Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Morabeza, Cash, or Body: Prison, violence and the state in Praia, Cape Verde

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In the past decade, Cape Verde has been facing severe and growing problems of youth delinquency and gang-related violence. The state has reacted to this challenge, mainly with a securitization politics in the "zero tolerance" tradition, expanding and modernizing its security forces. As a result, the Cape Verdean prison population has more than doubled over the same period. In the capital city of Praia, more and more youths from the disadvantaged periphery find themselves behind bars, serving long sentences for mostly drug and gang related crimes, in what seems to be a replication of the experience of many Cape Verdean immigrants in Portugal and elsewhere. In a personal fieldwork account, the article sketches out parallels between the experiences of immigrant youth in Portugal and marginalized youth in Cape Verde, and discusses the way the Cape Verdean state is presently dealing with the phenomenon of "youth delinquency". Essentialist notions of the country's supposed culture of "morabeza" (gentleness) are confronted with acutal patterns of symbolic and physical violence, revealing a persistent unwillingness of Cape Verdean public discourse to face up to the country's growing structural socioeconomic disequilibrium.

Keywords: Cape Verde, morabeza, Portugal, prison studies, violence, youth delinquency

When I started researching African immigration in Portugal in 2004, in some of the mainly Cape Verdean neighbourhoods in the outskirts of Lisbon, I quickly became aware of the main labels and discourses attached to these parts of the city, from within and from the outside: drugs, youth delinquency, violence, the way the state was dealing with such problems and how it should deal with them – according to the, quite different, opinions of residents, local government officials, the press or the "general" public. Cova da Moura, the neighbourhood where I started making contacts was at that time, mainly as a consequence of mass media reports, infamous in Portugal for allegedly being one of the centres of drug

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traffic, and was said to be a place that even the police would enter only with extreme care (and properly armed). While admitting the problems that the local trafficking in illegal substances brought, the residents themselves and, especially, the local associations, were eager to state that their *bairro* (neighbourhood) – while not altogether peaceful – was by no means utterly different from other parts of the city. The youths, for their part, complained about persistent harassment and violence by the police who, they maintained, actually rendered their *bairro* more insecure instead of helping to protect the people that lived in the neighbourhood.

My initial fieldwork in the outskirts of Lisbon was rather short-lived, as I decided to leave Portugal and start my research again in some of the very places where most of the African immigrants to the country begin their efforts to overcome the visa-bureaucracy that obstructs their way from the global lusophone South to the hoped-for work opportunities in the western tip of southern Europe. Arriving in Praia (Cape Verde), I had the pleasure of watching, on the Africa Channel of Portuguese National Television (RTP-África), the only material outcome of a couple of weeks of fieldwork in Lisbon: a short video-clip I had produced together with two residents of Cova da Moura (one of whom was running an improvised studio) and an employee of one of the residents' associations, himself a former resident of the neighbourhood.[2] However, the reason the clip (which, in a very fragmentary way, portrays the life of a youngster in the neighbourhood and the "temptations" and perils of delinquency) had suddenly become interesting for Portuguese state-run television, according to one of the participants, was a sad one: on 20 February 2005 (three months after we had sent the clip to RTP), a police officer was shot dead while on nightly patrol in Cova da Moura.

Portugal, Cape Verde and the globalized prison

The reasons I recount the story of this mildly successful fieldwork period and its audio-visual by-product are manifold. First of all, it was my research on African immigrants in Portugal which aroused my interest in the Cape Verdean prison system. Second, the discourses on violence and youth delinquency I came across in Portugal in 2004 strikingly resembled the public discourse on the same issues in Cape Verde nearly ten years later, and both here and there the mass media were occupying a central position in the evocation, reification and reiteration of the public "texts" on violence. Finally, the relation between the

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[2] The video-clip, featuring Lord Strike & Thugs, was called *Não posso mais* (see Zoettl 2008).

so-called "problematic" youths and the state in both countries seemed to have some evident parallels, which I will briefly outline in the following.

When I visited Linho prison (one of the main central prisons for the Lisbon region) in 2011, I was struck by the impression of being in the middle of what looked like a cut-out of Cova da Moura or one of the other Cape Verdean neighbourhoods of Lisbon – behind walls. The majority of the inmates seemed to be of African origin and, as they were not wearing prison clothing, perfectly corresponded to the imagery of the Afro-American style of dress *en vogue* among many of the Afro-Portuguese kids in the outskirts of the city. In fact, the visual impression that the Portuguese prisons had incorporated some of the neighbourhoods of the metropolis' periphery is corroborated by anthropological evidence. In her in-depth study *Entre o bairro e a prisão: tráfico e trajectos* ("From neighbourhood to prison: drug traffic and life's journeys"), Manuela da Cunha (2002) demonstrates how tightly certain urban areas are entangled with the Portuguese prison system. The prison, Cunha affirms, "has taken in the neighborhood. Sometimes, the incarceration encompasses such an extensive range of relatives, friends or neighbors that it eventually comes to absorb nearly completely the socioenvironment of a given inmate" (Cunha 2002: 200).[3] It should be mentioned, though, that the statistical evidence regarding the ethnic origins of Portuguese prisoners is somewhat weaker than my first visual impression: by the end of 2011, within the 19–24 age group, African nationals represented "only" around 17% of the prison population. Of these, 56% were Cape Verdeans (DGSP 2011).[4] However, taking into account the fact that only 0.37% of the population in Portugal, according to the 2011 census, holds Cape Verdean citizenship (INEPT 2012: 10), Cape Verdeans appear to be overrepresented 26-fold (!) in Portuguese prisons.[5]

