THROUGH A LOOKING GLASS: REFLECTED EXPERIENCE IN SÃO TOMÉ AND PRINCIPÉ
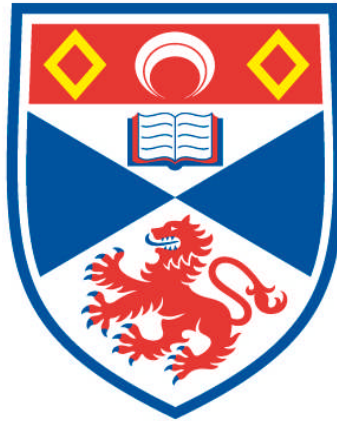
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at the
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Through a looking glass: reflected experience in *São Tomé and Principé*

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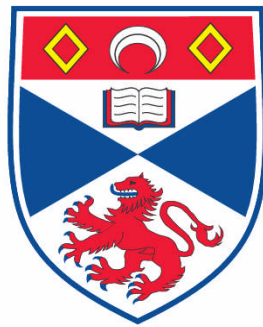
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at the
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28 January, 2013.

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abstract

The thesis sets out to examine how signfiicant experience is sought recognised and communicated in *São Tomé* and *Principé*. It notes the outcomes that are frequently searched for and describes the 'location' of significant experience in social interaction. It finds that experience which is personalised, qualitative and direct is preferred to that which is thought about. It describes how people adopt strategies that will result in achieving desired outcomes in social responses and material security and it notes that assertions made to achieve these ends can be seen to be associated with conditions of material life lived and utilise signs that reflect social differences locally and globally. It notes that material differences observed can be explained in social terms and social differences can be formed through showing material differences.

The study examines ways in which the physical properties of the island and the cultural artifacts still present from the past have an ongoing influence in forming the content, timing and quality of personal and social actions. It notes how the development of personal social connections are associated with material obligations and both how social connections can be developed for this end and how material obligations can confirm social connections.

The study notes the seeming inevitability of interaction to form personal social connections and the need thus for maintenance of 'social distance' to enable impersonal commercial monetised exchange to occur. It notes how such distance can be normatively asserted on others and how some utilise an awareness of such social 'architecture' to form obligations from which they may gain materially.

The study found that many people have clear and well formed ideas as to the qualities and interests of foreigners. Yet foreigners can also be

evaluated by the signs and actions they show. The study concludes that an 'architecture' of significant experience exists for many in the *reflected recognition* of others and that much importance is placed in particular personalised social relations. The important economic consequences of this is briefly outlined.

Note:
[The names used in this thesis are fictional to protect the anonymity of those described.]

Contents:

Chapter 1

Introduction to São Tomé and Principé

The man was standing by the side of the road bare chested and sweating from his labours clearing a field of vegetation. Small fires were burning sending up smoke into the pure blue sky broken only by some light clouds and a breeze that rustled the tree tops. He was planting pineapples, he said, showing me the ones that had "beards." He stroked with a finger the collection of small fine roots that hung from the base of the fruit he was proposing to plant. "Like mine," he explained rubbing the stubble beneath his chin grinning.

It was hot and I knew this conversation was leading somewhere for people did not stop and talk to you like this in this way for no reason. He must have noticed my caution and wariness for he continued rapidly with a discussion about how pineapples are planted and how he was removing the weeds and piling dried grass up in large bundles against the trees. It was these that were burning strongly scorching the tree sides. They would, he explained, mean that the tree defoliated and thus let in more light which was needed for the pineapples growing underneath them. Finally, he stopped and turning towards me brought the conversation to a focus. Did I have a cigarette I

could give him, he asked. I explained I did not smoke and thus had none. He sighed but quickly took control of himself. "It's okay," he said hurriedly. "It's okay." He returned to the field and carried on working. Maybe he added, I could give him some money so that he could buy one himself.

On arriving in São Tomé..

