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# “I want to marry in Cabo Verde”

Reflections on homosexual conjugality in contexts

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## Resumo

Este artigo pretende explorar o universo das relações afetivas em Cabo Verde que envolve aspectos relativos à conjugalidade e à sexualidade. Nosso interesse tem início nas demandas por casamento veiculadas pela Associação Gay Cabo-verdiana, bem como nos dados etnográficos em que o tema do casamento gay é debate entre militantes homossexuais na cidade de Mindelo (Ilha de São Vicente). Tais fatos serão analisados em contexto, ou seja, pretendemos refletir sobre as demandas da Associação situando-a no universo de conjugalidade e sexualidade heterossexual no país. Argumentamos que analisar o debate sobre o casamento gay ampliando a discussão para o entendimento de como as relações afetivas são vividas entre homens e mulheres no arquipélago é fundamental para refletirmos não somente sobre as dinâmicas das afetividades locais, mas especialmente sobre a circulação de discursos e valores no âmbito dos movimentos sociais globais e suas relações com as dinâmicas locais.

**Palavras-chave:** Cabo Verde, homossexualidade, conjugalidade, globalização, antropologia

## Abstract

This article explores the universe of affective relations in Cabo Verde, especially those aspects related to conjugality and sexuality. Our interest begins with the demands for same-sex marriage made by a gay Cabo Verdean

association and the ethnographic data on the gay marriage issue when it was debated by homosexual militants in Mindelo (São Vicente Island). These facts will be analyzed in the context of conjugal arrangements and heterosexual sexuality in the country. We argue that analyzing the debate on gay marriage and broadening the discussion to understand how affective relationships are lived between men and women in the archipelago, it is necessary to reflect not only on the dynamics of local affections, but especially how the circulation of discourses and values within global social movements impinges on the situation in Cabo Verde.

**Keywords:** Cabo Verde, homosexuality, conjugality, globalization, anthropology

# “I want to marry in Cabo Verde”

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## Introduction

In 2013, in the first gay parade of Cabo Verde, a *traveste*<sup>1</sup> protestor sports in the streets of Mindelo a rainbow flag – symbol of the international gay movement – and a poster that reads:



*“I want to marry in Cabo Verde”*

Source: Juliette Brinckmann/AGC/Facebook/Promotion

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to stabilize in writing sexual identities that are ethnographically fluid. Thus, in Cabo Verde, the boundary that separates gays and *travestes* (Cabo Verdean term for ‘transvestite’) is very thin and porous. The *traveste*’s identity concerns not only the ratings by intensity of masculinization/feminization of bodies, but also reverberates class positions. Overall, however, *travestes* are those born with male genitals to poorer strata of society, and who want to be *women*, and for this purpose, keep their bodies as feminized as possible, advocating, at times, this identity for themselves. The distinct spelling intends not only to mark a phonetic distinction of the word in the Creole language (*traveste*) in relation to the word in Portuguese (*travesti*), but also distinguish the *traveste*’s identity as being culturally different from the Brazilian transvestites’, for never having their bodies transformed by silicone implants and hormone treatments, technologies which are not always desirable, not locally available, and unviable from an economic point of view for them.

This demand is easily recognizable, if understood within the context of contemporary struggles in some countries for legal recognition of the right to same-sex civil union and marriage. However, it gains specific contours in Cabo Verde, since in this country, as we shall see, amorous relationships in general are not marked, necessarily, by their formalization before the state, nor the cohabitation of the spouses.

This article aims to explore the universe of amorous relations in Cabo Verde involving aspects related to conjugality and sexuality. Our interest begins in the demands for marriage made by the Cabo Verdean Gay Association (AGC), as well as in ethnographic data gathered during the debate on gay marriage among homosexual militants in the city of Mindelo (São Vicente). These facts will be discussed here in context of the universe of heterosexual conjugality and sexuality in Cabo Verde.

We also reflect not only on the dynamics of local amorous relationships, but especially on the circulation of discourses and values within the global social movements and their relation with the local situation. We utilize the concept of global assemblage by Ong & Collier (2005), who see this type of phenomenon as a global fact, proposing to comprehend the ways in which the values resulting from a global logic are incorporated into local realities.

The text is divided into three parts. We will first seek to describe amorous relationships between men and women, marriage in ideal and practice, the significance of children, and the strategies, especially of women, to deal with the constraints of this model. Then, we will explore how the demand for same-sex marriage is configured by looking at the debates have arisen among homosexuals of one of the islands of the archipelago of Cabo Verde, São Vicente. In the second part, we will analyze the various facets of the aforementioned demand in the local contexts and how they are reconfigured. Finally, we will reflect on the global agendas of the gay movement and how they strengthen notions of cosmopolitanism in Cabo Verdean society, so that we can then go back to the concept of global assemblage.

The paper results from a dialogue between two researchers of Cabo Verdean society. Andréa Lobo has concentrated on understanding family dynamics and contexts of migration, values, discourses, and objects for the last 15 years. Her studies reflect on how family relationships are configured in a society marked by movement as a cultural value, from a perspective that seeks to reveal the historical depth of family values. Francisco Miguel, on the

other hand, presents his data on male homosexuality and homosociability and the recent LGBT movement in Mindelo, on the island of São Vicente<sup>2</sup>.

## Marriage as a process

The Cabo Verdean family has been the focus of debate both among social scientists and local politicians. Associated with issues of domestic violence, problems concerning juvenile offenders, and the high proportion of female-headed households, the family appears both as a birthplace of social problems as well as a lifeline to society, that is, it is both the source of troubles as well as the solution for them. Local notions of disruption and disorganization appear as adjectives for family arrangements that follow their own logic, a dynamic that can only be understood as a deviation if compared to something held as a standard, as a model. In this case, an idea held of what the nuclear family is or should be.

There are many aspects to explore in this debate, however, we will focus on describing and analyzing conjugality, on the basis of ethnographic data gathered during research conducted on one of the islands of Boa Vista.<sup>3</sup> The theme, therefore, is marriage. What we will seek to demonstrate is that the notion of marriage must be understood within context, that is, as a native category, for if it is used as an analytical term it leads to dangers already widely discussed in the realm of kinship anthropology (Schneider 1972; Leach 1974; Peletz 1995).

### *Between men and rivals*

Romantic relationships between men and women are not easily noticeable in everyday public life. Couples walking holding hands, embracing or exchanging caresses are not part of the daily scenario, even in bars or nightclubs. Knowing who *tem com* (has with) requires entering local networks of sociability, meeting people, and being privy to rumors, comments, and

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2 This research resulted in a Master's Dissertation at the University of Brasília (Miguel, 2014).

