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# MIGRATION OR DIASPORA? PERCEPTIONS OF THE CAPE VERDEAN DISPERSION IN THE WORLD\*

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## ABSTRACT / RESUMO

*The word diaspora is becoming increasingly more used in the intellectual and institutional fields, as well as in the media to designate Cape Verdean migration. However, the traditional and common designations about the Cape Verdean abroad and of the transnational constitutions that emigration promotes in the archipelago are still upheld. In this work, we discuss the most common conceptions of Cape Verdean dispersion, the way these are connected with life stories (individual and collective) that are always affected by emigration and as well as with the practical knowledge the Cape Verdean society has of the migration world. Furthermore, we reflect on the reasons for the scarce dissemination of the word diaspora amongst the poorer segments of the population, taking into consideration that non-emigration on one hand and the social and class position changes derived from emigration on the other are considered the most outstanding social experiments of the archipelago. On the other side, the current adoption of the word diaspora as a synonym of migration seems to express the intellectual and official concerns regarding the political, social and cultural effects of the expressive Cape Verdean dispersion, with the probability of the scattered communities gradually escaping the nation's political rise.*

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The main fields of investigation are the development economics, international economy, sociology of development, African history and the social issues related to the development. From a geographical point of view the sub-Saharan Africa; Latin America; East, South and Southeast Asia as well as the systemic transition process of the Eastern European countries constitute our objects of study.

Several members of the **CeSA** are Professors of the Masters in Development and International Cooperation lectured at ISEG/”Economics”. Most of them also have work experience in different fields, in Africa and in Latin America.

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## CAPE VERDE IN AFRICA

In the whole of African experiences, we consider Cape Verdean migration organized itself as a diaspora sooner, consequently, the concerns with communities abroad appeared in Cape Verde earlier than in other African countries (OIM, 2010). The Constitution of the Republic has always consecrated Cape Verdean citizenship as a right of the emigrants and the laws on citizenship stipulate that Cape Verdean citizens residing abroad have the possibility of not losing their original citizenship and enjoy the same rights even after acquiring foreign citizenship. In this context, it is understandable that the anticipation of the entry of the word *diaspora* in the Cape Verdean migration lexicon carries great expectations of transferring competences and resources for the development of the country.

In the African continent in general, the term is associated to *development* (Bakewell, 2008)<sup>1</sup> and is solidly established in the lexicon, contributing to a quick expansion of the literature handling the potential engagement of the diaspora in the development processes (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2007). The Diasporas of developing countries, which include the whole of Africa, are widely seen as having responsibilities in sustaining the development of their land of origin, and the African Union itself has adopted the definition. Among the authors that reflect on the connections between (African) diasporas and development, Nyberg-Sørensen (2007) show the term is established in the political discourse as well as in popular speech, potentially making its use abusive, although it serves multiple functions, including the support for appeal requests, political power and obligations (Bakewell, 2008). This process has always been described in Cape Verde, that, in comparison to other African countries, anticipated the approach to widespread communities, as an important measure in the successive governments and, through time, the governmental executive in Cape Verde has insisted on the arguments that may bring the emigrants to broaden the traditional help they give to their families to the country.

The characteristics and potential of participation of the widespread community demonstrated in the development of the country have been a central theme of the analysis of Cape Verdean migration and, on the wider scope of the relationship of African countries and their diaspora, in the case of Cape Verde, it has been assumed the widespread Cape Verdean community is potentially explorable and a resource worth developing. This assumption, recent in Africa, according to Haas (2006), in Cape Verde allowed the development of approach mechanisms to emigrants abroad, maintaining and re-establishing contact and encouraging them to live according to the expectations of the place of origin.

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<sup>1</sup> Until recently, the concept of 'diaspora' was mainly used by cultural studies, and rarely referred to in the literature of studies on development (or African studies), to which it appears definitely associated. According to Bakewell, (2008) the growth of literature on African diasporas is also the reflexion of the fall of frontiers between subjects.