"Are Cape Verdeans really such a bad people?", one could ironically ask. Following Cunha, the right answer would be: "They just live in the wrong places." Cunha demonstrates that the "preference" of the Portuguese prison system for certain population groups is based less on racial or ethnical categories, but rather on categories of *space.* It is certain neighbourhoods in the periphery of the urban centres that fill the country's prisons, which in the ten years from 2001 to 2011 maintained a relatively stable total population. In the women's prison of Tires (just 5 km away from Linho prison), Cunha relates, the inmates

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[3] All quotes originally in Portuguese have been translated by the author, unless otherwise stated.

[4] Of the *total* prison population, 11.29% were African nationals (of whom 50.91% were Cape Verdeans).

[5] Exact numbers are difficult to calculate, as many Afro-Portuguese immigrants hold Portuguese citizenship and illegal immigrants are not counted by the official demographic statistics.

come systematically from the same neighbourhoods – shanty towns, improvised houses or houses built out of prefabricated materials, urban resettlements or suburban low-income housing […]. In the metropolitan area of Lisbon, 89% of the inmates originate from such neighbourhoods, the respective proportion in the metropolitan area of Oporto being similar (86%). (Cunha 2002: 76)

The majority of the Cape Verdean immigrants from the lower and lowest income brackets live in such neighbourhoods, and therefore slip almost "naturally" into the Portuguese crime and prison statistics. However, where Wacquant Wacquant (2002) and others, for the US context, affirm the prevalence of a "racial" bias among the police and in the prison system, Cunha points to mechanisms related to the *geography* of urban spaces, which contribute to the prevalence of certain segments of the population in the crime statistics. As a result of a variety of "collectivization mechanisms" (selective and proactive policing, judicial practice of summary processes, etc.), according to Cunha (2002: 26), the boundaries between prison and *bairro* in Portugal have become progressively "eroded" and the prison has become "an extension of the *bairro* inasmuch as the stigma that it formerly represented nowadays is instituted much earlier, long before imprisonment" (2002: 195). Imprisonment in Portugal, Cunha affirms, "only condenses the stigmatization that has already been established through belonging to certain neighbourhoods and groups connoted with drugs and trafficking" (*ibid*).

Crime and youth marginality in Cape Verde

With an eye to the Portuguese situation, one could claim that the Cape Verdean state is inadvertently on its way to re-enact, on its own territory, the immigration experience of many of its emigrants. As far as can be judged from the scarce and unreliable statistical data available, the country's prison population, has doubled in the last 10 years (Bordonaro 2012b: 85), and analysing the demographic and socio-economic composition of the Cape Verdean inmates, one finds, off the coast of Western Africa, the same "penal and social homogeneity of the prison population" that Cunha (2002: 17) encountered near Lisbon. In the only in-depth study available on the Cape Verdean prison system, *Direitos humanos nas prisões de Cabo Verde* ("Human rights in the prisons of Cape Verde"), the "typical" Cape Verdean prisoner turns out to be male, young and with little formal education (ASDZM 2000: 118). According to the study, 86% of the inmates are less than 40 years old and 58% are aged between 16 and 30. In that age group only 4% have completed school-leaving qualifications (11 years). As the study observes, the totality of crimes against people carried out by those in the 16–30 age group have been perpetrated by prisoners with "other professions": agricultural labourer,

stevedores, artisans, housemaids, guards, receptionists, barmen or car cleaners (ASDZM 2000: 115, 118).

Violent crime, especially in the form of crime perpetrated by juvenile gangs, became a serious problem in Cape Verde only from the end of the 1990s on (Lima 2012b: 58). The island state, totalling just around 4.000 square kilometres, suddenly had to deal with, as Lima puts it, "cinematographic" episodes like the "summary execution of individuals suspected to be involved in the international drug traffick" (2012b: 60). Ironically, for a country with a long and vital tradition of emigration, it was the so-called *Americanos,* Cape Verdean citizens deported from the United States of America, who were publicly tied to the unexpected wave of violent crime that struck the capital city of Praia – as many of them, as it was argued, were eager to re-implant their criminal knowledge, acquired in years of suburban gang-life in Boston, Providence or New Bedford, in their home country (cf. Cardoso 2012).

