

BUILDING CREOLE IDENTITY IN THE AFRICAN ATLANTIC: BOUNDARIES OF RACE AND RELIGION IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CABO VERDE

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I

The Atlantic may be a vast ocean for the most part devoid of human life, but that is not how historians see it. As the historian of the British Atlantic world David Armitage put it, “we are all Atlanticists now.”¹ Not a little of the excitement of the historical profession has turned on the need to construct broad and transnational perspectives for the exchanges of peoples and goods which have constructed modern worlds.

This is, as every reader of this journal knows, a process in which Africa played a fundamental part. Conceptualizing an Atlantic space in the early modern era requires the inclusion of African contributions to revolutions in ideas, agriculture, and global capital brought about by the forced African diaspora produced by Atlantic slavery.² And yet historians of African societies have not joined their colleagues working on the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe in the leap to embrace “Atlantic” history. While there have been some attempts to construct an African sphere of the Atlantic world, a general attempt to achieve this on a systematic basis remains lacking.³

*I would like to thank Philip Havik, José Horta, José Lingna Nafafé, and Armin Schwengler for their support and help in the recent past. My conversations with them on related topics to the one addressed here have helped substantially to shape the ideas in this paper.

¹David Armitage, “Introduction,” *The British Atlantic World*, eds David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (Basingstoke, 2002), 11.

²Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London, 1997).

³The best overall synthesis remains John Thornton’s *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (2d. ed.: Cambridge, 1998). Joseph C. Miller’s *Way of*

History in Africa 36 (2009), 103–125

Part of the reason for this is the current general decline in research in early modern African history. While the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s saw many highly distinguished monographs, such research is no longer so easy to come by.⁴ Shunning the externalized, European perspectives on which many traditional histories of Africa were based, post-colonial students of Africa have rightly interpreted African history from the viewpoint of African societies.⁵ As this has required primarily a cultural engagement with material, practitioners have moved towards contemporary histories, which may explain the present dearth of studies reaching farther back.

But the result of this situation is that the integration of an African perspective into the now vast field of Atlantic history is partial at best. Thus where Africa is brought into these wider histories it is all too often misrepresented, if represented at all.⁶ Africa's place in broader Atlantic histories is often from the perspective of the economic requirements of the Atlantic

Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830 (Madison, 1988) is a classic work locating African history within a wider Atlantic perspective, and there are also some recent studies which have begun the task of trying to integrate African experiences into Atlantic perspectives: see in particular Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago, 2002); Philip J. Havik, *Silences and Soundbytes: the Gendered Dynamics of Trade and Brokerage in the Precolonial Guinea-Bissau Region* (Münster, 2004); and Nicolas Argenti, *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields* (Chicago, 2007). Moreover these engagements with the Atlantic are in themselves highly controversial, with the work of Argenti and Shaw, borrowing heavily from symbolist schools of anthropology.

⁴A brief selection of these earlier works might include David Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola: the Mbundu and their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese, 1483-1790* (Oxford, 1966); K.Y. Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720: a Study of African Reaction to European Trade* (Oxford, 1970); Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, 1982); Phyllis M. Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast, 1576-1870: the Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango* (Oxford, 1972); Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Oxford, 1970). There are of course some exceptions to this general picture, and notably Robin Law has continued his research on early modern African history with works such as *The Slave Coast of West Africa 1550-1750: the Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford, 1991) following on from his earlier work *The Oyo Empire, c. 1600-c.1836: a West African Imperialism in the Era of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1977) and *The Horse in West African History: the Role of the Horse in the Societies of Pre-Colonial West Africa* (Oxford, 1980). Nevertheless, few historians of Africa would hold that the level of research on precolonial history and society is as extensive as it was 20 or 30 years ago.

⁵Havik, "Silences and Soundbytes," 17-18.

⁶A prime example of this is the respected Mediterranean historian David Abulafia's new book *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven, 2008), which gives over five pages to the African perspective on the early Atlantic as against, for instance, 56 to the settlement of the Canaries.

rather than through an understanding of the agency of African societies and an analysis of the effects of Atlantic forces on African societies.⁷ As Africanists have directed their attention towards the cultural contexts of the societies of the African Atlantic and Atlanticists to economic patterns of the wider Atlantic world, the opportunity to draw the broader outlines of the role and influence of an “African Atlantic” has been passed over.⁸

Such a vast subject cannot be comprehensively addressed in a single paper. Rather, my aim here is to illustrate the type of ideas and work which could result from a consistent engagement with an “African Atlantic.” How were new identities constructed in this space? What was the role of African exchanges in the wider Atlantic? Did the idea of “the Atlantic” itself mean anything to those who participated in it? These are the sorts of questions which may find an answer when we begin to examine the early modern African Atlantic and the issue of the emergence of Creole identity in Cabo Verde.⁹

The geographical focus of the paper is therefore on the Caboverdean archipelago. Situated some 500 kilometers from the northern coast of Senegal, and today composed of nine inhabited islands, this archipelago has been poorly served by historiography in general, particularly in English.¹⁰ And

⁷An egregious example of this is Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: the Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (London, 1997).

⁸The mechanism of this process is well discussed in Havik, “Silences and Soundbytes,” 17-18.

⁹It should be noted that these issues build substantially on the excellent work published by José da Silva Horta in this journal some years ago: José da Silva Horta, “Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in “Portuguese” Accounts on “Guinea of Cape Verde” (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)” *HA* 27(2000), 99-130. Also of note is Peter Mark’s *Portuguese Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington, 2002). These works show the importance of “Luso-African” identity to the region of Cabo Verde and Upper Guinea in the precolonial era. The issue of creolization in the context of Upper Guinea has recently been addressed by José Lingna Nafafé in *Colonial Encounters: Issues of Culture, Hybridity and Creolisation: Portuguese Mercantile Settlers in West Africa* (Frankfurt, 2007). My aim here is to build on the insights of these authors and to flesh out more fully their purport in the specific setting of Creole identity in Cabo Verde.

