

# Brazil and the Cape Verde Islands: Some Aspects of Cultural Influence

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Pedro Alvares Cabral's ships left Portugal on 9 March 1500 en route for the territory that he first named Terra de Vera Cruz and that later came to be known as Brazil. On the 22 March they called at the island of São Nicolau [Caminha, 1500], one of the northernmost islands of the Cape Verde group; this was about forty years after the discovery of the archipelago in 1460–62 [Albuquerque, 1991].<sup>1</sup> It is known that Vasco da Gama had stopped at the island of Santiago in 1498 on his voyage to India, and also in 1499 on the return journey. Straight after the discovery of Brazil Cabral sailed for India and on the way back also dropped anchor at Santiago. Indeed, our archipelago, which is situated off Cape Verde in Senegal (the place from which it appears to take its name), was to become an important stopover point for maritime traffic between Europe, Asia and the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both to allow crews to rest and to take on water, wood and some food supplies. It also became important as a holding point for slaves (a large number of whom came from around thirty Guinean ethnic groups and subgroups). They were dispatched from Santiago, known then as Cape Verde island, to territories such as Brazil from the early sixteenth century onwards, since these territories, which had only recently been discovered and were little known, needed people to work and populate them.

But these slaves from the African coast, who set out from the archipelago where they had been dropped and where they had waited to board again, often came back as changed people both culturally and psychologically [Almada, 1999]. Thus exchanges between Brazil and the Cape Verde Islands took place early. Influences from Brazil were to be felt in areas as diverse as Cape Verde literature, music, dance, religion, beliefs, folk medicine and social life. We shall analyse these influences in turn, highlighting those that have been felt during the twentieth century and particularly those that are thought to be recent. We shall take as our starting point the 1922 Modernist cultural movement in Brazil, of which Mário de Andrade, a *mestiço*, was one of the leaders. But first I shall review some general points.

Given the multitude of links that grew up between the Cape Verde Islands and Brazil, especially Bahia, the great coastal region that is in a way the mirror image of the agricultural landscape of the Guinea coast that supplied the slaves [Lobo, 1960], it is highly likely that the archipelago grew maize even before it appeared in Portugal [Ribeiro, 1962: 28]. The cereal was a crucial factor in the islands' colonization, since it was after its introduction that the colonization movement, which had previously been sporadic, "with highs and lows, and had not varied from the same feeble rate at which it had begun, started to take off" [Ribeiro, 1962: 31].

And so the Cape Verde Islands obtained maize from Brazil, but also tobacco, coffee, fruit trees and the medicine tree (*purgueira*), while Brazil, or more precisely Bahia, obtained from the islands the first oxen, mares, ewes, goats, coconuts, sugar cane, rice seeds, and of course many slaves [Ribeiro, 1960: 62]. All these animals, plants and slaves were exported from the islands but had come from elsewhere.

It is not surprising that a society evolved on the islands “paralleling the society in Bahia, on the other side of the Atlantic but in fact containing the same elements and characteristics that make them so alike even now, despite the differences in today’s environment”, as Ribeiro wrote in 1960 [p. 158]. Indeed, over and above these differences, there are many aspects common to the two territories. There is the important place of mixed-race people (a result of interbreeding of African slaves and European colonists in both tropical territories) in the development of both societies; indeed, mixed-race people were the main agents of the democratization of social life. However, mixed-race people stand for racial, social and cultural democratization in the islands more than in Brazil [Mariano, 1959], which can probably be linked to the fact that, unlike Cape Verde society, racial discrimination is sadly still a blot on Brazilian society.

Although Gilberto Freyre acknowledged some years ago that racial equality had not become either perfect or absolute with the abolition of slavery in 1888, he recalled the view of Bryce who said that in Brazil the distinction between races is more a distinction of position or class than colour [1972: 148], a view that he was not the only foreign visitor to express. “Even in the colonial period”, Freyre wrote, “if a person was politically or socially important, no significance was attached to whether or not their past was unsullied by African blood – he or she was considered to be white.” He called this *social aryanization*. Gabriel Mariano [1959] reaches similar conclusions as far as the islands are concerned.

However, we must reiterate that, whereas the archipelago solved the problem of racial equality some time ago, Brazil is still wrestling with it. If we are to believe the evidence, this may be verified today in several sectors of the economy: black Brazilians still encounter difficulties at work. With regard to these differences between the two societies, a Brazilian actress who was visiting the archipelago said recently that she never thought she would come across a people [like the Capeverdians] who think black, white, yellow, brown, or *‘furta-cores’* (‘of changing colour’) is all the same thing. It is very different in Brazil where to be black is to be disadvantaged. “You can’t imagine what it’s like to be black in Brazil” [Almeida, 2000: 8].

The reasons why relations between Portuguese and Africans (many of whom had set out from the islands) have had such different results (as well as many similarities) have to do with the small size of Cape Verde’s territory. It was not suited to large-scale farming, with its attendant need for slave labour and its type of dehumanizing social relations [for details, see Mariano, 1959; Lobo, 1960; Correia e Silva, 1996].

Some of the slaves sent to Brazil occasionally had their own very advanced culture, others took with them a culture that was already the result of a mixture of Portuguese and African elements, since while they were waiting to be shipped to their “final destination” they had been taught the rudiments of the Christian religion and the Portuguese language or the island creole.

We should remember that the slaves were mostly from the Guinea seaboard, *mandingas*, *jalofes*, *papéis*, Sudanese negroes, perhaps some Moslem *fulas*, Ibo, Yoruba, Bantu [Freyre, 1933; Ribeiro, 1960; Correia e Silva, 1996]. It is useful to bear this in mind when looking at

the issue of the relationship between these two tropical countries. But there is at least one considerable shadow darkening the picture, which was the probably unpredictable consequence of a political decision: the setting up in 1755 by the Marquês de Pombal of the Great Pará and Maranhão Company, whose excesses were for some time to plunge the archipelago into poverty and ruin.

