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“Immigrant Life is Not Life”: racism and sexism in Cape Verde[1]

Vinícius Venancio[2]

Abstract

Inspired by Lélia Gonzalez’s essay “Racism and Sexism in Brazilian Culture”, this working paper turns to another post-colonial nation, Cape Verde, and analyzes two case studies that shed light upon how the intersection between race and gender produces specific forms of violence in the bodies and souls of men and women from continental Africa living in the capital, Praia. The first case examines personal stories of young women who are exploited for their domestic labor; while their relationship with their employer is presented using the discourse of kinship, their situation is more akin to slavery. The second case looks at attacks on and murder of Bissau-Guinean men; the brutality of the violence and the lack of public attention demonstrates how some lives are considered more valuable than others. Both cases illustrate the degree to which race and gender continue to operate as social markers of domination in the lives of immigrant populations who are seen as blacker than the locals in Cape Verde.

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Introduction

It was one of my last days of fieldwork in 2022 when I sat down with Mariame[3] in her shop to conduct an interview with her to understand a little more about the difficulties she faced as a Senegalese woman living in Praia, the capital of Cape Verde on the island of Santiago. While she was answering the questions I posed, she uttered the phrase that is the title of this paper: *vida de imigranti é ka vida* ("immigrant life is not life"). She listed some of the issues reflected by this statement, including the distance from her family, the prejudice she suffered, and even the difficulty of renting accommodation. For her, the last two issues were the result of the same problem: the *desprezo* ("despise") that some Cape Verdeans have for people from continental West Africa come to live in their country.

Mariame felt that this discrimination was being directed not only towards her, an adult woman who was born and raised in Senegal, but also towards her youngest son. Even though her child was born in Cape Verde, he was seen as a foreigner because he was the son of Senegalese parents. The *desprezo*, as she said, was expressed in the Cape Verdeans' use of the term *mandjaku* – the name of one of the largest ethnic groups in Guinea Bissau; however, in Cape Verde, it is used pejoratively for all people from continental Africa, thereby equating different populations from different nationalities. *Mandjaku* thus becomes a synonym of being a savage, illiterate, dirty, *truly black*, and other demerits (Rocha 2009).

Encountering such a situation – repeatedly – in a majority black African country[4] brought me to the classic[5] article by Afro-Brazilian scholar Lélia Gonzalez, "Racism and Sexism in Brazilian Culture" (2021), originally published in 1984. She begins her narrative with an anecdote about an event in which "some whites" invited *blacks* to a party to launch a book about black people and their forms of sociability in Brazil. The problem started – or rather, the *quizumba* (Brazilian word of Central African origin meaning "trouble/confusion") was on – when a "sassy *neguinha* [pejorative Brazilian word for black girl]", in the words of the storyteller, took the microphone and complained about the spatial segregation of black people happening at the event: black people were meant to sit at the back of the room, in crowded tables, and could not participate. After this, general confusion erupted and the event had to end. As described by the narrator, every black person who was there said that the one that should be blamed for the whole situation was undoubtedly "that sassy *neguinha*" (Gonzalez 2021: 372), who would get in trouble with the whites for not knowing how to stay in "her place".

Following this illustrative example, Gonzalez presents the following thesis to understand how black people have introjected anti-black racism:

[3] Some information has been omitted to conceal the identity of my interlocutors. All names have been changed to preserve their identities.

[4] Although Cape Verdean legislation prohibits race from being asked about in national statistical data (Furtado & Lobo 2023:63), which prevents us from having official data on the racial self-perception of the country's resident population, it is undeniable that, phenotypically, the national population is closer to blackness than whiteness (Anjos and Rocha 2022). Some national elites have historically tried to refute this policy and recognize racial difference in the country (Meintel (1984).

[5] In "Why read (these) classics?", a recent article about how classical anthropologists are made – or selected – in Brazil, Carla Teixeira and Raíssa Cunha (2023) argue that becoming a classic author in our field is a process that not only depends on the historical moment, but is also strongly affected by gender, race, geographical origin, and other social markers of domination. For this reason, and in light of the growing capillarity of Gonzalez, an Afro-Brazilian anthropologist (or *Amefrican*, as she proposes) across the Black Atlantic, I choose to call her article a classic, since it already has received such a designation in non-hegemonic networks of anthropology. Referring to her article as a classic is also an invitation to unwhiten our pantheon of classics.

> "Ultimately, what we can perceive from it is the identification of the dominated with the dominant. And that was already very well analyzed by authors like Fanon, for example. Our attempt here, though, is to inquire about the cause of this identification. That is, what happened in order for the myth of racial democracy to be so widely accepted and disseminated? What were the processes that would have determined its construction? What does it hide beyond what it shows?" (Gonzalez 2021: 372)

The recurring problem that Gonzalez identifies in Brazil has striking similarities with the scenes I saw in Cape Verde during my doctoral research: the internalization of the Lusotropicalist ideology, expressed in self-blame and fights between black people even in scenarios of anti-black racism. Lusotropicalism is an idea that originated from (white) Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, who suggested that Portugal was "the European colonizer who best succeeded in fraternizing with the so-called inferior races. He was the least cruel in his relations with his slaves" (Freyre 1986: 185). Subsequently, the Portuguese fascist-dictatorial Estado Novo ("New State", 1933–1974) adopted this idea as a justification for the continuation of its colonial practices in African contexts. The main idea supported by Lusotropicalism ideology is that the Portuguese type of colonialism produced race blindness instead of the racial discrimination of other colonies. In Brazil, this supposed race blindness came to be known as racial democracy.

Racial democracy, in turn, is the racist and nationalist pseudo-theory that racial differences were less marked and violent in Brazil – and in other parts of the Luso-colonized world – than in regions colonized by other nations. As support for this claim, reference is often made to the mixed-race populations who emerged in places like Brazil and Cape Verde as a result of sexual relations between white men and black women. Even though most of them were rapes (Carneiro 2003; Gonzalez 2021), Freyre reads them as consensual relationships and hence as a sign of a lack of racial prejudice in Portuguese colonialism.

To ensure its stability and continuity as a "small but honorable" (Trajano Filho 2003 my translation) imperial nation, Portugal made use of the "black pet" system (Hurston 1943). In other words, as the basis of its colonial exploitation, the Portuguese empire relied on the strategy of knowledge and divide in order to govern (Pereira 2021), elevating the creole elites to positions in the lower administrative echelon in order to manage colonial territories (Henriques 2016; Trajano Filho 1998). As pointed out by Miguel de Almeida, "Portuguese colonialism in Africa was subordinate, administered from a weak center, a semi-peripheral country" (2007: 37, my translation) that lacked sufficient people of its own to guarantee the management of its colonial territories and their populations.

Thus, Almeida (2007) argues, in spite of some features that distinguish the Portuguese form of colonialism from that of other nations, it is not distinguished by particular kindness or a lesser amount of violence. As in other colonial systems, racial classification and hierarchization embedded itself deeply into the structure of the societies colonized by Portugal. Both in Brazil and Cape Verde, the Lusotropicalist ideology produced the feeling of identification of the dominated (black populations) with the dominators (the Portuguese).

