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## Becoming Manjaco: Immigration, Integration, and Identity in Cabo Verde, West Africa

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CHAPTER 4

## Becoming Manjaco: Immigration, Integration, and Identity in Cabo Verde, West Africa

*Brandon D. Lundy and Kezia Darkwah*

On January 23, 2012, Resolution No. 3 enacted the National Immigration Strategy for the island nation of Cabo Verde, the first of its kind in the country. As a buffer nation to Western Europe with a rapidly developing economy and good governance indicators, Cabo Verde is transitioning from a sending to a receiving nation for African mainlanders. A one-month ethnographic investigation among Bissau-Guinean labor migrants demonstrates how communities undergoing immigration pressures react to outsiders in complex ways. Hosts sometimes engage politics of identity to denigrate labor migrants when they perceive resource limitations. While a majority of the Bissau-Guineans had stable, full-time work, started families, and joined community organizations, frictions, especially between disenfranchised domestic youth and migrants, sometimes intensified intergroup hostility observable as prejudice, discrimination, and violence. These sentiments seemed to lessen when local institutions had the capacity to welcome and integrate visitors, uphold and revise laws, and create cooperative strategies around education, development, and security.

### The Manjaco

Ethnographer Eric Gable (2006) once described the Manjaco ethnic group of the Upper Guinea Coast as “quintessentially West African,”

BRANDON D. LUNDY AND KEZIA DARKWAH

working as “the first labor migrants in the region that comprises the Casamance (in Southern Senegal), the Gambia, and the rivers of Guinea-Bissau” (387). As noted in early European accounts of the coast, “Manjaco typically worked as sailors or stevedores for Portuguese merchants” (Gable 2006, 388), even learning their language and self-identifying as Portuguese throughout the region. According to Gable, Manjaco were a significant presence throughout colonial urban enclaves and, “To this day, Manjaco tend to migrate as laborers . . . in the lower rungs of the ladder in the cities of West Africa and Europe” (388). Alba and Foner (2014) refer to these types of migrants as “low status”—or those having low levels of education, low paying jobs, and often stigmatized in host communities because of this background. The Manjaco number approximately 300,000 worldwide, making up 8.3% of Guinea-Bissau’s population of 1.5 million today.

When conducting survey research among Bissau-Guinean labor migrants in Cabo Verde, five of the 57 surveyed were from the Manjaco ethnic group (8.77%), while other respondents self-identified as Fula (15), Papel (9), Mandinga (9), Balanta (8), Mancanha (6), and Other (5). Interestingly, the local population referred to many of these non-Manjaco labor migrants as Manjaco as well. According to one respondent, “One sign of bigotry that is quite common [in Cabo Verde] is when the locals call us Manjaco. The first arrival of Bissau-Guineans in Cabo Verde belonged to the Manjack ethnic group. After that, everyone else who comes from the West African mainland is referred to as Manjaco in the pejorative sense” (May 17, 2015). This chapter considers why many African labor migrants in Cabo Verde are “becoming Manjaco” and what this might mean for their prospects of successful community integration.

## Cabo Verde

The well-known Africanist Basil Davidson once described the island nation of Cabo Verde as the “fortunate isles” (1989). His description was partially ironic as “a barren land where people, as their poets say, have learned to feed on stones: the goats have taught them how” (5). Davidson was also in awe of the people’s perseverance in the face of deprivation, political successes against all odds, and strong spirit able to embrace a barrage of contradictions. According to Davidson, “The Cape Verde islands have long been an archipelago of emigration for reasons anything but fortunate. . . . Drought and famine have driven the people away. . . . they are ‘waiting to depart’ so that, while cheerfulness keeps breaking in, there is an air of sorrow to the place” (7).

The volcanic archipelago is located 310 miles from Senegal’s West African Coast, set adrift out in the Atlantic. With a land mass of only 1,577 square miles, partitioned among ten islands and a population of 505,000, “Today, more people with origins in Cabo Verde live outside the country than inside it” (BBC News 2016). The story goes that, while the islands were known to mainlanders who used them as temporary fishing sites from time to time, no permanent settlements were ever established until 1462, when Portuguese settlers arrived on the island of São Tiago. Ribeira Grande (later renamed Cidade Velha and inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009 as Europe’s first colonial outpost in the tropics) was established as a strategic settlement in the trade of firearms, rum, and cloth for enslaved peoples, ivory, gold, and salt. By 1495, Cabo Verde became a Portuguese crown colony that administered both its own territory and the adjacent mainland of “Portuguese Guinea,” present day Guinea-Bissau.