Given the need for labour for its plantations and trading posts in Brazil, the Company was granted in 1757 the exclusive right to trade and navigation on the islands and the Guinea coast. Abusing this power it doubled the price of slaves, which made it hard for the farmers of Cape Verde to obtain labour and led to the end of cotton growing, the decline of the cloth (*panos*) industry and the harvesting of a type of lichen [Amaral, 1964], an important product that the island colony exported to Europe (Cadiz, Seville, Paris) for silk and fine muslin dyeing.

The Company's disastrous effect on the archipelago was further worsened by the great famine of 1773–6 [Correia e Silva, 1996]. Its consequences were felt not only in Africa and Brazil, but even in Portugal [Amaral, 1964].

Finally we should note the part played by the port on São Vicente island, Porto Grande, in the exploits of the Dutch in Brazil. It was a crucial location for the conquest of Olinda in 1629. And its development was considered at least twice in terms of commercial relations with Brazil – in the nineteenth century as well as in the 1920s – since it was the link in the chain of trade between the two countries, and of course this did not cease with Brazil's Independence and the end of the slavery.

## **Cultural influences**

The history of many peoples whose lands were colonized (or occupied by foreigners) has demonstrated that, in certain circumstances, their culture has a tendency to mimic the colonizers' culture. It is perhaps in literature that this imitation is most evident. This it is generally recognized that the literature of the USA began by copying English literature until the nineteenth century when writers of the stature of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson appeared [Brown, 1954]. Similarly the literature of Brazil was first a continuation of Portuguese literature until the emergence of writers like José Lins do Rego, Jorge Amado, Jorge de Lima, Erico Veríssimo, Manuel Bandeira, among others, even though it is agreed that they had predecessors of some significance [see Freyre, 1972]. And literature was not alone; indeed it was aided in this task of establishing Brazilian identity by the sociological and anthropological work by Arthur Ramos or Gilberto Freyre.

## **Literature**

The literature of the islands also illustrates what has just been said; for a long while it was a reflection of Portuguese literature. It was only from the mid 1930s that it identified a group of themes that were more or less specific to it and found a more individual language; and these were themes and a language that distinguished it from what was being done (or would later be done) in Portugal. The individuals who made these first attempts at finding

an identity were considerably helped by their familiarity with the Brazilian Modernist movement. One of the leaders, Baltazar Lopes da Silva, said the following in 1956:

A little over twenty years ago a small group of friends and I had started to think about our problem, that is, Cape Verde's problem. We were particularly concerned with the process of social development on these islands, research into Cape Verde's roots. We could more or less put our finger on the problem but we had no specialist knowledge or any experience with this type of research. Apart from one or two fields, such as language, we were complete novices in so many areas, for instance cultural anthropology, acculturation, the relationship between race and culture, folklore studied as a science. We needed a systematic basis that could only come from elsewhere in the form of methodological assistance and research.

However, it happened that at that moment some books that we had identified as essential *pro domo nostra* came into our hands together as a fraternal loan. In fiction José Lins do Rego's *O Menino do Engenho* and *Banguê*, Jorge Amado's *Jubiabá* and *Mar Morto*, Armando Fortes's *Os Corumbas*, Marques Rebelo's *O Caso de Mentira*, which Ribeiro Couto had told us about. In poetry it was like a light coming on (*alumbramento*): *Evocação de Recife* by Manuel Bandeira, which I could visualize, with its dramatic characters and only a few details changed, in my village of Ribeira Brava. Totónio Rodrigues, with his pince-nez on the end of his nose, was Nhô Pedro António, whom I had got to know and who had the face of Father António Vieira in the pictures in my schoolbooks. And the stark naked girl was seen in the Ribeira João reservoirs, just above the *Pequena trapiche*. In poetry Jorge de Lima was the other revelation. In his work the *sinhazism* of the negress (Nega) Fulô and the superrealism of *O Menino Impossível* went hand in hand in our receptive minds with Jorge de Lima's *A Túnica Inconsútil*, with the asthmatic coughing, the sewing machines that need sleep, and the island theme, so typical of here, of the plane that kills the mothers' *saudade* [that is a consequence] of the fact that their sons are destined to wander. It is obvious that the plane, in our thematic, takes many forms, and can even be the sailing ship that goes from island to island in some of Jorge Barbosa's poems.

And Baltazar adds:

this fiction and this poetry showed us an atmosphere, types, ways of behaving, faults, virtues, attitudes to life that resembled those of these islands, especially as regards what is most characteristic and least contaminated about them.

As for the rest – anthropological and sociological issues, the relationship between race and culture, other problems in interpreting social evolution and cultural remains in societies like ours – Gilberto Freyre's work *Casa Grande & Senzala*, and Arthur Ramos's books, which are "packed with research and interpretation", were fundamental.

Baltazar Lopes da Silva, philologist, essayist, novelist, short-story writer and, under the pseudonym Osvaldo Alcântara, poet, together with a group of his compatriots, laid the foundations of Cape Verde literature under the influence, as it were, of "their brothers across the Atlantic". They began with a review, *Claridade*, which they launched in Mindelo in 1936 and published until 1952 (nine issues in all, with gaps of varying lengths).

Apart from Baltazar Lopes da Silva, there was Manuel Lopes, João Lopes and Jorge Barbosa. These Cape Verde intellectuals (the initial core group was slightly expanded with the addition of Arnaldo França, António Aurélio Gonçalves, Nuno Miranda, Teixeira de Sousa and Félix Monteiro) drew on the work of Brazilian masters to develop their socio-anthropological research and produced the first approaches that were essential for

an understanding “of the structure, values and cultural constants of the archipelago” [Silva, 1986: XIV].

