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A *Different Kind* of Family
The Domestic Environment on the
Boa Vista Island, Cape Verde

Andréa de Souza Lobo

Introduction

Here the problem of broken families is common, not so much due to divorce, since most aren't even officially married, but due to emigration. Women emigrate and children are raised by grandmothers, without a father or mother figure as a reference, which really complicates the family issue, because grandparents are part of an entirely different generation from that of the grandchildren and dialog is not possible.

Relations with emigrated mothers end up being difficult because of the distance, since they spend one or two months each year near their children and the remainder of the year abroad. The Boa Vista fathers don't care about their families at all, so the weight rests upon the grandmothers. Emigration is the good and the evil in our family.

It is a dysfunctional family, not a normal one like in Europe, for instance. There, the father and the mother share everything, responsibilities at home and at work. Here, there is nothing but sad women! Men only care about their *pequenas* (girlfriends) and *grogue* (booze).

Then there's the problem of precocious pregnancy and sexual promiscuity which is aggravated now by the excessive mixture in Boa Vista, due to tourism. This is how the problem goes: youths in Boa Vista behave increasingly under the influence of bad things precisely because they lack in the proper reference of father and mother living together, as it should be!

The ideas were exposed by a teacher at the Boa Vista Lyceum. She tried to explain to a young Italian lady why Boa Vista is losing the moral values which had distinguished it for so many years from the remaining isles in the Cape

Verde Archipelago: proper, simple, joyful and the most honest people of the islands. Where could the problem be? First the idea of a dysfunctional family in which the mother is abroad, the father anywhere but home and the grandmother, already at an advanced age, taking on tasks which would not befall her in a "normal" situation. Complementary to this picture, the teacher's explanation incorporates tourism and the "mixture" as a second source of trouble for youths on the island, the key category in this case being the "bad influence".

The image built by the teacher was shared by many who were invited by myself or some daily life event to reflect upon Boa Vista family organization. On several occasions I was corrected: *you mean family disorganization, don't you?* This question brought up an important and ubiquitous ambiguity in the understanding they had of my role there: when imagining that the nuclear and monogamist (and ideally European) family was the only adequate option, they concluded that factors characteristic of the Boa Vista family could only be backward, signs of disorganization or even decline of family relations. However, when such explanations were crossed with attentive and continued observation of family practices, the ambiguity became more evident, inspiring my dissatisfaction regarding the ideas of family disorganization in Boa Vista.

Since the first days of my field work I was impressed with the value given to men's, women's and children's mobility and circulation in the Boa Vista family universe and soon realized that such "scattered" families were not the result of disorganization, as explained by the teacher, but a "different" form of family organization. Although Boa Vista citizens themselves punctuate their conversations with sentences and statements which place value on morality of Christian families as an ideal, their practices and attitudes when faced with concrete facts reveal orientations that are quite different.

Family cohesion in Boa Vista society depends on the strength of mechanisms to deal with the risks of a structure which has specialized itself in ejecting some of its members, primarily adult women, out of the social system. In this context, the presupposition that families should live together is replaced by another idea of family. This is a family context which maintains strong characteristics of the matricentrality always associated with Cape Verdean families, but at the same time pushes women into emigration to Europe; of families which regard the mother-child link as the most important of bonds, and yet break it apart in the name of family reproduction; families which hold children in fundamental positions, and yet force them to

go house-hopping; families which build the idea of kinship by means of sharing and proximity relations yet experience their kinship relations from a distance. Could these values be ambiguous? Contradictory?

My analysis shows that the feeling of belonging or breach in family relations depends on a balance maintaining several principles of social filiations which keep people united. One principle emerges in a special manner, the mother-child unit. Therefore, the family structure found in Boa Vista functions, amidst its ambiguities, as a system of principles which provides the basis for individuals and groups to be able to reproduce practices and relationships which are vital to the system (Bourdieu, 1991).

In the form expressed in the speech which opens this introduction, ideas regarding what the Boa Vista family is or should be, when compared with the practices that produce and reproduce it, give the onlooker an impression of disorganization. The challenge I must face is how to understand such a reality based on a basic premise in anthropology: any cultural and social system has a logic of its own, and it is not on the outer layer of the accounts of social stakeholders.

In order to tackle this task, I will make use of ethnographic data to explore the particular logic of family organization on Boa Vista Island. The text is divided into three topics: the first part briefly introduces the Island of Boa Vista; the second part deals with the theoretical debate about the topic; and the third part is dedicated to presentation of ethnographic data and their analysis.

A Word About Boa Vista

Throughout 2004, during 15 uninterrupted months, I carried out my field work with the population of Vila de Sal-Rei, studying migratory flows and their influences on transformations which have been taking place in local family organization. Sal-rei is the main village on the island and houses approximately 2,500 inhabitants, of a total of 4,209 residents scattered among the seven small villages making up the characteristic dry landscape of the archipelago[1]. The main economic activity, which is subsistence farming, takes place in villages on the countryside of the island. Despite being the main

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1   For information regarding the meaning of dryness in formation of Cape Verdean identity, see LOBO (2001).

economic activity, it is not the one which provides the money, which comes from transfers sent by women emigrants who live, for the most part, in Italy, employed as housemaids.

Boa Vista is the third largest island, the least populous and peripheral in the national political scenario. The island fascinates Capeverdeans because of its attractive landscapes, dunes and long beaches. Due to its renowned natural beauty, Boa Vista is an important tourist pole with great potential for national development. This factor brings about a new economic opportunity for island denizens – tourism.

In the past years, tourism has grown rapidly, with heavy investments in hotel infrastructure, some state interest in local development and a growing movement of immigration from other islands (and countries such as Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and others in the African mainland), in search of employment and better opportunities.

In spite of developing tourism, which has increased the supply of labor for the general population, for most people, particularly young ladies, the solution for a better quality of life is still emigration. This desire is shared by the entire family. They believe that going abroad is the only possibility for qualitative change. The decision to emigrate is thus less individual than collective. It is a component of family strategies, with the family playing an important role both in the country of departure and in the destination of the emigrant.

