

“I EAT TO KILL HUNGER”

The foods of Cape Verde and the double-edged sword of Globalisation

[Received May 5th 2019; accepted January 28th 2020 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.14.1.14]

Kaian Lam

Centre for International Studies, ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon, Portugal
<Ka_Ian_Lam@iscte-iul.pt>

ABSTRACT: Cape Verde is a former Portuguese colony that experienced devastating droughts and famines with dire demographic and social consequences up to the last century. As the popular saying goes, “Cabo Verde não é verde” - ie Cape Verde (meaning ‘Green Cape’) is the opposite of what its name suggests. The islanders treasure food because they know how their ancestors and older family members suffered, maintaining to this day a close and grateful relationship with the land. Insular as it is, this archipelago is not immune to globalisation. This study examines some changes in the Cape Verdean diet induced by globalisation, the way food is produced and distributed, and how locals perceive and adapt to these trends. It draws preponderantly on five sessions of fieldwork on five of the nine inhabited islands undertaken between 2016 to 2019. It suggests that globalisation contributes to new urban dynamics and may have homogenising and demoralising effects on rural food traditions but also facilitates a range of synthetic experiences between these tendencies.

KEYWORDS: Cape Verde, creole, food, globalisation, tradition

Cape Verdean History and Society

Cape Verde, consisting of 10 islands and 16 islets, is situated in the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of West Africa. It is divided into the windward islands (Santo Antão, São Vicente, São Nicolau, Santa Luzia, Sal and Boa Vista) and the leeward islands (Brava, Fogo, Santiago and Maio) (Figure 1). According to data published by the National Statistics Institute of Cape Verde in December 2018, deriving from information obtained in 2017, the population is just above 537,000. For some, Cape Verde was the fruit of the European “Age of Discovery” or “Golden Age of Exploration” from the 15th to 17th centuries, which expanded European cultural and geographical reach and enabled the further expansion of the coherent European political, economic and social forces developed since Medieval times (Etkin, 2009: 50-51). For others, “discovery” is only one side of the story; a concept that can be understood from the perspective of men of the 15th Century (*homens quatrocentistas*, as they have been referred to) versus the modern perspective, which puts into question the universality of Portuguese history as World history or Cape Verdean history and calls our attention to the contrastive experiences of Europeans and Africans, respectively, in the historical formation process of the population of the archipelago of Cape Verde (Lima, 2017). For yet others, what gave birth to multiculturalism in Europe also produced creolisation and hybridity in Africa (with reference to archival research about West African pre-colonial social history from the perspective of reciprocal international encounter), so that what effectively occurred was circular creolisation, to the extent that “[a]fter the

encounter, West African identities were greatly affected and one can no longer talk about Africa and its identities as belonging purely to Black Africans biologically” (Nafafé, 2007: 179). Up to this day, Cape Verdeans are divided in their perceptions of their connection with the African continent (Henriques, 2016). Due to differences in the time of settlement, degree of miscegenation and other influences, there are issues on which islanders hold different opinions. The debate on creolisation in Cape Verde is perennial, nonetheless, and prominent scholars have studied and debated this topic (eg Furtado, 2012; Gibau, 2005; Seibert, 2014; and Almeida, 2007).

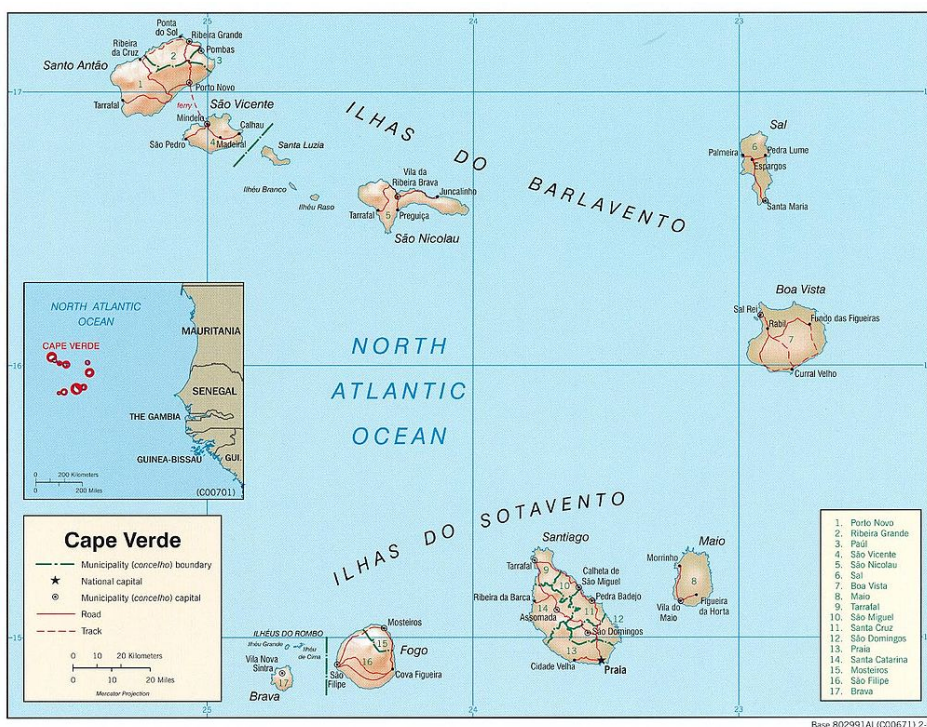


Figure 1 – Map of Cape Verde Islands and the adjacent African coast (Wiki Commons map 2020).