## MIGRANTS AND REMITTANCES

In the last decades of the 20th century, we have witnessed the consolidation of the presence of Cape Verdean communities abroad, coinciding with significant changes in the general profile of Cape Verdean migration. In their dislocations, Cape Verdeans maintain a preference for emigration to Portugal but other European countries are also important destinations, as is the case of France, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany. In that period, we witnessed the reactivation of the migrating networks towards the United States of America, a country that received the first wave of emigration from 1900 to 1926. The (rough) distribution of Cape Verdeans in the more current destinations is the following:

### Estimate of the distribution of Cape Verdean emigrants in a group of destination countries

Destination Countries	Emigrants
<b>United States of America</b>	265 000
<b>Portugal</b>	80 000
<b>Angola</b>	45 000
<b>Senegal</b>	25 000
<b>Netherlands</b>	20 000
<b>Argentina</b>	5 000

Source: ICMPPD, 2009, Cape Verde- Needs Assessment in the Field of Asylum and Migration

Despite the general indication of a reduction of the departures from the country, the current dispersion of Cape Verdeans involves approximately 30 countries in Africa, America and Europe and the specificity of Cape Verde as a country with a disperse community larger than the one residing in the archipelago is maintained; the 2000 census indicated 500 000 nationals living abroad and 450 000 in Cape Verde <sup>2</sup>.

The reduction of the migration fluxes from Cape Verde coincides with better living conditions in the archipelago and the rise of the return movements, although these mainly involve emigrants in countries (such as São Tomé e Príncipe, Angola, Guiné-Bissau or Senegal) that are not listed among the destinations whose remittances are essential to Cape Verde. From another perspective, Spain is a recent destination but it is accounted among the 6 destinations with a larger volume of transfers to Cape Verde. On the other hand, the United States of America, where 53% of Cape Verdean emigrants live, take the third place for monetary aids from emigrants towards Cape Verde:

<sup>2</sup> ICMPPD, 2009, Cape Verde- Needs Assessment in the Field of Asylum and Migration.

### Main countries of origin of remittances to Cape Verde

Origin of Remittances	Transfer Value (EUR)
<b>Portugal</b>	28 million
<b>France</b>	19 million
<b>United States of America</b>	12,5 million
<b>Netherlands</b>	10,8 million
<b>Italy</b>	6,4 million
<b>Spain</b>	3,2 million
<b>Luxembourg</b>	2,6 million
<b>United Kindom</b>	2,3 million
<b>Suisse</b>	2,1 million
<b>Germany</b>	1,3 million
<b>Angola</b>	480,000

Despite the references to the diminishing fluxes of remittances<sup>3</sup>, the 2008 data indicated that these were still the country's main source of income (9% of the Gross Domestic Product). In 2010, the money remittances rose to US\$144 millions<sup>4</sup> and the main urban centres in the country (Praia and Mindelo) remained the main recipients of those resources.

The international crisis is considered the main cause for the reduction of the remittance fluxes as it affects the emigrants' working conditions and employment. However, statistics do not exhaust the reasons for the phenomenon and, to explain it, the migrant and non-migrant Cape Verdeans<sup>5</sup> keep a perspective of the material dimension of the enterprise associated to the socio-economic and cultural environment. The reasons suggested by common sense can be combined in a set, according to which the current behaviour of emigrants and their remittances are due to: difficulties they face in Cape

<sup>3</sup> <http://asemana.publ.cv/spip.php?article58074&ak=1>, page viewed on 27.05.2011

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> According to interviews made in 2010, in the scope of the research on the discourse on diaspora. Concerning the remittances, we find the positions expressed by Cape Verdean readers (migrants and non-migrants) on national newspapers available online coincide with the contents of the interviews.

Verde when they intend to invest (reduced transparency of laws, different treatment in comparison with non-emigrant foreign investment, unfavourable monetary policy, lack of guarantee that their assets will be protected, improper appropriation of emigrants' land by some town councils); negative evaluation of the development of the country with, as a consequence, the reduction of the interest in returning after a lifetime of work abroad; rise in the commitment with the countries that have taken them in and offered access to security, education for their children, favourable credit, justice, peace on the streets, etc. The theme is also the motif of criticism concerning what some of the respondents point out as the *ignorance of Cape Verdeans of the reality of their migration these days* because, for example, contrary to the widespread idea that help always comes from abroad, the current circumstances have demanded that, in certain cases, the most recent emigrants will turn for help from families in Cape Verde to get through the early stages of relocation and adaptation to a foreign country. In the case of people that receive such remittances directly, as the research by Akesson (2011) shows, the (re) constitution of families at the destination is, also, a recognized reason for the fall in remittances.

The justifications, mentioned above in this work, concerning the emigrants' remittances suggest an ongoing process of attempts to disaggregate the diaspora and observe the different experiences in certain groups, regions and places of destination of which the most visible expression, for non-migrants, consists of the differentiated behaviour of the communities in terms of remittances to Cape Verde. More recently, there has been a growth of a more systematic attention aimed at the social and symbolic effects of the mobilities for Cape Verdean society (Akesson, 2011; Évora 2007) going beyond the analysis of the material and objective benefits, or the references to the place of origin seen as place of all the myths of origin and of actual or desired return.