The influence of Brazilian literature of the 1920s on *Claridade's* writers, the *claridosos*, has already been remarked on many times and not without some difference of view [see Ferreira, 1973: 86; Gonçalves, 1998]. On the other hand the influence of some Brazilian poets, such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira, Jorge de Lima, João Cabral de Melo e Neto, on the Cape Verde poets who followed the *claridosos* – I am thinking especially of T. T. Tiofe, João Vário, Corsino Fortes, Arménio Vieira – has not to my knowledge been highlighted. That justifies my saying a few words about it, even though this is not the appropriate place for detailed analysis.

It is odd to note that a certain concept, *pasagardism*, which was apparently suggested some time ago to designate the Cape Verde people's desire to escape, was inspired by a poem by Manuel Bandeira, *Vou-me embora pra Pasárgada* ('I'm going away to Pasárgada'). In addition, Bandeira gives prominence to certain characters from everyday life and, according to their written evidence, this seems to have interested Cape Verde poets such as Jorge Barbosa, Gabriel Mariano, Ovídio Martins, Tiofe and Corsino Fortes; he also stresses certain anxieties, which are elevated into myths or selected as themes worthy of exploration in literature, as is the case with Pasárgada. Originating with Bandeira, this theme was taken up by Osvaldo Alcântara, then by Ovídio Martins. But, whereas for his predecessors Pasárgada is a place that has to be sought out to enjoy the good things in life (Bandeira) or that is remembered with light *saudade*, since everything is there, it is a different civilization (Alcântara; see his cycle of poems *Road to Pasárgada*), things are very different for Martins who writes: "I'll yell/I'll kill/ I won't go to Pasárgada". This poem, which is dedicated to João Vário (one might rather have expected it to be dedicated to Osvaldo Alcântara or Manuel Bandeira), is very suggestively entitled *Anti-evasão* ('Against escape').

So it was that a famous Brazilian poem had echoes in our poetry and even further afield. As we have seen, it gives rise to a nation claiming to identify a psychological or sociological characteristic that raises to an 'empathetic' paroxysm (the case of Martins) an aspect of Brazilian literature's (here more precisely Brazilian poetry's) influence on Cape Verde literature and poetry. There is also empathy between Manuel Bandeira and Jorge Barbosa, the pioneer of the transformation of poetic themes into a Cape Verde idiom, who in an extremely moving poem (*A Palavra Profundamente*, 'The Word Deeply', published in *Claridade* 8: 26, 1958), wrote a comment on Bandeira's very beautiful poem *Profundamente*, in which the poet in just a few lines says everything there is to say about death, especially the death of friends and acquaintances. Empathy too exists between Ribeiro Couto and Jorge Barbosa. To see it one has only to read Ribeiro Couto's *Dia Longo* and compare it with Jorge Barbosa's *Caderno de um Ilhéu*. It was probably no coincidence that Aurélio Gonçalves was sufficiently interested in Erico Veríssimo to devote an essay [1949, 1998] to his novel *Clarissa*.

It should be noted that some of these writers from both sides of the Atlantic became firm friends. Some wished to get to know each other and exchange letters – one day this correspondence will have to be assembled and published. (We should also note that at least two pre-*Claridade* writers, José Lopes and Pedro Cardoso, had been interested in Brazilian literature and society [Manuel Ferreira, 1986: xxxvii–xxxviii].)

Baltazar Lopes da Silva stresses the fact that “the atmosphere, ways of behaving, faults, virtues, attitudes to life”, described in Brazilian fiction and poetry, are similar to

what can be found in our islands [p. 5]. In this context it may be interesting to point out some differences.

From reading their Brazilian counterparts, Cape Verde writers took the social critique, the description of daily life and in all probability attempts to deal with acculturation and the issue of socialization. But one cannot help noticing a significant difference that runs alongside these similarities between the novelists of the two movements: in the Brazilians' work there are extremely full descriptions of sexual relations, whereas the Cape Verde writers appear to avoid this type of description. This is also true of extreme poverty or racial conflicts. My compatriots speak of poverty, but not really, one would think, of extreme wretchedness and its traumas as the Brazilians do. Out of a certain squeamishness? Out of shame? T. T. Tiofe recalls that, having presented *O Primeiro Livro de Notcha* to Aurélio Gonçalves, the latter made just one comment a few days after reading it: "But why should one always talk about the poverty in these islands?"

I tend to think that, unlike their Brazilian counterparts, the *claridoso* novelists, Baltazar Lopes da Silva, Manuel Lopes and Aurélio Gonçalves, who were of mixed race, avoid talking about conflicts between whites and blacks, those which might have affected them personally during their studies in Portugal or which they might have witnessed in Cape Verde. Though these conflicts are probably less frequent in Cape Verde society than Brazil, they did get worse at particular periods, especially when a Portuguese expeditionary corps was in Mindelo during the Second World War (see the story *Bola ao centro*, in *Contos de Macaronesia*, vol. I, by G. T. Didial).

I think I am correct in saying that neither descriptions of racial conflicts between whites and blacks (except in Teixeira de Sousa), nor descriptions of sexual relations really appear in Cape Verde literature until after the *claridosos* (for instance, Germano de Almeida's *Le testament de Monsieur Napumoceno da Silva Araújo* and G. T. Didial's *O Estado Impenitente da Fragilidade*).

