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Cape-Verdean minority in Portugal and the local authorities: housing and schooling policies

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Abstract

Cape-Verdean emigration to Portugal suffered a change of status as a result of the independence: in the colonial times the Cape-Verdeans were considered Portuguese citizens who came to live in Portugal, mainly to work in the civil construction and tending to settle around the new construction sites, like Reboleira, Amadora etc., building very simple huts and living in precarious conditions, this way saving as much as they could to send some money to their families, most of them from the island of Santiago. In later stages, many of these Cape-Verdeans sent for their families and settled in areas in connection with their work. That is how poor quarters like the ones in Pedreira dos Húngaros, Marianas, Circunvalação emerged.

With the independence of Cape Verde in 1975, the Cape-Verdeans kept on emigrating, in many instances resorting to illegal schemes. With the exception of those who remained Portuguese by right, the Cape-Verdeans ever since migrated to Portugal as foreign citizens, which required a different legal procedure for them to be able to live and work in Portugal.

With the increase of the number of Cape-Verdean families who settled in different neighbourhoods of Lisbon and in the suburbs, namely in Amadora, Damaia, Buraca, Cova da Moura, etc. a corresponding new generation of Cape-Verdeans emerges, whose behaviour and attitudes take a different direction from the previous generation, often in conflict both with their parental values and with the non-Cape-Verdean communities in which they are inserted. These direct descendants of immigrants adopted aggressive attitudes and isolated themselves inside ghetto cultures. Illegal and marginal activities such as drug dealing and youth gangs find a fertile ground in such social and economic juncture.

In order to find solutions to the problems created by this process and to prevent similar occurrences in the future, actions have been taken at different levels, both by public administration and governmental and non-governmental institutions, as well as by schools in conjunction with parents' associations and parish administration offices. In this connection we should stress the importance of the efforts already made, and the projects undertaken by the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities, the Institute for Support to Immigrants, re-lodging programs for depressed areas with European funding, and others in cooperation with the Cape-Verdean Embassy and Consulate, as well as with the many Cape-Verdean immigrant associations. We should particularly stress the importance of the work done in the areas of stronger incidence of Cape-Verdean immigrants, as is the case of Damaia, Buraca and others, where the interaction between the school community, the local community and the authorities is of paramount importance.

If it is true that ethnic and cultural isolation is often part of a strategy of self-protection and self-preservation of a group's identity, it is also true that it can have negative effects, which may reach the extremes of self-exclusion and aggressive behaviour against other ethnic and cultural entities. In many cases it generates superiority feelings in relation to other groups. Isolation or segregation lead, on the other hand, to a complete lack

of knowledge about what the “others” are, and to the creation of prejudices and stereotypes which replace the mutual confidence that comes from socializing, cooperation and mutual knowledge. The situation worsens when the constitution of groups based on ethnic or cultural identities becomes associated with political parties or organizations, and political agenda are established based on ethnic and cultural premises, furthermore in possible connection with religious movements. This is precisely the fertile ground for the growth of ideas of ethical or racial supremacy, a ground that gave birth to the rise of Nazism in Hitler’s Germany, the establishment of the Inquisition and the persecutions and burnings of people in the name of the Christian Faith, or the Ku Klux Klan in the USA, etc. But it is also the ground where gangs emerge as a way out for enforced marginality and exclusion. The gangs move away from the laws of the society in which they live, but in which they don’t integrate themselves, adopting their own rules, codes and leaders, creating their own power structure and norms of behaviour and of operating, developing at the same time a ghetto culture, to which a language code of their own is associated, along with a set of attitudes and gestures and even some forms of artistic expression, as the ones reflected in the *rap* music, graffiti, hair-dos, etc.

In Portugal this phenomenon is relatively new and was accelerated by the decolonization process initiated in 1974-1975, having mainly to do with immigrants of African origin. Before that, the Africans with whom the Portuguese were used to live, brought along the uses and habits of their countries of origin, which were then Portuguese colonies, and diluted themselves into the Portuguese society becoming integrated without much difficulty.