¹⁰Significant works in English on the islands’ formative early modern era is found in two unpublished PhD dissertations: Trevor P. Hall, “The Role of Cape Verde Islanders in Organizing and Operating Maritime Trade between West Africa and Iberian Territories, 1441-1616” (PhD., Johns Hopkins, 1992), and Tobias Green, “Masters of Difference: Creolization and the Jewish Presence in Cabo Verde, 1497-1672” (PhD., University of Birmingham, 2007). Some attempts have been made in recent years to address the lacunae in Portuguese with the publication of a general history of Cabo Verde: Luís de Albuquerque and Maria Emília Madeira Santos eds, *Historia Geral de Cabo* (3 vols.: Lisbon, 1991-2002).

yet it holds a pivotal place in Atlantic history, having served as something of a paradigm for subsequent trends: this was, after all, the first locale in the Atlantic where slaves were all drawn from sub-Saharan Africa, the site of the first European city in the tropics, and the capital of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to Spanish America for the first century of its existence.¹¹

Quite apart from these historiographical concerns, there are sound methodological reasons for beginning an approach to the idea of the African Atlantic through the prism of Cabo Verde. There are sufficient published and unpublished sources to construct a reasonably nuanced picture of Caboverdean society in these early centuries. Collected administrative documents are housed at the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino in Lisbon, and there are also some relevant documents from the Portuguese Inquisition housed at the Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais da Torre do Tombo, also in Lisbon. Meanwhile, many documents from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are available in António Brásio's published paleographic transcriptions from a variety of languages.¹²

Cabo Verde's centrality in early Atlantic trade networks shines through from these sources. One may look for instance at the case of the first Governor of the Province of Nuevo León in New Spain, Luis de Carvajal y la Cueva, who spent his formative childhood years in Cabo Verde serving in various official posts.¹³ Carvajal's uncle, Duarte de Leão, had traded in Upper Guinea before becoming factor of the Casa de Guiné in Lisbon.¹⁴ By the 1560s Leão had a network of contacts ranging from Cartagena de las Indias in modern Colombia to Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo.¹⁵

Such international connections were typical as Cabo Verde was pre-eminent in Atlantic trade. Throughout the middle third of the sixteenth century, Cabo Verde had all but a complete monopoly on the trans-Atlantic slave

¹¹For a more detailed discussion of the role of Cabo Verde in trans-Atlantic slavery see Green, "Masters of Difference," part 2, chapter 1. Hall, "Capeverdean Islanders," 637 makes the point on first black slaves. João Barreto makes the point on Ribeira Grande's being the first European city in the tropics in his *Historia da Guiné* (Lisbon, 1938), 67.

¹²*Monumenta Misionária Africana: África Ocidental: Segunda Série* ed. António Brásio (7 vols.: Lisbon, 1958-2004) (hereafter MMA).

¹³Toby Green, *Inquisition: the Reign of Fear* (London, 2007; New York, 2009), 88-96. Carvajal ended by being reconciled by the Inquisition of Mexico, dying in his inquisitorial cell in 1590. An excellent summary of the Carvajals tried by the Inquisition in Mexico is Martin A. Cohen, *Martyr: Luis de Carvajal, a Secret Jew in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (2d ed.: Albuquerque, 2001).

¹⁴Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon (hereafter IANTT), Inquisição de Évora, Processo 8779, folio 66v.

¹⁵Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon (hereafter BA), Códice 49-X-2, folios 243r-245r; Archivo General de las Indias, Seville (hereafter AGI), Escribanía 119A.

trade to Spanish America.¹⁶ The settlement at Luanda was not founded until 1575. Moreover, while in the early sixteenth century the volume of slaves exported from Kongo exceeded numbers from the Caboverdean region, this trade had largely been directed at the nascent sugar plantations on the island of São Tomé and demand in Portugal.¹⁷ By the middle of the sixteenth century the slave supply from the Kongo region was centered around maintaining the work force for the sugar plantations of São Tomé and in supplying slaves for the gold trade at Elmina.¹⁸

Thus for much of the sixteenth century few slaves from the Angola and Kongo regions went to Spanish America. One of the causes for this was the local demand in São Tomé, and another the fact that the distance from Cabo Verde to the American port of Cartagena was so much shorter than that from Mpindi in Kongo or Luanda in Angola. By 1556 the slaves from Cabo Verde were in such high demand in the Indies that a premium of 20 ducados was paid for each one in comparison to any brought from São Tomé.¹⁹

Yet if commercial considerations are the most immediately apparent elements to emerge from a cursory consideration of some of our sources, this is merely because this was what navigators in the Atlantic world cared most about at this time. Then as now money motivated adventurers. As we shall see in this paper, the commercial position of the Cabo Verde region in the trans-Atlantic trade in these years mattered not only to commerce: it was a central factor in the changing social and cultural framework of an insular identity in formation.

It was a crisis which first made this connection apparent. Between 1580 and 1610 a series of droughts struck Cabo Verde and overturned the archipelago's power structure. The mixed race Creole class became increasingly

¹⁶Thus between 1544 and 1550, of the 252 ships legally exporting slaves to the New World, 247 went via Cabo Verde; see Maria da Graça Mateus Ventura, *Negreiros Portugueses na Rota das Índias de Castela, 1541-1555* (Lisbon, 1999), 121-33. A distinct elucidation of this Caboverdean pre-eminence is in Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Stanford, 1974), 40-43. Bowser shows how over half of all the slaves imported from Africa to Peru between 1560 and 1650 came from the Senegambia and Guinea-Bissau regions, the area in which the corresponding trading ports of the Caboverdean merchants were located.

¹⁷Ivana Elbl, "The Volume of the Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450-1521" *JAH* 38(1997), 31-75, 55-63; Birmingham, "Trade and Conflict," 25.

¹⁸By 1530 Benin was refusing to trade in anything except female slaves for São Tomé; see A.F.C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897* (London, 1969), 68. Indeed, Benin was remarkably successful at eschewing trade in slaves with Europeans through the history of the Atlantic trade (see Miller, "Way of Death," 108). On the role of the trade in slaves to Elmina and the gold trade there, see John L. Vogt, *Portuguese Rule on the Gold Coast* (Athens, 1979), 58-59, 70.

¹⁹AGI, Indiferente 425, Libro 23, 231r.

powerful, as the prolonged ecological problems led to economic difficulties and the fragility of the export-centered island economy. As the extractive export economy moved further south along the West African coast, this Creole class became increasingly assertive and eventually came to be decisive in shaping the cultural identity of Cabo Verde.

It is in this context that the rise of Creole identity will be located in this paper. The Caboverdean case matters when we try to conceptualize an African Atlantic because it deals with a locale which held a certain pre-eminence in Atlantic trade, and where many of the qualities which later characterized Atlantic trade were concentrated at an unusually early period. In Cabo Verde assertion of Creole power and identity was intimately connected to wider patterns of power in the Atlantic world. And thus the case illustrates how a full understanding of “Atlantic history” requires this African dimension.

What emerges is that the construction of Creole identity in Cabo Verde involved conflict, stereotyping and the development of elites who sought to channel access to power along routes that they themselves controlled. It also occurred within the domain of an external economic and intellectual hegemony which inevitably constrained aspects of that emerging identity.

