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Making Migrants Responsible for Development: Cape Verdean Returnees and Northern Migration Policies

Lisa Åkesson

Abstract: In recent years, there has been a surge of “Northern” policy documents concerned with increasing the positive effects of international migration in countries of origin. This article contrasts some basic assumptions in policies on migration, return and development with an anthropological study of Cape Verdean returnees, and it reveals some important disparities between the returnees’ experiences and the ideas underpinning policy documents. The article analyses the role returnees’ savings and skills play in local change in Cape Verde, and in particular it looks into entrepreneurial activities. This is related to a discussion of the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to make it possible for return migrants to contribute to positive social change. In conclusion, the article shows that structural conditions have a fundamental impact on individual migrants’ abilities to support development, a perspective often left out of contemporary policies.

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Lisa Åkesson is a researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute and a lecturer in Social Anthropology at the Department of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg. She is working on a project entitled “The New Developers? Circular Migrants in Policy and Practice”.

In recent years, the relation between international migration and development in countries of origin has been viewed in a positive light by the majority of policymakers, who anticipate that migrants' transfer of money, social capital and skills contribute to poverty reduction and maybe also to sustainable long-term development. One reason for this is that the optimistic view on migration fits well with the present development discourse, which Marc Duffield (2010) identifies as the liberal way of development. A key characteristic of this discourse is that development should be based on individuals' and households' adaptive self-reliance. Transferred to the field of migration, this view positions migrants as being responsible for development in their countries of origin. The migrants are exhorted not only to send remittances, but also to transmit new ideas and entrepreneurial skills and to provide access to transnational social networks. Thomas Faist (2009) argues that one of the characteristics of present policies on the migration–development nexus is the emphasis on the transfer of human and social capital. Thus, today's migrants are not only asked to provide economic support but also to transmit the useful knowledge and social contacts they have supposedly gained in the country of destination.

The contemporary enthusiasm in the field of development cooperation around the relationship between migration and development has resulted in a flow of “Northern” policy documents concerned with increasing the positive effects of international migration. In this article, I contrast some of the assumptions in such policies with an anthropological case study of Cape Verdean returnees. I have chosen to focus on returnees because of the high importance given to returnees' transfer of skills and resources in contemporary policies on the migration–development nexus. The article focuses on a critical comparison between some basic – and implicit – notions that underpin policies and the ideas and practices of people who themselves have migrated and returned, and it reveals some important disparities between the actual experiences of the returnees and the assumptions underpinning policy documents. Moreover, I show that structural conditions have a fundamental impact on returnees' abilities to influence a positive development.

Empirically, this article analyses the role returnees' savings and skills play in small-scale social and economic change in Cape Verde, a country with a long history of comprehensive out-migration. I discuss the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to make it possible for return migrants to not only support themselves but also play a role in local development. This includes an exploration of how the returnees use their savings and how they perceive their own abilities to contribute to positive social change. In particular, I look at entrepreneurial activities and small-scale businesses, which, according to both the government and international donors, are of key im-

portance for development in Cape Verde (World Bank 2010b). This is supplemented with a discussion of both Cape Verdean economic development and national policies on return and entrepreneurship.

The article is organized into three parts. First, I discuss return and development in relation to policies and to Cape Verdean migration. Second, I represent Cape Verdean returnees and their contribution to local social change by presenting four different categories of return migrants. In the last part, I critically compare the experiences of Cape Verdean returnees with some of the assumptions in contemporary policy on migration and development.

The case study is mainly based on 26 interviews made in 2010 with migrants who have returned to Cape Verde. In selecting the interviewees, I relied on insights from earlier periods of anthropological fieldwork regarding social variations among Cape Verdean returnees. My aim was to select interviewees that were representative of Cape Verdean returnees in general, and I paid attention to variations related to gender, age, education, socio-economic status, urban/rural background and country of immigration. Research assistants and friends in Cape Verde assisted me in establishing contacts with different kinds of returnees. The fact that since 1998 I have carried out altogether nine periods of fieldwork in Cape Verde helped me to contextualize the interviews and to bring out trends and topics that I believe are generally relevant for Cape Verdean return migration.

Return and Development in Policy and in Cape Verde

The debate on migration and development has moved back and forth between optimism and pessimism (De Haas 2010; Faist 2008; Portes 2009). The dominating view in the 1950s and 1960s was that remittances, return migration and the subsequent transfer of knowledge would help developing countries “take off”. Returnees were believed to play an important role in innovation and change. In the beginning of the 1970s the global economic recession led to increasingly restrictive immigration regimes in Europe. At the same time, a paradigm shift occurred in development theory toward structuralist and dependency views. As a result of these two processes, in the 1970s and 1980s migration was deemed to be linked to dependency, brain-drain and increased socio-economic inequality among those who stayed behind, which in turn would lead to more migration. Thus, migration was now seen as aggravating problems of underdevelopment. However, during the last decade more optimistic views have once again come to dominate. Many policymakers anticipate that the inflow of remittances in combination

with the involvement of diasporas will lead to poverty reduction and economic growth. Renewed hopes are put on circular migrants and returnees and their contribution to development. This perspective has been especially dominant since 2006 when the World Bank's yearly flagship publication "Global Economic Prospects" was dedicated to "economic implications of migration and remittances".

