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EL ROL DE LOS ESTUDIOS DE POBLACIÓN TRAS LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 Y
EL DESAFÍO DE LA IGUALDAD EN AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE

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Transnational identities of the Cape Verdean diaspora in
Argentina and the United States

Introduction

The concept of diaspora has often been defined as a fluid, unbound space or group, transcending assumptions of belonging, territory, and fixed identity. It has been linked to notions such as hybridisation (Kalra et al, 2005) and Third Space, suggesting an entity that challenges boundaries, a structure above and detached from the notion of nation-state that prevails in many accounts of mobility and processes of identity formation. The counterpoint of this definition is one in which a diaspora is merely the travelling “spin-off” of a nation(-state), that ‘can also reproduce the essentialised notions of place and identity that they are supposed to transgress’ (Carter 2005 p.54).

However, diasporas can be experienced in multiple ways, and diasporic groups encompass multidimensional identities and loyalties beyond the delimitation of the nation-state. Given the diversity of “places”, and experiences of identity, it is difficult to talk about the essentialisation of these notions within the context of diaspora. In order to better understand the different aspects of the notion of diaspora as well as mobility, in this presentation, I use the examples of the Cape Verdean diaspora in Argentina and in the US.

Methods

A narrative review of the general literature on Cape Verdean identity and diaspora and specifically for Argentina and the United States was conducted. The literature reviewed is put in relation with literature on diaspora theory.

The Cape Verdean diaspora beyond the nation-state

The Cape Verdean diaspora is characterised by its internal heterogeneity over time and among its members, due to its colonial legacy and the discontinuity of its migratory movements both to the US and Argentina. First, I will look at how Cape Verde was historically constituted, piecing together different identities, loyalties, and territories, forming a multi-layered imaginary difficult to “essentialise”. Second, I will look at how the moment of migration was crucial in shaping – and shifting – the ties and identity of the Cape Verdean diaspora.

As Pardue argues, Cape Verde was ‘born as creole’ and thus its ‘hybridity is heterogenous’ (2016: 335). It is the case that Cape Verde itself before the existence of the Cape Verdean diaspora is considered to have a hybrid, “Third Space” identity. The archipelago was discovered uninhabited and was colonised by the Portuguese, who brought enslaved peoples from West Africa to the islands mostly as part of the Atlantic slave trade (Carling and Batalha 2008: 14). Maffia considers that the ‘Cape Verdean

ethnic group' identifies with the 'African ancestral diaspora', but also with Portugal, as the Portuguese coloniser formed the 'creole society of Cape Verde' (2003: 242, translated from Spanish). There is thus a double heritage: the Portuguese and the African. Consequently, essentialising Cape Verde itself as a single, unidimensional space or place thus seems a difficult endeavour.

The Cape Verdean diaspora, following the historical constitution of Cape Verde, its colonial legacy, and its creolised population and imaginary, "hops" from one territory to another: Portugal, Cape Verde, or Africa as the ancestral home. This argument undermines to a certain degree the notion of diaspora as Third Space, although they are not antithetical, as the multi-layered Cape Verdean identity and imaginary might be itself a Third Space. However, it questions unilateral conceptualisations of diasporas as being tied to an essentialised place from which their identity is formed.

Carter's critique of the conceptualisation of diaspora by scholars such as Clifford is based on the notion that diasporas are usually tied to a single place, the longed-for "home". For Mavroudi (2007: 4) this is based on a definition of diaspora that 'depends on constructions of place, time, identity, community and the nation state as bounded, easily classified and defined.' However, defining the "home" of the Cape Verdean diaspora is not straightforward, as it is inscribed in former colonial dynamics, and postcolonial relationships. When the first waves of Cape Verdean immigrants arrived to Argentina, they identified as Portuguese (Maffia 2003). Early Cape Verdean migrants to US identified to their island of origin (Halter 2008 :37) as well as Portugal (Sanchez Gibau 2005). They were classified according to physical differences as 'Portuguese' if white and 'Atlantic Islander' if black (Halter 2008: 36). After the independence in 1975, the newcomers more strongly identified as Cape Verdean rather than Portuguese (Sanchez Gibau 2005: 410). This was however only the case in the US, as fluxes to Argentina have been minimal in the last decades (Gois 2005: 257). Here we can see different variables to identification: generation and (dis)continuity of movement across time as well as external identification based on phenotypical and physical difference.

Carter's argument is articulated around the politicised notions of place and identity and thus assumes that processes of identity formation are unilateral and unidimensional, ignoring intersectionality and failing to take into account the diversity of contexts across space and time. However, arguing that a particular diaspora forms a particular identity entirely disconnected from space would however be nonsense. Diasporas are not floating entities. They are however fluid, non-static, and might hop from one territory to another. In that sense, arguing that they reproduce an essentialised idea of space is difficult. Identity is not necessarily dissociated from territory, however both can be linked in the context of diasporas in a non-essentialised way, in so far as they are both multiple and draw from de-

territorialised elements. Moreover, the Cape Verdean example shows that if diasporas are not dissociated from territory, or “place”, they go beyond the ‘territorial limitation which confines the study of social processes to the political and geographic boundaries of a particular nation-state’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003: 578). In that sense, diasporas are cross-cutting, effectively defying ideas of “territory as nation-states”.

The Cape Verdean diaspora is heterogenous, as much as Cape Verde as “home” is. By adding “parameters” other than that defined as the contained and politicised entity of the nation-state, we can see that diasporas transcend notions of place and identity because they are multi-layered, both across space and time. This is in line with Clifford’s argument that associating the centre of a diaspora to an ‘actual “national” territory’ would ‘devalue the lateral axes of diaspora’ (1997: 269).