During fieldwork, I saw this identification produced in the interpersonal relationships between Cape Verdeans and Africans from continental West Africa. While Cape Verdean social scientists have been paying increasing attention to the civilization cleavages – or the use of white masks to cover up black skin, as Fanon (2008) formulates it – by Cape Verdeans towards their Senegalese and

Bissau-Guinean neighbors (Anjos and Rocha 2022), there has as yet been little research exploring the physical and material violence directed at this population.

The "white masks" used by Cape Verdeans to distinguish them from other West Africans consists in presenting themselves as more "civilized". As a middle-class Cape Verdean woman once told me, "Senegalese and Bissau Guinean women are way different from us because they eat with the hands, while Cape Verdeans use fork and knife". In fact, the spoon is the utensil most frequently used by Cape Verdeans for their meals; nonetheless, this type of discourse is widespread among Upper Guinea Cost elites (specially the creolized ones), among the creole elite in Guinea Bissau (Trajano Filho 1998), in Ghana (Pierre 2019), among wealthy women in Liberia (Moran 2018), and as a distinguished way of presenting yourself in Sierra Leone (Ménard 2023).

To give flesh and blood to the statement made by Mariame, this paper analyzes how the naturalization of Lusotropicalist ideology in Cape Verde during the colonial period continues to be active in everyday life; in addition, it demonstrates how race is employed in a similar way to the case observed by Gonzalez, dehumanizing black(er) people. For this, I use the idea of *cultural neurosis*, which means that although people do not admit that race is a structural factor that has shaped their society into the present, anti-black racism is still grammatical and alive in their daily lives. In other words, I focus on how material and physical violence are a facet of racial and gender discrimination.

Following the analytical framework proposed by Gonzalez, I look at the effects of the intersection between gender and race on the daily lives of the continental West African population living in Praia, the Cape Verdean capital, through two case studies which are similar to situations described by Gonzalez – the exploitation of women's domestic labor and the murder of black(er) men. The first case examines a situation of domestic labor analogous to slavery experienced by non-Cape Verdean African women, and the second considers the circumstances surrounding the murder of men of Bissau-Guinean origin and the (lack of) public responses to these murders.

All the data presented here was collected during my fieldwork in Praia between May and November 2022 and between May and July 2023. For the research, I employed the biographical method as well as life history and oral history. As Guita Debert rightly points out, "life history is an instrument that fills an insurmountable void" (1986: 141 my translation) in the study of groups – particularly subaltern ones – in contexts of great social diversity that have been neglected by social scientists, as well as fostering dialogue between interlocutors and social scientists. However, this is not to say life histories represent the truest picture of the past; rather, they act as a tool to "reformulate our assumptions and hypotheses" (ibid.: 142 my translation).

The paper is structured as follows: in the first section, I discuss the historical and current flows of people between continental Africa and Cape Verde in order to show the long history of these movements, how they have changed over time, and their importance for Cape Verdean society. In the second section, I present the stories of Afi and Maria, discussing how they ended up in situations akin to domestic slavery and how this violence is masked by discourses of kinship. In the third section, I look at the violent murder of Braima Barri in order to show the reification of hierarchies regarding whose lives are valued. Finally, in the concluding remarks, I tie together these ideas and examples using an intersectional perspective.

I. Cape Verde, a Country between Flows

The founding of Cape Verde – i.e., the process of occupation carried out by the Portuguese on part of the islands of the archipelago starting in 1460 – is, I argue, a central milestone in the Portuguese establishment of the Modern Age and mercantilism. As the Cape Verdean historian António Correia e Silva (2021) postulates, Cape Verde was a frontier between two worlds for Europeans: the world of Europe, familiar territory to the colonialists, and the world of Africa, an unknown zone beyond Europe's borders, characterized by "radically" different civilizational matrices and rife with diseases against which their European bodies lacked antibodies.

At this frontier, a third social world was generated, the result of the violent colonial encounter between whites and blacks, Europeans and Africans. The social sciences have developed the concept of creole societies to describe this new type of society. Even though the notion of creoleness refers to mixing, it should be remembered that the colonial encounter ultimately produced a socialized ambivalence: i.e., "As regards the Haitian, it must be recognized that the two ancestral elements in his civilization have never been completely merged. As a result, his outwardly smoothly functioning life is full of inner conflict, so that he has to raise his defenses in order to make his adjustment within the historical and cultural combination of differing modes of life that constitute his civilization" (Herskovits 1937: 295).

The uniqueness of creole societies has given rise, especially in recent decades, to a plethora of studies (Knörr and Trajano Filho 2018), especially focusing on the mixtures, fusions, and new products that emerge in the triad of language, culture, and identity. However, the idea can also function as a means to paint over racial cleavages – which at no time ceased to exist (cf. Anjos and Rocha 2022; Cidra 2021; Meintel 1984) even in places like Cape Verde, which has embraced creolization as a symbol of national identity and a society supposedly without racial hierarchies.

That race continues to function as a social category in Cape Verde is clear from a study by Deirdre Meintel in the early 1970s, which documented numerous racial classification terms: *bermedju, branco di cabeça seca, mulato claro, mixto, branco di cabelo crespo, mulato sucuro, negro, preto furrado, branco di dinheiro, branco, preto, morena, morena clara, morena escura, mulato, mulato claro di cabeça seca, africano, preto di Guiné, tipo europeo, castanha, negro bermedjo*. Five decades after Meintel's investigation, my field research uncovered other grammars of difference based on race, such as the terms *badiu; sampadjudu; mandjaku; amigo; branco-de-terra; branco das ilhas; brandjaku; branco do Platô; badiu di fora e badiu di dentru; pretu finu, rostu limpu; branku; branku claru; branku escuru; tuga; taliana; Fogo; copo leite*.[6]

In this vein, as Cláudio Furtado (2012) points out in relation to the idea of Cape Verdean "creole singularity", the Cape Verdean intellectual elite aimed to construct the country discursively not as an ethnic and transracial society, but as a post-racial one. However, there is a significant problem with this self-understanding of the national intelligentsia: the post-racial – that is, abandonment of race as a social marker of difference – never arrived in the country, and race continues to be a central factor in producing the difference between Cape Verdeans and "Africans" perceived as a homogeneous mass.

[6] A detailed discussion of the racial history of Cape Verde in all its complexity would go beyond the scope of this working paper. For a more comprehensive account, please see my PhD thesis (Venancio 2024a), especially the introduction, chapter six, and the conclusion.

The idea of *mestizaje*, creoleness, the existence of the mulatto, and the valorization of the Creole emerge as a way to advance more quickly in the game set by the civilizing and colonial process, which uses the discursive notion of race to distinguish between those who are human and those who are not (Hall 1996). When creoleness is positivized, it means that the racial hierarchies are silenced, but do not disappear. Pretending that race ceased to exist in those post-slavery societies in the name of a creole ecumene is a way to try to occupy the status held by whites (Furtado 2012).

