

Última versão entregue à revista. Para citar, consultar o original: Elizabeth Challinor (2015): Caught Between Changing Tides: Gender and Kinship in Cape Verde, *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, DOI: [10.1080/00141844.2015.1042489](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1042489)  
To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1042489>

## **Caught Between Changing Tides: Gender and Kinship in Cape Verde**

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## **Acknowledgments**

The research was funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), Lisbon, Portugal in the Centre for Research in Anthropology (CIA) at the University of Minho (UM). It began as a post-doctoral grant (SFRH/BPD/36914/2007), and fieldwork was then funded within the ambit of the Programa Ciência 2008 and the project 'Care as Sustainability in

Crisis Situations' (PTDC/CS-ANT/117259/2010) within the strategic project of CRIA (PEst-OE/SADG/UI4038/2014).

## **Introduction**

Studies of the internal vulnerabilities of Cape Verdean patriarchy (Rodrigues 2007) and of the threats posed to 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995) by recent socio-economic transformations in Cape Verde (Massart 2005) have contributed towards deepening our understanding of the situated nature of gender relations. In contrast to classical feminist theorizing which holds that 'most (all?) cultures are patriarchal and that such cultures give prominence, power and privilege to men and the masculine and depend upon the oppression, if not disparagement of women and the feminine' (O'Reilly 2007: 800), these studies provide a far more nuanced and complex analysis of gendered power relations by showing how gender ideologies do not automatically confer more power to men and by situating the agency of women in contexts which may easily be overlooked in approaches that focus on activism and resistance. The aim of this article is to build upon such an approach, by studying gender with a focus on kinship relations and family life, examining the kind of 'tactical manoeuvres' (De Certeau 1984) Cape Verdean women and men employ as they handle the tensions that arise in their attempts to reconcile conflicting expectations regarding relationships, sexuality and behaviour.

Strathern (1981) argues that when 'society' is taken as a 'male construct' this should not set women apart from the social system, as individuals manipulating structure from a more 'real' space, free from cultural suppositions regarding how to behave. She calls this 'mistaken concretism',

arguing that ‘The individual as a “person” stands in a specific relationship to ideas about gender’ (Strathern 1981: 168). In other words, women do not resist male domination from a “non-gendered” space. In order to understand the workings of gender ideologies they must therefore be examined within their social and historical context which, in the case of Cape Verde, cannot be reduced to that of the nation due to the transnational nature of Cape Verdean social life.

Non-Western and postcolonial feminist theorizing has also served to illuminate the cross-cutting oppressive influences of other dynamics beyond that of gender, such as race and class (Mohanty 1988; Bordo 1990) which produce an intersectional location of oppression for black women (Crenshaw 1993) that challenges the notion that gender inequalities affect all women in the same way. Collins (2000) argues that the theorizing of black women’s experiences of intersectional oppression holds the analytical potential for identifying other sites of interlocking inequalities in the experiences of different social groups. According to Patil (2013), transnational feminist theorizing has failed to pay sufficient attention to the nature of these sites by its uncritical usage of the notion of discrete nations as meaningful units of analysis for comparison. She describes this approach as “methodological nationalism that continues to associate particular sets of gender relations with particular nations, polities, societies, and cultures...” (2013:848). The shift of focus Patil proposes – from the bounded nation-state to include the historical and contemporary influences of “border-crossing forces” (2013:853) breaks down simplistic binary associations that

equate the traditional with the local and the modern with the global. This is clear in the case of Cape Verde which emerged as a geopolitical space through “border-crossing forces” that have created a transnational social world. The study of how gendered expectations regarding relationships, sexuality and behaviour are managed in Cape Verdean family life consequently requires the adoption of a transnational perspective because family relations stretch across geographical borders. The Cape Verdean gender relations examined in this article consequently draw upon data from fieldwork carried out in both Cape Verde and Portugal.

Adopting a transnational perspective elucidates the ways in which gendered expectations are influenced by the intersection of extralocal social and political dynamics. Traditional Cape Verdean gender ideologies cannot simplistically be labeled as “local” since they arise out of the nation’s history of colonialism and migration.

Mass migration during the colonial period, in response to widespread famine and drought, was followed by predominantly male labour migration after independence (attained in 1975). In traditional ideological conceptions of patriarchy, influenced by the values of the Catholic Church, women are thus expected to take on a nurturing role whilst men provide for the material well-being of the family. These expectations create ideal role types of behavior as evident in a popular saying, cited to me by an elderly woman in rural Santiago (during fieldwork conducted in 2005): ‘Mother is a blanket, father is breadwinner<sup>1</sup>’ -*Mãe é manta pai é papa* (Challinor 2011: 197). The

failure of men to succeed in the economic sphere may constitute a source of tension that challenges their masculinity in the public eye by not providing for their families. Gendered expectations are deeply embedded in kinship and community relations which Sahlins (2011: 2) defines as “‘mutuality of being’”: people who are intrinsic to one another’s existence’ and are thus affected by each other’s behaviour.

Changes in migration patterns with far more women migrating in recent decades than in the past and Cape Verde’s transition to democracy in 1991 which set the stage for social and economic transformations freed women up from the domestic sphere, allowing them to benefit from work and educational opportunities traditionally reserved for men. These changes are also reflected in gender ideologies. As ideas about gender in Cape Verde begin to shift, people find themselves caught between changing tides; pushed and pulled in opposite directions by divergent influences and expectations of their gender roles.

How then do individuals deal with changing gender ascriptions in the midst of their relations with community and kin? Do women and men respond differently to these changes? Are traditional gender ideologies more easily challenged in the diaspora? These are the questions this article seeks to address. The data discussed below illustrates that despite changes Cape Verdean gender relations continue to exhibit tensions between masculinity and femininity that intersect social status, rural/urban background, migration and unequal traditional/religious expectations for women and men. Even in

the diaspora, gender relations are not fully changed to accommodate to the demands and expectations of a different cultural context. Rather, Cape Verdean students maintain a tight sense of community where traditional gender relations are reproduced, especially by the men who struggle with women's changing gender roles including their demands for equal access to heterosexual freedom.

