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Isabel P. B. Fêo Rodrigues



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«OUR ANCESTORS CAME FROM MANY BLOODS»
*Gendered Narrations of a Hybrid Nation**

Narratives of mixed ancestry in Cape Verde use gender as common denominator in the weaving of a Creole nation. These narratives may hide tensions, conflicts, and adversities, but they also contain elements of fusion and national cohesion. They are and have been gendered narratives, partial and selective of the elements of fusion substantiating and sustaining a Cape Verdean identity vis-à-vis the multiple symbolic and material challenges faced by this young post-colonial nation-state. In them, Cape Verde is portrayed as an exceptional African case with boundaries carved by the ocean, free from ethnic conflict, and without a pre-colonial past through which to filter present realities.

«Nos ancêtres étaient de sangs mêlés»: les récits sexués d'une nation hybride

Les récits d'ascendance mixte au Cap-Vert utilisent l'appartenance à un sexe comme un dénominateur commun dans le tissage d'une nation créole. Ces récits peuvent dissimuler les tensions, conflits et les difficultés, mais ils contiennent aussi des éléments de fusion et de cohésion nationale. Ces récits sont et ont été sexués, chargés de partialité et établissant une sélection des éléments de fusion qui fondent et qui entretiennent une identité capverdienne vis-à-vis des multiples défis symboliques et matériels auxquels doit faire face ce jeune État-nation post-colonial. Ils dressent un portrait du Cap-Vert comme un cas africain exceptionnel aux frontières délimitées par l'océan, sans conflit ethnique et sans passé pré-colonial à travers lequel filtrer les réalités actuelles.

«Os nossos antepassados tinham sangues mesclados»:
Narrativas Criadas de uma Nação Híbrida

Narrativas de ascendência mista em Cabo Verde utilizam o género como denominador comum no entretecer de uma nação crioula. Essas narrativas podem esconder tensões, conflitos e adversidades, mas também contêm elementos de fusão e de coesão nacional. São e têm sido narrativas criadas, parciais e seletivas dos elementos de fusão substancando e sustentando uma identidade cabo-verdiana perante os múltiplos desafios simbólicos e materiais que esta jovem nação pós-colonial tem enfrentado. Nelas, Cabo Verde é retratado como um

* All the oral narratives in this essay were collected during my doctoral fieldwork, conducted in Cape Verde from September 1997 to July 1998; see «Crafting Nation and Creolization in the Islands of Cape Verde» (2002). The fieldwork was made possible with Praxis XXI, a grant from the Portuguese Ministry of Science and Technology. I am responsible for all the translations from Portuguese manuscripts.

caso africano de excepção com fronteiras cavadas pelo oceano, livre de conflitos étnicos e sem um passado pré-colonial através do qual se possam filtrar as realidades actuais.

«I am a descendent of Captain Cook. In one of his return voyages from Hawaii he brought a native woman; she was short, silky long air, like all the Hawaiian women [Berta touches her long black hair as she explains her ancestry]. She got very sick during the voyage because she was pregnant from Captain Cook. He realized she could not resist another voyage and decided to leave her in Boavista Island [in Cape Verde] thinking that he could get her back on his next trip to Hawaii after she had recovered. Of course he got killed on one of his voyages and so the Hawaiian woman remained in the island. The child was born, a boy, and then married local peoples and adopted the last name of Capitão, from his father the captain, and even today in Boavista the family is known as the Captain's family. I have been told that I look a lot like this Hawaiian grandmother, and if you look closely my hair my eyes resemble those of the pacific, but being this tall must be from Captain Cook».

Berta's family history, recorded in
São Vicente Island 1998

Who are these volatile ancestors who stopped in Cape Verde on their way to other worlds leaving descendants in the islands? Why Captain Cook? Or why the French pirates who are said to be responsible for so many of the blue eyes of Santo Antão Island? Are they national fictions? Should they be disregarded as mere myth making? Or are they a mere reflection of an imposed colonial ideology whereby African ancestries are forgotten and European genealogies remembered?

The incorporation of transnational genealogies is a significant part of Cape Verdean culture and history recounted in multiple genres, in written as well as in oral narratives. Not only are these narratives present in musical lyrics, folklore, and family histories narrated in the Cape Verdean Creole language, but they are also present in narratives conveyed through the Portuguese language. Significantly, these oral histories of mixed descent commonly interweave gendered narratives that are immersed in the creolization process and in local belief systems on being and becoming Creole (or *Kriolu* as it is spelled in the Cape Verdean Creole language) through past as well as present processes. While Berta's genealogy, cited above, is remembered through naming, with all the descendants being named locally «de Capitão» (of the Captain), many other genealogies of mixture left no name in Cape Verde. Yet, they are recalled on the local level as valid sources of hybrid genealogies that over time engendered the singularity of Capeverdeanity.

Approaching gender in Africa has often implied a quest to disentangle the subordinate position of women *vis-à-vis* men or account for the socio-economic complexities that place African women in a position of growing economic, sexual and medical vulnerability. Instead of focusing on gendered socio-economic inequities and political disfranchisement, this paper highlights the cultural and ideological role of gender in weaving narratives of mixed ancestry that have at the center

stage the islands of Cape Verde. While most forms of nation building and nationalism tend to weave histories of long established ancestry, cultural homogeneity, and territoriality we often neglect the fact that these narratives also weave ancestries made of women and by women. Despite of the centrality of women in narratives of creolization, genealogy, and nation, these gendered narrations coexist with the general invisibility of women in the political realm of the state.