In the research we made (Évora, 2010), the interpretations focusing on the remittances are formulated by people connected to Cape Verdean migration in different ways (migrants, non-migrants, migrants' relatives, representatives of official organizations) and assign different meanings to the transfers and the Cape Verdean dispersion around the world. In other words, and according to the Sato interpretation (2007) of processes of this kind, people meet in different places, facing up with rules, values, projects and goals in an autonomous or heteronymous mode; they are positioned in different hierarchic steps or not; with more or less power span to define the course of what is wanted from migration, the forms of organization, the objectives of the enterprise as well as the routes taken.

## **Preservation and integration as dimensions of the diaspora**

By mentioning internal and external reasons, they refer to the conceptions on migration and diaspora in the way they are made operational in everyday's practices. In that sense, for instance, they highlight an essential aspect of the definition of a diaspora: the assumption of existing values in the destination societies by emigrants that underlies the appreciation of the social resources the immigration country puts at their disposal. The existence of diverging opinions indicates the current Cape Verdean migration experience is perceived in a different way and, as demonstrated by the data of our research, they reflect the positions of the groups in relation to migration. Above all, they bring clarification to the possibilities and competences of the different groups to impose their conceptions and expectations in relation to migration, migrants, stays abroad (and absences from the country) and the position of Cape Verde in the wider context that includes the widespread communities.

In synthesis, by refusing an analysis that would homogenize the causes of Cape Verdean migration and its symbolic achievements in identity, we consider that, depending on their social positions and relation to migration, the groups elaborate interpretations and specific connotations on diaspora and the form of unity and solidarity that is maintained by a collectivity despite its geographic dispersion and the installation in different political organizations.

As with the studies interested in the internal repercussions of the emigrant stays, the ones that approach the communities abroad also constitute an important bibliography, focus on culture, education issues and the connection and relationship with the place of origin. However, beyond cultural preservation, there is still a lot to be understood on how Cape Verdeans incorporate the distinctive aspects of the societies of destination and the process of identification and interiorization of the norms and values of those communities<sup>6</sup>. These aspects are essential for the description of a group as a diaspora, that is to say, they clarify the conditions and the capacity demonstrated by the immigrant group to develop a prolonged contact with other communities at the destination and absorb the qualities of the place, incorporating new elements while still preserving a relationship with a mythical or actual place of origin. According to the definition of diaspora defended by authors like Safran (1991), this last characteristic confirms the group retains a collective memory of the land of origin that refers to its physical location and historical achievements. Moreover, in the authors' opinion, it ensures another essential quality consisting of a social experience where the group feels partially alienated or isolated from the society of destination because it believes it is not, or can not be, totally accepted by it. The ancestral land of origin is lived as being its real place, the ideal home where the emigrant (or its descendants) should (or could), eventually, return to when conditions allow it (Safran, 1991). Cohen's perspective is to

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<sup>6</sup> Studies put more emphasis on the effects of dislocations, with the underlying idea of the immigrant as possessing a base personality or a collective memory built since childhood and of which he keeps an indelible mark, much more than the emphasis in the rhythm and the modalities of adoption of the behaviour of nationals by immigrants and vice-versa.



consider that the troubled character that usually characterizes the relationship with the societies of destination does not discard the possibility that that meeting brings a distinct creativity that enriches the more tolerant welcoming societies (Cohen, 2008). These terms indicate one of the main controversies of the theoretical field of the diaspora as several authors, such as Tarrius (2001), consider the transnational character of the current migrations and the fluidity of the contacts must be highlighted as the main definers of a diaspora experience.

The enlargement of the field of usage of the term diaspora associated to the Cape Verdean experience coincides with the expansion of the term which currently includes a wide semantic and practical field and exceeds the restrict application to classical experiences of dislocation and exodus<sup>7</sup>. Nowadays, it includes populations of refugees (political or resulting from war), migrants, ethnic or racial minorities, etc and Tololyan (1996) agrees that the ease with which the term is used as a synonym for those phenomena, while strengthening it, brings conceptual problems due to the fast multiplication of meanings and uses that present it as a synonym for immigrant or descendants of immigrants. Thus, we can argue that not every migrant become Diasporas and not every diaspora can be considered as migrants (although their ancestors may have). In the same way, not everyone engaged in transnational practices are necessarily diasporic; they may simply, operate as networks of people with restricted relationships to some place (actual or imaginary).