Throughout Cape Verdean history, food production and distribution have caused serious problems. In the early stages of settlement there was very limited capacity to grow food and the colonial administration was found wanting (Patterson, 1988; Keese, 2012; Baker; 2008). The situation improved significantly in the period after independence in 1975, when the eradication of hunger was a key priority for the post-independence government, a major reason for its existence and the pride of the first generation of local politicians. Cape Verde graduated to lower-middle-income country in 2008, providing the first case of policy-induced graduation in Africa. It was subsequently crowned the “African Success Story” (African Development Bank, 2012). Studying Cape Verde allows us to understand the historical roots of food problems in Africa. In Cape Verde the impact of famine on people’s physical and psychological well-being and on society might have been as dramatic as that of slavery (Bigman, 1993: 81).

Climate is an important factor. Fieldwork suggests that Cape Verdeans do not see the change of weather as based on four seasons. For them (as in many other African countries), there are only two: the long dry months and the precious moments when it rains, with very minute distinctions in how dry it is. More generally, when there is no rain, it is the *ténpu di séka* (time of dryness); and when there is rain, it is the *ténpu d'azágua* (time of water) or *ténpu di txuba* (time of rain). Because of the importance of rain or water for agriculture and human sustenance, the vocabulary is very specific. It is a form of social communication shared by the inhabitants. Like most societies, Cape Verdeans have a strong connection to food. What distinguishes Cape Verdeans from many other groups is perhaps that this connection is often mediated by migration, separation and distance. “Já vendi Kamoca food/nas ruas de New York” (I sold *Kamoca* food/on the streets of New York), are two lines from a poem with a food-themed poetry collection titled *Pão & Fonema* (Fortes, 1974) that evoke images of the crossovers of tradition and globalisation. What does globalisation signify for such a small archipelago as Cape Verde? How significant is a discussion about food and sufficiency issues?

Of all the inhabited islands of Cape Verde, Ilha Brava is the smallest. It is the tiny dot on the left-hand side of Fogo Island in Figure 1. Sparsely populated, locals refer to it as “the forgotten island”. Emigration, especially to the United States, is a way of life (Åkesson, 2004; Batalha and Carling, 2008; Carling and Åkesson, 2009). The American dream is very much alive on this Atlantic island. There are American symbols all over the place: the American flag and eagles, the clothes people wear and the way they speak a creole language with English greetings and isolated words. To visit the island is to hear stories of successful and failed attempts at emigration and to empathise with almost everyone’s plans – past, current or future – to “make it” abroad. Compared with the other eight inhabited islands of Cape Verde, the inhabitants of this island feel that there is a lack of public investments and work opportunities (Teixeira, 2016). As a result, Brava is very quiet. Except for small groups of discrete white, middle-aged European tourists and visiting emigrants, life is quiet and predictable. The diet on Brava Island is monotonous and dependent on imports. As a female host says, “como para matar a fome”, meaning, literally, she eats to kill hunger. Even the best local sauce cannot disguise some chewy and bland-tasting chicken, which is foreign, deep-frozen and packaged. It first reaches the archipelago’s capital city, Praia, on Santiago island. From there, the chicken is loaded on a ship and heads for Brava. In the hot weather, the chicken half-thaws on the way. When it arrives and is distributed to the stores, it is frozen again. The transit damages the texture of the chicken. The host does not appreciate the white meat at all but is forced to consume it, week after week, because she is aware that meat is important for a balanced diet; chicken is cheap and there are not many alternatives. At the time of my visit, Santiago was preparing for a major religious celebration and the best fish were reserved for it. The fish that were shipped to Brava were bony and expensive. *Bravenses*, as the island’s inhabitants are called, have little control over what to bring in as far as food ingredients are concerned. In this way, eating becomes a homogenised act and is combative, since people eat to overcome hunger.

While there is rich body of research on the impacts of globalisation on islands with regards to food, the Pacific has received the most attention (Lockwood, 2004; Huges and Lawrence, 2005; Thow et al, 2010; Lauer et al, 2013; Plahe, Hawkes and Ponnampereuma, 2013; McLennan, 2017). A case study of Cape Verde will add to our understanding of global phenomena in local contexts and will complement other studies of food sufficiency issues in island contexts, especially in the Atlantic. It has been pointed out elsewhere that Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau have been largely ignored by the food self-sufficiency literature for various reasons, including being Portuguese-speaking countries surrounded by bigger,

more noticeable French and English-speaking ones (Bigman, 1993). Understanding that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – of which Cape Verde is an example – face distinct challenges with regards to food security (Connell and Lowitt, 2020), we need more studies that highlight the challenges of coping simultaneously with food production issues, insular conditions, demographic pressures and international dynamics in this geographic area (Godenau and Yanez Nunez, 2013). More specifically, this article addresses globalising changes in the Cape Verdean diet, the way food is produced and distributed, and how locals perceive and adapt to these trends. Knowing that contested dynamics of food manifest themselves in the city and in the country within a global foodscape (Domingos, Sobral and West, 2014), it suggests that globalisation helps to create new city dynamics, may have homogenising and demoralising effects on rural food tradition, but also mediates a whole range of synthetic experiences in between.

