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D'NOS MANERA GENDER, COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE CAPE VERDEAN COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of gender relations in modern diaspora communities by presenting Cape Verdeans in the United States as an understudied case within African diasporic experiences. Cape Verdean communities and their organizations have existed in the United States since the 1800s. The levels of intensity with which these organizations operate have shifted over time based on the realities of the host country and the homeland. As a labor diaspora, it will take the Cape Verdean community in the US several generations to shift from labor to skilled diaspora. This study argues that three factors impact the progress of the Cape Verdean community in the United States: 1) challenges of community building; 2) collective identity and the complexities of ethnicity; and 3) women's agency and leadership. This analysis incorporates the importance of gender relations into the complexities of immigrant community building and highlights Cape Verdean women as key actors in the advancement of their communities. It emphasizes that maximizing the potential of the Cape Verdean woman and her agency can lead to increased community cohesion and progress.

Key Words:

Cape Verde, Modern Diaspora Politics, Gender, Cape Verdean Women and leadership, (African) immigrant communities, Community Building, Ethnic Identity.

Introduction

This essay offers a preliminary analysis on the role of gender relations in modern diasporas' community identity formation and socio-economic

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upward mobility by presenting the Cape Verdeans in the United States as an understudied case within the contemporary African immigrant experience. Although there are existing challenges that must be addressed, the Cape Verdean community in the United States is on the path to progress as a labor diaspora. As such, it will take several generations for any major socio-economic upward mobility to take place, where Cape Verdeans shift from labor to skilled diaspora. Cape Verdean women, in particular, are highlighted as key actors in their communities as the voices of collective identity and preservers and promoters of the culture, navigating the dual social and political spaces of their insular and host country communities. These women are active agents of change in complex, multilayered transnational spaces. Consequently, maximizing the potential of the Cape Verdean woman and her agency can lead to increased community cohesion. The following three different components have shaped the Cape Verdean community: 1) modern diaspora community building in the United States; 2) collective identity and the complexities of ethnicity; and 3) women and community organizing. Given the limited research and statistical data available on this topic, my objective is to create awareness, raise questions, and offer preliminary recommendations leading to long lasting community conversations and increased research about this modern African diaspora community.

Making The Case For Cape Verdeans as a Labor Diaspora

Gabriel Sheffer defines modern diasporas, “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homeland (Sheffer 1986).” An ethnic community, as explained by Milton J. Esman (1994) is a group of people united by inherited culture, racial features, belief systems (religion) or national sentiments. Membership in an ethnic community is a relationship that an individual is born into. Ethnic identity is a set of meanings that individuals ascribe to their membership in an ethnic community, including attributes that bind them together as a collective and distinguish it from others in their respective environments. Once an individual accepts this membership he has certain obligations and responsibilities to the community that Esman refers to as ethnic solidarity. Solidarity is established and maintained by socialization reinforced by social controls, economic incentives, and external pressures. The population bases for

the solidarity that is necessary for ethnic political organization are “ethnic communities whose cohesion and sense of continuity reflect perceptions of common peoplehood, collective interests and destiny (Sears, Fu, Henry, and Bui 2003).” Solidarity means commitment to defending these interests. These may change overtime. The greater the solidarity, the more likely the emergence of ethnic political movements.

Ethnic political movements convert an ethnic community into a political competitor to combat ethnic antagonists or promote interests in the host country. It seeks to reflect the needs of the collective consciousness or aspirations of the entire ethnic community. These may be split into several different organizations. Once the ethnic community becomes politicized it mobilizes on behalf of its collective interests and aspirations. This requires political action, recruitment of individuals into organizations, and financial and material resources. Additionally, incentives must be provided for individuals to remain committed to and provide financial support to such organizations.

In his discussion on diasporas Esman draws from John Armstrong, distinguishing between proletarian and mobilized diasporas (Esman 1986). He argues that proletarian diasporas have no economic resources, few communication skills and limited organizational experiences. They are incapable of articulating their group’s interests and have little to no access to power decision-making circles. They are normally at the bottom of the income, occupational, and status ladders. Gradually they become proficient in local languages and obtain better jobs, more education, and advance their agenda within the public sphere. Esman makes the argument that diasporas take time to create in that, “The majority of migrant communities begin as proletarian diasporas. Before they develop the skills, capabilities and access needed to promote their domestic or international group interests, at least one or perhaps more generations may be required (Armstrong 1976).”

Mobilized diasporas however, bring occupational or communications skills that are in short supply in the host country. These skills are valuable to the local elite. The mobilized diaspora also gains access to public spheres and is able to push for the interests of its community by gaining the protection and trust of the “native elite.” As explained by Esman, eventually the native elite loses trust in the foreigner, and as the indigenous population gains the same skills and knowledge, the foreigner is no longer needed as an intricate part of this elite sphere. Proletarian or labor diasporas as political actors are driven by a compelling need for unskilled labor to industrial economies and desperate search for livelihoods in labor surplus developing countries. Labor migrations are not random. They are patterned by familiar

channels traceable to earlier links, established networks, and geographical convenience. Prospective migrants are attracted to locations where they can expect social support from earlier arrivals and job opportunities. These arrangements are facilitated by factors such as services to send remittance of funds to families in the homeland, two-way shipping of goods, arrangements of travel back and forth, and importation of foodstuffs. This can be said of such groups as the Mexicans in the United States, and North Africans in France.