In this respect, the most symptomatic sign of the internal conflicts present within Cape Verdean society is anti-blackness. In the internal history of Cape Verde, the black man par excellence, the one who was looked down upon on various levels, was the *badiu*.[7] This term is a Creole version of *vadio*, a word used for black Africans who escaped slave labor on the island, and who came to be seen as lazy. Nowadays, it is applied to those born on the island of Santiago, who are seen as “blacker”, more African, more violent, and less literate than those from the other Cape Verdean islands (Venancio 2020: 63–65). The opposite of the *badiu* is the *sampadjudu* (people from “whiter” islands like Brava, Fogo, and Sao Vicente); thus, people from Mindelo (the second largest city in Cape Verde, located on the island Sao Vicente) are seen – and see themselves – as more cosmopolitan and Lusitanian than those from Santiago (Anjos and Rocha 2022: 113).[8] However, certain aspects of the history of the island of Santiago, such as the fact that it is the most populous in the archipelago, as well as the fact that its inhabitants reverted political power to themselves during the first years of independence, made it possible to concentrate some political power in the hands of its elite. And with this political power, the *badiu* blackness remained part of the nation – but not without tensions (Anjos and Rocha 2022).

Complementing this scenario, the post-independence years are also marked by the solidification of the grammar of difference (Cooper and Stoler 1997: 3) based on anti-blackness, in this case due to the growing presence of citizens from other continental West African nations on Cape Verdean soil. With the archipelago having served for five centuries as a halfway point, a passage of no return, an intermediary between the white and black worlds, an Atlantic crossroads, this character of being a non-place – neither there nor here, neither this nor that, neither black nor white – has become the defining mark of the Cape Verdean social structure.

But how does anti-blackness appear in the continental African flows to Cape Verde? As Cape Verdean historian and anthropologist António Carreira (1983: 258–259) points out, there was a continuous flow of people from the African continent, especially from the Lusophone overseas territories (Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique), to the archipelago from the beginning of the twentieth century through independence. However, since the 1980s, Cape Verde has seen an increase in the influx of citizens from other African nations as well as a diversification of their origins.

At the end of the twentieth century there was an increase in the immigration of Senegalese, Nigerians, Gabonese, Sierra Leoneans, and Bissau-Guineans to the Cape Verdean island Boa Vista (Lobo 2021: 249) and a similar increase in immigration from Ghana, Mali, Guinea-Conakry, and the Ivory Coast (Rocha 2009). In addition to the pluralization of nationalities, the socio-economic profile

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[7] This negative dichotomy is applied even more strongly to African women from the continent, who are seen as blacker and less civilized than the Cape Verdeans.

[8] I am grateful to Anaïs Ménard for pointing out that the construction of a grammar of difference based on race was very common in precolonial West African history: during this period people with mixed descent labelled themselves Portuguese, Luso-African, white, Afro-British, etc., and black in that region meant slave, so being not black was being a free man. For a bibliography about this topic see Trajano Filho (1998), Moran (2018), Pierre (2019), and Ménard (2023).

of the people arriving in Cape Verde also changed, with the majority of them having little schooling, which means that they are concentrated in the least qualified areas of the labor market, thus promoting a process of social and economic marginalization (Furtado 2016: 234).[9]

According to the recent Cape Verdean immigration statistics report, which collects data on living conditions and poverty among immigrants for the years 2015–2018, in 2018, the immigrant population living in Cape Verde reached its lowest level since 2013, totaling 14,347 people (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2019: 15). Of these, 63.4% were men and 90.5% lived in urban areas. Praia alone accounted for 43.5% of the total immigrant population. Of all the immigrants, 43.4% came from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and another 36.4% from other countries in continental Africa. The main countries of origin of these African immigrants were Guinea Bissau (31.3%), São Tomé and Príncipe (23.5%), Angola (12.4%), and Senegal (5.8%).

The intensification of continental African flows to Cape Verde produces different contacts resulting from these mobilities; this, in turn, leads to a series of new integration processes and conflicts. Integration processes can be seen in the increase in the number of followers of Islam[10] – once the Cape-Verdean population was predominantly Catholic –, especially as a result of marriages between Cape Verdean women and Senegalese and Bissau-Guinean men (Tavares 2019: 50); these marriages are not without conflicts stemming from racial separation, or what W.E.B. du Bois dubbed a "color line".[11]

Caroline Panis describes a color line in the form of spatial segregation that is particularly pronounced on the more tourist-oriented islands.

> "The small town is spatially segregated, with tourists housed in the southernmost streets, residents living mainly in the town center, where there are shops, restaurants and bars, and migrants living further north, in buildings where it is not clear whether they are being renovated or are in ruins, and where walls or roofs are sometimes missing, often in very precarious or even unhealthy conditions." (Panis 2018: 134, my translation)

The construction of a color line that determines what possibilities are open to immigrants is also visible in the labor market. On the islands of Boa Vista and Sal, for example, the least qualified jobs are usually occupied by immigrants and internal migrants (Furtado 2016), especially *badius*, a fact also observed by Lobo (2021). In this multifaceted relationship, the use of the category *mandjaku*, the name of one of Guinea Bissau's main ethnic groups, emerged in the 1990s and came to be used pejoratively to refer to all people from the African continent.

Eufémia Rocha, a pioneer in the study of West African migration to Cape Verde, argues that the term *mandjaku* was used not only to designate where people came from, but also to construct difference, which is "underlined and functions as a stigma: skin color, name, clothing, ways of being, behaving, feeling, language, in other words, both physical appearance and culture trigger suspicion and rejection" (Rocha 2009: 14). This attitude, which stems from "idealized" or "traditional racial

[9] This is not to say that immigrants in the past were exclusively well-educated or of higher socio-economic status: my examination of material in the Cape Verdean National Archive shows that poor and non-educated continental African people have always been coming to the archipelago (Venancio 2024a).

[10] Although some data points out that the Islamic community in Cape Verde represents 2% of all religions, there is no data about the immigrants' religion specifically.

[11] W.E.B. du Bois (1903) calls the color line the great problem of the twentieth century. With this concept, he refers to a phenomenon that materially divides white and non-white populations, something that recurs across the globe and that structures the capitalist world-system in force. For the Cape Verdean context, the color line divides Cape Verdeans from "Africans" – or *mandjakus*, as they commonly say.

blindness” (Marcelino 2016: 131, 117) that marks the conception of Cape Verdean society, leads to the construction of a racially oriented division between “us” and “others”.

Even though my focus here is not on cataloging all the different ways in which racism and anti-blackness can emerge among Cape Verdeans against the continental West African population, it is important to understand that race, in the Cape Verdean context and elsewhere, is socially not only interpreted by phenotypical features but also by clothes, names, behaviors, etc. (Cidra 2021: 17–19). Thus, as Eufémia Rocha (2020) points out, the relations between Cape Verdeans and the continental West African population in Praia tend to be marked by

> “1. an aversion to [continental West Africans] as ‘strangers’, involving offensive treatment, which characterizes xenophobia;
>
> 2. the feeling of being victims of a racism that homogenized them as culturally inferior;
>
> 3. and the way in which, through daily interactions, they experienced the construction of a fiction of biological difference/biological danger.” (Rocha 2020: 137, my translation)

The use of the term *mandjaku* is part of a homogenizing practice applied by Cape Verdeans to represent “all Africans, all black people who come from Africa” (Rocha 2009: 73), regardless of what the recipients of the message say about themselves. In a conversation with Helena, the daughter of Cape Verdeans who was born and raised in Bissau, she noted that calling someone a *mandjaku* is a way for “Cape Verdeans [to say that they] are not that kind of African”.

