



# Where Blackness and Cape Verdeanness Intersect: Reflections on a Monoracial and Multiethnic Reality in the United States

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## **Where Blackness and Cape Verdeanness Intersect: Reflections on a Monoracial and Multiethnic Reality in the United States**

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### **Abstract**

As a Black American and fourth generation Cape Verdean American growing up in the United States, I've found that race and ethnicity are frequently conflated in ways that obscure my social reality and identity or put two integrated parts of myself into opposition with each other. In examining my own ethno-racial experience, I use critical race studies and identity construction to disentangle the structural concepts of race and ethnicity and build a frame work for understanding my own integrated existence within the United States. My personal trajectory is situated within the current and historical sociostructural context of Diaspora, White Supremacy and Colonialism. This article builds upon existing literature on Cape Verdean, Immigrant and Diaspora studies and integrates it with critical scholarship on power, race, ethnicity and identity. This work advances our understanding of Cape Verdean experiences in the United States post-immigrant integration, develops a framework for future work on racialized and ethnic experiences in the US, while interrogating sociostructural power structures and their impacts.

Key words: Diaspora, Black, Blackness, Cape Verdeanness, Immigration, Race, Ethnicity, Critical Race Theory, Identity, White Supremacy, Colonialism,

Frequently Cape Verdean scholarship focuses on the Cape Verdeans in the Cape Verde islands, or immigrant experiences and Diaspora communities. Immigrant related research might address questions of integration, identity or challenges such as deportation. The broader research looks at the transnational relationships across the diaspora and as they relate back to Cape Verde<sup>1</sup>. There is very little work, in the United States based research, that moves past the initial immigration questions to look at life “post-integration.” This leaves out the experiences of families like mine, where I am the fourth generation in the United States yet maintain a Cape Verdean and American identity.

Scholarship about race and Cape Verdeans in the United States tend to stop at the point where Cape Verdeans and Cape Verdean Americans must confront the United States Racial categories and learn how to understand these initial foreign categories<sup>2</sup>. What does it mean for those of us for whom these racial categories are not new, but rather are integral to our own upbringing and sense of self? Building on work that demonstrates the significance of embodied and lived experience<sup>3</sup>, I use my own ethno-racial experience in the United States of America as a touch point of reflection and exploration. This examination reveals ways in which race and

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<sup>1</sup> Lima-Neves, Terza Alice Silva. (2015). D’NOS MANERA- Gender, Collective Identity and Leadership in the Cape Verdean Community in the United States. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*, 1(1), 57-82.

Resende-Santos, Joao. (2015). Cape Verde and Its Diaspora: Transnationalism and Homeland Development. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*. 2(1), 69-107.

Rosa, Leila. (2015). “This country does not have my back!”: Youth Experiences with a Parent Threatened by Deportation. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*, 2(1), 35-68.

Silva, Clara. (2015). Immigrants from Cabo Verde in Italy: History and Paths of Socio-educative Integration. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*. 2(1), 25-34.

<sup>2</sup> Lima-Neves, Terza Alice Silva. (2015). D’NOS MANERA- Gender, Collective Identity and Leadership in the Cape Verdean Community in the United States. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*, 1(1), 57-82.

Pilgrim, Aminah. (2015). “Free Men Name Themselves”: U.S. Cape Verdeans & Black Identity Politics in the Era of Revolutions, 1955-75. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*. 1(1), 101-120.

Halter, Marilyn. (1993). *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean American Immigrants, 1860-1965*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois

<sup>3</sup> Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. (2008). Rethinking diasporicity: embodiment, emotion , and the displaced origin. *Africana and Black Diaspora* 1 (July).

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: The New Press.

ethnicity intersect in an integrated fashion in the United States of America and what that can mean for identity within this context.

### **Social Construction of Identity**

To understand my ethno-racial journey in the United States, it is important to understand the social construction of identity itself. Though identity is frequently thought of as a fixed element of a person, identity is constantly in construction as the result of both internal and external factors. Miller describes this identity construction as the story we tell ourselves and others about who we are; and like stories, this can change over time, or in different contexts, with some aspects being more malleable than others <sup>4</sup>.