The ethnographic material derives from periods of fieldwork in Cape Verde (1996-7, 2005, 2007, 2012, 2014) and amidst Cape Verdean university and vocational college students in northern Portugal (2008, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014). The main focus in my research in Cape Verde has been on local development associations in the island of Santiago. In Portugal, the focus of my research shifted to women's and men's experiences of unplanned student pregnancies and how this affected their family and social relations and their sense of identity which included an examination of student mothers' encounters with Portuguese professionals in the social care sector (Challinor 2011, 2012b, 2012c). The fieldwork took place in the city of Porto (April 2008 – December 2010) and in a smaller northern town called Âncora (June – December 2012). All names have been changed to safeguard anonymity.

The following section provides a social and historical overview of the context in which Cape Verdean gender relations are reproduced and contested.

### **Prestige, Honour and Silence**

There does not appear to be any historical evidence that the archipelago of Cape Verde was inhabited when it was discovered by the Portuguese in the mid-fifteenth century. Due to the lack of European women on the islands, female slaves gave birth to their Master's children some of which were officially recognized by their fathers (Fernandes 2002:37). This set in motion a complex process of socio-economic "whitening" that eventually produced the category of the "assimilated" Cape Verdean whose education and presumption of a "minimum shared culture" with the Portuguese served as important instruments for negotiating a higher social status than the one inherited through birth (Fernandes 2002:68). Education, like migration, has been highly valued since colonial times as a means of socio-economic advancement.

Mass migration from Cape Verde was caused by cycles of prolonged and widespread famine, provoked by a combination of frequent droughts, the archipelago's poor natural resource base and a lack of investment in the development of Cape Verde by the Portuguese colonial powers – they were far more interested in its strategic location in the Atlantic Ocean for serving the international slave trade (Bigman 1993). These cycles of famine continued into the late colonial period and were concealed by the Portuguese authorities from the international community whose European members had started to grant independence to their colonies in the 1960s. Only after a joint liberation struggle with Guinea-Bissau, initiated in 1963,



did Cape Verde eventually gain independence in 1975, after which the country depended upon the provision of international food aid and migrants' remittances for the survival of a large part of the population. Rodrigues (2008) argues that the postcolonial project of modernizing and promoting Cape Verde as a touristic location has produced a new modality of the silence that surrounded famine in the colonial period by failing to pay sufficient attention to the persistence of food vulnerability in urban slums. In order to preserve their dignity, undernourished urban dwellers refer to their predicament as a 'sacrifice' or 'necessity' and Rodrigues (2008: 346) analyses this in terms of the influence of Catholicism and Portuguese Mediterranean values:

The pervasive influence of Catholicism as well as Portuguese Mediterranean patterns of honour and shame have contributed to these deeply embedded mechanisms of culturally concealing one's food needs in order to preserve one's family honour and dignity. As is often conveyed, "Cape Verde was born from sacrifice" and this continues to mediate kinship obligations and reciprocities, a unique relationship with the harsh environment, and ultimately the content or absence of meals.

The relationship between silence, sacrifice and prestige is also evident in local development encounters in rural Cape Verde which I have discussed elsewhere (2012a). Internal conflicts within local associations are concealed from view by aggrieved members who prefer to sacrifice their individual interests and remain silent in order to promote a positive public image of

their association which will facilitate the procurement of external funding. It is within this context that maintaining a respectable standing in the public eye of kinship and community relations can also be analysed in terms of developing the tactical skills of knowing when to remain silent to preserve one's image or prestige. Issues of honour and prestige are also evident in gender relations.

Massart (2005) argues that in Cape Verde men pursue their prestige by conquering desirable women, causing them to lose their respectability. But if a woman who loses her respectability happens to be a man's relative then this also causes him to lose prestige. So men also protect their prestige by zealously ensuring that the 'good' reputations of the female members of their own families are kept intact and do not tarnish the men's self image. The stakes are far higher for the women, especially for single adolescent mothers, since loss of respectability may result in being thrown out of the house without any means of subsistence.

In several of the informal, unstructured interviews conducted in Porto, women gave me accounts of how older or younger sisters in Cape Verde had been thrown out of their parents' home in the wake of an unplanned pregnancy. In some cases, these women went to live in the households of the baby's father's parents and according to the accounts I was given, were burdened with heavy domestic workloads. After the baby was born, I was told, it was only natural that the parents' hearts should soften and their daughter and baby were usually welcomed back home. Lobo (2006: 86)

identifies a similar ritualized process of rejection and reconciliation in families confronted with the first-time pregnancies of their young daughters in the island of Boa Vista. However, from a national perspective this does not appear to be a wide-spread practice. A governmental survey on demography and reproductive health conducted in 1998 reveals that between six to thirteen percent of unmarried pregnant young women were thrown out of home by their parents (1998:125).

Adolescents in rural areas tend to become mothers at an earlier age than those with urban residences (20% and 18% respectively in 2005). In 2005 27% of woman of childbearing age were adolescent mothers (under the age of twenty). By the age of 17, one in five adolescents (18.7%) had begun their reproductive lives and by the age of 19 the percentage increased to 39%. The 2005 statistics reveal a small increase in the number of adolescents who began their reproductive lives from 15 % in 1998 to 19 % in 2005 (INE 2005:52-3). Data from 2009 from the Ministry of Health for women between the age of 15 and 17 also reveals an increase in adolescent pregnancy rates from 11,4% in 2000, 12,5% in 2005 e and 15% in 2009 (UNICEF 2011:67). Notwithstanding these figures, the total fertility rate for adolescent women between the age of fifteen and nineteen has declined from 13,5 % during the years 1986-1990 to 9,2% women during the period 2001-5 and the total fertility rate for all women dropped sharply between 1998 to 2005 from 4,1 to 2,9 children (INE: 2005:47). Given that statistics are not collected on the fertility rates of adolescents under the age of fifteen there is no baseline data for this age group.

Women have traditionally pursued security through an implicit social contract in which the woman's body belongs to the man but he must maintain it which includes providing a home. Men cherish the ideal of being in charge of a home, in control, asserting their authority over women (Massart 2005: 249, 251-2). This description of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995) is similar to Brandes' analysis (1981) of gender relations in the Mediterranean which have traditionally been governed by the pursuit of male prestige and of female respectability. Brandes (1981: 236) argues that in rural Andalusia, where he conducted his fieldwork in the 1970s, 'a family's honour is probably more dependent on the sexual conduct of its women than on any other single factor'. Yet, a closer look at the specific history of Cape Verde reveals that patriarchal dominance was not only influenced by Portuguese Mediterranean values; it was also eroded by the effects of poverty, migration and democratisation.