Thus, the influx of Africans from other countries into Cape Verde has jeopardized the country’s main national ideology, *morabeza,* an idea that defines the country as a hospitable land with a “super cordiality”, as Jose Carlos Gomes dos Anjos (2000: 201) writes, borrowing a phrase from Gabriel Mariano (1991). As my fieldwork showed, this is because *morabeza* is perceived to be aimed at those from the Global North and/or whites, who are generally seen as tourists and international cooperators, while for Africans from the continent there is *maurabeza*, i.e. the opposite of *morabeza* (*mau* means “bad” in Portuguese). Although surprising to some, this attitude only reflects how the *homem cordial* (de Holanda 2012), who is receptive and non-violent towards his hierarchical superiors (especially in terms of race), is one of the colonial spoils left by Portugal in its former colonies.

One facet of the practice of coexistence (and violence) between Cape Verdeans and immigrants is described in the following.

II. As If They Were Family: West African women and forced domestic labor

During my fieldwork, I had lunch almost every day at one of the small restaurants run by Bissau-Guinean and Senegalese women in Sucupira, Praia’s main commerce center, and after that I would sit on the benches in Parque 5 de Julho close to the market. On one of these days, still at the beginning of the fieldwork carried out in 2022, a young woman came up to me to ask where she could enroll in the Social Registry. I pointed her to the Praia city council offices at the back of the park and, noticing her accent, asked if she was a foreigner.

When she said yes, I asked her to come back after registering so that we could talk about the research I was conducting, which she did. I learned that her name was Afi; she was from a West African country and only 21 years old at that time. Single and childless, she had completed her basic education (high school). When we first met, she said she was not working, although she had

experience in sewing – in her homeland, Afi had worked as a seamstress but she sold her sewing machine before coming to Cape Verde.

When I asked about her arrival, she told me that she had landed in Cape Verde in September 2019 and was received by a friend of her mother's, who was her *patrícia* – in other words, from the same country – but she did not provide further details. As there are not many people from her native country in Praia, I asked her if she knew Omolara, a well-known trader from her homeland who was married to a *white* and rich Cape Verdean. That question made Afi's expression change from tranquility to hate. At once she told me that Omolara was the woman who had financed her move to Praia, promising her a guaranteed job as a saleswoman with a monthly salary of 12,000 escudos (equivalent to about 120 euros), the national minimum wage at that time. Upon arrival, however, she was confronted with a very different situation: she discovered that in addition to working in the shop, she was expected to look after Omolara's children and take responsibility for all the housework in Omolara's house, located in a wealthy neighborhood in Praia. And if the promised 12,000 escudos was already too little for that amount of work, the situation turned out to be even worse: Omolara paid her just 1,000 escudos a month.

Afi remained in this situation of forced labor for a year and five months, since she did not speak Cape Verdean Creole, the country's national language, and had no support network in the city. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic had started a few months after she arrived. As the country's economic crisis intensified, her employer added a new element to her exploitative relationship with Afi: Omolara tried to force her to have sex with an unknown man. For Afi, this was a step too far: she vehemently refused and was thrown out of the house where she lived and "worked" at ten o'clock at night, with nowhere to go and no one to turn to.

It was at this point, with nothing left to lose, that Afi decided to file a complaint with the Cape Verde public prosecutor's office. When we met again in mid-2023, the complaint had still not been finalized: she had not even been summoned to give her testimony. Because of the opening of the enquiry, her passport was withheld by national authorities, as the complaint was classified as human trafficking. However, due to the delay in processing the case, Afi went to reclaim her passport from the competent authorities with the justification that she wanted to remain in the country and continue with the complaint, so there would be no risk of her fleeing.

As she was already 21 at the time of the complaint, the Cape Verdean judiciary asked her if she wanted to stay in the country or return to her homeland, but she was emphatic when she said that *ka krê bai pa nha país* ("I didn't want to go to my country"). While she had family (her mother, three brothers, and a grandmother) in her homeland, she had no prospect of getting a formal job there and she would be expected to care for her grandmother. Even though she had spent months unemployed in Cape Verde and was unable to send money to her relatives, it was still preferable to be here, where there would be more job opportunities, such as the position she got in a hotel at the end of 2022 on one of the main tourist islands.

After being thrown out of the house where she had been exploited, Afi started living with a Cape Verdean friend in a *zona* (neighborhood) where few immigrants used to live. In spite of the fact that the person she had filed her complaint against was of high social standing in Praia, Afi had little trouble weaving networks of sociability and solidarity. She became an active figure in the association of her compatriots and took every opportunity she had to tell people what had happened to her, with the aim of alerting people to the false promises made by family and close friends during migration.

Shortly after our encounter, she started to work in a little restaurant owned by a Bissau-Guinean woman, who asked Afi to live in her home. She took advantage of Afi's presence to get her to sell lunch in one of Praia's markets, paying Afi only 300 escudos a day (less than 3 euros), which at the end of the month amounted to less than 9,000 escudos (90 euros). As sales were low, in mid-October 2022, three months after she had started that job, Afi was dismissed by the Guinean lady, leaving her homeless. She went back to work as a seamstress in the house where she rented a room – but fortunately not for long. A few weeks after my return to Brazil, Afi sent me a photo of herself with a huge smile, showing that she had been hired to work in a hotel on one of Cape Verde's "islands of the sun", where tourism is the mainstay of the economy.

If Afi's case is paradigmatic for thinking about the symbolic, physical, sexual, and material violence that can occur in migration from continental Africa to Cape Verde, unfortunately it was not the only such example I encountered during my fieldwork. Maria, a Bissau-Guinean hairdresser, experienced a situation similar to Afi's. About 30 years old at the time of our encounter, Maria told me that *nha irmõn ki trazem* ("it was my brother who brought me") to Cape Verde, where he was already living. She came to Praia because she was unemployed in Bissau and a Cape Verdean lady told her brother that she would pay for half of her ticket, offering her "housing, food and education". In addition to the material promises, what made her brother feel confident about the offer was the fact that the lady said that in her house Maria would be treated the same way as her children – *as if she were family*. In that context, the only service demanded from Maria in return was that she help out a little with the housework.

On arriving in Praia, Maria – just like Afi – found a situation very different from the one that had been promised. The lady's house was in Palmarejo, a neighborhood with a marked presence of rising middle-class people, and Maria said that the owner was neither rich nor poor, but she had good material conditions. However, Maria was forbidden several things. The owner of the house *ka ta dexam txiga na se geleira, ka põe mõn na kusa de ses fidjus, ka bai pa nenhum lugar* ("she wouldn't let me touch her fridge, I couldn't put my hands on her children's things, I couldn't go anywhere"). Although the owner of the house gave her a mobile phone when she arrived, Maria was unable to tell her relatives in Guinea Bissau what was happening to her, as her relatives lived in the countryside and had no access to technology.