Internal factors that might shape an identity story, could be personal experiences, preferences, personality or traits. External factors that might affect a person's identity could include the community she grows up in, how she is perceived and treated by other people, family relationships, and other interpersonal ties. For example, on an internal level, while my lineage has remained unchanged throughout my life, the way I relate to and understand that lineage has transformed as the result of different life experiences. And although I've always understood myself as Black, when I've travelled to other countries with different understandings of race such as Brazil other people might understand me as "mulatta" rather than Black or Negra and engage with me differently as a result.

This identity formation process occurs within a broader context of social disparities, privilege and oppression. A person's position within the power hierarchy influences her perception of self and others, and the relationship between self and others. Those in a privileged position may automatically understand themselves superior relative to a person in a marginalized or oppressed position, and the inverse may happen the other way around. Any individual may hold both privileged and oppressed – or targeted - identities simultaneously<sup>5</sup>, such as a wealthy black woman who might be privileged in terms of class yet targeted with respect to race and

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<sup>4</sup> Miller, Joshua and Garran, Ann Marie. (2017). *Racism in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions*. New York: Spring Publishing Company.

<sup>5</sup> Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: The New Press.

gender. This article focuses primarily on race and ethnicity, but it is important to remember that these structures interact with other social hierarchies in society as well.

An individual may be more aware of their identity with respect to their targeted categories, which may be charged with a heavily negative significance or stigmatization in society - such as being black, an immigrant, queer, or poor-; and less aware of their privileged identities which are usually normalized and valued in society - such as being white, a citizen, heterosexual or wealthy. This means that targeted people must learn how to reject negative stories about themselves for the stigmatized aspects of their identity and need to learn how to recognize the unearned benefits and power related to the privileged aspects of their identity<sup>6</sup>. For example, in her book, “Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?” Beverly Tatum examined how adolescents navigate their own understandings of self and others based on their racial positions within the US, the factors that shapes the processes, and the consequences for their sense of self. She identified how racism and discrimination may make Black children hyper aware of their racial identity, while White ones would not become aware of it until later in life<sup>7</sup>. My own identity formation took place in a highly racialized context of the United States with Black American and Cape Verdean ancestry. My social position within this context resulted in my being hyper aware of my race, ethnicity and Cape Verdean immigrant background and my integrated sense of self actively engages with all these components.

### **The False Dichotomy of Race or Ethnicity – Working to See Each and Both**

Born to a Black American Father and Cape Verdean American mother, I was raised and always identified as Black (or Black American)<sup>8</sup> and Cape Verdean, yet at different moments in my life people have asked me if I consider myself “Black or Cape Verdean?” This question confused me tremendously, as though the person had just asked whether I was left handed OR did I have two feet? Two coexisting parts of myself unnecessarily and suddenly put into opposition with each other. Over time, I’ve come to believe that much of this confusion comes

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, Joshua and Garran, Ann Marie. (2017). *Racism in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions*. New York: Spring Publishing Company.

<sup>7</sup> Tatum, Beverly. (2017). *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And other Conversations about Race*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

<sup>8</sup> I specify Black American here, because the while the racial category of Black is not exclusive to the US, the US experience of being Black is a particular one.

from how the distinct yet interrelated social constructions of race and ethnicity are often conflated into one construct.

Ethnicity is commonly understood in the US as culture and heritage related to ancestry and place of origin<sup>9</sup>. Though it may correlate with phenotypic traits (such as skin color, body type, hair texture), ethnicity is not defined by phenotype. Such an identity comes from a combination of heritage and internal assertion of belonging to that group. For example, my Cape Verdean ethnic identity comes from my ancestors being Cape Verdean combined with my own internal association with this ethnic membership. It is internally and not relatively defined. Ethnicities are not mutually exclusive. The association with one ethnic heritage does not automatically negate the validity of another heritage within the same person. Further, this identity is in no way affected by the presence of someone else's ethnicity. I am no more or less Cape Verdean if I stand next to a person who is ethnically Greek, Nicaraguan or Nigerian. My relationship to this identity only varies depending on my relationship to the Cape Verdean culture and community.