The state quickly reacted to this new situation, which was not only frightening the country's growing middle class but also threatening the island's image as a tranquil haven for beach or surf tourists from Europe. With financial and technical support from its development partners, Cape Verde banked principally on the modernization and expansion of its law enforcement authorities. The national police was reorganized, the number of officers increased and, exempli gratia, "a total of 19 vehicles and 11 motorcycles […] delivered to the law enforcement authorities to reinforce the Judicial Police and the National Police capability in terms of mobility" by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2012: 18). The latest upgrade of the security forces was the institution of the special forces Brigada Anti Crime (BAC) and Brigada de Investigação Criminal (BIC) in 2007, nicknamed *"ninjas"* by the population, in reference to the hooded appearance of their faceless agents.[6]

While the reasons for the rise in crime are many and obviously more complex than the public discourse spread by politicians and the media pretends ("deported gangsters from the US and Portugal", "disintegrated families", "loss of traditional values", etc.), the results of Cape Verde's securitization strategy are, on a short- and mid-term basis, relatively easy to make out. On the one hand, at least arguably, gang-related crime has apparently declined in the years following the expansion of the security forces. Though the country's crime statistics, like most crime statistics, are not very reliable (in 2006, only around 35% of crime victims called the police; UNODC 2007a: 32), at least the "felt" risk of eventually becoming a crime

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[6] BAC and BIC were later merged to become the Brigada de Investigação e Combate à Criminalidade (BICC).

victim reportedly seems to have temporarily fallen in the regional capitals of Praia and Mindelo (São Vicente Island).[7]

On the other hand, the number of Cape Verdean youths serving a custodial sentence in the central prisons of São Martinho (Praia) or Ribeirinha (Mindelo) has, as mentioned, grown considerably. The majority of the juvenile offenders imprisoned in recent years are members of one of the countless gangs that started to mushroom at the beginning of the 2000s, first in the city of Praia, somewhat later in Mindelo. Gang members are generally not older than 30 years old, and many kids start to join the gang of their *bairro* when they are as young as 12 years old. Some of the gangs, like the BBH gang of São Vicente, have even established a kind of "youth wing" for their youngest associates.[8] Today, even the picturesque island of Santo Antão has its own bunch of gangs that operate in the island's "capital" Porto Novo, a town of less than 10,000 inhabitants. As in Portugal, most of the young prison inmates come from one of the countless underprivileged suburban neighbourhoods – although "suburban", given the small size of the country's cities, does not necessarily mean far away from the centre.

Since 2006, not only can juveniles aged from 16 to 21 years be imprisoned,[9] so can adolescents aged from 12 to 15 years. The preamble of the relevant law demonstrates the basic attitude behind the strategies adopted by the Cape Verdean state in relation to the problem of youth delinquency:

> In this day and age, it has to be admitted, not uncommonly the violation of penal norms by minors of that age [12 to 15 years] is caused neither by situations of economic weakness nor family vulnerability, but rather by the firm determination to confront the law, an intention maintained in the full knowledge of the social detriments entailed by such confrontation. (DL 2006: Preâmbulo)[10]

To affirm that 12-year-old children come in conflict with the law out of a conscious and resolute decision to confront the country's society, "in the full knowledge of the social detriments" of their undertakings, may at first seem grotesque. The model of society behind such a view, though, is systemic: youth delinquency in Cape Verde is, at present, primarily dealt with as if it was the pastime of a small, if growing, number of indolent kids who refuse

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[7] However, in recent years, this positive trend seems to have already reversed. In 2011, the number of homicides reached a new record of 53, of which 33 occurred in the city of Praia (Televisão de Cabo Verde, 19 March 2012, <http://www.rtc.cv/tcv/index.php?paginas=13&id_cod=16578>). In 2009, 38 homicides had been registered, according to the National Police (see PN 2009).

[8] BBH ("Black Brotherhood") operates in the Fernando Pó neighbourhood; the youngest members are organized in a gang called "D'elite".

[9] The Cape Verdean penal code in force envisages a differentiated penal treatment for offenders aged 16 to 21 (DL 4/2003: Art. 8), to be regulated by law. However, to date such a law has not been drafted.

[10] Because of administrative problems and a lack of capacity, at the time of writing, only six teenagers were imprisoned in the country's only juvenile custody centre, Orlando Pantera, in Praia city.

to contribute to the country's economic expansion – and not as a phenomenon resulting from multi-faceted causes that would need to be addressed in manifold ways.

While, every now and then, in the local press a discourse of "middle-class gangsters" comes up (a subgenre of the "loss of traditional values" discourse), as a matter of fact all of Cape Verde's youth gangs originate from the economically disadvantaged periphery that surrounds the administrative and better-off districts of Praia (and Mindelo). Although Cape Verde was "graduated" by the United Nations from the group of least developed countries in 2007, poverty still remains severe in many parts of the archipelago. The constantly growing GDP of the last two decades[11] has primarily benefited the middle and upper classes, while the country's poverty rate increased from 30% to 36.7% between 1990 and 2002 (EC 2005: 19). Although recent data from the National Institute for Statistics (INE) suggest that this negative trend has been reversed in absolute terms, social inequality has been on the rise since the mid 2000s, especially in the capital city of Praia. On these grounds, Cape Verdean scholars have pointed to the increasing social fragmentation of the country's society and urban spaces (Lima 2012a).

