“Prison Is for Young People!” Youth, Violence, and the State in Praia and Mindelo, Cape Verde

Peter Anton Zoettl

Abstract: In the past decade Cape Verde has seen an unexpected outburst of gang-related urban violence. The state has reacted mainly by means of a repressive securitization policy, which has not been able to offer more than temporary solutions. In public discourses, “broken” families, youth drug consumption, and a supposed lack of education and sufficiently severe punishment are often referred to as the main causes for the rise in crime. The article discusses such discourses, contrasting them with the experiences and narratives of inmates from the country’s two central prisons. It suggests that extrajudicial punishment of suspects and offenders by police officers, as reported by many juvenile convicts, is part of the dynamics of violence manifest in different spheres of Cape Verdean society and may be a possible factor influencing the decision of young citizens to “opt” for, or stick to, careers of marginality and delinquency.

Résumé: Au cour de la dernière décennie, le Cap-Vert a connu une explosion inattendue de violence urbaine liée aux gangs. L’État a réagi principalement par le biais d’une politique de sécurisations répressive, qui n’a été en mesure que d’offrir des solutions temporaires. Dans les discours publics, familles “brisées,” consommation de drogues chez les jeunes due à un manque supposé d’éducation et des peines suffisamment sévères ont souvent été désignés comme causes principales à l’augmentation de la criminalité. L’article traite de tels discours, les contrastant

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avec les expériences et les récits des détenus de deux prisons centrales du pays. Il suggère que la peine extrajudiciaire des suspects et des délinquants par des agents de police, tel qu'elle est rapportée par de nombreux mineurs condamnés, fait partie de la dynamique de la violence manifestée dans les différentes sphères de la société Cap-Verdienne et peut-être un facteur possible d'influence dans la décision des jeunes citoyens à "opter" pour et rester fidele aux carrières marginales et de délinquance.

Keywords: Cape Verde; gangs; police violence; prison; youth offending

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Crime has become the number-one issue of public concern in Cape Verde. The island nation west of the Senegalese coast, a former Portuguese colony which became independent only in 1975 and is today a popular destination for beach and surf tourists from northern Europe, was considered a haven of tranquility until around the turn of the century. From 2003 on, however, official statistics confirm the popular perception of rising crime rates: the number of homicides, for instance, nearly quadrupled from 2003 to 2013 and reached an all-time high in 2014.[1] Violent crime has become a problem particularly in the archipelago's two urban centers: the capital city, Praia, on Santiago Island and the city of Mindelo on the island of São Vicente. In Praia, a city of around 130,000 inhabitants (a population figure comparable to that of the metropolitan area of, for instance, Hastings, U.K., or Jackson, Tennessee), thirty-three and twenty-nine homicides were registered in 2011 and 2012, respectively (MAI 2013)—which amounts to a crime rate nearly three times that of São Paulo and Mexico City, four times that of New York City, and twenty times that of London (UNODC 2013).

Popularly (that is, in media and political discourses), the increase in crime is attributed primarily to the country's youth, specifically the action of urban youth gangs which, in fact, have mushroomed in both Praia and Mindelo during the last decade. While it is difficult, due to the dynamics of gang formation, to quantify the number of youth gangs operating in Cape Verde, for the city of Praia, Lima (2015) estimates that there are currently around ninety active gangs; in Mindelo (a city of around 70,000 inhabitants), according to my own estimates, there are around a dozen. As a consequence of the state's politics of securitization and policies adopted from the mid-2000s on with financial help of Cape Verde's development partners—including reorganization of the police forces in 2005, the adoption of new laws on offending youth and internal security in 2006 and 2007, and the institution of special security forces in 2007—the country's prison population has increased significantly. While official numbers are not available, it can be estimated that the total prison population increased around 130 percent from 1997 to 2013.[2] In 2014, Cape Verde's prisons were home to more than fourteen hundred inmates, of which around nine hundred were imprisoned in São Martinho, the central prison of Santiago Island in Praia, which was extended in 2009 to augment its capacity by more than five hundred;

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Ribeirinha, the central prison of São Vicente Islands in Mindelo, was housing more than three hundred inmates, nearly twice its capacity (USDOS 2015).

Discourses on Youth, Violence, and Crime in Cape Verde

Cape Verde's economy has grown steadily during the last two decades, with an annual growth rate of around 5 to 10 percent. The solid growth of its GNP, a consequence of the opening of the economy initiated a couple of years before Cape Verde's political transition from a one-party state to a multiparty representational democracy in 1991, has improved the life of many islanders, but it has also increased the disparity of incomes (see Zoettl 2014). The increasing spatial segregation of the urban population of Mindelo and, especially, the capital city of Praia epitomizes this social disequilibrium (see Lima 2012). Notwithstanding a general improvement of a number of social indicators (literacy rate, access to basic and higher education, public health, etc.), unemployment remains high and poverty rates even increased, despite all the economic growth, over the course of the 1990s (European Commission 2005).

