Cape Verdeans in Cova da Moura, Portugal, an ethno-historical account of their destinies and legacies

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II. State of the Art

II.1 Studies on Cape Verdean Migration


Undertaking an exploratory ethno-historical study, I examined several complementary theories which provide a useful framework (although sometimes overlapping in their definitions) even for future research about this community. To gain an understanding of the interplay of families, social networks and individuals in the Cape Verdean community, I use and compare several major theoretical frameworks. Poverty can be the result of social and behavioural deficiencies in individuals that make them less viable within conventional

In terms of theories of migration, in the study by Portes (1995) ‘Social networks’, kin, friends and neighbours influenced the migrant's integration in the host country (accommodation, information, finding a job). For a better understanding of the types of social networks these families have developed, the research by Portes (1955), Boyd (1989), Vertovec (2001) and Elizabeth Bott’s early analysis of family networks (1957) proved useful. According to her model, highly interconnected networks would be more likely to share similar values and beliefs regarding conjugal roles than loosely connected networks.

Following the studies of Basch and Szanton (1992), Schiller (1995) and Carling (2002), the movement of individuals and groups that remain linked to their home communities is growing every year. A good example is the Cape Verdean community in Cova da Moura, as Batalha (2004) and Gois (2010) mention.
During the past two decades, research results have shown the transnational\textsuperscript{11} nature of Cape Verdean migration in Portugal (Jesus (1996), Machado (1997), Carling (2002), Meintel (2002), Gois (2002), Grassi (2003), Sorensen (2004)), but there is still very limited ethnographic research about Cape Verdians living in Portugal. Further studies should be made particularly about Cova da Moura and concerning their adaptation within Portuguese society.

The theoretical framework provided by Olwig and Sorenson (1995, 2002) and Sorenson (2005) on ‘transnational families and households’ was useful in the case of the target families because of the importance of the women’s role in this group. This approach offers a convincing basis for analysis of the complex family relationships and transnational activities these migrants embark on, both in their place of origin and at their destination. To gain an understanding of the motivations and social ambitions of each family; I used the concept of ‘narrative’ used by Wallace (1980), Portes and Rumbaut (2001). I realized that the ‘stories’ people tell about themselves and each other will help them to make sense of their lives, difficulties, limitations and responsibility towards others. Their recorded narratives are ‘the stories of their life’ with a beginning, middle and end which will form the corpus of my research.


\textbf{II.2 Background: History of Cape Verde}

For a Cape Verdean, emigration does not only imply sadness on leaving but also hope for a better life. To emigrate is to follow a tradition and the Sousa, Costa and Ferreira families are only three of

the hundreds of thousands of Cape-Verdeans who have left their homeland since the eighteenth century.

Figure 1: Cape Verdiean Islands (Google Maps, 2013)

Figure 2: Street-life in São Vicente / Cape Verde (Photo: Elsa Casimiro, 2010)
They left Cape Verde, an archipelago of ten islands and several islets located off the West African coast in the Atlantic Ocean, 300 miles east of Dakar in Senegal, with a total area of 1.552 square miles. These islands are volcanic and one volcano is still quite active on the island of Fogo. The archipelago is mountainous with the exception of the eastern islands of Sal, Boavista, and Maio. Lack of rainfall leaves the islands very dry throughout most of the year. Nevertheless, the extremely fertile soil requires only a small amount of rain for the ground to burst forth with vegetation.

During the last phase of colonialism (1961-1970) the Portuguese government issued a short ‘monography’ about the province of Cape Verde, in order to keep their record of civilizational progress updated. These publications include information concerning improvements in infrastructure, health, education, agriculture, tourism, etc. Before the first wave of Cape Verdean migration to Portugal, the three consecutive editions of *Cabo Verde Pequena Monografia* registered the increasing numbers of the islands’ population: Census 1950 – 148.331 inhabitants (2.909 brancos (whites), 42.092 pretos (blacks), 103.255 mistos (mixed), 6 Indians and 59 of other groups) (*CVPM*, 1961: 12). In 1955 there was an estimated 178.315 inhabitants, while the Census of 1960 confirmed 201.549. (*CVPM*, 1961: 13) In 1964 this number changed to 221.770 inhabitants (*CVPM*, 1966: 15) and in 1969, six years before Cape Verde’s independence, to 256.640 inhabitants (*CVPM*, 1970: 22).