Forty years ago it was mostly the men who emigrated, sending back remittances to their wives and children who stayed behind (Akersson 2009:387). Although extra-marital relations have always been customary, the traditional ideal family norm was that of the patriarchal nuclear family, influenced by Portuguese Catholicism (Rodrigues 2007: 135; Drotbohm 2009: 137). Yet, female-headed households are common in Cape Verde, partly as a result of migration. Others result from men's demise as partners and fathers, due to their incapability or unwillingness to fulfil their expected duty as breadwinners of their partners and offspring, while some others

result from the practice by married men of sustaining girlfriends and their children. In many cases, women are consequently sole providers for their children, so, in contrast to traditional conceptions of patriarchy and of the nuclear family, not all women are economically dependent upon men. In more recent decades, there have also been a growing number of women emigrating from Cape Verde, many as a response to demands in the North for domestic labour (Grassi and Évora 2007). Increased female migration, as well as participation in the informal economy, has reduced women's economic dependence upon their sexual partners (Rodrigues 2007: 132-8).

The connection between emigration and multiple partners was presented to me, during fieldwork in 1996, by a young man in rural Santiago, who claimed that since emigration had not left enough men to go around, then it was also beneficial to the women to share them. None of the women present made any comments.

Women across different social strata have conventionally avoided confronting men directly in their daily relations. In his urban study on Christian Rationalism in the island of São Vicente, for example, Vasconcelos (2008) discusses how women are actively encouraged to turn a blind eye to their husbands' "excesses" by patiently investing in their roles as exemplary mothers. He describes how middle class, middle aged women find emotional relief from the tensions generated by their husbands' behaviour through becoming psychic mediums. Women in rural Santiago express their complaints regarding men's behaviour in an indirect way

through witty proverbs and maxims (see Carter and Aulette 2009) and through the lyrics of *Batuku* which ‘releases women from the unspoken hardships and routines of survival that characterize their days’ (Rodrigues 2008: 368).

One such maxim that criticizes the behaviour of men which I came across in rural Santiago (Challinorxx 2011: 197) is the following variation of the maxim already quoted above: ‘mother is blanket, father is papa’ where the father becomes “papaya”. Although I found it was unfamiliar to Cape Verdean students in Portugal, originally from urban areas in Cape Verde, its significance was clarified by a young male student, Manuel, living in Âncora, originally from Pedro Badejo in the eastern municipality of Santa Cruz in rural Santiago. He explained that the papaya tree casts its shadow at a distance.

You don’t plant anything under a papaya tree it will catch too much sun. A blanket covers everything. Fathers aren’t valued so much, these days. My mother is everything for me. She is the one who listens to me, whom I share my problems with. The papaya tree doesn’t shelter its own kind - which is right underneath; it shelters those who belong to another. In the case of my father he has four women.

I came across a local variation of this saying – father is the shade of a coconut tree – (*pai é sombra coco*) in Cape Verde, when conversing with Dona Maria (September 2012) in Porto Gouveia in the municipality of

Ribeira Grande de Santiago, situated at the south of Santiago Island, fifteen kilometers from the capital Praia. She had never heard of the saying *pai é papaia* and told me there was not enough water in Porto Gouveia for papaya trees to grow. Her first reaction was to respond “father is a rotten papaya” (*pai é papaia podre*).

In Portugal, when I asked Manuel about the original maxim, “mother is blanket, father is breadwinner” he replied that this was an older saying which refers to the times when men used to be the sole providers. “Now women are even working in construction!” He added that this might be going too far which suggests that he felt there was a limit to how much customary gender role models should be changed. Dona Maria, on the other hand – a fifty-seven year old grandmother of a baby boy born to her student daughter Ana in Porto - was all in favour of challenging gender roles.

#### Gender and Education

Dona Maria, whose large house testified to her relatively high socio-economic status, was president of a local women’s association whose members had received gender training from a Spanish non-governmental organization that had encouraged the women to find alternative income generating activities to that of the illegal extraction of sand and gravel sold for construction, through intermediary lorry drivers. Apart from the numerous negative impacts it has upon the environment, sand and gravel extraction is also a dangerous and low-income occupation (Mendes Lopes

2010). In the association they made handicrafts - dolls, bags, table cloths and table mats to sell in a tourist shop in Cidade Velha. Sales were not easy and Dona Maria's sister told me that they earned less money than in sand extraction. "But now we don't want to [extract sand] because of the environment; our beaches used to have sand, now there is hardly any and the earth is dry". This sounded like a cultivated development discourse for foreign consumption (Mosse 2005) that lacked the conviction present in her earlier comment "We had to buy food and send our children to school<sup>2</sup>".

In the ensuing discussion regarding the fathers' general lack of interest in whether their children went to school or not, Dona Maria's use of vocabulary bears witness to the influences of extralocal processes in changing gender prescriptions. She claimed that the fathers never participated in school meetings and that it was the mother who took responsibility. "We women are interested in everything; work, the house, the street. We are the ones who raise our children. We women are stronger". Her words bear witness to two extralocal influences. The customary gender division between the public and the private sphere that reserves the street (*rua*) for the men is marked by traditional southern Portuguese values (Lopes Filho 2003:138). Dona Maria's eloquent challenging of this gender division testifies to the influences of the Spanish NGO. When I asked Dona Maria why she thought the men lacked interest in their children's schooling, Dona Maria referred to the psychological effects of the history of slavery (*Kuza di tempo di eskravo na cabeça*) and went on to claim that the training (they had received from the NGO) had given the women more self esteem. "The



woman must like herself (literally her own head) first. Men have that habit of gender based violence...” I then asked Dona Maria what was “gender” and she replied:

Gender is man and wife. Man thinks he is stronger; he is more violent. The man doesn't cry. He thinks he is superior because he is a man. He says 'shut your mouth you are a woman'. He doesn't want to give the woman self-esteem or gender equity.

I enquired if the men had complained that the women were saying things just because they had heard them from foreigners and, contrary to the lack of conviction I noted in her sister's comment on the environmental motivation for abstaining from sand extraction, the earnestness of Dona Maria's reply suggested that she had appropriated the NGO's gender discourse to make it her own: “We are human beings just like the ones who come from outside” (*nhos é ser humano sima kel di fora*”).

Given her role as association president, I also asked Dona Maria how she thought men could be motivated to take a more active interest. She replied that the focus should be on the younger men because if you manage to get the idea into their heads, they will bring the older men with them. She suggested the organization of a cultural activity, such as a musical event, to attract the men. “There is no point women trying to talk with them at home, the men don't even stop to listen”.