Ethnicity is not necessarily hierarchical or polar, while race is inherently so. Race in the United States is an externally constructed (through policy, norms, practices and culture), polarized power relation based on phenotype that everyone is placed into<sup>10</sup>. White only exists, because there is "Black." The sole definition of white is to not be black and to have more access to power, privilege and resources relative to Black or non-white populations<sup>11</sup>. The US is a white supremacist society, where white, heterosexual, Christian, wealthy, cis-gendered men, are supposed to be at the top, and everyone else is supposed to be varying degrees of below that. Though the US, like every society, is based on intersecting power structures, race is a dominant social structure and you generally do better, the closer you are to white and the further you are from black.

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<sup>9</sup> Vilna Treitler. (2013). *The Ethnic Project: Racial Fiction into Ethnic Factions*. Stanford California: Stanford University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Quinones-Rosado, Raul. (2016). Latinos and Multiracial America. In K. O. Korgen, Editor. *Race Policy and Multiracial Americans* (13-28). Chicago, IL: Policy Press.

Winant, Howard. (2000). Race and Race Theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 26, 169-185.

<sup>11</sup> Harris, Cheryl. (1993). Whiteness as Property. *Harvard Law Review*. 106 (8). 1707-1791.

Even though the white supremacist racial hierarchy is socially constructed, it still carries very real implications for people's lives. Although the first Africans to arrive in the United States had many different ethnicities, generations of living this racialized existence together has generated a Black American ethnic culture, contingent upon yet distinct from the initial African ethnicities<sup>12</sup>. For example, as Vilna Treitler describes in her book,

If I asked you to identify a group of people and told you that they are presumed to be dark in skin tone, were largely concentrated in the Southern United States prior to 1970; believe their people descend from persons who traveled from the African continent involuntarily even if, more often than not, they cannot pinpoint the national origin of their ancestor with any certainty; identify in great numbers with the Baptist faith; founded the music tradition known as 'jazz' and are known for 'soul music' and 'soul food'; and that other Americans tend not to intermarry with them, your mind would conjure up the ethnic group "African Americans" (2013, 21).

This reality that Treitler describes is unique to the United States and to this racialized group. Even though ethnicity is usually rendered invisible when talking about Black Americans, the Black American reality is that of a specific ethnic group constructed within the United States. Thus, my own identity is the integration of two US based ethnicities, Cape Verdean American and Black American.

While there are no externally imposed laws or policies regarding ethnic identification, there have been very rigid (yet frequently contradictory) ones with respect to race<sup>13</sup>. The specific requirements of what made someone "black" in the US would vary state by state, but the "one-drop" rule where a single drop of black ancestry made a person black is a prevalent ideology. Regardless of how light or dark your own skin may be, if you have parents or any ancestors considered black, you are black. In contrast, whiteness is lost once there is any non-white mixing because white is defined by "purity". This means that even though there is lots of phenotypic

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis, Earl. (1995). To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African-Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas. *American Historical Review*. 100, 765-787.

<sup>13</sup> Ngai, Tyrone. (2016). Multiracial Americans throughout the history of the US. In K.O. Korgen Editor, *Race Policy and Multiracial Americans* (13-28). Chicago, IL: Policy Press.

variety in the United States, and long history of “miscegenation”, those nuances are ignored because they are erased from the national narrative.

There have been some fluctuations in terms of how groups are racialized, but the overall system stays intact. For example, historically the Irish and Italian immigrants were considered “ethnic whites” and “non-white”, but now they are considered white. Similarly, Arab Americans who had been racially considered white, are recently becoming racialized into a distinct “non-white” category<sup>14</sup>. Though non-black groups in between may shift closer to one end of the racial spectrum or the other, Black and White are always in structural hierarchical opposition to each other with white always being on top and groups considered Black are never re-racialized into the White category<sup>15</sup>. In contrast to the US system, Cape Verdean national identity assumes mixed populations (racially and ethnically) and phenotypic diversity. The rigid racial system in the US is often an unwelcome and invasive experience for immigrants who come from places, like Cape Verde, where the social hierarchy is not based on such stringent racial categorizations<sup>16</sup>.

As a part of the “Americanization” assimilation process, immigrants are expected to rid themselves of ethnic identity and embrace a solely racial Americanized one<sup>17</sup>. This assimilation narrative comes from the idea that the United States is a “melting pot” where everyone’s differences are merged into one monolithic “American” identity. This ideology resulted in generations of immigrants being pushed or shamed into rejecting their unique ethnic characteristics, such as language, food or cultural traits, and conforming to white, middle class

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<sup>14</sup> Shyrock, Andrew. (2008). The Moral Analogies of Race: Arab American Identity, Color Politics, and the Limits of Racialized Citizenship. In A. Jamal Editor and N. Naber Editor (Eds) (81-113). *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Subjects to Visible Subjects*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

Mahdwi, Arwa. (2017, March 21). I’m a bit brown. But in America I’m white. Not for much longer. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/21/us-census-whiteness-race-colour-middle-east-north-africa-america>.