In contrast to this optimism, Hein de Haas (2010) argues that the contemporary celebration of migrants as agents of development "from below" is largely driven by ideology and not founded on substantial empirical evidence. Empirical studies instead point to the heterogeneity of migration impacts. Both De Haas and Thomas Faist (2009) maintain that the present highly optimistic view reflects a paradigm shift away from dependency and state-centrist views to a neoliberal stance on development. This, warn De Haas (2010) and Ronald Skeldon (2008), detracts attention from the wider political and economical constraints to positive human development.

Inspired by Faist and De Haas and their critique of the idea that developmental problems can be solved by individual migrants, I have explored some policy assumptions regarding returnees' contributions to positive social change. I have consulted policies produced at various levels of the global political system: the international level (UN High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development; Global Commission on International Migration; Global Forum on Migration and Development), the European Union level (Commission, Council of European Union) and the national level (Swedish Parliamentary Committee). Among other things, this review evinced that the policy debates are overwhelmingly driven by governments in Northern countries of immigration and international organizations such as the World Bank. Governments in the South have little influence (cf. Glick Schiller and Faist 2009: 5).

The review also made clear that especially EU strategies on migration and development are linked to destination countries' interests in fighting irregular migration, which is perceived as both a security threat and a catalyst of anti-immigrant public opinion. In EU migration policy, border controls and readmission of migrants, both to countries of origin and to transit countries, such as Libya, are high on the agenda. In line with this, development-oriented migration strategies are tied to the so-called "fight against illegal migration". This concerns, for instance, the Global Approach to Migration, which is the principal framework for the EU's stance towards immigration into the Union. The Global Approach to Migration was primarily adopted in 2005 as a measure to rapidly reduce immigration from Africa, and the first version of this policy (Council of the European Union 2006) contains hardly anything on migration and development. In a later version

(Council of the European Union 2008), formulations about “enhanced synergies between migration and development” were added. The EU’s efforts to promote positive links between migration and development are partly driven by a desire to coax migrant-sending countries into agreements on stricter border controls and readmission of migrants (Chou 2009). In order to make sending countries participate in the “fight against illegal migration”, the EU is prepared to support potential positive development effects of legal migration. In this context, the return of migrants is seen as a win-win situation as it supposedly brings development to sending countries *and* diminishes the number of immigrants in Europe.

In policy documents, the relation between migrants’ return and development is with almost no exceptions described as positive. For example, the UN General Assembly’s high-level Dialogue on Migration and Development states that “return and circular migration [is important], since migrants who return, even for short periods, are often agents for development” (United Nations 2006: 2). Similarly, the European Commission asserts: “Return, either temporary or permanent, can bring back human, financial, economic and social capital to developing countries” (2005: 12). In the following, I will not address the particularities of different policies but rather illuminate four assumptions that underpin the widespread idea that return migration is beneficial for development. These assumptions are seldom explicitly discussed in policy documents, but they are necessary underpinnings for a positive view on the connection between migration, return and development.

1. The skills, values, knowledge and social capital migrants obtain in the Northern countries of immigration are useful when they return to their developing countries of origin.

This is a key assumption in most policies on migration, return and development. A typical example is the following statement by the Global Commission on International Migration:¹

In the current era, there is a need to capitalize upon the growth of human mobility by promoting the notion of “brain circulation” in which migrants return to their own country on a regular or occasional basis, sharing the benefits of the skills and resources they have acquired while living and working abroad (2005: 31).

1 The Global Commission on International Migration was initiated by the UN secretary-general at the time, Kofi Annan.

Most policymakers are under the impression that migrants learn a lot in the Northern countries of destination and that the skills and social networks they have acquired are valuable in developing countries in the South.

2. Returnees have a “natural” sense of moral obligation to support the development of their country of origin.

Generally it is taken for granted that if you “come from” a poor nation-state, you feel a “natural” moral obligation to support development processes in that country if you return. This assumption rests ultimately on methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and the idea that an individual belongs to a specific country and has special responsibilities toward this “homeland”. Thus, migrants are seen as carriers of a “national essence” (Malkki 1992) compelling them to contribute when returning “home”. A Swedish parliamentary committee appointed to examine the relation between circular migration and development discusses why migrants want to contribute:

[T]he migrant in different ways often wishes to support development in the country of origin. [...] The motives behind the individual’s engagement vary. There may both be more “egoistic” reasons [...] and a philanthropic ground, a wish to “give something back” (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2010: 172, author’s translation).

