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Identity Processes and Dynamics in Multi-Ethnic Europe

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IMISCOE

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*edited by Charles Westin, José Bastos,
Janine Dahinden and Pedro Góis*

IMISCOE Research

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11 Cape Verdeanness as a complex social construct: analysis of ethnicity through complexity theory

Pedro Góis

Introduction

Emigration was an economic strategy for Cape Verdeans from as early as the eighteenth century. It has become an important element of Cape Verdean social identity or, as this identity also has been called, Cape Verdeanness. In a situation where there are more Cape Verdean emigrants and their descendants outside Cape Verde than living within the archipelago itself,¹ traditional theories of migration and/or national identity placing more importance on origin than on all other features in the process of identity construction seem misplaced.

Research we conducted in some of the destinations of Cape Verdean migrants (Góis 2002), together with data collected within the Cape Verdean archipelago, led us to hypothesise about the reciprocal influence that Cape Verdeans from both locations have on identity formation and identity modification. Easy access to rapid transport and communications brought about by globalisation together with the renewal of factors important to Cape Verdean identity, especially in expatriated communities, has sparked an ongoing development of Cape Verdean identity, encompassing a transnational dimension. We find an identity based on an ethnicity that somehow, in its development, transcends factors traditionally attributed as defining characteristics. A traditional understanding suggests that sharing a culture or cultural background and language facilitates differentiation in relation to the other. In the Cape Verdean case, however, we find a construction that challenges such traditional notions. In this chapter we shall try to explain what makes Cape Verdean identity processes unique. Our contention is that this case provides a model for transnational identity analysis.

The deterritorialised nation as a basis for a transnational identity

In our example of Cape Verde, the constant flow of individuals from this one community will lead ultimately to what theoretically could be understood as a deterritorialisation of the concept of nation. What we

see emerging is a deterritorialised transnational nation (Pries 2000; Glick Schiller et al. 1992), which finds itself within a new and emergent transnational social space (Pries 2000). This social space is necessarily and clearly conceptual; it embraces the Cape Verdean world. The emergence of this space is one of the possibilities suggested by Pries who describes the emergence of transnational social spaces as social realities driven by international migration. Migration inevitably pits social identities against one another, identities that distinguish themselves by their relations with one another (Pries 2001). The outcome is a paradox and a complexification of the variables enabling us to conceptualise the Cape Verdean world. While Cape Verdean identity is the result of previous migrations; further current migration patterns keep it alive.

Cape Verde's scale, dimension, small resident population and scattered migration patterns, as well as the existence of a huge and diversified set of studies about this country and its emigrants, make it almost unique at the global level. For the purpose of our analysis, we need to distance ourselves from the theoretical paradigms usually employed to analyse migration. We must question traditional basic assumptions and introduce a transnational perspective. Furthermore, we need to extend our analysis by looking at identity as a systemic concept. This can be achieved by applying complexity theory.

A look at Cape Verde's recent history shows that the development of the transnational social space, in which there are political, cultural, social and economic interactions, is the outcome of the country's migratory history. This involves an accumulation of collective and individual capital in which the social and cultural capital (organised in a network) are highly important. Such transnational social space is not limited by the geographical or political borders of the traditional nation-state; rather, it appears to consist of a web of social networks. The space evolved and was sustained through several waves of Cape Verdean migration from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Several of these migratory flows formed the bulwark of what earlier was regarded as a contemporary labour diaspora. Today we see that these flows lay the foundation of today's transnational community (Góis 2002). In its early stages, it might be referred to as low-intensity transnationalism (Góis 2005).

We should indeed mention that long before the concept of transnational communities was coined, the Cape Verdeans already had formed their own archipelago-like² experiential world, where they always felt at home. The Cape Verdean world comprised a *terra longe* (a distant place where the emigrants currently reside) and the *nha terra* (the homeland). The mythical Cape Verde was the social synthesis of both. The geographical archipelago of Cape Verde extended into the migratory archipelago, extending its origin far beyond the Sahel islands.

The map of this archipelago (Malheiros 2001) is well consolidated in the imaginations of those who left and of those who stayed behind (Carling 2002). Recent research allows us to probe deeper into how these identity and symbolic connections among members of this transnationalised nation are organised, and to reflect on whether this may be an example of a nation with a transnational identity (Góis 2002).

The attribution of a unique national identity to all these individuals, who do in fact share the same ancestral or imaginary origin and some features of a shared, specific culture, does nevertheless seem to be a gross generalisation. We are instead led to consider identity as a transnational phenomenon in which the inhabitants of the migratory archipelago share and integrate features of identity from the archipelago of Cape Verde and, at the same time, influence and participate in the creation of a new deterritorialised transnational identity, which is extended to all Cape Verdeans from and in Cape Verde.