Dona Maria claimed that urban men were more open minded and that they shared some of the child rearing responsibilities; she added that people in Praia were more intelligent due to their increased access to education (*pamodi escola es apanha*). Only in the past eight years had children from Porto Gouveia started to go to university. Whilst Dona Maria had reached seventh grade in schooling through adult education literacy classes, after the independence of Cape Verde, her daughter, Ana, was at university in Portugal.

Soon after arriving in Portugal, Ana discovered that she was pregnant. The father of the child was in Cape Verde and when Ana tried to send the baby back to be cared for by Dona Maria whilst she completed her studies, the father refused to sign the necessary legal documents. During our discussions in Porto, Ana had claimed that her boyfriend felt threatened by the idea of Ana staying in Portugal without the responsibility of caring for their child because this would make it easier for her to become involved with another man (For more details see Challinorx 2011).

Gaining and maintaining prestige, as an important means of asserting masculinity has become a harder task for men in the wake of the social and economic transformations precipitated by Cape Verde's transition to democracy in 1991 which has allowed some women to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities traditionally beyond their reach. Girls' participation in primary school, for example, increased from 70.4% in 1990 to 95% in 2000, and in 2007 girls constituted 64% of the pupils at

secondary school level (Siemon 2009:32). However, as Martins points out, it is also important to note that the opportunities presented by education, migration and the labour market have raised expectations that the postcolonial modernizing project of Cape Verde has not yet been able to deliver to the majority of the population:

Without ever going through a period of industrialization, the country passed abruptly from a colonial model of society that was essentially agrarian and deeply unequal to an economic model that was essentially dependent on the state sector and then gradually upon the tertiary sector, causing some improvements of living conditions for society at large which nonetheless remained profoundly unequal. Despite increased aspirations for social mobility based on education, poverty and precarious employment (or unemployment) have continued throughout this transition, affecting large factions of the population (Martins 2012 my translation).

So although the contract whereby women pursue security through men is no longer automatically assumed by a younger generation of women, the raised expectations caused by changing gender ascriptions can also lead to tensions and disappointments. Female migration is often only made possible by the sacrifices of other female family members who take over the caring responsibilities of mothers in the domestic sphere so that they may migrate leaving their children behind. When such responsibilities fall upon young women who stay in Cape Verde to care for younger siblings, nieces and

nephews instead of leaving to study or work abroad (Äkesson et al. 2012; Martins 2012; Martins and Fortes 2011) it may curb their opportunities and heighten the tensions they experience caught between the tides of changing gender ideologies. Even though the customary division of work between man as the breadwinner and women as the child-bearer is changing, the job and career opportunities available to women in Cape Verde are still relatively limited compared to those available to men. In 2011 unemployment figures for youth between the ages of 18 and 24 were 34.7% for women compared to 23.3% for men (INE 2011).

Unemployment affects especially young women. Women are over-represented in professions such as domestic servant, small trade, education and in the extractive industry; they are under-represented in the public and private entrepreneurial sector. If they work self employed, they do so without having staff of their own, and they usually work in professions requiring little qualification (Siemon 2009:34).

That the main job outlets for women should be in education and in domestic work provides a telling indicator of how these activities continue to be associated with the notion that women are the primary care givers. State jobs are also harder to come by for women because they are entwined with party politics which, despite the democratization of Cape Verde, continues to be a male dominated domain. Although in more recent years the number of highly qualified women integrated into party politics has increased,

Siemon (2009:59) argues that they are not very representative of the average Cape Verdean woman and that “[n]ot all of the female ministers...in government have a reputation for representing feminist interests and lobbying for women's empowerment”.

In the case of rural Santiago, female respectability is not the only reason why parents react negatively to unplanned pregnancies since parents also know that the responsibility of having a baby may weaken their daughter's chances of attaining security through the new opportunities available to women: education, migration and employment. First time pregnancies occur at a later age for women who have completed secondary schooling (INE 1998, 2005).

Education has also become an increasingly significant motive for the migration of young women in Cape Verde in the past few decades. The pursuit of technical qualifications in Portugal is a more recent phenomenon which constitutes an opportunity, for young women of lower social strata, that does not always meet their expectations. Some of the experiences of female students from rural areas in Santiago who come to study in vocational colleges in northern Portugal, may also be analyzed in terms of Collin's (2000) discussion of black women's experiences of intersectional oppression since issues of gender and sexuality intersect with wider social dynamics related to their social position and immigrant status in Portugal.

### **Cape Verdean Gender Relations in Portugal**

From 2007 onwards, not only in the northern city of Porto, but in numerous smaller towns in northern Portugal (such as Paredes de Coura, Melgaço, Arcos de Valdevez and Âncora) vocational training colleges have received quotas of secondary school students from rural areas in Cape Verde within the ambit of protocols signed between the colleges and local councils in Cape Verde. Students have come to study the final three years of secondary schooling in areas such as accounting, aquatic rescue, ancillary health technologies, tourism and socio-cultural animation. Although some students have come as young as sixteen years old, the majority were older either because they had repeated schooling years in Cape Verde or, in some cases, because they had concealed their qualifications in order to be able to qualify for a place. According to data obtained during interviews in local councils in Cape Verde and in the Cape Verdean embassy in Lisbon, between 2009 and 2012 nearly 3600 students came to study across different regions in Portugal.

In Âncora, Cape Verdean students worked in the summer in local restaurants that filled up with tourists. One student mother told me, she was already tired just thinking of the hard work that was waiting for her once the college year finished which also signaled the end of the accommodation and food subsidies which she was only entitled to as a student during the academic year. Like the year before, she would work, without a contract, in July and August from 10am to 3pm and then from 6pm until midnight or even 1 or 2am, earning twenty Euros a day. “Whites don’t accept this” she

told me. “But Cape Verdeans accept anything”. She added that if she were to ask for more pay, there would be plenty of other Cape Verdeans willing to take her place. Another student mother told me she also worked last summer (2010) earning the minimum wage (450 Euros a month)<sup>3</sup> and that none of the extra hours were paid. “I was too embarrassed to ask. If they didn’t mention it, I wasn’t going to”. The financial difficulties that some of the students faced, particularly in the summer months, coupled, in some cases, with the added pressures of unplanned motherhood illustrate how the emancipatory potential of educational opportunities in Portugal was not automatic for young women. The significance of sexuality, as a site where intersecting oppressions may meet (Collins 2000:128), was evident in the case of Lucinda which illustrates how her illegal status as a seasonal worker intersected with gender dynamics to result in an unplanned pregnancy.