In the specific case of Cape-Verdeans, the first generation of migrants (not classified as immigrants, strictly speaking, but as relocated, since they came from a Portuguese colony, officially called a Portuguese overseas province, and as such considered Portuguese territory) was easily integrated, or at least admitted, in a *modus vivendi* that could be defined as of mutual acceptance, and without much friction, especially when there were not too great differences of economic, social and cultural level. Their social status in the Portuguese society varied in accordance with their economic and cultural background, those who worked in civil construction tending to settle around building areas, as in Reboleira, Amadora, etc., lodged in primitive huts and living in precarious conditions so as to save as much as they could in order to be able to send some money to their families who stayed in Cape Verde, most of them coming from the rural areas of the island of Santiago. Other people were recruited to work in the Portuguese mines. Among the causes of the first waves of Cape-Verdean migration to Portugal were the droughts and famine threat in Cape Verde, as well as the need to fill the manpower gap in the building sector and mining work left

by the massive emigration of Portuguese labour force to France and other more developed European countries.

In later stages, many of these Cape-Verdeans sent for their families and settled in areas in connection with their working places. This was how the poor quarters like the ones in Pedreira dos Húngaros (which no longer exists, as a result of the local re-lodging plan), Marianas, and Circunvalação, emerged.

The affluence of people from the Portuguese colonies increased, and eventually saturated the work market, once easily accessible to the Cape-Verdean immigrants. Many Cape-Verdean immigrants were confronted with unemployment, taking shelter in their own ghettos or “barracas”, the primitive huts built in the suburban areas.

For the common Portuguese citizen the word Cape-Verdean was used to refer to any African person, often for linguistic convenience, since the Cape-Verdeans were the majority among the immigrants from African origin, a fact which had its own implications: any act of delinquency or crime perpetrated by an African person tended to be immediately attributed to Cape-Verdeans. As the Cape Verdean song goes: “*Fazi bu ka fazi, tudu kusa é badiu*” (Whether you do it or not, it is always the Cape-Verdean who is to blame).

The scant economic capacity allowed by their salaries did not give them any possibility to possess or rent a normal lodging, not only because the house renting market was in crisis, but also because there was a strong reluctance, or even total rejection, to rent houses to Africans who lived in such poor economic conditions. Naturally the degrading conditions in which the children of these immigrants were raised and educated gradually generated a new social category living in ghettos in the suburbia or within the urban centres.

With the independence of Cape Verde in 1975, the Cape-Verdeans continued to immigrate following the same pattern, and lodging in the same ethnic neighbourhoods for practical purposes, trying to find the support of relatives and friends. Many of these immigrants were brought in by “contracting agents” through illegal schemes. With the exception of those who remained Portuguese by right of option, the Cape-Verdeans were now migrating to Portugal as foreign citizens, which required a different and more difficult legal procedure to live and work in Portugal.

The sudden and massive flow of population started by the decolonization process, in spite of the organizational efforts from the control structures put in place, were at the same time accompanied by a parallel course of informal actions generating their own ways of survival, away from any predictable patterns, as was to be expected in the circumstances. In this context one can understand that “it was the possible decolonization, not the ideal one”. The decolonization happens as an “act

of necessity” in the last stage of the dismantlement of a system. The subsequent management of the complex problems generated within the former colonial metropolis as a result of that is quite another issue.

With the increase of the number of Cape-Verdean families who settled in different neighbourhoods of the Lisbon metropolitan area, namely in Amadora, Damaia, Buraca, Cova da Moura, etc., a corresponding new generation of Cape-Verdean immigrants emerges, whose behaviour and dispositions deviate from their parents’ course. In conflict both with the previous generation, whose habits, customs and values they tend to reject, – and often be ashamed of –, and with the autochthon society by which they feel discriminated and looked upon with suspicion, many of the new generation immigrants adopted aggressive attitudes and isolated themselves in ghetto cultures. Marginal and illegal activities, such as narcotic traffic and youth gangs found a fertile ground in these social and economic junctures of exclusion.

In order to find solutions for the problems arising from such situation and to prevent their further developments in the future, measures have been implemented at different levels, both by public administration and governmental and non-governmental institutions, as well as by schools in conjunction with parents associations and local city council offices, or “*juntas de freguesia*”. In this connection, we should emphasize the efforts made and projects carried out by the High Commissariat for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas), The Institute for Support of Immigrants (Instituto de Apoio aos Imigrantes), the Population Re-lodging Plan (Plano Especial de Realojamento - PER), and the many active Cape-Verdean cultural and local associations.