As a consequence, emigration, a traditional strategy of social mobility (it is estimated that around half a million Cape Verdeans live abroad) continues to be an aspiration for many, particularly young islanders. Cape Verde is a young country, not only politically, but also with regard to its demographic structure: the average age is well below thirty and half of the population is younger than twenty years old (INE 2010:18). While educational opportunities have improved significantly (Praia and Mindelo are home to a number of universities today), a severely limited labor market makes many young Cape Verdeans struggle with their present and future. Youth unemployment is especially high in the urban centers.[3] In a country with a nearly complete lack of natural resources (apart from its beauty), its biggest resource—its youth—has thus become also one of its prime areas of concern.

As scholars have noted, public discourse in Cape Verde frequently refers to the "crisis of youth" (Martins & Fortes 2011:17).[4] The archipelago's young population, as Martins and Fortes observe, "has turned into a symptom as much as an agent of social and moral panic, charged with being lazy and irresponsible, and contributing to the spread of new 'social evils' within the traditionally harmonious Cape Verdean society" (2011:17). Youth violence associated with urban gangs (whose members are called "thugs" on the island of Santiago, alluding to the U.S. background of some of the earliest gang leaders) has become one of the topics of the day in Praia and Mindelo. While politicians, media, and citizens alike offer a variety of explanations and possible remedies for the rise in youth offending, there are very few empirical studies that allow for more than a superficial understanding of the situation (but see, for instance, Bordonaro 2012b; Cardoso 2012; Lima 2012).

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As a result, the state's internal security policies since the mid-2000s resemble a shot in the dark, primarily resting on and executed by the country's hastily modernized security forces, and based on an overall strategy of what is designated locally as "zero tolerance" (*tolerância zero*). The local media generally subscribe to and reinforce public discourses on law and order, denouncing state institutions for their alleged laxness, or alternatively, praising the police and the judiciary for their "crackdown" on juvenile offenders, as exemplified by the following clipping from a newspaper report:

> The *"caçubudistas"* [muggers] of Mindelo are starting to learn that the 1st Criminal Chamber of the judicial subdistrict of São Vicente has adopted an iron hand when it comes to inflicting a penalty on those accused of assault in public space. And yesterday two persons were sentenced to three [years] in prison. It didn't help them that they were first offenders. The judge considered that, although the juveniles were first offenders, it is suspected that they are involved in muggings. Consequently, zero tolerance is required with people that perpetrate this type of crime which "scares society." And that the demand for general prevention determines that the offenders are sent to prison. (*Notícias do Norte* 2013b)

Popular crime theories, however, only partly corroborate such discourses on "zero tolerance." In a "Study on Crime in Cape Verde" ("Estudo sobre a criminalidade em Cabo Verde") undertaken by the Cape Verdean Drug Repression Commission (Comissão de Coordenação de Combate à Droga, CCCD) in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), law enforcement officers and "Cape Verdean society" were asked for their opinions on, among other topics, "crime, its causes and prevention." Of the 1,185 officers interviewed, the majority identified the main causes as the "use of drugs," "unemployment," "lack of education," "lack of severe punishment of delinquents" and "family problems" (UNODC 2007a:15). The opinion of the officers coincides, by and large, with that of the general population—of which 62 percent in São Vicente and 72 percent in Praia stated that they considered it to be "very likely" or "likely" that their home would be broken into within the next twelve months (UNODC 2007b:61). Like the officers, the majority cited "unemployment," the "use of drugs," "lack of education" and "family problems" as the main causes of crime, and also named "poverty" as an important factor (2007b:64).

In what follows, I will investigate two of the above cited theories on the causes of crime and the discourses pertaining to it—"family problems" and "use of drugs"—as well as the relevance of a perceived "lack of severe punishment, " and compare these supposed causal factors with the experiences and narratives of imprisoned juvenile gang members from Praia and Mindelo. These findings are based mainly on research undertaken during two fieldwork periods of three months each in 2012–13 and 2013–14.