The option that migrants may have no interest at all in supporting development is not mentioned.

3. It is possible to migrate for a short period of time (e.g. a few years) and rapidly build up the skills and capital needed for investments after return.

This assumption is especially salient when circular migration is discussed in policies. In receiving countries, circular migrants are expected to meet temporary labour shortages while countries of origin supposedly will gain access to money, skills and experiences of nationals who have been abroad for shorter periods of time. In policies at different levels of the global political system, circular migration is endorsed as beneficial for development. For example, the Global Forum on Migration and Development² (2008) and the European Commission (2007) state that circular migration meets the interests that developing countries have in fostering skill transfer. None of these

2 The Global Forum on Migration and Development is a state-led organization open to all UN members.

policies discusses whether a few years' stay abroad is enough to accumulate the resources needed for a successful return.

4. It is a given that returnees master the social, cultural and linguistic competence that is needed in their place of origin.

The development potential of migration is often compared to the effects of international development cooperation. For instance, many policy documents stress that registered remittance flows to households in the South are much higher than the sum of the OECD countries' development assistance. In the same comparative vein, returnees are contrasted with other development actors. Some donors see return migrants as potential agents for development efforts that are better integrated into local contexts than "foreign" development initiatives managed by international actors. Returnees are seen as well acquainted with conditions in their "home" countries and are therefore considered capable of conducting successful development activities (Adepoju, van Naerssen, and Zoomers 2006). They supposedly master the local linguistic and "cultural" competence and are well integrated into social networks.

Migration, Development and Return in Cape Verde

Migration from Cape Verde has a long history in all nine inhabited islands in the archipelago and encompasses all socio-economic strata, except the absolute poorest. Emigration from Cape Verde began on a large scale about a century ago and has been directed to three different continents: Africa, the Americas and Europe. Today, the number of Cape Verdeans in diaspora probably exceeds the half million inhabitants of Cape Verde itself.³

Cape Verde has a dark history of absolute destitution, which explains the longstanding and widespread propensity to migrate. At the time of independence in 1975, the country was highly dependent on external assistance in the form of migrant remittances and official development assistance, and the majority of the population lived in deep poverty. Since then, positive changes have occurred. In 1991, multipartism was introduced, and today the country has a reputation of being a stable democracy. The state has established a basic infrastructure in the sectors of transport, energy, sanitation, health and education. This has been accomplished with the support of international development assistance, which Cape Verde has attracted through its reputation of "good governance" (Baker 2009). Moreover, largely due to

3 There are no reliable statistics on the number of Cape Verdean migrants. Some are illegal, while others have acquired citizenships from their countries of destination.

the booming tourism industry, there has been strong economic growth with Real GDP averaging more than 6 per cent from 2004 to 2009 (World Bank 2010a). The positive macro-economic development implies that poverty is less widespread today, but it has not been eradicated. In urban slums, food vulnerability is a problem (Rodrigues 2008), and some people can only afford nutrient-poor food such as rice and/or have to skip meals. The economic growth has implied that socio-economic inequality rose sharply during the 1990s and has remained high since then (World Bank 2010a). In everyday life, people are increasingly upset about the abysmal differences in living conditions between the poor and the rich, along with the government's inability to remedy this situation.

Poverty in Cape Verde is strongly related to unemployment. According to statistics, only 48 per cent of the population over 15 years of age have a job, whereas 13 per cent are unemployed and 39 per cent are classified as "inactive" (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2009). One way the government has attempted to reduce unemployment is by supporting the establishment of small and medium enterprises. The service sector is prioritized, as Cape Verde has few natural resources and little arable land. For those who try to set up a business, however, the smallness and geographical fragmentation of the local market can prove a major challenge. The population of half a million people is distributed on nine different islands, and the geographical isolation in the middle of the Atlantic makes import and export difficult and expensive.

The Cape Verdean government has been late to recognize the potential of returnees' entrepreneurship. No policy currently exists that specifically deals with the question of how to harness the skills and resources of the returnees for local and national development. Recently, however, some progress has been made with regard to concrete actions. For instance, a limited number of ready-made business plans are offered online to migrants and returnees who want to invest in Cape Verde (Instituto de Comunidades 2010). The ongoing preparation of a government bill proposing tax reductions for migrants' investments is another initiative that may be of future importance. For those who have already returned, the greatest constraint is the difficulty to obtain loans for investments. Interest rates are high,⁴ periods of repayment are short, and demands on collateral securities are excessive. The majority of the banks are Portuguese-owned and they obviously have little trust in Cape Verdean small-scale entrepreneurs. This situation restricts not only returnees' investments, but all kinds of small-scale entre-

4 According to some returnee entrepreneurs interest rates for bank credits vary between 15 and 30 per cent.

preneurship. The government is aware of this problem and is trying to rectify it through supporting the establishment of a “social bank” (Novo Banco), but as the bank opened only recently, it is too early to assess the concrete effects of this initiative.