Migration and transnationalism

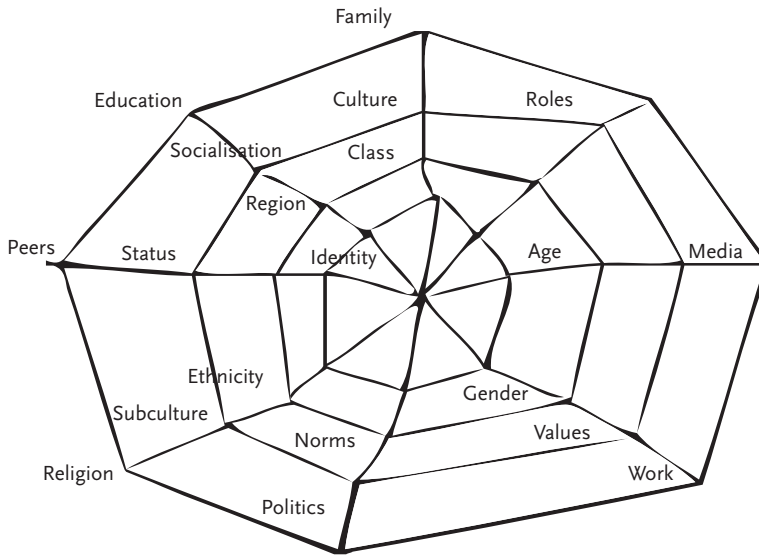
During the last two decades there has been a shift in focus in the study of migration, in the analysis of immigrant communities and in the way migrants and their descendants interact with the receiving societies. Since the 1990s, the body of literature on transnationalism has been growing in the Anglo-American social science community. From a paradigm based on the analysis of simple and linear unidirectional relations (for instance, origin-destination, return migration, family reunion, temporary or permanent migrations), we have moved to a complex multidirectional analysis that involves circular migration, remigration, transmigrations, cross-border migration, transnational communities and transnational practices. Several authors suggest that we can classify studies of migration according to their underlying rationale (Vertovec 1999; Itzigsohn & Saucedo 2002). In traditional countries of immigration, these studies have focused mainly on the integration/assimilation processes of immigrants. In traditional sending countries, on the other hand, research on emigration has focused mainly on contexts of departure, return conditions and issues of split families. The underlying rationale in these studies separates the sending society from the receiving society in two independent and non-overlapping realities, exemplifying what Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) have termed methodological nationalism and from which sociology is still struggling to free itself.

A new paradigm emerged in the 1990s, introducing the idea that migrants redefine but do not forsake the bonds linking them with the home country. Full assimilation/integration in the host countries does not usually take place, but rather, a complex mutual exchange between

the two or more societies. According to this paradigm, immigrants in different areas of social action create a series of bonds that transcend national borders and make migrants' social relations with the home and host societies more complex (Faist 2000). In contrast to traditional assimilation theories, these studies direct our attention to the stable links connecting many of the first-generation migrants and their descendants to their places of origin and providing a solid, enduring bond between origin and destination. This paradigm came into being when Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992) were studying migratory patterns of the late twentieth century and insertion into various host societies. The results of this work led to the adoption of the concept of transnationalism to understand migration.

The concept of globalisation points to 'the processes through which sovereign nation-states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks' (Beck 2000: 11). One of these actors was described by Glick Schiller et al. (1992) as a transmigrant. In their innovative contribution on transnationalism and transnational communities, Glick Schiller et al. have developed a research framework on international migration that goes beyond the traditional concept of space and societal requirements. In this analytic field the paths taken by transmigrants are not one-time and unidirectional, but form an extended social field incorporating both present and former areas of residence (Pries 1999). The spaces connected by transnational activities are more than the sum of each of them. According to the position taken by Glick Schiller et al. (1992), deterritorialised social spaces emerge, above and beyond the individual and concrete territorial space. As Sassen, Portes and other sociologists suggest, transmigrants are constructing a social field in which they link their country of origin with their host country. In these transnational spaces, transmigrants are leading figures with their economic and social relations, their political activities and their identities, which transcend classical frontiers, benefiting from global economic processes within a world divided into nation-states.

There is a large body of theoretical literature on transnationalism, basically originating from debates in the US and the UK. These works try to explain transnationalism as a combination of civic-political memberships, economic involvement, social networks and cultural identities linking people and institutions in two or more nation-states. The concept has, so far, exhibited numerous manifestations in the social sciences; in sociology it is understood as a form of organisation, spanning borders through networks, or as a state of mind permitting multiple identifications and loyalties. In cultural anthropology, the concept has been interpreted as a process of cultural interpenetration, finding its reality in everyday practices; while in the economic sciences,

Figure 11.1 *The web of identity*

Source: Original design by Chris Livesey

transnationalism has been understood as a factor in global financial currents and trade, as much as an outflow of global restructuring of production modes. Finally, in the political sciences, the significance of transnationalism lies in new forms of political engagement, as demonstrated by migrants' mobilisation in the host country and their activities in the home country. Such mobilisation is taken as an indicator of an upcoming global civil society (Castells 1997; Beck 2000).

