

Learning from Cape Verdean Experience

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The *Cape Verdean Connection* program provides an opportunity to experience a culture that blends West African and Portuguese elements in unique and moving ways. It also provides a clear perspective on two important aspects of how culture is understood and made part of public discourse at the end of the 20th century. One is the idea of transnationalism — in a sense, the way that culture and community can be seen to be independent of territorial boundaries. The other is the opening of national institutions like the Smithsonian to new cultural needs.

Cape Verdean culture is produced on both sides of the Atlantic, in communities in the Cape Verde Islands and in New England, California, the Netherlands, France, Senegal, Argentina, and elsewhere. Transnationalism in Cape Verdean society is determined, to be sure, in part by historical and environmental imperatives of dramatic proportions. But this condition is not completely unique. There are many other culture-bearing groups whose members find it necessary for survival to export their labor and themselves to another country, building new lives there but also sending support and maintaining ties to their old country through a variety of social and cultural organizations. This transnational aspect of cultural production is quite evident among Caribbean peoples residing in the United States, among Indians and Pakistanis worldwide, among Chinese groups, and among Eastern European nationalities.

Related cultures are often understood with a genetic model, in which related groups are compared as offspring of an ancestral culture, their separate development explaining cultural differences. But cultural relationships between such communities may sometimes

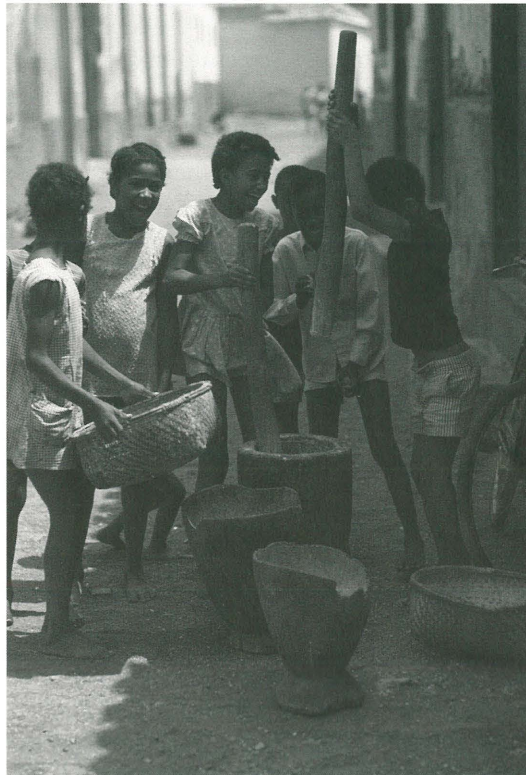


Photo by Ray Almeida

These Cape Verdean children play using traditional cultural objects, the mortar and pestle and the basket for winnowing corn.

be understood more concretely as having an institutional basis. Cape Verdeans maintain ties through Cape Verdean-owned ships and shipping companies; family remittances and other economic exchange, such as banking and investments in the home country; print and electronic media that disseminate news of the communities; political parties, which were active in the anticolonial struggle and continue in postindependence politics; and international musical touring circuits and Cape Verdean-owned recording companies that are firmly grounded in Cape Verdean traditional musical genres. These are among this community's tools for cultural survival in a transcontinental context.

It is also significant that Cape Verdean-American committees raised a substantial por-

tion of the funds necessary for *The Cape Verdean Connection* program. In sponsoring the program, the Cape Verdean Americans are not only “discovering” the Smithsonian -that is, planting a Cape Verdean cultural flag and gaining international attention for their magnificent cultural achievements. They are also following Cape Verdean independence leader Amilcar Cabral, known as the “Founder of Cape Verdean Nationality,” by using institutional means to establish a unified yet richly diverse culture as the bedrock upon which to build a Cape Verdean identity — one that can help its bearers work together to meet the challenges presented by Cape Verdean history and its environment. The Festival, and the Smithsonian of which it is part, have become an open forum for this kind of cultural exploration and discussion.

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Other Information Sources

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Cape Verdean Immigration Collection, Genealogy Room, New Bedford Free Public Library, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Special Collections, Adams Library, Rhode Island College, Providence, Rhode Island.

World Wide Web, Cape Verdean Home Page address:

<http://www.umassd.edu/SpecialPrograms/caboverde/capeverdean.html> (in development by Richard Leary et al., University of Massachusetts, North Dartmouth, Massachusetts).

Suggested Listening

Cape Verde: Anthology 1959-1992. Buda, France.

Cape Verde Islands: The Roots. Playa Sound, France.

Evora, Cesaria. *Cesaria*. Lusafrica/Melodie, France.

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Lobo, Mirri. *Paranoia*. MB Records.

Mendes Brothers. *Palonkon*. MB Records.

Music from Cape Verde. Caprice Records, Sweden.

Musiques du Monde: Cap Vert. Buda, France.

Pina, Frank de. *Ansiedade*. Own label.

Serra, Chico. *Piano Bar of Mindelo*. Buda, France.

Tavares, Norberto. *Jornada di un Badiu*. Lusafrica/Melodie, France.

Travadinha. *Le Violon de Cap Vert*. Buda, France.

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co-curators of *The
Cape Verdean
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