Research Methods

The study draws on five sessions of fieldwork in Cape Verde – March/April 2016, January 2018, March/April 2018, July/August 2018 and January/February 2019 – divided between Santiago, Brava, Sal, São Vicente and Santo Antão islands, using semi-structured interviews, participant observation and various forms of ethnographic register of relevant information, in Portuguese and Kabuverdianu (Cape Verdean creole). The focus was on day-to-day happenings in and around the home and among ordinary people. There was a search for cultural explanations that enabled the retelling of layered stories in words and pictures. Fieldwork in Cape Verde was facilitated by earlier-established contacts with Cape Verdean migrants in Greater Lisbon, Portugal. It was important to stay with local host families and establish trust to learn about a subject as domestic and intimate as food. Pseudonyms are used for privacy protection. Furthermore, in order to give greater expression to the popular perspective, this study also refers to oral tradition (Vansina, 1985) and Kabuverdianu expressions, the interpretation of which is based on acquired knowledge of the creole language with the help of dictionaries.

Food in National History, Culture and Traditions

Food shortages marked the history of Cape Verde (Carreira, 1984; Chastanet, Chouin and de Lima, 2014). As the popular saying goes, “Cabo Verde não é verde” ie Cape Verde (meaning ‘Green Cape’), is the opposite of what its name suggests. The islanders treasure food because they know how their ancestors and older family members suffered and, to this day, maintain a close and grateful relationship with the land. They are thankful for what grows on it – namely resistant, starchy crops that require little to no water. One hears stories concerning how food feeds interpersonal relationships from locals. On a regular basis, a mother on Fogo Island sends a burlap sack of beans, manioc or sweet potatoes from her farm by ship to her daughter living on the main island, Santiago; not because her daughter is too poor to buy her own but because this has become a habit, a form of communication between mother and daughter, an expression of care and encouragement. In another case, a father insists that a son going abroad to study (which is a common way to emigrate) takes a sack of dried maize with him as remembrance. There are many other stories about pigs and goats, and for richer people, cows. An act as simple as praying for the health of pigs is more than just a religious one – Catholicism being the dominant religion of most residents on Santiago – it also has economic and cultural meaning (Rodrigues, 2008: 367). Elsewhere, researchers have similarly discussed the symbolism of

maize – the most important food ingredient – in Cape Verdean culture (Hopffer Almada, 1998) and the influences of the harsh environment on literary imagination (Lobo, 2012).



Figure 2 – Tall dry corn stalks covering hills close to a main road in Santiago (author's photo, 2019).

The words “creole” and “traditional” are used frequently to indicate anything related to Cape Verde and are often used interchangeably. Cape Verdeans have a strong sense of what is “ours” (or *nos* in Kabuverdianu) meaning their own. One often hears expressions like *nos tradison* (our tradition), *nos kultura* (our culture), *nos terra* (our land, meaning place of origin) and *nos raís* (our root). Throughout the country, advertisements claim a certain coffee drink is ours, or a certain fruit juice is ours (eg *nôs sabor*, meaning ‘our flavour’ – see Figure 3). I also saw an advertisement on a van in Santo Antão stating “Nôs produtos – Preserve a qualidade e divulga o sabor” (“Our products – Preserve the quality and spread the flavour”).

There is a sizeable number of groceries, cafés and restaurants with “ours” in their name, eg Minimercado di nós (“Our Supermarket”) in Praia, and the “Nôs Amizade” (“Our Friendship” restaurant/bar in Praia. Sometimes, “yours” (*bo* in Kabuverdianu) may be used in the place of *nos*, so that a luncheonette that is “ours” may be “yours” as well, eg U Sabor, a luncheonette in São Vicente. Locals explain that such names display hospitality and promise a warm welcome. The slogan of Logurel, a milk-product brand, is “Saúde Tudu Dia” (“Health Every Day”). Emicela is a coffee brand based in Boa Vista; coffee is only produced in Fogo and Santo Antão, but the Empresa Sal Rei is based in Boa Vista. Its selling point is *café kriola* (creole coffee). Paradoxically, in Mindelo, São Vicente, there is an eating outlet called Fastfood Bô Ilha (literally, “Fastfood Your Island”). Fast food, an English term and a western concept of human nourishment, is relatively new to Cape Verde. There is no McDonald’s, and the burgers that are sold on the archipelago are prohibitively costly and not as fulfilling as other local alternatives. Moreover, many older people feel suspicious about the ingredients.