This whole situation was made even worse by the fact that Maria did not understand Cape Verdean Creole very well, since she was only used to Bissau-Guinean Creole.[12] Thus, the young woman found herself in a complex situation, since in addition the language difficulties, she understood that *el era más esperta ki mi pamodi el sta na se país* ("she [the owner of the house] was smarter than me because she was in her country"): Maria knew neither the people, nor the place and thus found herself hostage to the situation. Although there was no physical aggression, Maria reported that the woman spent the whole day *a mandar boka* (screaming, complaining, and fighting) to her. Although it is common throughout Cape Verdean society, the act of *mandar boka* reveals social hierarchies: it is a behavior often directed at marginalized groups, as some LGBTQ+ friends explained me. And in Maria's case, the *mandar boka* was marked with the verbalization of the racial difference between

[12] With regard to the creoles spoken in Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau, there is an idea that the creole spoken in Guinea Bissau is a *crioulo fundo* (deep creole) – i.e., one that is closer to African languages than the one spoken in Cape Verde, which has a lexical base closer to Portuguese. Despite the differences and because of the intense flows between the two countries, both languages have a wide intersection of intelligibility.

them, with the lady calling her *burra* (stupid) and *suja* (dirty), two words commonly associated with continental West African people in Cape Verde.

In other words, in addition to all the material violence she experienced (the non-payment of her salary), there was continual psychological violence. As Maria realized that the owner of the house was not behaving as she had agreed – she had been promised that she would be treated like a daughter, while in reality she worked from the moment she woke up until the moment she went to bed – Maria took the initiative to pack her bag and leave the house in search of her brother. As expected, the owner of the house took her mobile phone.

As she said, her "luck" in this situation was that her brother had not only paid half the cost of the plane ticket – the other half of which was paid for by the lady –, but he was also the one who sent her the one thousand euros she needed to show at the airport to enter the country. This requirement of the Cape Verdean government is meant to ensure that foreigners who arrive have a basic means of subsistence if they do not have a relative in the country who can provide a guarantee. In practice, however, the requirement is applied almost exclusively to ECOWAS[13] nationals. For this reason, Maria said that "luckily I have my brother, he was my salvation". After this episode, she tried to *djobi vida* (build her life/seek better living conditions) for three months on the island of Boa Vista, but ended up returning to Praia, where she settled in Sucupira, got married, and had her first daughter.

Both cases presented here can be understood in relation to the practice of *fostering*. This practice, which is reasonably well-known in West Africa – as well as in other parts of the world – consists of a circulation of children between the homes of families who may or may not live in the same region or city and produces what Erdmute Alber refers to as a transfer in belonging (2013). However, the situation of these children may be marked by a hierarchical differentiation between the children and the families that take them in as well as exploitation of the children for their labor, as Andréa Lobo (2021) observes in relation to the circulation of children in Cape Verde[14] and Wilson Trajano Filho (1998: 448) for fosterage among the Bissau-Guinean creole elite.

Here, we are not dealing with children, but with newly adult women who are invited to live in a household and promised work in dignified conditions. When they arrive in the country, they are inserted and isolated inside the houses – the central place of production and reproduction of the family. It is also worth remembering that they are inserted in the social dynamics of a post-slavery society where there is a history of domestic work being a universe of black African women; this dynamic is enhanced by a scarcity of white women in the marriage market of the city of Praia (Anjos 2013).

In this way, the low-paid or unpaid labor of young immigrant women like Afi and Maria becomes fundamental to that context, since the reproduction of domestic groups (Fortes 1958) of the middle and upper classes in Atlantic post-slavery societies demands the presence of these women in order to materialize (Venancio 2022), once the *white* (or *whiter/civilizad)* mother does not have to do the housework. While asking for "maids" from other African countries, those women were searching for people who were hierarchically below them. Thus, kinship, gender, and race are intertwined in this

[13] Economic Community of West African States, a political and economic union in which Cape Verde is a member state.

[14] After I sent an article of my own about the relationship between race and cronyism in Brazil to a dear Cape Verdean friend, she replied to me with the following message: "Here it is common, children of siblings who are orphaned and are raised by an aunt or an uncle, therefore, nephews, cousins, etc., are raised in the family as *minine mandod*, which means 'employee'. There is a brutal difference in the treatment at home between the couple's children and the 'fostered' one, in everything. It is up to the person being given shelter to do the housework, take on the burden of household chores, keep the leftovers, or even have access to used things, in short, he/she gets the remnants of the house".

case on different fronts. The low-paid or unpaid work is the option for young women in situations of social vulnerability from other African countries.

Reflecting on the complexities of social relations, Carsten (2014) shows us that kinship is marked by coercive and negative dimensions – a fact that is routinely overlooked by us anthropologists. When Cape Verdean homeowners bring young women from continental West African countries into their homes with promises they do not fulfil, their choice reflects racial orientations inside family and kinship relations. In the denial of these women's rights and their dehumanization with an exhausting workload, there is a reification of the socially established place for West African populations in the Cape Verdean social structure: that of people without the right to social rights who are treated as second-class citizens.

The racially oriented perspective that is constructed at the heart of domestic relations occurs because there is a specific direction to the national origin of the women who will be exploited in domestic work: West Africa. The fact that there are no similar cases in Cape Verde involving nationals of countries with white populations shows how race, class, gender, and geographic origin produce an intersection that enhances vulnerabilities and amplifies possibilities of exploitation.

And, as previously shown, all of this occurs from analogies with the logic of family, either through the vocabulary of kinship – "as if she were my daughter" – or through affective memory: Afi's mother was a friend of Omolara and trusted her. From this perspective, we can better understand how the exploitation of labor for little or no pay is linked to the use of the vocabulary of kinship. As Igor Kopytoff argues,

> "In African usage, the range of connotations carried by kin terms is much wider and the connotations tap dimensions that are quite different from Western ones. (...) In Africa, such terms as 'mother' and 'sister' convey sentiments of warmth, nurture, and attachment (and a man can thus be said to be 'a mother' to someone). Other terms – such as 'father', 'mother's brother', or 'brother-in-law' – tap such formal dimensions of status as authority, subordination, obligation, obedience, alliance, etc." (Kopytoff 1987: 37–38)

Bearing in mind that we are talking about a post-slavery society, it is inevitable that we think about how the reproduction of the households that made up the Atlantic world during slavery was only possible because of the exploitation of domestic labor carried out by women, whether as wives or, as in this case, women who take on the role of daughters or even nieces who are in lower hierarchical positions. In the same way, treating Maria as a "daughter" is a way to remind girls like her that they are under the authority of the owner of the house where they went to live. In this universe marked by the transatlantic slave trade, it is not the patriarchal nuclear family model, but rather an updated form of the colonial notion of the domestic group described by Meyer Fortes (1958). In this kinship scheme, there is not just a place for these young women; they are necessary to ensure the reproduction of the domestic groups of wealth(ier) people, once even during colonial times or nowadays, having house employees – especially maids – is a sign of power and economic opulence.

Having no other possibilities for upward social mobility, these young women are entangled in a series of gifts offered to them; their work is seen as the counter-gift paid by them for the debt built up for the costs of their plane ticket, clothes, mobile phones – as in Maria's case – and even food. As Gonzalez (2021) points out, the confluence of these two social markers of domination – gender and race – creates specific difficulties for the black Brazilian women in her study; the same holds true in this case for women marked by foreignness. Taking advantage of the poorly developed or even non-

existent support networks that these young women from continental Africa have in the Cape Verdean capital, Cape Verdean nationals – or *patrícios* married to people from the Cape Verdean elite – end up reproducing the old scheme that helped build the Lusophone world: the exploitation of unpaid domestic labor by black women (or in this case, women read as blacker than the locals: Maria and Afi were dark-skinned women who worked for brown- and white-skinned families).