<sup>15</sup> Vilna Treitler. (2013). *The Ethnic Project: Racial Fiction into Ethnic Factions*. Stanford California: Stanford University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Halter, Marilyn. (1993). *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean American Immigrants, 1860-1965*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois

<sup>17</sup> Vega, I. and Ortiz, V. (2018). Mexican Americans and Immigration Attitudes: A Cohort Analysis of Assimilation and Group Consciousness. *Social Problems* 65, 137-153.



social norms in pursuit of the “American Dream”. Scholars have shown that assimilation is not the only way that immigrant populations get incorporated into US society<sup>18</sup>.

While both White and Black Americans are identified primarily by racial markers to the exclusion of race, this happens through distinct processes. For White Americans that process was more voluntary, where they may suppress their own ethnic identifiers and relationships to appear Americanized/white and gain access to the benefits and privileges associated with that. For Black Americans this has been a violently imposed process, from explicit attempts to strip enslaved Africans of their ethnic identity, violently break family lineages which disrupted for the transference of ethnic identity and cultural knowledge, and finally the erasure and denial of ethnic roots in the present. Black Americans have worked to reconnect with ethnic roots by constructing the “African-American” identity label<sup>19</sup>, which shifts the categorization from a racialized to a more ethnic conception. Yet, the racialized position still prevails and those who are considered Black American, are not generally conceptualized in terms of ethnicity<sup>20</sup>.

Ethnicity is distinct from race, but ethnicity is used to racialize, or racially categorize, groups in the US and place them in the social hierarchy. Groups are categorized as White or non-white, then they may be Black or perhaps a racialized “other”. Racialization occurs based on phenotype, lineage and even place of origin. Regional racialization occurs when whole geographies along with anyone from that geography carries that racialization<sup>21</sup>. For example, Latin American countries are racialized as “non-white” or “Brown” and even though a person may be racially white within Latin America, once they are in the United States, they are placed in the non-white category of “Latino.” Cape Verdean population and families have vast phenotypic variety that challenge US based racial assumptions – like many other communities in the US and globally (e.g. Latin America, The Caribbean or Creole communities in the United

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<sup>18</sup> Portes, Alejandro and Zhou, Min. (2008). The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants. In D. B. Grusky Editor, *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective* (658-669). Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, Lerone. (1967, November). What’s In a Name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black. *Ebony Magazine* (46-48, 50-52, 54). Retrieved from [http://www.virginia.edu/woodson/courses/aas102%20\(spring%2001\)/articles/names/bennett.htm](http://www.virginia.edu/woodson/courses/aas102%20(spring%2001)/articles/names/bennett.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Vilna Treitler. (2013). *The Ethnic Project: Racial Fiction into Ethnic Factions*. Stanford California: Stanford University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Paschel, Tianna S. (2016). *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

States) – however, given that Cape Verde is considered part of Africa (which then defines you as Black) and almost everyone of Cape Verdean descent has (or is assumed to have) at least “one-drop” of black blood, Cape Verdeans in the US would always be considered Black and not white. Making Cape Verdean and Black racially synonymous, while ethnic particularities remain.

This structural reality of racialization may decide a person’s racial designation, yet individuals may or may not internalize that designation. Within my own family, even though Cape Verdeans would generally be considered Black, the degree to which individuals might embrace that (if at all) would vary. For example, my light skinned Cape Verdean grandmother was angry that my mother had come home from college with a dark skinned Black American boyfriend, and even when I was coming to understand race as a child, this same grandmother loved when I said she was white because of her skin tone, while my politically racialized mother who strongly identified as Black cried when I said she looked white. As Black Immigrants from the same immigrant community, each person navigates these dimensions differently.