Without a doubt, Brazilian literature that describes the vicissitudes of the Northeast, with famine and the exodus of peasants to the towns during the great droughts, was of particular interest to our writers, since it dealt with problems similar to those we experienced in our mainly agricultural islands. Passages from the novel *Vidas Secas* by Graciliano Ramos or the Pernambuco Christmas Mystery *Vida e Morte Severina* by João Cabral de Melo e Neto are not very far away from some pages out of Cape Verde novels about the droughts and famine on Santo Antão – *Flagelados do Vento Leste* by Manuel Lopes, *Famintos* by Luis Romano, and *A Saga das As-Secas e das Graças de Nossenhora* by Onésimo Silveira. [See Carreira, 1984, for the social aspects of twentieth-century famine.] The Northeast of Brazil and the archipelago are similar in some respects, as is the fate of their two peoples, for in fact "the inhabitants of Cape Verde live in endemic poverty and the Nordeste lives in day-to-day poverty" because of cyclical droughts. Or, as the Brazilian writer Edgar Barbosa sums it up: "The winds from Cape Verde blow over the Northeast and a whole series of affinities of ecology, of feeling and of misfortune make us equals."

Another problem common to both countries is the rise in society of mulattos or *mestiços* and the decline of the Casa Grande (the master's house). This issue has been treated in a more or less similar way in both literatures – in Brazil in *Fogo Morto* by José Lins do Rego [Nunes, 1997] and in Cape Verde in *Ilhéu da Contenda* by Teixeira de Sousa. To what extent did the existence of the former prompt the writing of the latter? Given the influence of Brazilian fiction on that generation of Cape Verde writers, it would perhaps be interesting

some day to carry out a comparative study of what both countries have produced, with these dimensions of anteriority and intertextuality in mind.

Let us now return briefly to the question of the influence of Brazilian poets on their Cape Verde counterparts after *Claridade*.

It was Tiofe himself [1999: 102] who confessed to having used *Invenção de Orfeu* by Jorge de Lima for the conception and structure of his poem *O Primeiro Livro de Notcha* (PLN); he also admits that the 'Discourse II' from PLN is inspired a little by *Evocação de Recife* by Bandeira. As for João Vário, he acknowledges his interest in Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poetry: his liking for abstract nouns owes a lot to the use Drummond makes of them [1999: 101]. Cabral de Melo e Neto's use of alliteration, which is both inventive and measured, may have suggested to both Vário and Corsino Fortes solutions for some of their verses. When Arménio Vieira tells us he received books from Manuel Bandeira in prison, it helps us to understand the touch of irony and disenchantment in his early poetry.

## Music

There are essentially three musical forms that are very common in Cape Verde: the *morna*, the *coladeira* and the *funaná*. As they are today they seem to be largely original inventions by the Cape Verde people, though systematic research still needs to be carried out to clarify certain aspects, in particular their origin [see Lima, 1979; Almada, 1999].

The presence of Brazilians in Cape Verde, on Boa Vista and Santiago, during the great period of the salt and urzela trade, or in the early part of the twentieth century because of the trade plied by the big companies whose liners served Brazil and other Latin American countries, as well as the presence of emigrants from Cape Verde who had returned from Brazil, probably helped to popularize Brazilian music and customs on the islands.

Since its creation maybe nearly two centuries ago on Boa Vista, the *morna* has passed through several stages, probably five or six different ones. According to Vasco Martins [personal communication, 1999] the most recent stages of the *morna's* development, the third (1910–1950) and fourth, were influenced by Latin American, and especially Brazilian, song.

As regards influences, it is interesting to note that the change the *morna* underwent when it came under the influence in Mindelo of B. Leza, one of the masters of this musical form, is thought to be due to the composer introducing the Brazilian semi-tone into its structure [see Martins, 1989].

In fact the 1940s–50s generation of composers and singers, especially in Mindelo, were strongly influenced by Brazilian music – samba and *baião*. I remember the delight and enthusiasm with which quite well-known singers such as Lela de Maninha, Marcelo and Djindja tackled these Brazilian compositions in my district of Mindelo, my little home town, where this music was very popular. They would play the *cavaquinho* Brazilian-style, as well as taking up other Brazilian instruments like the *reco-reco* and the *cuica*. Our composers of Carnival marches (Goi, Lulunzim) used to take their inspiration from Carnival marches from Brazil. Indeed this is still the case today. The *coladeira* turned into a kind of *coladeira-samba*.

With musicians from the succeeding generations – Danny Silva, Manuel de Novas, Tito Paris – ballads and other forms derived from the bossa nova were definitely influences. Luís Morais is a special case to the extent that I think he managed to touch on or incorporate

all these Brazilian musical forms in his style. He may have been assisted in this by what he inherited from his family, especially his father Musa, another famous musician from my childhood district.

The *chorinho* is another musical form that has been taken over by Cape Verde. Luís Rendall, an excellent exponent of the Spanish guitar (which is called *violão* in Cape Verde and Brazil), was the chief person responsible for introducing it to the islands [Brito, 1998].

Margarida Brito says that, according to the demonstration she was given by a man of around seventy years old, the *funaná* was danced like the samba used to be in Brazil. She also points out that the slow movement of the *funaná* is called samba. There is a question that crops up in several pieces of research and I do not know whether it has been answered: Was the word 'samba', which was eventually to be applied to one of Brazil's most popular musical creations, exported from Cape Verde to Brazil, or was it invented there? Or could it be linked to the word *semba*, which is used by Angolans for the *umbigada* dance?

## Dance

There are several dances belonging to the archipelago's past – *lundum*, *taca*, *galope*, *colá-Sanjon*, *coladeira*, among others.

According to the Portuguese conductor Frederico de Freitas, from the *lundum* is derived the *fado*, which was originally a dance, sometimes accompanied by singing. The *lundum* was brought from Africa by African negroes and was danced in Lisbon at the period of the Discoveries [1969: 20]. But Ribas maintains that though "the *taca* and the *lundum*, whose musical accompaniment is more melodious than that for the *torno* or the *coladeiras*, appear to have been imported from Brazil, they must have originated in Africa" [1961, 119]. And he adds: "in any case these must be among the very many dances that European sailors, who called at the ports of Brazil and Central America, made popular in European, and particularly Mediterranean, ports during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries". Dulce Amada writes that "the *galope* and the *lundum* came to us from Brazil, but it is not known whether they came direct or via Portugal. The former was taken up by Capeverdean composers, who started to use creole in their compositions" [1999: 26]. One of the most famous *galopes*, *manchê*, was often danced at popular dances to round off the evening. "The *lundum*, an *umbigada* dance [navel-to-navel, belly-to-belly], which had become established in Brazil, was also incorporated into the life of Cape Verde, where it was danced at weddings, at least on Boa Vista", says Almada [1999: 26]. But according to Margarida Brito [1998] it is still danced on the island and not only at weddings.