Poverty, drought, famine, and Portuguese colonialism created a country that suffered heavily from the dispersal of its people in Europe, the Americas, and mainland Africa. Cape Verdeans are the only group of African people who migrated voluntarily in large numbers to the United States before 1965 (Halter 1995). The major era of migration of Cape Verdeans to the United States took place between the mid-19th century and World War II. In 1924, the change in United States' laws restricting immigration of people of color decreased the flow of Cape Verdeans (Almeida 1978). Due to this restriction, Cape Verdeans did not go back and forth to the islands as often as they had previously. Communication with their relatives in Cape Verde was limited. From 1924 to 1965, Cape Verdeans in the U.S. and Cape Verdeans in Cape Verde were estranged, with rare interaction, something foreign to Cape Verdean culture. During the four decades following World War II, Portugal neglected Cape Verde and the islands were faced with severe drought, famine and poverty. With American immigration closed, Cape Verdean citizens began to emigrate to Europe, South America, and West Africa. Labor agreements in São Tomé and Príncipe allowed Cape Verdeans to work on those islands' plantations (Barrows 1990).

The Immigration Act of 1965 allowed for the reunification of Cape Verdean families (Almeida 1978). Cape Verdean families arrived in Boston, Brockton, Scituate, and New Bedford, Massachusetts; Providence, and Pawtucket, Rhode Island; Waterbury, Connecticut; and Brooklyn, New York. As they arrived, the vision of the American dream was replaced by the harsh American realities of racism, discrimination, poor working and living conditions, and political powerlessness. Although they had experienced racism in the islands prior to arriving on American soil, American racism and its rules differed from the racism in Cape Verde.

Cape Verdean organizations have existed since the inception of the community in the United States. They have experienced three distinct periods of activism: 1) settlement of newcomers; 2) Activism in the anti-colonial struggle; and 3) promotion of Cape Verdean culture. Organizations were formed to support the settlement of newcomers, helping them find jobs,

places to live and overall support with every day living in a new culture and society. Severe droughts on the islands in the 1930s and 40s resulted in thousands of deaths and exodus of Cape Verdeans. Organizations in the U.S. also organized on behalf of the homeland, by sending barrels of foodstuffs, money and appealing to the Portuguese colonial powers to actively help ameliorate the living conditions of the Cape Verdeans on the islands. With the struggle for independence movement in the 1960s, the organizations actively shifted their focus towards anti-colonial awareness and demanding US government support in ending Portuguese occupation of Cape Verde. In this instance, Cape Verdeans utilized their leverage in what Laura Pires-Hester describes as “bilateral diaspora ethnicity”, the use of ethnic identification with an original overseas homeland to benefit that homeland, through relations with systems and institutions of the current actual homeland to influence the US government support of Cape Verdean development (Pires-Hester 1999).

The first known association, the Associação Beneficente Caboverdiana was founded in New Bedford, MA in 1916. The Seamen’s Scholarship Fund was established by attorney Alfred Gomes to provide scholarship assistance to young Cape Verdean Americans. In addition, Our Lady of Assumption was established in 1905 in New Bedford, as the first Cape Verdean Catholic church in the United States. The Cape Verdean Ultramarine Band Club was also established in 1917 in New Bedford to provide musical education for its thirty-five male members and their families. In 1937, the Cape Verdean Woman’s Social Club was formed in Bridgeport, Connecticut as the first woman’s club, born out of the women’s need to have a space of their own since the men had their own club. The Cape Verdean American Veteran’s Association was founded in 1946. Another early association, the Cape Verdean Progressive Center is still in existence today in East Providence, RI, with a membership of over 300. Early associations were formed by members of the Cape Verdean community with leadership capabilities, limited formal education, and local networks. Association leaders in the second and third periods of activism constituted a more diverse group of people, including professionals in the field of law, education, community development, business, communications, government and had built networks outside of the New England Area.

Although most associations were non-political there were a few with political agendas. The American Committee for Cape Verde and the United States National Support Committee of the PAIGC, for example, supported Cape Verde’s independence from Portugal. Both organizations’ objectives were to educate the community on Cape Verdean culture and

create awareness of the issues facing Cape Verde's people prior to the independence. The Tchuba Newsletter by the American Committee for Cape Verde urged Cape Verdean Americans to support the newly independent Cape Verdean state. These organizations existed openly and mobilized on behalf of Cape Verde due to the civil rights movement in the U.S. as well as the international community's pressure to end colonization throughout the world. In addition to organizations, Cape Verdeans created other avenues to preserve their connections with the homeland and other diasporic communities through the world. The Cape Verdean News (CVN), launched in New Bedford in 1978 as a bi-weekly newspaper catering to the Cape Verdean community. Today, there are magazines like *Sodade* that focus on Cape Verdean music and *Iniciativa* Magazine provides news on business partnerships and possibilities between individuals and businesses in Cape Verde and the United States, interested in the development of Cape Verde. In addition to printed materials there are also several online news sources such as visaoonlinenews.com, forcv.com, caboverdeonline.com, and praiacapital.com. Cape Verdean radio programs have been on the airwaves since the 1970s. The first radio show *Musica de Cabo Verde* (Music of Cape Verde) was broadcast by Alcides Vicente and Romana Ramos in 1978. Currently, there are several radio programs such as *Porton D'Nos Ilha* (Gateway to Our Islands), and *Camim Pa Cabo Verde* (Road to Cape Verde), which transmit news about Cape Verde and its diaspora on a weekly basis. Cape Verdeans have also launched their own television programs. The most popular program, *Cabo-Video*, has been in existence since 1989. It is available to the Cape Verdean community in more than fifty cities in Southern New England. Cape Verdean Afro Beat (WRIU) is a popular college based radio station launched in 1993 by students at the University of Rhode Island. Online radio stations such as crioloradio.com are also available to the technologically advanced members of the Cape Verdean community. Cape Verdeans also stay connected via social media avenues such as Facebook. Many organizations such as the Cape Verdean Community Development Center (CACD) and Cape Verdean associations in Brockton, New Bedford, Southern California, the Carolinas and Atlanta have Facebook pages, keeping the community informed of events and news.