This rationale has necessitated looking at migration from a perspective that takes the home society into account, even when the integration of migrants into host societies is the analytical focus. It became clear that perceiving migrants as being quickly assimilated into host societies led to an approach which in simplistic terms sought to explain the relative immobility of these flows, categorising migrants as temporary (those who moved around) or permanent (the sedentary). By establishing these categories the classic studies on migration did not take the complexity of contemporary flows into account and were, therefore, incapable of providing any deeper understanding of this complex reality. For example, these studies failed to understand that migrants maintain a large set of relations with the home society, not in opposition to, but in connection with, leading one's life in the host society. A transnational approach to migration will pay close attention to the emergence of

social processes that cross geographical, cultural and political borders and which create unexplored fields of analysis beyond national confines.

According to the transnational perspective, analysing the social processes deriving from the interaction of specific migrant groups (in our case the Cape Verdeans) and the use of their networked social capital with or within different nation-states (home and host countries) allows us to visualise the emergence of a transnational social space (Pries 2001). We glimpse the appearance of a deterritorialised nation, where a country's people can live anywhere in the world and still be part of that nation. In practice, these communities deterritorialise the nation, by physically detaching it from the nation-state to which they belong, but without severing the social ties binding them to it. In doing so these communities create a form of socio-spatial organisation that supplements, enlarges and, in many cases, goes beyond the limits of the nation-state. For these authors, these new types of migrant, community and globalisation are objects of study that erode classic theories of migration and lead to the emergence of a less West-centric approach, more conciliatory with the reality of the home and the host countries. This approach must therefore consider the complexity of the social processes involved. Besides overcoming methodological nationalism, it must go beyond some highly simplistic paradigms, which have been used to analyse extremely complex social processes.

Transnationalism and identity

Portes shows that transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, but rather, a different perspective on phenomena that already has been known to exist (Portes et al. 1999). There has always been some kind of circular movement of people between countries. We could even discuss some historical transnational communities as the outcomes of diasporas and expatriated enclaves, which combine features of both the home and host societies (Meintel 2002). However, if this is so, then we must answer the question of how migratory processes have changed in such a way over the last few decades that many of the most recent migrants no longer are integrated in the dominant or *mainstream* ideology, but, on the contrary, appear to have developed new transnational identities that allow them to maintain complex social links (e.g. inter-, trans-, pluri-) with a large number of diasporic communities.

These actors are interlaced between an international and national legal system, finding themselves in a legal space occupied by a body of increasing norms and conventions shaping a form of post-national membership (Soysal 1994). Though receiving entitlements within the

limits of a national space, transmigrants refuse to ascribe their identity exclusively to one polity only. In a world of rapidly growing migration, such exclusive legal rights and entitlements would never be an enduring acquisition, which is why transmigrants are trying to leave more than one option open, transferring their social, political and economic capital from one political system to another when necessary. Transmigrants try to shape their identities by adapting themselves to the needs of the world-system and therefore cultivate multiple allegiances to place (Van Hear 1998). They form dense networks across political borders in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition. Through these networks an increasing number of people are able to live dual lives. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both (Portes 1999).

In a multiple social integration, transmigrants create several social identities and, even though they may organise their socialisation mainly or preferably within the limits of one national space, transnational migrants and their descendants refuse to confine their identity exclusively to the social references of the space in which they reside. The classical approach to migration defined such migrants and/or their descendants as not assimilated, as hyphenated nationals (e.g. the Cape Verdean-American) or by using similar expressions, whose purpose was to show the assimilation process was still incomplete but possibly irreversible. From a transnational perspective such migrants and their descendants are no longer seen as uprooted. On the contrary, they are seen to move freely from one place to another, across international borders and/or different social systems and cultures. These migrants and their descendants influence changes in both communities and places of belonging through their social or economic remittances as well as transnational political, cultural and social practices (Bryceson & Vuorela 2002).

In a world in which the time-space dimensions are compressed, adaptability is the golden rule. The existence of a social identity with multiple references is a competitive advantage for these migrants and their descendants. This option leads the individuals to try to model their identities on the countries with which they have established a referential relation (e.g. home or host country). It involves the creation of a multiple social identity, a shared social identity and a transnational social identity that migrants and their descendants share in the same transnational social space.

National identity, transnational identity and complexity

Anderson (1983) explains how the development of printing technologies at the dawn of modernity in Europe enabled individuals to imagine a national community beyond the limited group of persons with whom they interacted in their daily lives and, thus, how national identity was created. It seems fair to assume that with the development of modern communications and mass media, which reach people outside the national borders, it is now possible to imagine ethnic communities that extend beyond the national borders. One may also imagine that this process will be the basis for the appearance of transnational identities. Dismantling territorial borders and, consequently, deterritorialising identity as limiting the maintenance of a group identity/social identity is a conquest of the recent past, mainly as far as ways to sustain this identity are concerned. Several authors identify this deterritorialisation as a central feature in the process of globalisation and emphasise the disintegration of the economic, cultural and political borders as one of the characteristics of the contemporary world. However, we must stress that territoriality still has importance. The existence of a territory, mythical or real, is actually an essential condition for the maintenance of this type of identity. As long as ethnic meetings are possible some coherent and significant ethnic identities may be created without the actual presence of the object of identification. This is illustrated, in spite of the great geographical gaps between the spaces of belonging in the Cape Verdean case, by *nha terra* and *terra longe*. If there is a coherent and consistent contact among the Cape Verdeans of the different nodes of the migratory archipelago, then Cape Verdeanness will have found its source. In this case, ethnic identity³ tends to perpetuate itself even though it will necessarily assume shapes that differ from the Cape Verdeanness of Cape Verde or of other moments and places by interacting with and in the contexts in which it evolves.

