

The imprisoned youth: from exclusion to seclusion

An overview of the Caxias Youth Re-education Center, Portugal

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Abstract

The youth confinement in Portugal has undergone some changes in recent times, both from the ideological and the material points of view. Some of these changes derive from the overrepresentation among the prison population of the ethnic minorities as well as other groups living in precarious conditions, who are regularly the recipients of more and heavier jail sentences than the defendants from the mainstream population, a situation which reinforces the importance of the prison as an amplified mirror of the society's pathologies and asymmetric power relationships, both among adults and particularly among minors.

In Portugal, until recently the prison's personnel were not aware of, or prepared for the new situation of intercultural widespread miscommunication. Needless to say that among the staff the minorities are not overrepresented as is the case of inmates, and new problems arising from this intercultural coexistence mobilize the skills of the re-education agents. These professionals, besides being educators, are asked to perform parental roles of guidance and counselling, but now within a mingled cultural environment where social functions and values are diversely assigned and perceived.

Among the main issues are the connections between gender and authority, a delicate issue since most of the staff belongs to the female sex and the inmates come from a male-ruling tough world of Lisbon poor and unsafe suburbs. Other behaviour codes, such those of politeness, speech and table manners tend to create frictions between the young inmates and their re-educators.

The ethno-ethics approach, based on ethology and socio-anthropologic premises, reassesses the possibilities of a successful interaction among various patterns of behaviour giving due regard to the distinct ethnic settings, and thus helping to understand the potentially defiant attitudes of the young inmates according to their specific cultural backgrounds. Prejudices concerning values and expectations of the abstract "mainstream group" must be averted and rejected.

¹ I want to express my deep gratitude towards the Caxias' administration and staff and particularly to Sandra Borba, to all those involved in the Lisbon Seminar including the CEM team (Paulo Alves Coelho, Luís Couto and Patrícia Silva), to our European colleagues from the INTI project, to COFRIMI for its bibliographic contributions and to my friend Viriato de Barros for his constant support and encouragement.

Each individual failure in achieving the maximisation of one's own social capacities is indeed a failure of the whole society denoting a deficiency in intercultural communication, and nobody is more aware of this than the young person under a re-education program. This paper analyses statistics, reports and statements produced by the Caxias' staff during and after the Portuguese Workshop on Intercultural Communication in Public Service, 24-26th January 2005.



A portrait from the old days: the “non-ethnic” kid, nowadays becoming a minority among the incarcerated young population².

Friendship is to have a friend who doesn't allow u to steal, 'cause he doesn't wanna see you jailed.

Rui, 16 y.o.³

The many faces of a Re-education Center

Our workshop towards the promotion among public service agents of multicultural awareness and intercultural communication between the different cultural identities of Portuguese ethnic minorities and what is perceived to be “the Portuguese mainstream”, took place in a center for re-education of juvenile delinquents, the first and oldest of its kind in

² Image from João Teixeira LOPES & Daniela Sá CARMO – *A Tutoria do Porto, Estudo sobre a morte social temporária*, p. 46.

³ AAVV. – *Estilhaços*, Caxias 2002, s.u. Amizade.

Portugal, located in Caxias, 8 Km North from the Portuguese capital, Lisbon.

This institution derives from previous attempts to confine and reeducate Lisbon young people, and it is named after a catholic priest, Father António de Oliveira, who was instrumental in the re-shaping of the primitive *Detention and Correction House of Lisbon* (created and installed at the Monicas Cloister in 1871) into a more educational institution, thus becoming from 1911 onwards the *Lisbon Central Reformatory School*, afterwards renamed after his founder *Father A. O. Lisbon Central Reformatory* (1925). The institution was later renamed *Father A. O. Reeducation Institute* (1962), *Father A. O. Institute* (1978) *Father A. O. School* (1995). The present name *Father A. O. Education Center* dates from 2001, thus showing with this constant renaming the effort to attenuate the negative semantics assigned to, or acquired by, the former institutional designations.