In the 1970s, Cape Verdeans began building coalitions with African Americans and with other immigrant communities. They were elected to state legislatures in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Peter Coelho, for example, was the first Cape Verdean to serve as a Rhode Island State Representative from 1967 to 1978. Francisco Borges was twice elected as Connecticut state treasurer. Prominent Cape Verdean elected officials

include Vinny de Macedo (Massachusetts State Representative), Dr. Isadore Ramos (Mayor of East Providence, RI), and Phillipe Barros (City Councilor from Pawtucket, RI). In addition to politics, Cape Verdeans have been successful in many other fields. Dana Mohler-Faria as the president of Bridgewater State University and former special advisor for education for Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, Kenneth Monteiro, Dean of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, have served key positions in their communities.

In 1981, Cape Verdeans mobilized and requested official recognition as an ethnic group. The Cape Verdean Recognition Committee was formed to advance the interests of Cape Verdean Americans and their official recognition in the federal census (Almeida 1978). Cape Verdean members of the Black Heritage Committee formed the Cape Verdean American Heritage Sub-Committee of the Rhode Island Heritage Commission. In the late 1970s, the organization sponsored a major outdoor Cape Verde's Independence Day festival, which continues today as the oldest celebration and brings together Cape Verdeans from diasporic communities throughout the world.

Currently, there are more than forty Cape Verdean community organizations catering to different needs of its communities both in the United States and in Cape Verde (Lima-Neves 2009). Most contemporary organizations have been in existence since the 1970s with periods of low and high intensity activism, due to social and economic factors in the homeland such as famine, drought, and colonialism and racial discrimination, xenophobia, economic crisis and unemployment in the host country. They vary in the size of their membership, from ten to three hundred members. Some organizations meet in the private residences of their leadership because they do not have the capital resources to buy or rent a physical space. They offer immigration services, classes on the English language, citizenship, and computer skills as well as job placement support and cultural awareness events. Organizations focusing primarily on Cape Verdean development raise money to send school and medical supplies, clothing, canned goods, or build infrastructures like churches and schools.

While some organizations are geared towards Cape Verde's general needs or those of specific islands, others focus on their specific villages or hometowns. Most of these organizations are located in the Southern New England region. However, as Cape Verdeans migrate to other areas of the United States in search of jobs and better opportunities, they have formed organizations in various cities in California, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Students are also active in promoting Cape Verde's culture on their campus communities. There are over ten student organizations on multiple campuses of

the University of Massachusetts System with UMass Dartmouth being the pioneer of all Cape Verdean student associations. Others include Boston College, Boston University, University of Rhode Island, and Rhode Island College. There is also the Cape Verdean Alumni Network organization geared towards professional and college educated individuals.

Recurring themes emerged from interviews with Cape Verdean organizations. While they have been in existence for decades, their leadership cites limited community involvement as an obstacle to their success (Lima-Neves 2009). Organizations argue that individuals should become actively involved beyond attending social events. Community members should become active members, attend meetings and pay their membership dues so that there are enough resources to run successful programs for the benefit of the community. These organizations lack the human and financial resources to fund successful programs. In contrast, community members have highlighted a lack of trust in the leadership of organizations, lack of time due to long working hours and family obligations as the main reasons why they are not actively involved as members of organizations. Comparatively, Cape Verdean individuals and organizations in other diasporic locations such as Holland and Portugal described similar challenges as obstacles to community cohesion (Batalha 2004 and Rocha 2003).

It may take a longer time for labor diasporas, such as the Cape Verdean community to become more economically and socially established. Lack of resources do not allow for fast-paced community progress to take place. Learning and navigating through the politics of the host country's society is also challenging for most labor diasporas, especially if the primary language of this group is not English. Moreover, access to and pursuing college education may also take some time, as immigrants find their way through a complex and challenging system of upward mobility, particularly for groups who have encountered discrimination based on race and ethnicity, as in the case of Cape Verdeans in the United States. Two or more generations of skilled diasporas is needed in order for the Cape Verdean community to truly navigate the politics of American society. The challenge is to figure out whether or not, while in this process Cape Verdeans will lose their "Cape Verdeanness" and fully assimilate into the American culture.

There have been spurts of social awareness by individuals in the community, mostly in the arts and business. Several business ventures have benefitted from the sale of clothing and other items displaying images of and famous quotes by Cape Verdean revolutionary leaders, notably Amílcar Cabral. Some have critiqued these ventures as culturally exploitative and other members of the community have been supportive. Regardless of

which side of the fence one finds himself, perhaps these efforts small or big, successful or not, offer hope, a sense of community and collective identity for the members of an immigrant group of this small island nation in West Africa. If each person wears a Cabral shirt to a concert featuring a singer of traditional Cape Verdean or contemporary music at a nightclub, feels part of Cape Verde, then just for that moment the community has come together as a group. Cultural knowledge and education can be transmitted in multiple ways and venues, both formally and informally. Exploring the myriad of ways this education can take place can perhaps lead to young people being increasingly interested in Cape Verdean culture and concerns of the community.

When Being “Cape Verdean” is Not Good Enough: Questions of Collective Identity

Cape Verdeans in the United States have longed battled with the question of ethnic identity. Halter, Machado and others (Halter 1995; Machado 1978 and 1981; Sanchez Gibau 2005) have extensively discussed this complex foundation of Cape Verdean *crioulo* identity as it relates to the United States society. In this section, I argue that the Cape Verdean community in the United States faces challenges of collective identity and community cohesion due to the legacy of Portuguese colonial rule and the strict racial history encountered in this country.