In this scenario, the women who have "taken in" those young women see their domestic labor as a form of gratitude, despite the fact that, as part of an unequal gift-giving relationship marked by debt, the young women cannot refuse to do any work asked of them. A refusal is automatically seen as a scorn and can lead to the relationship breaking down, as happened in Afi's case. However, although break-ups are seen as a negative aspect of relationships because the opposite of the gift is war (Mauss 2015: 200), in these cases it acts to free these girls from a relationship of abuse and exploitation that uses the vocabulary of kinship to justify itself.

This circuit of gifts and debts is perfectly summarized by David Graeber as follows:

> "There's no better way to justify relations founded on violence, to make such relations seem moral, than by reframing them in the language of debt – above all, because it immediately makes it seem that it's the victim who's doing something wrong." (Graeber 2014: 15–16)

In short, in a context of scarcity and lack of prospects in the country of origin, it seems like a sensible choice for women like Afi and Maria to accept the opportunities being offered to them in another country, and not accepting the offers would be read as stupidity by their families, who had no idea what the women would face after arrival. While immigrant women from mainland Africa end up being pushed – or trapped – into forced domestic labor in Cape Verde, the men are directed to construction sites and other jobs requiring manual labor, where they may become victims of physical violence if they challenge situations of discrimination. Turning now to the experiences of continental West African men in Cape Verde, differences in the treatment of women and men reveal the way that gender intersects with racially marked foreignness

III. "One Less Here": brutal killings of Bissau-Guinean men

Although a common stereotype around the world is that immigrants are dangerous or threatening (Sayad 1992) – a view shared by many in the Cape Verde (Furtado 2012) – the experience of the immigrants I spent time with during my fieldwork in Praia was the opposite: immigrant men found themselves the object of violence rather than the perpetrators. Throughout my fieldwork, I heard stories and rumors emerged about immigrant men who had been subjected to physical violence, in some cases even culminating in death. The first time the subject came up was in a conversation with Lúcia. While we were talking about the funeral rituals of Bissau-Guineans in Praia, she said that *els [Cape Verdeans] ka sta nem aí si istrangeiru ta morri* ("Cape Verdeans don't care if a foreigner dies"). As an example, she told me about how a Cape Verdean lady had passed by the house where a person was being mourned and asked her who had died. When Lúcia replied that it was an "African from the continent", the lady raised her hands to the sky in thanks and said *menos um li* ("one less here").

In addition to the *fladu fla* (rumors, gossip) that reached me, the events that unfolded around a particularly brutal murder of a man of Bissau-Guinean origin during my research demonstrated a

similar disregard for the lives of West African men in Cape Verde. I learned about the death from my acquaintances in the Bissau-Guinean community. At the end of September, while I was on my way to the Palace of Culture in the city center to watch a theatre performance by a Bissau-Guinean association with whom I had maintained relations, I received a message from a Brazilian friend, who would be accompanying me that evening, asking if the event was still happening. Stuck in the bus trying to get through the heavy traffic that marks the end of working hours in the city, I replied to her that I believed it was.

That is when she informed me that a Bissau-Guinean man had died the previous morning – or rather, had been brutally murdered – mobilizing the entire community to arrange the funeral rites and burial. As I had not accessed my Facebook account all day, I had not yet seen the posts there, which multiplied during the days that followed – including the dissemination of the photo taken during the autopsy. When I arrived at the theatre, I saw one of the *homis grandis* (big men) of the association that was organizing the performance, indicating that it would take place as scheduled.

As soon as I entered the room where the play was to be staged, I spotted Madalena, who invited me to sit next to her. Without me having to ask, she began talking about the subject that seemed to mobilize everyone in the room. She told me the young Guinean man, Braima Barri, had been murdered the night before in Bela Vista *zona*, on the outskirts of Praia. The man, she explained, was a much-loved member of the community and he was very hard-working, working as a security guard during the night and as a tailor during the day, and he never failed to send money remittances to his mother.

He had recently gone to Guinea Bissau, where he married a woman his age. To not be far from his new wife, he had paid for her tickets so she could come to live with him in Praia. Because of the difficulty of Cape Verdean border bureaucracy (a challenge even for me as a literate person who speaks Portuguese and understands the state bureaucracy), he also paid 25 *contos* (25,000 escudos) to a policeman he knew to get her safely into the country. However, on arriving at Praia International Airport, the woman was deported to Guinea-Bissau, which prompted her husband to take legal action against the policeman he had hired. It was precisely this detail of the story that made Madalena suspicious about the motivations behind the killing, since the trial of the case was scheduled for the coming Monday.

Madalena had heard that the murder had happened while the young man was working his shift as a security guard: after alerting his colleague to a strange movement on the grounds, he was shot twice. However, when he did not die immediately, the killers tore his body apart – which meant that the burial was carried out quickly, given the state of decay his body was already in, – and with a closed coffin. She had rushed to the hospital when she heard the news, leaving her business in the hands of her helper: she needed to support her fellow countrymen, since the man had no relatives in the country.

In any case, she believed that – apart from the high level of violence that characterized the crime – there was no reason to think that it was a *kasu bodi*[15] as the police wanted to argue, since such an act consisted of robbery with homemade weapons and, in this case, nothing had been taken from the scene of the crime. Different versions about how the murder had occurred circulated among the Bissau-Guinean community. When Joana, Madalena's cousin, arrived at the event, she sat down next

[15] On this phrase, see Lobo (2018: 284): "A Creolized pronunciation of 'Cash or Body,' [a crime in which] people are robbed on the streets, raped or killed if they do not have any money.".

to me and shared the version that had reached her about what had happened. She had heard that the man had been beaten "to death" and, after lying unconscious, his body had been completely cut up.

The next day, I met with the women of Mindjeris di Guiné, the Bissau-Guinean women's association that I spent time with during my fieldwork, and I took the opportunity to accompany one of the women, Elaine, to the bus stop at the end of the day to ask her if there was any news on the matter. Although she did not have any information beyond what was already known, she raised two questions about what had happened: the first was that the murder had the appearance of being a witness elimination; the second was the question of the possible involvement of the Cape Verdean policeman with whom the man had negotiated. Having presented the two possibilities, Elaine also said that the big problem in that case was the fact that there were people who knew what really happened, but who would not tell for fear of retaliation. Furthermore, if this had happened in Guinea, the dead man's family would certainly have demanded the policeman's death – according to a principle analogous to right in rem (Radcliffe-Brown 1982). As he died outside his land of origin, this was impossible.

When we met again the following weekend, there was still no news on the case. Elaine reflected that since the witnesses to the situation did not report it, the Associação Mãe (main association) of the Bissau-Guinean community could not take more serious action on the matter. Initially, she suggested that the main problem lay in the fact that the man, knowing the situation he was in, had not tried to share his problems with someone else. That is why it is important to be in an association, as it is an ideal place to seek help in solving problems, as well as building safety nets for people who find themselves alone in a country that is not their own. However, she then said that she understood the young man, as he was alone in a foreign country and might fear retaliation. So even though, according to the *fladu fla* (gossip and rumors), the place where he was murdered had cameras, nothing was done about it.