II

Although the Cabo Verde archipelago today consists of nine inhabited islands, its main population centers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were limited to just two, Santiago and Fogo.²⁰ The sixteenth century was the one in which the contours of the Atlantic trade took shape, and it coincided with the economic growth of this way-station in the slave trade. A 1572 census revealed that there were 1058 hearths on Santiago and 240 on Fogo.²¹ The average recorded number of people per hearth was 9.8, which would give an estimated population for the islands of 10368 for Santiago and 2352 for Fogo.²² This is not a vast population, but it is significant and it

²⁰By the end of the seventeenth century other islands were inhabited. Dampier was told that 100 families lived on São Nicolau in 1683: *A Collection of Voyages* (London, 1729), 1:75. He also described three small towns with a combined population of around 230 people on Maio in 1699 (*ibid.* 3:17, 20). There were further small populations on Boavista, Brava, and Santo Antão. These communities dated from the latter sixteenth century and had been settled by people from Santiago and Fogo; hence investigation into the origins of Creole identity are concentrated on these two islands in this paper.

²¹*MMA*, 3:28-53.

²²Such estimates are moreover broadly in keeping with Francisco de Andrade's better known estimates of 1582, which put the population of Santiago at around 12200 and of Fogo at 2300: *MMA* 3:99, 102.

must be born in mind that populations in general were far lower in the sixteenth century than they are today. This level of population was adequate enough to form certain cultural characteristics which would become the cornerstones of the islands' Creole identity.

This level of population and its racial composition changed rapidly however between the 1570s and the 1620s. Africans had been brought from Senegambia and Upper Guinea, with the loan-words from African languages in the Caboverdean Kriolu of Santiago deriving mainly from Mandinga, Wolof, and Temne.²³ Whereas at first the African population had been overwhelmingly servile to European slave masters, the series of droughts between 1580 and 1610 decimated the population in general and led to a terminal decline in its European component and to the nature of power and interracial relations. Whereas in 1582, the ratio of white Europeans to slaves was roughly 1:10 on Santiago (and therefore comparable to later ratios on the plantation islands of the Caribbean), from the 1620s onwards the administrators of the islands repeatedly lamented that there were barely two dozen white men to be found there.²⁴ It is in the after-effects of these changes precipitated by the 1580-1610 crisis that the roots of a newly assertive Creole identity in Cabo Verde can be found.

By 1620, the conditions which would determine the evolution of Creole identity over the coming half century were all substantially in place. A letter from the Jesuit mission on Santiago elucidates the social categories that had developed. The letter, from 1619, stated that the population of Santiago's principal city, Ribeira Grande, could be divided into 4 groups: mixed race Creoles, New Christians, clerics from Portugal, and Old Christians.²⁵ The letter is important as giving one of the earliest indications of the society's social structure, and revealing much as to the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in this nascent national identity.²⁶

The Jesuits implied that they had ordered the groups in their letter according to their number, for the Old Christians—who were the last mentioned category—were, they said, diminishing in number and influence, and being replaced by the Creoles, the first mentioned category.²⁷ By offsetting

²³Jean-Louis Rougé, "Apontamentos sobre o léxico de origem Africana dos crioulos da Guiné e de Cabo Verde (Santiago)" in K. Zimmerman ed., *Lenguas Criollas de Base Lexical Española y Portuguesa* (Vervuert, 1999), 61.

²⁴For the 1582 ratios see Andrade's census, *MMA*, 3:99, 102. For the ratio in eighteenth-century Jamaica, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York, 1974), 72.

²⁵*MMA*, 4:633.

²⁶António Carreira, *Documentos para a História das Ilhas de Cabo Verde e "Rios de Guiné" (Séculos XVII e XVIII)* (Lisbon, 1983), 72.

²⁷Nuno da Silva Gonçalves, *Os Jesuítas e a Missão de Cabo Verde (1604-1642)* (Lisbon, 1996), 226.

the mixed race Creoles against the other groups, the Jesuits expressed the reality of a society that was increasingly divided between the (overwhelming) majority Creoles and minority groups of European orientation (in which category all the other three groups fell).²⁸ On one level, therefore, this may have been the most important division on the islands; but as we shall now see, the way in which this boundary was itself articulated may have depended on one of the other boundaries alluded to here, that between Old and New Christians, a category which referred to a social divide which was of central importance to the evolution of society in Portugal in the early modern period, between those who did and did not have some Jewish ancestry.

A brief explication may be in order. In 1497 Manoel I had forced the conversion *en masse* of the vast majority of Portugal's Jewish population. In order to distinguish between those who had been forcibly converted and those who had always belonged to Christian families, the converts and their descendants were known in Portugal as *cristãos novos*, or New Christians, while everyone else was a *cristão velho*, or Old Christian. Those who were New Christians were barred from numerous careers and were under constant threat of investigation by the Portuguese tribunals of the Inquisition until the eighteenth century.²⁹

Thus what emerges from this letter of 1619 is that 122 years after the conversion of Jews, the boundary of exclusion in Portugal between Old and New Christians was perceived as of relevance in the Atlantic setting of Cabo Verde. Moreover, the existence of this borrowed boundary of exclusion from the Portuguese setting occurred within a locale and framework where discrimination on the basis of race had been incipient for some decades following Cabo Verde's role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As we shall now see, the disputes between Old and New Christians were not irrelevant to the racial connotations of the articulation of the new Creole identity. In Cabo Verde, boundaries of exclusion and prejudice were recombining in subtle and new forms.

At first sight, the situation may not appear to be as complex as this assertion suggests. Some historians have seen the Jesuit letter of 1619 as indicat-

²⁸Carreira, "Documentos," 72-73.

²⁹The classic accounts of the Jews in Portugal in the fifteenth century are Maria José Pimenta Ferro Tavares, *Os Judeus em Portugal no Século XV* (Lisbon, 1982) and the bigoted, but stubbornly illuminating, J. Lúcio d' Azevedo, *História dos Cristãos Novos Portugueses* (Lisbon, 1922). A revision of the interpretation of the forced conversion and its consequences is provided by José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, *Os Judeus na Expansão Portuguesa em Marrocos Durante o Século XVI: Origens e Atividades duma Comunidade* (Braga, 1997), 83-84.

ing hatred, or at least indifference, between the Old and New Christians on the island.³⁰ Yet perhaps what is of most interest is not the relationship between Old and New Christians, but the way in which, as we can explore in this essay, overlaps had developed between the perception of religion and the perception of race. What the evidence shows is that this Iberian boundary between Old and New Christians was indeed appropriated in Cabo Verde as the new Creole identity emerged, but that it interacted in a novel way with the other node of opposition revealed by the Jesuit letter, that between mixed race Creoles and others.