The Theoretical Debate

Studies regarding family organization are traditional in anthropology. Since the days of the classic authors, debates about consanguinity, filiation, ancestry, kinship, family universality, the dichotomy between biological and social, generation conflicts, conjugality and others have kept us involved. These concepts have become indispensable to anthropologic thinking and the entire kinship terminology ended up becoming the area of study best characterizing anthropology as an independent subject (Pina Cabral, 2003).

As studies were developed in the area, researchers became increasingly challenged to redefine classical concepts and new debates arose in light of materials provided by societies under study. In the period between the 1960s and the 1980s, theories of kinship anthropology from the classical period were profoundly criticized. Leach (1961) and Needham (1971) were the

first to criticize the kinship theory radically, creating a crisis in anthropology at the time which was latent for some years. It was only in 1984, with David Schneider, that criticism to Eurocentrism of the kinship concept was brought up again, years later generating discussion regarding the problems of kinship along new lines, as well as a shift of focus to other topics, such as gender and household, among others.

Schneider (1984)[2] leads us to a deconstruction of the kinship category founded upon genealogical bonds. The author criticizes the path along which ever since Morgan anthropologists have applied Western ideas to the kinship analyses in other societies. He argues that not all societies have something called kinship or which may be defined in these terms. By claiming that centrality in procreation is assumed *a priori* in such theories, Schneider proposes that the category holds no value for the analysis of other cultures because its definition is built upon and limited by Western ideas. The only solution would therefore be to either abandon the category entirely or establish a more limited agenda: "given this definition of kinship, does this particular population have it or not?" (1984:200).

Along the same lines as Schneider, authors who dealt with gender studies and feminist studies, like Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako, lament[3] the fact that in the area of family and kinship, researchers have neglected the historic and contextual characteristics of different family configurations. When developing their arguments about stationary distinctions between nature and culture, showing that the notion nature is as socially built as any other, another distinction loses its meaning – that which separates kinship from gender into two academic realms. Save for differences in their analyses, the authors in this generation agree about rejecting kinship as a private realm of studies and acknowledge the uselessness of studying kinship without becoming entangled in the complex reality of societies.

I wish to retain here an analytical effort which maintained dialog with the radical perspective by Schneider and, to a certain extent, female

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2   According to Pina Cabral (2005), Schneider's kinship study is currently considered the most influential text in the area of kinship studies by respected critics. In favor of the concept's purity, he sees kinship as on object of study made possible only in its most restricted sense and perhaps only in Western cultures. It will be shown later that Pina Cabral proposes, instead of abandoning the category, that it be "de-ethnocentrified".

3   See the article *Is there a family? New anthropological views* (in: Thorne and Yalom, 1992).

anthropologists, and which generated the concept of relatedness. Carsten (2004), the author of this idea, has the ideas by Fortes (1974) as a starting point regarding kinship bonds. With Fortes (1974) it becomes visible that family dynamics are only evident when the analysis surpasses the isolated domestic unit and the present moment to include the logic of a broader system of social relations.

A change in the theoretical framework of kinship, family background and alliance categories is observed, which leads to a shift in discussions. Inspired by this shift to a process-oriented view of the domestic group, Carsten criticizes the Fortesian approach for its lack of attention to the intimacy of domestic arrangements and affectionate behavior connected with it. Adopting a process-oriented perspective, the term relatedness is used to refer to the fact that pre-defined blood ties do not define the feeling of proximity, since it is in continuous construction by the everyday actions of "living together".

Carsten (2004) revisits Schneider's critical views and confirms the author's argument since in her case study, ideas of kinship are not derived from procreation. Nevertheless, in spite of agreeing with the author, she does not advocate in favor of abandoning comparative use of kinship as an analytical category. She then proposes that the concept of relatedness be employed to indicate native forms of acting and conceptualizing relationships among people. It is by living and consuming together, sharing the same spaces, the households, that people become relatives. Despite the fact that the central substance of kinship according to local perception is blood, the largest contribution to blood is food. This relationship between both substances makes blood a constantly changing and fluid category. She therefore opts for a more flexible view of kinship. She tries to demonstrate, first of all, how people define and build their notions of relatedness, and what therefore are the values and meanings given to these notions. Based in ethnographic data, she shows how the separation between social and biological, which Schneider has shown to be the center of the historic definition of kinship in anthropology, is culturally specific.

In this study, the concept of relatedness is used as a possible means to consider genealogic relations as primary forms of establishing a connection, a first contact, a first exchange of fluids. However, it must be stressed that this is not enough, since there is a space which must be filled by signs of proximity: giving and receiving, mutual dependence, reciprocal exchanges

of materials, experiences and emotions. I attempt to show with the ethnography presented that the realm of kinship requires solidarity. Furthermore, if proximity relations do not happen in the universe of blood, alternatives are sought, creating kinship relations where there used to be none.

Within the universe I studied there are forms of family organization characterized by a social context in which individuals and groups have no access to the necessary means for fulfillment of values regarded as important and are never able to reach the ideal model. In it, family relations are profoundly marked by social bonds built routinely by the sharing and exchanging of objects, values and persons and the feeling of belonging is connected with a set of common references and with participation in a community of practices.

In this context, living together, being brought up in the same home, sharing experiences and things are the main sources of personal identification for an individual. His or her position in society is marked not only by family bonds, but also by the relationship with people who followed his or her socialization process. Given the importance of mobility – among houses, villages, islands and countries – which ends up generating what I call "scattered families", the forms of creating "proximity at a distance" are the instruments on which individuals fall back in attempts to deal with insecurities resulting from the mobility which characterizes this society.