Despite the high level of unemployment and the difficulties associated with business activities, my impression is that the number of returnees has increased in Cape Verde.⁵ Some migrants mention the change in 1991 from a one-party to a multiparty system as important for their decision to come back. A retired factory worker who has come back after many years abroad said,

My country is good now since democracy came. Before that we couldn't speak. I didn't return for 20 years because of that.

The existence of adequate health care and comparatively well-functioning schools is important to other returnees. Moreover, the rapid growth in tourism entices migrants to come back and try to invest in restaurants and hotels. The general economic growth has contributed to multiplying the supply of goods and services in Cape Verde, and many returnees emphasize that nowadays they are able to purchase “almost everything” on the local market. Despite these improvements, return is not easy. For those who come back before retirement age, the basic problem is finding a way to support themselves and their dependent family members. As I will show in detail below, savings and careful investments are necessary.

The Cape Verdean returnees are a heterogeneous group (Carling 2004). There is great variation with regard to almost all basic social characteristics such as gender, age, education, economy and family situation. Moreover, the returnees' migration experiences differ significantly in terms of length of stay abroad, reason for returning, country of immigration, and accumulated capital and skills. One condition they have in common, however, is that they are measured against the widespread and well-known image of the successful returnee.

The social importance of a “homecoming” that reflects one's success as a migrant is something returnees often brought up in conversation. In Cape Verdean Creole, this is expressed as returning in *kondisau* (from Port. *condição*). The word *kondisau* means a dignified and secure material standard. To live in *kondisau* is seen as a freedom from immediate economic worries and an achievement of a good standard of living. Ownership of a house is a basic prerequisite for a dignified return in *kondisau*. The house is a symbol for a successful migration trajectory, but it is also economically important as

5 There are no statistics at all on Cape Verdean return migration.

renting a house or a flat is expensive. It is common for returnees not only to construct a house for themselves but also to build additional houses, which they sell or let out. A second criterion for returning in *kondisau* is to have secured some kind of regular income that covers running expenses. Monthly rents from tenants are one example of such an income. Other common sources of income for returnees are old-age pensions from abroad and earnings from small-scale local businesses. Migrants returning to one of the Cape Verdean islands where it is possible to practise agriculture sometimes buy land.

Feelings of moral obligations to family members are important to many returnees. During their years abroad, many returnees sent remittances to family members in Cape Verde (see Åkesson 2009), but upon return some feel hesitant to continue the economic support as they themselves may have a hard time securing a stable income. Returnees often continue to support elderly parents, but this is an obligation returnees share with non-migrant Cape Verdeans.

Many returnees share the idea that it is important to support “our Cape Verde”. This notion has its roots in the independence movement and in the vulnerable condition of the Cape Verdean nation-state in the years after independence in 1975. Cape Verdean nationalism is of an intimate and quiet strand. People see their country as small and poor. This causes a will to support, but on the other hand people’s loyalty to the state is weak and dependent on the shifting political situation. Since 1991, governance has regularly alternated between the two leading parties, the Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo Verde (PAICV) and the Movimento para a Democracia (MpD). These two parties traditionally have an irreconcilable attitude toward each other, and national politics is sometimes dominated by an exchange of accusations. Among ordinary people, including returnees, this can give rise to at least three different attitudes. First, many people are open to making a contribution to Cape Verde only when “their” party is in power. Second, some distrust the state because they believe that the politicians use the state only to further their own and their party’s interests. Third, there is a group of people who try to put the welfare and development of the country first, and who look beyond deadlocked party interests. Some of the successful returnees belong to this group.

Different Kinds of Returnees

In order to organize and synthesize my presentation of the returnees, I have divided them into four different categories: the pensioners, the entrepreneurs, the highly educated and the unsuccessful. This categorization is pri-

marily based on how the returnees are positioned by themselves and those around them in local society. The four categories are quite distinct in the Cape Verdean social landscape. From an analytical perspective, this categorization also reflects differences with regard to the role the returnees play in local development.

The Pensioners

Many returnees are people who have worked abroad until they gained the right to an old-age pension, or, less common, to an early retirement pension because of disability or sickness. My impression is that the majority of the returnees belong to this category. In fact, many Cape Verdeans claim that it is impossible to return before one has obtained a pension.

To return with a secure pension is a classic way of returning in *kondisau*. The retired successful returnee is a standard figure in Cape Verdean discourse. Everybody is familiar with how the traditional labour migration trajectory leading up to a secure economic existence as a pensioner should unfold. Especially when talking about economic matters, many of the retired returnees told me similar stories about their experiences abroad and after their return. The homogeneous character of their narratives reflected the culturally appropriate story of the migration trajectory.