The Cape Verdean diaspora in Argentina and the United States

For centuries, the archipelago of Cape Verde has been characterised by its ‘intimate connection with migration’ as a country with a maintained emigration, as Resende-Santos points out (2015: 82). Both in Argentina and in the US, albeit slightly differently, patterns of racialization as well as postcolonial legacies have shaped the Cape Verdean diaspora. In that sense, it not only is where a diaspora comes from or when it goes that matters, but also where it goes, as Brah underlines with the concept of the ‘situatedness’ (1996: 179).

As a former colony, framed as “the whitest country in Latin America”, Argentina has only recently started to officially acknowledge the presence of Black communities as part of the nation despite the fact that most of them have been physically present in Argentina since colonial times (Monkevicius and Maffia 2014). The cultural practices of Argentina’s Black communities disappeared over time, either assimilated into other practices or appropriated as non-Black, and Blackness is an element of Argentina’s imaginary that has been suppressed. As such, the Cape Verdean migrants who arrived from the beginning of the 20th century identified as Portuguese in order to escape the structural racism of Argentina’s society (Maffia 2010: 172). The Cape Verdean diaspora in Argentina was thus made invisible, with a high degree of intermarriage and the limited reproduction of practices linked to the “homeland” as they were repressed (Maffia 2009: 4). However, as Maffia (2008) describes, the connection between Cape Verdeans in Argentina was maintained through internal networks.

In the past, there have been movements calling for the independence of Cape Verde from Portugal initiated by the diaspora in Argentina. However this ‘long-distance nationalism’, to borrow Anderson’s words (1992), was not received equally by all members of diasporas, some of which

frowned upon these politicised practices that emphasised difference from the rest of Argentine society (Maffia 2008: 50). There is no unified 'long-distance nationalism' despite the fact that there has been political engagement linked to the independence of Cape Verde. However it is also the case that diasporas primarily defined by a tie to a 'nation-state' can engage with politicised practices and struggles in the "host" society that are not directly linked with either the direct "homeland" nor the "new home". In more recent years in Argentina, the Cape Verdean diaspora has displayed a particular endeavour to unite with other Black communities, composed of descendants of slaves brought by the Atlantic slave trade, as well as more recent migrants from West Africa (Maffia and Zubrzycki 2014: 178). In participating in the movement for the recognition of Afro-Argentines, the Cape Verdean diaspora engages in disruptive practices akin demonstration of border thinking as defined by Mignolo (2011), as well as taking part in the politicised struggles of Africa's diasporas.

In the US, although there is an assimilative model of integration and normative whiteness arguably prevails (Hurd 2008: 294), the Cape Verdean diaspora was shaped in a slightly different way, and in a different timeline, than in Argentina. Although early immigrants identified as Portuguese, it was to 'signify nationality' and establish distance from other African American communities (Sanchez Gibau 2005: 409, Halter 2008: 43) rather than as a survival strategy as it was in Argentina. Consequently, when further waves of immigration occurred after Cape Verde became an independent republic (Sanchez Gibeau 2005: 410), Cape Verdeans were able to show a stronger loyalty to their homeland than in Argentina. In the US, despite tensions with other African American communities, the Cape Verdean diaspora has identified to an extent with the struggle for Civil Rights, in addition to being externally defined as a Black community with no allusion to its "territory" of origin (Sanchez Gibau 2005).

Conclusion

This presentation explores the different shapes which diasporas can take, through the example of the Cape Verdean diaspora in the US and Argentina. There is not one single way to belong to a diaspora, and that the practices, identifications, and manifestations of belonging vary.

This comparison shows us that the reproduction of 'essentialised notions of place and identity' is context-dependent and is usually inscribed in a greater context marked by relations of power and structural racism. This add to the notion of "territory hopping" I developed earlier, as I argue that if the Cape Verdean diaspora might identify with a single place or a single aspect of its identity at one given time, if we look over time and across contexts, these practices shift and evolve. In that sense, if we look at diasporas as non-homogenous groups, they do not simply reproduce essentialised notions

of place and identity. In this case, some aspects of a multi-layered identity tied to different places, might come out at certain given times. This does not however mean that practices are essentialised, as they are inscribed in a bigger context, which cannot be permanently narrowed down. In this way, even though they might appear to engage in essentialised practices, diasporas are not essentialising per se. Moreover, I push forward the argument that diaspora performance and the expectation of such thing, is rooted in an expectation of otherisation and sometimes exoticisation within a postcolonial context.

Belonging to the Cape Verdean diaspora is manifested in different ways across the US and Argentina. If the Cape Verdean diaspora in Argentina chooses to emphasize its African legacy contemporarily, in the US it chooses to retain loyalty to the Republic of Cape Verde while acknowledging both Portuguese and African legacies (Sanchez Gibau 2005: 410). In this way, there is not one single way to be part of the Cape Verdean diaspora. Moreover, both Maffia (2008: 48) and Sanchez Gibau (2005: 409) in their respective accounts of the Cape Verdean diaspora in Argentina and the US underline that idiosyncrasies linked to Cape Verde are not always reproduced.

In that sense, diasporas can transcend boundaries within and across nation-states. This has implications within the greater debate surrounding the notion of diaspora, as it implies that diasporas can, and do, have territorial ties without necessarily engaging in essentialising practices.

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