The non-linear multifarious character of Cape Verdean identity makes it particularly suitable for complexity theory analysis, allowing us to frame and consider several configurations that the different aspects of identity may assume. While working on a theoretical analysis of the Cape Verdean identity we came across complexity theory and its applicability to this kind of phenomena. According to Urry (2003), this could be the type of phenomenon to propel sociology towards the paradigm of complexity. Cape Verdean identity is an example of a complex social phenomenon that goes beyond a simple rationale explained by a national approach. At a time when the theoretical borders of sociology, and especially of the sociology of migration, are being released from the national character of their object, the international, transnational and multinational dimensions become central elements in a more

thorough explanation of the phenomena. Cape Verdeanness is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, though not unexplainable. As of yet, it tends to remain obscured by various incomplete explanations. To explain complex social phenomena we need to return to Durkheim's influential idea of 'treating social facts as things' or of 'explaining the social by the social'. In so doing we look at social identity as a system⁴ with its own rationale independent of the individual mind. The social needs to be explained by the social. It is neither a structure nor an agency but both, being complex, dynamic and intricate.

Personal identity and social identity

The concept of identity has lately assumed an increasingly prominent place in the social sciences. Analysis of the development of social identities themselves has become an important focus of research. Scholars using social identities as the building blocks of social, political and economic life have attempted to account for a number of discrete outcomes by treating identities as independent variables. The dominant implication of the vast literature on identity is that social identities are among the most important social facts in our world (Abdelal et al. 2001). Identity is a multidimensional and complex concept, frequently referred to both in everyday life and by the social sciences and humanistic studies, albeit rarely coherently defined. The scholarly literature on the definition, meaning and development of ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, gender and class identities is now extensive and covers a large number of disciplines and sub-fields.⁵ As a starting point, we are going to assume that there is at least some consensus about what the concept of identity refers to. This common ground is the conceptualisation of two different (and simultaneously intertwined) categories: social and personal identity.⁶

This means that identity can be defined either socially or individually. Fearon (1999: 11) clarifies these two definitions:

A personal identity is a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguishes her in socially relevant ways that (a) the person takes a special pride in; (b) the person takes no special pride in, but which so orients her behaviour that she would be at a loss about how to act and what to do without them; or (c) the person feels she could not change even if she wanted to. (Fearon 1999: 2)

A social identity, on the other hand, is a collective identity; an identity that denotes a group of people. A social identity 'refers simply to a

social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes.' Departing from this minimum consensus, a multiplicity of definitions has been proposed relating to different theoretical perspectives.

Let us take the example of an individual identity. Among the variables that contribute to the formation of this type of identity we can point to age or sex, which are logically self-contained, or to wider and more explanatory variables such as ethnicity, family, work or education. The choice of variable determines the form of our explanation and leads us to stress just one factor and omit all other possible explanatory variables. But even if we were able to isolate all other relevant variables and provide an explanation which would include their impact, that explanation would not be sufficiently coherent to explain our starting point: personal identity. The whole, as in so many other cases, is more than the sum of its parts.

From this perspective, personal identity resembles a web.⁷ A system and its parts, or fragments, cannot be analysed without understanding the framework as a whole. This web must be understood as Castells (1996) defines it: the parts of the web, connected by nodes and centres, are autonomous yet dependent on its complex system of relations. The interrelations of this whole with its parts (and vice versa) cannot be explained logically without losing some of the features of the system. This type of analysis is called complex thought, because there is no logical explanation for these apparently systemic relations. This is what Morin (1996) calls 'the order within the disorder' or the 'certainty of uncertainty', also known as complexity theory.⁸ This way of conceptualising identity is based on mathematical language and a set of concepts to describe non-linear complex systems.⁹

If we assume that personal identity and social identity are systems and that they are sub-systems of a larger whole, we are faced with two theoretical possibilities: they are either static systems (and the positivist perspective assumes that these systems can be described in full) or dynamic systems that resist analysis by reductionism.

Primordialism versus constructivism, and a third way

Two paradigms have dominated the theoretical debate on social identity. On the one hand, there are those who define identity as static, essential and one-dimensional; i.e. identity is determined by certain irreducible conditions of human nature. On the other hand, there are those who see identity as fluid, socially constructed and multidimensional. This means that we can either study identity as an independent variable (in fact, as a constant or invariable), or as a dependent variable. As an

independent variable, identity has been used to explain conflicts, war, aggression and cooperation, etc. As a dependent variable, identity appears in studies of national attitudes and ethnicity (Croucher 2004). Generically speaking, we refer to the first approach as primordialist or essentialist. The second approach is conventionally referred to as constructivist or social constructivist (for discussion, see also chapter 1).¹⁰

Recent contributions from cognitivist theories with a more process-based approach have led to new ideas about identity analysis. These contributions stress the importance of mental schemes – stereotypes, supporting mentalities, social representations and categorisations – in the construction of the identity architecture, irrespective of whether they are ethnic, racial, nationalist or cultural. The cognitive conceptualisation of identities allows us to delve into the process of identity formation itself. According to this perspective, the primordialisation and instrumentalisation of identity are two parts of one system of producing difference, i.e. they are two sides of the same coin. The cognitive approach brings out a third side, which is conceivable at the level of the process and, thus, becomes a third way. In the remainder of this chapter, however, we are going to focus on the social constructivist perspective.