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Research was carried out in low-income neighborhoods of Praia (Achada de Santo António area) and Mindelo (Ribeira Bote area) and in the prisons of Praia (São Martinho) and Mindelo (Ribeirinha). Research included twenty interviews with gang members (of which one was female) aged sixteen to just under thirty in Praia (5) and Mindelo (15), and a large number of informal interviews with youths from marginalized neighborhoods in both cities. The majority of inmates interviewed were referred to me by their friends, either from the *bairro* (neighborhood) or from within prison, which made it easier to establish a relation of trust. Interviews were conducted in English (with gang members who had been deported from the U.S.), Portuguese (with those who were fluent in this language), or else Cape Verdean Creole. Prison interviews were loosely structured and concentrated on the life history of the interviewee, the process of entering the gang and the dynamics of gang life (see Zoettl 2015), and the inmate's experiences with state institutions, particularly the judiciary and the police.[5]

Access to both prisons was authorized by the Ministry of Justice through the director general of the prison administration. While I was not able to carry out my fieldwork in São Martinho prison without hindrance (see Zoettl 2014), I was granted unrestricted access to the prisoners of Ribeirinha. Most comments of prisoners that are quoted below therefore came from young offenders from the island of São Vicente. However, the research I had carried out in the streets of Praia (and the informal interviews conducted there) reinforced what I learned from the young inmates of Mindelo.

Broken Homes: Youth, Family, and the State

When one is talking about "youth delinquency" and "youth violence," it is always worth emphasizing that young people themselves suffer various types of violence while they are growing up. In the case of Cape Verde, the sociologist Katia Cardoso describes a "hierarchization of the visibility and of the severity of violence" that urban gang members inflict and sustain, with the acts perpetrated by the so-called thugs receiving much "stronger social reprobation than other manifestations of violence, namely those within the family." As Cardoso points out, incidents of family violence frequently victimize "the same youths who are members of groups of *thugs* and agents of mugging [*kasubódi*]" (2012:37).

Indeed, the prevalence of domestic violence in Cape Verdean households has been the subject of a number of studies (see, e.g., Fernandes & Fonseca 2012; Rosabal 2010; Silva 2009). In a study of the Cape Verdean Institute for Minors, street children named "members of the family" as the predominant agents of the violence they suffered (ICM 2005:37), and family violence in particular was cited as one of the reasons that children make the decision to live on the streets of Mindelo (Bordonaro 2012a:417). A recent UNICEF report (2011) on children and adolescents in Cape Verde highlights the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation.

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In public discourse, it is primarily a supposed lack of parental supervision and an unstable family background in general that are blamed for the inclination of adolescents to "go astray." In a 2008 study on "youth and conflict with the law" commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, for instance, the authors remark that

> the discussion of the conflictual relation of young people with the law requires, apart from a knowledge of the idiosyncrasy of the individual offender, a careful analysis of his socio-familial environment, which means, among others, knowing about the family groups, their order and cultural dynamics, their constraints and afflictions. The causes of the anti-social behavior of the juvenile may be found precisely in his familial history. . . . The family may induce behavioral disorder of children whenever it does not or does not successfully fulfill its institutional role as an agent of socialization. (CED 2008:68)

Indeed, a number of my interviewees in the prisons of Mindelo and Praia came from what are frequently called, in Portuguese, "destructured" or "dysfunctional" families (*famílias desestruturadas/disfuncionais*)—that is, "broken homes," or families that do not correspond to the model of the "proper" or "intact" nuclear family. Some of my interviewees grew up in the absence of either their biological mother or father; others spent most of their adolescence in the families of relatives such as grandmothers, grandfathers, and aunts. One prisoner, sentenced to eleven years for homicide, reported that he had "never spent more than three hours with [his] mom, out there." Three had lived on the street at some point, and one had been sexually abused at the age of ten. Other inmates spoke of parents who had apparently lost control over their children. One interviewee said that even at age eleven, "my father was afraid of me."

> I was a mean kid. My father is a poor soul. He never really talked to me, and I never gave him a chance to do so. I always acted in a very aggressive way. He gave me a home, he had a big house, and he left me part of it. I wanted to live my own kind of life, and he ceded part of his house to me and my gang. It became a sort of *favela*, where we held our meetings.

The above interviewee was imprisoned at the age of sixteen and sentenced to a six-year term, for two incidents of "mugging," as he reported. Since he was only sixteen, his life experience seemed remarkable and made him look back on his own childhood as if it were something of a distant past, claiming, for instance, that "it was an unhappy childhood. Disturbed. I was a very disturbed child. Nobody ever took any pains to understand me. And so I led my life the way I pleased . . .". Nevertheless, other interviewees did grow up with their biological mother or father (or both), or did not experience their upbringing in the homes of relatives as problematic or traumatic in any way. The majority also enjoyed the support of their families in prison, being visited by close family members and receiving meals (in Ribeirinha)

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or small amounts of money that allowed them to pay for basic necessities that the prison did not provide. Family support was indeed the only regular support they received, apart from the limited moral and financial aid given by imprisoned fellow gang members to their newly arrived colleagues. According to one inmate,

> I get through here only due to the support of my mother and my son, here in prison. It's them who bolster up my courage. Them and my brother, I have a brother here in prison. Some guys do not receive visits [from their family]. They don't get supported here in prison. In prison, when you have visitors, things become easier. You avoid being sent to the disciplinary cell, because you don't want to lose the visits. So you already have a reason . . . to reintegrate yourself. And to get out as a different person.