This exaggeration in the use of euphemisms going as far as hiding a *reformatory* behind the name of a *school* led some parents from the surrounding areas to mistake its true nature and apply to the Director to have their children admitted in what was believed to be just another school like any other. Although politics seldom rely on appearances, changing names doesn't change realities. As Petitclerc puts it: *Il serait grand temps d'appeler les choses par leur nom. Un centre fermé, c'est une prison*⁴.

The Center is under the jurisdiction of the Justice Ministry and its Social Rehabilitation Institute (IRS), also in charge of the rehabilitation of ex-convicted adults.

How many minors are undergoing the rehabilitation process in Portugal?

In the whole country were later created an additional 9 institutions for boys besides 3 similar institutions being also set up for girls, now reduced to 2. Although 1 of the 10 male centers (*Navarro de Paiva*) was assigned to both sexes, in fact it only receives boys.

In 2002, the total young population confined in Portugal amounted to 226 inmates, more 7 than in 2001, of whom 218 were males and 18 females; the number of boys decreased by 1% from 2001 (2 boys), while the number of girls became 200% of the 2001 records (doubling from 9 to 18 and perhaps setting up a new trend in these statistics). Still, the number of girls sums up only to 10% of that of the boys. This disparity should not be ascribed to any “male predisposition” towards crime, but rather to an

⁴ PETITCLERC 2004, p. 69.

added exposure to extra-family life, the social pressure to behave daringly and in a fearless way, the general suspicion about male behavior (the so-called misandry, or cultural contempt of boys and men), the gang male culture, and the courts’ tendency to treat with more severity the offenders of the male sex. As the foreigners and the ethnic and other minorities are also subject to heavier confinement sentences, many of the boys interned at the Caxias Center suffered from multiple discrimination based on racial origins, sex, economic condition and ethnic identity.

The occupancy rate and the human resources assigned

It is worth noticing that in a country with chronic overpopulation of penal facilities and constant shortage of human resources, the Caxias Center would not suffer heavily from neither of these two handicaps, once it seems to suffer more from budgetary cuts than from the lack of employees. In fact the statistics show that from 2001 to 2002 there was a restructuring of the IRS services with an almost 50% reduction of the staff, and still the total number of people in charge is more than 300% higher than that of the minors under their custody:

	2002									
	Places available			Places in use			Staff			
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	senior and head officers	junior ployees and agents	em-workers
TOTAL 2001	373	306	67	219	210	9	1 916	868	749	299
2002	304	274	30	226	208	18	676	131	363	182
C.E. Padre António de Oliveira	22	22	0	20	20	0	68	11	35	22

Table showing the relationship between the number of places available / actually in use / and working staff (2002)⁵

The facilities

The actual premises of the Caxias Center are in use from May 31st, 1903, with the crucial transfer of the 180 boys population from the old Mónicas Cloister, where a similar institution for girls was at that time being created and installed. This important landmark helped to stress the two-sexes-separated correction systems, and established the only-male nature of the Caxias Center. Far were the days of the both sexes joint correction institution established in 1780 by the Police Secretary Pina Manique, who

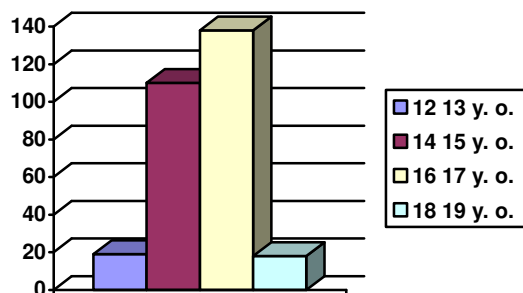
⁵ Source: *Estatísticas da Justiça 2002*, p. 424.

also had confined the young people together with the adults, beggars, homeless, troublemakers and libertine women altogether in one institution called *Casa da Força* located inside the Lisbon Castle. Since then any attempt to jointly reeducate young people from both sexes was never set up or has never been successful.