Working hand in hand, growing social disparity and the state's security policy – which, up to the present, relies almost exclusively on repression and a populist "zero tolerance" philosophy – have begun to erect on Cape Verdean territory what Wacquant has called, from a US perspective, "a single *carceral continuum*" (2002: 52). Life-in-the-*bairro* and life-in-prison are moving together in similar way as Cunha (2002) has observed in the Portuguese metropolises. Behind the bars of Cape Verde's prisons cells one finds increasingly a precise replication of the country's juvenile urban lumpenproletariat: kids with little formal education and no regular work, who grow up in certain no-go areas of the city, where they gradually become, themselves, part of the problem of their neighbourhood's violence.

The individual reasons that induce young people from the *bairro* to join a gang or to dedicate themselves to the practice of *kasubodi* (mugging or burglary) are complex and will not be treated here.[12] On a societal level, however, Cape Verde's development over the last two decades resembles closely that of other countries that have put their trust in law enforcement as the only strategy of social intervention. The case of Cape Verde seems especially tragic, taking into account the country's history as a former colony and country of emigration: more and more young Cape Verdeans from the "bad" parts of Praia or Mindelo

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[11] Cape Verde's GDP has been growing between 4.3% and 11.9% per year between 1993 and 2007 (INE 2013).
[12] But see Zoettl (2014: forthcoming).

have come to build up a criminal *curriculum vitae* comparable to those of some of their ethnic compatriots in Lisbon or Boston. While emigration was once the main vehicle of social mobility for Cape Verdeans of the lower classes, more restrictive immigration policies and tighter border controls worldwide have closed this door to those who do not have the necessary cultural and economic capital to make it legally to the still relatively prosperous countries of the northern hemisphere. The European crisis − which has delivered a severe blow to the Portuguese economy, heavily dependent on the construction industry that is one of the main employers of the country's immigrants − has contributed to the deteriorating situation of many Cape Verdeans abroad. As a consequence, at home as in the diaspora, the conjuncture of a lack of opportunities and a lack of non-repressive forms of social policies has given rise to a growing number of "no-future kids" from the underprivileged neighbourhoods of Praia or Lisbon, who are joining the crowd of second-class citizens who eventually end up living on the margins of society − in the *bairro* or behind bars.

The anthropologist, the prison, and the state

"Show me your prisons, and I …", goes the beginning of a proverb popularly attributed to Dostoevsky, Foucault, Churchill or even Nietzsche. In the following I will recount part of my own experience with the Cape Verdean prison system, particularly the prison of São Martinho in Praia. However, this "anecdotal" perspective is not intended as a mystification of another apparently miscarried fieldwork period, in what George Marcus (2010: 83) has called the *Malinowskian mise-en-scène* tradition of ethnography. The deconstruction of my personal failure to gain a more than superficial look into the daily routine of Praia's central prison, "home" to close to a thousand inmates, is rather meant to exemplify the modes of operation with which the Cape Verdean state at present is dealing with the social phenomena of juvenile delinquency and violence on a more general level.

My plan to carry out research in São Martinho prison was based on the idea that it would probably be the most convenient place to find out more on youth delinquency, gangs and violence in Cape Verde, and to learn, from an anthropological perspective, about the socio-cultural dynamics that make young people prone to take up a certain way of life. My first attempts to contact the Ministry of Justice in Praia to obtain a research permit were not met with success, as all of the ministry's telephone lines were "temporarily out of order". With the help of a Cape Verdean friend, I finally got hold of the private email address of the then director general of the prison administration, who responded promptly to my request,

forwarding it to the "usual administrative channels", as he wrote. As I didn't hear from him again, I decided, around a month later, to fly down to Praia, only to find that the director general had, suddenly and unexpectedly, as the press put it,[13] left office. Luckily, I managed to meet the new director general just a couple of days after my arrival. After briefly analysing my new research request (the original one had apparently been lost), and in response to my inquiry of whether he would eventually accede to it, he peremptorily answered: "First we must know about your *objectives!*"

The same question about my "objectives" was posed to me a month later, after I had managed to get my fieldwork in São Martinho formally authorized, thanks to the intervention of the Minister of Justice, by the then head of security *(chefe de segurança)* of São Martinho prison. Of course, the purpose of my research had been stated in my authorization request right from the beginning, but the "objectives" I had mentioned were of an *anthropological* nature. What the head of security and the director general were presumably wondering about, were rather my intentions and the *political* implications of my work, not its scientific objectives. Thus, when the head of security – another couple of weeks later and after I had managed to conduct only three interviews in private – finally ended my research exclaiming "We still don't know what you want!", he was probably referring not to a lack of transparency in my scientific objectives but to his uncertainty regarding whether my general *attitude* towards the Cape Verdean prison system was in harmony with the institution's own.