Until independence in 1975, Cape Verde’s power was placed in the hands of the Portuguese and other European occupying the islands. Because they were light in complexion, rulers were called *brancos*, or whites. Richard Lobban reveals:

In the fifteenth century, when the initial settlement of the islands was taking place, there were simply two large groups: (1) the *brancos*, the rulers, capitãos, administrators, noblemen, and top officers, settlers, and their wives and children, in addition to some exiled Portuguese criminals, and (2) the *pretos* (“blacks”), who initially were almost all slaves, with some exceptions for those who played special roles in slave raids and trade, in translating, in enforcement of the slave system, and in the military service (Lobban 1995: 54).

The Portuguese did very little to preserve African culture in Cape Verde. They banned African cultural practices, religions, languages, and music. Slaves were often baptized with European names and converted to Catholicism.

Slave records demonstrated that African ethnic features were just as important as physical features. Color was reported as preto (black) but as Lobban mentioned, "...there were many who are recognized as *preto fula* or simply *fula* colored, with a suggestion that an individual had a somewhat lighter complexion typical of the interior Fula people (1995:55)." In the Portuguese language color references were brown, light tan, and dark tan. With the emergence of the *mestiço* population, this same system used physical attributes such as nose type (flat or very flat), hair textures, and body build to describe slaves. This was very different from the United States where race classifications were sharply divided and any identifiable hint of African blood would be enough for one to be considered "Black" and therefore discriminated against.

Cape Verdeans served as middlemen during the colonial period. They were local administrators in various parts of Portuguese-speaking Africa. On the one hand, Cape Verdeans were exploited by Portugal but on the other, Cape Verde was better off than other African colonies in terms of economic development, health conditions, and education because they were considered an overseas province hence received some privileges. However, the system of divide and conquer had lasting effects in its society. There were those who accepted the colonial system and did not think there was an alternative. Cape Verdeans became both oppressed and oppressors.

From the initial period of their arrival in the United States, during the Nineteenth Century, Cape Verdeans faced the harsh realities of racism in the American society. In the rural areas of Cape Verde where most Cape Verdeans in America came from, race and identity was not a concern for everyday life. In the United States, however, the color of a person's skin was politically and socially important. Because Cape Verde was part of Portugal's colonial empire, Cape Verdeans called themselves Portuguese. In the United States, being Portuguese meant being white. In Cape Verde, being white was a social and racial label. A person of color could be called white, if they demonstrated superior social and education skills and possessed wealth (Machado 1981).

The white Portuguese from Azores and Madeira did not associate with Cape Verdeans, as they considered Cape Verdeans to be Africans due to skin color and cultural differences such as language. Cape Verdeans were almost fully excluded from Portuguese churches, social clubs, and communities. As Machado (1981) points out, they were not attracted to predominantly Protestant African American communities in New Bedford, although some Cape Verdeans converted to Protestantism or formed new Catholic churches. Cape Verdeans quickly noticed that, in America, there was racism against anyone who was not white.

Cape Verdeans were considered black not only because of the rigid racial structure existent in American society but also because of conventional American social classification. The jobs they were able to obtain were similar to those of African Americans. However, as Machado highlights, "By their own reckoning, Cape Verdeans were "Portuguese," culturally superior to Africans and to American blacks as well (1981:237)." They did not want to be seen as "Negro." Most Cape Verdeans sought to gain recognition as a separate social group than African Americans "by preference" and segregated from the white Portuguese by "necessity." Similar to the Cape Verdean community, this phenomenon was also true of the Irish community once its members saw value in being considered "white" and not a "minority (Ignatiev 1995)." Some Cape Verdeans "passed" for Latin Americans (Puerto Rican or Cuban) and others, who were darker, were lumped with the larger Black American population. This was true of Cape Verdeans from Fogo and Santiago islands, where the population was typically darker. These immigrants suffered discrimination from the American society as well as their fellow Cape Verdeans.

After independence there was an increased interest in Cape Verdean culture, music and language, especially by younger Cape Verdean Americans. Once these cultural expressions were brought to the United States, certain versions slightly transformed from their original forms in Cape Verde. The Crioulo language also gained social significance. Once considered embarrassing and a sign of illiteracy, Crioulo became a way for Cape Verdeans to identify themselves, create a cultural commonality, and distinguish themselves from African Americans. It also afforded them a sense of higher social status. "There was certainly some practical utility in maintaining the mother tongue, since American whites often regard foreigners of color as 'not the same as' or 'better than' American Blacks and accord them more benign treatment (Machado 1978)." As the civil rights movements gained momentum in the 1960s with the black pride and black power movements, many young Cape Verdeans joined forces and identified themselves as African Americans and not as white Portuguese (Glassner 1975).

For a people who, historically, were never required to place racial labels on themselves, they were faced with this phenomenon once they arrived in the ports of New Bedford. Cape Verdeans endure what Halter (1995) called the "double invisibility" of being black and foreign. Different labels emerged as Americans did not know what to call Cape Verdeans, "the green people," black Portuguese, and Bravas. Sometimes they were black, at other times they were white, but most of the time, Cape Verdeans were neither. American culture forces people to choose between the categories of "black" or

“white.” The identity question persists. The wide variety of recent ethnic studies on the Cape Verdean community and the question of its identity, demonstrate academia’s interest in dealing with this question within the strict racial spheres of American scholarship. However, the racial system in the United States, particularly within scholarly work, needs reconsideration in terms of the approach to studying black immigrant politics. It is not so much of a problem of Cape Verdean ethnicity but of the existing racial construct in the United States. Halter mentions, “Perhaps because the United States has had a history of institutionalizing racism within such fixed genetic categories as compared to other societies, even those with a history of slavery such as Brazil or even the Cape Verde islands themselves, it has been more difficult for American historians to view race as anything but a physical feature.”