The nine inhabited islands of the archipelago can be divided into two groups: the Barlavento and the Sotavento. The census of 2010 revealed the following numbers: the southernmost islands of Santiago (991 km² / 273.919 inhabitants, 55,7%), Fogo (476 km² / 37.051 inhabitants, 7,5%), Brava (67,4 km² / 5.995, 1,2%) inhabitants and Maio (269 km² / 6.952 inhabitants, 1,4%) fall into the Sotavento category. The Barlavento islands lie to the north: São Vicente (227 km² / 76.107 inhabitants, 15,5%), Santo Antão (779 km² / 43.915 inhabitants, 8,9%), São Nicolau (388 km² / 12.817 inhabitants, 2,6%), Sal (216 km² / 25.657 inhabitants, 5,2%), and Boavista (620 km² / 9.162 inhabitants, 1,9%). These figures amount to a population of nearly half a million, more precisely to a total of 491.575 inhabitants.

According to demographic information, the population of Cape Verde nearly doubled from 1969 to 2010 despite the several waves of emigration that occurred during these four decades.

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12 The last violent eruption of the Pico do Fogo volcano was in 1950.
However, the population of the Cape Verdean diaspora exceeds this number by far, but can hardly be accurately estimated.

The majority of the archipelago’s population live on the island of Santiago where the capital city of Praia is found. Praia is the cultural and economic capital of the South, whereas the port city of Porto Grande in Mindelo, located on the island of São Vicente, is that of the North. Located at the crossroads of several transoceanic routes, Porto Grande is a noted refueling point for Portuguese and international steamship lines.

Opportunities for migration arose from Cape Verde's strategic position in the geography of trade and empire; the necessity for migration was created by Cape Verde's lack of natural resources and insufficient agricultural base (Wall et al, 2002). The history of the islands is a history of abandonment and repopulation, of constant drought, of slaves being sold and of free workers being obliged to emigrate to other Portuguese colonies\(^\text{15}\). Maybe this historical characteristic of populational fluctuation is one of the explanations why so many people are still leaving the islands, because the Cape Verdeans feel it as a necessity, or even destiny.

For more than a century, emigration to the United States, the Netherlands or Portugal has become a hope and a dream to be achieved by young Cape Verdeans. When interviewed in Cape Verde or in Portugal many of them confirm this kind of predestination. According to Grassi, a Cape Verdean senses the “spirit of movement that emerges at the same time as a strong feeling for his country (caboverdianidade) that urge from the necessity of *escapá vida* (emigrate to survive)” (Grassi, 2006: 3).

It was mainly a male migration. As Sobrero (1998) mentioned, already in the Brazilian slave market the men were worth more than double the women that served in Cape Verde for work in the fields, for the economy of subsistence and for worker reproduction. The men worked as sailors on big American whaling ships or got time contracts in the ‘roças’ (coffee plantations) in São Tomé and Príncipe. Female emigration was mainly trips between islands to sell or change agriculture goods.

When it was discovered in 1460, the explorers António de Noli of Genova and Diogo Gomes of Portugal came across five uninhabited islands located approximately 500 kilometres off the coast of Mauritania while sailing under the auspices of the Portuguese Crown (Carreira, 2000).

\(^{15}\) Emigration was encouraged by the Portuguese Government to resettle in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe.
The Portuguese King Afonso V claimed these islands and seven others discovered shortly thereafter for Portugal. As a reward, the king gave Noli control over half of the island of Santiago, then partitioned the rest of the territory between Portuguese and Genoese nobility.

These settlers, especially Noli, came to the islands with hopes of producing great wealth. They began by populating the islands of Santiago and Fogo, first with Portuguese from the Algarve and Minho and some Jews who left Europe because they found themselves a target of growing persecution. Immigrants subsequently arrived from Madeira, Genoa, and slaves acquired from the coast of Guinea-Bissau. Within a couple of decades they had laid the foundations for a plantation society in the archipelago (Carreira, 2000).