Everyone, in the United States has a race and an ethnicity though one may be more salient than the other for a variety of reasons. Race is an identity that is largely externally constructed and defined. If everyone else in society perceives you as part of that racial category, then that is part of your racialization regardless of how you see yourself. Ethnicity is largely an internal construction process, primarily determined by individual assertion as opposed to external imposition. To ask the question are you “Black or Cape Verdean”, is to take a racial framework (polarized and hierarchal) and apply it to an ethnic question (multiple and not inherently hierarchical). To assert Cape Verdeanness is to primarily assert ethnic identity, even though that ethnicity has been racialized as Black. To assert Black Americanness is to primarily assert a racial identity, even though it also carries cultural and ethnic attributes. Even if the weights may shift more one way or the other, racial and ethnic identity are both present and do not have to exist in opposition to each other.

Phenotypically, I have Brown skin, with characteristics, such as hair texture and nose shape that clearly mark me as a Black person in the US. I have Black American ancestry from my Black American father. I am both perceived and understand myself as a Black person, in addition to the ways in which Cape Verdeans are automatically racialized as Black in the US. Given my, Cape Verdean American mother, personal engagement with my Cape Verdean

heritage and phenotypic diversity within Cape Verdean populations, I am also accepted and understood as Cape Verdean or Cape Verdean American. Because of my racial and ethnic embeddedness, I relate to, but am not limited by either of the social structures. Instead, I draw on both to expand how I relate to myself and others.

### **Power Structures, Revolutions and Identity Construction**

White supremacy (particularly, though not exclusively US based), colonial legacies in the US and Cape Verde, and the subsequent movements to resist those power systems are vital external forces in the construction of my own identity as Black American and Cape Verdean American. Colonialism and white supremacy are foundational power structures for Cape Verde and the US. Both the US and Cape Verde were the products of colonialism; however, the US was subject to settler colonialism in which the colonial power not only extracts resources from the colonial territory, but also settles on the land itself. In the United States, settlers gained independence from England in 1776, however colonizers who had settled here stayed in power and white supremacy remained intact. Thus, the white supremacist system in the US is embedded within a settler colonialist legacy<sup>22</sup>. When Cape Verde gained independence in 1975, after about 500 years of Portuguese colonial rule, the colonial power left the territory. Even though the Portuguese may have still held economic or informal power in many ways, the government and country were formally in the hands of the Cape Verdean people.

In both cases, the subjugated populations are forced to fit into the norms, values, systems and structures put into place to benefit the dominating population. Colonialism embedded a sense of valuing European and specifically Portuguese/white traits and devaluing African/black ones. White supremacy instituted a similar value system around Whiteness<sup>23</sup>. The contours of these power dynamics become evident in the myriad ways that people negotiate identity and survival in the face of these inequalities. Subjugated populations may seek out proximity to whiteness or the colonial power (European and white in this case) to gain access to power and resources for

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<sup>22</sup> Glenn, Evelyn N. (2015). Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 1(1), 54-74.

<sup>23</sup> Harris, Cheryl. (1993). Whiteness as Property. *Harvard Law Review*. 106 (8). 1707-1791.

Lima-Neves, Terza Alice Silva. (2015). D'NOS MANERA- Gender, Collective Identity and Leadership in the Cape Verdean Community in the United States. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*, 1(1), 57-82.

themselves and their communities, or they might embrace Africanness and Blackness in resistance to the white supremacy and imperialism.

Within the US, everyone navigates the white supremacy systems in their own way and whiteness has come with a plethora of resources and advantages. Cape Verdeans, like every community, have their own internalized supremacy before coming to the US which then interacts with the internalized supremacy system in the US. Immigrants in the US frequently try to get as close to whiteness as possible, or at the very least try to resist being perceived as Black. This has been true with Latinx communities, West Indian Communities, Asian, African and even indigenous communities have made efforts to be distinguished from Black American populations<sup>24</sup>. While Black people who phenotypically appeared white have used this proximity to whiteness to gain access to resources and opportunity at various points in history<sup>25</sup>. People use whatever tools they have available to find space for their sense of self and for survival within this system. In the Cape Verdean case, Aminah Pilgrim notes that:

...Cape Verdeans frequently manipulated their conditions according to the use of identity politics – often through the choice of language spoken, political or religious affiliations, etc. – and thus, their ‘blackness’ or status as African-Americans is/was never fixed. This was the case for those from Cape Verde and arguably for many other immigrants from the African Diaspora in the US racial context, in spite of the fact that they faced institutionalized racism that sought to categorize and define them otherwise.