The household[4] takes on a central role for these people, because it is a symbol of belonging. Houses are like anchors which keep the individual in a group in a context regarded as insecure and little prone to updating of family bonds. It is through intra-domestic relationships, among households, that a feeling of family identity is constructed. The shared experience of living together is of fundamental importance, since intense cooperation takes place among members. What is interesting, in this case, is that this takes place even if some of these members are absent and only see each other once every two or three years (which I call "proximity at a distance"). Having slept, eaten and lived together for a period creates a relationship which is maintained for life and which may be stronger than genealogic bonds.

The concept of relatedness seems to cover the reproduction system of the type found on the island of Boa Vista, where the central emphasis is placed

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4   I make reference here to the notion of home as a domestic space according to the native categories of my informants.

on the experience of co-habitation and domestic cooperation among people who are related and such bonds depend on continuing proximity strategies. The idea of family would then be a project, always built and re-evaluated by its members depending on their capacity to update proximity strategies (understood here as relatedness). Being stuck with concepts such as conjugality, paternity, maternity, family background, as understood by the classic authors in our subject could result in distorted and even erroneous views of the reality under analysis. It is therefore necessary to seek instruments which help us think about family forms in a comparative perspective – a perspective which rejects ethnocentric hierarchies, while at the same time rescuing the specificity of each social configuration. In addition to describing forms and standards, cultural rules of residence and succession, cycle patterns in the domestic group, it is necessary to give attention to the ways in which relations among relatives are lived in everyday life.

I thus choose to emphasize new ethnographies in everyday practices and concreteness of substances shared among relatives. Such perspectives raise important questions for a new debate on kinship theories, in which relations are visibly more constructed than given by an imaginary nature or the formal existence of kinship bonds.

About the Families: A Bit of Ethnography

The family organization which was the object of this study has the following general characteristics: the significant unit is the extended family; blood ties have priority over conjugal relations; mobility of men, women and, particularly children among several houses is part of family dynamics; the concept of maternity is more social than biological, being a combination of two generations of women to fully undertake social maternity; the household is the central unit, strongly associated with women and children; men have relationships marked by absence and distance from everyday lives of children and their mothers, contributing financially and socially in a sporadic manner; adult women emigrate leaving behind family members, children and the fathers of their children on the island.

Domestic units are heavily centered around the figure of the mother or grandmother. Women have an important economic role and, furthermore, predominant conjugal arrangements encourage instability and circulation

of men in several domestic units throughout their adulthood. All of this gives more weight to women within families. Feminine centrality is reinforced by family networks which, due to the relative absence of men, operate among households by means of exchange and sharing of objects, values and persons.

In this context, sharing is a fundamental category for the understanding of family relations and this is not restricted to genealogic bonds. The analysis of sharing practices, mutual assistance and solidarity among people and domestic groups reveals that the fundamental concept of "making a family", i.e. strengthening bonds among relatives and creating kinship where there once was none. Given the characteristics of the Boa Vista reality, focus should be placed on the family system regarded as a process constructed in everyday life.

What happens is that as part of a Creole society – and, therefore, the result of social dynamics in which forces, processes, values and symbols from two schools of civilization, African and European, are mixed, conflicting and interweaving, giving birth to a third school (Trajano Filho, 2006:1) –, family organization in Boa Vista involves competing practices and models which oscillate between one school and another. Thus, in parallel with the practices which reproduce a family system such as the one described above, one finds values based on a nuclear family model, with one couple residing together with their children, based on the European model which is considered ideal, particularly by women. On the one hand, we have practices which reproduce traditional forms (coherent with what is regarded as an African model) of family organization, and, on the other, existence of an ideal model which never becomes a reality, leading to the idea of disorganization.

"We are all one family"

The forms with which proximity is constructed in Boa Vista can be seen in the amplitude of the kinship system. In theory, those who are part of the family are not necessarily restricted to genealogic bonds, i.e., when in the realm of the broad concept of family, an important consideration is the type of relationship constructed in daily life by individuals or domestic groups.

According to the ideal pattern, family relations are characterized by mutual commitment, regular social contact and a constant flow of material and immaterial benefits. What is interesting here is that these

requirements, fundamental for construction of the concept of proximity, can both strengthen pre-existing bonds and widen the scope of relations regarded as kinship.

The idea of family is associated with an ideal of unity and harmony, and people always emphasize their own individual contributions to it. Illustrating yourself as solidary and generous toward family members is a common means of referring to relations in the community. *We are like relatives; we are but one family here; we are all cousins, nearly brothers*, are common statements when talking about one's self and family, but also to characterize Boa Vista inhabitants in general. The community constitutes itself as an extension of the family[5].

In all of these cases it is possible to observe a continuous flow of goods, services and information in reciprocal circulation among neighboring households. Good neighbors, as well as relatives, exchange meals, help take care of one another's children, lend children to help with the *mandados* and, since they are not actual relatives, may wed children amongst themselves (an arrangement which is strongly preferred). There is a special fidelity of sorts among inhabitants of the same area, the type of treatment often dispensed to relatives.

It becomes clear that both internally and externally to the homes, there is a network of solidarity which encompasses all domestic and inter-domestic organization. Participation by women in income-generating activities depends largely on the possibility of counting on relatives (ideally the mother) who can put up with the children. These children, in turn, feel like they belong both to the units where they spend their days as to those where they spend their nights. In a very clear manner, the limits of domestic organization go beyond not only the boundaries of the household, but also blood relations. The network of solidarity among women is associated with the principle of "living together" and with the rules of reciprocity this involves. There is a type of kinship treatment regarding the person who can be counted on, she who is close by, day in and day out, and with whom one can exchange goods, favors and information, as if they were close relatives.

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5   Of course this is an idealized image. When contacts became closer, and I began to delve into confidentialities, a more complex picture arose, In family relations there is a dynamic and complex reality which is also marked by both cooperation relations and hierarchy and competition. This extends to the remainder of the community as a whole.