The islands of Fogo and Santiago were the most suitable for agriculture and became the cornerstone of Cape Verde’s economy for several centuries. Slave labour was harnessed for the production of exports including sugar, livestock, orchid (a plant that produces a purple dye), and textiles (Bigman, 1993). Settlers used the drier and flatter islands of Sal, Maio, and Boavista for livestock production and salt harvesting (from large salt flats). The archipelago also became notorious for using slaves, some of whom were exported to the Azores, the Canary Islands and Europe (Carreira, 2000).

After the discovery of the Americas, Cape Verde’s strategic location made it an ideal point for ships to refuel, pick up supplies, have ships repaired and purchase slaves and livestock to transport to the New World. Despite the importance of the slave trade, textiles and dye exports remained the main source of revenue for the islands until the 19th century (Bigman, 1993).

The Portuguese empire underwent a series of significant changes during the 19th century, which affected its relationship with its colonies. The independence of Brazil in 1822 and the British empire’s assault on the slave trade effectively displaced Portugal as the central power in international trade and permitted its replacement first by the Netherlands and then by England (Ferreira, 1974). This was a devastating loss for Portugal, a country that was overly dependent on trade. Ferreira explains:

Merchants in the Portuguese empire were allowed to trade only on behalf of the Crown which laid down conditions regarding times and prices which deprived them of

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16 In 1836 a decree called for the abolition of the slave trade. But Portugal only prohibited slavery in 1858. Nevertheless, the system of indentured labour in the context of plantation economy was conducted until the 1970s and this hardly could be differentiated from the exploitative conditions of slavery (Batalha 2004: 39)
economic initiative. They became a commercial aristocracy, adopted feudal ways, and depended exclusively on trade instead of making investments and helping to establish industries – the stage through which other colonial powers passed on their way to industrial capitalism. (1974: 32).

The restraints of these mercantile practices combined with the starkness of the aforementioned events led to a crisis in Portugal that forced the empire to rethink its relationship with its colonies, for Portugal was itself an “underdeveloped economy which needed colonial profits to maintain her position” (Ferreira, 1974: 33). Another equally decisive event that shaped colonial policy at the time was the victory of the liberals over the monarchists in 1834.

The rise of liberalism allowed new values to shape colonial policy (at least for a period) and compelled the state to wrest control of colonial education away from the missions. Portugal began to introduce formal education in the colonies and at the same time, tighten administrative control. The decree of 1845 marked the establishment of several primary schools in Cape Verde for the first time in its history (Ferreira, 1974).

In 1901, at the Congresso Colonial Nacional (National Colonial Congress), an eight-point programme was introduced, aiming for decentralization of the Portuguese colonies in Africa and giving them more autonomy. The metropolis should regulate, inspect, approve or disapprove measures. More power was given to the governors and their staff and African and European codes were separated.

These reforms were sanctioned by the Colonial Reform Act of 1907 and followed by decrees from 1908 to 1912 that tended to increase local autonomy in the colonies. The decentralization and provincial autonomy of Portuguese-African possessions was accelerated by the proclamation of the First Republic in Portugal in 1910.

In 1926, Portugal became a military dictatorship that came to be known as the Estado Novo. The deepening financial crises were followed by serious questions as to the ability of Portuguese Africa and indeed of Portugal itself to survive.

António Oliveira Salazar, interim colonial minister, promulgated a new Colonial Act in 1930, restricting the local economy, although not entirely eliminating it, and giving catholic missions a privileged position as “an instrument of civilization and national influence” in Africa (Abshire et al, 1969: 85).
The new administrative system in Portuguese Africa was established by a new Colonial Act in 1933 and incorporated into the constitution of the same year. The main principle of the act involved affirmation of the unity and solidarity of a Portugal consisting of people ethnically, economically and administratively varied but united in goals and interests. Other principles included the special character of colonial legislation, normally pertaining to the colonial ministers; extensive granting of power to the colonial governors, financial autonomy, economic organization according to the principle of national unity, establishment of a special judicial system for the Africans and a degree of decentralization according to the state of development of the various colonies and division into colonies of ‘simple government’ as was the case of Cape Verde (Caetano, 1951: 275-276).