The Center lies now inside a closed area, comprising 3 main buildings closely located: 1) residence, including school and laundry; 2) kitchen and workshops; 3) technical and administrative offices, and comprising also the sport facilities and recently a small swimming pool. From 2001 onwards, with the creation of a threefold legal system, the Center was modified to isolate the “half-open discipline” inmates (medium severity convictions, with some freedom of action including outside escorted activities), from the offenders of the strict and restrained “closed discipline” system, who serve more serious convictions. The Caxias Center does not receive inmates of the lighter “open system”, in which the minors can spend weekends and holidays at home, but has 2 places for urgent arrest (48 hours maximum, before presentation to court). In addition, the institution receives also a few external boys to whom the courts assign a small penalty of non-confinement, usually 3 or 4 weekends of study and some workshop activities performed together with the resident young population.

According to the recent *Minors Law*⁶, the minors having perpetrated such acts the penal law classifies as “crime” at the time of having 12 to 16 years old, are assigned by the special courts (“minor’s courts”) to the re-education institutions.

Graphic of age distribution (country’s total)⁷



It is believed that at such an age the key to revert anti-social tendencies lies in seclusion from society as much as in successful schooling

⁶ *Lei Tutelar Educativa*, 166/99, September 14th.

⁷ Source: *Educar para o Direito*, an IRS leaflet.

as well. So the re-education process intents to inculcate into the minor's mind the values of “abiding to the laws”, “social ethics” and obedience to the authorities and law agents.

In addition to the school curriculum, this re-education center also provides training on gardening, woodwork, electricity, computers, ceramics, drawing, cooking, photography, printing and bookbinding. The center prints its own newsletter from 1955 onwards, with the title *Childhood and Youth*. Sports being regularly coached are *capoeira*, acrobatics, dance (mostly African rhythms), football, athletics and cycling. Extra-school activities at the different reeducation centers vary according to the capacities of each one: for instance, the two female re-education centers adopted hairdressing as their common professional training, completed by computers in one, and performing arts in the other.

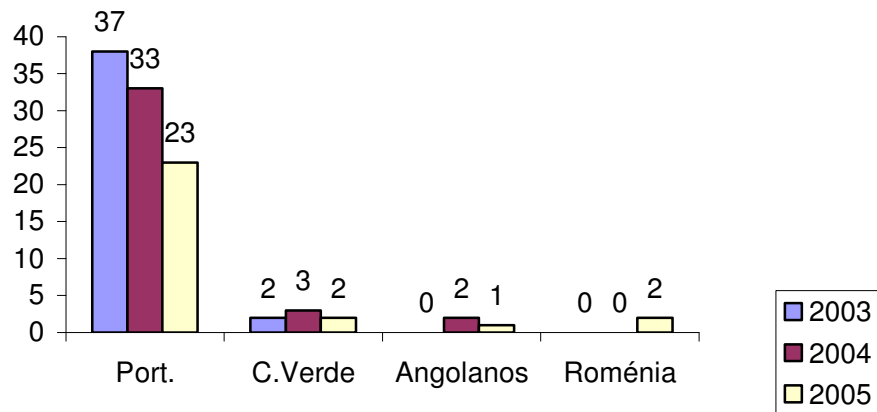
The new multicultural environment

Sometime around the year of 1982⁸, the first “ethnic kid” showed up. He was a Cape-Verdean, born in Portugal from parents probably coming from the Santiago Island of the Cape Verde Archipelago⁹. The first of many, many more to come later, changing the proportionality of the ethnic minorities among the general population into an inverted ratio among the secluded population. But to show how statistics can be misleading and how often the reality is hidden behind the records, we find that according to the official distribution by nationalities few of the inmates in the Caxias Center had any foreign background at all:

⁸ Chronology provided by the Center staff.