3 Boa Vista is one of the ten islands that form the archipelago of Cabo Verde. It is the third largest in area, with the main town being Vila de Sal-Rei, which hosts more than half of the total population of the island. Boa Vista was one of the first islands to be discovered, but was only inhabited later on. Within the national context Boa Vista is historically marked by modest settlement, a fact that has been reversed over the last ten years thanks to the growth of tourism investments.

confidences about one's own or another's love life. *Ter com* is the local expression that may be considered equivalent to dating, or even having a more lasting relationship with children, regardless of whether the couple live together or not.<sup>4</sup> When there are children the terms *father-of-child* or *mother-of-child* are used to refer to the partner with whom one shares the child, and such expressions are used referentially even if the amorous relationship between them has already dissolved. The term marriage is only used when it is legally sanctioned, that is, *no papel* (on paper).

From a woman's perspective, relationships, from the start, are marked by the real threat that the companion might also be seeing another woman, or other women, concurrently. As we will see, this expectation is a source of tension and conflict, experienced with anxiety by a number of women. Having more than one *pequena*<sup>5</sup> is perceived as a masculine characteristic, something inherent to *being a man*, a symbol of masculinity shared by both men and women.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is something to be expected but not necessarily accepted by women, who use various strategies to ward off the *rival* and have their partner all to themselves.

To a certain extent, these relationships quickly become public through comments, which range from approval to reproach. It all depends on how the *betrayal*<sup>7</sup> takes place. This becomes very clear in the account of Sónia<sup>8</sup>, who has lived for over 15 years with her *father-of-child*. In one of our conversations about the behavior of men, she claimed to distinguish herself from other women saying that she never underwent the situation of actually seeing her man with another *pequena*. She states never having allowed this lack of respect: of having the man pass in front of her or walk down the street with

4 It is difficult to find a translation equivalent to the Creole expression "to have with so and so" given its plurality of meanings, which can go from dating, to having an affair with, or even be applied to a long-lasting relationship, with children and cohabitation. We opted, therefore, to keep the expression in Creole in order to avoid translations that carry a moral burden, fatally inadequate to the case at hand here.

5 Local term for girlfriend or lover.

6 Other behaviors are described in the literature as important symbols of masculine identity in Cabo Verde, especially a public performance marked by violence and machismo. On this subject see Vasconcelos, 2012; Bordonaro 2012; Miranda 2013.

7 This is a local category, often used by women when referring to the relationships their partners have with others. The notion of betrayal, from an analytical standpoint, seems to translate exactly this dimension of the dilemma experienced by the women, of something that is expected, but not accepted. Since it is a category used locally, it will be used here in italics.

8 It was agreed with our interlocutors that their real names would be replaced in the publications resulting from the research in order to keep their experiences and stories in relative anonymity.

another woman. “He does his own because every man does, but does it well done, well hidden, because to this day I’ve never caught him red-handed. I’ve heard stories, but to see with my own eyes, I’ve never seen. As long as it is so, it is all good, all within respect.”

Sónia was not the only one making this kind of statement, which is more common when more mature women compare ancient times with the present day. “In the old days” refers to the time when men had other *pequenas* and even families, but it was all *within respect*, that is, they did not “rub the other woman in the face of their families”. According to them, nowadays things have changed a lot and no one has respect anymore, “today they are with one, and tomorrow they already show up with another strolling through the square, for all to comment”. It is interesting to note the major concern with the rumors that *betrayal* can cause, rather than with the fact itself. As Sónia says, “every man cheats, but the important thing is for it to be done with respect”.

In fact, *betrayals* and conflicts between rivals are preferred subjects in conversation between women and men. There are numerous reports of fights, men caught in the act, and cases of aggression between rivals, including situations that ended up involving the police. Reports vary with regards to the nature of the relations: sporadic affairs, seduction games, and even dual residence. Women send messages and threats to those who *invade* their relationship with their partner. If the warning does not result in the end of the rumors, they come to blows. Information about the alleged *affair* circulate through *faladeirezas* (gossip) and the rivalry takes on greater proportions as these rumors gain wide circulation, which thus seems to augment their credibility. In cases of suspicion, women, relatives, and friends begin a process of investigation that can last a long period of time.

Every effort boils down to driving rivals away from their companion, in an attempt to curtail the relationship, and especially to avoid the birth of children. There is an explicit fear that she be *exchanged* for the other, and maybe this is why there is a preference for the other relationship to be kept hidden, because it is a sign that the man does not intend to take on the other *pequena*. On the other hand, when the relationship becomes public, the woman is pressured to take action, either confronting the rival (physically if



necessary) or ending the relationship with the *father-of-child*.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, men who maintain relations with many women say they would never accept the same behavior from their partner and would never fight over a woman.<sup>10</sup>

In this universe, what are the strategies used by women in order to maintain a minimum of control over their conjugal relationships? It is common to find in Cabo Verdean literature on conjugality the interpretation that the man's ability to provide for the home and the children is an important factor in maintaining a conjugal relationship. However, the stories of women maintaining a relationship with men who do not support them emotionally and economically are common. When asked why they stay in a situation of conflict and defined by their own selves as humiliating, women always replied in the same way: "the woman is weak, she has a weak spirit."

Being weak does not mean she is dominated or without power in all aspects of life. Being weak means she is the frail part of the relationship between the sexes. As with polygynous masculinity, female frailty is constructed and perceived as something inherent and inevitable to the universe of women. Female sexuality predisposes women to be unfit/unable to resist male seduction. In addition, there is the notion that men are all the same and that a good companion is hard to find. The way out is one of two choices: not staying with anyone, at least steadily, or remaining with the same person, since it is *no use changing*.

The notion of a "good companion" seems to oppose that of a "Cabo Verdean man". Ideally the good companion is a man "like the European", who helps at home, gets involved with the care of the children, is affectionate, romantic, and does not go around with other women. At the opposite end is the Cabo Verdean man, "who is no good", is never home, provides no attention or emotional and financial support for the children and *mother-of-child*, has other women, and is a brute, not romantic. Despite being defined with these negative characteristics, these would be considered the best partners

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9 This rarely happens in actuality, the most that was witnessed during the research were threats or temporary separations. Generally, the dispute occurs between the two women, with the man only being the pivot of the conflict. However, in the few accounts we have of women who took a stand, they became a reference of how a woman should act with a man who disrespects her.