Identity as a social construction: ethnic identity

For us, identity is a contextual social category, because it depends on the contexts of interaction. Identity as we see it is socially constructed and historically contingent. It may change over time and, since it is socially constructed, it may also change across space. If we ask ourselves what identity is, we can come up with several different answers depending on the context. Therefore identity is by definition a plural concept. Every individual has access to a large number of social identities without any fixed limits. So any single individual ‘belongs’ to several social identities at the same time. These identities are not static, but created; they change, evolve and may even disappear. According to Fearon (1999: 17), ethnicity is a clear example of an identity, which depends on one or more complex sets of social rules.

Coming back to our example, the social invisibility of Cape Verdeans (Bryce-Laporte 1972) in several countries where they settled (such as the US, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Argentina and France) is an identity marker. It is the outcome of the community’s self-enclosure (*nos ku nos*) and of incomplete integration (non-assimilation) of the Cape Verdean migrants into the host societies (Góis 2002). Not only does integration lead to social convergence in the host societies, it also leads to detachment in relation to the societies of origin. In other words, the more

assimilated, the less Cape Verdean they are. This phenomenon, which is well portrayed in the study of the Bostonian Cape Verdeans conducted by Sanchez (1998), led to a distinction within the émigré group itself between the American Cape Verdeans (the *Merkanu*), who arrived at the beginning of the twentieth century and the more recent arrivals (the *Kriolu*). This dual Cape Verdeanness in the diaspora generates conflicts, debates and perplexities. It affects all varieties of Cape Verdean identity, because the influence of the *terra longe* (foreign land) on the *nha terra* (homeland), or the reverse, is of such importance to identity construction.¹¹

Theoretically speaking, the need to negotiate a collective social identity, which is often socially invisible on a daily basis and in several social contexts, forces the Cape Verdean émigrés and their descendants to re-think and to rebuild their own identity, because, as Bourdieu points out, social identity emerges mainly through differentiation in relation to the other (Bourdieu 1979: 191) – an other that changes in time and space. The acceptance of the *Merkanus* and the *Kriolus* as two Cape Verdean identities is a token of the degree of co-ethnic acceptance. Accordingly, social identity arises in the form of a sense of belonging to a common social category: Cape Verdeanness.

We have here an example of how a definition of ethnic identity is based on a set of characteristics that restrains the individual regardless of his will. In the Cape Verdean case this ethnic identity is the result of a process of historical construction, of identity differentiation and re-grouping. Both the individuals who were born in the archipelago and their descendants, who never had any (direct) personal contact with the ancestral archipelago (the Cape Verdeans of the migratory archipelago), participate in the construction of this identity. As for the former, contact with the origin set in motion the struggle for independence and the reconstruction of the nation (in the *nha terra* or in the *terra longe*) in the post-colonial period. As for the latter, the sharing of symbols (such as Creole, food, music and the ancestral myths) gave rise to a sense of belonging. For example, in the American case, we can have the so-called ‘cachupa’ Cape Verdeans versus ‘true’ Cape Verdeans, who differ from the former because they keep in close contact with their cultural origin. The former have developed a non-participant relationship with the community, a merely symbolic relationship (Gans 1999), while the latter participate in the social movements of the community recreating their own identity and interacting with the original archipelago, for instance, through their remittances.

Operationalising the concept of ethnic identity

There is inconsistency in the use of the concept of social identity, and even ethnic identity, and no unanimity about how to operationalise social/ethnic identity. The Cape Verdean social identity is constructed from a variety of factors and dimensions such as a collective ancestry, a set of shared historical memories, a common culture, motherland, language, religion and race.¹² In the Cape Verdean case, these dimensions are measured through a group of indicators upon which researchers agree. The language (Creole or Cape Verdean) is the most relevant element of identity, but music and dance, literature, the celebration of Christian rites such as baptism, first Communion, weddings and funerals, traditional food, the family and social relationships which generate *morabeza* also serve as indicators of Cape Verdeanness.