The Centres of Support to Immigrants (Centros de Apoio aos Imigrantes – CNAI) were created in Portugal a year ago (2004). Inside their premises one can find the offices of the Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (Foreigners and Borders Police), Segurança Social (Social Security), Inspeção Geral do Trabalho (Labour Inspection), Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional (Employment and Professional Training Institute), Ministério da Saúde (Health Ministry) and the Instituto de Habitação (Housing Institute). Other services are also available at the CNAI: the Office for Recognition of School and Training Certificates, Office for Technical Support to the Immigrant Associations and the Institute for Development and Inspection of Labour Conditions.

To have an idea of the activity of these centres, 1,500 immigrants apply to the services of the CNAI daily and in its first year of existence the two centres received 235,000 immigrants in Lisbon and 50.000 in Oporto¹.

¹ Official data from <http://www.acime.gov.pt/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=798>.

Most of the immigrants looked for the SEF (Foreigners and Borders Police). Other offices more in demand were the Social Security Office, Labour Inspection, Legal Support Office and Family Regrouping Office.

The attendance at the Centres for Support to Immigrants can also be done in the Cape-Verdean language (Creole). Although the Cape-Verdeans understand Portuguese, many of them are unable to speak that language properly. This may cause misunderstandings or misinterpretation, followed by a chain of actions where one error generates another. The effect on those who get caught in the mesh of chain reaction behaviour has not been justly evaluated yet, and it is responsible for a great deal of attitudes from both sides of the line that separates the public administration offices and the immigrant that looks for their help. It seems, therefore, a very positive measure to have someone to work as a mediator between one side and the other of the desk or counter.

The public administration structures, no matter how well-equipped they are, will only function effectively and produce practical results if they are able to fill in the gaps in communication between people of different cultures. And that is only possible if we are prepared to understand, accept and deal with the differences.

At the present stage, the problems of reception at the office desk level do not lie so much in lack of administrative structures or availability of public servants, but depend rather on the adequacy and ability of the reception service offered to the immigrants. The great majority of the Cape-Verdean immigrants have some difficulty in expressing themselves in Portuguese and do not understand the Portuguese bureaucratic jargon, a fact that results in a first disadvantage for them, when they address the civil servant at the reception desk. This difficulty is aggravated by the fact that at the other side of the desk the civil servants assisting the immigrant who applies to the office tend to pre-evaluate him by his appearance, in accordance with his own prejudices and misconceptions. Even though they claim not to have any racial or social prejudice which sometimes underlies unconsciously, the person standing or sitting behind the counter tends to be less careful, less considerate, or less patient when he deals with a person of African origin, especially when that person has visible signs of his economic and social unsteady status, and cultural/educational meagre background. In more concrete terms, by the way he dresses, the way he talks, and by his often too humble attitude (which in some circumstances may change from humbleness to hostility as a reaction to attitudes of lack of respect for him on the part of the public officer).

This poor level of communication results in a constant waste of time and energy for the immigrants who run back and forth from office to office all day, and sometimes day after day, just to get some certificate or some document.

The reception desks often work as barriers separating the immigrant from the services they need to resort to. In order to change them into real bridges instead of barriers, it is indispensable that the public employees who attend the immigrants should have adequate training that prepare them to understand the cultural differences and deal creatively with them in a way that makes their work more efficient, and useful to solve their problems and difficulties, therefore at the same time making their own job easier and perhaps more interesting to themselves. On the part of the immigrant it is important that they should be aware of their own rights, either as immigrants or in the process of legalizing their status. Recently the Portuguese top executive of the independent state branch called *Provedoria da Justiça* (Justice Mediation Office), whose function is to prevent any acts of injustice due to some illegality, partiality or simply bad administration by public entities, sent a communiqué to all city council local offices (*Juntas de Freguesia*) to alert these municipal departments as to their duty to issue certificates of residence, life, or economic situation and similar documents to the immigrants, regardless of their legal status in the country. This alert came in the sequence of several complaints filed by immigrants, claiming that these offices refused to issue these documents to them arguing that they did not possess a valid permit of permanence in the territory. These documents are needed precisely to apply, for instance, for permanence legalization or for admission in the Health Centres. According to the existing legislation the issuing of residence certificate does not depend on the legal status of the applicants. The local municipal offices in question cannot, therefore, refuse to issue these certificates based on the legal status of the immigrants, because in doing so they are “denying them the exercise of fundamental rights”, to quote the Justice official. If actions like the one above point to a positive direction, they show, on the other hand, the discrepancy that may exist between what is legislated and what often happens at the bureaucratic level.

