



Changing Lusospheres

**Europe, Brazil, Africa. On old and new connections
between centers and peripheries**

*Elisabeth Boesen, Karl Heinz Arenz,
Cristina Donza Cancela & Antonio Otaviano Vieira Junior*

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The case of Cape Verdean funerary practices in Luxembourg

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Diversity, conviviality, and entangled traditions. The case of Cape Verdean funerary practices in Luxembourg

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Introduction

The mobility of religions is historically and contemporarily of great importance in the lusophone world, just as it is in other spaces created by colonial and postcolonial relationships. The present volume begins, chronologically speaking, with a contribution on the work of a seventeenth century Catholic missionary from Luxembourg in Amazonia; it ends with an article on contemporary religious relationships that might be described as re-migrations or re-importations of Catholic religious beliefs and practices from Cape Verde to Europe, namely to Luxembourg. One could speak of a closing circle or, alternatively, of reciprocity: the gift of the past is now, with some delay, being returned.

With this understanding, the phenomena discussed in this article are linked to the broader field of “independent Christianities” in Europe, new churches that see their mission as being to bring back the gospel to those who originally spread it and have since gone astray.¹ This unexpected element of immigration from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Haar 2008, 37) has only gradually been recognized in migration studies, leading to a growing interest in religious transnationalism.² In France and other West-

¹ Cf. Haar (2008); on the “théologie messianique de la mission ‘en retour’”, see also Mary (2008, 10).

² For a brief overview on the emergence of this new field of migration studies, see Bava & Capone (2010).

ern European countries, research on migration and religion was initially largely focused on Islam. For some years now, scholars have also shown interest in Christian churches from the South, notably from Africa—an interest that, in part, has been inspired by the growing visibility of these churches in public urban spaces.³

Studies on religious transnationalism in Luxembourg have been lacking. However, the country is an interesting case for the study of these migration-related phenomena, not least in view of its pronounced and long-standing religious homogeneity, which, as will be shown, had a considerable impact on migration policies. The spreading and growing importance of “African International Churches”⁴ in recent decades, as well as that of churches founded in Brazil and prospering mainly in the lusophone world, also make Luxembourg an interesting research field.⁵ The rapid growth of Brazilian neo-Pentecostal churches, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, in Europe and elsewhere has attracted much scholarly attention.⁶ Another religious movement worth mentioning is the *Racionalismo Cristão*, a “spiritualist philosophy” founded in Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century, which has been very prosperous on the Cape Verdean islands since its inception (Vasconcelos 2007; Plaideau 2009) and has also been present in Luxembourg for some time.

Religion is thus one of the domains in which relationships between different lusophone regions are continuously renewed and maintained and can gain importance in the process of individual and collective identity construction at new places of residence. The present article does not go into the complex mobilities of independent churches or religious movements but concentrates on differences that occur within the Catholic community—or, to put it more cautiously, that are not related to the adherence to another community of faith. In describing Cape Verdean funeral

3 See, for example, the special issue edited by Stefania Capone and Monika Salzbrunn (2018) on what might be described as audible religious landscapes, that is, on the spreading of musical styles that accompany mobile religious practices.

4 A term coined by Gerrie ter Haar (2008, 39).

5 On the importance of Brazilian religious practices in the making of transnational “lusospheres”, see Oosterbaan, Kamp & Bahia (2020).

6 See, for example, Rocha & Vasquez (2013).

ceremonies, I propose investigating the return of elements of folk Catholicism, that is, of spiritual beliefs and social practices that are not really foreign in the Luxembourg context but are nonetheless strange and potentially disturbing. Studying transnational Christian folk religions is important not only with respect to historical processes of exchange and mutual transformation, especially when related to the emergence of Creole cultures,⁷ but also with respect to current popular religious reinventions and forms of re-enchantment. The case of Cape Verdean funeral ceremonies in Luxembourg is illuminating with regard to the possibility of reinvigorating or reappropriating traditional modes of spirituality in the processes of the re-enchantment of modern urban spaces and relationships.