Figure 3 - “Nôs Sabor Kriol” (“Our Creole Flavour”), advertisement, Santiago (author’s photo, 2019).



Figure 4 - “raiz d'nôs kultura” (“the root of our culture”), mural, Mindelo, São Vicente (author’s photo, 2018).

Cape Verdean food tells stories of the inhabitants’ constant struggle to negotiate their social and cultural identity since they started to prepare a version of *Cachupa*, their “national dish” (Cusack, 2000) from the earliest phase of settlement in order to survive in exceedingly harsh conditions (explaining why there were differences and adaptations in dietary habits in Cape Verde in as early as the 15th century - Torrão, 1995). Essentially, *Cachupa* was a creole slow-cooked stew of edible, starchy, nutritious, locally sourced ingredients for a people who chose to practice agriculture.



Figure 5 – *Cachupa*, rural Santiago (author's photo 2018).

Food is a prominent theme in oral tradition, an important Cape Verdean cultural heritage. Telling stories used to be a means to transmit information orally, enabling the young to learn from the old and the passing on of knowledge. It was a form of evening entertainment when television was not yet popularised. Some stories have clear morals; others are ironic and not unfrequently sensual and sexual. There are common threads and the stories are historically, culturally and socially situated. Food themes permeate Cape Verdean oral tradition. For instance, the appetite of a man indicated how worthy he was as a person, meaning that work output and food consumption were related. A Cape Verdean might be very hard-working; but if he was voracious, it would be difficult to satisfy him. In one folktale, a husband who “*éra rei di trabadjador, más tánbe éra rei di kumidor*” (literally, “works like a king, also eats like a king”) invented a story to persuade his newly wed wife to cook more food, causing her to exclaim, “*Trabádja, e'ta trabádja ki nen buru... Más kume, tánbe e' ta kume ki nen pó frádu!*” (literally, he works like a donkey... but he eats like a friar!) (Silva, 2004: 53). In such cases, what would a man do to pretend that he was a good, marriageable prospect? One option was for him to conceal his appetite until after marriage, when he would invent a reason for requiring more food. There are equally provocative stories about women. In one, a newly wed, home-minding wife made excuses not to prepare lunch for her farmer husband when in reality she cooked delicious food only for herself. The husband was hungry on the farm, drank water and dug up raw roots to stuff his stomach - “*tudu kel ténpu si almusu éra mandióka kru k'el ta galába*” (“during all that time his lunch was raw manioc that he dug up”) (ibid: 41-42). Meanwhile, his wife made “*si panela di papa ku manteja*” (“her pot of maize meal with butter”), a traditional, local delicacy.

Food in the Diaspora

Among Cape Verdean communities in the United States, it is common to find Cape Verdean food stores, cafés and restaurants. Some of these serve mainly emigrants while

others primarily cater to non-Cape Verdean patrons. In other parts of the world, there are comparable examples, testifying to the liveliness of cultural practices – food, music and dance combined (Gomes, 2015; Brito-Sernedo, 2015) – and national/diasporic pride. Cape Verdeans have emigrated in order to survive, search for a better life and reunite with family members. They form communities in the United States, Portugal, France, Italy and the Netherlands, in particular. Cape Verdean islanders consider the global diaspora as an integral part of the Cape Verdean nation. Their numerical, economic, social, cultural and political importance is not to be understated.

There are many Cape Verdean communities in New England. In Boston, for instance, it is common to find food stores that offer “the tastes of the land.”¹ Cape Verdean cafés are visibly present in Boston and Brockton (Massachusetts) and Cape Verdean-American restaurants such as Boston’s *Restaurante Cesária* provide not only traditional food but also traditional *morna*² and other types of music. There are similar examples in Europe that testify to the liveliness of cultural practices (food, music and dance combined) and national/diasporic pride. In Praia, the Nham Nham – Sabores de Cabo Verde restaurant famously shares old recipes and proposes new ones on its website and *Restaurante O Coqueiro* in Portugal (and its Facebook page) is a gastronomic reference point for Cape Verdeans, Portuguese and European tourists alike. Back in Cape Verde, there is a long tradition of receiving *bidons* – a collection of diverse items in long, large barrels, not infrequently shipped from the United States. In them there are all kinds of foods, especially packaged, processed and dry ingredients that last months or years. These include rice, sugar, oil, flour, canned products, condiments, beverage concentrates, chocolates, drops and other American delicacies (known as *encomendas de terra*).