Lucinda was proud to have secured a summer job, although she did not have a contract. Since her partner wasn’t able to find work, he was planning to go Lisbon to look for work until Lucinda invited him to move in with her. Then, one day, after her summer job, she arrived home and realized that the contraceptive pill she was taking had run out. But on that day Lucinda claimed she was very tired; there was the house to clean, food to cook and so she didn’t go to the health centre. “I became pregnant on 13 September,” she told me. There was no mention of her partner having taken any responsibility for domestic work or for contraception. In the case of Âncora, Cape Verdean students tended to socialise mostly amongst themselves, thus reducing the potential for challenging traditional gender ascriptions. There

was also no mention of using an alternative method, such as the sheath. In other discussions I had with Cape Verdean male students in Âncora, some of them claimed that the use of the sheath was only for casual relationships and that to stop using the sheath signalled intimacy and trust. Male and female students also claimed not to like using the sheath, arguing that direct skin contact (referred to as *pele pele*) was much more pleasurable. The opinion that the sheath reduces pleasure is held more widely by men than women in Cape Verde (57% compared to 26%) and the statistics are higher for men in rural than urban areas (63% compared to 53%) (INE 1998).

What about abortion? Lucinda claimed that as many as twenty of her colleagues had had abortions but that she was always a religious person and went to catechism and believed that it was killing a person. This view was expressed to me by a number of student mothers. Given that it was a sensitive topic, I did not actively seek out students who had chosen to abort, but discussions with the doctor in the local health clinic confirmed that abortion was also a frequent option.

Abortion has been legal in Cape Verde since 1986 and according to official data there are around twelve abortions for every hundred babies born; however, the statistics for abortion in the 1998 and 2005 national surveys on demography and reproductive health are much lower because many abortions are not declared, especially if they were clandestine, or are declared as miscarriages. Existing data nevertheless reveals that abortions are more common in urban areas, in particular in São Vicente and Praia and



amidst women who have higher levels of education. The surveys found that women from rural areas with little schooling are less likely to resort to abortion – 7% of women with secondary education or higher compared to 1% of other women (INE, 1998: 35-38, 129). The reasons that women and young women in particular take recourse to clandestine abortions – estimated in a study commissioned by the association for the protection of the family, VerdeFam, between 70 -75000 per year, seven times more than legal abortions – include shame, the moralizing attitudes of health professionals and lack of trust in the confidentiality of health services (Afrosondagem 2012)

The sexual freedom women experience in Portugal– far from the controlling eye of community and kin – has been commented to me by several students. In Âncora, I attended a party organized by students who had received the Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation. The atmosphere in the room was charged with excitement; people laughing, talking, drinking beer, wine and sangria, eating beans, meat, potato, cake, milling around, suddenly bursting into spurts of energetic sensuous dancing, either in small clusters or in intimate female same-sex or mixed couples and then stopping to talk with someone or chase after somebody else. Dancing partners were constantly forming and dissolving as the students took up together in sudden bursts of explosive sexuality and then swiftly separated without further ado. Some couples danced knit closely together for longer periods of time, abandoning their bodies to the undulating rhythms that filled the room.

This display of sexual agency was also influenced by the commodification of sexuality in media representations of black bodies as being hypersexed (Brooks and Hébert 2006, Howe and Rigi 2009). Fortes describes the black body in postcolonial Portugal as a form of physical sexual capital which creates pressure to perform (2011:271). The psychologist of the vocational training college in Âncora told me that the female students turned down the free second hand winter clothes available to them claiming that “warm clothes are not sexy”. Most of the women in the party were wearing very short tight-fitting skirts or dresses and the men’s trousers hung off their hips revealing over half of their underpants. When the trousers looked as if they were about to fall down completely, which happened quite often, they would hitch them up, but only slightly, consciously placing the waistline half way up so that their underpants were still clearly visible and eventually it would slide down to nearly three quarters again. I asked a male student why they wore their trousers so loosely on the hips; he explained it was the fashion, imported from the United States. He went on to add that the women followed Brazilian fashion and when I asked what that was he said it was very short and swept his hand across the top of his legs, smiling.

Lucinda, whose twins were born in a town close to Âncora, told me she had no intention to return to live with her family in Cape Verde; her father never used to let her go out. Her mother was looking after the babies for her in Tira Chapeu – a poor urban area of the capital Praia. Lucinda complained that when she had gone to visit the twins, her father had still tried to control her but she had told him he was no longer in charge of her.

Parental control does not usually signify that young women are virgins upon arrival in Portugal. On the contrary, it is common, in Cape Verde, for boys and girls to initiate sexual relations at an early age, often before they are fifteen years old (Tavares et al 2011, Lobo 2006: 85). But to preserve their respectability, girls should prevent their sexual relationship from becoming public knowledge. Lucinda proudly told me that from the age of thirteen to nineteen she managed to keep her boyfriend secret from her parents because she only saw him at school. According to Fortes (2011) it is common for daughters in Cape Verde to date behind their parents' backs. Maintaining a respectable standing in the public eye of kinship and community relations consequently depends upon the tactical skills of knowing how to keep a secret. The students claimed that this was easier to achieve in the anonymity of Portuguese towns although even here, Cape Verdean woman still had a reputation to maintain amidst their peers. Much may also depend upon the size of the town. The Cape Verdean community of over one hundred students in two vocational colleges was smaller, more visible, and closely knit in Âncora - a coastal town of around five thousand inhabitants than the larger but more dispersed student community in Porto which is a city with numerous universities and vocational colleges of around two hundred and thirty eight thousand inhabitants. Yet, in her study of gender relations between Cape Verdean university students in the capital of Portugal in Lisbon, Fortes (2011:267-70) identifies a tight sense of community and discusses the pressures placed on women to date within their ethnic group to avoid accusations of betrayal. The women complained that Cape Verdean

men still expected them to conform to the traditional gender role of the submissive, caring mother figure.