Bourdieu has reminded us that "family" is one of those many concepts that are seemingly descriptive of a given social reality while actually being part of its very construction. When talking about families one should be careful not to forget that "family" as a concept does not necessarily correspond to "family" as an empirical fact. Families are what Bourdieu (1998:67) has called a "realized social fiction": they exist as normative models that tell us how things "ought" to be from a particular point of view, but not necessarily how they are.

The Cape Verdean discourse on "destructured" or broken families epitomizes such a prescriptive model, projected onto an empirical reality to which it hardly corresponds. In their study of low-income families in the city of Mindelo, Martins and Fortes note that family has become "more and more an object of strong political and moral rhetoric which evokes 'destructured' families in contrast with an idealized patriarchal and nuclear family" (2011:25)—despite the fact that none of the families they came upon in their empirical research actually corresponded to this model. Still, young people regularly referred to their families as a "solid part of their lives, something they depend on and which they value and respect more than anything else" (2011:17).

When making a connection between youth offending and family, it is thus important to differentiate between individual cases, in which children and adolescents have indeed grown up in (or abandoned) families that did not provide a positive environment for their personal development, and normative (and often Eurocentric or colonial) notions of "ideal" family structures. A number of inmates of Ribeirinha and São Martinho—whose family composition proved to be quite varied—had indeed suffered domestic violence. However, the violence suffered at home was generally part of a biography marked by frequent episodes of physical violence in very different spheres of life. A correlation, let alone causal relationship, between family composition and youth offending could not be verified.

Martins and Fortes suggest that the Cape Verdean discourses on "the crisis of the family" point instead to the crisis of a model of society "which goes back to colonial times and which provokes increasing social

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disparities, causing aspirations and opportunities of the disadvantaged strata of the population to drift substantially apart" (2011:14). Lima, similarly, notes that the notion of "broken homes" represents an attempt to "transfer the culpability [for urban violence and youth delinquency] from the state to the family" (2012:145). While, within such discourses, an adolescent offender's parents are blamed for their offspring's deviant behavior, the state and society at large are conceptualized primarily as victims of juvenile misbehavior, leaving other possible links (such as structural disadvantages or a lack of supportive institutions) out of consideration.

Drugs Use and Drug Traffic

Along with the supposed failures of the family, another widespread discourse for explaining the prevalence of youth offending in Cape Verde focuses on individual behaviors. Within the last two decades, roughly coinciding with the period of strongest economic growth, Cape Verde is known to have developed into one of the main hubs of international drug trafficking from Latin America to Europe. However, as UNODC reports, "part of the drug that passes through Cape Verde stays in the country and is used for internal consumption, mainly among male youths" (2012:6–7). The same UNODC report notes "a tendency to mitigate the real situation of the country" by government officials (2012:4). Recent seizures of large quantities of cocaine (more than 500 kg in November 2014 in São Vicente, more than 1 ton in territorial waters in January 2015) demonstrate the magnitude of the problem (see *A Semana* 2014a; *A Nação* 2015).

Many of the juvenile gang members I interviewed in Praia and Mindelo had been using drugs before imprisonment, and some even continued to do so in prison. Interviewees who were using drugs before being sentenced confirmed that in Praia and Mindelo access to hard drugs, including crack (which, after cannabis, is the most widely used illegal drug in Cape Verde; see UNODC 2008:51), was fairly straightforward, and prices relatively "modest."[6] Their addiction usually started in early adolescence, and none of the inmates I talked to had ever received any kind of treatment. The following conversation with an inmate from São Vicente provides a sense of the dominance of drugs in their lives as adolescents:

> It was really about time that I came to rest [in prison].
>
> *So you were tired of the life you were living?*
>
> Yeah, I just smoked too much drugs.
>
> *How many rocks [pedras] did you smoke a day?*
>
> I don't know, I smoked from night to day. I didn't sleep. I just smoked, and smoked. . . .
>
> *Did your mother know that you were smoking crack?*

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> Yes, but I was stronger than her. When you smoke, you feel like you are somebody else. She always rebuked me, but when she did so, I started to attack her. The drugs made me nervous. I was frustrated, I was broken. I told them [her parents]: "The drugs are doing harm to me!" I told them that I wanted to be committed. I told them: "I'm a drug addict!" And they said: "No. You got yourself into that, now you'll have to get out of it by yourself."
>
> *You wanted to be committed and they said no?*
>
> They didn't want to spend money for something that they thought wouldn't bring about any result. And so I continued.