Prisons have never been "total" institutions in the way Erving Goffman (1961) once characterized them for analytical purposes. And while the reforming enthusiasm of the late 1960s and the ideals of rehabilitation and reintegration of convicted lawbreakers into society have progressively languished, giving way to ideas of securitization and "law and order", the modern prison "is not as completely or effectively 'cut off from the wider society' as Goffman's description might lead us to believe" (Farrington 1992: 6). Prisons continue, though, to be quite *untransparent* institutions, in the sense of effectively obscuring not only the inmates' look to the other side of the wall, but also society's look into the prison courtyard (cf. Zoettl 2013). Foucault's description of the Panopticon as a "machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad" (1979: 202) can easily be extended beyond the guard/prisoner perspective: what is, and what is not, being seen by the state and its agents – compared to what a state's citizens are able to see (and know) – is, as Foucault has remarked elsewhere (Foucault and Gordon 1980: 146ff), constitutive of the relation of power between them.

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[13] See *A Tarde,* 24 November 2012 (<http://mx1.asemana.publ.cv/spip.php?article82355>, visited 6 April 2013).

In the case of Cape Verde, São Martinho prison in the capital of Praia has effectively been closed to a more thorough look inside, since the cited in-depth study of the local non-governmental organization Zé Moniz (ASDZM 2000). According to personal information from the NGO's collaborators and colleagues who have done or have intended to do fieldwork in São Martinho, access to the prison has been severely limited, based on a strategy that goes from open dismissal to techniques of constant hindering or even humiliation of potential "intruders". To give an example, one of the staff members of Zé Moniz, responsible for keeping contact with prisoners who do not receive regular visits of friends or family members, finally gave up on her task after having been strip searched in a room equipped with video surveillance. My own experiences were of a rather harmless kind, such as being made to wait endlessly in midday heat in the shadeless, desert-like open space that surrounds the prison walls (São Martinho is situated a couple of kilometres away from the city limits), telling me that "the director is not here today", that "he couldn't talk to me today" or simply that "at this time of the year we do not allow research", apart from, more importantly, not allowing me to conduct interviews with "very dangerous" prisoners without the presence of prison officers.

The reasons for the persistent efforts to repel any look from outside over São Martinho's prison walls may easily be found in the cited study and other documents. Despite Cape Verde's much-quoted reputation as an "exemplary African democracy" (strategy paper of the European Community, EC 2005: 6), the human rights record of some of its penal institutions is deplorable. The report of the NGO Zé Moniz, for instance, concludes that in Cape Verdean prisons "human rights are systematically disrespected" and points to the fact that prisoners regularly "receive physical punishment in an unjustified and disproportional manner", often being arbitrarily locked up in "disciplinary cells that do not present a minimum standard of illumination, ventilation and hygiene" (ASDZM 2000: 15). Scholars have also recorded frequent allegations of physical punishment (see Bordonaro 2012b: 85, 99), in conformity with the 2010 report of the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDHC 2010: 113-115). At the same time, drug trafficking within São Martinho seems to be a major problem: The 2008 study of the local UNODC office reports that roughly a third of the inmates have used drugs inside prison. In nearly a fifth of the reported cases, drugs were apparently supplied by staff members (UNODC 2008: 4, 32).

Against this background, the reluctance of São Martinho's supervisors to keep the institution transparent is hardly surprising. Unfortunately, it is of course precisely this lack of

transparency, together with a lack of effective control and supervision procedures,[14] which fosters human rights abuses, and which has impeded the country's reasonably well-functioning democracy from extending its arm behind the prison walls. To the contrary: the dark sides of Praia prison seem to be partly taking hold of the country's public administration as well. While the director general of the prison administration who had initially received my authorization request was eventually detained himself (allegedly for the misappropriation of official documents and possession and trafficking of weapons of war),[15] his successor was, according to the press,[16] being investigated by the French and the Cape Verdean criminal investigation departments for participation in an international car theft organization, only two months after his appointment.

