

Abstract

Making a life: Meanings of migration in Cape Verde. By Lisa Åkesson
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This anthropological study examines the meanings and practices associated with migration in Cape Verde, and the social and historical space in which these are produced. More specifically, it analyses an ideology of migration that concerns collective experiences of Cape Verde's history, political economy, ecology and geography as well as notions about the life of the person. Mass migration from Cape Verde has been going on for more than a century, and today the diaspora communities in America, Africa and Europe outnumber the population in the Atlantic archipelago. As a result of this, nearly everyone in the homeland has a close relative living abroad.

Ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the town of São Vicente has provided insights into the many ways in which São Vicentians engage with their migrant relatives. Activities, ideas and material resources located in the diaspora strongly influence the lives and identities of those in the homeland. Precisely because practices associated with mobility are so deeply entrenched in São Vicentians' everyday lives, aspirations to migrate become self-evident. The ethnography suggests, moreover, that the Cape Verdean culture of migration is underpinned by the construction of both the individual and the nation. When aspiring to make a life through migration, São Vicentians imagine themselves as respected and autonomous persons, but they simultaneously participate in the creation of their (trans-)nation. Hence, migration is not perceived as a rupture or discontinuity in one's experience of self and others, but rather as an integral part of Cape Verdean life.

By exploring how mobility is culturally construed, this dissertation shows that migration cannot be adequately understood by using economic explanations and conventional perceptions of upward social mobility alone. It also demonstrates that the Cape Verdean culture of migration must be understood from a transnational perspective, as the long-distance interaction between those at home and those abroad is crucial in shaping the migration project. Attention to this interaction makes it clear what it means to be a transnationalist while remaining at home, and distinguishes this dissertation from most other contemporary studies of transnational migration, which focus on the experiences of those who have actually migrated.

Key words: Anthropology, Cape Verde, culture of migration, transnationalism, sending country perspective, kinship, life-making