This entire system is operational in two senses. Firstly, with the high rate of emigration from the island, it is not always possible to count on immediate help from a mother or sister who, when nearby, are the first to be sought for care of the children, helping in some household chore, or even for financial assistance during a dire situation. By amplifying the rules of reciprocity to those living close at hand, women in a given location can widen job opportunities, since they can rest assured that someone will always help with childrearing in times of need. Secondly, as stated by islanders when referring to husbands who are always somewhere else, the network of solidarity is also fundamental because it reduces the dependence of women on their companions; men "cannot be counted on".

Being close by is an essential factor in construction of family relations both inside and outside the house – the kind of treatment is closer, transforming neighbors into relatives. But does the inverse also take place? In Boa Vista it is said that there are Relatives and relatives, in an attempt to clarify that, in spite of the blood relations which unite people of a same family, there are levels of proximity which vary from close to distant. These levels are not defined by blood, but by relationships.

The idea of living together is so strong in the definition of family that the concepts of proximity and distance, even among siblings, are commonly associated with the relationships maintained among them. It becomes clear here that pre-defined blood bonds do not necessarily define the feeling of proximity, since it is in continuous construction by means of daily actions and relations. As Carsten affirms, proximity bonds are created by procreation, as well as by actions of caring, sharing and living together. Such bonds are so important that they could dilute relations based on kinship, or create kinship where it previously did not exist (2000:20).

Nha familia

When people from Boa Vista speak of "*nha familia*" (my family), they refer to a group of people immediately close to them and with whom interaction manifests strong emotional, economic and social bonds. This group is in the center of the personal universe of an individual and evokes the image of reciprocity and intimacy, of living together. The group is varied in form, possibly made up of parents, children and siblings, i.e. the nuclear family. Most

commonly, though, it is made up of grandmothers, grandfathers, cousins, uncles, parents, and at times brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law and *fathers-of-children* or *mothers-of-children*[6].

It is necessary to note that "living together" has a broad meaning, not necessarily synonymous to sharing a roof. It is important to be physically close, but in the cases in which this is not possible, maintenance of social proximity by means of reciprocal obligations is a factor of maintenance of the relationship. On several occasions, when asking an informant to report who he or she identified as his or her family, relatives who live abroad were included, be it on another island or in emigration.

Another factor to be taken into consideration is that *nha familia* is elastic, possibly including or excluding persons genealogically related according to the treatment dispensed. I came to this conclusion based on conflicting situations experienced throughout my field work, especially among siblings. In these cases, those involved defend that in spite of blood ties, they do not have treatment of brethren and are thus not considered as their family. Of less importance is being half-brothers or full brothers, what matters is having spent their childhoods together, as well as other stages in life. It is thus understandable that one finds cousins who treat each other as siblings and siblings who do not see each other as part of the same family.

Being raised in the same house strengthens bonds. Stories of shared childhood experiences and the characteristic of the resulting relationship are at times more important than genealogic bonds. Normally, proximity among siblings is defined by motherhood, i.e. half-brothers on the mother's side have a better chance of living together than those related on the side of the father. This is due to the fact that it is more common for children of parents who do not live together to live with the mother and closer to her extended family than his.

Studies regarding family organization in Cape Verde (Solomon, 1992; Dias, 2000, Monteiro, 1997 and Akesson, 2004) emphasize the fundamental bond which constitutes the concept of family: the mother-child relationship. In Boa Vista, this bond is the basis for formation of networks of reciprocity among relatives and non-relatives which provide stability, continuity

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6   These are the terms commonly used to refer to the man or woman with whom ego had a child. Furthermore, when the couple maintains a conjugal relationship, this is the term used to refer to the companion, my *father-of-child* or *mother-of-child*.

and amplitude in one's relationships. However, once more it is necessary to be aware of the concept of maternity for Boa Vista inhabitants. The bond between mother and child is not restricted to relationships between biological mothers and children, but also involves so-called "social mothers".

In comparison, the bonds between father and son are more diffuse or looser, and in large part depend on the capacity the man has of being close to the children when they are young. Being a good father, providing financial, material and emotional support is culturally approved and appreciated. However, it is more common for fathers to be characterized by children as distant figures whose absence is justified by economic difficulties.

Children

Children, like women, are fundamental links in the maintenance of solidarity networks. Children between five and ten years of age are the most frequent mediators among households. They are the carriers of messages, presents and items for bartering (food, utensils, cash). It is children women send with objects and food which make up the reciprocity that maintains the houses related. They are constantly called upon to take care of *mandados*: balancing buckets of water on their heads, feeding livestock[7], carrying swill buckets on their heads, doing dishes, babysitting, delivering and bringing back messages, running errands and, when older, helping in the kitchen. These responsibilities are gradually taken on starting at the age of five, increasing as they get older.

Part of the *mandado* chores include urgent shopping, as well as taking on responsibility for sales of products handcrafted by the women in the household. In addition to taking money and materials back and forth, children also carry words among houses, in the form of messages or rumors. In conflict situations, they are the only ones free to roam between two houses which have become off limits to adults. Due to their characteristic mobility, children personify and reproduce large part of the exchange relations which are necessary for maintenance of this amplified concept of family[8].

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7   In Boa Vista many families still own a few pigs or goats. Therefore, leftovers are kept in a bucket to be deposited at the end of each day in the location where animals are kept, in order to feed them. In families with no livestock, leftovers are sent to relatives or neighbors who keep animals at home, or thrown in the ocean.

8   Despite their widespread insertion in community life, there are two moments of sociability in

In addition to this daily circulation, living between two households carries another meaning in Boa Vista. Mobility is extended into a sort of circulation[9] of children. The idea here is that others, who may be relatives or not, can take care of a child for a set amount of time. This happens frequently among those regarded as relatives. Children, in addition to being important vessels for reciprocal exchanges and sharing, are themselves the objects of sharing and reciprocity.

It is most frequent for a child to reside more or less permanently in the house of a relative close to the mother, especially the maternal grandmother. Arrangements and reasons for granting a child to a different house vary. The time of the stay also varies between months, years and even a lifetime. Receiving someone else's child, especially when the situation does not involve blood relations, means solidarity.