10 This affirmation does not mean that women do not have other relationships, either through life or concurrently. The sexual and emotional behavior of some of them is also called into question, being the target of gossip and possible mistrust. However, for women this is not a typical way of living sexuality, being more the exception rather than the rule, and subject to heavier moral sanctions.

as far as sex is concerned. Such a combination of factors results in the female perspective of *weakness* and in the feeling that it is *no use changing*.

Exploring women's strategies, the birth of a child is, sometimes, a way of ensuring a man's support. It is common for a woman to get pregnant in an attempt to create a stronger sense of duty in the man. This often does not work and she ends up having several *fathers-of-child* throughout life, having to support her children without a man's constant support.

Hercules and I *have already had with each other* for 20 years, we've never lived together in the same house because he *already had with* Lina when I arrived (in the relationship). We got pregnant at about the same time, because there is a six-month difference between their first daughter and my son. But his family put pressure for they were neighbors and there were some relatives involved. Soon she came to be pregnant again, went on to live in his family's house, and they live so up to this day. I am not one to make trouble, so I never *meddled in*, for me it is alright the way it is. It wasn't because she came before me, because we did arrive together, but it was because she used cunning and ended up getting three children from him, so there was no way of him getting away, and he ended up living with her. But I never went without a man; he was always there for me when I needed him, although he never gave much to the child. However, I do not let any other women who want to intrude do it, I really fight back, because they already found me here and I will not give up what is mine that easily, it's been 20 years together, and it's not any *pixinguinha* (prostitute) who will come and take over just like that.

The advantage of being the first *mother-of-child*, the argument that she *was already there* when the other women arrived is important. These two factors give her a "right" over the man that is expressed concretely in the fact that she may fight for him. On the other hand, it warrants her the respect of the other women, who also recognize her prerogative to *fight* for the maintenance of her relationship. It is clear that this tacit agreement does not guarantee the stability of the union, for the man may, at any time, abandon the *mother-of-child* and establish a *fixed* relationship with another woman. It is also clear that, as seen in the passage above, *firstness* is a target of dispute between rivals, and the factors time and children can act in favor of both.

*To have with* another is, therefore, a constant source of quarrels between the rival women, often generating conflicts between the couple, and it may

reach the point where the woman threatens to leave her companion, even though this hardly ever takes place. On the one hand, the most common is the feeling that too much time has already been invested in the relationship, and therefore, one has the right to want to keep it. On the other hand, there is the feeling of impotence or weakness is common among women. They feel they can not break off a relationship that has already lasted a considerable period of time, has already generated children, and they justify this by saying that if they leave the *father-of-child*, they will find another man who will do the same or worse, so they stay where they are and avoid having a child from each father. Another reason used in order to explain why the relationship is kept lies in the fact that while the man goes around with other women, he always returns.

It is worth drawing attention to the dilemma experienced by these women: to remain or not to remain in relationships that they themselves classify as being problematic or a source of suffering. One possible analytical answer would be to invoke the competition of models operating in the Creole society of Cabo Verde (Trajano Filho 2003; Lobo 2014). In the family context these standards in competition inform the dynamics of life of women, men, and children through the notions of family structure and dysfunction. Breaking with family behaviors considered destabilizing becomes imponderable for young women who find themselves in constant conflict between discourses and practices in competition.

### *“Marriage is for life”*

As it must have become clear by now, the fact that a couple has a child does not mean they share a new home. Usually the mother, along with the child, continues to live with her mother or family in which she was raised, while the father remains in his home. But when the couple reaches a more mature age, the transitory nature of relationships tends to be less frequent. Couples live a conjugal relationship not formalized by marriage, but living together, or, even if in separate homes they visit each other on a daily basis. Usually the woman goes to sleep with the *father-of-child* or companion, but spends the day and affirms living in what she calls *nha casa* (our home), with her immediate relatives.

The older they get, the more common it is for men to claim being in search of conjugal tranquility and stability. They say they want a peaceful life

by their *mother-of-child*. In spite of this, it is rare to find adult couples living in a situation formalized by legal marriage; the most common form of conjugality is union itself, and legal marriage is more an exception than the rule.

The postponement of the formal wedding is generally linked to the perception that it is an expensive and unimportant ceremony. However, in practice, it is envisioned as a possibility or project, especially for women. They hope to get married and the moment upon which the desire will become reality ultimately depends on the men. Directly or indirectly, the power of decision is male. In conversations with women on the island of Boa Vista, it was common to hear them say they were waiting for the man to settle down in order to formalize the union, because marriage is a serious business and it is for life. This moment arrives when they are older, when the children have been raised and grandchildren already tread their grandparents' house (Lobo 2010).

A document on the analysis of weddings in Cabo Verde for the period between 2000 and 2011 presents interesting data (INE 2013). The crude marriage rate per year is considered low, less than five weddings per one thousand inhabitants, and the age at which marriages occur is considered high, of almost 40 years for men. This data is in accordance with our field experience, in which we were able to interview, observe, and talk to dozens of women and men on this topic, finding that the overall voice is that marriage is seen as a *serious step*, one that requires responsibility, and which is *forever*.

A formal wedding is an important symbol of prestige, especially when the ceremony is held in a church. We see, then, the Christian model, so valued in this society, as a reference of an ideal way of life, being, finally, fulfilled through the formalizing of a conjugal relationship that has already lasted for years in a situation of "informality". The statistical rarity of formal weddings does not mean a detachment from the Christian model of marriage. On the contrary, it indicates full adherence to it. People marry formally only when they truly feel able to follow the model to the letter, keeping the marriage forever. This data suggests that it is more worthwhile not to marry rather than to do it and subsequently break such an important bond.

A man marries when he is willing to take on formal responsibility for the family, even if he is already doing so in practice. With the wedding, which implies cohabitation, the woman feels safe. This is the phase in which the man has already *settled down* and is more present in the domestic sphere;

usually, it is during this period that religious weddings take place. Organized by the children and grandchildren these ceremonies tend to celebrate the couple's long years of union. It was so in the case of Nha Raimunda and Nho Justino. When they completed 25 years of living together, the children organized the wedding ceremony in the church to celebrate and formalize the union. Nha Raimunda confided that she had always wanted to marry, for she is religious, but they had never had economic conditions to do so, and also because Nho Justino used to drink a lot and was a *man of his parody* (party). He had now grown tired of this *evil life of going out stag with his fellows* and was more *settled down*, that is why he decided to get married and have the celebration his children wanted.