The issue of gender roles was raised during a meal in Âncora (in November 2012) at the flat of a Cape Verdean couple with their Cape Verdean student friends. Simão, originally from a rural area in Cape Verde, began to make bragging comments about his drinking. He stated that when he was in Cape Verde, he would get drunk morning, lunch and evening but never in front of his mother. He claimed never to drink in the presence of his mother or of his grandmother because this would signal a lack of respect. This comment led to a discussion of appropriate gender roles and behaviour in which Simão claimed that he was not sexist, but that women should not get drunk; it was ugly. He added that it was acceptable for the man to go out dancing and leave the woman at home but it was intolerable for the woman to go out and to leave her man snoring in bed. This contrasted with the attitude of a Cape Verdean male student in Porto, originally from the urban capital of São Vicente, who had been visibly proud when he recounted to me (in 2009) how he stayed in to baby sit so that the mother of his child could go out dancing with her friends. Whilst Simão, displaying traditional rural values, criticized this kind of behaviour, his girlfriend, Dulce, sat laughing next to me and said, 'See, Listete, this is how it is for us women'. It was clear through her laughing and ironic tone that she did not agree but neither did she confront her boyfriend directly.

All of this was said in relation to the “woman of the house” – *mudjer di kaza* – and Simão and the other two male students present all agreed that there were three types of women: *kurtiçon*, *namorada* and *mudjer*. *Kurtiçon* derives from the verb *kurtir* which literally means to have fun and in this context, refers to the lack of commitment in a sexual relationship. Both Dulce and Simão were in agreement that the distinction between *namorada* – girlfriend and *mudjer* - which can either be translated as woman or wife - was that the *namorada* does not live with her partner, whereas *mudjer* lives, but is not necessarily married to her partner. Simão and Dulce had been living together for three years. I asked him if he considered Dulce to be *mudjer* and he confirmed that he did. He also approved of marriage but this was something he aspired to for the future. In his study of Cape Verdean youth in Mindelo, Martins (2012) found that common prerequisites for marriage were stable employment and accommodation both of which were often beyond the reach of young couples.

I asked Simão if a woman could go from *kurtiçon* to *mudjer* and Simão replied that this was not easy because nobody likes to have a woman who has been with lots of men. I then enquired if there were any classifications the other way round - for distinguishing between different kinds of men. Did everyone’s blank expression provide me with the answer or was the women’s silence an indication of something else?

In her study of Cape Verdean family relations in Mindelo, Akesson (2004:106) identifies two very different images of manliness: the

*konkistador* – the conqueror - who has multiple partners and the *om' responsável* who is a reliable provider. I had heard, on other occasions in which men were not present, Cape Verdean women comment upon the lack of fidelity and reliability of Cape Verdean men. Although much of the meal was dominated by Simão's performance of masculinity, it would be hasty to interpret Dulce's muted response as submissive acquiescence. This was confirmed two years later, in November 2014, in an interview with Dulce when she assured me that Simão had been joking because she often used to go out at night while he stayed in. It is significant that Dulce did not contradict him publically.

Sheldon and Rodrigues (2010: 93) argue that women's fiction writing offers a window into the "terrain of intimacy" that "harbours many gendered silences... across differentiated social strata." Their analysis of the novel "A Louca do Serrano" by the Cape Verdean writer Dina Salústio is taken as an example of how the current Lusophone African literature of women writers creates female characters who take recourse to "strategizing allegiances in which emotional and consanguine kinship, motherhood, and female solidarity are key avenues to survival." Female solidarity amidst the students in Portugal was poignantly illustrated to me by Lucinda who gave up her plan to go out dancing, to celebrate the end of her vocational course, to babysit for a friend, so that she could go dancing instead. The father of the child, Manuel, from Pedro Badejo, who had explained to me the significance of the maxim "pai é papaya" not only refused to stay in with

their baby but was clearly annoyed that Lucinda had offered to instead. The mother took the opportunity to wean her baby from the breast.

The case of Célia, from Palha Carga in the rural municipality of Santa Catarina, about 60 kilometres north west of Praia, provides a compelling example of how these kinds of strategizing alliances need not result in an outright rejection of traditional gender ideologies but rather, in a concerted effort to navigate conflicting gendered expectations. The detailed account of Célia's piecemeal tactical manoeuvring, given below, derives from an extended interview conducted in Porto in July 2008.

### **Silent Navigation**

When Célia completed her secondary education, at the age of twenty-one, the opportunity arose to pursue higher education in northern Portugal. Soon after arriving in Porto, Célia discovered that she was pregnant. The father of her child, whom she had been dating since the age of eighteen, had remained in Cape Verde.

I waited nearly three years for Marta's dad, thinking we were good together...I used to say to myself "I have a daughter, it doesn't look good to switch fathers". But when I found out that he was with another, I realized I had been mistaken and there was no need for me to be tied down. But his family really like me and they are always ringing me...

Even though Célia was now living in Portugal she still occupied the ‘terrain’ (De Certeau 1984) of expected kinship norms. It was the chance discovery of her partner’s infidelity which altered Célia’s attitudes. This occurred through a phone conversation with another woman who informed her that a mutual acquaintance of theirs had recently had a baby in Cape Verde with Bernardo - Célia’s boyfriend. Célia portrays this episode, with hindsight, as a kind of emancipation: no longer having to conform to expected norms. Yet, it is also evident from Célia’s account that personal, emotional ties had been forged with Bernardo’s family with whom she had lived for several months whilst planning to study in Portugal. Célia had first gone to live with her aunt in Assomada, the capital of Santa Catarina, because Palha Carga which was over an hour’s drive away did not have a secondary school.

He knew that I was going to travel abroad to study and so he became afraid of losing me and took me by force....He kept me for a whole afternoon in...well... it wasn’t kidnapping...look it was like this. We were going out with each other and we both liked each other a lot and so he said I wasn’t going abroad to leave him on his own. I was about to catch a *hiace* (collective taxi) and he called me over into the garage where he worked, saying he wanted to talk to me. Then he held me there from about six in the evening to around midnight or one O’clock in the morning. At that hour, I couldn’t go to my mother’s or aunt’s house. They are very conservative. I would most certainly get a beating. With two brothers, ready to beat me, I said to myself, “No, I’m not going”. So then, he took me to his house. The next morning my mother came



looking for me but I told her I wasn't going back home because I would get a bad reputation. For us, in Cape Verde, it is like this: if you sleep in your boyfriend's house for a night and then return home, people will gossip about you and I couldn't stand people talking badly about me.

The locking of Célia in a garage could be interpreted as a sign of 'hegemonic masculinity' at work: her boyfriend – nine years older than her - was in control, asserting his authority, using force. Since Célia claims it was not a kidnapping, it could also be interpreted as a form of ritualised elopement as a means of publically formalising the couple's relationship with which she was ambiguously complicit. Unlike Bernardo however, Célia did not interpret her aim to study abroad as an impediment to their union and drew upon strategizing female alliances to further this goal.