I had arrived in *São Tomé* for the first time in December 2009 and after some four months travelled to *Principé*. It was there by a roadside in the west of the island that I had met the man planting pineapples as I walked back to a small *roça* (plantation) where I was staying at the time. I had read of the history of the islands and that the social divisions of colonial life were marked, and at times conflictual, that they were a product of economic and political forces that derived from elsewhere and that whilst much had changed since Independence I believed that much would still also be present, and thus as I rode in a taxi from the airport for the first time, it was with ideas of investigating contemporary *São Tomé* and *Principé's* social structures.

"We are all *São Toméans* now," though claimed one taxi driver some weeks later, after I had talked about some of the divisions that had marked the past. His assertion was more an aspirational statement than a wholly real one, I was to discover, for whilst the taxi driver was right that many of the social distinctions of the past were of categories that no longer existed - the economic and social reasons disappearing along with colonial plantation life - other distinctions remained or were forming that had some 'meaning' to those living on the island at the time of my visit there. These might be ethnic, linguistic or denoted ways of life (and consequential income distinctions) that were noted and talked about.

Yet whilst such differences were still of undoubted importance their significance had clearly changed since colonial times. It was this change in importance to an era when people from different groups mixed and could mix that had brought the taxi driver's large smile. For whilst his assertion was more aspirational than wholly true it was also dismissive. He was de-emphasising their significance. If such categories were no

longer people's prime focus what was I wondered and it was this that I decided to seek out in *São Tomé* and *Principé*.

I had not had to wait long to find out what it *might be* for on my first day on the island of *São Tomé,* a man crossed the street to lecture me about my responses – or lack of them – to him and his companions, who had been calling out to me. Yet whilst he was energetic, passionate and urgent in his pleas and berating, I still might not have taken this as a focus of study to be recorded, but treated it as a one-off, had it not recurred in different forms many more times in the expectations and responses of other people who were also interested in receiving a response to an assertion made and *of a particular kind.* I thus began to record all such interactions and noted any patterns that emerged from them.

A particular question asked...

My fieldwork became then a search not just for *what* was important to people in *São Tomé* and *Principé,* but for *how* this was constituted; for how people would strive, strategise and plan, for how and where they

would position themselves and for what resulted in despondency and consternation when it was not obtained and to a broad smile and nod of satisfaction when it was. I noted what comparisons people deemed to be valid and which actions were seen as appropriate. I became gradually aware of which strategies and social presentations were approved of and which were not and of how the social world was subject to an interpretation that had emerged from the specifics of *São Tomé* and *Principé's* history and contemporary circumstances. Of how there was an interpretation of the physical world as well and of how people would see themselves and others in it.

It became apparent that there existed a perspective in which a particular view and evaluation of the world and the person in it was being sought. I noticed that despite this there existed differing interpretations and that some would value some things more than others did. That social obligations and responsibilities would often be variously and at times conflictually interpreted. That people would dispute what was appropriate and what was owed. Yet there existed also much agreement

and in the disputes people would frequently refer to ideas that were held by nearly everyone.

There existed thus an 'architecture' to people's experience. It was not a fixed architecture, but one that flowed and reproduced itself in the ongoing patterns of social interaction. Yet its structure was at times remarkably consistent if also differently interpreted. People would refer to the same explanations and justifications despite their obvious differing conclusions.

Walking to the main coast road one day from a small restaurant that was in the grounds of a hotel near the village of *Santana*, I came to the gates where two men were acting as guards. Nearby stood a bus, engine running and filling with staff from the hotel. It was about to return to the capital. As this was where I was heading I asked the men if the bus might take me. The answers were telling. The older man shook his head. "The bus," he explained, "is for staff only. It does not take visitors." The younger man disagreed. "Ask the driver," he said. "If he agrees. There is

no problem. He can take you." The older man vehemently disagreed with this. "No," he explained. "It is only for staff." The younger man thought about this before replying. "The matter is for the driver. If he is okay with it then there is no problem."