Esther Goody (1982), in her study about the Gonjas in Western Africa, shows that children circulate with the objective of interweaving geographically scattered branches of the family. When speaking of the circulation of children, the author establishes the difference between crisis and voluntary circulation. In the latter case, the objective would be to tighten kinship bonds, with the child being seen as a resource in the family. Fostering should thus not be seen as micro-movements of children, but rather a form of replication and reproduction of society.

This hypothesis leads to a reflection about some aspects of the Boa Vista situation. The ease children have of circulating among houses compensates for several tendencies which could otherwise weaken solidarity in the family as a whole. When caring for a grandchild, for instance, a woman justifies her need for material and affectionate support for her own children. Grandmothers are entitled to special benefits when caring for a grandchild: their chances of receiving child support are higher and their rights to receive support from the network of relatives are strengthened.

In addition to uniting generations in a stage of the domestic cycle which

which they are barred from participating, situations of illness and death. The houses of seriously ill or deceased persons are the only places in Boa Vista where no children can be found. These visits have a strong feeling of obligation and formality. There is little talk, plenty of food and drink and a quiet atmosphere. Children are not welcome during these events.

9   The concept of foster children is used here. Adoption is not the appropriate category in the case of Boa Vista, since circulation of children is not formal or fixed. Claudia Fonseca (2006) also uses the term circulation in her case study in Porto Alegre.

could be characterized by dispersion, children can balance out the male tendency of becoming distant form the family. A woman can, depending on the context, shelter children of a male relative. Mothers can take care of children of their sons and even sisters take care of children of their brothers. Grandmothers and paternal aunts would then be the link between the father and his children. Regarding the relationship between mother and father, a child is certainly not a guarantee for stability, but is a link which may insure cyclical returns of the man with establishment of a fixed residence at the end of the process (thus the importance of being a mother-of-children).

In the cases of emigration, depending on the relationship between mothers and children at a distance, mothers do not feel as if they have abandoned their children and the children do not feel abandoned. Leaving children with another, even if this other is the maternal grandmother (the preferred choice), means a sacrifice for the benefit of the child and the family. Whoever keeps the child sees this as an act of solidarity and a possibility of maintaining and intensifying relationships. Furthermore, the company of children gives special meaning to daily routines, adding pleasure and fun. Children are not a burden, but rather a gift. Taking care of a child fills up one's day, guaranteeing social interactions with neighbors, allowing for sharing of household chores, as well as being a source of affection and a link between mothers and daughters.

Among other strategies, sharing children reduces the threat of loosening solidarity among relatives due to valued social mobility. Fonseca (2006) states her case study about the circulation of children on the outskirts of Porto Alegre, that understanding that children moving across time and space, among generations and households, is not a problem, but rather a process which is part of a social dynamic. This makes us see this family organization not as an alternative model (which exists when there is an ideal model) or much less an anomaly, it is only a different form of social organization. Just as ours, it is one system among so many others.

Paternity and maternity

The relationship between mother (not necessarily the biological one) and children has a very special character. If there is any relationship seen as long lasting and stable in Boa Vista, it is that which connects mothers and

children. Furthermore, I believe that the filiation relationship tends to take precedence over the conjugal relationship in constitution of the family, and women on the island are aware of this. For instance, Sónia, an informant, claims she does not take disrespect from the father-of-child, because in her hierarchy of affection, her daughter comes in first, second and third, followed by her mother, and the father-of-child comes in last.

Still during childhood, the role of the father varies according to the residence scheme adopted. Generally, the relationship between father and child is more or less intense depending on whether parents live together or not. In cases in which the father is physically separated from the mother, his role is restricted to periodic visits. As far as economic assistance goes, it depends on a number of factors and mothers often complain of not receiving any financial support from the father-of-child. Even in cases in which fathers and children live in the same house, the emotional bond with the father is loose, and the relationship is characterized by distance, while regarding the mother, great proximity and affection is evident.

It should be noted that the relationship between father and child is not absent, but exists and is mediated by a feeling of respect toward paternal authority; it is the father who imposes authority and children are to respect that. Nevertheless, among children, there is also a feeling very close to the one reported by women when speaking of the husband's presence in the household, always as someone who cannot be relied upon. This is not only financially, since it is generally the mother or grandmother who takes care of school and feeding expenses, but also in psychological links and transmission of knowledge, areas which fathers sidestep from a distance, especially when children are still young. Under these circumstances, the centrality of women and their networks of relations become strengthened and emotional bonds among the fixed residents in the domestic unit tend to become so solid that the role of men as husbands and fathers becomes increasingly marginal.

This distant relation does not discourage fathers from wanting children. In most cases, the woman becomes pregnant at the request of the boyfriend or lover and he is the one who spreads the news to all, with pride and joy. Having a child is an important value in the male universe, as is having a woman (or many). Both are symbols of manhood constantly shown in men's circles. While women appreciate the idea of being close, men are involved with the domestic universe by means of a distant belonging. Men should have a

family (which means having children), but their relationships with it are marked by distance.

An overview of the debate about emigration

The social structure in Cape Verde has a peculiar characteristic. It expels its members out of the social system. This has turned the country into a diaspora society since the process of colonization (with the *lançados*[10] on the African coast) up to the emigrants of today who launch themselves into a search for a better life. Migratory projects are connected with the need to connect to one another and thus constitute one's self. Cape Verdeans migrate in order to build their livelihoods, their homes and a better future. The cash transfers, sending of goods, visits and general flow of objects would be types of material contextualization of bonds of affection, a fundamental strategy for maintenance of the feeling of belonging and construction of "intimacy at a distance" both for those who are abroad and those who remain in their homeland.

Mobility is a value in Boa Vista society and it operates in different instances. There is mobility among houses, i.e. an individual circulates among homes of relatives with ease which makes it hard to find someone who has lived throughout their entire lifetime in only one house. There is conjugal mobility, since changing partners is common and expected of both men and women throughout their lives. There is relative socio-economic and professional mobility, since individuals may have their economic situations altered by offers of employment on other islands, countries or even by tourism.