On Boa Vista the *taca* was still being danced in the 1930s, says Almada, who wonders whether the *taca* was what the Brazilian *fado* became when it was adapted to Cape Verde [1999: 26]. The *maxixe*, which originated in Brazil and was probably a variant of the *lundum*, also used to be danced on our islands [Brito, 1998].

The *coladeira* associated with the feastsdays of São João and São Pedro, or *colá-San Jon*, found on the three North Windward islands (São Vicente, São Nicolau, Boa Vista), is an *umbigada* dance that came from Angola. According to Dulce Amada, these types of dance acquired the generic title *batuque*. Exported to Brazil (direct from Angola or via Cape Verde?), they ended up as the samba. But the *colá-San Jon* is danced differently from the



*batuque*, which is accompanied by singing in Santiago. Nowadays it is has nothing in common with the Brazilian or the Angolan *batuque* [Almada, 1999].

## Religion

In West Africa, where the majority of the Africans came from that were 'held' in Cape Verde pending their dispatch to the Americas, religion was the basis for all human activities, both sacred and secular [Almada, 1999]. In all likelihood this is important for an understanding of how the culture of these ethnic groups, who were transplanted into slave societies, succeeded in withstanding cultural violence and socio-economic oppression and even in developing further in Brazil and Cape Verde, to mention only the territories dealt with here.

We have already looked at the areas where this development was possible or most evident. And indeed it was more or less marked according to whether these religious practices were more (Brazil) or less (Cape Verde) strong.

"The surviving remains of African cults in the archipelago are minimal. It is clear that religious syncretism has lent a certain colouring to Christian practices in Cape Verde, but I cannot discern an African core to this colouring [ . . . ] On the contrary, I see the lyricism of shapes and colours that Gilberto Freyre recognizes in the Catholic practices of Portugal and Brazil", writes Baltazar Lopes da Silva [1999: 142] and he adds: "I think it is only in the *tabancas* of Santiago island that some feeble echoes of organized cults can be found, but mixed in with normal Christian practices [ . . . ]; maybe the *tabanca* is losing its ritual character and, while preserving its formal ritual, will eventually melt into the *batuque* in a Dionysiac expression of life" [1999: 142].

*Tabanca*, a word that was probably imported from Guinea meaning a village or a group of huts, evolved semantically to the point where it meant a kind of friendly society formed to assist its members both emotionally and materially, particularly in cases of death or sickness or other troubling events [Quintaninha, 1928; Monteiro, 1948; Almada, 1999]. It in fact conjures up memories of societies of slaves and, by extension, practices that preserve ancient religious values.

There are *tabancas* named after different saints, which hold cult events at certain points in the year: between May and July in particular a cycle reminiscent of the traditional festivals called *festas juninas* in Brazil [Semedo & Turano, 1997].

According to Félix Monteiro, research into the *tabancas* could provide information on the origin of the slaves who brought these practices to our islands [Monteiro, 1949]. In the meantime it appears at first sight a definite fact that the transformation of African practices remaining on the archipelago, interwoven with their European equivalents, has not resulted in anything comparable to the *macumbas*, *candomblés* or *catimbós* in Brazil. However, the relationships between these phenomena need to be better researched, since there could have been reciprocal influences, among other things [Almada, 1999].

In any case his analysis of the structural elements, both material and spiritual, of the *tabancas* led Monteiro [1949] to find some similarities with the *candomblé* from Bahia. Furthermore, although there are strong indications that the *tabanca* is an entirely Cape-verdean creation [see Semedo & Turano, 1997], nevertheless it has been suggested that it could be a kind of successor to what were called the *reinados*, societies of slaves that

were formed on Santiago in the eighteenth century, which could be the equivalent of the *congadas* or *reisados* that appeared in Brazil around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [for details see Almada, 1999]. There are other influences between Brazil and the islands that ought to be researched further in order to get a more precise idea about certain aspects of the movements of the bearers of culture, the agents of cultural re-elaboration, between these two tropical regions.

## Beliefs

The Portuguese of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries were deeply superstitious, as indeed was the whole of Europe at that period. They believed in witchcraft, called on souls from the other world or diabolical spirits, made food and drink designed to change someone's behaviour; in order to read the future they did not hesitate to use a dead person's or animal's head, water, a crystal or any shining object such as sword [Almeida, 1990]. Some of these practices recall techniques that are still used in Angola by the *muilas* and *cabindas* [Varela, 1999b].

They would take stones from rocks and throw them in the water to make it rain, they worshipped Catholic saints and would travel to faraway places to attend folk festivals in their honour, or go on pilgrimages to keep promises made to cure the sick (for instance, Saint Braz for skin diseases), or for various kinds of protection (for example, Saint Barbe for protection against lightning) or other good offices they might provide. However, several of these beliefs (and not all of them have disappeared even today) were severely punished in Portugal by royal command: depending on the case, by public whipping, exile to Ceuta, death sentence, branding on the face with a letter F followed by deportation to São Tomé or other islands. Sometimes, as well as being whipped, the culprit had to pay his accuser a sum of money.

Almeida, who reports these details, summarizes the position in the following words: "magic, witchcraft, being able to contact supernatural forces, were as much a part of the imaginary world of the kingdom's Portuguese as the Amerindian's or the African's" [1990: 46; see also Espírito Santo, 1980: 86].