Such differences in viewpoint were common, yet people would refer to assertions and specifics that they believed were beyond dispute. In this case, the younger man had referred to the driver's personal preferences and his role as being in charge of the vehicle as taking priority, but for the older man there was a 'larger' role of the group of people to which travelling in the bus was appropriate. Neither viewpoint was wrong. I had heard both asserted by many people before. The discussion was which had priority *in this case.* The argument became quite heated and I explained I would walk to the road and await a public taxi. As I walked away and up the hill I could hear the animated discussion continuing as the men continued the discussion as to which view was correct.

Along with the sense of what was right and appropriate, there existed an evaluation of others actions, and people could debate at length the rights or wrongs of these. Lying in my small room one night I heard a discussion going on outside as a neighbour lamented the way someone had treated her. She seemed inconsolable and someone else was trying to comfort her without much success. I would overhear such discussions being made by taxi drivers, street traders and occasionally couples.

Collins writes in an article how the Durkheimian tradition of 'sociological theory' "...proposes social reality is at its core a moral reality. Society is held together by feelings of right and wrong, emotional sentiments that impel people towards certain actions, and into righteous revulsion against certain others" (Collins 1988:44). People could at times express such views assertively and at length as I had discovered. Social life was thus often both vocal and lively.

Such asserting and responding to the assertions was discussed by Mead, who gives as an example two dogs involved in a dog fight, noting that

"The act of each dog becomes the stimulus to the other dog for his response. There is then a relationship between these two; and as the act is responded to by the other dog, it, in turn, undergoes change" (Mead 1934:42-43). The two dogs are thus engaged in a social process. As Mead states it, "The very fact that the dog is ready to attack another becomes a stimulus to the other dog to change his own position or his own attitude" (Mead 1934:43). The two interact and this occurs repeatedly in an ongoing manner, each response changing the other's. Mead notes that Wundt isolated the gesture as "that part of the social act which serves as a stimulus to other forms involved in the same social act" (Mead 1934:42). Yet Mead distinguishes between gestures that simply 'call out' a response from the other by expressing an attitude of the person making them and ones that act as significant symbols for they have an idea behind them. Mead gives as an example someone shaking a fist at another arguing that the gesture expresses more than an attitude but also an idea (Mead 1934:45). Moreover such ideas have the capability to arouse in those making them the same attitudes as they do, or are intended to do, in those to whom they are addressed. In such

circumstances the gestures are, according to Mead, "significant

symbols"(Mead 1934:47) and by 'calling out' the same attitude in the

person making the gesture as it does in the person to whom it is directed

enables the presenter to become aware of how they are experienced by

another and thus of their self as 'object'.

Mead argues that "..the conscious or significant conversation of gestures

is a much more adequate and effective mechanism of mutual adjustment

within the social act – involving, as it does, the taking, by each of the

individuals carrying it on, of the attitudes of the others towards himself –

than is the unconscious or non-significant conversation of gestures"

(Mead 1934:46). Significant conversation of gestures as ideas

communicated are different from mere responses to stimuli for the ideas

they represent indicate more than the social processes in which they are

presented and it is this which makes them, in Mead's terms 'objects'. As

Blumer describes it "..to indicate something is to extricate it from its

setting, to hold it apart, to give it a meaning or, in Mead's language to

make it an object. An object – that is to say, anything that an individual

indicates to himself - is different from a stimulus; instead of having an intrinsic character which acts on the individual and which can be identified apart from the individual, its character or meaning is conferred on it by the individual" (Blumer 1969:80).

As Bakhtin puts it, "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions, it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents is a difficult and complicated process...." (Bakhtin 1981:77).

As a sign shown symbols represent something and it is through the recognition of this by another that the idea, which is also what the symbol 'means', is communicated arousing in the other, as well as in the person presenting it, the attitude hoped for. Its appropriation by the person makes its use synonymous with their intentions. It acts as 'language' and whilst separate from the immediate ongoing social process in its origin, acts to form them in effect, enabling such signs to 'describe'

social relations. The importance of this dialogical process was noted by Bakhtin. Holmquist, writing about Bakhtin's work, notes, "I get my self from the other: it is only the other's categories that will let me be an object for my own perception. I see my self as I conceive others might see it" (Holmquist 1990:28).