But Cape Verdeanness cannot be measured. There is no single, unambiguous or coherent answer to the question: What is a Cape Verdean? Were we to have an answer, as when we talk about 'reconstructed identities' (Saint-Maurice 1997), we would revert back to a primordialist (albeit unconscious) premise in which we establish an earlier concept of the Cape Verdean for analysis of developments from that initial condition. In a text about methods and techniques to measure identity, Abdelal and colleagues (2001) explain why the social sciences are unable to measure identity per se. The fact that we do not have standardised, coherent and durable instruments to measure indicators is a sign of this inability. The identity concept is devaluated in much of mainstream social science precisely because it resists operationalisation (Brubaker & Cooper 2000). To operationalise this concept involves the assumption that identity is a variable, which is a highly questionable assumption. Abdelal and his collaborators put it:

to conceive of identity as a characteristic of individuals or groups that varies along some metric or value in such a way that it has a systematic, independent, positive or negative effect on some other variable. In principle there are three types of variation: 1. dichotomous (present or absent); 2. categorical (different types, mutually exclusive, exhaustive); 3. interval (numerical, continuous valuation along some metric). It may make little sense to treat identity as a dichotomous variable – present or absent. Since a group exists by definition through having an identity, some kind of identity can never really be absent (though in historical studies, the emergence of previously non-existent social identities, in particular national identities, is one of the most studied issues). Thus, in terms of categories and intervals, identity

can vary in three fundamental ways: content, intensity, and contestation. (Abdelal et al. 2001: 9)

With this definition it becomes possible to establish certain parameters of identity, but not to operationalise and measure it. First, because it may be placed in doubt that objective and/or identity dimensions exist, it is the individual himself (or the group) that creates the categories which make sense of the surrounding world. Secondly, because individual and/or social identity is always relational and situational (it is obviously a network of social categories or dimensions), it challenges the outer world and depends on specific contexts of interaction. Thirdly, because complexity is visible since the individual (as a social actor) is the bearer of an unlimited number of simultaneous social identities, several categories may be activated at the same time, depending on the social context. This multiple and simultaneous belonging will influence the individual's behaviour as member of a certain social group and relations to other social groups.

Identity and complexity

Taking into account that social complexity is an important feature of modern societies, the study of identities is a problematic task, particularly when we look at the construction of identity as an open, dynamic and complex process; it is no longer possible to describe and analyse this phenomenon from the perspective of the classic identity theories in which the process of understanding the whole is to split it into elementary parts. The dynamic of the system does not, however, allow us to isolate dimensions that constitute it or to isolate variables for analytical purposes. The interdependence between the parts of the system makes it prone to chaos (organised complexity), which is caused by slight fluctuations of its parts, known as the 'butterfly effect'.¹³

A complex system is characterised by: 1) the existence of a network of linked elements; 2) the existence of diffused control through its components, which means that there is no centralised control but a bottom-up process; 3) the existence of several hierarchical levels of organisation; 4) the ability to anticipate without necessarily being aware of it; 5) high adaptability.

When characterising social identity from one of its parts, ethnicity, we become aware of the complexity of identity and the entropy established in the system. Since ethnicity is only one of several social categories (or dimensions) of identity, the definition of an ethnic identity is a metonymic definition, leading to a reversal of the usual meaning of the words by which it is described as, for example, speaking of cause

rather than effect, or whole rather than part. The question ‘What is a Cape Verdean?’ becomes highly problematic because of the multiplicity of contexts of interaction, of different social roles and positions and of transient rules applying to interaction in different societies. Being a Cape Verdean in the US is different from being a Cape Verdean in Cape Verde; therefore, space becomes a significant dimension, as a framing variable of Cape Verdean identity. Moreover, whether one is a *Merkanu* or a *Kriolu*, both in the US, is defined in relation to the dimension of time. The dimensions of time and space interact with many other variables such as sex, age, social class, education and phenotypical characteristics, which, in turn, interact, producing a feedback effect on the representation, meaning and perception of the variables. They interact with and in the system as a whole, which interacts with its parts and modifies them. This is when the concept of autopoiesis becomes important.

The application of the theory of autopoiesis to the social sciences was developed by Luhmann (1995) to conceptualise the reproduction of making distinction. Autopoietic systems are defined as systems that produce the conditions of their own existence. Operations are their constitutive element, in the sense that autopoietic systems maintain themselves through operations recursively attached to preceding operations. Consequently, a system only exists as an actually ongoing operation for the time period between the preceding and the following operation. As a result, autopoietic systems are characterised by an autonomous consciousness of time, in the sense that no direct equivalence exists between a system’s internal time consciousness and time consciousness in its surroundings. Every change within a system takes place according to the system’s own tempo and in the system’s own rhythm. Consequently, the conclusion is that it is not only according to the calculus of indication, but also according to the theory of autopoiesis, that social systems should be understood as phenomena operating in their own time.

Ethnic identity and autopoiesis

To define and to ponder the concept of identity is no easy task. Nor is it to ponder, define and quantify ethnic identity. As Horowitz wrote:

The minimal definition of an ethnic unit ... is the idea of common provenance, recruitment primarily through kinship, and a notion of distinctiveness whether or not this consists of a unique inventory of cultural traits. This is close to Max Weber’s conception of a ‘subjective belief’ in ‘common descent’ ... whether or

not an objective blood relationship exists. To this I would add a minimal scale requirement, so that ethnic membership transcends the range of face-to-face interactions, as recognized kinship need not. So conceived, ethnicity easily embraces groups differentiated by colour, language, and religion; it covers 'tribes', 'races', 'nationalities', and 'castes'. (Horowitz 1985: 53)

A definition such as this one gives anyone the implicit possibility to identify with the ethnic origin she or he would like to, thus making a conceptual definition of ethnic identity even more difficult. Because of the complexity of Cape Verdean history, which incorporates several origins for the rise of a Creole ethnic group through miscegenation, the assumption that creolisation would end at a certain point seems to be a mistake that many neo-essentialist theorists stubbornly repeat.