Methods and conceptual considerations

My description is based on the results of ten narrative interviews with people who were from the Cape Verdean islands or had a family background there, most of which were held within the framework of a comparative project on cemeteries in Luxembourg and the Greater Region SaarLorLux.⁸ While the project primarily dealt with the spatial and material dimensions of mourning and commemoration, my individual research gradually deviated from this focus and turned toward the much broader and at the same time narrower field of Cape Verdean practices and beliefs related to death and dealing with the dead, which resulted in a sustained interest in the social aspects of mourning practices and the question of the social visibility of certain forms of aesthetic expression.

The research also included interviews with different “experts” in the field of funeral services, including three priests who were engaged in the Mission Catholique Portugaise in Luxembourg, representatives of the pastoral service of the archdiocese and the cemetery service of the city of

⁷ See, in this context, Pierre-Joseph Laurent on the process of creolization in Cape Verde (2022).

⁸ The research project “Material Culture and Spaces of Remembrance: A Study of Cemeteries in Luxembourg in the Context of the Greater Region” was conducted at the University of Luxembourg, Institute for History and financially supported by the *Fonds National de la Recherche Luxembourg*; see <https://transmortality.uni.lu/Project-RIP>.

Luxembourg, stonemasons, and the owner of a funeral parlor. A further activity consisted of visiting Luxembourgish cemeteries. During these inspections, I was in part accompanied by a long-established Cape Verdean migrant who was familiar with the deceased members of the Cape Verdean community and their families and remembered the circumstances of their deaths and their funerals. My empirical research was interrupted by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which made further interviews and actual participant observation (consisting of attending funeral ceremonies) impossible. This means that the study is unfinished and that the following article should, above all, be understood as indicating hitherto-neglected old and new connections in transnational lusospheres.⁹

My paper also aims to provide a critical appreciation of the narrow field of research on Cape Verdean migrations to Luxembourg. Studies in this area are altogether sparse, and the few we do have focus largely on questions of participation in the domains of work, education, and housing and, with the exception of Tavares' ethno-linguistic work (Tavares 2018),¹⁰ are based on quantitative data.¹¹ Less attention has been paid to religion or, more generally, to spiritual beliefs and related practices and, ultimately, to the issue of cultural difference. The study of Cape Verdean funerary practices is well suited for introducing the problem of the perception and appreciation of difference in Luxembourg society. The issue of cultural difference, which occupied the social sciences intensively in the 1970s and 1980s, when the concept of ethnicity was widely discussed, has recently re-emerged as an important subject of research. This is reflected in new conceptual approaches that attempt to grasp the increasing complexity of cultural and social diversification processes—think of the much-debated concept of superdiversity (Vertovec 2023). At the same time, there is also a growing interest in the concrete forms of everyday

⁹ In their work on the global trajectories of Brazilian religious forms, Oosterbaan, Kamp and Bahia propose the term “lusospheres” to capture the dynamic intersection of practices that produce both openness and experiences of community (Oosterbaan, Kamp & Bahia 2020, 3).

¹⁰ See also the contribution by Tavares in this volume.

¹¹ See, for example, CEFIS (2011), CEFIS (2017), and Alieva & Valentova (2015). Several master's theses completed in recent years in the fields of anthropology and history have also addressed the topics of participation and belonging: Anthony (2017); Correia Da Veiga (2017); Kieffer (1998); Lang (2011).

encounters in complex formations of difference or, to mention some of the notions that accompany this new orientation, in conviviality, everyday multiculturalism, and prosaic negotiations of cultural difference (Gilroy 2006; Amin 2002).

These new concepts have essentially emerged against the backdrop of demographic and social developments in urban centers of the former colonial metropolises, for example, London. Interest in conviviality implies a questioning of such concepts as integration and social cohesion, which have been central to social sciences research on migration for decades. This is expressed particularly clearly by Paul Gilroy in his criticism of British liberal multicultural policies. In order to escape the dichotomous categorizations that stem from colonial conditions and are perpetuated by this multiculturalism, one must, according to Gilroy, turn to the everyday culture created by immigrants and their descendants, the “unruly convivial mode of interaction in which differences have to be negotiated in real time.” (Gilroy 2006, 39). The notion of conviviality has of late provoked some lively debate (Novicka & Vertovec 2014, Wise & Noble 2016; Boesen et al. 2023). Some authors see it as one of the latest turns in the humanities and social sciences; others deplore that it aggregates conceptual inconsistencies (Lapina 2016). The idea of conviviality remains imprecise, among other things, with regard to the distinction between descriptive-analytical and normative dimensions. However, this lack of conceptual rigor does not prevent the notion from inspiring a fruitful way of looking at our social reality; one that seeks to understand the actual practices of living together; the basic social processes that are both brought about by and constitutive for living with difference.