A chanced interview with Peter, an emigrant-retiree on a brief visit to Mindelo, São Vicente, on a to see his Cape Verdean family (which happened to be the author’s local host), provided the following individual perspective on diasporic experience. Originally from Brava island, he has lived in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, for decades with his family. Even though there are many Cape Verdeans in the neighbourhood, he stressed that he has worked under a Chinese supervisor, befriended a Polish nurse, and had received free rides from American police. He has worked full-time or part-time in factories, hospitals, Burger King and other fast-food outlets. Many of his observations about life in America are related to food. He was adamant that he was not born for fast food (and laughed at his recollection of Americans who leave their food on the top of their car and forget it, so that when they drive off, their food flies away). He cooks and eats traditionally, as if he had not left Cape Verde a long time ago. For him, eating traditionally is eating healthily and he is glad when others appreciate it. He recalled once inviting a Polish nurse and her husband to his house for his birthday. She had helped to arrange a job for him in a hospital. He and his family only prepared Cape Verdean food such as *Cachupa*, *Xerém*, and *Cuscuz* (not to be confused with Moroccan couscous). But he was worried that his guests would not feel comfortable eating strange food on their first visit so, just in case, he bought Burger King fried chicken also. The day ended with great joy. His Polish friends liked his home-made food a lot. Nobody touched the fried chicken. Likewise, in Portugal, many emigrants consciously preserve food traditions, doing as they remember how, irrespective of the fact that they live abroad and visit the archipelago infrequently. The above example concerns one person, but it reflects how the Cape Verdean diet is preserved abroad; it also corroborates what Cape

¹ See the locations listed at the Sabor di Terra (Boston Area) webpage.

² See Aoki (2016) for discussion of *morna* music and its relation to Cape Verdian creole identity.

Verdeans state about their visits to America and what they witnessed there. People have confidence in what they consume and feel a sense of satisfaction in being different. Cape Verdean food is neither American food nor Portuguese food. Emigrants do not eat *Cachupa* because they are hungry and need a lot of calories (like their farming ancestors in the past) but because their creole food tradition enriches their modern, diasporic lifestyle.

From island-bound informants' accounts, food sharing was once common and something that richer families particularly did in the past, as a socially sanctioned display of wealth and generosity. The hosts did this by keeping the door of their house open and making sure that there was always food in the pot and coffee to heat up. People just walked in to eat. If they did not have a place to stay, they were invited to sleep through the night. Nowadays, this is being ritualised and compartmentalised – food sharing takes place in big festivals like the *Bandeirona* (Flag Feast) on Fogo Island, funded and supported by emigrants in the United States. This tradition involves ritual food preparation and testifies to the strong identification of islanders with local foods. During the mid-late 20th Century it involved elaborately prepared and exuberant displays and was considered one of the richest festivals in Cape Verde and is an important element of national cultural heritage. Big pots of traditional food are placed on the street. No one is questioned all are served regardless, they do not need to say in advance that they are coming. The more the people turning up, the happier it is, and the more successful the event. In recent years, the feast has diminished in scale and the locals expect fewer and fewer *Foguenses* from America in the future. Along with this decline in numbers, public sharing of food and displays of generosity have become less common. The older generations are too weak to mind their stoves, they depend on others and they shut their doors for security amid high crime rates. Neighbours and friends are welcome to visit but preferably on notice.

Island City Dynamics and Contrastive Practices

Cape Verde has developed at great strides, thanks to political and social stability. It is estimated that the country produces about 20-30% of its food while the rest is imported, received as donation or remittances. Many families grow some of their own food, which is not accounted for by statistics. People are in movement, and so is food, which comes from everywhere and is traded all over the place, especially in Praia and Assomada, two major towns situated on the island of Santiago (emphasising the relevance of urban centres as a field for Island research - Grydehøj et al, 2015). These towns host dynamic marketplaces, petty trading and spontaneous peddling. The two locations are connected by a highway and served by passenger vans. In and around municipal markets, entrepreneurs offer the widest possible selection of staples, including fruit, vegetables, chickens, suckling pigs, fried snacks, ready-cooked meals and iced water. Casual sellers sit waiting for customers in public squares and by roadsides. They occupy spots where vehicles stop. They are in their own front gardens, under the shade and outside schools. The intermixing of hot and cold, alive and dead, fresh and preserved is present at all moments, as the fishmonger joins the butcher, and a fruit seller sets up stall next to the clothes vendor. One buys a fish cake from the other, and the latter buys a drink from the former. Imported fruits are sold per unit. It is not easy to separate the urban from the rural, the producer from the consumer, the buyer from the seller, the local from the global. People from all over the country and foreigners intermingle as part of socialisation. Food is part of the human movements and activities that characterise Cape Verdean urban living. Seen this way, the Cape Verdean local foodscape (Appadurai, 1996; Hull, 2014; Liu, 2016) is a generative and regenerative ecology that promotes human interactions and role shifting, bolsters community support

and democratises access to economical but healthy sustenance and nourishment. When we pay attention to food in the city, we are, in effect, studying component aspects of how Cape Verdeans negotiate a meaningful social and cultural life despite difficult circumstances. The organisation of spaces does not necessarily respect strict, legal limits. The separation between the formal and the informal or between the public and the private is porous. Life on the archipelago seems to have preserved a balanced relationship with Nature.



Figure 7 – Traditional festive food, rural Santiago, (author's photo, 2018).