We must realise that there is not and never can be one (single) universal Cape Verdean ethnic identity. What we are talking about is a multiple ethnic reconstruction, which is different in each of the countries where there are immigrant communities and in the archipelago of Cape Verde itself. On the one hand, this is due to the confrontation with the differentiating others, and, on the other hand, to the contexts and conjunctures in which that interaction takes place.¹⁴ This ethnic identity refers to the way an individual uses racial, national, cultural or religious concepts to identify and establish relations with others. Ethnic identity thus conceived incorporates, complementarily, both an element of self-attribution and of attribution by others (hetero-attribution). This specificity reconfigures itself; recreates itself, in a complex concept of (self- and/or hetero-) Cape Verdean identity, of self-Cape Verdeanness and hetero-Cape Verdeanness.

As Saint-Maurice (1997: 157) points out in her study of the identity reconstruction of Cape Verdeans in Portugal, identities emerge from the perception of difference which takes place in the contexts of interaction with significant others, relevant interaction partners, members of their group or of some other group. In the Portuguese case ethnic origin and social class are main dimensions that, in the confrontation with the other, enhance that differentiation, and consequently bring about the notion of Cape Verdeanness. By assuming an ethnic origin as a pre-existing variable, Saint-Maurice defines it without operationalising it.

The Cape Verdean identity, created from (and within) the diaspora, must be seen as a social recreation in time and space. It is a process that implies a close relationship between the cultural claim and the political claim. Its ultimate referential would be the other along with society and the nation-state in which they are inserted and the socio-political conjunctures in which that integration takes place. As França et al. (1999: 20) point out:

It is in the interaction with the host society that groups create their identity, by difference or opposition, that is, they delineate their outsidersness from the way they represent the others and themselves. Thus, identity is only outlined from the moment in which there is a perception of the difference.

The concept of ethnic identity, which is part of a larger social identity, is here part of a system that is not only dynamic but also non-linear. According to the premises of complexity, this is also called a self-organisational system (autopoietic). We are trying to extrapolate the concept of autopoiesis (which comes from biology) for the realm of the non-biological: the realm of the self and of personal identity, as Luhmann did.¹⁵ The objective is not to start a new movement of biological reductionism, but to extend the concept of autopoiesis to an area for which it was not originally intended. The point is that the maintenance and constitution of an identity are functionally related to biology and to the autopoietic organisation, not on a molecular level, but in terms of production. Identity is the constant source of autopoietic updating and maintenance. One of the main changes proposed by Luhmann in his analysis of social systems was to replace the concept of an open/closed system with the concept of autopoiesis (autopoietic system). Autopoiesis means that a complex system, aided by its own elements, reproduces its elements and its structures in an operationally closed process (Luhmann 1995). This system is duly framed by time and space.

This means that its present is largely explained in relation to its future, i.e. with the representations of the future in an autopoietic and self-referential process (Luhmann 1976, 1990, 1995) but, which, at the same time, contains all the past which supports it,¹⁶ and emerges only because of the daily confrontation with the other. Thus, we can only apprehend Cape Verdeanness in relation to its colonial past and with Portugal, but to fully understand Cape Verdeanness we need to think about how we anticipate the future. The time dimension is therefore essential. To embrace the space dimension, we must consider the two archipelagos, Cape Verde and the migratory archipelago (the diaspora). We should consider this relation as multipolar and complex, in which everyone is influenced by each and all players. The existence of an archipelago of origin and of a migratory archipelago, the *nha terra* and the *terra longe*, is a distinguishing feature of Cape Verdeanness in relation to other identities. The fact that Cape Verdean migrations consist of different stages (Góis 2002), and the fact that these migrations are made up of distinct individuals with varied personal identities adapted to the circumstances in which they develop, is a complexifying element.

Conclusion

One of the most important principles of explanation in social sciences states that social facts occur because of other social facts. This principle has met strong resistance, both in the practical knowledge, and in the forms of representation. The conflict between common sense argumentation and the analytical demands of research is well known. If common expressions such as 'treating social facts as things' or 'explaining the social by the social' are used, instead of attempting to generalise according to models developed by the natural sciences, we should define social as a concept with its own logic, independent of individual minds. The analysis of Cape Verdean identity assumes implicit and explicit shapes, which, originally, almost always possess the characteristics that gave place to the debates about central issues, such as the relationship between nature and culture, individuals and society, or the relation between different groups and cultures (us versus the others). Sociological research has always tried to fight common sense by questioning it, but, in this case, common sense is an important feature of Cape Verdeanness. The social sciences and, obviously, sociology, aim to explain a certain social fact from a critical and external point of view, not from an individual perspective that considers culture, ethnic group, geography or the mores of a certain group as almost natural features. But as far as identity is concerned, these self and hetero definitions of Cape Verdeanness are based precisely on such characteristics, with the aggravating consequence that they are seen as essentialist and, in one sense, immutable. In a certain way, we are faced with a situation in which common sense reduces social complexity to a lowest common denominator, giving it a name that, in our opinion, is already a sign of prejudice.