Furthermore, this paper underscores the importance of narratives of mixed ancestry in the daily forms of substantiating and sustaining a Cape Verdean identity *vis-à-vis* the multiple symbolic and material challenges faced by this young post-colonial nation-state. The association between nation and narration has been at the center of theoretical discussions on nationalism and nation building¹, rarely do we find a direct applicability of such theoretical developments for the relatively young postcolonial African nation-states. Instead, they are commonly conceived as artificial political entities carved out to serve competing European interests. As a result, narratives of national cohesion tend to be over shadowed by the pervasiveness of political instability, ethnic conflict, and underlying processes of symbolic and structural violence intertwined with competing party politics.

Against this background of postcolonial national instability, Cape Verde is often portrayed as an exceptional African case with boundaries carved by insularity, free from ethnic conflict, and without a pre-colonial past through which to formulate claims of national continuity. This image of insular serenity, however, hides the fact that Cape Verde has not been immune to the structural violence of poverty, famine, and social inequities, which have affected women and men in differentiated proportions². What is indeed remarkable in the Cape Verdean case is not how different it is from the rest of Africa but how despite a history plagued by poverty, famine, and structural inequalities local narratives continue to weave conciliatory accounts of nation building. This paper suggests that these narratives on identity formation and nation building are accepted on the local level precisely because they are deeply gendered, colored by unchallenged gender roles and inequalities, and textured by pervasive continuities between the colonial past and the postcolonial present.

Without exposing a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature on post-colonial nation building in Cape Verde, this paper underscores how the realm of power and ideology is inseparable from the cultural context and the cultural agents that reproduce and in turn give life to national narratives. Thus, the selected narratives will bridge the oral and the textual, the ideological and the cultural, the peculiar and the mundane. They retain powerful, yet often overlooked gendered

¹ Cf. B. ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1991, for the importance of print capitalism in disseminating narratives of nation as a shared community. See also H. BHABA, *Nation and Narration*, New York, Routledge, 1997, for a discussion of how nations belong to a cultural tradition of narration that defines their temporality and sequence as if belonging to time immemorial.

² For a discussion of gender and food insecurity cf. I.F. RODRIGUES, « Escassez Abundante: memória e rotina alimentar em Cabo Verde », in C. CARVALHO & J. de Pina CABRAL (eds), *A Persistência da História, Passado e Contemporaneidade em África*, Lisbon, Imprensa das Ciências Sociais, 2004.

voices that provide temporality, symbolic cohesion, and a sense of innateness to the conflicting process of crafting a postcolonial national identity. As Anne Marie Alonso points out, gender and kinship are commonly used discursive mechanisms of national narration that «substantiate» the processes of nation building through common-sense or acceptable categories such as those derived from biology, kinship and gender that give nations their clout of inevitability³. Nevertheless, while the tendency is to analyze how national ideologies resort to «substantiating purist» genealogies moving as cohesive entities through time and space, the same cannot be applied to Cape Verde. Unlike many histories of national homogeneity, of *motherland* and *fatherland* (particularly in Europe), the primary narratives on Cape Verdean genesis are inscribed in mixed or hybrid ancestries as opposed to a purist entity. The narratives selected in this paper demonstrate: 1) that gender is key to national narrations; 2) that these narratives voiced by women and men are nonetheless tied with a history of gender inequality; 3) they paint a reconciliatory history whereby the lines between colonized and colonizer are blurred in intimate histories of likely and unlikely *fusion*.

The Rhetoric of National Authenticity and Cultural Homogeneity

In the classic theory of nations and nationalism greater emphasis is placed on principles of homogeneity, or in Ernest Gellner's words, on the «nationalist imperative of the congruence of political unit and of culture»⁴. That is from a theoretical stance, national ideologies tend to privilege historic narratives of *pure* origins and cultural hegemony of one group over the other⁵. This process is, depending on the theoretical perspective, generally attributed to the role of the state in producing historical foundational narratives capable of finding resonance in their citizen's collective memories and performance of nationality.

³ A.M. ALONSO explicitly associates gender metaphors with the construction of national narratives that cast national identities as irreducible and natural entities, moving intact through historical trajectories as unchallenged polities; see «The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism, and Ethnicity», *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23, 1994: 379-405.

⁴ E. GELLNER stresses how states produce the homogenizing mechanism of culture, such the creation of national educational systems whereby each individual is trained into becoming a national citizen by turning the same page of the same history textbook, thus learning and acquiring a common national culture; see *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1983: 121.

⁵ E. KEDOURI discusses the ideological rise of nations in 18th and 19th century Europe as part of the emergence of philosophical and historical necessity to respond to the predicament of modernity. In his views, the idea of self-determination based on the congruence of culture and polity were the main national contributions to the international order. Kedouri was also instrumental in highlighting the dual role of memory and forgetting in the construction of national histories, see *Nationalism*, London, Hutchinson University Press, 1960. GELLNER, *Nations . . .*, *op. cit.*, follows a similar analysis by focusing on the European experience and the state's role in producing cultural homogeneity. A. SMITH emphasizes the «ethnic» origins of nations evolving through time into larger units in articulation with a strong relationship to a kingdom or state in his *National Identity*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1984. Overall, they represent the classical approach to nations where cultural homogeneity becomes key to the national project.