Célia told me that she spent much of the time crying in the garage and whilst she cried, Bernardo said to her, 'You can cry tears of blood, but I am not going to let you go home. You are going to sleep with me tonight. You can go home tomorrow, if you dare'. Normative expectations regarding the appropriate behaviour of women and the probable reaction of male family members - a beating - prevented Célia from returning home that night. Yet, the opportunity arose the following morning when Célia's mother came looking for her. She warned that it was a large household and that Célia would have to work much harder than she was used to working at home. But Célia made her see that returning home would tarnish her respectability. She

still intended to study abroad and asked her aunt to help with the visa application, reassuring her that there was no need to call the police.

Célia was careful to avoid the public humiliation of her boyfriend; she knew that studying abroad challenged Bernardo's masculinity: shouldn't he be the one leaving? Célia's secret 'tactical manoeuvres' to prepare for her departure were thus carried out within the 'terrain' of expected behaviour - living with her boyfriend and his family whilst relying on her own family's support to secretly prepare her departure to study abroad.

In April 2014 I interviewed Célia's mother who sold tobacco, bay leaves and other products in the market in Assomada. She had four grown children. When they were young, the father didn't help very much and then he left. She used to work cultivating tobacco, and selling it in Tarrafal. She told me it was hard to make a living.

In her recollection of events, Célia's aunt had sent a message to Palha Carga to inform her that Célia had not arrived home that night. This was how Célia's mother discovered that Célia had a boyfriend. Initially she was angry because she felt Célia was too young to date, fearing she would give up her plans to study. But after meeting Bernardo's parents, whom she did not know, she felt more assured that they would treat her daughter well. Célia's mother claimed that Bernardo would not allow Célia to leave and it is likely that her humble socio-economic background prevented her from challenging Bernardo, as she lacked the social and cultural capital displayed

by Dona Maria, referred to above. But she was also reassured that her daughter would not give up her studies by Célia's aunt's pledge to help her acquire a visa.

Célia lived for three months in her boyfriend's house. When all her papers were ready, Célia's aunt rang the house but since her niece was out at the time, she left a message for her with Bernardo. When Célia arrived home later in the day, Bernardo asked her to go into the bedroom to talk. He said that her aunt had called to say that she could go to get her visa, 'a visa for what?' he asked her. 'I'm going to travel; I always told you that I was going to travel'. Now it was Bernardo's turn to shed tears. Célia told me with pride how she had responded, 'You can cry tears of blood if you want to. I am going to Portugal'. Nonetheless, she did not break up their relationship and promised to be faithful. Célia told him that if he loved<sup>4</sup> her he would have to bear the separation just as she was going to bear it. If one day he decided he couldn't stand being apart anymore and did not want to carry on, then he should ring her and tell her and she would understand. She promised to do likewise.

But he didn't do that. My family knew he was with somebody else but they didn't tell me so as not to upset me. I was furious and this is probably why I found another boyfriend so quickly...I was feeling lonely and as soon as I found out, [after having waited three years] I started to date someone else. Then he found out and told me [over the phone] that

he couldn't believe that I was seeing someone else. Then I said to him, "You went out with someone else, so why can't I?"

Célia's reflection upon what is fair but also appropriate behaviour for both women and men elucidates the tensions of a woman caught between changing gender ascriptions. Her actual experience and behaviour, as a woman who chooses to date another man, is defended in the name of gender equality whilst simultaneously acknowledging that women cannot behave in the same way as men because it will tarnish their respectability.

I said, "Look, for me, there is no difference between men and women. If a man does something, a woman also has the right to". Well, we can't do everything that men do because then we are the ones who will be talked about badly. I won't do that, but it is not just "he does it because he is a man". Everybody feels like doing something, we just have to think before we do something bad.

Although Célia sees no essential difference between the sexes, she is aware of how the normative expectations governing women's behaviour in rural Santiago create an unequal terrain that discriminately constrains women. Recent socio-economic transformations in Cape Verde have nonetheless, contributed towards evening out the 'terrain', opening up new possibilities for women that challenge gender inequalities, changing traditional behaviours, especially in urban areas. The urban men, interviewed by Massart (2005:250), for example, complained about the new assertive

behaviour of women. The following section which takes a male perspective upon the experience of being forced to take in a girlfriend, who has been thrown out of her parents' house, further elucidates the importance of kinship and community relations in rural Santiago.

### **Caught Between the Tides**

Pedro was Célia's cousin, also originally from Palha Carga but about ten years older than her. The extended interview I conducted with him, in Porto, in May 2009 reveals how the relatively more sexual freedom enjoyed by young males does not necessarily release them from the obligations of community and kin - even if they consider their girlfriend to be *kurtiçon*. Following a comment of mine, during the interview, regarding the ritualised social practice in rural areas of expulsing daughters from their homes, Pedro gingerly confessed to having been at the receiving end of such a practice when he was living with his parents in Assomada – the capital of the municipality. Rather than challenge the cultural script of ritualised elopement - that formalised a casual relationship and created new in-law relations against his will – Pedro, like Célia, adopted a tactical strategy of biding his time. Pedro describes the unfolding of events as though they were beyond his control, embedded in wider community and kinship norms and values which took him and his mother by surprise. The contents of the interview conducted with him are condensed below.

Oh yes, if [a girl] goes out with her boyfriend and does not come home it is not very easy for her family to take her in the next day...I myself have gone through this. (Long pause). I was with my girlfriend, we were there in the house; we carried on for a long time into the night, when I went to take her home - her parents didn't know we were together – [they] did not take her in. It was just after midnight. But of course, in the countryside, they go to bed early. They didn't take her in, so...my parents had to for quite a while. For about six, seven months...I had no thoughts, no plans whatsoever. Suddenly, I arrived home [with her], my mum was shocked... I didn't get a wink of sleep [that night]...she was at high school. I was older than her, in the final year. I intended to do a degree...it was a bit complicated because, well...I was in my parents' house because I didn't have a job...Then I had to go to Portugal. I spoke with her and she returned to her parents' house...She liked me a lot. Then one or two years later she married. She was lucky.