In order to conceptualize this complex relationship, there is not the scope here to undertake a detailed analysis of all Old/New Christian relations in Cabo Verde at this time.³¹ Instead the analysis will be grounded in a detailed case study, that of João Rodrigues Freire, a New Christian who lived on the islands from the 1620s through to the 1660s. There is much archival evidence on Freire, which makes his a useful particular case study from which, and drawing also on wider considerations, some general conclusions may be drawn. His status as an acknowledged New Christian on the archipelago is not entirely unknown to historians, but it has not been given the attention which it should have been, with the result that numerous central points that his case reveals as to emerging Creole identity have been missed.³²

Freire had first been denounced to the Inquisition in Lisbon for being a suspect New Christian in Cabo Verde in 1630.³³ A letter from the bishop of Cabo Verde to the inquisitors contained a hearing taken in Ribeira Grande on 30 July 1629, in which Freire was accused of numerous crimes: refusing to work on Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath; talking in public with his wife's uncle about keeping the Jewish Sabbath; swearing vehemently at the mention of an author who had written a book against the Jews and saying that the author's sister had slept with a goat; and holding others as his enemies because they were not New Christians like he was.³⁴ Also in the deposition sent by the bishop was a letter that Freire had tried to send to his brother-in-law, Francisco Nunez Barbossa, living in Pernambuco, Brazil, which

³⁰Carreira, "Documentos," 73.

³¹Those desiring such a study should consult Green, "Masters of Difference."

³²Freire's case is mentioned briefly in Zelinda Cohen, "A administração das Ilhas de Cabo Verde pós-União Ibérica: continuidades e rupturas," in Madeira Santos ed., *História Geral*, 3:87.

³³IANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 214, ff. 11r-14v. "Suspect" here indicates that Freire was held to be a secret Jew observing certain elements of the Jewish faith; as all the New Christians were baptized (Judaism being illegal in Portugal itself), this was heresy and hence fell within the province of the Inquisition.

³⁴*Ibid.*, ff. 13v-14r.

claimed that people in Cabo Verde were “in a worse condition than the baby Moses.”³⁵ At a time when the followers of the “Mosaic Law” were outcastes across the Iberian world, this was genuine evidence of Freire’s New Christian roots and of possibly heretical religious sympathies.

The denunciation to Lisbon had some effect for a time in Cabo Verde, as Freire was forced by the bishop to work in his goldsmith’s shop on Saturdays.³⁶ However, the Inquisition did not leap to impose strong punishment on Freire. It was not in its economic interest to do so.³⁷ This was in spite of the fact that, as the decades passed, denunciations of Freire’s Judaizing activities repeatedly reached the authorities in Lisbon, with complaints being sent in 1633, 1635, and 1641. In the last of these, Freire was accused of never working on a Saturday and of whipping a figure of Christ on the crucifix—a charge commonly leveled at secret Jews in Iberia and the Americas.³⁸ Nothing was done, however, and about 1655 witnesses still claimed to have seen Freire whipping a crucifix and burying it next to the door of his house.³⁹

The evidence from the archives of the Inquisition makes it plain then that Freire was widely known in Ribeira Grande for being a New Christian who kept true to some of the commandments of Judaism.⁴⁰ Yet as the seventeenth century unwound across the Atlantic, the Inquisition—and, indeed, the authorities in Cabo Verde—did nothing to arrest Freire’s activities. This becomes clear from despatches to the Conselho Ultramarino, the body in

³⁵Ibid, f. 11r.

³⁶IANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Processo 8626, f. 177v.

³⁷A fuller discussion of the way in which the overseas activities of the Portuguese Inquisition reveal the economic priorities of the institution can be read in Green, *Inquisition*, 159–61. One must nevertheless bear in mind the pioneering work of José Martínez Milán, *La Hacienda de la Inquisición, 1478–1700* (Madrid, 1984), which reveals how far the Spanish Tribunals usually ran at a loss. Thus while economic motivations may not be considered as sufficient to explain the formation of the tribunals, as Llorente originally suggested in the nineteenth century, they certainly played a role in some decisions made by the institution as the documentation cited in Green (above) makes clear.

³⁸IANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 217, ff. 475r, 479r; this last case is described at IANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 220, f. 352v.

³⁹IANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Processo 8626, ff. 166r, 168v.

⁴⁰For sound scholarship on the question of whether or not the New Christians of the Atlantic maintained elements of Jewish faith, see Jonathan I. Israel, *Diasporas within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World Maritime Empires, 1540–1740* (Leiden, 2002); and Nathan Wachtel, *La Foi du Souvenir: Labyrinthes Marranes* (Paris, 2001). Israel argues that the New Christians of the Atlantic were more faithful adherents to Judaism than is sometimes supposed—and the evidence on Freire would support this (Israel, *Diasporas*, 109–10). Wachtel’s overall argument is that the New Christian diaspora in the Atlantic relied more and more on memory of the faith of ancestors than on anything that could be termed true belief in Judaism.

Lisbon that administered Portugal's overseas territories. In 1656 the post of *escrivão da correição* (Scribe of the Local Registry) became free on the island of Santiago, and one of the applicants for the post was none other than João Rodrigues Freire.⁴¹

In his application Freire claimed that his father had held a position in the Royal household, and that he himself had served as the *escrivão do cunho da moeda* (Scribe of the Mint) on Cabo Verde.⁴² Thus in spite of the long-standing rumors about his background and faith, and the numerous adversaries he had on the islands whose animosity towards him is attested by the frequent denunciations to the Inquisition, Freire had been able to hold down a position of some authority in the islands.

Needless to say, Freire's old adversaries did not let his application for the new post go uncontested. They lost no time in writing to the Conselho Ultramarino and pointing out his unsuitability for a post of trust: Freire was of the "Hebrew nation and a brother of his was punished in an [Inquisitorial] *auto da fé* last year;" it was "public [that he belonged] to the [Hebrew] nation."⁴³

This was enough to prevent Freire from getting the post, but it did not halt his advance through Caboverdean bureaucracy. By 1663 he was the *escrivão dos contos do Almojarifado* (Scribe of the Accounts of the Royal Exchequer), one of the most important administrative posts on the archipelago.⁴⁴ Thirty-three years after first being denounced for being a secret Jew, Freire had reached a post of considerable influence, even though just seven years before Pedro Ferraz Barreto, then Governor, had written to say what an untrustworthy person Freire was.⁴⁵ None of this had stood in his way, something which itself says a great deal about the disjunction between Portugal's ideals as to the nature of this evolving society and the reality of Creole society as it developed in Cabo Verde.