In our own day severe punishments are still inflicted in Angola on witches accused of someone's death by members of the victim's family, as they are in Europe too – in Portugal and France, for instance.

"The Brazilian people are par excellence a people who believe in the supernatural [...] Which explains why both high and low spiritism is so popular with them", says Gilberto Freyre [1933: 46]. In this I think they are like the Capeverdeans.

If I have spent a long time reviewing these matters, it is first in order to point out what kind of person was sent to colonize our countries and secondly so that any reader who is not familiar with these issues should see clearly how understandable it is that a perfect meeting took place in Brazil and the Cape Verde islands (not to speak of the other countries of Portuguese-speaking Africa – Angola, Guinea, Mozambique, São Tomé) between the age-old superstitions and magical practices of the Portuguese and those of the black Africans.

Telling fortunes with an egg-white in a glass of water was a common occurrence in fifteenth-century Brazil [Freyre, 1933], as also used to be the case in Cape Verde. I did it

myself on Midsummer's Eve when I was a child, as tradition required. The people around me *saw* the egg-white in the glass of water turn into a ship and predicted I would be a sailor.

We should note some Capeverdean beliefs in magical acts: to trigger disagreements or even kill or bring sickness, to protect against mortal danger, to separate husband and wife or bring them back together, to instigate a marriage, to harm someone using a photo, effigy or doll resembling them; evil can be done with hairs, pieces of nail, saliva, an object belonging to the enemy or an item of their underclothing [Monteiro, 1949]. Phenomena similar to some of these spells or beliefs, probably resulting from the cross-fertilization between African and European culture, are to be found in Brazil. It remains to be discovered whether this is because these beliefs were brought to Brazil by the slaves, who would already have created this syncretism here in Cape Verde, or whether it is the result of a process of acculturation which occurred simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic.

There is a strange observation made by Freyre, who writes about "a piece of medieval magic of the purest European type": "Antónia Fernandes, nicknamed Nóbrega, claimed she was the Devil's familiar; when people consulted her, it was he who answered through her. It was 'something kept in a bottle that spoke'" [1974: 309]. This is reminiscent of an object called *baloetsi* that is used by the Basotho in Lesotho for medical diagnosis, except that in their case it is not the devil who is thought to speak but the spirit of an ancestor who was a doctor [Varela, 1985].

A further quotation from Freyre will conclude this section:

Like Portuguese magic, Brazilian witchcraft, once it was taken over by blacks, continued to deal with love, reproduction and fertility, to protect pregnant women's and children's lives, which were threatened by fevers, cramps, snake-bites, breastbone collapse, the evil eye. Pregnant women were protected against all these evils and many others by a series of practices in which African influences, often distorted, were mixed with Catholic liturgy and remains of indigenous rituals. Various beliefs and sexual practices imported from Portugal took on new life here: the belief that mandrake root brings fertility and counteracts evil spells against homes and additions to the family, the custom among pregnant women of wearing round their necks 'altar stones' in a little bag, of not walking under ladders during pregnancy, since that would stunt the child's growth [1974: 309–10].

As it has been understood, some of these beliefs have to do with the traditional healing arts, that is, folk medicine.

## **Folk medicine**

Medicine is one of the richest elements, though not always the easiest to decipher or interpret, when one is trying to understand the culture of peoples in a traditional setting or at a pre-scientific stage [see Varela, 1982, 85; 1999a, b]. First, this is well known, because it is difficult to identify the most common tasks or the profiles of the most frequent participants: the soothsayer (who sometimes makes diagnoses), the healer who is a traditional doctor or practitioner and is often also a priest and/or sorcerer, the so-called sorcerer himself, as such, the sick person with his view of the world which is often arbitrary or 'baroque', but not without its own internal logic. Then it is because the

semantic dimension (here the word is involved to an extent and with a reach that is hard to grasp or verify) creates a frightening frame full of pitfalls and approximations. This is also the case with our topic here.

Thanks to indigenous Amerindian women, the Portuguese from the kingdom learnt about local seeds and drugs, remedies in Brazil that were unknown in Europe. They had the good sense not to disregard completely the indigenous healer, even though they gave priority to the kingdom's official medicine [Almeida, 1990].

It is reported that in the eighteenth century the archbishop of Pará, Brother Caetano Brandão (1782–1789), used to say that it was better to have someone treated by a healer from the interior, who made observations with acute instinct, than by doctors from Lisbon. However, Santos Filho [see 1994: 533] remarks, in his *General History of Brazilian Medicine*, that after the discovery of America and during the period when they were teaching the catechism, the Jesuits started a defamatory campaign against traditional practitioners and had them replaced. But in the same text he acknowledges that many Brazilian remedies made from vegetable material have been incorporated into world medicine.

At the period when Brazil was being colonized, that is, when Europeans and slaves started to settle, the local diseases, according to contemporary reports, were relatively simple ones: pian, endemic goitre, some parasitic and skin complaints, skin infections that were probably bacterial or fungal in origin, influenza, rheumatism, respiratory infections such as pneumonia, pleurisy, complaints due to digestive troubles, bites from poisonous creatures, war wounds and blindness.

The causes of these diseases were thought to be either natural and visible (traumas, arrow wounds, for example) or more often supernatural (for instance, pains, vomiting, fever, diarrhoea). So they used prayer, blessing, the sign of the cross, various amulets, incantations, a specific ritual. The causes of most of the illnesses in Cape Verde are also thought to be supernatural [see Santos & Soares, 1995]; when I was a child, jaundice was treated mainly by prayer, as was breastbone collapse [for further details see Vieira, 1989], and this was the case in Brazil too [see Freyre, 1974].