While there were no new developments in the case, Elaine had heard about another incident that week: someone had called the Assomada Police Station in the hinterland of Santiago, anonymously reporting lethal violence against a Bissau-Guinean man. The man, who worked on a building site, had gone to collect his wages from his boss. Unhappy with his "subordinate's" behavior, the employer shot him – or so the story went. However, when they searched the local hospital for a man who had been admitted with gunshot wounds, no one found any similar cases. At the time, Elaine interpreted the situation as a prank, although we later realized that the man's "disappearance" could also mean the concealment of a corpse. Whether it was real or not, what mattered was that the death of a Bissau-Guinean man in such circumstances was so plausible for the police that they carried out a search for the body in local hospitals.

It is not my purpose here to find out what the truth is in this story – how the man was murdered, or even whether a second killing took place in Santiago Norte. As a large part of the discourse I present took place in the context of *fladu fla,* or rumor, it is necessary to treat it as such. Here I draw on a proposal made by Brazilian anthropologist Trajano Filho (2002: 91) in his study of the rumors shared on internet pages about the Bissau-Guinean political elite at the turn of the last millennium. In his analysis, he points out that the most fruitful way to analyze rumors lies in understanding the

construction of the social that they promote; therefore, they should be understood not through the prism of truth or lies, but as performative acts.[16]

Because they have the power to narrate the ambiguities and anxieties of social life (Venancio 2024b), this is where I want to center my analysis: on how the narratives, promote "consequences resulting from the very act of telling them" (Trajano Filho 2002: 85 my translation). Even though the stories that reach me differ in some of their details, violence and dehumanization are the hallmarks of all the narratives that deal with the man's murder – as well as of the act itself. It is not just the killing itself that matters, as Silvia Rivera (2010) rightly points out in relation to the murder of the native peoples of so-called Spanish America by the Spanish colonists: by cutting off their heads and limbs, the colonists not only killed these people, but also dehumanized them.

Thus, such events serve to remind Bissau-Guineans that, even though Portuguese colonialism is over, Cape Verdeans – or rather, the Cape Verdean elite – still see themselves as white and, for that reason, better than other Africans (that is, insofar as the Cape Verdean elite sees itself as African). This does not mean that deaths like these occur without contestation or challenges to hierarchies by Bissau-Guinean community in Praia. As Paulino do Canto (2020: 49) shows, after the first cruel murder perpetrated by a Cape Verdean against a Bissau-Guinean in 2003, the community took to the main streets of the city to demand justice and respect.[17]

In an interview with me, José Viana Ramos, president of the Platform of Immigrant and Resident African Communities in Cape Verde, stated that the number of murders and physical violence against West African immigrants has fallen a lot compared to the years 2010–2016. However, during my fieldwork I heard a number of stories, like the one told by Elaine, that pointed to the opposite. Lúcia, for example, told me the story of another Bissau-Guinean man who was murdered in his home and had his head cut off. According to her, the murderers had taken care to put a cloth over the door so that the blood would not leak out and attract attention.

However, the stories and memories reflect more than just the disposability of the lives of Bissau-Guinean men. Lúcia also spoke about her brother, who worked as a security guard in Praia and – as she made a point of stressing – ended up paraplegic after being shot in a robbery on 14 April 2017. At the time of our conversation, Lúcia was waiting for a response from the Cape Verdean government; she still did not know who had done this to her brother and she had no intensive support in caring for him. In the case of the murdered Bissau-Guinean man, there has been very little media attention, with only a news report during the *Record Cabo Verde* nightly news. Meanwhile, other acts of crime and violence, such as a European who had his gold chain stolen during a *kasu bodi*, or even the headmistress of the Portuguese school in Praia who was slapped in the face by the mother of one of the pupils, end up becoming topics discussed nationwide.

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[16] For some Africanist ethnologists, such as Bonhomme (2012) and Elis (1989), the particular narratives that emerge in West Africa are a direct product of African modernity, which has resulted in the growth of anonymity, which in turn has reduced trust between people (Ellis 1989). However, it is important to stress that rumors are more than "parochial gossip" (Bonhomme 2012: 207); they are a tool used for constructing the social, understanding social tensions, and limiting power.

[17] As José, one of Canto's interlocutors, described this in an interview in 2019: "It all started from a mix-up in the Fazenda neighborhood between a Guinean and a Cape Verdean from the island of Santiago. It was during the second term of José Maria Neves' government as Prime Minister, more or less in 2003. In this fight, the Cape Verdean stabbed the Guinean who hours later did not survive the blow. After that, all the African foreigners gathered and demonstrated in front of the Government Palace. José Maria Neves called me, as I was the oldest representative of immigrants, and told me so that we could be calm that he was going to invite all the African immigrant communities to discuss the situation and find out what was going on. When I passed on the message to those who were at the door of the Government Palace at the demonstration, they refused to listen to me and a group replied: 'no [...] *nu ta mata tudo cabo-verdiano hoji* (we will kill all Cape Verdeans today)'. They blocked traffic, which is illegal because to demonstrate we would have had to have authorization from local policy and we didn't" (Canto 2020: 49, my translation).

These differences in media attention and public awareness show which bodies are worthy of compassion and which are disposable. Thus, I argue, there is an updated continuity of violence in both practices or targets, and that this continuum is constantly updated, as Mbembe (2019) points out. I visualize this as a *continuum* that extends between distant territories and centuries because, as in the colonial murders of indigenous peoples analyzed by Rivera (2010), the violence was not carried out simply to take the life of a potential enemy; rather, it was carried out in order to remind both him and the entire Bissau-Guinean community of the low value of their lives and to deny their humanity. In other words, by drawing this parallel, we can see that, much as in early colonial times, murder of social minorities has an exemplary function and is meant to demonstrate power to all those in the minority group.

Final Considerations

A central question underlying this article is how the grammar of difference produced by European colonialism in Africa endures and is updated in these nations post-independence. To illustrate this, I examined two examples of physical and/or material violence experienced by people from continental West Africa while living in Cape Verde. Whether in the form of a brutal murder or slavery-like conditions experienced by domestic workers, both cases reveal processes of dehumanization of the Other that have racial difference as their guiding principle – the result of seeing people from continental Africa as less civilized and, therefore, deserving of more violent treatment.

This marker of foreignness – read, in this context, as a racial trope – ends up producing specific types of violence when combined with other markers such as gender. While women encounter dehumanization, their lives continue, as does the expectation that they care for others; men, by contrast, are dehumanized by having their lives cut short. Reading these events in the light of the insights offered by Gonzalez (2021), I argue that, although colonialism and its continuities manifest themselves in various ways, the link that unites post-colonial experiences is gendered anti-blackness. An intersectional gaze at how different social markers of domination impact the lives of men and women from continental West Africa who live in the Praia also helps to give "flesh and blood" to the harsh statistical and quantitative data: numbers are people, with unique histories and trajectories.

Even in a country that "is visibly black" (Anjos and Rocha 2022), the color line, identified by du Bois (2021) as one of the main problems of modernity, can act as a central element in deciding who should have their lives preserved and valued, versus those who should not only die, but be left to die in a ghostly, almost zombie-like state of existence (Mbembe 2001, 2021). This ghostly existence is reflected in the public perception and responses to the violence in the cases I examined: the murdered Bissau-Guinean man has been largely neglected in the media, and for Afi, Cape Verdean justice is moving at a tortoise's pace.