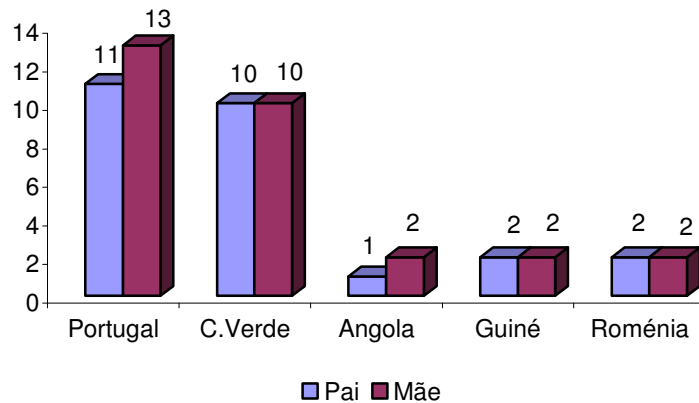
⁹ The Archipelago of Cape Verde was for centuries a former Portuguese settlement that later became a colony, and finally an overseas province before formal independence was recognized in 05.07.1975 under a joint new state with Guinea-Bissau, from which the latter seceded in 1980. Cape Verde became a sole political entity from its Constitution of 1981 onwards.

Inmates' place of birth (Caxias)



However, through the graphic of their parents' origins, we can obtain a more realistic ethnic map of the Caxias population, showing now the mainstream Portuguese as a minority, in figures still needing further correction accounting for the fact that some parents also from Cape-Verdean ancestry were already born in Portugal:

Parents' place of birth (Caxias)



The Portuguese and the Cape-Verdeans

The Cape-Verdeans are islanders with an extremely original culture, neither African nor European, but surely related to the cultures of other people living in islands, i. e., in isolated environments. At least two major varieties of Crioulo reshaped down there the Portuguese language into a

new code of communication: *sampadjudo* at the “Barlavento” group of islands (Northern) and *badiú* at the “Sotavento” islands (Southern).

The Portuguese language, the main source of the C.-V. Crioulo, was never used as the Cape-Verdean mother tongue: “As for the Portuguese language, it is not right to say that it fits the communication needs of our populations. Illiteracy in Cape Verde is still widespread, and our traditional cultural heritage could hardly be transmitted by a language that, although being familiar, it is nevertheless foreign.”¹⁰

The majority of the Cape-Verdean migrants came from the main island of the Sotavento group, Santiago. As much rivalry exists between the populations of the Archipelago, Santiago inhabitants are generally reputed aggressive and bad-tempered by the other islanders. Their variety of Crioulo, being called “badiú >vadio” which means troublemaker, points already to a specific portrait of the Santiago man, whose difficult condition is historically explained by the fact that the capital and C.-V. biggest city, Cidade da Praia, lies on that island, attracting many intra-Archipelago migrants looking for jobs and better life, and becoming somehow frustrated and unruly in the event of not finding neither of these.



Cape Verde map¹¹

Some of these Santiago people choose to migrate to Portugal, among other destinations, from the past century sixties onwards. So they became, through a troubled history of half a century settlement, the oldest ethnic identifiable minority living in Portugal by the beginning of the present

¹⁰ Manuel VEIGA, in Eduardo CARDOSO, *O Crioulo da Ilha de S. Nicolau de Cabo Verde*, Praia 1989, p. 13.

¹¹ http://mundofred.home.sapo.pt/paises/pt/cabo_verde.htm.

century, and enduring the effects of constant exclusion and prejudice. Arising as a cultural resistance movement, as in other parts of the world, they rather created a rich culture of their own, a youth culture of resistance against the arrogance and autism of the so-called cultural majority, and expressing itself in art, fashion, dance and music.

However, they reign undisputed over the suburbs, where Crioulo imposed itself as the *lingua franca* of all the hopeless, regardless of ancestry from Cape-Verde or from Angola, Guinea or the Portuguese. The Crioulo is now the mother tongue of quite a visible section of the Portuguese new generation, and the second most spoken language in Portugal after Portuguese, a language of prestige in this forgotten world where it is conveyed in the lyrics of many musical hits, adding a Cape-Verdean flavor to the songs and dances nowadays popular among the sons of the poor living in such districts, whatever their nationality is, for the boundaries of exclusion do not respect race or color – they establish themselves along the thin gap that divides success from failure, chance from misfortune, and pride from shame. And so we have to keep in mind that ethnic minority does not mean ghetto people. Some Angolans, Cape-Verdeans and other members of the ethnic minorities rather belong to the social majority of middle-class people and some to the smaller group of the rich, usually sharing the mainstream values that worked so well for them, contrarily to what happened to their brothers in color. Likewise, in the ghettos of Lisbon one can find also members of the ethnic majority as well.