We should point out the importance of the effort made by schools, together with parents associations from the areas of stronger incidence of Cape-Verdean immigrants, as in the case of Damaia, Buraca, and others, and private initiatives like the associations *Moinho da Juventude* in Cova da Moura and *AJPAS (Associação de Jovens Promotores da Amadora Saudável)* in Damaia, where the interaction between the school community, nurseries or similar child care private institutions, the local community and the local authorities is essential. The schools, and consequently the teachers, are confronted with two different cultural, social and economic environments: one at school and one at home with their families and neighbourhood. The attitudes and behaviour of the students at school are determined more by the “hidden” curriculum functioning within the school space than by the school official curriculum. On the other hand, this hidden

curriculum is determined by, and in intimate connection with, the students' awareness of their ethnic and cultural differences, and should therefore be understood from this perspective.

I shall next give you, as a study sample, an account of what happens in one of the schools in Damaia, one of the Lisbon neighbourhoods with the largest concentration of Cape-Verdean immigrants. I have chosen this school because it is inserted in perhaps the most problematic areas of Lisbon and it takes children not only from Damaia/Buraca, but also from Cova da Moura, Seis de Maio, Fontainhas, all of them problem areas. More recently the Cape-Verdeans living in Fontainhas and Seis de Maio have been re-lodged in a place called Casal da Boba, by the Population Special Re-lodging Plan, owing to a road project for the area (CRIL). Casal da Boba is near Casal S. Brás, considered the “noble” zone of that administrative division. Casal da Boba has seven “bairros” (quarters). The people who live in Casal S. Brás complain about the presence of their new and unwelcome neighbours. The same mistake was made in Zambujal. Conflicts arise constantly; there are no proper street structure, and no nurseries. The people who live in this quarter are a mixed group of different ethnic origin (Cape-Verdeans, Gypsies, Indians). The whole situation is chaotic.

The school is a 5th and 6th grade one in the centre of Damaia. 60% of the children are Cape-Verdeans, according to the information given by the teachers interviewed, who are very much committed to the school efforts to integrate the Cape-Verdean children and build a link of communication and understanding between the school and the Cape-Verdean local communities and families.

In the Portuguese school system the children are admitted according to the following age distribution:

At 6	in what is called	1 st cycle (1 st to 4 th grades)
At 10		2 nd cycle (5 th and 6 th grades)
At 12		3 rd cycle (6 th to 9 th grades)

Theoretically the adolescents finish their secondary education when they are 15 years old. What happens in reality is a different case. In the 5th grade they have 15-year-old adolescents, who normally should be in the 9th grade.

I quote: “*Actually these children are just survivors of a situation and, at this stage, no longer think as children. They had the bad luck of being born in the “Seis de Maio” neighbourhood and of belonging to certain families. These children do not value formal education*”. End of quote.

To the question “*What will happen to these children?*” the teacher interviewed, who is very familiar with the neighbourhood, says without any

hesitation: *“These children end up in the street. You will see them leaning against the walls around the blocks. Sooner or later this one or that one will be recruited by some drug dealer or for another illegal activity and becomes a member of the underworld”*. The contradiction generated in this process is that the issue of juvenile delinquency has moved into a large grey zone, while the authorities argue that the schools remain the places where these children and adolescents must be. The judicial courts apply what is called ‘tutelary measures’ to them, and they are compelled by the law to fulfil the obligatory level of education. So this young person is compelled to stay in school until he finishes ninth grade. But in practice the courts cannot monitor or control these cases. As one teacher puts it, it is a “make-believe” education.

One of the problems in the education system is that there are no transference structures between areas at the different training levels. There are no intermediary entrances for the different courses. If a student realizes at a certain stage that he has no taste for the area he initially chose, he cannot change. So he fails and simply drops out.