As Jackson argues "Language articulates social relationship more than it expresses information and ideas. And agency is not so much self-expression as self-restraint tied to an ability to foster mutually beneficial alighments within a wide field of social and extrasocial relations" (Jackson 1998:12). Moreover as Mead points out "The self, as that which can be object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience. After a self has arisen, it in a certain sense provides for itself its social experiences, and so we can conceive of a self arising outside of social experience" (Mead 1934:140).

Yet if self is a social experience, at least in its origins, so perhaps more overtly is language. "Observes Thomas Luckmann, learning a language

"presupposes and, in a sense, 'repeats' the idealizations and the processes of intersubjective 'mirroring' which are predisposed in the constitution of language" (Luckmann 1972, 488). Language "arises out of social experience" (Hanks 1990, 44); it extends and augments modes of *social* interaction and interexperience which are *already in place* (Edwards 1978, 451)" (Jackson 1998:11).

Jackson argues that ethnography "corroborates Merleau-Ponty's understanding of sociality. We understand others, he observes, not through cognition and intellectual interpretation but through "blind recognition" of reciprocal gestures, common metaphors, parallel images and shared intentions (Merleau-Ponty 1962:185-86)" (Jackson 1998:12).

Understanding is thus there *before* language 'emerges' as another form of communication. It utilises symbols that are 'significant' as, in Mead's terms, they are 'objects' and thus potentially separate from the social processes themselves. Mead goes further though arguing that only "in terms of gestures as significant symbols is the existence of mind or

intelligence possible, for only in terms of gestures which are significant

symbols can thinking – which is simply an internalized or implicit

conversation of the individual with himself by means of such gestures –

take place" (Mead 1934:47). Thinking, an awareness of self and language

all emerge from and are secondary to the social processes of interaction

in which understanding, in terms of responses to another, is already

present.

Self as social experience

Yet the self as social experience is viewed differently in different times

and places. Mauss describes in an article this variation, at times ascribing

a role "or a right to assume a role or ritual mask" (Mauss 1985:14) He

notes how under the Romans "it is a basic fact of law. In law, according

to the legal experts, there are only *personne, res* and *actiones*"(Mauss

1985:14). Noting that the Latin *persona* translates as a mask, but that it is

the Christians "who have made a metaphysical entity of the 'moral

person *(personne morale)*, after they became aware of its religious power.

Our own notion of the human person is still basically the Christian one" (Mauss 1985:19). "The person is a rational substance, indivisible and individual" (Mauss 1985:20). He concludes that "The one who finally gave the answer that every act of consciousness was an act of the 'self' *(moi),* was Fichte. Kant had already made of the individual consciousness, the sacred character of the human person, the condition for Practical reason" (Mauss 1985:22). Seeing a progression in forms he concludes, "From a simple masquerade to the mask, from a 'role' *(personnage)* to a 'person' *(personne)*, to a name, to an individual; from the latter to a being possessing metaphysical and moral value; from a moral consciousness to a sacred being; from the latter to a fundamental form of thought and action – the course is accomplished" (Mauss 1985:22). Yet in all of these descriptions the self remains a social experience and if 'meaning' is the recognition and sharing of attitudes and predispositions that are communicate and understood, the self as a form experienced, is a consequence of the conceptions, assertions and recognitions by others.

social presentation

If the 'significant symbols' of Mead as language describe social relations, as Jackson argues, they also can form and influence them. Goffman descrbes how people act to present a 'front' to others. As he puts it, "It will be convenient to label as 'front' that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind, intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance (Goffman 1971:32).

Such a front is a collection of signs shown but they occur in a 'setting' which acts as a stage for their presentation. Goffman divides the front itself into 'appearance' and 'manner,' arguing that, "'Appearance' may be taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social statuses" (Goffman, 1971:34). Whilst "'Manner' may be taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of

the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation" (Goffman 1971:35).