But adding to the strains of poverty, the C.-Vs. suffer also the effects of other prejudices leading to *multiple exclusion*: color, place of abode, manners, tastes, looks, behavior and, last but not least, language. Indeed, the linguistic oppression of the C.-Vs. starts early in the life of the young students at the Portuguese schools with the imposition of the hegemonic Portuguese language which is the basis of all recent official education policies clearly intended to oppress the minorities. Accordingly, instruction is never given in the minorities' mother tongue, a fierce demand when it comes to the European foreign policy dealing with non-European countries, but never applied to Europe itself. Likewise, Crioulo is banned from the school curriculum where it should be used in schools with majority of C.-V. background pupils, and it is ignored and despised by the mainstream society, the media, and the authorities altogether. Not a surprise if it is prohibited also inside the re-education Center, as a further step in the linguistic repression of this minority leading to the humiliation of its ethnic heritage and the disregarding of their fundamental rights, namely linguistic and cultural. If the Portuguese schools were not meant, as they in fact are,

to be the antechambers of prisons and re-education centers, the Cape-Verdeans and other minorities were to receive their instruction in their mother-tongues by teachers of their own ethnic background, with high regard for polyglot skills and through the use of a curriculum that would not insult, deny or suppress their identities and the cultural achievements of the various people, past and present, they descend from and belong to.

The C.-V. descendants are so in deep quest for their roots, unsteady in their oppressed cultural heritage and uneasy in their fragile personal identities; neither “black” nor “white”, they suffer the social ambivalence of an enigmatic and problematic identity: *elles héritent de cultures qui ne sont pas spontanément conciliables, puisque elles ont été historiquement dans des rapports conflictuels. De nombreux métissages sont issus des cultures du maître et de celles de l’esclave*¹². Born foreigners in a foreign land, belonging to no place, to no society, and to no tolerated world, sentenced to invisibility and silence, they become easily the victims of all possible adverse circumstances: broken families, meaningless schooling, and violent suburbs are humiliating traps intended to expand the legion of the jobless and the disempowered. As one kid puts it straightforward: *to get a job is very important for one to be free*¹³. It takes a hero to choose a consistent and safe path out of this chaos. But it takes a hero too, if one is to engage into the challenging of law and authority, the despising of one’s own parents and society alike, the hate towards the majority and towards the other minorities. These are consequences of the constant conflicts with themselves and the insane destiny that placed them in the wrong family, the wrong house, the wrong neighborhood, the wrong society, all of this exactly at adolescence, the “wrong time” of their growing path, adding such extra pressure on the always disturbing teenager years of a boy’s life. “– *One way or another you will get caught*”, such is the testimony of a young inmate as follows:

When I was around 9 years old my family broke apart when my mother split up with my father. My mind was turning around like crazy: family problems, living with my father then again with my mother, and ending up with my father again. My brothers paid no attention to me or to my needs. Escaping from hell at home I found peace in the streets of Setúbal, the place where I was living. I worked hard to be the best: at climbing trees, at jumping upside down, at catching running buses, at stealing cakes from the school cafeteria, from the supermarket, and with a little more jumping I was burglarizing houses and robbing cars. At 12, I was already famous at the police station as a promise in the criminal world.

¹² Alain VULBEAU, Une socialisation du troisième type, *Informations Sociales* 119, p. 15.

¹³ AAVV. – *Liberdade*, “Luís, 15 anos – o que eu penso sobre a liberdade”.