The descendants of African slaves in the US – according to the ‘one drop rule’ all those of any traceable African descent or the traditionally defined ‘African-Americans’ – always sought alternatives to one definition of blackness and collectively resisted that definition, and its attendant stereotypes, in transforming their collective ‘name’...’Neo-African-Americans,’ or ‘African-non-Americans,’...maintain their cultural identities and

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<sup>24</sup> Ngai, Tyrone. (2016). Multiracial Americans throughout the history of the US. In K.O. Korgen Editor, *Race Policy and Multiracial Americans* (13-28). Chicago, IL: Policy Press.

Waters, Mary C. (1999). West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities in *Black Identities*. Pp.5-8, 336-338.  
Quinones-Rosado, Raul. (2016). Latinos and Multiracial America. In K. O. Korgen, Editor. *Race Policy and Multiracial Americans* (13-28). Chicago, IL: Policy Press.

<sup>25</sup> Harris, Cheryl. (1993). Whiteness as Property. *Harvard Law Review*. 106 (8). 1707-1791.

resist over-determinant blackness by similarly naming themselves – holding on to the names associated with their countries of origin... ( 2015, pp.112).

Even though there is ample literature documenting Black immigrant resistance to being labeled as Black as described here, some important literature has also documented how some ethnic groups specifically identify with Blackness and Black American culture. For example, in Ana Aparicio's work with Dominican Youth in New York, she found that many second-generation youth attributed their parent's resistance to Black people, to not actually knowing any real Black people and ignorance about their own African ancestry<sup>26</sup>. In this sense, immigrant populations are rejecting stereotypes, but have very little knowledge about actual people.

Usually immigrants only learn about Black populations in the United States through stereotypes. It is important, however, not to reduce Blackness to merely being undesirable within the White supremacist system, but to also recognize the unique values of Blackness. Not only is it vital to acknowledge the social assets we have developed<sup>27</sup>, it is essential that cultural products such as hip hop<sup>28</sup> or resistance struggles not be discussed in a way that ignores their Black American foundation<sup>29</sup>.

The US supremacy system has created a false dichotomy of race and ethnicity (through policy, norms, and national narratives), where the presence of one frequently implies the denial or erasure of the other. This dichotomization and erasure can generate distance and hostility within and between Black and Cape Verdean (or Black immigrant) communities. Asserting ethnic identity may be interpreted (or many in fact be) denying Blackness, and immigrant communities may shun blackness in a range of implicit and explicit ways. Though I have experienced my identity in an integrated way, this has required that I push back on erasure or antagonism within my own communities. On my Cape Verdean side, I was frequently simply swept into the Kriola identity and the Black Americanness would mostly be ignored. While on

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<sup>26</sup> Aparicio, Ana. (2007). Contesting Race and Power through the Diaspora: Second-Generation Dominican youth in the New Gotham. Special Issue on youth and globalization. *City and Society* 19(2), 179-201.

<sup>27</sup> Yosso, Tara. (2005). Whose culture has capital?: A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 8(1) 69-91.

<sup>28</sup> Rosa, Ricardo D.. (2018). Cape Verdean Counter Cultural Hip-Hop(s) & the Mobilization of the Culture of Radical Memory: Public Pedagogy for Liberation or Continued Colonial Enslavement. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*, 3(1), 92-113.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, Earl. (1995). To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African-Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas. *American Historical Review*. 100, 765-787.

the Black side, a person might respond “Naw girl, you just black,” in response to me naming my Cape Verdean identity.

I would suggest that Black immigrants are not simply rejecting Blackness but that this might be a place where race and ethnicity are being conflated in this resistance. There may be both an ethnic resistance – to refuse the loss of ethnic connection in the face of an assumed assimilationist immigration trajectory in the United States – and, or, a racial resistance – the refusal to be categorized or see oneself in terms of stereotypes and perceived Blackness.

Black resistance to ethnic naming may be more nuanced as well. Given the myriad of ways that our Black existence is constantly being invalidated, threatened and undermined, along with the persistent denial of Black ethnicity, and polarized racial structure, it’s not surprising that affirming ethnicity can be experienced as racial invalidation. By decoupling race and ethnicity and interrogating these resistances further I believe we would discover a more multifaceted understanding of these experiences. Historically, global liberation movements have played an important role in bridging racial and ethnic resentment fostered by the dominant power systems.