The case of Boa Vista is no different from other Cabo Verdean islands and other ethnographic scenarios. For example, Edith Clarke, in her study on Jamaica (1979), states that instability is the central feature of conjugal relations in Creole societies, noting that, within these social contexts, relations of extra-residential, non-domiciliary, or visitation nature, and with various alternatives to the conjugal standard are institutionalized. Another central feature is that the ideal age for marriage is high, with it being typical for marriage to be preceded by several years of cohabitation. It is normal for father and mother to marry after the children are already grown and even when they are already grandparents. The author also points out that few are the men who only have one conjugal union. Most are involved in two or more, aside from engaging in a series of chance encounters.<sup>11</sup>

However, when analyzing the phases through which conjugal relationships go through, a question remains: instead of accepting the idea of instability, we could ask ourselves whether the postponed wedding would not represent a strategy within another scale of priorities<sup>12</sup>. Wouldn't the wedding in Cabo Verde, as in some African cases, have a processual character?

In order to clarify this point, we propose going back to the analysis of the Tallensi marriage made by Fortes (1969), in which he demonstrates that

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11 In the extreme of this model, there is the ethnography of Cai Hua on the Na, from China (2001). The author provides an interesting analysis of a kinship system in which there is no formal marriage, or cohabitation, nor are there the terms in the language for "husband" and "father". Social reproduction takes place through nightly sexual visits. Who takes care of the children is the mother's brother.

12 Woortmann (1987) in his book "The Family of Women" does not gratuitously buy into the notion of stability and instability to define families of poorer strata of society in Salvador either. Such notions, according to the author, are not easily determined.

marriages are unstable in the early stages. A young man rarely remains permanently with his first bride and the young women themselves see their first marriage as an experiment, except in the cases in which the husband is older or the marriage is the result of a negotiation. Mature men claim not to remember all the women they had. Although the idea of marriage is not one of an eternal bond for the Tallensi, many couples stay together for life. In his effort to understand African marriage, Radcliffe-Brown (1978) states we should not think of it as an event or condition, but rather as a process in development.

Given these examples, we risk suggesting that conjugal relations in Cabo Verde may be less unstable than they appear to be in the speech of the interlocutors. Instability as a negative factor arises, then, as a clash between local practices and a Western model, which, according to Pina Cabral (2003), merges affiliation, conjugality, and residence in family formation. Against an ideal model that values a Western Christian perspective, the local universe appears as dysfunctional. As in other ethnographic contexts, marriage here can be understood as progressive, the result of a process of long negotiations and that develops in stages. Unlike the case described by Clarke, what we have here is not instability, but process.

In the local explanation, marriage and other forms of union can not be seen as alternative forms of conjugal association in which the individual is free to choose. While union in fact is a type of arrangement that does not involve a secure conjugal bond or a well-defined relationship of kinship, legal marriage is seen as a serious step which requires responsibility from both parties. Marriage takes place, then, as the last stage of an association that before took other forms: first, of chance affairs (with or without children), then, actual unions, and finally, marriage. The last being an indication that the economic and social conditions for such have been met. Marriage is the sign that the contracting parties have approved of each other to the point of submitting themselves to the risk of changing *status* and the responsibility this entails. This type of union marks the end of a free association that can, theoretically, be dissolved at any time. In the conception of women, one should only marry after the man *stopswandering* and *sits his head* at home, because marriage is *for life*.

It is within this particular context of conjugal relations that lies the main issue that concerns us in this article: how to understand the demand

for gay marriage in Cabo Verde, if in this archipelago the nuclear conjugal model held as hegemonic and presupposed in the international LGBT agenda (Epprecht 2013)<sup>13</sup> might not take place?

## Male (homo)sexuality and gay marriage in Cabo Verde

Before proceeding, it is necessary to understand how male (homo)sexuality is experienced in this country.<sup>14</sup> In order to do so, we open this section with the account of Bela, a *traveste* from Mindelo:

We in Cabo Verde, we are gays, we are *travestes*, but we never get involved with gays. We like to get involved with men. Men who do not like to take it in the ass. Men. We like men; we do not like gays, unlike foreigners. Abroad, gays like gays. But not us, we are different.

In this account, the *traveste* Bela discusses in local terms the hegemonic system of male sexuality in Cabo Verde, which separates *men* and *gays*<sup>15</sup>. Such a system is analogous to the one described by anthropologist Peter Fry for the poorer strata of society in the outskirts of Belém, in Brazil, studied in the 1970s. In Brazil, the author finds a system that separates “men” and “fairies”. In his own words:

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13 Marc Epprecht notes that: “The ‘gay international’ has been instrumental in developing such responses, in helping African associations to network and professionalize, and in funding research to support rights claims. Global solidarity associations such as Human Rights Watch, ILGA, and the International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) have also played a significant role, lobbying donor governments to be alert to the issues.” (Epprecht 2013:159) For some examples of pro-gay marriage campaigns promoted by international civil society movements, see: [http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/issues/families/campaigns\\_and\\_events](http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/issues/families/campaigns_and_events)

14 We take this opportunity to briefly justify our decision of dealing solely with male homosexuality. From Brazil, the little material that arrived from the Cabo Verdean LGBT movement made male homosexuality much more visible than female homosexuality. Upon arriving in Cabo Verde, our closest interlocutors were all men, aged between 15 and 40 years old. Within this group of friends, there was only one girl who identified herself as being “30% homosexual” and who *had with* another female friend from the group. Thus, female (homo)sexuality will not be approached in this work, because, aside from being made more socially invisible, our relations in the field led us primarily to male homosociability. An exemplary case in the field of this invisibility brokered by the lesbian women themselves, was when, upon being invited to participate in the first TV program in Cabo Verde that would discuss “homosexuality”, they promptly refused.

15 Being *gay* or *homosexual* within the hegemonic model of Cabo Verde – and these are categories triggered as synonyms locally – has to do not only with an attitude of publicly taking on one’s own homosexuality (and this is done not only verbally, but also with the people one hangs around with, garments, body performance, etc.) but also with the local classification on sexual performances, which couples male passivity to *homosexuality*. Being *gay* on those islands is also bearing on one’s own male body signs of femaleness; it is to resemble a woman, in some way or in some aspect.