Then my mother moved into a new house and I followed her, because she always had given to me all the attention and love I was in need of. In the new school, at first I didn't get very much involved with nobody, but a few weeks later I became acquainted with the school gang. After one month I was the boss both of the school and the gang.

My mother made her best to correct me, but I was under the stronger influence of my brother. The male part of the family had the reputation of being stallions, dancers and troublemakers. People pointed me out as being part of such a family, of being ill fated to be a bad guy. So I gave them a reason to talk. I stole and spent, and I had fun... until I came to the reeducation center.

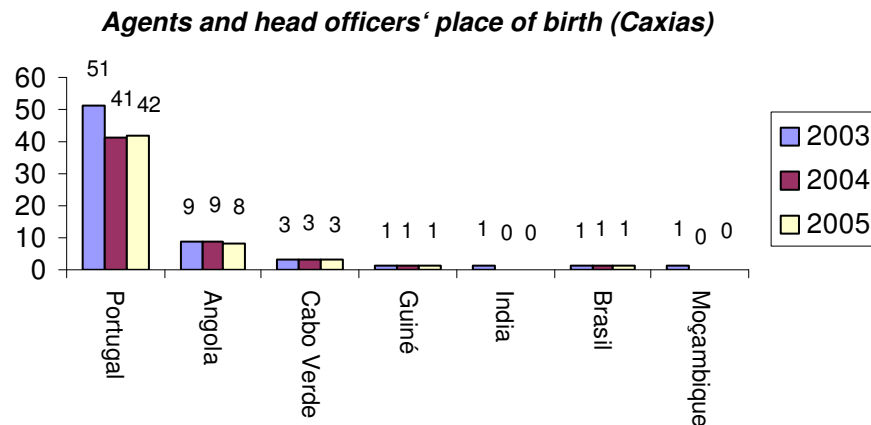
People find me gentle and peaceful, contrasting with my fame. I am proud of being Cape-Verdean, and I believe that such identity is not a cause for failure. I grew up in the streets, but I stood up to the values my grandmother taught me. From her I derive my politeness; thanks to her I kept alive my good side.

Today I think my life was a theater play, a bad play never rehearsed, a fight against fate, a constant waiting for a happy end.

These minorities had little to expect from social conformity and good behavior. They have little to expect from school, from the state, from the laws, from the country. They have little to expect from life itself. Crime becomes a way out of a worthless life, the victory of the hero inside them, a course where excellence and reward can quickly be attained. Certainly not a solution to all of their problems, but the sole and only solution to the pursuit of individual success in a world that constantly demands victory at any price, and values quick acquisition and dissipation of goods, and living at the verge of all risks. Such is the world as they watch it in the American movies, TV serials, American-inspired advertising, and computer games – a realm of violence and wickedness, of fast triumph or blatant defeat. And such is the modern hero's world. Petty crime is so a rebellion against injustice, the expression of the inevitable anxieties of youth, and a compensation for sexual tensions and social frustrations caused by highly pathogenic parents and societies altogether.

The Caxias' Center staff

Cape-Verdeans account for the majority of the excluded and imprisoned, but they are underrepresented in positions of power, authority and as role models. As regards our Center, we find that only 6% of the personnel comes from Cape Verde. Cape-Verdeans are actually the second smallest ethnic group among the staff, far behind the next, the Angolans, which is 3 times their size. As it was expected, the majority restores itself again as majority.



Until the INTI Project Portuguese seminar of January 2005, this staff had not received any specific training to deal with the issues of intercultural communication, which were widely disregarded. Awareness of *ethnoethics*, i. e., the contextualization of values, attitudes and behaviors inside different and sometimes opposed ethnic frames, was used during the seminar as an important tool to intercultural communication.