Anti-colonialist movements started to form in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. Initially, Cape Verdean nationalist sentiments were expressed in the literary *Claridade* (Clarity) movement, founded by Baltazar Lopes and others in 1936. The intellectuals and writers of the *Claridade* movement, known as *Claridosos*, examined the roots of Crioulo and spoke out against racism, fascism and Portuguese colonialism. In 1951, Portugal changed Cape Verde’s status to that of an “overseas province” in an attempt to avert growing nationalism. Despite this action, nationalists responded by founding the clandestine party *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), in Guinea-Bissau, an initiative by Amílcar Cabral and others in 1956. Influenced by the writings of political theorists, including Marx and Lenin, the PAIGC created a political strategy of national liberation and Pan-Africanism, its main goal being to liberate both Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde from Portuguese colonial authority. Relying on the support of the Soviet Union, Cuba and other socialist/communist states, the PAIGC abandoned peaceful means of protest in favour of a war of national liberation.

In 1963, an armed struggle began, subsequent military action concentrating in Guinea-Bissau. After a serious illness, Salazar was replaced in 1968 as Portuguese Prime Minister by Marcelo Caetano (one of the authors of the Portuguese Corporate Constitution). As far as the African provinces were concerned, Caetano promised continuation of the Salazar government’s policies and consequently further suppression of ideas of independence. By 1972, the PAIGC  

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controlled the greatest part of Guinea-Bissau. Although Amílcar Cabral was assassinated in 1973, the PAIGC intensified its attacks against the Portuguese armed forces.

After the revolution in Portugal in April 1974, the independence of Cape Verde was declared one year later on 5 July 1975. Aristides Pereira became the first president of the Republic of Cape Verde, while the PAICV\(^\text{18}\) kept ruling the young state until 1990. In 1991, the first multi-party elections took place with the Movimento para Democracia (MpD) (Movement for Democracy) replacing the PAICV. António Mascarenhas Monteiro was elected president. The MpD increasingly privatized the country’s economy and continued the earlier policies of improving educational and social services, which resulted in assuring this party’s parliamentary victory in the second multi-party elections in 1995.

Desiring change, the citizens of Cape Verde returned the PAICV to legislative power in 2001 with Pedro Pires as elected president. The 2006 legislative and presidential elections confirmed a PAICV legislative majority and the continuation of Pires in the highest office. Under the newly oriented PAICV, Cape Verde has developed economically. Since 2001, the government, supported by international organizations, has implemented a series of programmes which improved the infrastructures fundamental to the development and sustainability of the archipelago.

These programmes included public investment in infrastructure, private investment in fisheries, services and export processing, an increase in agricultural output and increased services in international air and maritime transport. Through another government incentive, tourism has become the major industry (especially on the islands of Sal and Boavista). As a result of nearly two decades of free and fair democratic elections, good governance and strengthened political and economic ties with donor states including Portugal has made Cape Verde one of the fastest developing African countries, with economic growth of 4.5% in 2009\(^\text{19}\). Consequently, access to health services and education has greatly improved for the whole population – nevertheless, emigration continues.

\(^{18}\) PAICV, Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo-Verde (African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde) founded in 1980 after the rupture with the Party established in Guiné-Bissau.

\(^{19}\) International Monetary Fund (2010), IMF Country Report nº 10/367.
II.3 Alto da Cova da Moura

Cova da Moura is a district of Amadora in the western part of the Greater Lisbon Metropolitan Area, inhabited mainly by Cape Verdeans. In terms of infrastructure, Amadora received a first dynamic impulse with the inauguration of the Sintra railway line in 1887. However, it was only after the Second World War, especially between 1950 and 1980 that Amadora began to have a significant increase in population. As the most densely populated town in Portugal, situated on the periphery of Lisbon with a total population of 255,000, it is known for its immigrant population and cultural diversity. In 2005, the percentage of non-Portuguese residents in Amadora was 12.3% (cf. Grassi, 2006: 10)\(^\text{20}\), decreasing to 7.27% in 2010.

As Figure 4 illustrates, settlement in Cova da Moura started before the 1970s. From the beginning of the 1970s to 1974, the neighbourhood was mainly occupied by Portuguese farmers who had built shacks and cultivated the area to sell their products in the local

markets. After 1975 a new period of settlement began, characterized by a great influx of immigrants and Portuguese ‘retornados’ from the ex-colonies. During this period the urbanization of the neighbourhood (including basic infrastructures) was initiated. The decade from 1980 to 1990 coincided with the arrival of an immigrant population, mainly Cape Verdeans, leading to consolidation of the neighbourhood. After 1995, the statistics show a new influx of undocumented immigrants from the ex-colonies in search of better opportunities close to Lisbon.