Cape Verdean immigration to Luxembourg, and the Luxembourg case in general, can make an interesting contribution to these new approaches, as it allows the study of diversity and everyday multiculturalism in a country without a direct colonial past and without large cities. With roughly 640,000 inhabitants, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is very small, and it has strong rudiments of rural socio-spatial structures while at the same time being superdiverse. The latter is not only true for Luxembourg-city, where 70 % of the slightly more than 130,000 inhabitants are non-Luxembourg nationals from a total of more than 160 countries; former industrial towns in the country’s south, and even small rural towns, are also marked by a high degree of national diversity.

Research on this rural cosmopolitanism is in line with recent developments in both migration and rural studies, which are beginning to show interest in the different forms and effects of mobility and migration in villages and small towns.¹² This turn to rural localities can imply specific methodological and conceptual challenges. Studies on difference and conviviality are typically based on the results of empirical research in public urban spaces—a municipal park, a high street, or an individual grocery store.¹³ While Luxembourg-city and some of the country's industrial towns also have particularly diverse neighborhoods and ensuing infrastructures and spaces of encounter, public space is generally less characterized by urban structures and habits. The question of the place of research therefore poses itself differently. My research is dedicated not to a specific space but to certain cultural practices, namely ways of mourning and remembrance. These have an emblematic place in the public realm—the cemetery—but they are not limited to it. Due to the diversification of individual and collective forms of mourning, the spatial dimension of mourning practices is increasingly coming into view. Instead of focusing on distinct ceremonial spaces, a growing number of scholars in the field of funerary studies turn to the multiplicity of places and practices associated with death and the dead, and to the symbolic and performative transformation of everyday spaces and landscapes into elements of these “deathscapes.”¹⁴ Before turning to Cape Verdean ceremonial practices as elements of modern deathscapes and addressing the conviviality of mourning in these indeterminate spaces, I will give a brief account of Cape Verdean migration to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Cape Verdean migration to Luxembourg

After a long period of “classical” labor migration to Luxembourg that started in the second half of the nineteenth century when the steel industry began to flourish in the country's south, a second phase of immigration linked to the growing construction and service industries began

12 For a discussion on the notion of “rural cosmopolitanism,” see Woods (2018).

13 See, for example, Lapina (2016) and Valluvan (2016).

14 On the notion of “deathscape,” see Maddrell & Sidaway (2010).

in the 1960s. The most significant group of immigrants during this second period was Portuguese, meaning that today, about 16% of the country's population holds Portuguese citizenship.¹⁵ The first Cape Verdeans came to Luxembourg as part of this Portuguese labor force. Before 1975, the year when the national independence of the Cape Verdean islands was achieved, the inhabitants of the archipelago possessed Portuguese citizenship. Among the numerous Portuguese migrants who arrived in the Grand Duchy following the labor agreement between Luxembourg and Portugal signed in 1972 were therefore people originating from Cape Verde. The arrival of these unexpected "African Europeans" provoked negative and, in part, openly racist reactions and political efforts at limiting access to the country to white Portuguese. These measures comprised instructions released by the Ministry of Justice in 1974 to employers' associations regarding the undesirability of recruiting Black people (Bauer et al. 1974; Laplanche & Vanderkam 1991; Kollwelter 2005).

Many Cape Verdean residents of Luxembourg are Portuguese citizens. Official demographic data therefore provide little information about the actual number of Cape Verdeans in the country. Although the figures are imprecise, we can state that the entire group is relatively small, probably numbering slightly more than 10,000 people.¹⁶ However, the numerical size of the group does not reflect its social and cultural significance. Cape Verdeans were the first and, for a long time, the only non-European immigrant community in Luxembourg. This also means that they were the first to challenge the notion of Luxembourg as an immigration society based on cultural homogeneity—a homogeneity that is grounded in a common Western European culture and, importantly, in a common adherence to Roman Catholicism.