In contrast, hybrid nations imply plurality and the making of something new out of the intersection and friction between two or more cultures, ancestries, languages, and world-views. Unlike narratives based on the supremacy of one group over the other, claims to Creole and hybrid identities stress the normalcy of mixture and the legitimacy of *doubleness*⁶. Like-wise, Cape Verdean notions of creolization do challenge the permeability of the dichotomies between colonizer and colonized, white and black, and Europe versus Africa.

Moreover, theoretically colonizing nations are often conceptualized as authentic communities belonging to a «natural» historical progression from kingdom to state and nation-state. In contrast, postcolonial African nations fall short from that model. Anthony Smith, for example, states that anti-colonial nationalist movements are «imitative» and «reactive» largely based on the work of an intellectual class exposed to European ideals⁷. This view, however, seems to disregard the fact that nationalism in Europe also coincided with the making of colonies and ideologies of Empire. Thus, we can also question are European nations «imitative» of one another? Were their national narrations believable because they were tied to the legitimization of their empires? There is a general agreement among scholars that nations are modern creations despite cast and represented as if belonging to a time immemorial. European nations competed amongst themselves in reactive terms in their attempt to legitimate their right to colonial possessions and in so doing they were also imitative. That is, they did not necessarily grow from a history of territorial, language, and cultural uniformity *per se*.

Similarly, colonized populations who were not directly exposed to European educational institutions were exposed to its contradictory practices in the tropics. Being a citizen as opposed to being a subject had real consequences in determining forced labor, conscription into the colonial army, access to positions in the state apparatus, and access to social privileges. As a result, postcolonial national narratives in Africa tend to emphasize their anti-colonial nature and historicize the anti-colonial independence movements as the founding leaders of national identity, national history, and national narratives. This temporality of national narrations associated with independence movements may be a misleading historical marker, since potential national narratives often pre-exist the postcolonial state. The case of Cape Verde illustrates that point.

Narratives of mixed genealogies tied to an independent national identity pre-exist the modern postcolonial state, thus raising the question of how they become accepted as postcolonial national narratives? What cultural contexts allow the incorporation of such narratives as powerful shared history? In other words, what makes them as acceptable as natural? Creolization in Cape Verde is not a process based

⁶ P. GILROY provides a critical analysis of how the Afro-Atlantic as a place of cultural exchange, diaspora, and displacement has always been intertwined with modernity. In his view essentializing notions of race based on the dichotomy of white and black, have prevented western scholarship from recognizing the legitimacy of mixture, hybridity, doubleness, in Creole spaces. Focusing on the Anglophone Afro-Atlantic, however, Gilroy overlooks Cape Verdean history as a place where the creolization process actually pre-dates the nationalist projects in Europe; *cf. The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1993.

⁷ A. SMITH, *National Identity*, *op. cit.*: 108-109.

on a state sponsored interest to dig into the past for an identity freed from the colonizer's influence or subtracted from a time immemorial before European arrival. Instead national narrations coincide with creolization, which are in turn conveyed through gendered narratives.

In the context of the «Black Atlantic» where Cape Verde is situated historically and culturally, hybridity has been used to re-conceptualize the African diaspora as a center of cultural exchange or as a space where modernity and interchange have been the norm challenging essentializing roots of racial ancestry⁸. Despite differences in conceptualization and uses of hybridity, the Afro-Atlantic as a place of cultural exchange is not and should not be restricted to the Atlantic islands. Creolization also occurred in continental Africa, the difference is that in many such places it has not been claimed as a national narrative. Even when constructs of purity were part and parcel of colonial forms of domination, leaving behind a history of racial antagonism, the fact remains that in places of extreme racial segregation such as in apartheid South Africa many individuals claimed to be mixed and lived lives where cultural exchange across presumed stable racial boundaries was the norm.

Furthermore, when nation building is conceptualized in terms of hegemonic forces of one culture over multiple others, one «original» people conquering and homogenizing plurality, hybridity or Creole histories tend to be discounted as unstable *vis-à-vis* purported homogeneous nations. In sub-Saharan Africa the dichotomy between the white colonizer versus the black colonized granted national independence movements a different character. Independence movements not only confronted a colonial system where the linkages of political and economic accountability were directed to distant metropolis, but also a socio-cultural system where social privilege was concentrated in the hands of a colonial white elite. Yet, the boundaries between colonized and colonizer were permeable, and cultural borrowing did occur on both sides whether consciously or unconsciously. Similarly, African political resistance often borrowed the religious and the cultural repertoire of the colonizers in order to use those codes to resist the colonizer. In short, it is not a history of exceptional creolization and cultural interchange that led to Cape Verdean singularity, but how narratives of Cape Verdean Creole paths became central to the formation of a postcolonial national identity.