The dynamics of immigrant communities in the United States has changed. Globalization affords immigrant groups the ability to build and maintain stronger ties with their homeland. More recent immigrant groups have been successful at maintaining their original ethnic identity and passing this identity to their children, as opposed to assimilating to the American society. In his research on the Haitian immigrant community, Michel Laguerre explains that, “Nineteenth Century America provides us with a good laboratory for the observation of the diverse forms of integrating immigrants in urban America (Laguerre 1998: 5).” He questioned the assimilationist ideology, which failed because America is inherently a transnational state filled with diverse cultures. The assimilationist ideology predicted that all newcomers to the American society would absorb themselves into the American cultural and social norms thus producing a homogenous nation. However, as in the case of Cape Verdeans, most immigrants continued to maintain strong links to their countries of origin by corresponding with relatives and friends as well as by sending monetary and in-kind remittances and sometimes, returning to their homeland. Full assimilation to the American culture did not happen because of “their attachment to their countries of origin, their unwillingness to become completely AngloSaxonized, and their desire to speak their native language and establish schools, churches, and newspapers that maintain their cultural identities and traditions (1998).”

Black immigrant groups in particular, face significant pressure to assimilate to the African American community but have resisted this because, in many ways, this is a culturally despised group. Thus, *Cape Verdianity*, *Cape Verdeanness*, or *Creoleness* creates a safe social space for Cape Verdeans in the United States to be who they believe themselves to be and not what has been assigned to them by the American racial system. The notion of cultural and

ethnic commonalities, as described by Gillis (1994:3), “indicates the promotion of or adherence to a communal identity that is characterized by a sense of sameness over time and space.” This also pertains to Cape Verdeans who were born in the United States who maintain a symbolic relationship with their homeland. Even if they have never visited Cape Verde they still refer to it as their homeland. More recent Cape Verdean immigrants maintain active ties with Cape Verde with frequent phone calls to relatives, and sending monetary remittances home. As asserted by Sanchez Gibau (2005: 5), “whether maintaining an active or passive connection, Cape Verdeans still conceptualize the Cape Verde Islands as a defining cultural symbol in their identity construction.” Similar to Cape Verdeans, other African and Caribbean immigrant groups have used diverse approaches to developing community. The Somalis, Nigerians and Ghanaians have used religious and social organizations as well as residential segregation as ways to form and maintain strong community identity and cohesion. Somalis have deliberately moved to areas with low concentrations of African American populations (Arthur 2000). Additionally, immigrant communities from the Caribbean have also used the residential segregation approach to develop strong community organization. Thus, Cape Verdeans are not unique in their desires to preserve their ethnic identity.

Similar to Cape Verde’s *Claridade* literary movement of the 1920s, led by Baltasar Lopes Da Silva and Manuel Lopes, which declared the social and cultural emancipation of Cape Verdean society, the Créolité movement in the French Antilles in the early 1990s, proclaimed they were “neither Europeans, nor Africans... [but] Creoles (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant and Khyar 1990).” Créolité appeared as a literary movement in 1989 with *Elogé de la Créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)* by Martinican scholars, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphael Confiant, and Jean Bernabé. Noted Martinican writer Édouard Glissant (1997) pioneered this movement with his descriptive novels on the realities of creole culture in Martinique. These scholars defined creoleness as an “interactional or transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history (1990:891).” Their history is a braid of histories affected by several different kinds of languages, idioms, religions, which ended up on the islands. Creoleness implies the recognition and acceptance of multiracialism and the commonalities of creole peoples in the new worlds and Indian oceans and Oceania.

According to Bernabé and others (1990) creole culture was created in the plantation system with the creole language at its core. Orality, for the Martinicans and Cape Verdeans alike was and continues to be a central point

of their creoleness. It has produced songs, tales, and proverbs, creating the people's knowledge base. Another distinctive point that defines creole people or any colonized peoples is the legacy of colonialism and its impact on defining and creating the people's history. In most instances, the history of the colonization process is perceived as the history of the people. Historians offer accounts or responses to colonialism and often omit the stories of resistance and spirit of the people. Thus, the history of colonization is erroneously recognized as the history of the people. Similar to the Creolité movement in Martinique, the scholars of the Claridade movement in Cape Verde used literature to convey the realities of the common man and woman and resisted the vanishing of Cape Verdean creole culture.

Criolas Ki Ta Manda? Cape Verdean Women and Community Building

Women have been the backbone of most communities and Cape Verdean women certainly are no different (Knight, Bangura, and Watson 2012). Although Cape Verdean women have not, for the most part, accessed prominent positions of political leadership, they have found their own way to exercise power, engage in activism and build community. Cape Verdean women are not marginalized but rather, have made a conscious choice in the way they exercise and navigate power politics in their community and beyond. Shifting the ways we analyze and define political and social activism as well as community building practices and allowing individuals to determine for themselves the ways they organize can provide better insight into the lives and practices of immigrant communities. .