The high degree of cultural and especially religious proximity between native Luxembourgers and immigrants, which resulted from an immigration policy that restricted access to the country to migrants from predominantly Catholic Western European countries, was seen as one of the rea-

¹⁵ Inhabitants who possess a dual citizenship—Portuguese and Luxembourgish—are not counted as Portuguese citizens in the official statistics.

¹⁶ In 2011, 2,472 people holding Cape Verdean citizenship resided in Luxembourg; the group of inhabitants with Cape Verdean origin—including people who had at least one parent with Cape Verdean citizenship—amounted to 8,358 people (CEFIS 2017, 19).

sons for the country's "immigration success story", that is, the fact that the high proportion of foreign residents in Luxembourg did not result in anti-immigration attitudes and xenophobia.¹⁷ This exclusivist policy was compromised when, in the 1970s, the growing group of immigrants of Portuguese nationality also comprised people from Africa, especially the Cape Verdes. A further step toward diversification was taken in the 1990s when Luxembourg accepted refugees from former Yugoslavia, including people of Muslim faith. Since then, the Muslim minority has grown with the arrival of refugees from Near Eastern and Middle Eastern countries and the arrival of French immigrants of North African origin.¹⁸ The number of migrants from other non-European countries, including sub-Saharan African countries, has similarly increased. Meanwhile, the alleged success story has also been strongly called into question. Public debates now focus explicitly on the economic and social situation of the country's non-white population and present a rather bleak picture. In the "Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Being Black in the EU" (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018), Luxembourg ranked among the countries with the highest rates of experiencing racially motivated discrimination and violence. Nowhere were the rates concerning people from Africa higher than they were in Luxembourg.¹⁹

Given the prominent position that Cape Verdean migrants occupy in Luxembourg's migration history, it seems surprising that until recently these people have remained more or less invisible. Not only were they largely overlooked in social sciences research, as already mentioned, but they were also absent from the political scene and from the country's public life in general. We are confronted here with what has been described elsewhere as a postcolonial paradox; namely, the fact that visible minorities become invisible both by being treated as nonexistent and by opting for (partial) invisibility themselves.²⁰ Cape Verdean socio-cultural life and its popular expressions, such as music, dance, and cuisine, are highly

¹⁷ Cf. Parsons & Smeeding (2004); for a general assessment of the impact of this culturalist immigration policy, see Fetzter (2011).

¹⁸ The proportion of the country's inhabitants of Muslim faith is estimated at 3.2%; cf. Pirenne (2017).

¹⁹ See also Tavares & Vieira (2023).

²⁰ This has been stated for French immigrant society by Boubeker (2010); see also Ndiaye (2008).

secluded in Luxembourg. The situation is somewhat different in the domain of religion. Cape Verdean (and Portuguese) believers take an active part in the ecclesial life of a number of Catholic parishes, and Cape Verdean graves are gradually becoming a constituent part of the country's funerary landscape.

This partial visibility hints at the specificity of the Cape Verdean case; the immigrants in question fulfilled the requirement of cultural homogeneity that underlaid Luxembourg's immigration policy: they were Europeans in as much as they were Portuguese citizens and, like other Portuguese, Roman Catholic. The characterization of Cape Verdeans as non-European immigrants is thus an undue simplification. They called into question the clear categorical distinctions between European and African, familiar and foreign, self and other. It was, so to speak, the task and merit of the Cape Verdean migrants to acquaint Luxembourg society with processes of cultural intermingling and creolization. Although the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg had been engaged in multiple ways in the processes of global exchange and exploitation, including involvement in Belgian colonial enterprises in Congo and elsewhere,²¹ the cultural effects of these relationships had remained virtually unknown in the country itself.