Cape Verde forces us to re-examine how processes of postcolonial national identity may become inscribed in places where the starting point is entangled with a colonial past that speaks to the present through multiple narratives of remembered and forgotten forms of subjugation. Similarly, the genesis of national identities are not determined by postcolonial texts alone, but may utilize the crafting of alternative cultures and histories which make the dyads between black and white, colonial and postcolonial less believable.

Hybrid ancestries, in a context of social stratification and profound tensions between past and present, remain a source of plasticity and cohesion. They provide plausible narratives of national integrity *vis-à-vis* daily realities of growing poverty and inequality. Through a fusion of cultures, intersection of histories and

⁸ P. GILROY, *The Black Atlantic . . .*, *op. cit.*

genealogies, Cape Verde emerges as a nation founded on the deep history of hybrid relations with a multitude of others. That is, mixed ancestry becomes Cape Verdean.

If this belief is seen as a mere elite production concocted to preserve the status quo by neutralizing the origins of Cape Verdean inequity through the fog of cultural fusion, we lose sight of the rich cultural repertoire on mixed ancestries that takes place in multiple island spaces and across social strata. Should we regard these narratives as mere myth making? Is the recollection of hybrid ancestries a result of an alienated history aimed at forgetting past enslavements? The quest for national origins is political, but the political is widely accepted as natural when based on existent cultural beliefs that grant them its common sense allure and widespread unquestioned status.

As many anthropologists remind us, nation building is at the cross roads of culture and politics. Gender is often a powerful cultural and ideological bridge between the two⁹. Likewise oral narratives such as that of Berta from Boavista Island cited in the beginning of this article, not only spice our texts, but also widen our understandings about the agents of kinship and nation building in Cape Verde and elsewhere. Her narrative is not a result of an impinged postcolonial state ideology, her ancestors pre-date the postcolonial state like many others construed as a process with deep origins in a past that is well rooted in the islands belonging to Cape Verdeans – A past that is invariably mixed, overlapping histories of the Lusophone and other empires where once displaced peoples creatively spun gendered narrations of hybridity and nation.

Narrating Nation as a Gendered Encounter

Volatile male ancestors (such as Captain Cook) who left descendents in Boavista Island exemplify how narratives of hybridity in Cape Verde, implicitly and explicitly, engage gender and sexuality in the making of family histories between Cape Verdeans and Europeans. These biological unions are powerful mechanisms of identity formation, for they serve to «naturalize» political ambiguities and tensions, through biological metaphors of «birth», «conception», «ancestors», «descendants», «genealogy» and «motherhood». In other words, a gendered encounter is commonly accepted and used in multiple genres of literature on Cape Verde and on Cape Verdean creolization. This gendered encounter continues to conjure a national identity as if a neutral process based on the «union» or the «mixture» of ancestors (real or mythical) from different cultures.

⁹ Cf. A.L. STOLER, «Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia», in M. di LEONARDO (ed.), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, and A.L. STOLER, «Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia»: 19-55, in Avtar BRAH & Annie COOMBES (eds), *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, New York, Routledge, 2000. Stoler explicitly connects national histories with histories of empire, articulating gender and sexuality with identity formation. She argues that Creoles and mixed-race people constantly challenged European categories of purity, exposing their fears and vulnerabilities.

These narratives of mixed ancestries, despite tied to complex processes of memory and forgetting, which are beyond the scope of this paper, constitute a conciliatory point of convergence, providing a temporality and sequence that engages the past in the present without opposing the two. That is narratives of mixture not only provide a genealogy of past origins but also of present continuity through Cape Verdean transnational kinships in the diaspora. In order to question their function and acceptance necessarily involves an examination of the role gender plays in naturalizing ancestors and symbolically reconciling tensions between past and present, colonial and postcolonial histories and identities. In Cape Verde a national identity is conceived through a historical project that overlaps the colonial period and progressive transformation into a new creation – made ultimately by Cape Verdeans «from many bloods».

The birth of Cape Verde conceived in *Ribeira Grande*, today commonly called «Cidade Velha» (Old City) the first colonial European town in West Africa is also historically tied to a gendered history where the omission of data on enslaved and free women is nonetheless revelatory. The great majority of European men did not bring their wives to Cape Verde, in fact by 1588, the *Corregedor* (colonial officer) Amador Gomes Raposo was entrusted with ensuring the correction of this state of affairs in order to avoid the abandonment of Portuguese wives in the kingdom, ordering:

«That all married men who left this kingdom [of Portugal] many years ago and who did not want to live there [in Cape Verde] with their [Portuguese] wives and without provisioning or caring for their survival, leaving them in poor and desolate conditions, should be send back to Portugal»¹⁰.

As many historians have pointed out, it is the African woman and those women born from liaisons between European men and African women, referred in the literature as *mestiças* who became the sexual partners of European men. The emergence of a mixed society is uncontested, leading to early succession of «cartas de legitimação» (letters of legitimacy) whereby fathers appealed to the kingdom of Portugal following the logic of the Christian European model of patrilineal descent to legitimate their children. These documents revealed the rationale of believed *inherent* blood ancestry following the father's line while omitting the female as mother and reproducer of children for the empire. Despite the lack of historical evidence, however, this process took place through women's life histories that are often silenced in the colonial historical record. Similarly, we cannot lose sight of the social tensions inherent to any process of domination and reproduction through the subjugated enslaved female population. Women were the reproducers of patrilineages, negotiating their status and mobility through that of their legitimated children, particularly their sons. This bond between mother and son remains a strong feature of kinship in postcolonial Cape Verde, often reproducing gender preferences and imbalances within the family.