The young people that are led to the IEFP (Employment and Professional Training Institute) to find some kind of work also fail at the very threshold of that Institute, most of them because they are not documented, but also because they are not equipped with the minimum professional skills. The lack of documentation is another problem that should be re-examined in an objective light within the Cape-Verdean immigrant community. Many children of immigrants are undocumented because their parents when they were born did not know they had to apply for their identification and other necessary documents to the government offices that issue them, and tried to ignore them until they happened to be needed. And there lies another vicious circle. It does not help to handle these problems in a patronizing way by condescending with irresponsibility of the adults towards the children for which they are responsible. The question is: when the parent, or parents, neglect their responsibility, or do not show the least capacity to be responsible for their children, who is going to play this role? And we cannot close our eyes to the fact that it is not easy to deal with some situations in the correlation between the school and the families in these communities. In an effort to establish a link between schools and immigrant families the Ministry of Education has more recently appointed “mediators”, whose task is to visit families in these communities and establish a link of communication between them and the schools so helping to solve some of the existing problems. This is a task that takes special training and a capacity to deal with some specific problems of these areas and families, and with some risks that cannot be ignored or underestimated. The least we can say when a mediator happens to be a young woman, is that she risks to be sexually harassed by a drunken

head of the family she may be visiting and that this is a very unpleasant situation.

Allow me to include here a written testimony given to me by a teacher who works in this area, who happens to be a daughter of Cape-Verdeans, born in Portugal:

O “I” – A história de um menino de rua no Bairro X.

A irmã tem a tutela do menor, dado que o pai foi preso por ter assassinado a mãe. O menor assistiu a este crime.

O jovem “I” vive numa casa degradada no bairro X com 3 irmãs, com idades aproximadas à dele. A avó que também vivia nesta casa faleceu recentemente.

A irmã mais velha, que tem a sua tutela, vive em outra casa no bairro, sendo que não tem capacidade para se responsabilizar pelos irmãos mais novos, já que tem que cuidar da sua própria família (filhos, marido).

O jovem “I” foi sinalizado pela escola para a Comissão de Protecção de Menores, como criança em risco. De acordo com o relatório efectuado, chegou-se à conclusão que este menor deveria de ser institucionalizado. A irmã concordou e pensa que a melhor opção será colocá-lo numa casa de acolhimento.

O jovem de 14 anos não tem documentação alguma (apenas certidão de nascimento).

Actualmente, o jovem “I” pratica alguns crimes de furto e roubo.

O processo de Promoção e Protecção já foi aberto há cerca de 3 anos, no entanto devido ao volume de processos de menores em risco na Comissão ainda não houve resposta.

Se, simultaneamente, ao processo de Promoção e protecção de menores, houvesse um processo penal grave, sabemos por experiência que teríamos uma resposta mais rápida no acolhimento em instituição do Estado (Centro de Reeducação).

Translation:

“I” – The story of a “Neighbourhood X” child.

“This minor is under the guardianship of his sister, because his father was arrested for having murdered his wife. This child witnessed the murder.

Young “I” lives in a degraded house in “neighbourhood X” with three sisters with little difference of age. His grandmother, who also lived in this house, died recently.

His elder sister, his guardian, lives in another house in the same neighbourhood and has no way of taking care of her younger brother and sister, since she has to take care of her own family (husband and children).

Young “I” was reported by the school to the Minor’s Protection Committee as being a child at risk. The report conclusion was that the child should be put in an institution. His sister agreed and thinks the best option is to put him in a shelter home.

At present the child commits theft and burglary.

The Promotion and Protection file was opened 3 years ago. However, owing to the amount of children-at-risk files at the Committee, there hasn't been any answer yet.

We know from experience that if at the same time there were a serious criminal file, we would have a quicker response for this child's admittance at a re-education centre (youth detention institution).

The experience of some countries that have dealt more successfully with the problems of immigration and the study of their solutions would be useful to help tackle the problems we have been analysing with respect to the Cape-Verdean immigration in Portugal. In Rotterdam, for example, according to the information we have, the municipal authorities have the responsibility over the reception of immigrants, working in association with the different public administration and government departments. The immigrants are oriented from the day of their arrival according to their individual, family and professional profiles towards different lodging quarters, employment centres, and in the case of families with children, schools in their residential areas. Each case is studied and sorted out at the beginning and at this level and not at a school office, which not only prevents the kind of chaotic situations we have described, but also leaves the school free from the bureaucratic work and with more space, time and mental disposition to do its work.

This is a multiethnic and multicultural society. It has for a long time enjoyed the reputation of "bland customs". Gradually the virus of systematic misgiving, insecurity and violence sets in. The places of outbreak are always the same. The accusing fingers tend to point dangerously to one direction. And in this cause-effect equation the problems are usually dealt with at their last stages, that is, those of the effects, while the causes persist and a vicious circle is set.

(Keywords: Cape-Verdeans; public welfare; local authorities; ghetto; intercultural conflict).