This complex 'presentation' is thus shown to others for their recognition. As Goffman puts it "While in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure" (Goffman 1971:40). Yet performances can also be subject to lapses and mistakes which Goffman argues may need remedial action if the performance is to remain credible.

There also remains a difference between what is believed to be real and what is shown. Some performances are performed and are deemed as real by those performing them whilst other performers are aware of them to be an act. Audiences are the same being cynical about some performances but believing others. People relate differently to them. In *São Tomé* and *Principé* audiences evaluate some performances as

appropriate and commendable and greet others with disapproval and dismay.

time and place

As Bakhtin points out interaction occurs in time and space (Holmquist 1990:21). The signs used, the predispositions and evaluations present are moreover particular to the history and specifics of the place. As Mead asserts, "..the individual's consciousness of the content and flow of meaning involved depends on his thus taking the attitude of the other toward his own gestures. In this way every gesture comes within a given social group or community to stand for a particular act or response, namely, the act or response which it calls forth explicitly in the individual to whom it is addressed, and implicitly in the individual who makes it; and this particular act or response for which it stands is its meaning as a significant symbol" (Mead 1934:47).

The focus for the study thus became what are the particulars of this social evaluation. How are signs shown and actions of others evaluated.

What are the particulars of the 'architecture' of experience in *São Tomé* and *Principé*. For as Jackson notes "... the repertoire of psychic patterns and possibilities that generally have been implemented, foregrounded, or given legitimacy in a particular place at a particular point in time" (Jackson 1998:16). They are a derivative of history of the people concerned and of those they have come into contact with and had to interact with them. They have been formed out of these lived interactions and social processes.

preferences

Yet if a society has predispositions it also has preferences. Or rather it values some forms of experience recognising them and seeking them over others. As a man sitting in a shared taxi returning from *Santana* explained one day "Santomeans like to see things in their hands rather than think about them." They prefer the directness of experience that comes from holding some thing, just as they prefer the directness that comes from experiencing an acknowledgement of a certain quality or the social meaning of a gift given. They prefer such direct experiences

rather than those that are thought about. These forms of experience are different as direct and are different as they occur as part of an interaction in which presentations made are recognised and acknowledged.

That a certain directness to experience is valued and regarded as significant was confirmed by a woman who used to sit outside a school near to where I stayed in the capital. She sold sweets and pens and small items to school children and passers-by along with three or four other street sellers. I used to speak with her fairly often and one day she explained that "if your feet are okay and your hands are okay then everything is fine. You can sleep okay. If you feel bad and are sick, then.... well you are sick, but if your feet and hands are okay then you *are* okay." It was an assertion that I was to hear again for one of the people I met at *Augustino Neto roça* had said something similar: "If you don't have money but your body is fine, then everything is fine.*"* Whilst there are practical and valuable consequences to survival of hands, feet and body being 'fine', it was the sense of one's hands and feet *feeling okay* that the woman was referring to. You know you are okay *really*

because your hands and feet *feel okay* she had explained. In *São Tomé*

and *Principé* people value experiences that are personalised, direct and

qualitative, and social responses from another possess all of these

preferred qualities, for they are qualitative in evaluation, personalised in

their target and usually direct in their delivery.

'Architecture' of experience..

Together the responses to signs and actions recognised form a type of

'*architecture*.' That there were such shared patterns seems undeniable.

People would respond similarly too often for there not to be, and

sometimes they would verbalise these patterns or explain them, but they

did not call them 'an architecture' for this is my term which I use to sum

up their responses. It is not an *emic* term of *São Tomé* or *Principé* but

one that seems appropriate to use in describing the observations I made

of shared patterns of social actions. The building and forming of social

relations, their quality and the significance felt and recognised is a

matter of recognition of patterns and of forms that are *already known*.