Apart from plants, both organic and inorganic substances and various products – blood, saliva, urine, horn, powder made of charred bone or burnt toad – were also prescribed as remedies; scarification was practised, as well as blood-letting, which was common in Europe too [Santos Filho, 1994].

We should note that during these centuries blood-letting was not simply used by Europeans for therapeutic purposes: colonists arriving in the tropics were advised to submit to blood-letting so that their blood could be replaced with black blood, similar to the natives', which would help them to acclimatize [Freyre, 1933].

In colonial Brazil as well as Cape Verde or other traditional societies (for example, Angola, Mozambique, São Tomé, etc.) traditional doctors were sometimes also priests or sorcerers. In both roles they administered remedies often accompanied by unintelligible (especially for laypeople) words and ritual incantations; they were familiar with plants with diuretic, antipyretic, anti-dysenteric, purgative, emetic and haemostatic properties, among others. Their use of some of these plants (chinchona, coca, ipeca, cashew) can be justified scientifically because of their active ingredients [see Varela, 1999c].

The medicine of fifteenth-century Europe was at a pre-scientific stage and indeed remained so, to all intents and purposes, till the mid nineteenth century [for details and references see Varela, 1982, 1985, 1999a]. To a great degree it was not very different, as

regards its interpretations of sickness and its therapeutic arsenal, from the medicine practised by the people of the territories where the Portuguese colonists settled – Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau. Slaves brought to the archipelagos of Cape Verde and São Tomé, to settle them or to be traded, were in possession of healing arts that were comparable.

Finally, we should remember that the training of the European doctors who accompanied the colonists of that period was generally very basic [Freyre, 1933; Vieira, 1989; Santos Filho, 1994].

In conclusion, the ideas about the etiology of diseases and the aspects of the healers' therapeutic methods that we can study in both the territories that concern us are a result of contributions from both cultures – Portuguese and African (as well as Amerindian of course, in the case of Brazil). So we need to know whether the similarities between the Cape Verde medical system and the traditional Brazilian one are 'original', that is, whether they occurred locally, on both sides of the Atlantic (a similar question has been asked more than once already in this article), or whether in Cape Verde; for instance, whether these similarities are examples of recreations on the part of slaves who set out from here, went to Brazil and then brought these ideas and practices back to the archipelago.

The first possibility seems more plausible, given that medical systems comparable to those in Cape Verde and colonial Brazil exist in other regions of Africa (for instance in Lesotho [see Varela, 1985]). But systematic research needs to be carried out in order to provide a proper answer.

In a recently published paper [Varela, 1999a; see also Varela, 1995] I set out several similarities between the healing arts in Europe at the pre-scientific stage and those in Africa in ancient times and today, particularly with reference to nosology, nosography, etiology and therapy. In the last two areas, the similarities are to a certain extent reminiscent of what is said in some passages of the following quotation (which is long enough to illustrate my point) from *Masters & Slaves*, the book by Freyre that I refer to at many points in this article, sometimes in my own translation of selected pieces, sometimes in Bastide's translation, as is the case here:

Old wives' remedies that were common in Portugal travelled from there to Brazil: infusions of bedbugs and rats' turds for stomach upsets, ostrich marrow to dissolve bile stones, human or mule's urine, burnt hair, crushed dog's excrement, skin, bones and flesh of toad, lizard, crab, etc. [1974: 353].

At another point in this masterly work he writes:

We find the patriarch of Brazilian medical literature, Dr João Ferreira da Rosa, a seventeenth-century physician, telling his patients to drink "powdered burnt crab in a glass of molasses water", to put "under the arms, in the armpit . . . arsenic paste", with "gum arabic", and "for urinary incontinence" to smear with *copaiba* oil "the penis, interseminal canal and belly" [1974: 352–3].

We should add that in traditional Africa, as in colonial Brazil, remedies and philtres for impotence abound, some more arbitrary and bizarre than others. But in this respect – and this is an impression that needs to be checked – Cape Verde curiously seems to be an exception. The same could be said for the number of times excrement is used in various

remedies. There too the question as to what influence Africa had and what Europe had cannot be answered with ease or certainty at the present stage of research in colonial history and medical anthropology.

To conclude these reflections on love we should note that for a long time it was believed in Brazil that men suffering from syphilis and urethritis could get rid of their disease by making love to young black virgins, since the germ was passed on to the partner [Freyre, 1933], a kind of *barring* in fact [for this concept see Varela, 1999b]. This recalls the amazing notion in Africa today that makes men with AIDS seek out young virgins for sex in order to be cured of the infection.

## Social life

At different periods Brazil influenced the social life of Cape Verde, especially the life of Mindelo since its Porto Grande took over from Santiago as an important way-station for ships making for South America. Here I am starting from the supposition that specific Brazilian influences, which should be further researched, are operating nowadays at four levels: 1) choice of people's names; 2) house types; 3) women's and girls' styles of dress in the two main towns, Mindelo and Praia; 4) proliferation of *Racionalismo Cristão* (Christian Rationalism) centres and the growing number of their members, who are directly answerable to their headquarters in Brazil and are somehow motivated by them. Another level, leisure activities, could also be added.

As regards the Centres of Redemption or Christian Rationalism, we should note that the craze, which was already there during the colonial period, has grown considerably since Independence; and their followers have put up grand buildings, for instance in Mindelo. Furthermore it is interesting to observe that Capeverdeans are exporting the doctrine, which is also an alternative therapeutic practice: they have built Centres in Holland, the USA and other countries that receive emigrants. According to a recent paper (Graça, 1999) it is thought that an average of 400 people a year have been cured of various psychopathological illnesses by two centres operating in Rotterdam.

Around fifty years ago sick people in Mindelo used to send letters with complaints or symptoms of illnesses for which they needed advice or treatment to the Centres in Brazil; it seems that this is now less common, since in the intervening period the directors of the local Centres have become more autonomous in this respect because they are better educated.