The category *bicha* (fairy) is defined with regards to the category “man” in terms of social and sexual behavior. While the “man” should behave in a “masculine” manner, the “fairy” tends to reproduce behaviors generally associated with the female gender role. In the sexual act, the “man” penetrates, while the “fairy” is penetrated [...] the act of penetrating and the act of being penetrated acquire within this cultural area, through the concepts of “activity” and “passivity”, the sense of domination and submission. Thus, the “man” ideally dominates the “fairy”. In addition, the relationship between “men” and “fairies” is analogous to the one established between “men” and “women” within the same social context, where the male and female gender roles are highly segregated and hierarchized (Fry 1982:90, free translated).

This system, which Peter Fry denominates “system A” is the hegemonic model found in the fieldwork in the city of Mindelo, in present-day Cabo Verde. In this city, ideally, the male and female genders are equally segregated and hierarchized. There, the sexual behaviors of *men* and *gays* are also, ideally and respectively, “active” and “passive”. Finally, in Cabo Verde, men are also presumed to act in an extremely masculine way, while *gays* and *travesties* would articulate many of the feminine signs found in their culture. Obviously, there are creative displacements and recitations of these signs of masculinity/femininity in the bodies of the subjects, and sexual performances are not always so Cartesian either. In other words, this model never transpires perfectly, but operates as a standard and it is in this sense that such models of sexuality proposed by Fry help us here.

Nevertheless, there as here, there is more than one male sexuality system coexisting and competing (Fry 1982:91). Thus, a second model formulated by Fry, also applicable to Cabo Verde, would be the symmetric model of the “knowledgeable men”, or system B.<sup>16</sup> This model B of male sexuality, in which the division lies between men and “knowledgeable men”, or “heterosexual” and “homosexual”, also operates in Cabo Verde, however, with less resonance.

16 In system B, “the male world is no longer divided between masculine men and effeminate men as in the first system, and is divided between ‘heterosexuals’ and ‘homosexuals’, between ‘men’ and ‘knowledgeable men’ (Fry 1982:93-4, my emphasis). The author points out that: “the ‘man’ is not the same as in the previous system, for in that one, the ‘man’ could perform homosexual behaviors if he restricts himself to being ‘active’. In this new system, the male who engages sexually with another male, even if ‘actively’, ceases to be a ‘real man’ and becomes ‘knowledgeable’ or ‘homosexual’. Thus, in this new system the acceptable sexual relations are different from the ones in system ‘A’. Now, men must only relate with women, and ‘knowledgeable men’ with ‘knowledgeable men’ (Fry 1982:94).



Bringing forth the hegemonic Cabo Verdean system (“System A” or “hierarchical”, in the terms of Fry) is key to understanding the relationship.

With the “non-gay” category, we intend to encompass all men who do not identify themselves with a non-heterosexual identity, yet that relate erotically with people of the same sex. This criterion is not simply an arbitrariness of the anthropologists, but rather a classification of gay interlocutors themselves who always tended to categorize these “straight with quotation marks” or “non-gay” men within the same class. The prefix “non” is not by chance: it is used here because, even if they relate sexually with people of the same sex, it is precisely in the coincidence of the negative responses of these young men, when asked if they are “gay”, that there is a possibility of classifying them within a same group.

With this understood, homosexuality among Cabo Verdean men is mostly experienced non-conjugally, and, above all, is hardly experienced romantically<sup>17</sup>, whether in the lower or middle classes. Unlike the cases presented by Rodrigues (2010) within the upper classes of the capital<sup>18</sup> male homosexuality in Mindelo is experienced, especially through isolated sexual encounters, even though many participants suffer enormously due to this lack of romanticism.

In this regard, in one of our long conversations through the nights in the city of Mindelo, Didi, a young non-heterosexual actor, sarcastically asked his friend Elzo, gay activist and defender of same-sex marriage as a priority in the agenda of the local LGBT movement: “Ok! If they institute [same-sex] marriage here, who will marry whom? You will convince the young lad over there to marry?” Didi was referring to the non-gay young men who eventually *have with* them. And goes on, “I will marry Lunga? Tchinda?” What Didi meant is that since homosexuals do not date homosexuals, here could be no reason of having marriage if there were no people who intended to marry. Didi also argued that it *would take decades to change the minds of Cabo Verdean men*, so that they would want to get married.

17 By conjugality, we mean a relationship marked by the ideal of cohabitation and an emotional, sexual, and financial commitment taken on between the parties, in most cases on monogamous terms. This is an “ideal”, since the non-occurrence of one or more of these characteristics in people’s real everyday lives would not necessarily disrupt the notion of conjugality.

18 The Cabo Verdean sociologist Claudia Rodrigues inaugurates the field of homosexuality studies in her country. Her master’s dissertation, defended in 2010, covers various aspects on gender, sexuality, and class among some *homoaffectionate* couples of the elite of the capital Praia.

As we saw in the previous section, conjugality is a broader issue that also affects the universes of heterosexual affection in Cabo Verde. It is a way of experiencing conjugal relations, which have in the categories *mother-of-child* and *father-of-child* its greatest expressions. In Mindelo, and not only on the island of Santiago, as diagnosed by Miranda (2013), masculinity is constructed, overall, through the public display of virility (Miranda 2013:77). Thus, masculinity is exercised through dramatized actions, simulations, much public display, quarrels, and the depreciation of femininity (Miranda, 2013:81). The ways in which a Cabo Verdean man's masculinity is constructed, however, has its burden and bonus both for women and for the self-identified *homosexuals*, with whom these men also tend to get involved. Thus, gay subjects value virility, the "grip" of other non-gay men, the manly way in which they approach, however, even though they sometimes complain about the lack of romanticism, the lack of a fixed relationship and "affection". There is anguish among some of our gay interlocutors who share the romantic values of monogamy and conjugality. As we have already seen, it is not only gays who complain of this lack of affection from Cabo Verdean men, women do the same.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps as a further indication of the so-called "liquid love" (Bauman 2004) in contemporary times, in which dyadic relations are transformed, becoming progressively more fluid, these almost exclusively sexual and fleeting relations between gay subjects and Cabo Verdean young men are treated with less and less enthusiasm by the former. This maxim, hovering over the Creole spirit, of a masculinity that is impenetrable (Sáez & Carrascosa 2011) by romanticism, and in which it is unbecoming for the man, understood as the masculine subject, to display affection, impacts the subjectivities of Cabo Verdean gays.