It is important to note, however, that what has been said in relation to the varied family backgrounds of inmates proved to be equally true in relation to their use of illegal drugs. Only some of the inmates had been addicted to drugs in their pre-prison lives, while others either did not consume illegal drugs at all or else used them in a manner that did not affect their daily activities or their financial situation. Those who revealed themselves as former drug addicts told different stories about their past. Some had resorted to *kasubódi* (muggings) to finance their addiction, others did not. Some had started to use drugs before joining a gang, others afterward. Some who had resorted to criminal activities to finance their drug use had done so after joining a gang but not before. Others were part of a gang but never participated in any nonlegal undertakings apart from the (at times deadly) "war" between hostile gangs (see Zoettl 2015).

While drug consumption was thus a factor in youth offending in some cases, it would be wrong to assume a causal relationship between drug use and youth offending or gang membership in general. Such a relationship, however, is frequently suggested in Cape Verdean public discourses. To give an example, a study of the Commission for the Coordination of Combat of Drugs (CCCD) on the "prevalence of consumption of psychoactive substances within the general population (CCCD 2013) revealed, among other data, that within the fifteen to twenty-four age group, 6.9 percent of the sample had used illegal psychoactive substances at one point of their lives, mostly *padjinha* (cannabis). When the report was presented to the public, though, the media and government officials focused extensively on these relatively modest numbers (compared to, for instance, 41.5% in Denmark and 12.6% in Portugal).[7] And while the CCCD had not actually collected any data on crime or youth offending, the then minister of justice was quoted as being "concerned" about drug use "especially among youths," and its "direct and clear" connection to criminality, since drug users without money "resort to crime" to buy drugs (*Agência Lusa* 2013). The secretary general of the CCCD, in turn, was quoted as saying that, taking into account the fact that drugs were mainly consumed at home (though the study actually states "on the street/in the open" as the predominant places of consumption), "parents must assume their responsibilities in relation to

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their children, to avoid them having access to and starting to consume psychoactive substances" (*A Semana* 2013).

The latter quotation demonstrates how discourses on drugs and "broken" families often go together. On the one hand, it is generally admitted that the international drug trade (and other large-scale criminal activities like money laundering, arms trafficking, etc.) have had, and are having, a strong impact on Cape Verdean economy and society. Recent occurrences, like the attempted murder of the former chief public prosecutor in September 2014, the murder of the mother of an official of the criminal investigation department (*polícia judiciária*) in the same month, and the attempted murder of the son of the acting prime minister in December 2014, suggest that well-financed criminal groups may have come to represent a serious threat to the country's democratic institutions.[8] On the other hand, when it comes to youth offending, public discourses tend to overlook the connections among the international trade in drugs, local consumption of (readily available) hard drugs among youths, and the mushrooming of urban gangs (some of whose leaders are reported to work as contract killers for the international drug trade). Political and media discourses in particular often choose to single out for responsibility those who are the "end users" of a by-product of the wholesale trade that has started to get a grip on Cape Verde's society and institutions.

First Encounters: Youth, Violence, and the State

While family problems and drug use (as well as unemployment, lack of education, and lax criminal prosecution) are frequently cited as causes for the rise in crime, and particularly the increase in youth offending, other dynamics often pass unnoticed. In what follows, I will point to another "tradition" that, in contrast with the supposedly traditional *morabeza* (gentleness) of Cape Verdean society, forms part of what I consider deep-rooted dynamics of violence in the country, and of which youth offending is only one facet: the violence of the police. This is not to argue that the acts of some law enforcement officers should be considered the main cause of gang violence in Praia or Mindelo, let alone the sole reason for an adolescent's decision to join an urban youth gang. Nor is pointing to the actions of police officers an attempt to transfer the responsibility for youth offending from the individual adolescents to collective entities like "the state" or "the police." Without denying the importance and validity of a multitude of other factors for explaining the country's elevated crime rate, I wish here to give voice to less dominant discourses (those of young offenders) which, being grounded on first-hand empirical knowledge of crime and criminal careers, may contribute to a more differentiated view of the causes of gang-related violence.