Cape Verdean islanders attempt to incorporate tradition and modernity. In the countryside, many homes have an indoor kitchen and an outdoor kitchen, meaning that the inhabitants use gas, but they can also use firewood. While people are building new houses with big kitchens, this does not prevent them from using public spaces for cooking. Even in cities, people cook in the street. One time, Sally, a youth mother in her early thirties, was surprised that a neighbour had set up a cooking fire with three stones very close to the backdoor of her house. Sally was angry at first because she had to sweep away the ashes and clean up. As she was not sure who the neighbour was, she did not complain. But then, a week later, Sally missed eating *Cachupa à Lenha* (*Cachupa* cooked on firewood). This is when she decided to use the same spot with the three stones to cook her own. She was going to mix ingredients: supermarket purchases (European carrots, deep-frozen Dutch meat and Brazilian maize), a cabbage from a local vendor, beans and sweet potatoes from her mother's farm, as well as Portuguese Chorizo presented to her (to replace the traditional *linguiça*). Before that, a group of carpenters had borrowed her pot. So, when Sally went to their workshop to retrieve the pot, she was given a pile of sticks as an expression of gratitude. The story ended well as the *Cachupa* was delicious. Sometimes, however, cooking in the street is problematic. Hungry men may come close. They sit and wait, hoping to share the food for free. Once Sally was cooking *Cachupa* in the street. As it takes two to three hours to be ready, wood must be replenished now and then to keep the fire burning. As she was cooking, an old woman – a total stranger – saw the pot. She then

picked up wood sticks from the rubbish and poked them into Sally's fire. She disappeared at every poking and then reappeared to comment on the food and remove the pot lid to "supervise" the cooking. Sally's husband was annoyed. He pulled out the old woman's sticks and threw them to one side. He shouted in Kabuverdianu: "panela é privadu", ('the pot is private!'). When the old woman saw and heard this, she understood that she was not welcome and left in silence. There are many interesting, contrastive elements above. It is at once traditional (returning favours, cooking in a big pot in the public, bothering neighbours, sharing food) and modern (cooking for one's immediate family only, using modern ingredients and fuel substitutes).

There are many changes underway in the Cape Verdean diet. The Cape Verdean with American nationality whose story was related above, holds the firm impression that Cape Verde and his compatriots are different from some decades ago. He is particularly dismayed by the indifference of neighbours, increased crime rates, lack of interest in community gatherings and the irresponsible attitude of today's youth, etc. He could have added food practices to his list. Invited to a baptism party up on a mountain in rural Santiago, from where many have emigrated to France, I was surprised to find how international the ingredients in cuisine are. The host and her family had gone abroad for some decades and are considered successful emigrants by their neighbours. When I visited they made a late celebration of the birthday and baptism of the host's grandson. It was a big feast and so the neighbours prepared several pots of food simultaneously, using both gas and firewood in various spots, in front or behind their houses. The fare included both traditional and introduced dishes. There was hot, festive food – with an abundance of maize, beans, vegetables, wheat, rice, pork, beef and chicken – served outdoors. We ate to our hearts' content. Then, we had cold, western-style snacks, cakes and sweets indoors. It was an emotional day, not only for the young child's sake, but also because of the significance of "return" in the Cape Verdean culture of emigration. It is in the partaking of happiness and joy with compatriots that emigrants find the courage to persevere in the face of difficulties on foreign soil. Food plays an important part in this.



Figure 8 - *Xerém* (maize and bean dish), rural Santiago, (author's photo, 2018).

The above discussion tends to confirm existing literature on the sentimental aspects of eating (Civitello, 2008; Counihan, 2009; Counihan and Van Esterik, 2013; Wilk, 1999). What is less studied, though, is how globalisation *mediates* manifestations of traditional practices. For instance, in the above episode, the father of the child carried a three-tiered cake up the mountain in one hand and on foot because there is not yet a way for a car to navigate the path's narrow curves. Together with him came the child, the mother and some friends. From a higher point, it was quite a sight to see them climb all the way up. The party took place on Santiago Island, but it brought back recollections of what was previously seen on a high spot on Santo Antão Island, which is also very hilly and agriculturally productive. There, women also climbed up the hills, not carrying a cream cake but deep-frozen meat in plastic bags, marring the countryside scene of smoke from firewood cooking going up the chimney and the apparent tranquillity and simplicity of island life. The contrastive imageries – that of globalisation and tradition – are profound. Instead of saying that globalisation is being lived in traditional ways, or that tradition is going up in smoke, we may venture to say that tradition will not disappear in Cape Verde but that it will increasingly come to indicate a whole range of *synthetic* experiences mediated by globalisation.