Although most gay subjects say they experience casual relationships with young men, at least three interlocutors in Mindelo claimed having *fixed* conjugal relationships, even if these deviate significantly from the more hegemonic romantic model they hold as a reference. The first was the *traveste* Barbie, who, nonetheless, never told us anything about her "husband". The second was Pedro, a 29-year-old physical education teacher, who claimed having experienced a conjugal homosexual relationship with cohabitation

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<sup>19</sup> This is, in fact, one of the reasons cited by the young university student from Mindelo, Mônica, of why she relates affectionately and sexually with other girls.

in the island of Santo Antão, but now lived what appeared to be a non-monogamous long-distance marriage, because his companion lived in Spain. The third was the hairdresser and makeup artist Cesar, age 40, who between comings and goings with former partners, ended up reconciling with an “ex-husband”, whom we never met. Allegedly, it was a young man with whom he *had* shortly before his long season in Europe. The young man, persuaded by family and neighbors to forget Cesar, became involved with a local girl for three years, until the moment Cesar returned to Cabo Verde.

One day, they had an argument, when the boy provoked Cesar by deciding to show him photos of his girlfriend so that he would be aware of *the level of woman he was able to attract*. When we asked Cesar why he had made up with this “ex-husband” (since he was getting on with another young man he said he liked), he replied the “ex-husband” forced him to. When asked if the boy had that kind of power over him the answer was positive, echoing the same characteristic of *weakness* highlighted by women. Gays and women live different experiences of affection, but as representatives of a feminine *ethos*, they would be the weak link in these relationships.

Elzo once joked about both Cesar’s and Pedro’s claim of having “husbands”, because for Elzo it seemed very strange for someone to have a husband and not to live with him, or worse, spending long periods of time without seeing him, as in the case of Pedro. These stories show that a current complaint among gay subjects is that the relationships they establish with non-gay men are almost always “casual”. Unlike the accusation of the *homo-affectionate* of the elite from Praia described by Rodrigues,<sup>20</sup> this has nothing to do with a sort of “ignorance” typical of gays of lower classes, but is mainly due to the refusal of non-gay men to “assume” a properly “gay” identity, as it becomes clear in this interview with Lunga:

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20 The moralizing view of this elite, which the author calls “homo-affectionate”, for considering that this term extracted from the Brazilian context would best describe her interlocutors (Rodrigues, C. 2010:3), is narrated as follows: “In their view [of the *homo-affectionate* of the elite], gays of lower classes reproduce the homo-affectionate model that comes down to sexual intercourse, with clear distinction between the ‘masculine’ man and the gay man, denoting the power relationship between two men. He who practices oral sex on another, or has an affectionate attitude, is seen as an equal, or, in the voice of my interlocutor, as a ‘fairy’, and the lower-class gays want to have relations with men who they see as straight and not as ‘fairies’” (Rodrigues 2010:81). The colonizing perspective of the *homo-affectionate* elite of Praia, mostly inserted into a “symmetric model” of homosexuality, seems to propagate a modernizing ideal that conceives the becoming of such relations between individuals of the same sex as egalitarian and democratic. However, as we have shown previously (Miguel 2014:87-88), for various reasons, this elite does not display the same subversive character of the lower classes, with regards to the LGBT political agenda.

**How is the relationship between same-sex partners here in Mindelo? Is it always casual? Is there dating?**

No, it's casual! I think 99% is all casual. That's if there is such a thing as 1% (laughs), it's all casual. It may be a casual that lasts a few months, it can last for years, but it's all casual.

**Why? What is it then to be casual?**

Because, like... here... it is very complicated. Because here, I don't know whether it's because it's a small place, people... Yeah... Homosexuality here in Cabo Verde is very complicated. Take me for example, I'm openly gay, or Elzo who is also out... We are gay, we say we are gay and we like men and I don't know... The young men who relate with us, they are not... They can relate with you for years on end, but for them, they are not gay. They are boys who like to be with gays, but they do not identify themselves as being gay. So, then, I think there is this difficulty of having a relationship. Because they may even like you and want to be with you, but they do not want to face society, they do not want to come out publicly. For example, he can tell Elzo, for example, "Oh, I want to be with you" and there may even be a relationship, but it's all hidden. He will not go out with you out there... I'm not talking about walking down the streets holding hands, because I don't want that either. But they will not... For example, say "oh, I date him", "I'm going steady with him" but to meet you and come to your home or... It's all very discreet, because... they do not want to face it, they do not want to say on the streets "Oh, I live with a boy" or... So the relationship is a bit complicated. I think it's more because of this that relationships only remain within the realm of casualness, right? It's all...

**I understand. And these guys date girls too?**

In most cases, yes. In 99% of cases (laughs).

The "casualness" pointed out by gay subjects, also understood as a lack of commitment on the part of young men towards them, is something that is diagnosed as early as the courting ritual, in *sending mouths*<sup>21</sup>, in the "aggressive" or "brutish" performance, going through a contempt for them in everyday life, until the final refusal of continuing the relationship. From what

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21 *Sending mouths* (*mandar bocas*) is an idiomatic expression of Cabo Verdean Creole which allows for a more or less broad set of meanings. It can, therefore, refer to both the exchanging of banter with friends, regarded as innocent, as well as operate as jeers, insults, and humiliation. The *mouths* can be directed to typical targets of mockery (jokes) and teasing, such as fat people, the very thin, country people, the toothless, the effeminate, the very stupid, and any others identified as "deviants" (Miguel 2014)

we have seen so far, it is already possible to speculate that the behavior of non-gay young men, if analyzed within the context of heterosexual relationships, may be less a problem of embarrassed sexuality and more of a broader Cabo Verdean masculine *ethos*, which tends to escape the model of romantic conjugality. As suggested by the anthropologist Peter Fry at a given point, *in this case it may have more to do with gender rather than with sexuality*.

In this sense, and without disregarding the importance of the dimension of sexuality, from the field we were interested in knowing, for example, how young men acted when gay subjects with whom they had some kind of amorous or sexual bond, greeted them on the streets.

**And for example, one of these boys who do not, do not assume their homosexuality, and suddenly you meet one of them on the street, can you greet him in front of his friends, if he is together with friends?**

There are some you can't, and others who you can. And ... It is always a middle term here. There is always an intermediate. There are those with whom you shouldn't even, even, even show your face.

**What happens? What would happen?**

No, they would get completely flustered. (laughs) They get totally flustered. Especially if they have, like, a girlfriend, or any other girl with them. They get that... that distraught look, as if we are going to do something: we're going to shoot him...

**And how do you feel in one of these situations, occasionally, having one of these more steady partners and for whom you have some affection, and, publicly, you can't even... even greet him, in the street, like... How is that? Is it ok for you?**

[At one] point it [was] not easy. Nowadays it's ok. Again I repeat: "I become blonde"<sup>22</sup>. Of talent. Back in the day, I used to get super upset.