¹⁰ I.C. BALENO, «Povoamento e Formação da Sociedade », in L. de ALBUQUERQUE & M.E. Madeira SANTOS (eds), *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, Lisbon, Instituto de Investigação Científica e Tropical, I, 1991: 125-177, quote on p. 153.

This process whereby gender is embedded in social tensions between freed and enslaved, between legitimated children versus illegitimate, became the common thread of social reproduction, which in turn led to a history of ambiguity among those who were simultaneously Portuguese through the father's line but excluded from the lineage. As the historian Ilidio Cabral Baleno points out, *mestiço* sons were not always well accepted by the elite white progenitor especially when they were competing with white children for entitlements to land, title, and social status¹¹. The boundaries of race class and gender, albeit porous, were also deeply contentious. Nevertheless, historical discussions (in Cape Verde and on Cape Verde) on the formation of a Creole society tend to privilege the notion of *fusion* as opposed to the tensions, conflict, and negotiation within and across boundaries. To illustrate:

«We think that it was in the intimacy of the mixed household, where the white man cohabitated with the black woman, that the first ethno-cultural interpenetration occurred. Deprived of sexual partners from his race, the white man had to resort to the enslaved black woman, either for occasional and dismissive liaisons without establishing formal ties, or for creating a family where relationships were more stable and long lasting»¹².

The *mestiço* thus became the embodiment of fusion born of this intimate encounter of world-views, cultures, histories and genders. This focus on fusion instead of tensions portrays a Cape Verde where the creolization process becomes unproblematic as if a natural outcome of racial mixture. In other words, a gendered encounter is at the foundation of a Creole nation, serving as a naturalizing force attenuating remaining ambiguities that continue in the postcolonial present.

When recent archaeological research (carried out by Portuguese archaeologists) discovered an area in São Vicente Island where a fishing settlement indicated possible occupation prior to Portuguese colonization, the debate on Cape Verdean origins was revisited on the local level with tales of lost treasures, pirates and shipwrecks. This debate involved questions about the settlement date and whether it was a «mere fishermen site» or an indication of settlement by «civilized» peoples. In a conference sponsored by the city hall one official discussed the issue of origins, clarifying for the audience,

«It does not matter what they [archaeologists] found on the coast. All this debate does not bring any modification to what we are. They may have been here, whoever they were, but that does not change the fact that our history started in 1461, and for that fact we shall demand a lot more from Portugal [economic aid and support of immigrant communities] than we do from others» [Mindelo, 1998].

Cape Verde in his view originated out of that encounter. Fathering children with African women is the common narrative of historical mixture, rarely are African women said to have «mothered» children of European men.

Elsewhere, I have discussed this view of creolization in relation to how sexuality was used in Portuguese ideologies of empire including *Lusotropicalismo*¹³. Here,

¹¹ I.C. BALENO, «Povoamento . . . », *op. cit.*: 162.

¹² *Ibid.*: 175.

¹³ I.F. RODRIGUES, «Islands of Sexuality Theories and Histories of Creolization», *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, XXXVI (1), 2003: 83-103.

we should be reminded that ambiguity is not a condition of Cape Verdean creolization. Whether as part of Africa or conceived as part of the other Atlantic islands (Madeira and the Azores), uncertainty towards Cape Verde's geography of identity within the Portuguese empire reflected the uneasiness through which racial mixture and hybridity undermined notions of purity. Along with this ambiguity were the uncertainties of whether the colonial project of replicating Portuguese identity in Africa, particularly in Cape Verde, was feasible without Portuguese Creole subjects. That is, ambiguity also characterized the colonizer's project conceived through the lens of church and state.

The historical documentation left by the Jesuits during their thirty-eight year presence of in *Cidade Velha* indicates the distrust assigned to racial mixture as a degeneration of European and Christian society in Africa. In 1642 the Jesuits cancelled their mission arguing, among other things, that the local bishop and governor did not appreciate their presence. They also complained that it was extremely hard to eradicate the «bad customs» of the land, referring to sexual behavior. In their view, the white population was diminishing due to miscegenation and many of these whites were Jewish or of Jewish descent, thus not real «carriers» of a Christian faith to the tropics. Moreover, the governors of Cape Verde constantly delayed the payment of the Jesuits' salaries, the residents plotted against their well being (namely Jesuit rights to property), and finally there were «little fruits» to be expected from the black population¹⁴. Similar accounts of «degeneration» continued throughout colonial history particularly voiced by outsiders to the islands and by those whose presence in the islands was sporadic and disentangled from local genealogies.