Cape Verdean funerary culture

The visibility of Cape Verdean migrants in local religious contexts seems to result from similarity, a similarity that manifests in, among other things, common ceremonial forms, that is, in Catholic liturgy and ritual, as well as in certain aesthetico-material expressions, as shown by Cape Verdean graves in Luxembourgish cemeteries. The graves comply in essential respects with the usual local standards of grave design, which means that they have massive gravestones and slabs built from dark granite or marble—elements that are rarely found in cemeteries on the Cape Verdean islands. However, while the graves are similar, they also show differences. These do not reside in their enduring material form, but rather in the way they are maintained and looked after, that is, in

21 Cf. Moes (2012); see also Moes in the present volume.

the ongoing interaction with them. When wandering around the cemeteries of Bonnevoie in Luxembourg-city or Lallenge in Esch-sur-Alzette, one easily recognizes that for many Cape Verdean families, in contrast to most Luxembourgish families, the grave, and thus the public realm of the cemetery, is a social space where kinship relations are entertained. The bond with the dead is expressed and enacted in the adornment of the grave. For all their similarities, the graves thus point to differences in the relationship to the dead and hence to different attitudes toward public expressions of both religion and kinship.²²

While research on Cape Verdean migrants in general, including comparative works on migration to different European and North American countries, is relatively rich (Batalha 2004; Batalha & Carling 2008; Góis 2008), we find almost no studies on their funerary culture. One exception is an article by Pierre-Joseph Laurent and Charlotte Plaideau on “*esprits voyageurs*,” which gives some insight into the importance of ritual communication with the spirits of the dead among Cape Verdean migrants (Laurent & Plaideau 2010). In a “*société à distance*” like Cape Verde, where the number of citizens living abroad is higher than the number of domestic residents, the spirits of the deceased are principal agents of social integration. According to Laurent and Plaideau, they establish relations at a distance in families torn apart by migration.²³ As far as research on the Cape Verdean islands is concerned, the findings are strikingly inconsistent. The funerary culture on the island of Santiago has been intensively researched (Da Veiga Correia 2009; Mendes 2003 and 2018; Sareiva 1998) and is the subject of popular representations (Vera-Cruz 2017). In contrast, we know very little about the other islands. The internal diversity of the Cape Verdean islands, especially the distinction between leeward islands (Ilhas de Sotavento), including Santiago, and windward islands (Ilhas de Barlovento), which corresponds, among other things, to linguistic differences, cannot be discussed in the present article. My description concentrates on beliefs and practices that can be described as typical of the funerary culture of Santiago, the island from

²² Cape Verdean graves on Luxembourgish cemeteries are described in more detail in Boesen (2019).

²³ Laurent & Plaideau (2010, 42); on mourning and post-death rituals of elderly Cape Verdean migrants in Lisbon, see Bäckström (2020); on attitudes toward repatriation and cremation, see Ramos (2018) and CEFIS (2016).

which about 50% of Luxembourg's Cape Verdeans and most of my interview partners originate or to which they are connected through family ties. While they presented their attitudes and practices as "Cape Verdean," some of the interviewees alluded to the internal dichotomy by describing the relative lack of expressions of grief among the inhabitants of a northern island, claiming that the latter could be mistaken for Europeans because, like them, they do not cry when burying their dead. As we see here, internal differences tend to be associated with emic notions of varying degrees of "Africanness"; the inhabitants of the southern islands, and Santiago in particular, are considered more African than those of the northern islands (Marcus 2019; Rodrigues 2002). However, just as remarkable as the non-Europeanness that is expressed here seems to be the strong identification with Catholic folk religious traditions. Interviewees not only compared the ceremonies of Cape Verdeans from other islands with European ways of mourning, but also often associated them with other Christian denominations, for example, Pentecostal or Baptist churches.²⁴

These brief remarks should make it clear that the notion of a homogenous Cape Verdean funerary culture would be misleading. At the same time, they were meant to point out that factual commonalities—in the present case between Cape Verdean and Luxembourgish Catholic practices and beliefs—can go hand in hand with fundamental differences and dichotomous categorizations. Against this background, I explore Cape Verdean ways of relating to the dead in Luxembourg and ask how entangled traditions contribute to their social (in)visibility and a conviviality of mourning.

The conviviality of mourning

As already described, the graves of Cape Verdean families largely conform with local standards. Conformity was also signaled by interviewees who emphasized that they appreciated the neatness and orderliness of

²⁴ On the other hand, the "traditional" catholic forms of public mourning are strongly criticised by certain Christian churches and religious movements whose influence on the Cape Verdean islands is relatively recent; see Saraiva (1998, 138).