As in other forms of circulation, despite being expected, appreciated and reproduced by this society, emigration is a source of insecurity and challenges for those involved. On the island of Boa Vista, characterized by heavy female emigration, it may be considered that emigration generates situations of instability and an apparent tendency toward erosion of fundamental bonds for the feeling of family.

If we characterize the Boa Vista family as based on updating of daily bonds in which "living together" is the first step toward the feeling of belonging to a group larger than the nuclear and conjugal family, if we agree

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10   Name given starting in the 16th Century to Portuguese and Cape Verdeans who moved up the rivers of Guinea to trade with local inhabitants and became Africanized. See Carreira (1977) and Trajano Filho (2006) for further information.

that the woman is the central figure in this universe, that she is the focal point of authority in the domestic unit (the household), that she is the center of relationships with children and that she puts in motion the networks of solidarity which "make families" in this society, then a question arises: how does a society in which women are the center of domestic and extra-domestic relations specialize in exporting them? Furthermore, how do families continue to reproduce themselves in a system with these characteristics?

Studies regarding family structures in contexts of emigration are good examples of how kinship networks operate in a relevant manner in situations of spatial and temporal separation. The importance of relatives becomes clear in groups which, faced with difficult living conditions and frequent separations (including conjugal separations), networks of mutual assistance become indispensible, being updated, especially by means of sharing: exchanges of goods, values, food, objects and persons.

The idea that emigration is simply motivated by the desire for better financial and social status has been adopted too often without questioning. Some theories build alternative views, emphasizing other aspects of life in society and enriching debates regarding the subject. For example, Olwig and Sorensen (2002) criticize the idea of migrants as *homo oeconomicus*, claiming that the search for better opportunities is not restricted to economic figures, but to cultural constructions regarding means of subsistence. At a different moment, with the use of the "social networks" methodology, it was possible to observe and place due emphasis on the importance of networks during production and reproduction of an emigration system. It was possible to demonstrate, therefore, how they interconnect people who stayed home while relatives and friends emigrated, as well as functioning as catalysts for more out-migration.

More recently, the so-called "transnational studies" define transnationalism as a process in which immigrants construct social networks connecting their country of departure with the country of arrival (Glick Schiller et al, 1992:02). This perspective emphasizes immigrant experiences and relations established in the new location, providing a more sophisticated view of the complex realities created by migration between the places of departure and arrival. However, the universe of those who stay behind and experience a different side of the relationship with "transnationality" is little explored.

In order to understand how this takes place, I will call upon the point of

view of Levine (1973), author of an interesting text about African personality patterns containing reflections regarding family relations in contexts very close to those found in Boa Vista. Of particular interest to me is his reflection about the lack of anxiety toward physical separation, which would be reduced by a transnational logic of material obligations, and the tendency to characterize social relationships by the idiom of material transactions.

According to Levine, differently from Western societies, in which the emotional component in interpersonal relationships is more important than the material transactions involved, Africans characterize their relations in terms of the types of material transactions involved: who gave what to whom and under what circumstances. The value given to the exchange and sharing of materials defines the quality of relations, especially in families, described in terms of feeding or providing food.

Regarding the relative lack of anxiety in cases of separation, Levine compares Western and African people. The former wish for intimacy in social relations and its absence generates anxiety. In their perspective, Western people are used to making sacrifices to avoid being far from their beloved ones. Separation anxiety and sentimentalism are forms which our culture finds to deal with affective and intimate relationships. In the African world, things would be a different: "they indicate finding physical separation among loved ones less emotionally disturbing and do not see it as a motive for breaking up a relationship" (1973:138). Therefore, the relative lack of separation anxiety makes husbands and wives and parents and children see it as less painful and disruptive than it is in our society. The emphasis on material obligations makes it possible to maintain relationships strong during prolonged absences. African families do not have to remain residentially intact in order to stay socially and psychologically real for their members. Nor are kinship and marriage obligations reduced during prolonged absences (1973:142). Moreover, scattered members have a central role in redistribution of economic resources.

Trajano Filho (2005) shares with Levine what he calls the "idea of an African universalism", regarding the set of practices and incorporated dispositions which make up a shared ethic. Relations among emigrants and their family members in Cape Verde may thus be analyzed from a perspective of space understood first and foremost as a social space. As noted by Trajano Filho, from Levine's point of view:

The tendency of "pushing people out of the country" and its regular and long-lasting operation in Cape Verdean society, always having been marked by dislodgement of its members, generates unbearable tensions which could tear asunder the social fabric were it not for a collective ethic which emphasizes the relative absence of anxiety with regard to physical separation between those who stay behind and those who leave and maintenance of relationships, in spite of the distance, by means of continuing material obligations (2005:8).

The feeling of belonging is more connected with the quality of social relations updated from a distance than staying in a shared geographical area. What is therefore reproduced is something conservative and traditional. Distance ends up helping preserve patterns of traditional organization in spite of growing mobility. The migratory process in this country can be explained better as continuity of African cultural universality – which drives community members to move toward the borders of the social system – than as a badly explained product of contemporary transformations of a global nature. "Flows of people, capital, information, objects and values in time and space are not limited to modern days, but have always existed. What has changed is the scope of the circulation of objects, people and symbols." (Trajano Filho, 2005:3).

My argument when trying to understand the forms of reproduction of "scattered families" in Boa Vista follows the lines adopted by Levine (1973) and Trajano Filho (2005). Understanding the local situation as part of this African context sheds light on local practices observed in the field and helps me analyze this other idea of proximity, which does not always mean physical proximity. Living together thus has a much broader meaning than sharing a space. Families have continuity thanks to the expulsion of some of its most important members, women who are mothers.

Emigrants, who might by seen by many as "agents of change", express in their relations with their homeland a conservative aspect when encouraging and inducing maintenance of traditional values regarding issues of gender, matricentrality, relations among generations and daily practices of substance sharing[11].