These tensions and ambivalence remained a strong presence throughout the history of the colony, and still characterize Portuguese and Cape Verdean social interactions in the postcolonial present, particularly when politics overlaps the realm of identity. Eugénio Tavares, a Cape Verdean writer at the turn of the 20th century, expressed this ambivalence between «siblings» in his poem entitled «Irmãos (Brothers)»:

«Children of the same parents	«Filhos dos meus pais
We are Portuguese	Nós somos Portugueses
Brothers by blood and heart	Irmão de sangue e coração
Some times	Algumas vezes
Before the law we are equal	Diante de lei iguais,
Other times not».	Outras não». ¹⁵

This expressed *brotherhood* was not fulfilled by a clear colonial policy towards Cape Verde. As in other colonial situations, racial miscegenation was feared despite not being bluntly regulated and opposed by colonial policies¹⁶. From the perspective

¹⁴ N. da Silva GONÇALVES provides ample evidence of the tensions in early colonial Cape Verde, where power disputes between church, governor and municipality were common occurrences; cf. *Os Jesuítas e a Missão de Cabo Verde, 1604-1640*, Lisbon, Brotéria, Associação Cultural e Científica, 1996: 233.

¹⁵ E. TAVARES, *Poesia, Contos e Teatro*, Instituto Cabo Verdiano do Livro e do Disco, 1996: 78.

¹⁶ Cf. R.J.C. YOUNG for a discussion of sexuality and the fear of European tropical degeneration in the Anglophone historical context, in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*,

of those who stayed and were of the islands, narratives of mixed genealogies incorporating outsiders to Cape Verde continued to influence survival and social mobility. In those narratives, instead of peripheral islands, Cape Verde was and is seen as the center stage of this fusion. These narratives of transnational genealogies continue in the present and are transmitted on the local level through narratives of many bloods and recalled ancestries that tie the islands to a multiplicity of places and cultures.

In the present, family pictures, family albums, and memorabilia continue to contain links to ancestries outside Cape Verde, which are shared among family members and visitors. Pictures of in-laws from Holland, Portugal, and the United States among others contain visual memory cues of present forms of recalling mixed ancestries and mixed descendants. Significantly, Cape Verdeans in general intertwine their islands' history of fusion with a maritime global history where the islands become strategic ports of passage, first for vessels to capturing the trade winds during the age of sail, second as a replenishing coal station in Mindelo's *Porto Grande* serving British transatlantic ships during the age of steam, and finally as a strategic port to the Portuguese military during the late colonial wars. These histories become entangled in local narratives, in popular music, and in the commonly sung *mornas* (Cape Verdean national song). As a strategic maritime archipelago, those who came, even when passing through, left seeds of their presence.

The educational system supports a similar history of creolization. This history is taught in elementary schools where children learn the «strategic» importance of Cape Verde in relation to the main Atlantic routes «half-way» to Europe, Africa and South America. They also learn from textbooks written in Portuguese (as opposed to their mother tongue *Kriolu*) that Cape Verdean society was founded on African and European cultural forms as seen in this fifth grade text:

«The quotidian life in Cape Verde was certainly marked by the cultural influences of the groups that settled here. It is natural that given the numeric majority of the African population, many of the customs and daily practices revealed the African influence. However, many elements of the European culture were also introduced in our society [. . .]. The Cape Verdean language (Creole) is a result of the conjunction, of the two cultures – the Portuguese and the African».¹⁷

Hence, Cape Verde is placed at the intersection of maritime routes in popular culture, in educational materials, and in the media and state celebrations of Capeverdeanness.

In Santo Antão Island similar histories of «mixed blood» recount the constant presence of pirates who, as one interviewee explained, left «many bloods». As popular history narrates, there were many French pirates who stopped in Santo Antão, «some of whom stayed and married into local families, this is why so many of us have blue eyes.» Tales of piracy are common and validated by the historical record, though what is seldom validated is how their presence in Cape Verde

New York, Routledge, 1995. Many comparable elements can be traced, despite a generalized ideology of Portuguese sexual permissiveness in the tropics.

¹⁷ *Ciências Integradas, Quinto Ano*, Ministry of Education of the Republic of Cape Verde, 1997: 63-65 (5th grade textbook).

is spun in another direction of history and identity construction. On the level of Cape Verdean oral history, pirate genealogies are also made Cape Verdean.

In São Vicente Island, where the island economy was related to the transatlantic port, having mixed ancestry that is untraceable to a particular country of origin is conveyed with pride as typical of the island culture and of being *genuinely* Cape Verdean. In literature, we see Baltasar Lopes dealing with this *sui generis* nature of mixture when, in a preface to «Aventura Crioula (The Creole Adventure)» he writes:

«There has been in general a tendency to frame the «problem» of Cape Verde [. . .] erroneously as a dilemma: we have the option, in order to «define» the «problem», of two irreducible terms: Europe or Africa.

Yes, because they ask us, they ask us people of the islands:

– If you «are not African», what are you? European?

Or inversely, but I believe this question occurs less frequently:

– If you are «not European», what are you? African?

Of course if the table is set up in this way it leaves no freedom to the guest, who will most likely feel constrained from announcing his only real ethnological identity:

– Neither one, nor the other: We are Capeverdean».

He added that in relation to Brazil,

«[Cape Verde's] extremely small scale conferred greater purity to the result of the interaction of cultural forces, and as a result, I am convinced that Cape Verde is a social organism more harmonious than the Brazilian»¹⁸.

By emphasizing mixed ancestors, racial categories are blurred or dissipated into other forms of social differentiation. Lopes, reflects the late colonial indeterminacy towards Cape Verde and the fact that not only mixture was the norm in Cape Verde it had had substantial time to be harmonized in a more homogeneous whole with far less social fissures than those present in Brazilian society. This of course is highly debatable, but the point remains that creolization becomes far more associated with fusion than with tensions.