Referring to the *Santiaguense* feast, some ingredients were from the islands, but most came from around the world. There was Argentinian maize, Thai rice, German milk, Dutch luncheon meat, Portuguese olives, French sugar, Maltese instant flavoured drink, Spanish yogurt, Moroccan sweets, etc. The host bought a lot of basic ingredients – including condiments and frying oil – in supermarket chain stores in France and put them in *bidons* (large shipping barrels). Interestingly, nobody raised questions about the foreignness of any element of this Cape Verdean tradition. Local people purchase and/or consume imports so naturally and habitually that they do not even read the labels. It is no coincidence that Europe supplies a great part of what Cape Verde needs. Countries like Portugal, France and the Netherlands are not only popular destinations for emigration but are also the origins of much of what Cape Verdeans consume daily. On Brava and Fogo islands, the inhabitants prefer the United States. With emigrant remittances and investments also come American products. Frozen meat and agricultural produce come from South America, especially Brazil. Rice comes mainly from Asia. Chinese and other traders introduced Asian and East European products at lower prices to the Cape Verdean market. By contrast, African countries, even Lusophone African countries, fade into the background. Generally speaking, families with higher purchasing power and greater financially stable tend to prefer big European brands and buy more packaged products, less regularly and in bigger quantities. Meanwhile, families on lower incomes – such as those with a female head working in the informal economy, for instance – will choose lesser known, alternative brands, buy loose goods, more frequently and in smaller quantities.

While Cape Verdean tradition is increasingly being sustained by modern ways, people nurture a special connection with the soil (Fe, 1992) and preserve an *agri-culture* that has remained very strong. The latter continues to be the most important economic activity. See, for instance, the following explanation:

In Cape Verde, despite the aridity of the soil and an unfavourable climate for the practice of agriculture and despite having a sea rich in fish, agriculture constitutes an essential base for the economic life of its population. Because of the strength of tradition, Cape Verdeans continue to be persistently attached to cultivating the soil even though it is a sector which is more and more unproductive due to the lack of rainfall on the archipelago. It can be

concluded therefore that agriculture in our country is, in effect, more a “cultural” act than a rational one. (Ethnographic Museum of Praia, 2018)

Cape Verdeans call their food *comida cabo-verdiana* or *cozinha cabo-verdiana*, and frequently *comida tradicional*. Doubtless, food is *tradition*. On São Vicente Island, however, there are some people who are not convinced that they have a distinctive food *culture*. For them, Cape Verdeans are cosmopolitan, and so they do not follow one way of eating. To put this in perspective, São Vicente was the last island to be inhabited, is highly creolised, largely urbanised, and is the most European. Besides its fishery, it produces bread and pastries using imported wheat. The *badius* (*Santiaguenses*) like to joke that the *Sampadjudus* (of São Vicente) care more about entertainment than about food and that biscuits and tea are enough for the latter. There are different ways of imaging food and spatial organisation on the islands. On São Vicente Island, people do not appreciate unauthorised street vending and prefer that everyone keeps to their own corner. On Brava Island, also known as the Island of Flowers, flowers are grown on good soil. People who cultivate their own vegetable gardens also plant flowers for aesthetic reasons. Sal Island is practical and is serious about tourism and business. There are many Chinese stores, so that food is literally at one’s door. Santiago Island is the most dynamic and its formal and informal economies are continuous and complementary. This is the island on which authorities have most difficulties demarcating spaces for uses, eg selling and buying fish in the fish market only and not around it or beyond it.

Cape Verdean identity is paradoxical, neither black nor white. Similarly, its culture is ambiguously defined. On the one hand, Cape Verde has a rich intellectual and literary heritage, as manifested by the *Claridade* literary movement in the early-mid 20th Century,³ concerned with insularity, rural agrarian life, emigration and rootedness and the diaspora. On the other hand, many Cape Verdeans struggle to match famous authors with their works and to explain what they wrote about and why their writings are important today. Everyday Cape Verdeans are more familiar with oral tradition, dance, music, food, etc. and far more comfortable talking about these topics, using a rich creole vocabulary. Cape Verdean food is not prescriptive but incorporates ambiguity and play; it is a creole food tradition relativising European influences and African legacies. There are many instances of globalising food practices gaining ground in Cape Verde. One time, visiting a young female graduate of the University of Cape Verde in the centre of Praia, who managed to land a job at the Bank of Cape Verde (an enviable, administrative entry job) almost immediately, at a time when youth unemployment was very high in the capital city, she was seen cooking and sleeping in the room she rented in a house which was still under construction and so had no roof. Removing the lid of a large pot sitting over a gas bottle revealed a mass of spaghetti with some canned tuna and packaged green peas and sweet corn mixed in. These were mostly likely bought, imported ingredients. The soup had completely dried up and the spaghetti had become sticky and clumpy. That pot of food would last several days. She also had bananas – small, chubby ones from the islands. In another case, a young woman lived with her child and mother-in-law in rural Santiago while her husband attended university in Praia. Unlike their neighbours, they seldom prepare *Cachupa*. When asked why, the woman explained that they could not gather all the ingredients. Due to the lack of rainfall, they could not grow the desirable variety of maize, beans and other legumes and

³ A progressive socio-cultural movement named after the eponymous literary review (founded in 1936 in Mindelo on São Vicente).

vegetables and did not want to buy them. Occasionally, when they could have some fresh tuna from the sea, they remembered to return favours to neighbours and share the fish with older family members in the community. The part that they felt they could keep for themselves was chopped into small bits and pieces. When mixed in a big pot of spaghetti soup, it was as if the fish had melted away and disappeared. When the woman saw imported fruits sold by street vendors – sometimes already half turning bad under the hot sun – she would pick an apple or an orange preciously and discretely, only for her son. In the above two episodes, globalisation did bring benefits, namely in the supply of food. However, it also made eating automatic and artificial. People ingest a certain number of calories to energise the body and it is only rational to substitute expensive food with cheaper alternatives in the same category (eg canned tuna from Portugal is cheaper than that from Cape Verde).