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11   My intent is not to argue that emigration brings about no changes, that the flows of objects, values and people do not result in transformations in local life. My point is that these transformations are the price to be paid for maintenance of a traditional form of social organization.

Emigrant women

As stated by Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild in their study with the title "Global Woman" (2002), little is heard about the flow of women in migration theories: the growing movement of millions of women from poor to rich countries, where they work as nannies, housemaids[12] and at times sex workers. These migrant workers generally leave their children under the care of grandmothers, sisters or other relatives, and travel around the world to work.

The authors review the history of the migratory process from the third world to the first and claim that by contrasting the period of 1950 to 1970 with the 1990s, the latter has as its mark "femininization of emigration." In spite of the fact that emigration patterns are different in each region, the number of emigrant women, to the surprise of many "sending" countries, has surpassed that of men. I show below the fundamental differences between female and male emigration. Nonetheless, it should be noted that similarities are observed when the object is the direction of moving. Most head from the South to the North of the planet, from poor countries to rich countries and generally in migratory flows already pre-established in the country of origin.

In the opinion of Parrenãs (2002) in a study about female migration in the Philippines, the departure of women causes great impacts and transformations in society: gender relations, economic patterns, demography and others. Such impacts would be strong on the life of children left in the country of origin to be raised by other women[13]. However, if on the one hand the serious emotional problems which young children go through are due to female emigration, on the other strategies are employed by mothers and children to "lessen the hardships of the emotional situation caused by prolonged geographical and temporal distance. Hardships are lessened when children receive support from the family and establish periodic communication with mothers in emigration" (Parreñas, 2002:40). The studies I had access to always highlight that female emigration has a high price for mothers and children and that both make considerable efforts to maintain social and affective bonds from a distance.

The context of emigration of women from Boa Vista Island adds new data

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12   See the study by Fleischer, Soraya about emigrant Brazilian women in Boston (2002).

13   When speaking of female emigration the role of men must not be overlooked, since, as many studies have shown, they do little to increase their contribution to housework.

to these interpretations. The analysis I present thus brings interesting questions about how members of domestic groups overcome distances and what circumstances make them evaluate the strength of bonds kept or broken by those who departed.

This evaluation takes account of of strategies to maintain "proximity at a distance" by means of social and financial obligations of the emigrant. In order to have the support of family members, to be loved by children and feel that she belongs to a group, it is necessary that she, as well as others involved in this relation, maintain a continuous flow of information, visits, rumors, exchanges of objects, values and material resources. If these strategies are kept accordingly, emigration is worth it and the absence is mitigated, becoming proximity at a distance.

But the reader may question the specificities of female emigration, i.e. how is women's out-migration so different from male emigration that an argument can be built on the theme. Many countries of origin encourage women to emigrate in search of work, since they are more faithful than men in sending home money to the families which stayed behind and spend little on themselves. In general, the woman sends home more than half of what she earns. These transfers have a significant impact on the lives of children, parents, siblings and relatives in general – as well as in the cash available to governments in their countries (Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild, 2002:07).

I assume that responsibilities taken on in emigration situations vary according to gender. As demonstrated by others (Akesson, 2004; Dias, 2000; Carling, 2004), when it is the man who leaves, children receive full support from the mother who stays behind and from the female network of which she is part. When it is the woman who leaves, children do not receive the same type of comfort. The father seldom takes on the role of caretaker, which creates the need for arrangements that fulfill the role of the woman-mother in household routines and children's lives.

Female emigration, I dare say, more than male emigration, forces members of a domestic unit to negotiate roles not only to define if the woman may or may not leave, but also to establish who is to take on the responsibilities left behind and to define the new functions of the person leaving. It is interesting that these strategies do not necessarily lead to new forms of thinking and understanding the world, but can function as important reproducers of traditional forms of local life.

A *Different Kind* of Family: Closing Comments

After describing the social situation of the Boa Vista families, I would like to draw attention to the matter of social maternity, focusing on a fundamental stakeholder, the grandmother figure and her important role in construction of this *other* family.

Within a context in which relationships among relatives are more constructed than biologically determined, the concept of motherhood is also more social than biological. The relationship between mother and child, although it is central, is but one element within this family universe. Each individual is involved in a blood relations network which demands constant demonstrations of solidarity (blood ties have precedence over contractual relationships) and children play an important role in these relations. The woman who gives birth has at her disposal a solidarity network to raise her child, since one rarely takes care of a child alone.

Judith Modell (1998) claims that circulation of children is a form of reproduction, and is, as such, an appreciated resource subject to competitive interests from different parties. Thus, not only production of children, but also their distribution come into play. In Boa Vista, both are made easier by the organization of the domestic routine which favors circulation within the maternal family, since conjugality is not an ideal necessary for reproduction, meaning that the child's birth generally occurs when the mother is still living with her parents.

The maternal grandmother figure is the main point of support for a young mother and, ideally, this grandmother is entitled and obligated to share maternity of the daughter. This implies that it is not necessarily the mother who will take care of the child, and that both the biological mother and the maternal grandmother (or, occasionally, the other grandmother), may share the social identity of mother.

Depending on the context, this is a source of dispute among those involved, in particular when the mother emigrates. In these situations (despite efforts and strategies to maintain proximity from a distance) the mother is at risk of having her influence wane in the daily life of her children.

There is, however, another source of tension between mother and daughter, which is the demand for definition of roles resulting from the collision between the two models present in this society, as expressed in the account by the teacher in the beginning of this article: on the one hand, there is the

social practice in which (1) one generation alone cannot handle maternity, (2) conjugal relations are marked by instability and (3) there are no corporate groups; and on the other the perception of the Western nuclear family as the ideal type of family organization. Let us understand each of these levels in more detail.