Symbolically, Cape Verde becomes the center of a historical plot rather than the periphery (as is usually cast in histories of empire) by incorporating outside histories shaped by the island's own agency. The islands become a place of «strategic importance» in the history of Atlantic routes – where history «stopped» and stayed through the island's genealogies, spinning in a direction that follows local memories and local agency. These are histories that are centered and staged in the island's territory, like the history of Captain Cook who left descendants in Boavista Island, thus tying the locals to events and people beyond Cape Verde.

This way of remembering ancestors is also tied to past colonial forms of stratification where name and genealogy were crucial to high status maintenance and to upward social mobility. This process finds historical resonance in island practices of naming, a process tied to Catholicism and its role in changing African names to those of their European masters. West African ancestries changed in Cape Verde through the act of naming and through the baptism of the enslaved

¹⁸ B. LOPES, «Prefácio», in M. FERREIRA, *A Aventura Crioula*, Lisbon, Plátano Editora 1973: xi and xii-xiii.

population with the master's family names. That is, slave ownership and patri-lineage went hand in hand. This process had the effect of tying genealogies with Europe and suppressing the transmission and collective memory of African names. West Africa provided ancestors whose descendants, male and female, remained in Cape Verde without their name of origin.

The remembering of mixed genealogies has also its mythical qualities, not necessarily because they are invented but because they communicate a form of articulating reality with desire under adverse circumstances. Where poverty is widespread and survival is a daily struggle for a large part of the population, the local symbolic repertoire also contains mechanisms of coping with local adversities. The ability to find ancestors outside the realm of one's difficult living conditions fosters ways of coping and of producing alternative histories for the present.

The image of Cape Verde as a point of converging cultures is clear in tourist brochures that advertise the «typical» traditions from music to Catholic saints festivals in which the genuine spirit of Capeverdeanness can be discovered in the islands. In an attempt to attract tourists, most of them from Europe, Cape Verde is often cast in geographical as well as cultural proximity to Europe as a place of cultural interchange naturally auspicious to outsiders. The gendered narrative is implicit in the brochures featuring the exoticized Creole woman as an element of Cape Verdean national attractiveness. This gendered construction of the nation is enhanced through Carnaval advertisement and portrayals of local women in Brazilian Style samba parades where sexuality is implicitly part of the musical attraction. *Morabeza*, the sense of auspiciousness, hospitality, and smoothness, contributes to this gendered image of a Cape Verde sold to outsiders.

Yet, not all these narratives are associated with the exotic and with this emerging re-defining of the nation for the tourist industry. Many narratives of fusion incorporate histories of survival and capacity to overcome adversity. In Mindelo, considered to have been the most cosmopolitan town of Cape Verde, the «tempo de Inglês», or the *English time*, is a main historical marker repeated in oral narratives, poetry, and prose. That time was a short-lived period when the English rented use-rights from the Portuguese government to build a coal station for their trans-Atlantic lines during the era of steam navigation. The telegraph and the Atlantic cable lines of the English empire passed through Portuguese territories including Cape Verde. Despite lasting little more than a half-century, the British presence marked the island's collective memory as a time of plenty contributing to the creolization of the island, celebrated in the popular lyrics of Teófilo Chantre's *morna* sung across the world by Cesaria Evora as:

«An era of splendor	« <i>Um era d'esplendor</i>
That left traces in its population	<i>Ki tchá traso na povo</i>
In your architecture	<i>Na bô arkítetura</i>
Your cosmopolitanism	<i>Bô kosmopolitismo</i>
That makes you	<i>Ki fazê de bô</i>
A Creole Rome	<i>Um Roma krioula</i>
Glorified and decadent»	<i>Gloriosa e dekadente»</i>

That period is also remembered as a time of greater employment opportunities in the island's port economy, especially in the English telegraph offices, social clubs, and businesses. Today when *tempo d'inglês* is remembered is with nostalgia

and with a critical eye to the present. Such a historical trajectory is ignored by most of the citizens of Great Britain, yet it is remembered as a high point in Cape Verdean history. Similarly the British presence has been transformed by local interpretations and incorporated into local aesthetics as part of Cape Verde and particularly of being Cape Verdean in Mindelo. Such narratives centralize Cape Verde as the social stage of cultural exchange and fusion hiding the tensions that surely occurred during the English presence. Thus, rather than mere myth making, it is useful to see how the local context of economic uncertainty intertwines with past symbolic survival. Conceiving one's genealogies across time and space, beyond the geography of Cape Verde as if these relationships had always been coherent and uncontested through time, is thus instrumental in times of uncertainty and socio-economic vulnerability.