Cape Verdean women arrived in the United States, built their communities from the ground up, beginning with their own families (Lima-Neves 2009). Although men immigrated in larger numbers in the early periods, women played a major role in community organizing and resistance. In her autobiography, Belmira Nunes Lopes, a Cape Verdean American woman details her struggles for equality and ethnic recognition in the early periods of the Cape Verdean community (Nunes 2001). They worked hard in the cranberry bog industry, factories, and in domestic and janitorial services. They held community meetings in their kitchens and were instrumental in organizing for the sake of helping the newly arrived Cape Verdeans ensuring living spaces, clothes, food and more. Similarly, women also came together to collect goods to send to families in Cape Verde in time of need. Cape Verdeans, women in particular, no longer reside solely in Providence,

Brockton, or Boston areas. They are branching out to other cities like Atlanta and Los Angeles in search of better professional and educational opportunities. Although data is not available, the current profile of Cape Verdean women in the United States is diverse. They are skilled business professionals, students, teachers, entrepreneurs, social and political activists, nurses, and hard-workers in labor intensive positions at factories and hospitals. This group includes women who were born in the United States, Cape Verde and other countries where Cape Verdean communities exist such as Holland and Portugal. Within this group, there is also a generation of younger girls who may feel alienated from their parents due to generational and cultural issues. Rumbaut and Portes (1998: 233) define this concept as cultural dissonance, where parents and children possess contrasting views on behavior and ideas. This intergenerational conflict affects the entire Cape Verdean community leading to increased parent-child conflict and manifestations of rebellion such as criminal activity.

Women are the pillars of the community as organization leaders and preservers of culture. They meet at their homes to share political and social ideas. For example, those who are fluent or have advanced understanding of the English language, teach the others about new government policies related to immigration that may affect them. During a meeting with the community at the Cape Verdean Progressive Center in East Providence, Prime Minister José María Neves recognized the importance of women's role in the development of Cape Verde and the preservation of its culture, stating "women build the future before it happens and with Cape Verdean women in the U.S.A., Cape Verde will always survive and the culture will remain intact." Women are important actors in the transnational process. They bring the different diaspora communities together and also connect them with the homeland (Gois 2005). Women entrepreneurs in the informal market carry traditional Cape Verdean products to be sold to the diaspora and in turn, bring back to the Islands consumer goods such as clothes, shoes, domestic appliances, foods as well as other products otherwise inaccessible to the poor.

Research shows that in most immigrant communities men dominate the positions of organizational leadership. In his research on gender and political participation in the Latin-American immigrant community, Jones-Correa (1998) argues that, "with the loss of status in the receiving country, men tend to form, participate in and lead ethnic organizations whose interests and focus is in the country of origin" while women are more independent and diverse in the way they build community and very often serve as intermediaries between their immigrant communities and other communities.

He adds, "Because of the role ethnic institutions play for men in validating their social status, and because this social status is tied to the home country, men are generally not interested in seeing ethnic institutions shift their orientation towards the receiving country." I argue that in the Cape Verdean case, this may be true in the earlier periods when the first immigrants arrived in the U.S. In the context of social organizations, there has been a shift of leadership. Women are equally represented in the positions of leadership in social organizations. An exception can be made of sports related organizations, namely soccer, where most members and leadership are men.

Cape Verdeans, men or women, have not yet made a significant impact in accessing political positions in elected offices. There are a few examples as in the case of Dr. Isadore Ramos, the first Cape Verdean mayor of a U.S. city, and more recently, state and local district representatives Vinny De Macedo and Julio De Carvalho, both in Massachusetts. The lack of political representation does not mean women do not feel empowered or are content with their level of community involvement. A Cape Verdean American woman and community activist residing in Rhode Island highlights, "I'm in the background by choice and I may be wrong but I'm pretty powerful that way." She asserts that her position is not because of lack of access but rather a conscious choice to position herself where she is most useful to her community and not necessarily where others believe she should be. She further notes that some individuals running for political office have identified the Cape Verdean community in Rhode Island as "divided" and do not court the community for its votes, "In Rhode Island, politicians have told me that although we have power in numbers they don't bother to support us because they see how divided we are and see how fast we divide even when they try to help us grow. That's sad." Consequently, interviews with residents of Massachusetts and Rhode Island believe that the Cape Verdean community in the former is better organized and more cohesive as a group: "...the Massachusetts community organizers are much more organized and supportive of each other. They seem to want to work together to solve some of the issues that they are facing. As for us in Rhode Island, everyone wants to be the leader/ president." These findings may have significant implications on community engagement given that the small city of Pawtucket, Rhode Island is home to the Cape Verdean Community Development (CACD), the largest community center in Cape Verde's diaspora.

There is a distinction between the community activities of the younger and older generation of women. Although there aren't any known formal organizations, younger women form groups to bring awareness of specific issues, such as anti-gang violence peaceful protests, the "Criolas Contra

Cancer” (Criolas Against Cancer) and “the Baroneza Project”, a writing program created to address challenges faced by young criolas. Activities organized by younger women utilize the Internet and social media outlets as well as nightclubs to advertise for their events. In contrast, older women’s activities are centered on the preservation of Cape Verdean traditional culture such as celebrating the various religious holidays or informal gatherings based on the hometown or island of origin, with no particular agenda in mind. Both generations have found ways to utilize available vehicles and what is familiar to them to address issues relevant to their generation. They have also found ways to gauge the interest of and attract the attention of their particular generation.