III

The career of João Rodrigues Freire shows, therefore, that there was a disjunction between the theory and the practice of colonial administration in

⁴¹Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisboa (hereafter AHU), Cabo Verde, Caixa 5, doc. 36: note: all documents in the early *caixas* for Cabo Verde and Guiné in AHU lack folio numbers.

⁴²AHU, Cabo Verde, Caixa 5, doc. 84; this post had been instituted in 1654 - Álvaro Lereno, *Subsídios para a história da moeda em Cabo Verde, 1460-1940* (Lisbon, 1942), 20.

⁴³AHU, Cabo Verde, Caixa 5, doc. 36.

⁴⁴AHU, Cabo Verde, Caixa 5A, doc. 155.

⁴⁵AHU, Cabo Verde, Caixa 5, doc. 36.

Cabo Verde. Although the quality of *limpeça de sangue*—"purity of blood," that is, the absence of Jewish forebears—was desirable, it was not in practice a necessity. Yet, as also emerges from Freire's case, the question of purity of blood was a boundary which helped to establish categories of inclusion and exclusion on the archipelago during the seventeenth century. Thus the Caboverdean example can show us how ideas were changing in the period when Atlantic trade was in formation, and therefore can stand as an example of how studying African history through the prism of an "African Atlantic" can help to put some of its facets in sharper relief.

The Freire case illustrates this process in some detail. As we shall now see, it reveals how in the African Atlantic the concept of *limpeça* began to adopt a racialized connotation as boundaries between religion and race blurred. This blurring was perhaps testament to the "doubleness" of emergent Caboverdean identity, whereby Caboverdeans were inside and outside cultural worlds: both Portuguese and Caboverdean in the Guinea trade, both familiar and other, and thus able to perceive boundaries of exclusion through both the religious worldview of Portugal and the increasingly racialized world of the Atlantic.⁴⁶

To elucidate this process, we can return to Freire's application for the post of *escrivão da correição* in 1656. One of the other applicants for the post was Fernão Rodrigues da Silva. Silva claimed that he was "a resident of the Island of Santiago de Cabo Verde and one of the most noble people on that island and an Old Christian without any trace of the infected nations [sic]." He had been born on Santiago and had served in various official capacities, both in the administrative service and in times of war.⁴⁷ Although the evidence does not specify that da Silva was given the post, the inquiry by an official of the Conselho Ultramarino makes this likely. The official, Christovão de Melo e Silva, said that da Silva was a "man of dark color but they say that he is a man who works well; I did not know him except by sight but he seems to me to be the best of the applicants."⁴⁸

When we think about the way that religious and racial concerns were fusing in the formation of Creole identity, da Silva's deposition is important. Most significantly, it indicates the growing doubleness of identity referred to above as integral to evolving Creole self-perception. The emphasis he places on his Old Christian identity, his nobility, and the absence of New Christian blood in his genealogy shows that the binary opposition between Old and New Christians mattered to the elites of Cabo Verde, and,

⁴⁶On "doubleness" and "double identity" as a growing facet of Caboverdean identity, see Horta, "Luso-African Identity," 99-130, 112.

⁴⁷AHU, Cabo Verde, Caixa 5, doc. 35.

⁴⁸AHU, Cabo Verde, Caixa 5, doc. 36.

moreover, that members of the elites were well aware of one another's status as Old or New Christians, since da Silva was clearly aware that other applicants for the post were New Christians.⁴⁹ This tells us quite clearly that the category of New Christian was then deemed among the elite of Caboverdean society to be a potential category of exclusion.

But even more importantly, da Silva's understanding of what it meant to be an Old Christian showed a sophisticated understanding of the concept of *limpeça de sangue*, and, crucially, one that must have already been germinating for some time in Caboverdean society. For it clearly shows that da Silva was aware of the orthodox essence of *limpeça*—as something involving the absence in one's genealogy of ancestry from people of "impure" religions—even at a time when the concept was mutating in an ugly manner in the wider Atlantic world to embrace color as well as faith.

This consideration requires us to consider something of these wider Atlantic processes and emphasizes how the study of early modern Caboverdean history requires us to conceptualize an African Atlantic. For this alteration to the concept of *limpeça de sangue* was something that occurred across the Iberian world, with Portugal and Spain constituting a united empire between 1580 and 1640 and the mercantile classes of the two countries deeply interconnected throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Spain's American colonies, the seventeenth century saw the development of a system of caste purity known as the *sistema de castas*. People of mixed Amerindian and Spanish blood came to be known by terms which indicated the percentage of Spanish blood in their genealogy: a *tercerón* had a third non-Spanish blood, a *quarterón* had a quarter, and a *quinterón*, a fifth. This division of people according to the level of European ancestry which they possessed led to social and professional boundaries of exclusion being developed within colonial society in Latin America.⁵⁰

It is now acknowledged that this increasing racial differentiation stemmed in large part from the earlier religious differentiation between Old and New Christians in Iberian society.⁵¹ The development of the concept of

⁴⁹This was not just true of Freire; two other applicants for the post, Afanasio da Fonseca and Manoel da Serra, were said to be New Christians; *ibid*.

⁵⁰Juan Gil, *Los Conversos y la Inquisición Sevillana* (5 vols.: Seville, 2000-01), 3:37. The *sistema de castas* eventually unraveled in Latin America owing to the extent and variety of mestizaje; George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: a Short History* (Princeton, 2002), 40. However, its implementation coincided with the period under study in this paper, which suggests that analogous categories are at work.

⁵¹Gil, "Conversos y Inquisición," 3:37. See also Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2004), 201; and Fredrickson, "Racism," 40. "Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain is critical to the history of Western racism because its attitudes and practices served as a kind of segue between the religious intolerance of the Middle Ages and the naturalistic racism of the modern era." It is also to be hoped that

limpeça de sangue, with its emphasis on the slightest portion of “impure” Jewish or Moslem blood, paved the way for the transfer of this principle to perceived “racial” features, and was to find echoes not only in the *sistema de castas* but also in the “one-drop” rule of the American South in the nineteenth century, where the slightest African ancestry was deemed enough for an individual to be classified as non-white.⁵² The acceleration of this process with regard to religion had been apparent in Portugal from the late sixteenth century onwards. Inquisitorial documents spelt out whether an accused was a “half,” a “quarter,” an “eighth,” or even a “sixteenth” New Christian—formulae, it may be observed, very similar to those soon to be employed by the *sistema de castas*. The early development of the transference of this process to race in Iberia was facilitated by early participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and by Iberia’s important role in opening up international economies in the Atlantic world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