The typical retired returnee has few years of schooling and left Cape Verde in his or her early twenties. The majority are male, but there are also quite a few female retired returnees. Many have worked abroad for 30 or 40 years, the men typically in activities related to shipping or in a factory and the women as care workers or domestics. Their jobs have seldom required the learning of new skills or given them access to influential social networks. The segregation in countries of destination has sometimes made it hard for them to create social contacts outside the local Cape Verdean diaspora community. Some of the retired returnees are unable to communicate even at a very basic level in the language spoken in the country where they have worked. Some have low self-esteem, at least in relation to their role outside a small group of family members and friends. Some retired returnees asked why I wanted to talk them; they believed they had nothing of value to tell.

House construction is by far the most common investment for retired returnees, but alongside this some of them are engaged in other economic activities. Male returnees commonly invest in small-scale transport businesses or grocery shops. As many of the retired returnees have chosen to invest in these two economic niches, they are both characterized by market saturation. In urbanized areas there is an empty shop and a waiting taxi at every corner. If female elderly returnees set up a business they typically open a tiny clothes shop in the ground floor of their own house. Again due to

market saturation, this kind of shop seldom attracts customers, but friends and acquaintances of the owner are frequent visitors. The female shop owners I interviewed described their business as a pastime rather than an economic activity.

Some Cape Verdeans maintain that the classic retired returnees played a more important role in the first decades after independence than they do today. At that time, the migrants introduced new materials and new techniques for house-building, and their investments in taxis and grocery shops were much needed in a country which had suffered from extreme poverty and neglect during Portuguese colonial rule. In contrast, today's retired returnees' more seldom contribute with new knowledge and skills or make innovative investments. Many return migrants find that those who stayed behind master the same skills and knowledge as themselves.

A question I always wanted to raise in my interviews was whether the returnees themselves believed they "made a contribution to Cape Verde", but when talking with the pensioners I hesitated to ask this. Most people in Cape Verde believe that elderly returnees have the right to enjoy the fruits of their hard labour abroad in peace and quiet. Many people know that most labour migrants work under hard, often exploitative, conditions in the US and Europe, and that they suffer from stress and racial discrimination. Those who have been able to return in *kondisau* are seen as people who have undergone much privation in order to realize this dream. To ask such a person to be responsible for the development of Cape Verde is considered quite offensive.

The Entrepreneurs

The entrepreneurs are people who have worked for many years abroad and have then returned to Cape Verde to set up a business. The entrepreneurs as well as other people in the country emphasize that this is not an easy accomplishment. A critical obstacle is the time factor. It takes many years to save enough money to return in *kondisau* and to start up a business in addition. As mentioned, it is almost impossible to obtain bank credits for small- and medium-scale business activities, which implies that capital for investment has to be secured before return. At the same time, it is important to come back when one still is young enough to be able to develop the new business.

José, who is a successful returnee and businessman, told me he was proud to have accomplished a return after only 16 years abroad. He said that migrants normally have to spend at least 20 years abroad in order to be able to build a house and invest in a business in Cape Verde. This was corroborated by other returnees who talked about 20 or 30 years as the minimum.

José himself had left Cape Verde with a strong intention of coming back as soon as possible. After two years as a construction worker in Luxembourg, he started his own construction company, which at one point employed as many as 120 persons. José ran this company for 14 years, and during his years abroad he bought three apartment houses in Cape Verde along with what is locally considered to be quite a lot of land. After returning, he invested in an import-export business. José's successful career as a business owner in Luxembourg is an exception. Most migrants have to rely on their meagre salaries to save up for their eventual return. Another advantage for José was that he never resided illegally in Luxembourg. Undocumented migrants have to accept the exploitative salaries in the informal labour market, which makes it hard for them to save money.

The successful entrepreneurs I met had either started up a business activity that was new to Cape Verde or set out to improve the quality of already-available services. An example of the first kind is Martin, who in Europe worked as a mariner, factory worker and barman. After more than 20 years abroad, he returned and became a vegetable grower. Agriculture is nothing new in Cape Verde, where more than 40 per cent of the population still live in rural areas (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2009), but Martin introduced both new sustainable cultivation techniques and new sorts of vegetables that nobody else grew, such as spinach, aubergine, leek and pak choi. The last mentioned vegetable, a kind of cabbage, Martin produces specifically for the community of Chinese shopkeepers who have recently established themselves in Cape Verde (Haugen and Carling 2005). Martin said that the first years were hard as few people were interested in changing their diet and trying his "strange" vegetables. Gradually, business got better thanks to people's improved access to mass media and health care. Persons who suffered from illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure learned from television and their doctors that it is healthy to eat vegetables. Rumours about Martin's healthful vegetables spread and today demand is higher than what he manages to produce, although he employs ten year-round workers.