While drug use and family issues were sometimes, but not always, part of the inmates' life stories, the biographies of interviewees did reveal some other common elements (that is, apart from their belonging to

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a marginalized strata of population). These were related either to the internal dynamics of gang life (see Zoettl 2015) or, as I outline below, to early encounters with the country's law enforcement authorities, which shaped the way the juvenile offenders conceptualized their relation with the state and society at large—and hence their own actions. The following account from an inmate who was imprisoned at the age of sixteen describes his first arrest, when he was still under the age of criminal responsibility:

> The first time [I was arrested] was when they caught me with a knife. . . . That day, they handcuffed me, they left me handcuffed, I spent the night standing. They tore my shirt apart, hit me with the truncheon, punched me, everything. They kicked my head, a lot of things. Then I asked for water. They went to get a bottle of freezing water, with ice in it. I was handcuffed, and instead of giving me the water to drink, they poured it over my head. "You want water?" Freezing water, there, in the backyard of the police headquarters. . . . These kind of things, they make you more, let's say, furious. Every time they seize you, you get more into it, and commit more crimes.

Reports of police violence in Cape Verde are commonplace (see, for instance, Bordonaro 2012b; UNODC 2012; USDOS 2013, 2015; CNDHC 2010). Recently the U.N. Human Rights Council expressed concern that "police brutality against juveniles, as a form of extrajudicial punishment, may be common" (UNHRC 2013:5). My conversations with gang members suggested that the "strategy" of some police officers, when dealing with adolescent lawbreakers under the age of criminal responsibility, consisted of an ad hoc application of physical punishment behind the walls of the police station. A great many of the prisoners and ex-prisoners I interviewed in Praia and Mindelo confirmed having received some kind of physical abuse during the time they were detained by the National or Judicial Police.[9] However, such extrajudicial corporal punishment of offenders doesn't generate a lot of heat within Cape Verdean society. To the contrary, it is apparently "sanctioned by the society," according to the same U.N. paper (2013:5). According to Bordonaro,

> Police violence is considered perfectly legitimate by the population in general, on the assumption that violent repression is the only way of dealing with the *thugs*, and offenders in general. "But what the blazes [do you mean by] human rights! (a girl was shouting on the street, while watching . . . [a] clash between *thugs*). Human rights are for people, and the *thugs* are not people (*thug i ka genti*)." (2012b:127)

Extrajudicial punishment by police or prison officers has been reported to be widespread also in other Lusophone African countries such as Angola (see Carvalho 2010) and Mozambique. Bertelsen (2011) and Machava (2011) point to the colonial "tradition" of corporal punishment in Mozambique, where the "rigid politics of punishment as institutional mechanisms of state

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violence and social control" during the rule of Frelimo "reproduced colonial methods of punishment in different ways" (Machava 2011:595). The claim quoted above—that thugs are "not people"—also matches Bertelson's observation that Mozambican prisoners represent "the 'other' of sociality" (2011:625). The precise way in which youth offenders and gang members are conceptualized by Cape Verdean society in general, and police officers in particular, is a question that still demands (empirical) investigation. I suggest, however, that trust in "on-the-spot" correctional measures is not only based on notions that deny youth offenders the status of fully fledged members of society (and consequently, full citizens and holders of basic civil rights), but also on a general view of youth offending that sees adolescents in conflict with the law as lifetime delinquents who are beyond redemption. While this, of course, is not a position expressed publicly in Cape Verde, such ideas can be detected between the lines in many private and public statements. In 2013, for example, the newspaper *Notícias do Norte* reported on the case of a fifteen-year-old who was arrested for his involvement in a burglary in the city of Mindelo.

> The adolescent of 15 years of age who was involved in a case of robbery of a residence in Chã D'Marinha on the island of São Vicente will be sent to a youth detention centre [*centro sócio-educativo*]. The judge imposed the severest of correctional measures, because reoffending in crimes of this nature does not allow the application of other measures. For sure, his imprisonment is imminent, once he has served his sentence [in the youth detention centre]. . . . According to a judge the NN [*Notícias do Norte*] got in touch with, "this measure is fair, because being a reoffender . . . the court had to send him to a youth detention centre." Questioned on [his opinion] on the penalty, the interviewee emphasized that "an adolescent may not stay in this place of reintegration for an indeterminate period of time. It is the court who decides the duration of the measure [of internment] and, in the present case, the adolescent will reach his 16th birthday in June, meaning that from this month on, the minor can be held responsible for the crimes he will [eventually] come to commit [*vier a cometer*]. And if this happens, the court will have comprehensive authority to send him to prison." (*Notícias do Norte* 2013a)

The fatalistic understanding of delinquency is evident in this statement. The journalist and the judge (if cited correctly) seem to agree that the future of the arrested adolescent will be, in all likelihood, behind prison bars. His admission to prison, as the newspaper reported, is "imminent" because of the crimes he will eventually "come to commit" once reaching the age of full criminal responsibility.[10] Within this discourse, the possibility that the adolescent might *not* commit another crime appeared to be ruled out a priori. To the contrary, the newspaper report seems to express the wish that the offender will complete his sixteenth year sooner rather than later—so that he can be judged according to adult criminal law and sent to prison before long.