Furthermore, not all narratives of mixture are voiced or narrated. Many are silenced and may hide other gendered histories that disrupted local conceptions and boundaries between the ideal and the real, the normative and the unaccepted, the ethical and the unethical. Not all ancestors and *mixed bloods* can be remembered, but they are nonetheless present in the social fabric of Cape Verde. While weaving *panos de banda* (traditional Cape Verdean cloth), *Nha Toi*, a local artist recounted how he had many brothers and sisters, perhaps fifty altogether all spread through the different islands, for «wherever my father went he made a child. I may die not knowing all my siblings spread through the world». In those days [referring to late colonialism], he continued,

«When I was growing up in our village in Santo Antão there was a priest who had many children. At the time this was a great sin and it is still a great sin. We all knew who the mother of his children was. But no one said anything about it. Instead his children were called the nephews and nieces of the priest. They all had *nominhas* (nicknames). Out of respect for the Church and for the priest no one dared calling the children *filho di padre* (the priest's children). But once we were in our private homes we all knew that when we talked about the “nephews” we meant the “priest's” children. I never found out if the children really knew who their real father was. Could they really believe the priest was their uncle?» [Excerpt from *Nha Toi* oral history, São Vicente 1998]

Nominhas, the invented nickname one gains as a child, indeed allows for the silenced genealogies and histories of *illegitimacy* to coexist with other genealogies said to be *legitimate*. Disturbing local patterns of morality, the children of the priest were redefined as his nephews and nieces and social life carried on. This redefining of genealogies, this fiction that bridges reality, ultimately becomes real. The fictive reality is authentic from the perspective of the participants, part and parcel of other gendered narratives of fusion and mixture that bridge nation with creolization.

Captain Cook, the Pirates, and Fictive Kin

Narratives of mixed ancestries, bridge the fictive and the real, becoming acceptable daily realities for those who, as the children of the priest, performed their life histories as the priest's nephews. That is they became the priest's nephews.

These narratives of mixed ancestry hide many tensions, conflicts, and adversities, but they also contain elements of fusion. They are and have been gendered narratives, partial and selective of the elements of fusion substantiating and sustaining a Cape Verdean identity *vis-à-vis* the multiple symbolic and material challenges faced by this young postcolonial nation-state. In them, Cape Verde is portrayed as an exceptional African case without ethnic conflict, with boundaries carved by the ocean, free from ethnic conflict, and without a pre-colonial past through which to formulate claims to pre-European identity and history. Many other voices and selective memories could be brought to the table of creolization, but the elements of fusion tend to prevail in popular narratives, lyrics, and history. Creating a deep history of integrative differences, the process of nation building is understood to have deep origins starting with the formation of the colony in the 15th century. Gender is present in all these narratives, breaking the boundaries of legitimacy and silencing the tensions of illegitimacy by redefining and renaming, and thus creating a livable reality.

Redoing kinship with volatile European outsiders reveals the importance locally attributed to *mixed blood* in the process of identity formation. Kinship remains the most unquestioned mechanism of this Creole genesis and the most seemingly apolitical, and for those reasons it is probably the most effective and everlasting. Kinship intertwines with gender where women are the main agents. National identities are replete with masculine symbolism, such as the martyr who died for the nation, the frontier men, or the lost soldier. In Cape Verde, however, gendered narratives of nation do not address this type of violence but ease the tensions derived from the structural violence of poverty, the history of famines, and social inequities, which have affected women and men in differentiated proportions.

As many anthropologists continue to point out, the realm of power and ideology is inseparable from the cultural context and the individual agents that reproduce and in turn construct the daily reality of national narrations. These narrations bridge the oral and the textual, the ideological and the cultural, the fictive and the real. Through gendered histories, they provide temporality, symbolic cohesion, and a sense of innateness to the conflicting process of crafting a postcolonial national identity. As already stated, the use of gender and kinship are forms of «substantiating» the processes of nation building through *natural* categories such as those of biology, kinship and gender that give nations their clout of inevitability. In postcolonial context, such as the Lusophone, where the tensions between colonized and colonizer are still remembered and lived, gender becomes a powerful mechanism of cohesion whereby the lines between colonized and colonizer are blurred in intimate histories of likely and unlikely *fusion*.

Berta's quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates this point. Her genealogy is greater than the individual, centered in the island but transcending the island's history. It is a genealogy tied to a global history through Captain's Cook passage in Cape Verde's Boavista Island. Did Cook actually stop in Boavista Island? Did he leave descendants? For how many generations have his descendents passed this history to one another? Was this narrative transmitted by family women or by family men? What was lost and added in the process of that transmission?

Those are questions that could be answered by simply asserting that all genealogies and processes of identity formation are inescapably myth making and that all

traditions in one way or another are invented¹⁹. However, Berta's genealogy becomes profoundly genuine by placing one's history and place in the center of a narrative, which is manifested and materialized and embodied in her hair and height. Similarly, her life history suggests the centrality of remembering genealogies as a mechanism of identity maintenance. The *Capitão* lives in her narratives of Boavista and Cape Verde. That is, Captain Cook is creolized in Berta's genealogy, becoming Cape Verdean.

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Isabel P.B. FÊO RODRIGUES

University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth

Sociology and Anthropology Department

<irodrigues@umassd.edu>

¹⁹ E. HOBSBAWM & T. RANGER eds, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, highlighted the invented nature of tradition in opposition to notions of authenticity, particularly in colonial contexts where the colonizer struggled to find legitimacy and symbolic acquiescence from their colonized subjects. While all traditions are to a certain extent invented and re-invented, they are not born out of an immaculate conception, but derive their material and repertoire from pre-existing cultural codes and re-assemblages.