One of the most significant qualities of this 'architecture' are *the*

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responses people make to others. It is what these responses are, their quality as an acknowledgement or gift given that denotes for many, people's relation with the world and their place in it. People evaluate them as actions carried out and responses made, expressing an opinion on whether they are appropriate. It is a response to what *appears.* Are they thinking, walking, did they arrive with transport? What kind? How do they act?

Perhaps the best confirmation of there being 'an architecture' that is often recognised, is that people can adopt strategies for they know how others are likely to respond. It was not just the man at *Augustino Neto* who dressed up to impress, the woman who had called me 'my amigo', who I describe in chapter 7, was also smartly dressed herself with an immaculate white headscarf and clean clothes. It would seem she was already concerned about her appearance and how the world would evaluate her *before she met me.*

People assert themselves *into* the world using signs that they know will be recognised by others. This showing, which acts as a form of *theatre,* has intentionality, it seeks to impress itself on the world and to mark it in a way that will be reflected back. People choose, at times and when then can, signs that will when recognised reflect back on them positively. It is a way of making the world respond to them in a manner desired. Such assertions seek goals and, as I describe in chapter 4, these assertions can be seen to be associated with conditions that are lived by the person. It is as if they emerge from the needs produced by the conditions lived.

It is though in the quality *of responses* to assertions made that significant experience is recognised and people can be opportunistic in achieving this. They will position themselves where they think they are 'visible' to others. This may be because they want to show a need for some good, such as a replacement fan belt for their broken one or some carpentry tools they do not have, or it may be because others may then notice them and through the responses of these others to them they will experience themselves significantly. Those who sit on the wall of the

marginal in the capital, that I describe in chapter 4, are there to 'stay cool' but they all sit facing inland for it is the actions and responses of people passing that interests them, not the sea.

It is the reciprocity of another's response that is sought and as the man near the *Praça do Independência* had put it, it was *a warm response* that was expected for it is a good country. The expectation that one should respond in a way that reflected the quality of the people, emphasised once more the social quality of the experienced self and its realisation in interaction. That particular interactions (and responses within them) were evaluations of a place more generally was illustrated once more one day as I walked back to the rooms I had rented in the west of the capital. I was in a good mood that day for things were going well, it was fine weather and I was happy. As I approached where I was staying a man, who I had never spoken to before, crossed the street and warmly shaking my hand said *Obrigado* (thank you). He looked at my face and smiled broadly. The man worked in a shop and would have seen me many times for I walked along that street every day, yet this was the first

time he had ever said anything. The difference was the good mood I was in; it reflected well on *São Tomé,* for my positive mood stemmed from my interaction with the island. The evaluation perceived by the man in my interaction with the island was used as an evaluation of the island, for as people say "somewhere must be good if it is experienced as good." In contrast, when I had ignored the men in the streets near the *Praça do Independência,* that I describe in chapter 4, the response had been very different. With the island though I had responded. It was on my face and in my demeanour and it was in response to this that the man crossed the street.

a quality in the presentation; acting con força

If value is perceived in responses to presentations, how the presentations are made – their manner to use Goffman's term – is a matter of some cnsequence. Sitting one evening in the west of *Principé* the sound of drumming could be clearly heard coming from the direction of the small settlement of *Daniel. "Puita"* said one of those present. *Puita* drumming, which originates in *Angola,* is particular because the

drumming changes note. The drummer can pull on a cord that changes

the tautness of the skin of the drum creating often a plaintive and

expressive tone to the drumming. The sound continued to come through

the trees all evening accompanied by singing and around midnight, as it

was still going on, I went with one of the men from the *roça* to *Daniel* to

listen. The Moon was high and its light lit the dark red road as we walked

along the rough track heading in the direction of the drumming which

slowly got louder and louder. As we arrived at *Daniel* the noise suddenly

became much louder. The sound came from the garden of one of the

houses not far from the central road of *Daniel.* Despite the loudness of

the sound we found only three drummers, a percussion player and a

singer. A sixth man tended a small fire. They invited us to join them for

awhile as the three drummers continued to drum and the singer sang

various songs.