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This tacit notion of juvenile offenders' careers that can only be dealt with effectively by (potentially life-long) imprisonment invokes Foucault's deliberations on the (nineteenth-century) conceptualization of the delinquent as "the strange manifestation of an overall phenomenon of criminality" (1979:253). Foucault's critique of the prison system, which "cannot fail to produce delinquents" (1979:266), is well known, as is his analysis of the "ensemble whose three terms (police-prison-delinquency) support one another and form a circuit that is never interrupted. Police surveillance provides the prison with offenders, which the prison transforms into delinquents, the targets and auxiliaries of police supervisions, which regularly send back a certain number of them to prison" (1979:282). I would like to suggest, however, that the practice of extrajudicial punishment of youth offenders in Cape Verde exemplifies the potential role of the police not only in "providing" offenders for penal custody, but also in the making of delinquent careers. The following testimony from two other juvenile prisoners demonstrates not only the extent to which the logics of extrajudicial retribution have already been internalized by youth offenders, but also how the experience of having suffered "unfair" police violence may lay the foundations for a life behind bars:

> The second time the police arrested me, I hadn't done anything. They caught me when I was in a taxi, they arrested me and beat me up. . . . They handcuffed me, made me kneel down, and kicked me. Later they told me that they had mistaken me for somebody else. But I will pay them back. That's why I started to exercise. Wrestling, *vale tudo* [Brazilian mixed martial arts]. . . . If I had done something, if they had arrested me in the gang fights and then taken me with them to beat me up, I wouldn't worry. But to beat me up without me having done anything, I'll have to pay them back.
>
> They think they can sort out the problem by beating us up. This won't sort out the problem. It only creates more problems. There are many people who join the gang because of this. The police beats up people who are friends with people from the gang, but who themselves are not member of the gang. And then they also enter [the gang]. The police is sheer insanity. The police only know how to beat [people] up, nothing else. Just to show off.

According to Cape Verdean law, acts like the ones described by the first intervewee are considered torture, a criminal offense subject to two to six years of imprisonment (CPC: Art. 162.2). To its adolescent victims, however, police violence is not conceptualized within any kind of official legal discourse but in terms of more comprehensive notions of justice and justness. The majority of the prisoners of Praia and Mindelo had internalized the dynamics and logics of violence that exist, more or less openly, in many spheres of Cape Verdean society (see Zoettl 2014). Although many complained about the "sharpness" (that is, length) of their prison sentences, and sometimes about the physical and symbolical violence suffered within prison (a complaint heard much more frequently in São Martinho than in Ribeirinha),

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most of them considered their prison sentences, in one way or another, "just" in relation to the crimes they had committed. However, many of them expressed the feeling that in situations of conflict with law enforcement authorities *before* their eventual imprisonment, they had been treated neither according to the law nor according to their own notions of justice, honor, and respect. What they remembered from their earliest encounters with Cape Verdean state power, as represented by the officers of the National and Judicial Police, was the impression of being treated as suspects not for a deed they had actually committed but for the milieu they belonged to. Their vague feeling of being stigmatized by Cape Verdean society, the state, and its agents points, again, to Foucault's very definition of the delinquent as someone who "is to be distinguished from the offender by the fact that it is not so much his act as his life that is relevant in characterizing him" (1979:251). One interviewee, for instance, recounted a time during carnival when he was detained at police headquarters, with no specific charge, simply because, as the officer said, "I am a danger to society." Another prisoner affirmed that "if they catch you once committing delinquency, afterwards, for example, you walk on the streets, they come and arrest you. They use torture, a lot of things. They had some iron bars. They say it is them who command in São Vicente. . . ."

Prison Is for Young People!

The politics of securitization adopted by the Cape Verdean state to combat the wave of urban violence that has flooded the country during the last decade has by and large failed in terms of its objectives. Neither the real nor the perceived crime risk in the country's urban centers has been reduced by the expansion of the security forces or the imprisonment of juveniles (see, e.g., Afrosondagem 2012; MAHOT 2011). The tightening of juvenile penal law and the introduction of special security forces (like the Brigada Anti Crime in 2007) have not proved effective in diminishing the influx of young citizens to the countless gangs that operate in the regional capitals of the archipelago. As one of the inmates of Ribeirinha prison stated somewhat boastfully,

> There are already a lot of arms [circulating] in São Vicente. So, the situation is getting worse. They say it's getting better. But São Vicente is not getting better, it's always getting worse. They are not in our skin to know what's going on. The kids stop for a month, and they say: "São Vicente is getting better. Crime has come to an end." But no, the kids have only gone on a break. Crime will never stop in São Vicente. . . .
>
> *And the kids from the bairro [neighborhood], don't they want to change their way of life?*
>
> They don't. They never change. Some say they'll change, but they never change. Because once they get out [of prison], . . . in the area I live, all the kids are part of the gang. All the youths.