Violence, culture and society in Cape Verde

São Martinho prison, though, is not the only violent place in Cape Verde. Police violence has been reported by frequently,[17] and may be considered one of the factors that contributes to the spiral of violence which puts juvenile gangs into confrontations with Cape Verdean society (cf. Zoettl 2014: forthcoming). Not behind bars, but right behind the doorstep of many Cape Verdean households, domestic violence is a time-honoured and persistent problem. While such violence has been hushed up (as in many societies) for a long time, recent studies show the extent to which more than a few women in the country of *morabeza* suffer from male brutality. A survey of the National Institute of Statistics reaches the conclusion that one out of five Cape Verdean women have been victims of domestic violence (INE 2008: 198). Notably, for the purpose of the survey, "moderate" physical violence (*"violência física moderada"*) was defined as "aggressions like shoving away, throwing of objects, slaps in the face, pulling the other's hair, kicks, dragging on the floor and punches", while the category

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[14] The National Commission for Human Rights (CNDHC), founded in 2004 as a " national mechanism to promote, safeguard and monitor human rights" in Cape Verde (DL 38/2004) does not comply with the Paris Principles of the United Nations (UN 1994), as it is not government independent. The CNDHC is not granted access to the country's prisons without prior authorization by the ministry of the interior. Cape Verde has signed in 2011, but not ratified, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

[15] *Expresso das Ilhas,* 16 January 2013, <http://www.expressodasilhas.sapo.cv/sociedade/item/33885-fidel-tavares-foi-detido-na-posse-de-armas-de-guerra> (visited 18 March 2013). He was released the next day on a statement of identity and residence.

[16] *Liberal Online,* 19 January 2013, <http://liberal.sapo.cv/noticia.asp?idEdicao=64&id=38443&idSeccao=525&Action=noticia> (visited 20 Janaury 2013).

[17] See, for example, Bordonaro (2012a: 18; 2010), CNDHC (2010: 15, 21f, 25, 118f), USDOS (2011).

"severe" physical violence was reserved to "inflicting burnings, wounds, strangulation or threatening with arms" (INE 2008: 198).

Domestic violence in Cape Verde is not exclusive to the underprivileged classes. One of my interlocutors at Praia's state university (Universidade de Cabo Verde), for instance, mentioned being reluctant to start a new relationship, out of the fear of being victimized. Statistics prove her concerns to be solidly based: in a 2011 study, 39.9% of the interviewed female university students affirmed having suffered domestic violence since adolescence (Alvarenga apud Fernandes and Fonseca 2012: 220). Even more remarkable is the apparently widespread acceptance of violence as a valid male practice among Cape Verdean women. In the cited study, more than 17% of the women interviewed agreed that either "letting the food burn", "arguing with one's husband", "leaving the household without giving notice", "refusing to have sex" or "punishing or neglecting the children" would be reason enough to justify a husband beating his partner (INE 2008: 38).

Such numbers indicate how deeply interpersonal violence is rooted in Cape Verdean culture and society. The country's colonial history might be offered as one reason for this (see, for example, Rosabal 2010; Silva 2009), overindulgence of the country's popular sugar-cane spirit *(grogue)* as another. While one should always be aware of essentialist notions, it is fair to say that certain concepts of "masculinity" may indeed be tied to the cycles of violence that victimise individuals and society in Cape Verde. Massart (2013) has recently pointed to the centrality of local ideas of masculinity within (male) identity construction processes in Cape Verde. As Massart writes, "to be a man in all thing" ("*ser ômi em tudu kuza*") was a recurrent identification for his interlocutors, and implied certain attitudes and specific relations to constantly reproduce the notion of "being man" (Massart 2013: 294). In his study on adolescent sexuality in Cape Verde, Anjos (2005: 176) has similarly commented on the "rhetorics of masculinity" prevalent among economically marginalized youths from Praia. Some of Anjo's interlocutors cited the need for money to maintain a relationship as the motive for dedicating themselves to *kasubodi*. Correspondingly, for the South African context, Kynoch (1999: 58) affirms a strong link between "violent criminality and an aggressive masculinity" within urban gangs. To express masculine identity "through violent behaviour, […] predicated on the domination of girls and women", according to Kynoch, is a "historical constant amongst South African gangs" (*ibid*). Violence legitimising norms of masculinity have equally been discussed in relation to the prevalence of youth delinquency in Europe (see, for instance, Enzmann et al.: 2003 for the German context).

As I noted elsewhere (Zoettl 2014), Cape Verdean gang members are often much more concerned about how to "pay back" (*diskontá*) to either law enforcement agents or society at large, than they would be afraid of staying in or returning to prison. Bordonaro's (2012a: 18) observation that Cape Verdean police officers would "incorporate the same logic of masculine supremacy" and "operate according to the same ethos" as juvenile gang members, hints at entrenched thought patterns that may also underlie the widespread popular discourse of "zero tolerance". Curiously enough, the "zero tolerance" slogan is in Cape Verde not used to designate the "proactive, confident and assertive" policing style which "tackle[s] minor crimes and misdemeanours", in the hope of deterring more serious crimes (Pakes 2010: 51), but to invoke a simple "law and order" approach which suggests to confront juvenile misbehaviour with "tougher" laws and "stricter" law enforcement. Reinforcing violent patterns of behaviour instead of trying to amend them, such an approach is more likely to contribute to the problem of rising crime rates, especially among youths, rather than attacking it. Furthermore, as some of the cited human rights issues in Cape Verde exemplify, the "iron fist" of law enforcement often tends itself to transgress the limits of penal legislation, bringing into discredit, especially among youths, public pleas of law-abidance.