By arriving home after midnight, Pedro's girlfriend had failed to keep her relationship a secret. Pedro had behaved as a typical Cape Verdean male tarnishing his girlfriend's respectability and consequently undermining her family's honour. After Pedro's parents went to visit the girl's parents, Pedro claimed that her parents did not only expect to be informed but rather formally requested, by Pedro's own father, to allow their daughter to date his son. This should not have been a private matter between Pedro and their daughter; their relationship should have been governed by a social agreement between the two families. In accordance with tradition, it was

now the duty of Pedro and his parents to take her in to their home. This, in turn, distanced Pedro from the whole situation, enabling him to take refuge in his parents. When I asked him if it had been difficult for his girlfriend to return home when he left for Portugal, Pedro's choice of language distanced him from his girlfriend, by speaking about her in the plural, as a category, rather than as an individual person. "Yes, they feel shame, they are scared". His claim that she was 'lucky', because she eventually married, reproduces the traditional perspective on how a woman's self-advancement is achieved through securing a stable relationship with a man which is not easy if she has a reputation for being *kurtiçon*. Since I was not able to gain access to the perspectives of the other participants in this case<sup>5</sup>, it could also be argued that beyond any concerns of respectability, the girl's parents were taking advantage of the customary elopement script because they saw an opportunity for their daughter to commit with a promising boy who would soon be studying abroad.

Pedro's account also suggests that he felt uncomfortable with the situation since he was only living in his parents' house because he was unemployed. Lack of professional opportunities constitute a severe impediment to the financial autonomy of young people in Cape Verde, preventing them from setting up their own homes and it is consequently common for them to continue living with family members. (Martins 2012). Pedro's comment that his girlfriend was 'lucky' to have married should consequently also be interpreted in the light of the uncertain future faced by many of Cape Verde's youth.

Not all parents in rural areas agree to take in their sons' girlfriends and babies. Irene, a middle-aged kindergarten teacher, single mother of four boys, had raised three more children for close relatives whilst struggling to complete her studies. In April 2014 she was studying to become a primary school teacher. I held long conversations with her in the rural locality of Covada, Santiago island and she told me that young people were having more children now than ten years ago and leaving them with their grandmothers. "A fourteen year old child is the child of an adolescent mother who has no conscience. Today they go to bed practically on the first date". She claimed she overheard a girl at school say to her teenage son, "I like you. Why don't you make a move? You are an idiot". Irene claimed that if girls hid their boyfriends they couldn't take precautions to prevent pregnancy and that they should be able to talk about it with both parents. "I always tell my boys, I work hard to raise you, not for you to bring more children for me to care for. I have worked hard, I have gone hungry and I am tired. Don't have a child early; I won't raise your child for you. Study, work and then when you have the right conditions you can have your child". These words came from the mouth of a woman who had been denied education during her childhood and had been determined to catch up ever since. "You have to fight to make a life and you have to have lots of courage. I am poor, but I have been given the courage to fight".

## **Conclusion**



Most of the youth interviewed came from rural areas in Santiago island where young women and men have to navigate the tense and complex expectations of becoming educated, self-fashioned, self sufficient individuals while still holding on to kinship values that privilege male sexual freedom and female sexual purity. The data has also demonstrated how social control and support for youth's education is still exercised via family and kinship relations, which often requires unequal expectations and demands from daughters and sons. These continue to significantly impact how young women and men strategically navigate their gender roles and expectations.

The cases of Pedro and Célia contrast with that of the poor urban youth in Praia studied by Anjos (2004) who argues that their lack of insertion into traditional networks of kinship relations of solidarity and mutual control of the sexes that characterize rural life and impose a minimum degree of male responsibility, is evident in the way in which both male and female sexuality becomes a performance and, in some cases, a way of life. The performance of sexuality was also evident in Cape Verdean parties in Portugal.

The Cape Verdean process of changing customary gender ascriptions is following an on-going worldwide tendency described by Inglehart and Norris (2003) as the "Rising Tide of Gender Equality". Drawing on the data from their cross-national study of attitudes towards gender equality in nearly seventy countries, the authors conclude that modernization brings systematic, predictable changes in cultural attitudes toward gender roles in a

two-stage process that consists of two main shifts: from agrarian to industrialized societies and from industrial to postindustrial societies. It is hardly surprising that Cape Verde – often omitted from world maps – is not on their list of countries in the study but I would also suspect that it would not fit easily into their model of cultural change. No clear shift from agrarian to industrialized society has taken place in Cape Verde and young women and men are consequently not only caught between the tides of changing gender prescriptions but also between the expectations and frustrations of the failed promises of modernity (Martins 2012). In their attempts to handle the tensions that arise, their actions are not characterized by an outright rejection of customary expectations but rather by piecemeal tactical manoeuvres to plot a route through the centrifugal forces at play. But change is not uniform and equally distributed, just as traditional notions of family and honour were not. The data discussed above elucidates the ways in which women's lives are differently intersected and affected by the unequal distribution of tensions, kinship obligations and reproductive choices. The onus falls more upon the women to reconcile the tensions that emerge as they try to steer a course through changing tides in search of more autonomy and heterosexual freedom. The reason why women may choose not to challenge traditional kinship obligations directly and to circumvent masculinity may be found in the traditional maxim “the tooth bites the tongue but they live together<sup>6</sup>” (Da Silva: 1997:39).



## Acknowledgments

The research was funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), Lisbon, Portugal in the Centre for Research in Anthropology (CRIA) at the University of Minho (UM). It began as a post-doctoral grant (SFRH/BPD/36914/2007), and fieldwork was then funded within the ambit of the Programa Ciência 2008 and the project 'Care as Sustainability in Crisis Situations' (PTDC/CS-ANT/117259/2010) within the strategic project of CRIA (PEst-OE/SADG/UI4038/2014). I am grateful to Susana Viegas, Lisa Äkesson and the anonymous reviewers for all of their insightful comments and suggestions.

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<sup>1</sup> Papa translates literally as instant cereal.

<sup>2</sup> Dona Maria's sister then added that "some still do it; they have no alternative".

<sup>3</sup> 450 Euros was the minimum wage for 2009. In 2010 it had gone up to 475 Euros (<http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Salario+minimo+nacional-74>) so the student was actually receiving less than the minimum wage.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase in Portuguese was 'se gostas de mim'. In this context I have chosen the verb 'to love' since the term 'gostar' is commonly used as a substitute for the more literary verb 'amar'.

<sup>5</sup> I met Pedro's mother in Assomada in April 2014, selling in the market, but she did not wish to be interviewed.

<sup>6</sup> Denti ta morde lingua, mas es ta mora djuntu.