The 1950s through the 1970s was a time of asserting positive identities in the African Diaspora. Cape Verde was entrenched in struggle for independence while Black Americans in the US were asserting their own Black racial identity and fighting for their own independence. As Cape Verdeans were going from Portuguese, to black Portuguese, to Cape Verdean<sup>30</sup>; Black Americans were going from colored, to negro, to African-American and Black<sup>31</sup>. Each striving to construct an identity and sense of self separate from the colonizer or oppressor. The cultural revolutions of the mid twentieth century brought many Black immigrants into to new racialized consciousness and connection to Black America. Pilgrim further notes that:

Arguably, many Cape Verdean American men and women (if not most) of Salah’s generation experienced a so-called ‘Negro’ phase; this phenomenon has continued until

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<sup>30</sup> Pilgrim, Aminah. (2015). “Free Men Name Themselves”: U.S. Cape Verdeans & Black Identity Politics in the Era of Revolutions, 1955-75. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*. 1(1), 101-120.

<sup>31</sup> Bennett, Lerone. (1967, November). What’s In a Name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black. *Ebony Magazine* (46-48, 50-52, 54). Retrieved from [http://www.virginia.edu/woodson/courses/aas102%20\(spring%2001\)/articles/names/bennett.htm](http://www.virginia.edu/woodson/courses/aas102%20(spring%2001)/articles/names/bennett.htm).

now where it is evident that some newer and younger Cape Verdean arrivals in the US embrace commercial, African-American hip hop identity (Pilgrim, 2015, 117).

Salah may have felt aligned with the Black Power movement, yet it does not appear that he personally accepted a Black identity, but rather held a strong affinity. While other Cape Verdeans of Salah's generation and current Cape Verdean immigrants, may have a "Negro phase," my Black identity is not optional. Being Black American and Cape Verdean American especially living outside of the Cape Verdean enclave, my Blackness is never a choice. To deny my Blackness would not just be to reject what I interpret as a foreign community but would mean negating an integral part of myself and the rich social legacy that accompanies it.

I was born to parents who were each affirmatively defining themselves as Cape Verdean and Black in a community of Black and Pan African consciousness. My blackness was always a beautiful thing that carries meaning, integrity, pride and substance. My blackness and the blackness of others brought, joy and fullness and significance to me. I was understood as black and was proud to understand myself as black. I was simultaneously imbued with a deep connection to my Cape Verdeanness, being intimately familiar with our immigration history and connecting directly with some of our ethnic traits such as language. For me to be situated and to identify the way I do is to be firmly embedded within the anti-oppressive nexus of these power structures. Which means being connected to my targeted identities, while pushing against the social structures that subjugate people based on them.

### **Extending to the Diaspora Identity**

In her article, "Free men name themselves: U.S. Cape Verdeans & Black Identity Politics in the Era of Revolutions, 1955-75", Aminah Pilgrim discusses racialized identity processes for Cape Verdean Americans and situates the discussion firmly within critical race and diaspora (specifically afro-diaspora) studies, and within the historical context of cultural identity revolutions. She describes the Cape Verdean diaspora as:

being made up of 'overlapping diasporas' (a term coined by Earl Lewis), having multiple points of origin and settlement, and consistently moving communities, with multiple identities and subjectivities that themselves shift according to time and place. (Pilgrim, 2015, pp.109)

Diasporas are constantly in flux, remaining connected yet always changing. I think of it as river channels where water flows and collects, and move into other water basin, while remaining part of the initial water system. From a Diaspora perspective, it's easy to see how the two sides of my family are part of the same legacy. I am the product of African Diaspora trajectories (Cape Verdean and Black American) re-merging in the US.