On another perspective, the efforts in conceptual delimitation are seen as attempts to restrict and attribute the definition to some populations and not to others, reserving it to those that were dignified by social representations about their social qualities demonstrated when they dedicated to exchanges (trading diaspora), by the ancientness of civilization (Chinese or Indian) or by the dimension of the original catastrophe (Jews, Armenians or Palestine). The critics of restrictions conclude that, for the term to have value, it should be applied to all the widespread populations that maintain connections, whatever their prestige, and not only to Jews, Armenian, Greek or Chinese (Schnapper et al., 2001).

Where Cape Verde is concerned, the doubts in the application of the term to the migratory experience are presented only by a few authors that point out the limited dimension of the permanent presence of Cape Verdean in comparison to communities such as Indian, Chinese, Jews, etc that settled in other places. Due to the controversy generated by the application of the term to Cape Verdeans, Gibau (2008) considers that the greater impact of recent re-conceptualization of the diaspora is the way the diasporic population redefines itself. The common experience of relocation, according to the author, is the basis of solidarity among Cape Verdeans in different places, or even different countries, and it is evoked in informal conversations and through traditional

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<sup>7</sup> In Western literature, the dislocations of the Greek, Jews or Armenian, for instance, are considered classical experiences.



music, allowing, this way, the connection of personal experience with the experience of every Cape Verdean (Gibau, 2008:256).

### **Transnational dynamics as a factor of contemporary diaspora**

Our researches show the distinctions between *migration* and *diaspora* are not relevant to the people involved, the terms being used indistinctively. We see the term *diaspora* is not included equivalently in the lexicon of the different groups involved in the mobility processes of Cape Verdeans. As we mentioned on a previous paper (Évora, 2010), it has been assumed, mainly by social segments belonging to the middle-class or the elite, politicians, intellectuals and the artistic class. In the study, it was considered that the expansion of the term in the media is the result of the action of those groups, while in the popular segments, in general, people did not identify the *diaspora*. Among those who recognize the term, it is common not to establish differences between its meaning and those of *emigrants* and *emigration* that are still the main definers of the disperse community and its mobility. As we mentioned earlier (Évora, 2010), the logic of appropriation of the term *diaspora* by groups in Cape Verde is eloquent about the categories through which they define emigration and about the repositioning of classes and social segments towards the transformations of migratory processes through time. Consequently, when we approach the subject through the discourses of the agents with different positions on migration, we are not set to elect one of the discourses as fundamental or generator and assess the other circulating discourses as repetitions and confirmations, but rather to understand as they resume, restart and comment among themselves.

The process through which a new term is introduced in the lexicon is enlightening, as much of the way the new dynamics of migration are perceived inside and outside the country, as of the recognition and interiorization of the realities derived from contemporary Cape Verdean experience, with a particular focus on the forms of territorial and symbolic anchorage. In the field of studies on diasporas, emphasis is put on the ways these groups appropriate the urban spaces in which the partially reconstructed families and the structures that make a mark in the presence of such collectives are inscribed. In this sense, the analysis falls as much upon cultural, political and economic networks that favour the inclusion as on territorial markers (church, monuments that praise the history of the group, commercial enterprises, coffee shops, street names, schools, etc) that, progressively, take the new space of the community. The richness of associative life is also a reference of the type of inclusion as well as the political divides and the demand degree (in relation to the original culture of the group) imposed to the younger generations born in the diaspora (Bruneau, 1994).

The literature on African diasporas considers Cape Verdean emigrants have well organized and structured networks mainly in the USA (Boston, Brockton, Pawtucket,

Providence, Bridgeport), Senegal (Dakar), Portugal (Lisbon, Faro and Porto), France (Paris and Marseille), Italy (Rome, Milan), the Netherlands (Rotterdam), Switzerland (Lausanne), Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) and Luxemburg. More recently, they are especially involved in transnational dynamics that connect communities, but this fact is not highlighted as an important descriptive element differentiated of dislocations that were previously described between origin and each destination. In this sense, the experience that builds the emigrant/immigrant pair, as well as the dynamics between origin and destination remain, in the collective imaginary, as an expression of the migratory act. Cape Verdeans identify the growth of intensity of the connections with Cape Verde as an effect of the improvement of communications and transportations, without pointing out, also, as a reflexion of that improvement, the intense transnational circulation between communities and the development of identities associated to belonging to multiple cultures.