If Leandro places "getting super upset" in the past, it was not exactly what his eyes and his expression conveyed. In our conversations the hurt resulting from the impossibility of achieving a specific model of a romantic relationship was a constant, very much in the present. The warnings from the boys "you don't know me and I don't know you" immediately after a fleeting sexual act in the streets; or the aggressive *mouths* such as "*paneles*"; the

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22 Here, the expression "I become blonde" means that he pretends that something is not happening.

disappearance of the boys when gay subjects went after them; the hesitation about the kiss on the mouth during sex; the denial about the relationship by the boys when they are with friends in a public place; all this creates a feeling of anguish among the homosexuals of Mindelo.

It was with sadness in their eyes and tone of voice that some young gay subjects such as Romeo, Leandro, or Didi, as many others, spoke of their amorous experiences with boys:

**And how are these relationships? Do they last a while? Do you stay together?**

So far in my situation they did not last long. Only one stayed a while, but he soon left.

**And is it usually so?**

It has usually been so. I don't know if someday I'll find someone and we can be together like this, I don't know.

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**Would you want to date?**

Absolutely! It's my greatest wish.

**And you can't because these men do not take on, do not want these relationships...**

Yeah...

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**And then... Well, the sexual intercourse happens, but is there any complicity, is there any emotional relationship, jealousy, longing...**

Um... no. If there is, I think it's immediately annihilated by the boys themselves, because the pressure is so high. They, I don't know, it is very confusing... It's really impossible, it's impossible. I would say there is no affection at all, none... There isn't. If something begins to emerge, as I said, it is annulled immediately. There's nothing. It's really impossible. With me, and others as well. Of course there are other cases of some who can get something out of it, I don't know what... But because they invest their time and insist and insist and suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer... But not me! I usually say that I really like myself very, very much.

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**But have you dated? Have you been married?**

No. "Dating" in quotes, around here, around here one should not even use this word.

### **Oh yeah? Why?**

Dating here is... has... it's like a scale: there's a plate facing up and another one facing down. It's hard to keep your balance. Because the partner is never, never fully surrendered to you. There's always a conjuncture or another. Another engaging side to it. It's something, like... A salad.

### **And you're talking about male partners specifically?**

Specifically.

The dialogues above point to several interesting issues. Firstly, they are the accounts of students, artists, or activists, relatively mature young men, aged between 25 and 30 years old who gradually realize the mismatch between the values of their culture and the romantic values they project onto their lives. Aside from this, it is interesting to note that they do not draw, in their speech, a parallel with the forms of relationship between men and women. Although their speech is very close to women's – who negatively perceive the expressions of local masculinity materialized by the fortuitous relationships, a sense of instability, the lack of romanticism, and the non-realization of a relationship within the idealized “Western” standards – our interlocutors did not observe that the hegemonic standard does not occur in the heterosexual world either.

What seems to permeate such contrastive discourse – between what they experience in reality and what they would like to experience – is a set of external values, possibly introjected by their emigration experiences in the American and European continents; by Brazilian soap operas that have been showing for some years now homosexual couples on local prime-time television;<sup>23</sup> and by the agenda of the LGBT movement in many countries for the legalization of homo-affective unions<sup>24</sup> (Vale de Almeida 2010), even with the support of important scientific associations (American Anthropological Association 2004).

Although non-gay young men maintain sexual relations with gays, they simply do not conceive the possibility of conjugality in these relationships. Marrying or even dating, most of the time is not part of the relationship

23 Some examples of Brazilian soap operas which had homosexual couples in their plot and were broadcast during prime time in Cabo Verde are: “*América*”, “*Paraíso Tropical*”, “*Avenida Brasil*”, “*Senhora do Destino*”, among others.

24 Extracted from the Brazilian legal world, we will use the term “homo-affective” here to refer always to sexual and amorous relationships, more or less stable, between people of the same sex, which do not cease with fleeting sexual encounters.

grammar of these young men. Even younger individuals, who already establish some kind of change upon identifying themselves as “bisexual” (and, therefore, differently from others, take on a non-heterosexual identity), do not escape traditional amatory and erotic games. Therefore, the boy Tiago, age 16, and self-proclaimed “bisexual”, when asked about his dreams, projects a future in accordance with the possibilities provided by Cabo Verdean tradition:

Yes... I want to get married, as always. To a nice person, I want to be a doctor, let me see what else... Leave, get to see new places...

**And when you say married, is it to a man or a woman? Or it doesn't matter?**

Oh, that I do not know. I don't know if I'll marry a woman and cheat on her.

As with the women, we asked, after all, why they get involved with these non-gay young men and get frustrated, if it is set culturally that the language of relationships is permeated by these signs understood as “crudeness”, “insolence”, “rudeness”, etc.

Yeah... There's that, too, because we... I speak for myself, but I can also speak for others. And... We have fetishes for difficulty, almost as if it attracts us. Instead of being here in the gay scene, some people more associated with one another... Instead of being here, peaceful, experiencing our conversation. No! We do not live like that! We go on to look for a really... thorny and knotty problem.

**Which are these boys...**

Exactly.

**And why? What is attractive in them?**

I don't know (laughs). To this day I am searching for the explanation. I don't know, I don't know... I like them. I think I like them. Because only a person to like.

**But is there some physical attribute, a behavior, what is it that attracts?**

Certainly! A lot attracts. The physical matter is indifferent. But, sometimes even by, by the character too. Sometimes we see some little thing that, like a... a speck that attracts. But in the end, no, it is not set. There is always something...



Leandro's account reveals that the amorous and erotic game between two people demands from them a shared semantics, in which both need to create convergent expectations, match meanings, and communicate with each other. In other words, it is clear that both gay subjects as well as women, although they negatively evaluate the treatment received, somehow share and corroborate the social norms of gender and sexuality that keep the system operating. Among the gay subjects, for example, it is evident how they demand from the young men a hyper masculine posture, corroborated in tradition. And which if not performed by the boys – as when they reveal they prefer to be passive in the sexual act – is denounced and ridiculed by the gays themselves. On the other hand, women often blame their *fathers-of-child* for failing to support their offspring, as if this were the primary social role of a man, reaffirming or reviving traditional gender roles.