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It is unlikely that a politics of securitization based mainly on a strategy of crime repression, to the neglect of other means of (social) intervention, will make the "kids" change their mind. As I have noted elsewhere (Zoettl 2015), imprisonment, though often anticipated by those still on the "streets" of the urban periphery, does not seem to be a fate that the great majority of gang members from Praia and Mindelo worry about. But the painful "lessons" occasionally taught by security forces to juvenile offenders are never forgotten, and constitute memories unlikely to instill respect for the country's legal order. On the contrary, for those who have little to lose in economic terms, the personal attributes of honor, dignity, and justice are all the more important, and "to pay back" (in the words of one inmate) an individual police officer or society at large may easily come to be regarded as the appropriate way of upholding one's self-respect.

Bordonaro (2012b:106) has suggested that the Cape Verdean thugs "do not represent a social anomaly," a "historical or social discontinuity, a cultural aberration, or an anomaly in the 'functioning of the Cape Verdean society', but a paroxysmal expression of elements that are characteristic of the country's culture." Contrary to notions of "lifetime delinquents" which dominate Cape Verdean discourses on internal security and youth violence, one of the most frequently voiced hopes of the inmates of Ribeirinha and São Martinho was to *belong* to society and to lead a "normal" life. "When I was a child, I wanted to be a police officer," one prisoner told me, "a crazy dream of mine. Today my dream is to be happy. To be happy, one day, within society." "When I get out here I want to work," said another. "Do an honest job. Start a family." And a third even praised the unexpected opportunities offered by imprisonment.

> I have never had a job. But here in prison, I have the chance to get one, because there are courses where they teach handicrafts, they give courses and other things. There are opportunities. Prison is for young people! So what I want to do now is take these opportunities. Because if I don't take them now, I won't never ever.

Sadly enough, this same prisoner who praised the opportunity for vocational training behind bars also mentioned in the course of the interview that none of the announced courses had actually taken place. But while dreaming of the life of a "normal" citizen after their release from prison, most inmates were also conscious of the difficulties of (re)-integrating into society; one even admitted that he would most likely revert to small-scale drug dealing in order to support his mother and his sick brother. Neither the fear of returning to prison nor the actual privations of prison life seemed to affect the inmates' visualization of the future. To the contrary, more than a few had seemingly internalized the idea of lifetime marginalization, tacitly submitting to their "state of being" as delinquents. Tightened penal laws, the prospect of longer sentences, and the action of special security forces had made hardly any impression. "Prison doesn't worry me too much,"

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I was told. “From prison one day one is released. And if not, one stays.” It seems clear that rather than institutionalizing the marginalization of more and more of the country’s youth and segregating them behind bars, Cape Verde will need to develop strategies of inclusion capable of persuading the large number of young citizens who currently live on the fringes of society that their country is truly interested in making them part of the island nation’s development.

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Notes

1. According to data from the National Police (PN) and the Ministry of the Interior (MAI). In 2014, 65 homicides were registered.
2. Estimates based on internal data of the prison administration.
3. Official numbers point to a youth unemployment rate of around 25% in urban Cape Verde in the 15–24 age group (INE 2010), which partly glosses over the actual situation, as severe under employment is not taken into account, in accordance with the "one hour of work" criterion of the ILO (1987).
4. All quotations from published material and interviews with informants that were originally in Portuguese or Portuguese Creole have been translated by the author.
5. To guarantee that interviewees may not be identified, I give only very limited information on the individual prisoners quoted. The gender used with reference to an inmate does not necessarily represent her/his actual gender.

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6. Crack street prices in Mindelo apparently averaged around U.S.$6 per "rock" (*pedra*).
7. According to data from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) on lifetime prevalence of use of cannabis in the age group 15–24. See http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/2014#displayTable:GPS-3.
8. See *A Semana* 2014c; 2014b; 2014d.
9. The Cape Verdian police is administratively divided into the "national" and the "judicial" police (*Polícia Nacional* and *Polícia Judiciária*). The former is mainly responsible for street patrolling and investigation of most criminal offences, while the latter's responsible is reserved to the investigation of felonies (Lei n° 30/VII/2008 de 21 de Julho).
10. The Cape Verdean penal code treats offenders over the age of 16 like adults, in anticipation of a law that will institute a different regime for offenders aged 16–21 which, however, has never been passed (CPC:Art. 8). Adolescents aged 12–16 are subject to being held in youth detention centers (DL 2006). See also Zoettl (2014).

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