In the last few years, Cape Verdean emigrants intensified their dislocations between different European countries where communities have settled and, with the help of networks, have an important commercial and social activity. This way, they engage in a model of migration globalization that contributes to transform traditional migration and, thanks to meeting other mobile collectivities, inaugurate new networks of sociability responsible for new cosmopolitanisms (Tarrus, 2001). In the same sense, multiple dislocations they, especially women, undertake between the communities, in Cape Verde, the USA or Portugal, are perceived as a practice of commerce, without any reference as a factor of transnationality, and consequently, of contact between the communities that exceeds the mere exchange of products they commercialize. Moreover, in Europe as in the United States of America, the growing circulation and approach between different communities happens through the promotion of meetings and socio-cultural activities, as shown by football championships that involve teams from different places of immigration. Among Cape Verdeans, the importance of these sporting events is bigger when their goal is to have the winning team participating in championships held in Cape Verde. Also included in these current movements, the emigrants that stay in the different places, according to the work market conditions that are offered, that is to say, for instance, can move from Portugal to France or the Netherlands following the information on where the best employment conditions can be found. After a certain period, they may return to Portugal and receive relatives or friends who, originally, emigrated to those countries. As Tarrus states (2001:45), new forms of *savoir-faire* the traditional path of migration according to the capacity shown by the group are built, of better negotiating the entries and stays abroad when the emigration conditions are changed. This movement favours a better circulation of the knowledge about each community and the characteristics and qualities of each traditional place of Cape Verdean emigration, an essential factor for the choice of the candidates to emigration. This kind of transnational movements favours a more precise knowledge of the characteristics of the different countries, a knowledge that is not spent in their material conditions since they allow the approach to the orders of the nation-

states and the qualities and divergences among the different societies. In a way, these movements contribute to the construction of global perspectives for the emigrant, in so far as they promote the establishment of contacts no longer just of the societies of origin and destination but the societies that share the fact they are places of destination.

The apprehension of the physical and symbolic space of the diaspora must go through the place of origin - the pulling force through memory – in the same way it goes through the relationship system in the network space that connects the different poles of the diaspora. We observe, however, that, in general, Cape Verdeans still do not indicate the transnational movements connecting the communities as important descriptors of the current migratory experience. Schnapper (2001) is among the authors that reflect about the challenge transnational mobility presents to the efforts of naturalization of the ideas of nation and territory proposed by nation-states, which can be one of the motifs for the late introduction in the political debate and its implications as a new form of migration that makes use of the social space built by emigrants throughout time. In fact, even among the groups that adopt the reference to migration as diaspora, the transnationality of Cape Verdean migration is pointed out almost exclusively in the aspects that signify the intensification of the relationships with the archipelago, that is to say, the coming together of emigrants as a way to strengthen the centrality of Cape Verde among the diasporic society. However, the state intends to use the networks created by the long time presence of communities abroad to promote new partnerships of the country abroad and a new place for Cape Verde in the international context. It is understandable; therefore, that the discourses on diaspora emphasize the need to assume and deepen the global and diasporic dimension of the Cape Verdean nation, as this emphasis is in tune with the challenges of our time. By mentioning the diaspora, the agents usher the more contemporary official discourse according to which the new movements impose the challenge of “producing society and re-inventing *being Cape Verdean*”, but in a process where the state of Cape Verde recognizes the existence of a new sociability with a role in the promotion of that kind of community of communities, where the state keeps its central place.

## CONCLUSIONS

A diaspora assumes that the dispersion of a population in different countries of destination manifests a communitarian tie and states a territoriality. In the case of Cape Verde, the territory of origin is present in the memory, but the diaspora presents its discontinuous, reticular, polycentric spaces, where the local scale of communities is privileged and the international scale of the circulation networks is highlighted, although these are still little understood. The adoption of the concept between different agents of Cape Verdean migration presents different rhythms, but contributes to the loss of the sense of the idea of territorial limit. The agents familiarized with the term try to safeguard the ideology of the group for which the space of reference is still the common homeland, the lost paradise, without ignoring, however, the challenge of recognizing the roots established abroad and the consolidation of a transnational society. The efforts of these agents consist of maintaining the state as guardian of this new community of communities. The agents involved in transnational practices and in the circulation networks keep emigration/immigration as privileged descriptors of their experiences but they appear conscious of the potentialities of transnational paths becoming themselves survival strategies.

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