Cape Verde has an essentially sensual, taste-driven food tradition. In Kabuverdianu, the term *sábi*, is very commonly used to express a complex feeling of liking someone or something. For example, “Kabú Verdi é (terra) *sábi*”, which is used frequently in songs and in commercial and cultural promotions. *Sábi* is thought to have come from Portuguese: *saborear* (to taste), *sabor* (taste) and *saboroso* (tasty). Checking *Dicionário Prático Português Caboverdiano. Variante de Santiago* (2002), *saboroso* (in Portuguese) is *sábi* (in Kabuverdianu), which concerns everything to do with food or food made from sugar. Moreover, in a figurative sense, it means pleasurable, delightful, agreeable. According to *Dicionário do Crioulo da Ilha de Santiago (Cabo Verde)* (2002), as a noun, *sábi* refers to happiness and joy (and the antonym is *kasábi*). As an adjective, *sábi* means good and agreeable and as an adverb, it means well or agreeably. Interestingly, if one is to translate the examples given in the second dictionary into English, there is a full blossoming of meanings of *sábi*. It is a culturally and socially rich Kabuverdianu term. Note the examples such as: “Rapásis, k anhos bai strága gentis ses *sábi*” (“Young men, don’t destroy people’s happiness”); “Ami N stába na un lugar *sábi*” (“I was in an agreeable place”) and “Si bu kre kume *sábi* bu tem ki da más dinheru” (“If you want great food, you need to give more money”). There is a plethora of possible translations for *sábi*. Once staying with a host on Sal Island who had just visited her daughter in Portugal, the host commented emphatically that Portuguese food is bland and tasteless (*kasábi*) since the Portuguese only add salt but do not marinate their fish and meat properly. Marinating food is a loving and sensual act.

Conclusion

Local and global food networks intersect and local practices are going global. As one of the opening research anecdotes related, a good sauce is often the salvation of cuisine on Brava Island. The previously discussed cook’s secret sauce, used especially for fish, includes mashed garlic with salt, sugar, onion, green and red peppers, tomatoes, Portuguese Bom Dia olive, Compal ketchup and Dutch Cook Brand margarine. The fish is fried in Belgian Oilio (soyabean oil). Unconsciously, she makes a world sauce with internationally sourced, branded ingredients. Numerous changes are taking place on the foodscape of Cape Verde. The experiences of islanders and the contextualised interpretation of these are important for our understanding of traditional food in the past, present and future. This article discussed globalising changes in the Cape Verdean diet, the way food is produced and distributed, and how locals perceive and adapt to these trends. It analysed the subject from multiple perspectives. In urban areas, globalisation seems to have fed into a generative and regenerative ecology of food processes. Nevertheless, Cape Verdeans are far from

embodying a “global culture” and embracing an “island identity” wholeheartedly (Fog Olwig, 1996). If globalisation has created new urban dynamics, it can also have homogenising and demoralising effects on rural food traditions, so that the creole food of Cape Verde needs to be re-defined in order that we do not take food as a set of economic questions but rather as total social entity (Briand, 2007). “Tradition” will increasingly come to indicate a whole range of synthetic experiences in between the two extremes. A traditional dish is necessarily modern, meaning that when “consuming” tradition, one is also “consuming” modernity, and vice versa.

Cape Verde continues to face many challenges due to its geographical location. Food is a source of calories and often poor families have little food choices. However, on a more symbolic level, as evidenced by interactions in the process of fieldwork, Cape Verde has a hot, pot-food tradition wherein each stirring invokes memories; every chat over the ingredients reaffirms solidarity and every tasting redoubles remembrance of Cape Verde. Foreigners may find it difficult to understand why Cape Verdeans love apparently heavy vegetable mixtures because they themselves have never had the chance to taste the food and have no memory to invoke and no tie to activate. People tend to present their food in units, knowing by heart long lists of ingredients in all colours and shapes, from the land and the sea, from the high mountains and from deep valleys. Cape Verdeans thereby give great importance to individual units, so that any food is the result of a certain combination of these. The particularity concerning minute differences and details is something well noted. Therefore, Cape Verde foods – in the plural and encompassing all the ingredients and processes – have strong evocative qualities. They tell stories; they transmit human warmth and sustain interpersonal relationships.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for the comments she received at the 16th Summer University dedicated to Food & Drink Studies, European Institute for the History and Cultures of Food, Tours, 26th August – 2nd September 2018, and at the African Studies Association of the UK Conference, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, 11th-12th September 2018, where she presented a part of her work. She was a recipient of the Internal Third Cycle Scholarship in African Studies from ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon and of the Postgraduate Scholarship from the Higher Education Bureau of the Special Administrative Region of Macao, for the year 2018/2019, respectively.

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