Interviews with women from different age groups expose the multilayered and multifaceted divisions between women of older and younger generations, related to styles of leadership, community engagement and outreach. One Cape Verdean woman states, “There is a strong discouraging divide amongst the older women, it’s sad to see them so stuck in their ways and do not appreciate the younger generation despite the change in outreach styles. Meaning social media and the way that many of us have managed to understand that politics plays a role in our community growth and children’s activities. The older ones just don’t care anymore about what kids are able to get into if not being entertained by sports or after school activities. The older women in power think or fear that the younger ones are trying to take over and might do a better job and how dare they! No acceptance of this social media world that we have become and technology savvy generation.” Contrastingly, another woman in her late thirties highlights potential intra-generational challenges, “I don’t believe that there is much divide between older generations and younger ones. I feel that I’m always given support by the older Cape Verdean women when needed. There is, however, a divide among my age group. We seem to be less supportive of one another.” A Cape Verdean woman in her late fifties agreed that older generations must actively support younger generations of women and youth who organize activities in the community. She goes on to say that, “if these activities are positive and are keeping the kids off the streets and they are benefiting from them, who are we to tell them how to do these activities? We have to be open minded and support them!” The challenge remains as to how to find a bridge to connect generations so they can learn from each other and find ways to preserve and promote Cape Verdean culture in ways that complement and incorporate diverse methods of engagement and learning, sustainable over time.

Popular culture provides a one-dimensional view of criolas, objectifying their existence to only physical beauty in social media, music videos and

magazines (Lima-Neves 2009). One American born Cape Verdean woman living in New York mentions, "Most people assume that I am either Latina or Brazilian and I often have to really convince people that I am not Puerto Rican or Dominican. The beauty in this is that you can move easily among people, fitting into almost every environment you encounter, and it also gives you a chance to educate people on the Islands. These days more and more people in America have become aware of Cabo Verde, mainly due to high-profile Cape Verdeans (primarily women) in the entertainment business. The one thing that really bothers me about this awareness is that it seems to be only focused on Cape Verdean women and our physical beauty. While it's great to be complimented on your looks, I would much rather be respected for my intelligence and it is somewhat bothersome that public images of Cape Verdean women always focus our looks and not our other qualities and accomplishments."

Because the socio-economic make up of Cape Verdean women in the U.S. is more diverse than in previous periods, it is important to discuss the different issues that impact the decisions made by this subgroup of the Cape Verdean community. Patriarchy, access to education and cultural identity are some of the challenges faced by women, which were revealed in interviews. A young Cape Verdean American female artist describes how she utilizes negative past experiences for self-motivation:

I was a proud American woman of Cape Verdean descent who saw women treated as maids by their husbands: not equals in some cases throughout my childhood. I saw women asking permission to speak about finances, etc., I saw women who were silent about infidelity, parenting, etc. In some cases though, I saw the direct opposite. It was the worst cases that stuck with me, however, and it taught me to be strong and never tolerate such actions in relationships or in the workforce. I believe positivity can certainly come from negativity. The treatment of some women in our culture made me vow to be the change I wanted to see in myself. Many Cape Verdean women are standing up for themselves and I couldn't be happier. It is a different story for our generation.

Young women credit their parents, particularly their mothers with encouraging them to pursue education:

I would have to say that the most important aspect of my identity as a Cape Verdean woman living in the United States is my value for education. As long as I can remember my parents have always placed a great value on education. College was never an option for my sisters and I. It was a must. I feel that a lot of other Cape Verdean families feel the same way. You come here with hopes and dreams

that your children will become successful individuals and live a comfortable life style and education is the key to such success. My Cape Verdean upbringing has influenced me to become the best individual I can be. My parents have constantly reminded me of their hopes and dreams for their children and that is why my hope is to never let them down. My mother tells me that the proudest day of her life has been to see my sisters and I graduate from college, especially me being the youngest of the three. Because of my parents' consistent faith and support, I plan on doing what most people in my neighborhood will sadly never accomplish. If all goes as planned I will be the first in my family to receive a PhD.

Another Cape Verdean woman shares the influence of her mother and great grandmother in her pursuit of an advanced degree:

I come of lineage of strong women. For instance, my mother tells me the story of how my maternal grandmother and great grandmother made a point for her to go to school despite my grandfather's (and society in general's) disapproval. The thought process at the time was that the place of women was in the home not in school. My mother was the only girl in her class among countless boys. As she said 'ca foi facil' translating to 'it was not easy' referring to being the only girl in school among all boys. My mother later became a teacher and taught on the island of Boa Vista for twenty years before migrating to the U.S. My mother instilled in me the importance of education and being an independent woman despite the challenges that lie in front of you.

The community must address formal education for young women more actively. A Cape Verdean woman educator in her thirties raises some important questions for the community to consider:

I think we often lose focus on what our potential can really be. I think for all of us we come [to the United States] with a clear focus of education and realizing all our wants and yet we get seduced by the "flashy lights" and instant gratification. I truly believe that we currently have people who can be community organizers and make monumental changes in our communities; however they have yet to realize it. The question is how to we move from the mediocre to greatness? How do we keep our culture and still move around this [American] culture without selling our wants and needs? How do we train our voices to be the voices of our parents and ancestors that didn't have this opportunity?

Although some argue that the Cape Verdean community is divided and younger generations are not interested in learning their culture, interviews with a group of younger women ranging in age from early twenties to early

forties from diverse socio-economic backgrounds suggest there is a changing trend. Young women define themselves as Cape Verdean and discuss how they maintain their cultural identity:

Cape Verdean culture to me is a way of living. I maintain the culture through everything I do, it is my daily life I make sure the tradition, values, life lessons are being passed down from generation to generation. I have two daughters and I make it my priority that they learn about the Cape Verdean culture and live it. The music, the food is part of our daily lives. I cook typical Cape Verdean food everyday and I teach my daughters how to cook them. I am a volunteering member of the Cape Verdean Association in New Bedford, I travel to Cape Verde every year bringing back money, food and donations to family and charitable organizations. My most important aspect is being a proud 'Badia'. I'm a Cape Verdean woman living in the United States because I know that this land of opportunities will give me the means to take care of my family and allow me to provide to my family back home. I attended community college for two years, but haven't yet completed my degree. I am currently a certified nursing assistant.