Luxembourgish cemeteries. At the same time, however, they were often very explicit in describing the differences that exist despite the many similarities. They characterized Luxembourgish graves as cold, impersonal, and even neglected, and explained that Luxembourgers do not visit their graves, do not decorate them with flowers, and do not keep the gravestones clean. Compared with Cape Verdean (and Portuguese) graves and their typical floral abundance, those of Luxembourgish families do indeed give the impression of neglect. The contrast is particularly striking in urban cemeteries, where the vast majority of Luxembourgish graves are decorated with a flower arrangement only for major holidays, such as All Souls' Day and Christmas. These differences in grave care seem to indicate that the family grave and thus the cemetery do not serve as places of mourning and remembrance in a similar way in both cases. The same is also evident in the burial ceremonial.

The standard Luxembourgish funeral consists of obsequies in the local morgue, held in the presence of the family and a small circle of relatives and friends, often followed by a mass in a nearby church. The inhumation takes place directly after the obsequies, and in many cases this is done by the cemetery workers in the absence of the bereaved and the funeral party (Kmec & Westendorp 2023). Cape Verdean funerals depart from this procedure in several respects, notably in regard to the importance of the presence of the corpse and the interaction with it, including accompanying it up to the act of burial. The tomb, at the moment of the burial, is the most important ceremonial place for collective expressions of grief and sorrow. Cape Verdeans experience the burial of their dead accompanied by relatives, friends, and acquaintances—often hundreds of people who arrive from near and far to express their sympathy for the bereaved and support them in the ritual event. This brings us to another distinguishing feature mentioned by interviewees: the individualization of mourning. It was noted that, different from Cape Verdeans, Luxembourgers do not show their grief and thus do not allow others to share it with them. They separate the relation to the dead from other social relations and exchanges.²⁵

²⁵ I have dealt with the problem of the individualisation of grief at greater length elsewhere (Boesen 2023).

By insisting on taking leave of their deceased at the open grave, Cape Verdeans engage in a negotiation about proper funeral ceremonies. Their collective mourning at the cemetery, including prayers, ritual laments, and often musical performances, can easily last for several hours. This means that it significantly affects the standard ceremonial sequence in both its secular and its religious aspects, that is, the services provided by the cemetery workers and by the priest. It goes without saying that these interferences with conventional procedures are conflictual and require concessions. One such concession to Cape Verdean customs made by several priests has been to change the ritual order by holding the religious service in the church before the actual entombing, whereas the service usually concludes the entire ceremony. Certain elements of the collective ritual are, however, difficult to negotiate, among other things because the negotiation partner is no longer an institution or office, such as the cemetery administration, which is committed to a certain degree of religious and cultural tolerance, but a diffuse multitude of cemetery visitors and passers-by.

An essential part of Cape Verdean ceremonial mourning is the ritualized lamentation called *choro*.²⁶ It comprises highly stylized crying and laments directed at the deceased as well as at the funeral party, recalling the qualities of the deceased and moments in their life, and it is accompanied by bodily expressions including gesticulations and vehement movements.²⁷ Some of the interviewees described *choro* as a kind of spectacle that might even involve quasi-professional performers, people who are renowned for their skills. In Luxembourgish cemeteries these lamentations are held in a much-reduced form because, according to interviewees, the poignancy of the true form as practiced in Cape Verde and especially on the island of Santiago would irritate other people to an unacceptable degree. Here, negotiation brings about (partial) concealment. The intensity of the expressions of grief must be reduced, since aesthetic approval or even mere indifference toward them cannot be expected.

²⁶ From Portuguese *chorar* (“to cry”), *chorar alguém* (“to beweeep someone”). For a detailed analysis of different modes of *choro* on the island of Santiago, see Da Veiga Correia (2009).

²⁷ Cf. Saraiva’s description of the emotional intensity of the laments on the islands of Santiago and Fogo, which might culminate in individual fainting at the moment of sepulture (Saraiva 1998, 141); see also Mendes (2018).

With this attenuation, however, the intensity and nature of the relationships expressed in the manifestations of grief are also concealed. In the present context, I will not delve into the religious beliefs that underlie the described forms of mourning, that is, the question of whether the ritual laments, just as the floral adornment of the grave, are to be understood as gifts in an ongoing exchange with the dead, which turn the dead into benevolent ancestors and are thus reciprocated. While it would be interesting to investigate the compatibility of ancestor cults and certain forms of spirit possession in Cape Verde (and elsewhere) with the Catholic idea of purgatory and the practices connected with it,²⁸ my present focus is on whether Cape Verdean ways of relating to the dead are visible or rather invisible in Luxembourg's multicultural society and what this (in)visibility tells us about difference and conviviality. To put it differently, I am more concerned with the social than with the spiritual dimension of mourning.