![Figure 4: Year of settlement in Cova da Moura](image)


Everett Lee (1966) gave expression to push and pull theory. Dual labour market theory states that migration is mainly caused by pull factors in more developed countries. Applied to the Cape Verdean community in question, the secondary labour market in the Portugal of the 1970s was very labour-intensive, requiring low-skilled workers. Migration from a less developed country like Cape Verde to a more developed country like Portugal is a result of a ‘pull’ created by the need for labour. Migrant workers are employed to fill the lowest ranks of the labour market, because native workers have emigrated to other (even more developed) countries in Europe, or simply rejected these jobs, as they are hard, imply low social status and impede social mobility. The main factor of attraction for the Cape Verdean immigrants’
choice of Cova da Moura is its location ten minutes from the centre of Lisbon and proximity to train station and buses.

Figure 5: Alto da Cova da Moura: Plan of Intervention
(Projecto dos Bairros Críticos, Gabinete Central, 2008)

This migrant neighbourhood is located on a small volcanic plateau with an area of 16.3 square hectares of which 11.1 hectares belong to the Moura family, private proprietors, with the remaining area being owned by the Portuguese State and the Misericórdia (Institute for Public Welfare).
During the 1970s Cova da Moura experienced its peak of occupation. Cape Verdean migrants constituted 59% of the total population, 28% were Portuguese repatriates ('retornados') from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa and rural migrants from North and Central Portugal. Only 9% came from Angola and 4% from S. Tomé and Príncipe and Guinea-Bissau. In 2010 it had 7,000 residents.

Cova da Moura is an ethnically heterogeneous neighbourhood. According to the Survey of the Municipality of Amadora (1983) it was spatially divided in two areas: the African quarter ('Quarteirão Africano'), which was much more densely occupied and the European quarter ('Quarteirão Europeu'), where Portuguese ‘returnees’ (returnados) lived, together with internal migrants and some Africans.

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21 Newcomers frequently settled in residential areas already occupied by Cape Verdeans and people of their own nationality (cf. Malheiros and Vala, 2004).

22 Estudo de Caracterização/ Diagnóstico do Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura (Study aiming to characterize the neighbourhood of Alto da Cova da Moura).
Figure 7: 'African' and 'European' Residential Areas in Alto da Cova da Moura

Figure 8: Neighborhood perspectives from behind the fence (Photo: Elsa Casimiro, 2010)
Alto da Cova da Moura\textsuperscript{23} is an area occupied at the end of the 1960s by poor families of immigrants that had taken advantage of incentives for returning migrants promoted by some European countries. The shortage of housing and poor economic conditions caused a large number of internal and external migrants to occupy this area near Lisbon. It was easy because the land-owning family, called Moura, was in Brazil. For African residents, economic deprivation as well as social and racial exclusion were the major difficulties.

The first constructions (shacks) in Cova da Moura were built in 1960 by former agricultural workers from the neighbouring area (Quinta do Outeiro)\textsuperscript{24}. In 1974/1975 Portuguese working-class families from the north of the country and Portuguese ‘retornados’ from the ex-colonies started to arrive in Cova da Moura. They occupied or bought the largest plots in the southern part of the neighbourhood, where they built their houses along the main street. During the post-revolutionary period (1975/1976), African immigrants arrived and bought the land from the former occupant or appropriated the northern part of the neighbourhood for themselves,

\textsuperscript{23} ‘Cova’ means hole, but the name cannot be derived from Cova da Moura’s physical location. Moura is the name of one of the legal owners of the land, on which the quarter was built. He had emigrated to Brazil in the 1960s.

their family and friends. They started to build brick houses or transform wooden shacks with debris from previous constructions. According to a municipal report (1978), the ‘African blocks’ were overcrowded, invading the public space and should therefore be demolished.

As the surveillance and pressure from the City Council to demolish their shacks became more intense, the residents built brick houses overnight or at weekends with the help of relatives and neighbours. These houses had only one floor and the inhabitants realized that the space was too small. The arrival of new family members and friends from Cape Verde needing accommodation made them improvise a second floor, again with the help of family and neighbours.