That this changing boundary of discrimination applied to the development of identity on Cabo Verde at this time is demonstrated by a vital document. This is a petition from certain residents of Santiago dating from 1627, asking that those who are born on the island without the blood of Africans should not be known as “neophytes.” The petitioners claim that “it does not seem that those who are born of clean whites can be called Neophytes, that is New Christians, nor the descendants of such, and that this term applies to those who in some way descend from black people.”⁵³

This petition can tell us much about society on Santiago at this time. It implies that the petitioners were themselves New Christians [i.e., descendants of converted Jews] who were trying to improve their social status by transferring this epithet to the “others” around them. It therefore points to the growing doubleness of Creole identity on Cabo Verde in these years, as these were people who both recognized their New Christian identity in an Atlantic context and yet tried to shun it in a Caboverdean context.⁵⁴ Moreover, in the context of the Freire case, the petition dates from just two years before the first denunciation of João Rodrigues Freire to the Inquisition. Clearly, then, this was a moment of tension between different categories of people in Cabo Verde, and the tensions found expression in these competing ideas about what was an appropriate boundary of exclusion, race (according to the 1627 petition) or religion (according to those who denounced Freire).

understanding of this process may be deepened by Francisco Bethencourt’s history of race in the Atlantic world, (forthcoming: Cambridge, 2009).

⁵²On the “one-drop rule” see Juan Comas, *Racial Myths* (Paris, 1951), 21.

⁵³*MMA*, 4:198-99.

⁵⁴On the importance of New Christian identity in the Atlantic context for these people in Cabo Verde in these years, see Green, “Masters of Difference,” part 3.

The petitioners of 1627 were trying to reconfigure the boundary of exclusion to include those who had African ancestry, that is, the vast majority of the Caboverdean population. Ideas of doubleness, race, and religion which had gathered together on Cabo Verde in these years were at a key moment of flux.

With these important social conditions in mind, we may return to the language of the petition used by Fernão Rodrigues da Silva for the post of *escrivão da correição* in 1656 in his competition with João Rodrigues Freire. It is important to recall that da Silva was a Creole emphasizing his nobility and his status as an Old Christian. It is clear that this is a modulated form of the use of *limpeça* to that employed by the petitioners just discussed, who sought to ally the term to color. Da Silva's use of the term, by contrast, referred only to religion.

This might suggest that this was the generally accepted use of *limpeça* to create boundaries and exclusion among Caboverdean Creoles. We can bolster this idea with examples of other cases which support the general conclusions we have drawn so far from the Freire/da Silva case. There is for example the inquisitorial inquiry made about the priest Luis Rodrigues for various excesses. Rodrigues claimed that two of his accusers, the brothers Belchior Monteiro and Domingos Viegas, were his enemies "because of various arguments that he had had with them after he called them New Christians."⁵⁵ Yet when the same brothers were accused of launching an insurrection in 1664, the report to Lisbon mentioned only the fact that they were mulattos, which was presumably deemed by the author then to be more reprehensible in the eyes of the metropole.⁵⁶ That this situation constituted a change from the situation in the sixteenth century, and therefore provides evidence of changes in self-perception can be seen from the fact that throughout the mid-sixteenth century Caboverdeans wishing to cast slurs on their neighbors accused them of being New Christians rather than of being of mixed race.⁵⁷

By the seventeenth century, in contrast, while in Cabo Verde accusing two people of being a New Christian was said by Rodrigues to be enough to gain their enmity, informing Lisbon that the same people were of mixed racial origins was now more likely to prejudice their case. It is clear both that there was a blurring of these boundaries of distinction and also that Cre-

⁵⁵IAN/TT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 239, f. 89r.

⁵⁶AHU, Cabo Verde, Caixa 5A, doc. 186.

⁵⁷There are very many examples of this. To name but two, we can cite the accusation of Pero Moniz of protecting New Christians in 1546, and the accusation of Diogo Barassa to the State in 1559 for abusing his position. See Green, "Masters of Difference," 82-83, 111.

oles in Cabo Verde were developing sufficient flexibility and doubleness in their new identity to integrate both the religious and racial categories of exclusion into their social awareness.

Through this node of the opposition between Old and New Christians, and the way in which its use changed in Cabo Verde in contrast to the metropole, we can see that a distinct Creole identity was in the process of being formed, in which ideas of race and religion, and the facility to have a doubleness of understanding which incorporated both, were key. This is of course not to say that these were the only attitudes to Creole identity and *limpeça* in Cabo Verde at this time, since, as Newitt points out, what often emerged were “conflicting and interacting attitudes to identity . . . issues of race, religion and identity [remaining] in a state of permanent dialectic with one another.”⁵⁸ However, it is to say that, at least in some quarters in Cabo Verde at this time, these attitudes defined themselves outside the boundaries of exclusion then developing acceptance in Iberia, retaining in fact the original meaning of *limpeça de sangue*, proof that the form of identity developing in Cabo Verde at this time was distinct to that of the metropole.

IV

The fact that there were distinct understandings of what constituted “pure” and “impure” categories in Cabo Verde, distinct from those recognized in the metropole should not be altogether surprising. Cultural and social realities on the ground were, of course, vastly different in Santiago than those in Lisbon, and this was of course a situation which pertained to the African Atlantic as a whole. Nevertheless, the confirmation that ideas on this issue were different in Cabo Verde confirms that a distinct social consciousness was forming there, and that we are not projecting too much of present attitudes into the past when we talk about something like “Creole identity.”

In order to interrogate this process, it is worth pausing to reflect on the language used by Fernão Rodrigues da Silva in his 1656 petition. The fact that, as da Silva’s petition shows, the boundary between Old and New Christians retained its religious connotations among Creoles without immediately absorbing the racial ones found elsewhere in the Iberian world at this time suggests at least that it is worth inquiring into the importance of religion in the development of Creole society in Cabo Verde.

The evidence which we will examine here may suggest that the unique role of the Catholic religion on the archipelago explains the longevity of the strictly religious meaning of *limpeça* in some quarters. However, this

⁵⁸Malyn Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668* (Abingdon, 2005), 257.

unique role fell within a wider context, whereby Catholicism was also a means of creating boundaries and subordinating a large majority of the population. Thus although the Creole identity which emerged was substantially autonomous from Iberian identity, it developed within the wider parameters of boundaries by which Lisbon sought to rein in the autonomy of Caboverdeans. In other words, religion was the hegemonic arm of Portuguese power in the islands, a religion then appropriated by Creoles in their own struggles to form an autonomous ideology.

The term “hegemony” is used carefully here. Antonio Gramsci, the patriarch of hegemonic discourses, himself described the church as a “so-called private organization” and one that thereby was encompassed by civil society, thus gaining influence through hegemony.⁵⁹ What enabled Christianity to exemplify this process in Cabo Verde in the period under discussion is that the Catholic religion had a central ideological role with regard to slavery in a situation where slavery was essential to the wealth of the islands’ growing Creole oligarchy.