The next day someone who worked as a housekeeper at *Ponto do Sol*

roça explained, "If the drummers drum *con força (with force)* many

people will come." The wailing noise of the drumming acts as a calling

for people. To act *con força* with force was a strategy I was to witness

adopted by an woman in *Trindade* and with some fishermen at *Lapa,*

incidents that I describe in chapter 4. By increasing the force it was

hoped that a deeper impression would be made and the assertion would

be more effective. A common farewell on *São Tomé* was to say *Força!*

(force). It was an exclamation encouraging the other to act forcefully and

thus effectively with the world, to impose and assert their will upon it

forming it in the way desired.

If *força* is an manner of assertion it takes place within social strategies

which I describe in chapter 4. at times assertion takes place implicitly

and without much assertion at all, but to present *con força* is a way

many use to impress and form a particular social response, whereas

those who do not use it rely on social connections *that are already*

formed.

Any assertion needs to be recognised though and the origins of the

'patterns and possibilities' (Jackson 1998:16) of experience, as Jackson

describes them, lie in the history of *São Tomé* and *Principé*. Many of these influences did not end at Independence but rather changed and are ongoing. *São Tomé* and *Principé* may have been settled and formed by the influences of global trade and the actions of European colonialism but they exist in a world in which they are still connected to global trade - importing rice, wheat and other commodities - and being visited by visitors, businessmen and even the occasional passing cruise ship. The banks work in a system that is international in scope and people are aware of outside events and news through television. The popularity of Brazilian soaps and the emigration of relatives to Angola, Portugal and other countries means that many Santomeans and Principeans feel part of a much larger global society and have a sense of their place in it. A place that is perceived in relation to these other places.

Historically *São Tomé* and *Principé* were Portuguese colonies and this had an important consequences on how social relations developed on the islands. Colonial Portugal had a very centralised and hierarchical structure and such a structure was imposed on the island at settlement

also. Social relations were unequal and repressive. Intriguing then that the response of so many Santomeans and Principeans is to assert themselves back on the world often *con força* (with force) in an attempt to make an impression initiated by themselves in a world that had been so assertive and repressive on them historically. Understandable also that many of the signs used and goals sought are responses to this period.

Yet if some aspects of the societies of both islands can be seen to derive from the specifics of colonial Portugal, others are common in plantation societies more generally. Both *marronage* (escape of slaves) and revolts were characteristic of plantation societies wherever they were in the world. Indeed a desire to overcome the unequal oppressive social relations of colonialism was what was celebrated at *Fernão Diaz.* That there existed these larger 'narratives' in which more personal relations between people are evaluated and assessed, means that the assertions made take reference of these signs as part of the narrative. To understand the relevances and particulars of the signs, attitudes and

predispositions some attention needs to be paid to the history of the islands.

Contextual Introduction

The two islands were historically colonies of Portugal and gained independence in 1975 to form together a single nation state with a population of 188,000 (Source: WHO for 2009) of which around 6,000 live on *Principé* and the remainder on the much larger island of *São Tomé*. Life expectance at birth stands at 62 years for men and 65 years for women (Source: Global Health Observatory, WHO for 2009). Literacy rates are 92.2% for men and 77.9% for women for those aged 15 or over. (Source: 2001 Census).

Settled from the late fifteenth century with settlers from Portugal and slaves from the African continent the islands' economy was initially based almost exclusively around the growing of sugar for export and the trans-shipment of slaves across the Atlantic.

Geographical Location

São Tomé is situated just to the north of the Equator, which passes south of the island, in the east equatorial Atlantic. It lies east of the Greenwich Meridian and "one hundred miles west of the African mainland of Cape Lopez (Gabon)" (Garfield 1992:1). *Principé* is located some 150 kms to the northeast of *São Tomé.*

Topography

São Tomé and *Principé* are both extinct volcanoes being part of a chain of volcanoes that runs from the African continent in a south-south-westerly direction. The most northerly, Mount Cameroon, is still active and erupted in February 2012. The geological fault line runs from the mainland out into the Gulf of Guinea and has over time produced four volcanic islands the largest of which is *Bioke* (formerly *Fernando Po*) which lies close to the Cameroonian coastline and can be seen from the shore of the continent.