As we have seen, for many Cape Verdean Luxembourgers, burying the dead is still essentially a collective duty, and the cemetery is therefore a space of communal agency. Yet collective funeral celebration is not limited to the moment of interment at the grave but stretches over a period of eight days, during which the family receives guests at their home, where rosary prayers are held every night. The private home of the deceased person thereby turns into a public sacred realm, a transformation that is emphasized by the mounting of a mat (*esteira*) where female mourners gather and that marks the liminal space between this world and the beyond.²⁹ Even in the months that follow, the family will receive visitors who arrive from abroad and make up for not having been able to attend the funeral. Interview partners stressed that from the moment a person's death has been announced, the door of their house is open to everyone. Not only relatives and close friends, but all those who are somehow related to the deceased or one of their family members feel

28 See, in this context, Pons on what he describes as a specificity of lusophone societies, namely the remarkable religious pluralism that "took root in the soil of a strongly dominant, indeed non-conciliatory, Catholic matrix" (translation by the author) (Pons 2021, 2). Also revealing are historical developments and differentiations within Christianity; cf., for example, Mary Douglas on the "abolition of purgatory" in Tudor England and its social and political effects (Douglas 2004, 186).

29 For detailed descriptions of this period, see Saraiva (1998, 123–134); see also Mendes (2018, 121–125).

obliged to come to the house, express their condolences, take part in the prayers and—especially with regard to female visitors—make their contribution to the ritual laments. The funeral and the ceremonial mourning in general are moments of heightened sociality that culminate in a big meal. After the burial, the funeral party, which may involve several hundred people, gathers in a public space, usually a municipal hall, to eat and drink together. The meal consists of traditional dishes that are, in part, prepared from gifts of food. Condolence visitors feel obliged to contribute by bringing a bag containing certain products, just as they are obliged to share food with the bereaved.

In all this, Cape Verdean mourning rituals resemble former Luxembourgish customs, which were greatly influenced by traditional rural culture. Here, too, death used to transform the private domestic space into a public space where family, friends, and neighbors gathered for rosary prayers and collective wakes that included the element of convivium, that is, the sharing of coffee and spirits. For many Luxembourgers, especially the older generations, exposure to Cape Verdean ways of mourning and dealing with the dead implies an encounter with the ritual forms and social practices of folk Catholicism that were common in Luxembourg until the second half of the 20th century—with rudiments of this still subsisting in certain rural areas where participation in funeral ceremonies, especially accompanying the remains to the grave, is still widely considered a duty and a contribution to a collective effort.³⁰

What we do not find in Luxembourgish customs is the ritual lament or “tuneful weeping” (Robson 2007), which plays such an important role in Cape Verdean mourning ceremonies, especially in those practiced on the island of Santiago. Forms of public mourning comparable to *choro* are not unknown in Europe but are primarily found in Eastern European countries and in Greece (Seremetakis 1991; Danforth 1982; Holst-Warhaft 1992). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that this element of funeral practices provokes irritation and disapproval in Luxembourg. Complaints from neighbors are frequent, and female interviewees pointed out the dilemma in which they find themselves because they want to be consid-

³⁰ For brief descriptions of the traditional ritual, see Fontaine (1883, 149–152); Hess (1929, 197–200).

erate of their neighbors' sensitivities but are unable to refrain from crying. The women described a struggle between almost physical expressive urges and civic considerations; they had to mediate between emotional and aesthetic fulfillment on the one hand and respect for the susceptibility of their fellow citizens, with their lack of appreciation and understanding, on the other. However, conflicts are also caused by those parts of Cape Verdean customs that are not as foreign to their Luxembourgish fellow citizens. The huge number of visitors, and their flow for days on end, can be perceived as a nuisance. Interviewees also mentioned that the large communal meal that concludes the funeral is not always received favorably and that they may encounter difficulties in obtaining a suitable locality.