As an example of the issues the seminar dealt with, we can recall the complaints over the inmates' disregard for feminine authority, and the recurrent "bad" etiquette and manners, namely at table. Such were issues arising not from a foreign cultural identity, or from an exotic pattern of behavior, but from the nearby culture of the *Lisbon's ghettos*, i. e. raised rather from social than ethnic differences. It is fundamental to understand that the *difference* lies in the eyes of the beholder, never in the behavior of the beholder. And that ethic is not to be considered as being the same as legality or common agreement, especially where ethnoethics are considered, i. e., when the individual got his system of values from a culture other than the dominant. So Wacjman points to the "anti-reality bias" of the "institution's institutional mission" and its harmful nature: *Relativiser ces réelles valeurs pour accepter et intérioriser d'autres valeurs institutionnelles est un véritable travail d'enculturation où la perte relative n'est pas souvent compensée par le gain de l'assimilation.*¹⁴

¹⁴ WACJMAN 2002, p. 103.

How to put Cape-Verdean inmates' identities in context?

So where to find the roots of the Cape-Verdean migration identities? In Cape Verde? In Santiago? In former Portuguese Africa or in Portugal itself?

Ghetto identities are not specific to Portuguese Cape-Verdeans, they are rather the result of a widespread experience, common to all the populations kept in a state of partial slavery, and illustrated by the old *muceques*, or townships, around the African colonial “white towns”, where the workers lived in and to where they had to return after a day of hard work in the beautiful houses and broad streets of their colonial masters.

Important is to recall that the populations once reduced to slavery, and then turned into servants in Portuguese Africa, were to suffer this ill-fated ordeal not because of their skin color, cultural identities or supposed “primitive stage” of civilization, but simply because they were militarily unprepared to resist the extremely violent assault, invasion and robbery of their lands by the European states all over Africa (and Asia and the Americas). Relocated from small villages to the former African colonial suburbs, the ghetto people today are also living in the suburbs, this time of the European cities. These ghettos replicated the same urban structure: where in Africa exclusion from the city expelled the working force to precarious huts, in Portugal the victims of unemployment and hard living conditions stagnate as squatters in half-ruined precarious constructions they themselves build, or, at the best of chances, in cheap and disqualified “social housing”. It is the colonial past that is alive in the Lisbon ghettos, with its “little Africas” where one can find not only the Cape-Verdeans but a strong presence of the Angolans and Guineans too.

Nowadays, a new African migrant population starts to come to Lisbon: temporary students and functionaries from Cape Verde and Angola, seeking to obtain their academic degrees. But some still fund their studies with the help of manual work. Others are privileged bureaucrats with nothing in common with their unfortunate co-citizens. And the new labor force present in humble and underpaid jobs speaks increasingly less Crioulo and more Ukrainian, Romanian, and Brazilian Portuguese, as Cape-Verdeans became no longer the largest minority present in Portugal. Surely, the youth reeducation centers will change rather slowly and there the C.-V.s are still predominant (for how long?), reminding us where the dreams of their parents ended up: behind the bars of a cell from where there is no possible escape. As there was no possible escape from poverty to their parents too.

A new ethnicity awareness among the staff

The personnel are a team of generous and dedicated education workers, serving the cause of re-education with love and enthusiasm. They know they have the power to change the lives of others to the better, and they are sensitive to such responsibility, even if sometimes they tend to adopt a paternalistic and parent-like attitude. Their position is somehow uncomfortable: if on one side they are the guardians of the “mainstream society” values, on the other they were entrusted with the full development of the kids’ personalities, knowing that these young rebels did not conform to such ideological and abstract constructions which the society tries to impose on them.

It must be recognized that the Caxias Center staff performs its tasks with devoted enthusiasm and remarkable commitment. Perhaps we could say more: with loving care. When two days ago I was visiting the Centre and the inmates were disputing some handball game against a visitor’s team, the result was sadly announced among the staff in this way: “– *we lost!*” It was striking to hear “*we*” in place of “*they, the kids*”. Fortunately they know that each victory of their pupils is also their victory, and each defeat, their defeat. And such conscience should illuminate the fact that the primal defeat leading the youth to confinement was not exactly the kids’ defeat, but a sad defeat of the society as a whole.

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(*Keywords: young people; minorities; Cape-Verdeans; confinement; ethnoetics*).