These sister republics rebelled against the Portuguese under the leadership of agronomist Amilcar Cabral, with many Cabo Verdeans joining the liberation war in Guinea-Bissau by 1960. With the

BRANDON D. LUNDY AND KEZIA DARKWAH

Carnation Revolution in Portugal on April 25, 1974, when the Estado Novo regime was overthrown, these two West African territories won independence and were granted UN membership by 1975. Soon after, the conditions worsened in Guinea-Bissau due to an ongoing drought and racial tensions between the black population of Guinea-Bissau and the mulatto population of Cabo Verde. On November 14, 1980, João Bernardo “Nino” Vieira, a highly respected member of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) and a key figure in the war against Portuguese colonial rule, toppled the unified government of Luis Cabral, Amilcar’s half-brother, in a bloodless coup. By 1992, a new constitution brought a multi-party system to Cabo Verde, which has been dominated by two parties ever since, the African party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV) and the Movement for Democracy (MpD), while Guinea-Bissau has rarely seen an elected president serve out a fully-mandated term in office (Lundy 2012).

To summarize, “Poor in natural resources, prone to drought and with little arable land, the Cabo Verde islands have won a reputation for achieving political and economic stability” (BBC News 2016). Guinea-Bissau, on the other hand, remains mired in political uncertainty, underdevelopment, and poverty, leaving many to seek their livelihoods outside of the country.

## Regional Integration

As Davidson noted, for much of its history, Cabo Verde has been a country of emigration, with large diasporas springing up in the United States, Europe, and the West African region. By 2007, however, the West African route into the Spanish Canary Islands from Cabo Verde was blocked due to a bilateral agreement with Spain, including a repatriation clause and the installment of the SIVE maritime surveillance system. According to the World Bank net

migration indicator, which is the total number of immigrants less the annual number of emigrants, Cabo Verde went from  $-25.866$  migrants/1,000 population in 2007 to  $-11.052$  migrants/1,000 population by 2012 (World Bank Group 2017). This is a clear indicator of fewer people leaving, more people coming in, or, more likely, both. Also in 2007, Cabo Verde was promoted from least developed country to developing country status by the United Nations based on improving economic conditions, thus making it more enticing to economic migrants from throughout the region. Furthermore, Cabo Verde validated the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) *Protocol of Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment*, although, by 2008, they had also enacted a new Labour Code that “introduced a law that only foreigners in legal status have the right to work” (Varela and Barbosa 2014, 459). Therefore, while migrants have the right to enter Cabo Verde for up to 90 days, those that overstay violate this Labour Code and become irregular migrants left unprotected, what Pedro Marcelino referred to as denizens (2016), trapped in what Stef Jansen calls “zones of humiliating entrapment” (2009).

### Rising Immigration and Tension

Once a transit country for potential Europe-bound immigrants, Cabo Verde has now been described as a “buffer nation” for the West and a “final destination” for labor migrants due to these new restrictions and tourism investments (Marcelino 2011; Varela and Barbosa 2014, 451). Data supplied by the Cabo Verdean National Statistics Institute for 2013 listed 17,788 immigrants that year, 3,961 (22%; 3,243 male, 718 females) of which came from Guinea-Bissau, the most from any sending country. Overall, people residing in Cabo Verde representing other nationalities now make up about 3% of the total population (Varela and Barbosa 2014, 454), while the island of Boa

BRANDON D. LUNDY AND KEZIA DARKWAH

Vista's population of 8,698 (2010) is made up of 22% (1,942) foreign guests. This dramatic rise in immigrant populations has led to increased tension between local hosts and foreign guests in some communities. For example, on October 5, 2010, a headline decried, "Boa Vista get to the streets for peace after a brutal murder." According to the story,