The Cape Verdean ritual, even in its reduced Luxembourgish form, violates fundamental principles of the (urban) spatial order in which mourning and the remembrance of the dead are confined to the narrow framework of the family and to certain functionally defined public places, such as the morgue, church, or cemetery. At the same time, however, Cape Verdean ritual is reminiscent of common Catholic traditions. Here, difference does not mean confrontation with entirely foreign beliefs and religious practices. Cape Verdean funerary culture is essentially made up of Catholic customs that were—and, in some parts, still are—widespread in Luxembourg. The difference resides in the social significance of mourning. The perception and impact of this difference may be influenced by the fact that it can be attributed to relatively recent developments. In Luxembourg, the rationalization of the relationship to the dead and its separation from other social relationships essentially took place in the decades after the Second World War. Moreover, unlike in Protestantism, this rationalization of mourning is not justified and legitimized by religious dogma—which would exclude communication with the deceased and hold that the relationship with them can only be of the nature of memory—but rather the result of state institutional and administrative reforms. At the same time, the process is remarkably advanced, as is shown, for example, by the fact that the grave and the actual burial are usually no longer part of the funeral ritual.

It seems unlikely that a returning or renewal of Christian beliefs and practices, which, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, certain new churches see as their task today, will succeed in the present

case—leaving aside the question of whether such aspirations exist at all among Cape Verdean migrants. There are, however, indications that a need for other forms of mourning exists. This is shown, for example, by recent research on notions of continuing bonds, which gives some insight into the religious dimension and therapeutic effect of various forms of and mediums for communicating with the dead, be they grave-visiting rituals, home memorials, virtual cemeteries, or spiritualism (Kjærsgaard 2018; Wojtkowiak & Venbrux 2010; Gamba 2007; Despret 2019). Another indication is the emergence of new forms of collective and public mourning, ranging from “public crying” on the streets of Western European cities in the event of violent deaths (Weigel 2015) to eventized rituals—or, as Hubert Knoblauch formulates, “rituals of collective solitariness” (Knoblauch 2000)—that create an ephemeral community whose purpose is precisely to enable an individual ritual experience that does not require attachment to a religious or other community.³¹

Local traditions and efforts to preserve them can be a starting point for the revitalization of religious and spiritual beliefs. An example, which also comes from the lusophone world, is the *encomendação das almas* (“commending of the souls”), a custom that involves the communal singing of prayers for the dead. In certain parts of rural Portugal, where the custom originated and is again enjoying growing popularity, local initiatives are seeking to have the custom recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (Antunes 2020). Comparison with these phenomena suggests that the idea of protecting *choro* is not that far-fetched. The popularization of Cape Verdean laments could be favored by their artistic-aesthetic dimension. They contain the moment of elaboration, a striving for perfection and, accordingly, also an agonistic element. Ceremonial weeping is compared to creating a song, and the differences in talent and performance are subject to evaluation.³²

The question remains as to how the fact of entangled traditions, the migration and re-migration of religious customs, influences processes of

31 For an example of these new forms, see the “multidisciplinary community-arts project” initiated by the Dutch artist Ida van der Lee called “Allerzielen Alom—The Art of Commemoration”. Accessed January 19, 2024 <https://allerzielenalom.nl/en/>

32 On the lamenter as an artist, see also Holst-Warhaft (1992, 5).

revival and popularization. The progressive rationalization and division of labor in our modern society might play a role here. Public mourning has always been associated with a high degree of functional differentiation; in most societies it was and is predominantly a task for women.³³ Will it, like other female duties, increasingly be left to immigrants, as envisaged by Bov Bjerg in his recently published book “Der Vorweiner” (“the pre-lamenter”) (Berg 2023)? Bjerg’s story is set at the end of our century, when the members of a *resteuropäische* (“rest of Europe”) upper class—Europe being almost completely flooded—hire and cultivate personal *Vorweiner*; migrants, preferably from the countries around the Gulf of Guinea, who by their artistry in weeping manage to move the funeral guests when the ashes of those they weep over are ceremonially scattered.

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³³ On gender and lament, see Holst-Warhaft (1992, 20–27); see also Haland (2008). A deviation from this functional differentiation can be found, for example, in Albania, where mourning the dead is (or was) primarily the responsibility of men; see Kondi (2017).

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