In the 1940s and 1950s Brazilian influence could be seen among footballers, singers, composers, guitarists (playing the *violão*, the Spanish guitar), viola and *cavaquinho* players and organizers of Carnival processions. This was the influence of Brazilian football, popular music and Carnival.

The interest two of the most popular of Mindelo's musicians, Lela de Maninha and Marcelo, showed in Brazilian music, lifestyle and speech (I think there is also room for research on the words that have come into the language of Cape Verde from Brazil), the pleasure they got from singing the *baião* and the samba imitating the Brazilian accent, go to prove it. Their *morna* and samba sessions would be punctuated by plentiful snuff-taking or smoking, exchanging quality cigarettes, drinking glasses of hot toddy, often with or followed by bits of fried fish or eel (which we call *bafa*) in portions of varying size,

according to those bohemians' financial means, which normally fluctuated; they used to be my neighbours on Guibarra Street (better known as Morguine Street) and were often joined by a local singer and composer, Lulunzim, who was also an enthusiastic brazilophile. That was a way of enjoying leisure time that could be compared to the Brazilian way, as Freyre has described it [1972: 30], and it might be thought that it was somehow influenced by Brazil because of Mindelo's port and the movement of Capeverdean emigrants. The feeling of similarity is so great that it has been captured by Barbosa in a poem, *Você, Brasil*, by a *morna* entitled *Brasil*, one of whose lines says that Cape Verde is a little piece (*um pedacinho*) of Brazil, and by a Carnival march that says the island of São Vicente (which, with its capital Mindelo, has been most influenced by Brazil, as I have already said) is a *bresilín* (a miniature Brazil), especially during Carnival; this march was composed by Pedro Rodrigues and is sung by the currently most famous Capeverdean singer, Cesária Évora [see her recording *Café Atlântico*, Editions lusa-africa, 1999].

During my childhood and teenage years Brazilian influence was felt mainly in the poorer or most modest sections of society; at that time, I think, the more favoured classes were especially captivated by English lifestyle and culture.

Another area of Brazil's influence on the life of Cape Verde today is that of first names. In fact in Cape Verde till quite recently they used to be taken from the Christian calendar (as was the case in Brazil and, for that matter, the Christian world): children were given the name of the saint on whose day they had been born. The names of family members were also chosen – grandparents, parents, uncles; eventually the name of a historical hero was also selected. Since Brazilian TV soap operas (*telenovelas*) became popular, many names that are clearly of Brazilian origin (for instance, Admilson, Jailson, Adilson, Hailton, Gerson, Roselice, Josimar, Maira, Zuleide, Gilmara, Neide, Odair, Jailma, Rosângela, etc.), which have been discovered and popularized through these soaps, have appeared in our country in great numbers. The Portuguese have noticed the same phenomenon in Portugal.

Another influence from these TV soaps seems to be the types of houses that my compatriots have been building for some while, especially in Mindelo – huge, sometimes extravagant in structure and shape, baroque (apparently as seen on TV) – and it is puzzling how this can be possible in a country in considerable economic difficulty, where salaries are generally fairly low and there is not, by any stretch of the imagination, the wealth there is in Brazil, the country that is being aped. This is accompanied by a certain luxury, which gives rise to the same kind of remark. This does not contradict what I wrote a while ago about the emergence of a young high-quality style of Capeverdean architecture, a completely new phenomenon in a country that has no specific tradition in this field nor a school of architecture.

In this context it is interesting to note that Nunes [1997], a professor from the University of Brasília, who was in Praia for a Brazilian literature course at the Secondary Teachers Training College, noticed architectural similarities between our buildings and the Northeast of Brazil; according to him a number of buildings in Praia are not very different from the ones you could see in Florianópolis thirty years ago. Nunes also draws our attention to the fact that a big open-air market where almost everything sold is called Sucupira, a name that comes from a Brazilian soap, *O Bem Amado* by Dias Gomes, which is as popular with us as it is in Brazil. Something similar has happened in Angola with an open market called Roque Senteiro. In any case, many aspects described here of Brazilian influences on the social life of Cape Verde can also be seen in Angola.

With regard to the luxury mentioned earlier, we should remember that there are records of considerable luxury and ostentation in fifteenth-century Portuguese society. Aristocrats who lived in extreme penury made a great show of luxury in public, which led to the idea that this was national characteristic – convenience and comfort are not important, what is essential is luxury and ostentation [Almeida, 1990: 25]. This recalls what Gilberto Freyre describes on the sugar plantations in the Northeast of Brazil, among the privileged families of Pernambuco and Bahia [1993]. *Mutatis mutandis*, could the same be said of contemporary society in Cape Verde? It would seem so.

Another feature of social life that should be mentioned here concerns the little attraction marriage had for Capeverdeans; this situation persisted, if I am not mistaken, right into the mid twentieth century or thereabouts. I think the change was largely due to the influence of émigrés who had internalized the local customs, in Holland and France in particular, and came back to find a wife in their native land.

In all likelihood, the prevalence of cohabitation has the same explanation as in Brazil where, according to Freyre [1933], it could be related to the custom of irregular union between white men and black women, who were often slaves. As is clearly shown in a study quoted by Mariano [1959], governors and others of the kingdom's important administrators, as well as small administrators, tradesmen, members of the clergy, soldiers, etc., cohabited. This all had a decisive part to play in the racial mixing and the creation of society in both territories.

\*

The influence of Brazilian culture has been felt in Cape Verde in many different fields over the centuries; some of these influences have been discussed here, others still need to be explored, for example, influences on cuisine and folklore, as well as those we have highlighted that require further research, on religion, medical systems, language and leisure activities.

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## Note

1. Unless otherwise indicated, extracts from the texts quoted were translated from Portuguese into French by the author of this article.