What is at stake, from the color line, is which bodies are worthy of compassion and which are disposable. And in this sense, race and gender intersect profoundly in determining the ways they are disposable: women returning to the place of being enslaved and men having their lives taken, in a similar way to that observed by Gonzalez.

In Gonzalez's study, the main form of violence directed at black men is police violence and the extermination of black youth on Brazilian soil. For black Brazilian women, it is domestic labor analogous to slavery that violates their lives from the earliest age. The scenario she describes is similar to the one I found in Cape Verde, where the violence is directed at continental Africans who

are seen as blacker than the Cape Verdeans; gender is also a way to understand and compare both types of racial violence.

Gonzalez describes another gendered aspect of violence that is relevant to my study. In Brazil, she observes, black women are the ones who fight for justice when their sons, husbands, and brothers are killed by the police. In Cape Verde, I saw something similar: notwithstanding the men's demands for justice during the Associação Mãe meeting, it is the women who are responsible for taking care of men disabled (by racial violence), and the work of carrying out the men's funerals also falls to them. While the violence against Bissau-Guinean men is done by Cape Verdean men, West African women may be violated by men or women of various nationalities. Thus, gender reveals the complexity of anti-blackness practices in Cape Verde.

In a world system and post-imperialist context of profound anti-black racism, which promoted – and continues to promote – the extermination, dehumanization, and disqualification of black populations of the most varied skin tones, the anti-blackness that is the language par excellence of colonialism ends up being introjected into the habitus of black peoples, such as Cape Verdeans, as a way of surviving in a world marked by white racial supremacy. The idea of "civilization" works as the main trope to construct the differences that are the basis for West African internal racial hierarchies. In the Cape Verdean national context, "the feeling of anti-blackness, which presupposes an incomplete humanity in bodies that are overloaded with the traces of Africanness" (Anjos and Rocha 2022: 111, my translation) is directed towards those who share common ancestors with Cape Verdeans, namely the populations of continental West Africa.

In this context, different controlling images (Collins 2000) are directed towards the latter group in order to reify in them an archetypal Africanness that makes it possible to distance Cape Verdeans from the idea of blackness produced by European whites to subjugate these peoples. This occurred even on the island of Santiago, where, as José Carlos dos Anjos and Eufémia Rocha (2022) point out, the differences in phenotypical traits are not so visible to the naked eye. And this is why I argue that race, considered sociologically, has been and continues to be a discursive-social fiction constructed to justify unjustifiable violence.

The racial division constructed between Cape Verdeans and *mandjakus* is based on the ultimate characteristic of contemporary nation-states: "the desire for an enemy, the desire for apartheid (for segregation and enclaving), the fantasy of extermination – all today occupy the space of this enchanted circle" (Mbembe 2019: 43). However, in an African state like Cape Verde, the desire to exterminate the Other and their Africanness is also a desire to exterminate oneself, the result of the manifestation of anti-blackness and self-hatred engendered by the racial structures inherited from colonialism.

Believing themselves to be *junior partners*[18] in the civilizational endeavor spearheaded by the Euro-American world – a promise historically made by the Portuguese empire that they would be granted a place in the world as equals with Europeans – Cape Verdean anti-blackness ends up understanding those from other ECOWAS countries as enemies – that is, in the words of Achille Mbembe, those "with whom no agreement is possible or desirable, [who] generally appear in the

[18] The notion of junior partners is developed by Wilderson, who understands it as the set of "people who are Human but not White hetero males. For example, people of color and White women who are targets of White supremacy and patriarchy, respectively, and, simultaneously, the agents and beneficiaries of anti-Blackness. This category also includes LGBT people who are not Black and Indigenous communities. They are "partners" because, as with White hetero males, anti-Blackness is the genome of their paradigmatic positions and because they suffer at the hands of contingent violence rather than the gratuitous or naked violence of social death" (Wilderson 2020: 94).

form of caricatures, clichés, and stereotypes" (Mbembe 2019: 53). This *Other* is less educated, given to non-Catholic beliefs unlike the ones who founded the nation, dirty, blacker, less human – after all, they must be saved by his more civilized brothers – when their body is not subjected and/or dismembered, as in the cases described. Thus, we can see that "the forms of government idealized by European colonial regimes have been maintained in the post-colonial context. This puts at the center of this dialogue the possibility of conceiving inequality of power as an effect of discourses and practices created in a colonial context" (Abrantes 2022: 33 my translation).

My intention here is in no way to crystallize an image of Cape Verdeans as radically hostile to the citizens of continental Africa. I met some Cape Verdeans who said things like *ami cresci ku guineenses, trabadja ku guineenses, bai pa escola ku guineenses. Ami likes Guineans. Guineans are hardworking people, they know, they eat together* ("I grew up with Guineans, I work with Guineans, I went to school with Guineans. I really like Guineans. Guineans are hard-working, good people, they eat together"). However, individual intentions are of secondary interest in this paper, which is concerned with the way the social structure is organized. On the Bissau-Guinean side, there is still a widespread idea in their community that despite the difficulties and challenges, Cape Verde is still the preferred destination for them, the place outside their country where they would feel most at home, given the history shared between the two nations.[19]

In the persistence of this obsession with racial classification and othering, we can see the *cultural neurosis* proposed by Gonzalez (2021: 372) is also present in the Cape Verdean context. As she writes,

> "a neurotic individual builds their own ways to conceal their symptoms, because concealing them grants them certain privileges. This architecture frees them from the anguish of repression. In fact, the text is trying to reach further than what it actually analyzes. From the moment it speaks about things through the act of denying them, it reveals itself as self-ignorant." (Gonzalez 2021: 380)

Thus, by digging a deep chasm that racially separates Cape Verdeans and *mandjakus* on the basis of the ideology of creolization, Cape Verdeans construct a way to hide the symptom – in this case, their own blackness.

In this context, we see an attempt to identify the dominated with the dominator, as postulated by Frantz Fanon (2008): by choosing white masks to cover up the (not always so) mestizo skins, the claim to creoleness is a way to bring Cape Verde closer to Europe and, at the same time, distance it from Africa through the "internalization and reproduction of Western white values" (Gonzalez 2021: 385). At the end of the day, anti-blackness as a discourse and practice is necessary not only to guarantee the "elaboration and maintenance of White (and non-Black) subjectivity" (Wilderson 2020: 95) but also as a fundamental tool for the construction of internal splits within black peoples as they strive to distance themselves from the archetype of uncivilized and savage blackness.

Anti-blackness can be traced throughout the history of Cape Verde, which previously deported all people from Portuguese Guinea, Angola, and São Tomé who were considered undesirable; today, it continues to assign people of African origin the status of those who are strangers, dangerous, and less human. In other words, anti-blackness is the language that makes it possible to construct white

[19] At a *Gentis di Guiné* event, one of their representatives said that "if they [the Cape Verdeans] changed the flag, it's because they can't change history", with the recurring idea that *sangui bu ka ta laba* (blood doesn't wash out), referring to the consanguineous ties that bind the two nations.

masks, because other markers – the use of Portuguese, eating with fork and knife, being more cosmopolitan, and so forth – however powerful they may be, are not capable of hiding all the black skin on self-styled creole bodies. As a result, although the presence of West Africans in Cape Verde is central to the construction of the national *self*, it simultaneously damages this self by destroying one of the highest points of Cape Verdean national identity: *morabeza*.

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