Violence in Cape Verde, in its various forms of expression, should thus rather be conceptualized as a *modus operandi* of society at large than as the individual manifestation of non-compliant behaviour. Within such a framework, physical violence, be it on the streets, behind bars or behind the front door, would then have to be put in relation to the varied forms of *symbolic* violence ("violence which extorts submission, which is not perceived as such, based on 'collective expectations' or socially inculcated beliefs", Bourdieu 1996: 115) exercised, in varying degrees, by certain segments of society towards others, on the basis of an unequal distribution of "symbolic" (and economic) power. The conviction that, for instance, men have the right to beat up their partners for burning their meals could, in this sense, be reckoned as "the result of a disequilibrium of power strongly rooted in our [Cape Verdean] society", as Silva (2009: 55) has put it – which may dispose some of the potential victims to (unconsciously) submit to their inferior position within a relationship.

From an supra-individual point of view, the unequal distribution of wealth in Cape Verde (as in innumerable other societies) is the most obvious example of a situation of class domination considered, by the majority of the country's rich and poor alike, as "given", "normal", "unavoidable", etc., and not the result of any kind of "violence" whatsoever. In fact, social inequality in Cape Verde is blatant. As mentioned before, the constant growth of the economy during the last two decades has scarcely benefitted the poor. The country's Gini

index of 2001/2002 was estimated at 0.57, compared to, for instance, 0.40 in Mozambique (third-last in the latest UNDP Human Development ranking)[18] and 0.27 in Italy[19] (INE 2004: 138). While statistical data should always be treated with caution,[20] between my visits to Praia in 2005 and 2012/2013, the divide between the rich and the poor had augmented palpably.

On the quiet, there seems to be a tacit consensus within well-informed circles that the international drug trade is responsible for a significant share of the economic growth from the mid 2000s on, and that the country's recent crises are not only a reflection of the European (and especially Portuguese) crises but also the result of a growing effort to combat precisely this traffic. Although the seizure of 1.5 tons of high-quality cocaine in 2011, in an operation vividly named *"lancha voadora"* ("flying speedboat") and the concomitant arrest of the then director of Praia's stock exchange might be viewed, considering the magnitude of the problem, as symbolic acts,[21] the international pressure on Cape Verde *not* to turn a blind eye to both *narcotráfico* and money-laundering[22] has unquestionably yielded some results.[23] On the other hand, Cape Verde's tourism industry has grown significantly, especially on the beach islands of Maio and Boa Vista.

Whatever the reasons for the economic growth of the last decade, it has widened the gap in incomes of the population and made class differences even more apparent than before. While Cape Verde, in population figures, compares to, for instance, Manchester in the UK, its public administration naturally comprises the entire scale of official state representatives of other, much more populous, democracies, and its political and economical elites enjoy a lifestyle, and the insignia of power, in no way inferior to their counterparts in the Global North. In an arquipelago where, relatively, so many people are *something,* it must be even more disconcerting to be and have *"nothing"*. Not to drive at least a passenger car in Praia forces the humble citizen to get on one of the scarce and crowded city buses or, alternatively, to walk around in the heat of the day. What may seem to be a banal question of convenience, is in fact a paradigm of unequal distribution of, simultaneously, "symbolic" and economic power – keenly felt within Cape Verdean society. One of the kids on my block in the middle-

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[18] See < http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> (visited 21 March 2013, 2012 data).

[19] Gini data of 1997 (Mozambique) and 1995 (Italy).

[20] For 2007, the National Institute of Statistics claims a reduction of the Gini index. Published statistical data, though, is not available, as the data was considered "not statistically relevant" (personal information from a staff member, February 2013).

[21] The trial of the accused started in March 2013 and was still going on at the time of writing.

[22] Money-laundering is "officially" recognized to contribute a 4% to the GDP, according to the National Bank's financial information department Unidade de Informação Financeira (*A Semana*, 10 April 2012 <http://www.asemana.publ.cv/spip.php?article74870>, visited 21 March 2013).

[23] See, for example, the UNODC's (2012) *Independent Project Evaluation of the Anti-organized Crime and Counternarcotics Enforcement in Cape Verde Project (ANTRAF)*.

class district of Palmarejo, where I was residing in "splendid isolation", but without a car, during the time of my fieldwork, eventually came to, incredulously and compassionately, ask me "Why is it that *you* don't have a car?", giving expression to his sensation that my way of getting about did not correspond to my presumed social status. And one of the guards of São Martinho prison who regularly gave me a hard time at the entrance, had most likely come to his conclusion "You are *nothing!*" (as he once put it) because I usually arrived at the prison gate in one of the crammed *hiace* transporters,[24] together with the bunch of non-privileged visitors who had come to see their imprisoned friends or relatives. It goes without saying that he completely changed his attitude after he had once seen me arriving in the SUV of a Portuguese colleague.