Boa Vista has witnessed the biggest demonstration in its history. The Guinean community, people from every island in Cape Verde, Europeans living on the island of dunes, tourists, all united in the March for Peace, a response of love and hope for an episode that stunned Boa Vista: the brutal murder of a Guinean citizen in the heart of the capital and the subsequent revolt of their community. A case that exposed the social weaknesses in the first tourist island of the archipelago. The City Council has already warned that it will be "more selective" in the granting of residence permits. (Valdigem 2010)

This incident and others like it led to a number of local and national initiatives aimed at abating this increasing community tension, including the enactment of Resolution No. 3, the National Immigration Strategy for the island nation of Cabo Verde, on January 23, 2012, the first of its kind in the country.

### Politics of Identity (Becoming Other)

The politics of identity create complex feelings about others, those who are different from oneself in a way that has been determined to be meaningful; and then these feelings are often acted upon in either helpful or harmful ways (Appiah 2006). These sentimentalities toward the other can change over time from feelings of receptivity and belongingness to alienation and othering expressed through feelings of prejudice and discrimination toward an outgroup that

can accompany intergroup hostilities (Baumeister and Vohs 2007; Campbell 1965; Jackson 1993). Triggers to intergroup hostilities can be perceived or real shortages of valued resources such as jobs, while positive relations can be achieved through shared values and goals, such as security and community development. One of my favorite quotes expressing these sentiments is from Chuck Frake (2006, 41), who writes,

A major motive in human life, on occasion not even second to survival, is the need to be somebody. To be somebody, one must have recognition from one's fellows. Violence, by threatening survival, one's own as well as others', provides a sure route to recognition. But who are one's fellows? Who are those like you? And who are the "others," those to whose fate one can be indifferent? . . . These are the issues from the individual perspective. From the wider social and political perspective one must ask, what are the conditions of conflict and what are the available resources for identity construction? And, historically, how did these particular conditions and resources come to be at hand? Fully appreciating the power of each of these perspectives (agentive, structural, and historical) within a single account is the necessary but elusive goal of any proper social theory.

Conflicts abound in the context of immigration in Cabo Verde. Dilemmas around belongingness and difference are complicated when discussing Bissau-Guinean labor migrants in Cabo Verde, where a shared language and historical context overlap with racial difference and economic disparities. What results is a complex scene where identities directly affect livelihoods, security, and feelings of belongingness or discrimination.



BRANDON D. LUNDY AND KEZIA DARKWAH

## Findings of Conflict (“Becoming Manjaco”)

In May and June of 2015, we surveyed 57 Bissau-Guinean immigrants on the islands of Boa Vista and Santiago, islands with two of the three largest immigrant communities in the country. These migrants worked in service and construction, and some attended school. Twenty-four (24) of the 57 respondents had resided in Cabo Verde for more than ten years, with the average age at the time of migration being 25.6. Respondents’ average salary was \$3,422 dollars, close to the average GDP per capita (PPP) of \$3,800 (2008 est.) in Cabo Verde and well above the same in Guinea-Bissau, which was only \$600 (2008 est.). Respondent remittances averaged \$1,007.45 per year. When asked if they had ever experienced intolerance, prejudice, or discrimination in Cabo Verde, 41 of 57 Bissau-Guinean respondents said that they had. Furthermore, 26 of 57 felt insecure or extremely insecure when it came to their personal safety. Ten (10) of the 57 survey respondents mentioned the term “manjaco” as a derogatory label used against them as an African mainlander with darker skin.

The ethnic Manjack are considered one of the earliest peoples to come to Cabo Verde in conjunction with the Portuguese in the 1500s, sometimes in their employ and others as their captives. Today, the word expresses a marker of difference. These perceived markers of difference are enacted and sometimes even escalated to violence. For example, one respondent recounted, “On May 10, 2014, a Bissau-Guinean security guard on his way to work was assaulted by three men who were trying to provoke him and take what he had on his person. He didn’t respond, and they shot him in the face where he ended up losing an eye” (May 17, 2015). During a focus group discussion with the leadership of the Guinean Association of Boavista (May 24, 2015), they described a similar violent event, “We can recall a serious conflict that happened in 2002, when Guineans

brawled with locals from Santiago. During the fight, a Guinean got stabbed. . . . We were afraid that he was going to die, and there was no hospital.”