Anyone who ‘owned’ a house could take advantage of the social and economic opportunities within the neighbourhood by renting out rooms or apartments to friends, acquaintances or other families. The informal rental market was, and still is, very profitable. The rents in Cova da Moura were almost the double those asked then in nearby neighbourhoods, because neither deposits nor identification documents were required. Some of the houses have an open room at street level to be used for small businesses. There were a significant number of entrepreneurs in Cova da Moura who rented these spaces for high prices and the house-owners would receive a percentage of their earnings.

For many newcomers, Cova da Moura offered an opportunity for home ownership close to Lisbon, for work and some social mobility. The majority of inhabitants worked in low-paid jobs in the construction industry (58%) and in services (32%) outside the neighbourhood. Access to schools and public services was provided by extended family ties and a network of contacts, spread through Portugal and other European countries, particularly the Netherlands and France, and the United States of America.

A continuous flow of information between those living in the neighbourhood and their relatives, friends or co-villagers living in other European countries provided neighbourhood residents with a wide space of membership and identity (Horta, 2000: 151). Frequent trips abroad have contributed to the development of social networks, sometimes to visit relatives, but mainly to work temporarily in the informal sector of the Channel Islands (fruit-picking on farms) or in Spain, France or other European countries (on building sites).

Neighbourhood mobilization and tacit alliances with local authorities and political partisanship were some of the strategies developed to improve living conditions. In 1978, a small group of residents with one of the first Portuguese residents in the neighbourhood, Ilídio do Carmo (Portuguese repatriates from the African colonies, Angolans and some Cape Verdeans) founded the Residents’ Commission of Cova da Moura (Comissão de Residentes da Cova da Moura) to successfully demand the construction of basic infrastructures (paved streets, water pipes, electricity, garbage collecting) from the Oeiras Municipality. Four years later, the same group founded the Association of Sport and Leisure Club of Alto da Cova da Moura (Clube Desportivo e Recreativo da Cova da Moura) which promotes collaboration with state authorities (Social Security) to provide social services for the inhabitants and also a cultural project with activities such as dancing, theatre and gymnastics for more than 60 children.

In 1984, the Cultural Association of Moinho da Juventude was established by a small group of residents, led by Eduardo Pontes and his Belgian wife Godelieve Meersschaert. The Association presented itself as a ‘community project’ with two objectives: the appreciation of cultural difference and social integration of ethnic migrant communities in Portuguese
society. This ongoing project has an educational component providing schooling for almost 200 children (aged 5 months to 10 years); from nursery school until the end of primary school (the school timetable is from 7:00 until 20:00). Professional courses for young unemployed residents in the neighbourhood, sports and cultural activities like the female music group Grupo Batuque Finca Pé (traditional Cape Verdean song used in weddings and parties), which has gained an international recognition.

In Cova da Moura recreational areas only exist in these two associations, where everyone can enter freely and use the facilities. Nevertheless, the neighbourhood is ‘alive’ with many children playing in the streets even with traffic all day and at night. There is also a constant movement of adults, and weather permitting, they sit in front of their dwellings or in cafes, talking and greeting passers-by. Businesses are geared towards satisfying personal needs and are marginal to the economy of the city as a whole, and the area is considered self-sufficient in commercial terms. There are an increasing number of shops, in 2010, hairdressers and barbershops (more than 20), boutiques, repair shops, a telephone and an internet centre, garages, a travel agency, an undertaker, a typography and consumption of food and drink, coffee-houses (more than 25), restaurants, groceries and butchers. But informal business is

Figure 11: Association Moinho da Juventude (Photo: Elsa Casimiro, 2009)
also carried out by the residents (selling ready-made food, fish and vegetables in the streets) and by outsiders: gypsies selling cheap clothes and drug addicts who exchange stolen goods for cash to buy drugs in the same streets.

The ‘ghetto’26 da Cova’, as it is called by the teenagers, because of a fence that separates the neighbourhood from the surrounding buildings, is like a small island imported from Africa and separate from the outside world.

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26 The fence that surrounds Cova da Moura to divide it from the neighbouring buildings contributed to the image of a ghetto. The word is used by young residents as a synonym for Cova da Moura and shows their identification with the place.