Studies about African societies show that people are valued and, furthermore, are regarded as a sort of social and political "capital", with each individual bringing several benefits to the group. If the person is a fundamental value, rights in persons, in this context, stand out, considering that the status of each individual can be seen as the set of rights he or she has in relation to other persons or objects, added to the corresponding duties.

It is important to recall that rights in persons may be transferred, with compensation or indemnization. In the scope of kinship, such rights can be manipulated in order to increase the number of people under the command of one individual and the forms through which rights are transferred are of utmost importance in the African context (for more on this subject, see Kopytoff & Miers, 1979; Parkin & Niamwaya, 1987; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952).

Bringing this discussion to the topic of Boa Vista families and acknowledging the value of people in a society marked by the scarcity of resources, the characteristic of exporting members and importance of family life, it becomes clear that children are a fundamental value. Women who have children know their immediate and long-term value: a baby is at the center of reproduction of relations with relatives and neighbors, encouraging visits, parties and bringing together women from the mother's and father's family; the child, starting at the age of 6 or 7, is responsible for household chores, company and circulation among houses; the adult helps with financial support for the elderly.

Given the impossibility of raising a child alone, created by the family system itself, the ideal person a mother can share the value of her children with is her mother, the child's maternal grandmother. For the grandmother, the grandchild represents an asset which guarantees her centrality in the domestic realm. For the mother of the child, leaving the child with the maternal grandmother may be the guarantee that she will always be remembered as a good mother, even in cases of prolonged physical distance. The value of the child is also extended geographically, as a fundamental link between the father's and mother's families, other relatives and neighbors.

The woman should therefore share her children in the same way she should share food, material goods and information. In a system of matrifocality, all female production is creator and keeper of relations and children's mobility is a component of this practice: it reproduces female centrality and increases the number of women to whom an individual owes his loyalty. In turn, children and young adults have, by means of the relationship with women (in the paternal and maternal family), a safe source of emotional comfort and transmission of material goods and values.

Fortes and Radcliffe-Brown explained belonging as fundamental in the life of individuals in African societies, for example among the Tallensi, where the principle of lineage enables a man to seek support from his kin on any matter, i.e. individuals of the same lineage grow up together, visit each other, identify with one another and act alike in corporate business. Furthermore, they know each other's stories in detail and this is true power in the corporate life of lineage and community.

In a society marked by the absence of groups with these characteristics, other mechanisms become necessary to produce and reproduce solidarity. Families therefore take on a special characteristic, a fruitful space for construction of relations of belonging, transmission of goods and values. If this privileged space is marked by the distant character of the man as father and companion, female centrality seems to be the space for belonging by excellence.

Naming is important here. According to Geffray (1990), all members of a society are characterized by a series of distinctive linguistic operations which identify them. Words allow the speaker to name the people who arise at each of the milestones of material and social reproduction of one's community (:157). When naming grandmothers *mamã*, as is customary in Boa Vista, grandchildren are not confused about generations, but extending the category of mother beyond the figure of the biological mother and incorporating women from a different generation. In other words, two generations are necessary for motherhood to take place in Boa Vista.

The main tensions which arise from this social framework have to do with the collision between a traditional model with all characteristics analyzed here and the constant reference to an ideal Western nuclear family present in the accounts of individuals. Grandmothers, when questioned about their relationships with their grandchild stress that "it is the mother who

gave birth", going against, at the level of speech, the characteristic shared maternity observed in the daily life of families. Grandchildren, particularly younger ones, start to appreciate a so-called "normal family" and lose interest in what grandmothers have to offer. Mothers increasingly seek options to build their spaces according to European standards of living and family organization.

As with the family, maternity in Boa Vista should not be regarded in our terms. It should first be analyzed in the context of female solidarity, particularly between mother and daughter. When a child is born, mother and grandmother become active and complement each other in the duty of raising and educating the child. In a way, for a child, being with the grandmother is complementary to being with the mother and this is expressed in the complementarity of the terms "mãe" and "mamã". Thus, in Boa Vista maternity is social and can only be fully exercised by the joint action of two generations. Being a mother is a process which starts when a child is born and only fulfilled when the women becomes a grandmother, with the necessary presence of two women to raise and provide for a child[14].

Female centrality is, thus, a fundamental characteristic in this type of family organization and dispersion of functions among two or more women does not lead, as one might think, to weaker bonds between mothers and children or even among family members. In this context, the sharing – of goods, food and even children – does not weaken but rather strengthens reproduction of the system. Mobility and sharing are the values which create and recreate family relations.

All of this should be understood in light of the man's standing in the domestic realm. Given the fluid characteristics of conjugality, financial difficulties and male behavior, the man as husband and father is a distant figure in Boa Vista households. Particularly in the perspective of children, the father appears in the form of an "absent presence." Despite being close physically, because he does not share, exchange and "live together," the relationship is marked by emotional distance. The female network thus becomes an efficient strategy to make up for the absence of the husband and father.

What I can conclude from this trajectory is that the kind of family I found

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14   I note that this configuration or arrangement is not restricted to cases of emigration of the biological mother, being therefore seen as a common type of family arrangement (and, I dare say, characteristic) in this society.

in Boa Vista is a project. In other words, it is the result of constant negotiations among members, going through the inherent challenges to consider mobility as a reproduction strategy. This understanding does not come from the immediate accounts of individuals, but from observation and analysis of practices in family universes which the people I met construct. I hope this option has enlightened the forms which these families have and the ways people become members of a group, regardless of physical proximity among them.

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Abstract

This article discusses family organization on the Island of Boa Vista, in Cape Verde, within a context of female emigration. The category of disorganization used by the social Cape Verdeans themselves is revisited so as to make the concept of family relative by using the concepts of "scattered families" and "distant proximity." The analysis shows that the feeling of belonging or breach in family relations depends upon a balance in the maintenance of the numerous principles of social filiation which keep people united. Important concepts such as consanguinity, filiation, conjugality, kinship and others are analyzed in the light of ethnographic data presented.
Keywords: Social organization, emigration, gender, anthropology.