The second option, to offer products of a better quality, has been pursued by Sofia, who opened a restaurant in the town of Mindelo after having worked for many years in Europe as a waitress. There are already quite a few restaurants in town, but according to Sofia they mostly offer the same kind of food, which, moreover, is comprised of dishes that everyone cooks at home. Sofia has introduced international "ethnic food" with inspiration from Turkish, Thai and Senegalese cuisine, and this attracts a steadily rising number of customers. She has also trained her staff to offer a new and higher standard of service through, for example, meeting customers at the

entrance door and showing them the way to their table. Another successful novelty at her restaurant is the option to order only a single glass of wine instead of a bottle.

An important question in this article concerns whether returnee entrepreneurs make use of the skills and knowledge they have gained as migrants. Martin decided to return and become a vegetable grower because that was his Cape Verdean childhood dream. What he had learnt from working hard at sea, in a factory and in a bar was of little use to him. Instead, he turned to the Internet and to books for knowledge. It could be, however, that his taste for “strange” vegetables was formed during his long stay abroad. In contrast to Martin, Sofia said that she makes “very good use” of her experiences from abroad, where she learned to organize and run a high-quality restaurant through observing the management of the places she worked. An obvious difference between the two is that although Sofia has advanced from being a waitress to becoming a restaurant owner, she continues to work in the same line of work as she did in Europe, whereas Martin has totally changed his career.

When I asked José, the successful businessman, whether he had made any use of experiences from abroad, he explained that his years in Europe had been a good education, but then he added that the skills he had acquired during his youth in Cape Verde had been equally important for his achievements in Europe. I received similar answers from other interviewees. Some of those I interviewed said that in Cape Verde they had learnt to socialize with people of different backgrounds, to communicate with all kinds of people and to respect themselves despite coming from a poor family, and that these proved to be valuable experiences when working abroad. In fact, it happened quite often that my question about the usefulness of skills acquired as a migrant was turned into a description of how experiences gained in Cape Verde had been helpful abroad. I interpreted this subtle turn as an implicit protest against the globally widespread idea that social capital obtained in Europe and the US always is useful, while skills and values acquired in a developing country are useless and irrelevant, a view especially prevalent in the rich and powerful North.

The Highly Educated

Similar to the retired labour migrants, the highly educated returnees are a well-known category in Cape Verde. During colonial times, families belonging to the small Cape Verdean elite sent their sons, and sometimes daughters, to Portugal for higher education. After finishing their studies, some of these young people returned and took up a position in the colonial administration or in one of the few local companies. Since independence, young

people have continued to go abroad for studies, as tertiary education in Cape Verde was nonexistent until recently. This means that qualified jobs in Cape Verde are nearly exclusively occupied by people who have returned after studies abroad in places such as Portugal, Brazil, Cuba or an Eastern European country. In recent decades, many of the students have begun staying abroad after obtaining their degrees, mainly because it has gradually become more and more difficult for them to find a qualified and well-paid job, or any job, in Cape Verde.⁶ Students who finance their studies with a grant have signed a contract stipulating that they must return to Cape Verde after having graduated, but as one highly educated and unemployed returnee said: “Many, many stay abroad. I don’t know why the state tries to force students to come back when there are no jobs for us.”

Others have a more positive view of the possibilities in Cape Verde. Carla, who graduated from a school of social studies in Boston but now works as a real estate agent in Cape Verde, said that she advises highly skilled migrants to return to the islands:

I tell them that they should move back and that many things need to be done here. It’s not necessary to contribute with very special ideas, but it’s important to create a more professional level. It’s about enriching the country, but it’s not for everyone. You have to be able to adapt to a slower tempo and to less professionalism. You have to adapt, but some things are definitively better here, such as the absence of stress.

Besides the return of young Cape Verdeans who have studied abroad, there is a new and small inflow of a special kind of highly educated returnees: the “second-generation returnees” (King and Christou 2010). They are labour migrants’ children who are raised and educated abroad, and who have decided to move back to their parents’ country of origin. They are probably few – there are no relevant statistics – but at least in Praia and Mindelo, the two largest towns, they have started to have a presence. All second-generation returnees I have met have at least a secondary education, which means that they are highly educated by Cape Verdean standards. Another characteristic of the second-generation returnees is that they have left behind an economically secure existence in a “rich” country because they believe life in Cape Verde has other values: freedom from stress, an intense and happy social life and a nice climate. Their decision to depart from family, friends and a safe income is in many cases related to a wish to “do something good for Cape Verde”, but not at any cost. The second-generation returnees have

6 According to the World Bank (2011), two-thirds of tertiary-educated Cape Verdeans live abroad.

a cosmopolitan attitude in relation to their future life, and they often hold double or triple citizenships. They may stay on in Cape Verde, but they have not closed the door to the country where they were raised, and they are also likely to consider moving somewhere else if opportunities arise.