The slaves obtained on the coast of Upper Guinea were in the sixteenth century taken first to Cabo Verde where they were baptized and received into the Catholic faith. A decree of 1514 ordered all slaveowners to try to ensure that their slaves were baptized and converted within six months of taking ownership of them.⁶⁰ Although slaves did have the right to resist this conversion, they were then subjected to severe pressure from the priors and priests of their parish.⁶¹ There can be no doubt from this decree that slaves who did not convert were likely to be seen as recalcitrant and suspect. Conversion equalled acceptance of the ideology by which the person had been enslaved in the first place, for under this ideology, slavery was deemed a noble action, as the infidel were being saved from damnation, and Catholicism on Cabo Verde was thus a central act in the moral legitimization of the slave trade, and thus also of the entire social structure which grew up with the new Creole society on the islands.

In the early period of the development of the trade then, the ideological role of Catholicism in the Cabo Verde archipelago facilitated a means by which slavery, and slave modes of production, could be developed and widely accepted under conditions of the prevailing morality. As Cabo Verde was as we have seen the heart of the trans-Atlantic slave trade until the seventeenth century, for the first century or more of the islands’ settlement the Catholic religion had a peculiarly central role in legitimating the social and

⁵⁹Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci” *New Left Review* 100(1976/77), 22.

⁶⁰*MMA*, 2: 69.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

economic life on the archipelago, and thereby in replicating, and instilling, metropolitan values in a Caboverdean context.

While of course, for the majority of the population of the islands the benefits of the slave trade and the consequent evangelization in Santiago were questionable to say the least, evidently for the elite in Ribeira Grande this was not the case. It would seem therefore that Catholicism was an essential part of identity among the Creole elite on Santiago, since Catholicism legitimated their position within a society where slavery had been of such importance.

Perhaps it is within this context that the enduring presence of an essentially religious meaning of *limpeça de sangue*, such as that used by Fernão Rodrigues da Silva in his petition of 1656, should be seen. This can suggest that the specific role of the intersection of religion with slavery and the slave trade in the vital first century of the settled history of the Cabo Verde archipelago was crucial in the formation of Creole identity, and in the boundaries which this identity subsequently defined within the islands' elite. In the early modern world, where religious and cultural identities were difficult—if not impossible—to separate, this may not seem surprising; but in a wider Atlantic environment where vectors of discrimination were increasingly channeled through race and not religion, it is worthy of note.

The assertion of Creole identity that we have been tracing here emerges not only from the different meanings of *limpeça de sangue* which have emerged in this paper, but also through other linguistic evidence. In classical theories of creolization, the moment when the hybrid language becomes a vernacular is a crucial one in the formation of cultural identities.⁶² It is clear that something of this process was occurring at this time in Caboverdean space. While a form of basic creolized Portuguese may have emerged earlier as a form of trading language, specialists in the history of the Caboverdean *kriolu* language place its emergence as a vernacular form of language at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁶³ Although in 1635 a French visitor to the Guinea coast said that the Africans there still spoke Portuguese (rather than *kriolu*), this was a time of change.⁶⁴ By 1647 a visitor to the same area said that the Africans spoke “half Portuguese.”⁶⁵ And in 1666 another visitor referred to this as a “corrupt form of Portuguese.”⁶⁶

⁶²Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth Century Mauritius* (Durham, 2005), 208.

⁶³Nicolas Quint, *Le Cap-Verdien: origines et devenir d'une langue métisse* (Paris, 2000), 19.

⁶⁴Jean Boulègue, *Les Luso-Africains de la Sénégambie: XVIe-XIXe siècle* (Dakar, 1972), 49.

⁶⁵*MMA*, 4:492.

⁶⁶Boulègue, “Luso-Africains,” 49.

The role of the development of an autonomous vernacular language in the formation of national identity was persuasively championed by Anderson, and it would seem that the case of Cabo Verde supports his thesis.⁶⁷ The fact that different conceptual and ideological frameworks were emerging in the first half of the seventeenth century on Cabo Verde at a time when the *Kriolu* language was also being articulated as a vernacular is a persuasive argument that the two phenomena were connected. That language itself was seen by Iberian contemporaries as a crucial aspect of nationhood is revealed by the Jesuit missionary Balthasar Barreira, in his description of the Mandingas of Gambia in 1606, where he wrote that “this nation of the Mandingas which borders with the Berbecins [Serers] has multiple kingdoms, where all speak the same language and have the same law and customs.”⁶⁸ The unity of language is the first attribute of nationhood referred to by Barreira here, which stresses its perceived importance.

One may see then, that in Cabo Verde linguistic and religious considerations coincided in the formation of Creole identity in the seventeenth century and emphasize that this was a new identity in the process of formation. While these influences are to be expected, what is unexpected in the Caboverdean case is how the particular local conditions shaped the modes by which these influences recombined in the Creole class. In particular, Cabo Verde’s role in the early trans-Atlantic slave trade should not be underestimated as influencing both the role of religion in Creole identity, and the early adoption of a vernacular Creole language which had developed by way of trading connections on the African coast. Not for nothing have creolists seen slavery and Creole society as inextricably linked; or, as the Cuban writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo put it, “the certainty about creolization is that it inevitably refers to the plantation.”⁶⁹

Thus, although the Creole identity that emerged was autonomous, key aspects of it were themselves circumscribed by the hegemony of Portugal’s institutions both through the economic realities of the slave trade and through the ideological realities of the Portuguese religion. Thus if the Caboverdean Creole identity implied freedom in one direction, it also implied subalternity in the other.

⁶⁷Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (2d ed.: London, 1991), 12–18.

⁶⁸Guy Thilmans and Nize Izabel de Moraes, eds., “*La Description de la Côte de Guinée du Père Balthasar Barreira (1606)*” *BIFAN* 34B, 29.

⁶⁹Antonio Benítez-Rojo, “Three Words Towards Creolization” in Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnès Soireau, eds., *Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity* (Gainesville, 1998), 56.

V

We are left, then, with several distinct oppositions which served to create boundaries within Caboverdean society in the seventeenth century as that society took the shape which was to characterize its future development following the droughts of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These boundaries existed along the faultlines of religion, "race," and hegemonic struggles—struggles that encapsulated something of the ideological ambience of both Cabo Verde and the wider African Atlantic in the first centuries of its formation. In the final part of this paper, we will see that these oppositions may best be understood as spheres of influence which occasionally intersected, but each of which also operated separately and in its own right.