Facing all these contingencies, we arrive at the conclusion that, ultimately, ethnic identity, being or not being Cape Verdean, depends on an internal condition of the individual (self-attribution), which is therefore subjective; but, on the other hand, it also depends on a hetero-attribution (local and contingent) which is, once again, subjective. In this complex process, the borders of identity are the outcome of this daily confrontation. The existence of a singular Cape Verdean identity is compromised, whereas the existence of a complex Cape Verdean identity, a transnational identity, can be proclaimed but not empirically checked. It seems to us that we have to start from the beginning and consider the definition of Cape Verdeanness as indefinite. It is too complex and contradictory to be simplistically assumed, but, if there is a Cape Verdean identity, it will be founded on a transnational rather than a national basis. As this hypothesis aims only at questioning consensus we obviously need to launch a debate about all these issues.

Notes

- 1 We are speaking here of hundreds of thousands of Cape Verdeans and their descendants in Portugal, the United States and Western Europe.
- 2 We refer to this world as 'archipelago-like' because it is and was discontinuous in space.
- 3 The concept of ethnic identity is re-emerging in the study of contemporary migration even though it is not widely accepted (see Kaplan & Brady 2004).
- 4 A system may be an atom or a galaxy, a molecule, a cell, a living being or a society. A system is a combination of different elements (Morin 1990).
- 5 For example, on ethnic identity see Horowitz (2001); on race see Appiah and Gutmann (1998) and Waters (2001); on national identity see Citrin (1990), Gellner (1994) and Walzer (1990); on linguistic identity see Laitin (1998); on religious identity see Weber (2001); on gender see Scott (2001); on class see Willis (1990).
- 6 As we use it now, an 'identity' refers to either a) a social category, defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic attributes or expected behaviors or b) socially distinguishing features that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential (or a and b at once). These two social categories may be termed 'social' and 'personal'. (Fearon 1999: 3)
- 7 These webs are not material structures, like fishing nets or spider webs. They are functional webs, networks of relation between several processes. In a cell, for instance, these processes are chemical reactions among the cell's molecules. In a social network, they are, mostly, communication processes.
- 8 When we think about complexity, the idea that comes to our minds is chaos, disorder and darkness. However, such an impression is almost the opposite of the etymological meaning of the word. The word comes from *plexus*, which means interlaced, woven together.
- 9 Luhmann (1995) defines complexity in a system as a line beyond which it is no longer possible to establish relations among all the elements of the system. For Luhmann the concept of complexity is related to the impossibility of establishing relations among all the elements of a unit. Thus, complexity means that a selection becomes necessary in order to update the relations among the elements. The differentiation between elements and relations, which allows us to observe a situation of selective bonding, is, therefore, essential for the definition of complexity. The complexity of the system is an organised complexity, made up by the selective connection of the elements of the system; it is the selective organisation of the autopoiesis.
- 10 Most of the research in social sciences has been based on what Fearon (1999) defines as social identity and, in particular, what he calls 'type identities' (class, sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, etc.) as opposed to 'role identities' (father, lawyer, etc.). See also a discussion of the primordial-constructivist debate in chapter one of this current volume.
- 11 See several debates that take place on the internet about the Cape Verdean identity: to be or not to be African, to be or not to be black American.
- 12 It is not our intention to get polemical about these concepts in this chapter.
- 13 Lorenz (1963) coined the expression 'butterfly effect' to explain how small random fluctuations may lead to unpredictable outcomes in a complex dynamic (or non-linear) system.
- 14 The possibility that this non-singular identity, which is constantly being recreated, is one of the distinguishing features of the Cape Verdean ethnic identity is one hypothesis we bear in mind. In this case there would always be a single Cape Verdean ethnic identity, which would obviously assume different content and intensities according to the context in which the individuals associated with it are integrated. In this

- particular case the dynamic of the identity system would paradoxically be an identity feature. We will analyse this possibility in further studies.
- 15 Luhmann considers self-organisation and autopoiesis to be two different concepts. The first concept refers to the creation of structures of the system through operations of the system itself. The second concept refers to the determination of the status from which other operations are possible through the operation of the system itself – the former appears to refer to the *structures* of the system and the latter to the *operations* of the system (Luhmann 2004).
- 16 With the intention of applying the concept of autopoiesis to sociological theory, Luhmann realised that the theorem of self-organisation had already been applied in the biochemistry of cognitive processes by the Chileans Maturana and Varela. They coined this concept from the Greek word '*poiesis*', which means 'production'. Therefore, autopoiesis means self-production. The word appeared for the first time in international literature in 1974, in an article published by Varela, Maturana and Uribe to define living beings as systems that reproduce themselves. An autopoietic system is therefore both product and producer.

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