A problem for both those who return after studies abroad and second-generation returnees is adapting their knowledge and qualifications to Cape Verdean realities. Many of the students have exams that are incompatible with the demands of the Cape Verdean labour market. It is, for example, difficult for all those who have studied humanities to find employment. Inadequate knowledge of languages may also be a problem. Although Cape Verdean Creole is always used in everyday conversations, Portuguese is the official language in Cape Verde, and a good command of written and spoken Portuguese is seen as an important indicator of a person's education. The second-generation returnees are generally not fluent in Portuguese, except for those who have grown up in Portugal. At home they have spoken Cape Verdean Creole, and besides that they have learnt the language(s) used and taught in the country their parents migrated to. The same problem may be true for returnees who left Cape Verde as children and studied abroad.

The Unsuccessful

To return without savings and a house of one's own is a social catastrophe in Cape Verde. In the Cape Verdean Creole, this is called migration *mal sucedid* ("unsuccessful" migration), and according to emic notions, unsuccessful returnees are a special category. On a general level, such returnees are described as unwise, wasteful and pathetic figures. People are often less judgemental when the unsuccessful returnee is a family member or friend, and may then in detail explain why he/she failed to follow a successful migration trajectory. In fact, such stories are commonly told as nearly everyone knows an unsuccessful returnee. Despite this, it was hard to find someone belonging to this category to interview. I heard stories about people who had returned because of illness, abusive husbands, prolonged unemployment and strong homesickness, but none of these persons wanted to talk to me. "It is too shameful" was the common explanation. In the end it turned out that people who had been deported, i.e. forced by immigration authorities to return, were more willing to talk to me than the "unsuccessful", who had returned for other reasons, although these reasons could be equally compelling.

The deportees I interviewed all said that they had been forced to leave the country of destination because of undocumented residence. To them it was utterly important to make clear to everyone that they had not been deported because of criminality. Some people in Cape Verde believe that all

deportees have committed a crime. Many Cape Verdean migrants manage to stay abroad for long periods of time without residence rights, which makes some people conclude that nobody is deported just because of illegal immigrant status. A way for non-criminal deportees to signal a distance to those who have been deported because of criminal activities is to try to live up to the image of a successful returnee. Accordingly, one male deportee told me that “some people believed I was a criminal until they saw the car I had brought”. The car signalled that he had been able to save some money abroad, while criminal deportees tend to arrive broke in Cape Verde after having served a prison sentence abroad.

A major problem for deportees is that they have no influence over the timing of their return. They may have been able to save some money, but not enough to build a house and start an enterprise. This means they become dependent upon other family members, living either in Cape Verde or in the country of destination. One of the deportees I interviewed was supported by siblings still living abroad; another had been helped in finding a job by family members in Cape Verde. In a third case, the deportee was unemployed and received no remittances. It was obvious that she suffered much from being a burden to her family in Cape Verde.

Disparities between Policy and Practice

As already indicated, there are some disparities between the assumptions made in policies on migration and development and the practices and experiences of the migrants themselves. I will now return to the four underlying policy assumptions defined in the beginning of the article and relate them in more detail to the Cape Verdean ethnography.

1. The skills, values, knowledge and social capital migrants obtain in the Northern countries of immigration are useful when they return to their developing countries of origin.

The majority of those I interviewed had little use for their working life experiences from abroad. Cape Verdean migrants, as other migrants from the South, are often reduced to menial and repetitive jobs. They have little influence over their working conditions and few opportunities to learn new skills. In fact, they are sought after as labour power exactly because their living conditions force them to accept jobs that offer few chances of acquiring skills, knowledge and new social networks.

The result of this is that many migrants come back without the entrepreneurial skills that are much needed in Cape Verde. Some of them make small business investments, either because they are looking for additional

income or because they need a pastime. As mentioned, it is common that returnees invest in sectors characterized by market saturation. Normally, these investors have no business experience and therefore choose to make the same kinds of investments that earlier generations of returnees have made.

There are, however, a minority of returnees that stand out from this pattern. “The entrepreneurs”, as I have called them, are normally both quite young and quite well educated. They tend to emphasize their experiences from abroad when talking about their business activities or careers in Cape Verde, and they point out that they have made good use of what they learned as migrants. To some of them, it is important to demonstrate that the experiences they acquired before leaving Cape Verde have been equally important to them at different stages of their life.

2. Returnees have a “natural” sense of moral obligation to support the development of their country of origin.

The idea that returnees have a moral duty to support their “homeland” is treated with some ambiguity in Cape Verde. On one hand, many people believe that returnees should make a contribution to Cape Verde, and it is often pointed out that migrants have played a positive role in development through sending remittances and building new and better houses. On the other hand, many returnees are retirement pensioners and not expected to play an active societal role. Instead, they are encouraged to rest and relax after many years of hard work abroad. Younger returnees who have managed to save money in order to guarantee a return in *kondisau* before retirement age may also feel that they have worked enough. Some are worn out because of exploitative working conditions in the country of immigration. Many have no confidence in their own ability to support social change after having been positioned as ignorant low-status immigrants for decades.