Diaspora is an explicitly integral component of Cape Verdean identity and Nationality. Uninhabited prior to discovery, the Cape Verde islands were colonized by the Portuguese and Cape Verdeans as a people are the product of the violent integration of African and European peoples through the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism. Kidnapped Africans were first taken to Cape Verde to be conditioned and “broken in” for slavery. Some remained on the islands to become the foundation for our Cape Verdean society, some were shipped off to a wide range of destinations in the transatlantic slave trade – creating the foundation for our Afro-Diaspora. In addition to this role, Cape Verde has also served as a vital thoroughway for migrant, wandering or fleeing populations across the globe at different points in history and regular cycles of drought and famine have made emigration a vital component of survival. As a result, we have been a country characterized by massive emigration and Diaspora communities. We have a very strong diaspora community and identity, that allows for the integration of other nationalities and ethnicities while retaining a Cape Verdean identity<sup>32</sup>.

Black Americans are part of the global Black Diaspora while also having a US domestic diaspora trajectory<sup>33</sup>. From families being broken up and sold, to people fleeing enslavement and the great migration north post-reconstruction, Black migration within the United States has continued to be an important part of our reality. On my Black American side, I can trace my lineage back to around reconstruction, when an ancestor that had been enslaved in Texas, escaped to Virginia and went back to free their mother. I know that the great migration north, resulted in my family settling in a steel mill town in Pennsylvania. I know that civil rights, and

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<sup>32</sup> Halter, Marilyn. (1993). *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean American Immigrants, 1860-1965*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois.

Resende-Santos, Joao. (2015). Cape Verde and Its Diaspora: Transnationalism and Homeland Development. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies*. 2(1), 69-107.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory, James M. (2005). *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.



black power moved even more of my family into colleges and professions across the country, including to the college town where my parents met.

On my Cape Verdean side, ongoing challenges in the islands combined with economic opportunity in the US, pushed my great-grandparents to migrate to Cape Verdean immigrant enclaves in New England in the 1900s. The opportunities that attracted my Cape Verdean ancestors were the result of industry and labor shifts post-slavery. These same forces led to my Black American side pursuing new life and opportunities up North. I am the third generation to be born in the US, but generally the first generation to have parents who married outside of the Cape Verdean community and the first to live outside the enclave. Like my Black American side, civil rights and black power moved many of my family members into higher education, and for many, into a newfound racial consciousness as well.

Not only are the sides of my family united racially, they are also connected through interwoven Diaspora streams that merge in my identity. Throughout the long history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and enslavement in the United States, it is very likely that ancestors on my Black American father's side overlapped with ancestors on my Cape Verdean American mother's side. Perhaps my first Black American ancestor came to the US through Cape Verde, perhaps there were Cape Verdeans working on the slave ship, or perhaps a British ship traded with a Portuguese one on the way to the US colonies. Then global pressures continued to push my Cape Verdean ancestors towards migration, as US structures and norms continued to feed into forced and chosen internal migration. And finally, liberation movements of the 1950s and 70s facilitated each of my parents accessing new opportunities and attending college at the same time and place, where they met and then made a family.

### **Understanding the Monoracial Multiethnic Reality**

As with all identities, mine was constructed through a confluence of internal and external forces that shape how I am understood, how I understand myself and my experiences. This was shaped in the US social context in which while both sides of my family have distinct ethnic legacies, yet both are legacies of being racially Black in the United States. Thus, I understand myself as being monoracially Black and multiethnically Black American and Cape Verdean American.

I grew up with Blackness and Cape Verdeanness existing as one. My Cape Verdeanness is an extension of my blackness, and my blackness is never removed my Cape Verdeanness. These parts of my identity have come together in an enriching fashion, that allows me to draw from the long traditions of resistance, survival and resilience that both strains have provided to me and make it possible for me to exist, thrive and resist within the US. To understand this reality, it was essential to: explicitly address race and ethnicity as well as their interactions and integrate that into an analysis of attitudes and experiences; pay attention to broader historical and structural context; examine what identity means for those who are post- the initial immigrant integration; and expand to a Diaspora identity that unites the interwoven Cape Verdean and Black American trajectories.

Cape Verdeans have been coming to the US for a long time, it is one of the oldest CV diaspora communities in the world and each generation must contend with the racial reality of the US<sup>34</sup>. To deepen our understanding of individual and collective identity formation and experiences, it is vital that we use frameworks that match this US reality and we must continue to examine other post-integration positionalities. Work like this can shed light on experiences within the US and across the Diaspora while providing more insight into how local and global social structures.

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<sup>34</sup> Between Race and Ethnicity, and Some Kind of Funny Porto Rican?:A Cape Verdean American Story. The article from my MA thesis.

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