more permeable to influences from 'elsewhere' — influences which until recently could only be imagined. An image of islands inhabited almost exclusively by women since the men had migrated abroad now overlaps with an image of a feminine *Terra Longe* delimited by blurred, indefinite boundaries. *Terra Longe* has come to be populated by migrant women

moving in transnational spaces, travelling and periodically returning home, maintaining contact with family and friends, sending goods and remittances, and acting as family heads at a distance. In this circuit of women travelling from *Terra Longe* to *Terra Mamaizinha* and back, the ‘feminine’ islands and comforting warmth of *Terra Mamaizinha* seem almost to encompass ‘abroad’ as well. At the same time, *Terra Longe* is brought into the place of origin via goods from abroad set up in the homes of migrants as an expression of their migratory success. Symbolically, therefore, this new transnational ‘home’ created by women can serve as a space for resolving contradictions: *Terra Mamaizinha* and *Terra Longe*, departure and return, private and public life, femininity and masculinity, inside and outside, islandness and transnationalism.

Having taken on feminine characteristics, *Terra Longe* seems to appear less dangerous and more desirable, in some ways, to the women who stay behind. In a sense, abroad is ‘tamed’ by the presence of women in the imaginary related to the home. In the case of Santo Antão, women do not suffer from a sense of never feeling at home no matter where they go; instead, ‘outside’ is brought into the female world of the islands and, through a powerful process of genderization, the ‘outside’ is likewise turned into home and integrated into the female world (Giuffrè, 2017). The sea that previously separated and somehow imprisoned instead becomes a bridge between houses on the islands and houses in the place of immigration. This bridging effect gives rise to a sort of transnational islandness in a network of lands that are united, rather than separated, by the sea (Hau’ofa, 1994). In this process, the sea likewise becomes a great bridge to the land of immigration, thereby overturning insularity and bringing about a shift in Santo Antão women’s belonging from insular to transnational.

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