Alongside this, some returnees feel that the responsibility for developing their country rests with the government and not with themselves.

3. It is possible to migrate for a short period of time (e.g. a few years) and rapidly build up the skills and capital needed for investments after return.

Temporary/circular migration is high on the agenda in contemporary EU policy on migration and development, but few policymakers acknowledge that it often takes a long time to accumulate the resources necessary for a return that is beneficial not only to the migrant but also to the local society. Returnees in Cape Verde generally believe it is necessary to stay abroad

between 20 and 30 years in order to come back in *kondisau*. For many migrants, it is impossible to go back permanently before they have obtained the right to an old-age pension. In contrast, people who have returned after only a few years – either “voluntarily” or as deportees – often become a burden to their family, whether in Cape Verde or abroad. This reality clashes with policymakers’ ideas about migrants swiftly moving between continents in order to meet the shifting demands of receiving countries’ labour markets.

4. It is a given that returnees master the social, cultural and linguistic competence that is needed in their place of origin.

After many decades abroad, returnees may have lost touch with changes taking place in their homeland. An example of this are the returnees who make investments in sectors that were promising in the 1970s and 1980s but are now saturated. Another problem is that many of those who have studied abroad return with a degree or qualification that is inadequate for the demands of the local labour market.

In Cape Verde, linguistic realities also question this assumption. Returnees with an education from a non-Portuguese-speaking country generally neither speak nor write Portuguese, which is a requirement for a qualified job. Therefore, highly educated returnees may find it difficult to obtain employment that matches their qualifications, which makes it harder for them to support ongoing development processes.

Conclusions

This article shows that it is important to critically examine the contemporary celebration of migrants as “grass-roots developers”. In particular, it articulates four points:

1. Southern migrants working in segregated destination countries seldom have the chance to acquire skills that are useful for complex development processes in those countries of destination.
2. Methodological nationalism guides the idea that migrants have a natural obligation toward “their” country.
3. It takes decades to accumulate enough resources for a successful return.
4. Returnees’ skills and resources are not always adapted to local realities.

The article also corresponds with Duffield's (2010), De Haas' (2010) and Glick Schiller and Faist's (2009) critique of the neoliberal ideology of development, which makes economic and political constraints less visible by placing the responsibility for development on the people in poor countries. The Cape Verdean case shows that wider social, economic and political structures fundamentally influence the returnees' abilities to support positive development in their homeland. One important example of this is the fact that as non-European migrants, many Cape Verdean returnees have been subjected to structural discrimination, which has negatively affected their abilities to gain knowledge, skills and self-confidence abroad. On the national (Cape Verdean) level, one key structural constraint is the difficulty in obtaining loans for small-scale investments.

As I have shown, however, some Cape Verdean returnees play an important role in local development. There seems to be an increasing number of former migrants who use their savings and their experiences from abroad to start up promising entrepreneurial activities. Also, the success of these entrepreneurs illuminates the fact that the development potential of migration is related to wider social and economic processes. To a significant degree, their achievements have been possible because the Cape Verdean state manages to provide basic infrastructure and because there has been continuous economic growth in the country over the last decade. This suggests that positive structural change may lead to an increase in returns that are beneficial both for the migrant and for local society.

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Wenn Migranten für Entwicklung verantwortlich gemacht werden: Rückkehrer nach Kap Verde und vom „Norden“ geprägte Migrationspolitik

Zusammenfassung: In jüngster Zeit entstand eine Flut politischer Dokumente im “Norden”, die sich mit den positiven Effekten internationaler Migration in den Ursprungsländern der Migranten beschäftigen. Der vorliegende Beitrag kontrastiert einige grundlegende Annahmen im Bereich der Migrations-, Rückkehrer- und Entwicklungspolitik mit den Ergebnissen einer anthropologischen Studie über Rückkehrer nach Kap Verde und deckt einige gravierende Differenzen zwischen diesen Grundannahmen und den Erfahrungen der Rückkehrer auf. Die Autorin analysiert, welche Bedeutung

die Ersparnisse und die Qualifikationen der Rückkehrer für den lokalen gesellschaftlichen Wandel haben und ist dabei insbesondere an unternehmerischen Aktivitäten interessiert. Darauf aufbauend diskutiert sie, unter welchen Bedingungen zurückkehrende Migranten positiv zum sozialen Wandel beitragen können. Sie kommt zu dem Schluss, dass die Möglichkeiten für einzelne Rückkehrer, die Entwicklung ihres Heimatlandes positiv zu beeinflussen, stark von strukturellen Gegebenheiten abhängen – eine Tatsache, die bei politischen Planungen vielfach unberücksichtigt bleibt.

Schlagwörter: Kap Verde, Internationale Migration, Rückkehrer, Entwicklung