Morabeza, cash or body

The Creole term "*morabeza*" is one of those expressions which are said to be difficult to translate, as they presumably represent a cultural "something" unique to a certain people and society, which would be difficult to express in the idioms of others. While I have translated it here with the British "gentleness", one can easily come across quite different interpretations, like "welcoming", "warmth", or "hospitality" (Pina 2011: 1). However translated, *morabeza* is probably to be one of the first Creole words a foreigner will be confronted with, even before arriving on the archipelago. The second, at least in the city of Praia, will most likely be "*kasubodi*", the eidetic representation of a street mugging scene (a creolization of "cash or body") which one hopes never to presence face-to-face.

The apparent contradiction between the marked level of violence inherent in Cape Verdean society and the country's image of *morabeza* may best be dissipated by ignoring the term's essentialist connotations, and considering its usefulness as a *discourse*. Searching the internet for "cape verde morabeza" provides a first clue to the marketing value of *morabeza*.[25] More importantly, Miguel Vale de Almeida (2007) has pointed to the *political* usefulness of related notions like "creoleness", "miscegenation" or "Luso-Tropicalism", within the history of the Portuguese colonial endeavours in Brazil and Africa. Similarly, the concept of *morabeza* could be taken as, to use the words of Vale de Almeida, a discourse "born within a tradition of culturalist essay writing on national identity, specificity, and exceptionalism" (2007: 24) – with certain political, economical and societal *objectives.*

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[24] Toyota HiAce transporter used by private passenger services.
[25] A search with Google puts the "Hotel Morabeza" first (29 March 2013).

The notion of Cape Verdean *morabeza* would well be worth a study on its own; I will limit myself here to very briefly pointing out its importance in the positive reification of the country's supposedly democratic "national character". Vale de Almeida describes how Gilberto Freire's doctrine of a distinct Portuguese form of colonialization has given way to, among others, the Brazilian myth of a "racial democracy" in the tropics (2007: 19). A comparable idea can be found behind Cape Verdean *morabeza:* Pina (2011), for instance, points to the widespread assumption that the "spontaneous cultural character of the Cape Verdean would be pro-democratic". The image of Cape Verde as a "robust democracy", writes Pina, "is linked to the idea […] that Cape Verdean culture is, in its essence, naturally democratic, something common to societies with intense miscegenation and/or Luso-Iberian colonialisation" (2011: 238).

As a symbol for the country's "natural" propensity for democratic values, the concept and label of *morabeza* is not only good to promote touristic undertakings, but also recommends the country and its administrators to the sponsorship of its international partners. Rereading the EU strategy paper (EC 2005) cited earlier gives an idea of how successful the archipelago has been in "selling" its image of a model pupil of Western democracy. Apart from, as mentioned, being an "exemplary African democracy", one learns that "it is known that Cape Verde is a country little affected by corruption" (2005: 6) or that "there are no significant problems with the implementation of Human Rights conventions" (2005: 60).

Even though Cape Verde has without doubt a better human rights record and better governance than many continental African countries, a brief look at some of the studies cited here would suffice to paint a fairly different picture.[26] Although the outbursts of gang-related violence since the mid 2000s in the capital of Praia have severely damaged Cape Verde's image as a haven of tranquillity, trust in the democratic modes of operation of the country's public administration still seems to be uncritically high, as the heavy financial and ideological support of the development partners for the adopted securitization strategy shows. While the EU paper cited points to the "increase of the inequality of income distribution" (EC 2005: 19), notwithstanding a "context of strong real growth of GDP of around 6% yearly in the decade of 1990" (2005: 19), the solution for the country's poverty problems is still seen in "a strong and accelerated growth of the economy" (2005: 20) – an opinion reaffirmed to me during an interview with a senior EU representative in Praia in 2013.

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[26] Corruption, to give another example, was considered by the private sector as "the second major obstacle to doing business in the country" (UNODC 2007b: 14).

This is of course nothing else than a recycled version of the "trickle-down" hypothesis, which has been recommended to the global South since the end of the Second World War (cf. Wallerstein 2002: 22). On a regional level, it suggests that the enrichment of the Cape Verdean upper classes would, in the long run, also benefit the lower strata of society. Unfortunately, this is not what has happened. Cape Verde is becoming an increasingly fragmented society, in which the dynamics of accumulation of economic and cultural capital ensure the reiteration of social structure. Those who do not have the money to pay for school and higher education, and/or do not belong to the closed coteries of the local elite of Praia (which generally unites political and economic power), find themselves ever more dependent on a peonage-like way of living, surviving on *biscates* (occasional jobs). The growing recourse to violence of young citizens, be they marginalized or deliberately living on the margins of society, has unveiled the widening crevice in the country's societal consensus, underneath the curtain of *morabeza*. "Zero tolerance" towards those who refuse to subordinate themselves to the present social order and the status quo of economic disparities might be a successful strategy in the short-run, but is unlikely to reshape Cape Verde back into a country of "*brandos costumes*" and *morabeza*.[27]

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[27] "Gentle manners"

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