For example, João Rodrigues Freire fell on the wrong side of the *limpeça* boundaries created by both Portuguese Old Christians and the Creole elite, yet attained a position of administrative influence in Cabo Verde. As the Inquisition in Portugal acted severely with regard to New Christians, this combination of circumstances must mean that the power of Old Christians in Cabo Verde to enforce their imported categories of exclusion was severely limited in this part of the African Atlantic. Had they been able to enforce these categories, they would have done so, but Freire's steady progress in Cabo Verde shows that they could not. Thus, the first conclusion to draw is that Portugal's power to shape Caboverdean society through force was in fact negligible, a conclusion that is reinforced by the numerous letters to the Conselho Ultramarino detailing how the governors were unable to impose their wills on the islands.

This shows that the ideology and identity which emerged on the islands in these years was distinctively Caboverdean, and not dependent on the metropole. Moreover, to make a second point, the inability of Portugal to enforce its own boundaries extended to the fact that the new use of *limpeça* to impose racial boundaries in the Atlantic world in the seventeenth century appears to have had little impact in Cabo Verde.

It would seem, to draw a third conclusion, that in this emerging Creole culture, the boundary between Old and New Christians was more potential than actual, and related to specific occupations. Freire was not barred from positions involving financial authority—which both stereotype and the consequence of stereotype saw the New Christians as excelling at—but where official posts and representations to Lisbon were involved, members of the Creole elite knew exactly which buttons of prejudice to press in order to secure the outcome they desired. Creole identity in Cabo Verde thus simultaneously absorbed the realities of metropolitan values and rejected them, a

rejection which was made possible by the growing power of the Creole class on Santiago.

What emerges most strongly is that, when thinking about emerging Creole identity in the seventeenth century, we come up increasingly against questions of perception. Who was, or was not, perceived to be an Old or New Christian, or more or less European, mattered in different degrees to different people and according to their different points of view. Thus though the English privateer William Dampier, arriving on the island of São Nicolau in 1683, declared that “they were all very swarthy; the Governor was the clearest of them, yet of a dark tawny complexion,” thereby implying a link between color and nobility in Caboverdean society, it is entirely possible that this is just a reflection of his perception of color and its role in hierarchies of authority.⁷⁰ We know, for instance, that Jews in Europe were frequently referred to as black in the late seventeenth century—that is, during precisely the same period that Dampier visited the archipelago—something which today we would ascribe to perception and preconception rather than to fact.⁷¹

Whatever the role of perception in shaping the racial boundaries of society, however, it is also clear that it was the Creole sphere of influence that was decisive in shaping emerging tropes of Caboverdean national identity. While visitors may have perceived color as a defining feature, within Creole identity things were not so clearcut. While the prevailing ideology of Portugal would usually have barred men like Freire from official positions, this did not bar them from such positions in Cabo Verde if it was felt that their presence might be useful.⁷² And while the Portuguese in Ribeira Grande may have trumpeted their nobility as “whites,” this was ignored within the categories of *limpeça* developed by Creole—that is, by the population at large.

When we come to think about the influence of these events in wider Atlantic discourses, we should not underestimate them. Cabo Verde was the first locale in the Atlantic world where a Creole society developed, and the adjacent African coast saw the first use of the term “Creole” in a linguistic sense, by Jajolet de la Courbe in 1685.⁷³ Moreover the influence of the creolist theory of monogenesis, which suggests that all Atlantic Creole languages derive from that developed in the African Atlantic in these years,

⁷⁰*Collection of Voyages*, 1:75.

⁷¹Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 179-81.

⁷²Although one must note that the exclusions required by the doctrine of *limpeça* were not uniformly applied in Portugal either, and that there were always exceptions; see Fredrickson, 34.

⁷³John Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles* (2 vols.: Cambridge, 1988), 1:15.

reminds us of the specific importance of the Caboverdean region to the trajectory of Creole languages and societies in the Atlantic world.⁷⁴ In recent years specialists have begun to show that Caboverdean kriolu bears so many syntactical and semantic similarities to the Papiamentu spoken in Curaçao that this cannot be accidental.⁷⁵ It may well be, in short, that the social and cultural contexts of the articulation of Creole identity in Cabo Verde were fundamentally related to and perhaps a necessary if not sufficient cause of subsequent developments elsewhere in the Atlantic world.

This conclusion emphasises the importance both of bringing the study of the African Atlantic more fully into Atlantic history and also of how the concept of Atlantic history can help us to understand more fully nuances of historical processes on the African coast. To answer some of the questions posed at the start of this paper, African exchanges were essential to wider Atlantic discourses and ideas, and the ways in which identities were articulated in the African Atlantic were fundamentally connected to the particular historical contexts in which they emerged, both African and Atlantic.

In Cabo Verde, as we have seen, the consequence of all this was the creation of a distinctive and autonomous identity in the early seventeenth century, as society changed fundamentally with the exodus of Europeans following periods of drought. Yet at the same time, while Portugal could not impose its ideological vision through force thereafter, its ideas did trickle into Creole identity. The very existence of the concept of *limpeça*, in whatever form, is evidence enough of this. More soberingly, the Caboverdean concept of *limpeça* as specifically religious, springing, as has been argued, from the Catholic church's early ideological role in the slave trade, reveals the extent to which emerging Creole identity was circumscribed by external ideologies. While the idea of the "Atlantic" as a space perhaps meant little to Cabo Verde, its people could not so readily escape the ideologies being formulated in this wider world. Thus the "African Atlantic," in Cabo Verde, reveals a curious tension between autonomy and rejection of the metropole on the one hand, and a wider ideological dependence on it on the other.

Perhaps this conclusion elucidates the importance of defining a space of the "African Atlantic" and of locating precolonial African polities within it. For the external and violent features which had defined the formation of Caboverdean society also defined the nature of the struggle that Caboverdeans would have to fight to forge an identity outside these early

⁷⁴Ibid., 1:46-52.

⁷⁵Quint, "Cap-Verdien," 119-96. See also the recent work of Bart Jacobs, "Los fundamentos Afro Portugueses del Papiamentu: una comparación lingüística entre el Papiamentu y el Criollo Caboverdeiano de Santiago," (M.A. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2008; unpublished MA dissertation).

conditions. Projected ideas from elsewhere in the Atlantic world were reshaped and modulated, but it would be hard to eradicate them. The economic and ideological systems imposed first by domination and then by hegemony in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries created an atmosphere in which this identity would have to fight hard to escape the boundaries which had been arbitrarily imposed. Nevertheless, the act of rejection of these ideas, autonomy of linguistic expression and the overcoming of Portugal's power to impose a direction to Caboverdean society were decisive steps, and not ones to be taken lightly even today, in the ongoing process of forging nationhood and viable independent economies in the twenty-first century.