Another example from a Bissau-Guinean woman who sold hamburgers out of her shipping container storefront said, “Where I sell hamburgers, people are sometimes drunk. They always try to get stuff from me on credit, and sometimes I cannot accept that. They then start to insult me by saying, ‘Ah don’t forget, you are Manjaco. You think you are an important person, but you are not.’ I just try and let it go” (May 22, 2015). These rising tensions between these neighbors, usually made up of disenfranchised urban youth from the capital city of Praia, the local community, and immigrants from the mainland, have transformed the country’s socio-cultural milieu. To illustrate, researcher Derek Pardue wrote, “By 2007 the term *kaçubodi*, the Kriolu pronunciation of ‘cash or body,’ had become a catch all phrase to describe the rise of urban violence” (2016, 333). Survey respondents, when referencing their fear related to personal security and rising crime rates, particularly muggings and youth gang activity, also regularly used this phrase.

According to some, however, these incidents of discrimination have lessened since 2012 when a national plan was put into place to help resolve tensions resulting from immigration pressures. According to our interview with the police chief of Boa Vista,

The statistics on crime rates on the island are very low and have decreased significantly between 2012 and 2014. But something bad will happen and the whole perception of safety will go down. The most recent incident of note was when a member of the Guinean immigrant community was assaulted by a youth from Praia. Thousands of immigrants gathered in front of the suspected perpetrator’s house. I believe this event went down without

BRANDON D. LUNDY AND KEZIA DARKWAH

incident because I had established rapport with the community. (May 25, 2015)

## The Immigration Policy

The findings of this study are very much in line with those expressed in Resolution 3, the National Immigration Strategy (2012). This policy opens with the following statement:

Cape Verde is considered, mainly starting from independence, a country of immigration, with the entry of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and the West African Coast. The causes identified are the political and social stability of Cape Verde, its geographical position at the crossroads of three continents, the dynamic of economic growth, the regional integration in ECOWAS pursuant to the ratification of the treaties and conventions they respect, as well as the bilateral and multilateral accords kept internationally. (translated by Lisa C. Smith)

This immigration policy now inscribes the adoption of measures to combat discrimination and the violation of the rights of migrants by training officials and by creating campaigns to influence public opinion about common misconceptions around migration (Lartey and Lundy 2017). Recognizing that the integration of immigrants into society is one of Cabo Verde's most important challenges, this policy acknowledges,

Integration is a dynamic and bi-directional process of including immigrants in institutions and in the host society. To overcome barriers, the host society and immigrants must engage in a mutual process of integration. The promotion of fundamental rights, non-discrimination, and equality of opportunities for all are fundamental aspects. (Cabo Verde National Immigration Strategy 2012, 24; translated by Lisa C. Smith)

Furthermore, the policy promotes access to labor markets, education, housing, social protection, and healthcare, along with encouraging coexistence of citizens belonging to different religions and cultures. During our fieldwork, we witnessed and later wrote about these community changes in action, including the building of affordable housing, literacy campaigns, intercultural events at schools, effective community policing, amnesty periods, and the opening of national and municipal-level immigration offices (Lartey and Lundy 2017).

## Conclusion

Finding common ground is one way to avoid intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination. For Bissau-Guinean immigrants and Cabo Verdean hosts, there is a lot of fertile ground to find similarities. To name just a few, there is a common history including a shared colonial experience and independence movement, a common language, geographic proximity, and the necessity to seek a livelihood far from home. The politics of identity remain a powerful motivator of negativity in Cabo Verde around racial and religious differences and a lack of resources, including high unemployment rates (12.4% in 2015, down from a high of 16.8% in 2012). Active and sustained mitigation on the part of the national and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and local community associations, however, are having a clear effect on both local receptivity and foreign guests' community integration. Through these initiatives throughout Cabo Verde, instead of the immigrant others becoming Manjaco, they are trusted neighbors instead.

BRANDON D. LUNDY AND KEZIA DARKWAH

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