In addition to education, cultural traditions often linked to gender roles, patriarchy and machismo as well as the dual identity of being a Cape Verdean woman living in the United States have presented points of contentions for Cape Verdean women. A young Cape Verdean woman who is pursuing a graduate degree says:

How come you aren't married yet? How come you have no kids? As if those are the two most important things a Cape Verdean lady can do. The most frustrating statement: "You are too liberal, you have become Americanized and no longer recognize the Cape Verdean culture... good luck finding a Cape Verdean man who will put up with such nonsense." It frustrates me when folks see my standing against sexism as something other than being Cape Verdean. So for me, sexism needs to be unpacked within the Cape Verdean community. Opportunities for dialogue need to be created so that Cape Verdeans can distinguish sexism from cultural/traditional norms. Such dialogues need to happen across gender, but also within gender. Issues to be unpacked: Masculinity, gender roles, internalized sexism and sexism at the individual, cultural and structural."

Another Cape Verdean woman living in the U.S. since her early teen years, but born in Portugal to Cape Verdean parents celebrates the diversity of her upbringing and the ways she embraces the duality of Cape Verdean and American cultural traditions:

There is much to gain from our elders, I take pride that my mother, a Cape Verdean woman taught me the value of raising a family, taking care of your house and your spouse. I also take pride in the Cape Verdean music and the artists that create it, and the food that we cook and enjoy it with our families and friends. But there is also another culture that I take pride in, the American culture. I take pride in it for its education, freedom of speech, and the belief that we can become whatever we want to be. I take pride that I have grown into such a well rounded person who is able to enjoy my Cape Verdean culture as well as the American culture. It has made me who I am today. My status as a woman is not my gender, it is my individuality, my uniqueness of being blended by two very strong cultures. Our parents moved us to America to grow, thrive and live. It should not be our down fall once we meet our goals; we should not be looked down because we are independent and might not want to start a family right away. We have not forgotten our culture, we live it every day when we have conversations like these, when we cook our Cape Verdean foods, and dance to our music, when we pass our traditions down to our children or our friends, when we are able to speak our language, when we educate others about our culture, when we take care of our men and household, and when we support one another just to name a few. Instead we should be valued and appreciated for our accomplishments.

Preliminary Conclusions and Future Considerations

The Cape Verdean community in the United States has been affected by the legacy of colonialism, racial discrimination, economic, political and social shifts in both its homeland and host country, stunting its transition from labor to skilled diaspora. This major shift is the only viable way for real community development to take place. Only within this transition, will individual and group socio-economic upward mobility take place as more members of the community become formally educated, have access to more resources and can positively impact their communities. This phenomenon can potentially have results related to individuals becoming separated from the community and class division. One result is that individuals may become accustomed to "American ways", they might forget the homeland's cultural traditions, become unattached from the mother land, form their own families and relocate to other cities where Cape Verdeans communities are not as large and might not actively teach the language and other cultural markers to their children, thus causing a further decline in the collective identity of the Cape Verdean immigrant community.

The second potential impact of this transition is the historic pattern of middle and upper classes exercising power over less privileged sectors of

the community in their desires to 'uplift them' as described by Kevin Gaynes (1996) in his research on African Americans, rather than work collectively to uphold and respect the ways the working class and impoverished section of the community find their own unique ways to articulate their social and political concerns. Perhaps the issue of ethnic identity is not an internal concern for Cape Verdeans as much as community divisions based on class, gender, island of origin or inter and intra generational challenges to community leadership. Other island nations such as Dominican Republic and Martinique face similar questions related to ethnicity. However, in the case of Cape Verdeans in the United States, questions of identity arise, particularly when faced with the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination, which still exist today. Ultimately, in terms of ethnic identification the Cape Verdean case study is not unique. Similar to other Black immigrant communities, most Cape Verdeans exercise their right to view themselves as "Cape Verdeans", thus defying external pressures to be defined by strict racial constructs (Waters 1999).

At the center of the community is the voice of Cape Verdean women, which has received limited attention from both the Cape Verdean community and scholars. Future research and conversations within the community should consider the formal and informal social and political practices as ways to improve community cohesion. Preliminary research provided in this essay via written interviews, demonstrates that Cape Verdean women have an in-depth understanding of the significant role they play in their families and broader community. In fact, many women have strategically selected the way they manifest their multilayered identity as Cape Verdean, woman of color, immigrant, community activist and cultural preserver. In choosing their own paths to community building they consider themselves powerful.

Perhaps the future leadership of the Cape Verdean community already exists. However, this leadership may defy what the traditional or mainstream role of what the leader looks like. Should leaders be politicians, formally educated people, of a specific sex, age group or own a very successful business? Should political and social community building only occur in formal spaces such as formal organizations and government institutions or will the community accept discussions taking place on Facebook, Twitter, a nightclub, or someone's living room? In essence, who determines where and how community building takes places? Should mainstream scholarship or American culture define how immigrant communities organize and self-identify or can these communities determine that for themselves? Cape Verdean immigrants must collectively address these questions when defining their space and continue to build their legacy in the United States.

Special Considerations

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- I am thankful to Cape Verdean community members and leaders, particularly criolas for their honesty and courage. I am honored that they allowed me the privilege of sharing their stories with others.
- The term crioulo is used as an adjective for Cape Verdean person. The term crioula(s) is used to refer to Cape Verdean woman.
- The written interviews used in this article took place between the periods of 2010 and 2014 with Cape Verdean women ranging in ages between 18 and 80, in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island communities where Cape Verdeans reside. Interviews with leaders and members of Cape Verdean organizations were held between 2008 and 2009 in Southern New England.

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