It is worth going back to the dialogue at the beginning of this section, to the clever way in which Didi provokes Elzo: "Ok! If they institute [same-sex] marriage here, who will marry whom? You will convince the young lad over there to marry?" This question seems to touch deeply on the argument raised here – would the demand for gay marriage have any echo in this society? Our response can follow two routes. The first one would be to analyze the local political-sexual environment, or the universe of discrimination as approached by Miguel upon reflecting about the native category of *hypocrisy* (Miguel 2014). But our choice was to put into dialogue the local conceptions on affection and conjugality and the ways in which gays and their demands are inserted in such a context.

Upon comparing the characteristics and expectations of women and gays with regards to the universe of affection and sexuality with men similarities and differences emerge. There are interesting parallels in the construction of the image associated with the masculine and in the expectations generated from it. Women and gays associate with the Cabo Verdean man's behavior when it comes to fortuitous relationships, the lack of romanticism, the impossibility of a monogamous relationship, and, by contrast, present a self-image of fragility and dependence. Both construct a scenario for which there seems to be no way out, since *men are all the same*. However, the parallels seem to end there. While within the homosexual environment contacts do not usually go beyond the sphere of the erotic, of fortuitous moments (albeit with some continuity in some cases) left to anonymity, women have

in their favor a set of strategies explored here, and, above all, the expectation of building a path together which results in the formalization of the relationship, that is, *marriage on paper*.

Once acknowledged that marriage must be understood as a process, which, in order to become effective, needs to go through several phases in which it is up to the woman to wait while the man enjoys the possibility of fully experiencing his masculinity, which can also involve having children; and also once understood that homosexual relations are experienced between gays and non-gays and that the latter perceive such practices as an exercise of their masculinity rather than as a reason to put it into question (Miguel 2014); the demand for romance and marriage in the universe of homosexuals seems to sound out of context. Why, then, raise this banner?

## Various flows in Cabo Verde

Cabo Verdean society is markedly known in the field of social sciences for its migratory profile. Emigration in the islands is central to an understanding of local social dynamics, national identity, and the country's integration in the global scenario, both in the past and in the present. Local historians, writers, and poets have also spent much ink upon mentioning the 10 tiny grains of sand scattered in the middle of the Atlantic, which were not forgotten by God there thanks to the character of its people, who see in the sea their source of pain and isolation, but also of hope, adventure, and the possibility of a better life. These perceptions go beyond the pages of academic and writers and are reflected in everyday practices, in a cosmopolitan atmosphere that Cabo Verdeans update in the relation with foreigners, in the incorporation of external signs, in the fluidity with which they overcome linguistic and cultural barriers.<sup>25</sup>

This openness to the other takes on important contours in the insertion of the Cabo Verdean nation state on a global scenario. Ever since independence, in the 1970s, the political and economic relations with European states and international organizations, through their international cooperation actions with countries classified as poor or third-world, are of fundamental

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25 On these themes see Trajano Filho 2009; Lobo 2014b; Braz Dias 2014; Miguel 2014; Braz Dias and Lobo 2012; Carling 2001.

importance to Cabo Verde on several fronts, exemplified in the actions in the field of the Struggle Against Poverty, of health, and education.

Within civil society the same trend is observed. Various non-governmental organizations and associations update in Cabo Verde the leading discourses, values, and demands of social movements around the globe. Gender, violence, environment, and other issues of the global agenda are banners of numerous associations who find fertile ground on Cabo Verdean soil. This is the context within which the Cabo Verdean Gay Association (AGC) is inserted. Composed of militants from different social backgrounds and founded in 2010 by a *traveste* who had recently returned from Italy, the AGC was the first local gay association to have been legally registered. It has always counted on the human and financial support of international organizations, such as the Spanish Triangle Foundation, which fights for gay rights in Latin America and Africa.

The demand for gay marriage within a hegemonic model of marriage, which, as we have been demonstrating, does not find immediate assent in Cabo Verde, does even so have resonance, since cosmopolitanism is also a feature of Cape-Verdean culture and society. (Vasconcelos, 2007; Correia & Silva 2000; Nascimento 2008) In addition, for Cabo Verdean activists the gay marriage banner has the effect of marking a historic diacritic with the Africa continent, supposedly “uncivilized”, and which now *murders gays* (Miguel, 2014). Thus, the demand for gay marriage is related to various internal and external dynamics that go beyond, by far, a simple desire to formalize new types of conjugality.<sup>26</sup>

The reflections of Aihwa Ong<sup>27</sup> on globalization studies, and her proposal to focus on understanding the ways in which the values resulting from an adjustment of global capitalism to local realities are incorporated, and to map who the relevant actors and protagonists in the distribution of power and

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26 By focusing on the dimension of cosmopolitanism, we do not intend to deny that there are other reasons for the demand for gay marriage in Cabo Verde, as well as for the gay movement itself. Among these demands we could even include a social appeal for male subjectivities in the country to be domesticated by romanticism, in line with the Western model. Therefore, we suggest that this demand might result from the anguish of those gay subjects, who are more enthusiastic about the Western romantic models, of not being able to fulfill their individual cosmopolitan gay projects in a culture such as theirs. Finally, in order to explain the existence of the local gay association, the less noble, but equally human, reasons could be mentioned, such as the vanity of the leaders of this association, their need to take part in functions of social prestige, and the need to raise international funds for the survival of these very activists, who most of the time are formally unemployed.

27 See Ong (1999) and Ong & Collier (2005).

knowledge of a so-called global citizenship (2009) are, can help us understand how AGC's demands for gay marriage interact with local concepts and practices on conjugality. This is because her notion of global assemblage allows us to look at the universe of strategic interactions inherent to global and local flows and actions; her emphasis falls on the interactivity of the flows in social practice and the consequent reconfiguration of power relations.

By proposing to discuss the demands for gay marriage within context, that is, viewing them within the local dynamics of conjugality, our focus falls on the universe of interactions between the global and the local. Therefore, we turn our attention to how the structural dimensions of social life – family, community, nation – condition, shape, and transform the subjects and their practices producing political-moral dilemmas. The dilemma experienced by gays we have presented, masterfully expressed in the dialogue between Didi and Elzo, in our view, serves to stress the fact that the fluidity with which global demands and values circulate are limited by the local social order.

Globally hegemonic views on how to live conjugality (hetero or homosexual) appear in dispute whenever they interact with local contexts. However, as Ong (1999) reminds us, this is a field of power relations where what is at stake is the implementation of processes of intervention in “living arrangements” (Collier & Lakoff 2005), dictating political, social, and economic conditions that raise the question of “how one should live”. “I want to marry in Cabo Verde” is, therefore, a demand to be problematized, for it encapsulates values and relations that seek to remake lives and social practices within contexts of dispute for power and hegemony.

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