The next is the much smaller *Principé*, followed by the second largest

São Tomé and finally diminutive *Annobon*. Both *Bioke* and *Annobon*

were ceded to Spain in 1778 whilst *São Tomé* and *Principé* remained

Portuguese colonies until their independence.

The volcanic past shows in the topography of both islands, which varies

considerably. *São Tomé* possesses a rugged coastline without good

natural harbours but with numerous wide sandy bays. The surrounding

waters are shallow for some distance around the island descending

slowly on its eastern side and more quickly off the west coast. In

consequence contemporary ocean going vessels need to moor some

distance off shore and unload onto lighters, which transfer the goods

into the port.

The centres of both islands are mountainous with numerous high peaks,

and on *São Tomé* possess two impressive phonolithic rock towers. On

São Tomé steep slopes carry numerous fast flowing streams that were

used in colonial times to power mills. In the north-east of the island the

land is flatter and this region forms the agricultural centre of the island.
The city of *São Tomé* is here, constructed around the *Baia de Ana
Chaves*.

Principé has a high rugged southern interior, but in the northern half of
the island the ground is flatter with plateaus that are mostly forested
from which the land slopes steeply to the sea. Many of the plantations
are located in this area although as in *São Tomé* they extend also along
the coastal verges south. The capital of *Santo Antonio* is located at the
head of a relatively large inlet in the north of the island. The island is
supplied today from *São Tomé* by small boat and airplane.

European Discovery

I have taken much of my historical introduction for the island of *São
Tomé* from the work of Garfield who provides a comprehensive history
of the island in his book, *A History of São Tomé Island, 1470 – 1655*
(Garfield, 1992). *Principé* had a different but linked history
experiencing both colonial settlement and plantation economy. In 1753

until 1852 it was the administrative capital of both the islands of *São Tomé* and *Principé*.

The exact date of discovery of *São Tomé* by Europeans is, according to Garfield, open to question, "but the most commonly accepted one is 21 December 1470 – St Thomas' day – after whom, in keeping with Portuguese tradition, the island was named" (Garfield 1992:5). The discovers, *Pero Escobar* and *João de Santarem* also discovered the islands of *Annobon* and *Principé* on the same voyage. Whether a landing was made is uncertain as no record exists recording it, but Garfield suggests that it is likely due to the information supplied to the *King João II* in Lisbon which according to Garfield could only have been obtained through a survey (Garfield 1992:6). They moreover brought the news that the island was uninhabited, though this has been disputed in modern times.

The reason for settlement may have been in part to provide a watering and refuelling station for ships bound for India – a role Garfield notes it

was never really to fulfil - although the option of resupplying "passing ships" was to resurface more than 100 years later in 1641 (Garfield 1992:287), when the island was in economic difficulties.

As Garfield explains, "The lack of population, its fertility, and its presumed healthiness in contrast to *Fernando Po* all disposed *King João* to choose *São Tomé* rather than the former as a site for an extensive settlement" (Garfield 1992:5). The template of other economically successful Portuguese islands, such as Madeira, the Azores and Cape Verde, may have directed the decisions on *São Tomé's* future. From the beginning it was such economic and strategic concerns of those who did not live on the island that were to play such a central and defining part in forming how the social structure on the island developed and formed. Due to its distance from Portugal and the infrequency of communication it was decided to use the *donaterio* system of administration, namely "...the granting of the island to a favourite to rule as a personal holding subject to the legal restrictions and financial benefit of the crown" (Garfield 1992:7). This system had also already been used in the Azores,

Madeira and Cape Verde islands (Garfield 1992:7). The consequence

was that the centrist and hierarchical model of government that was

present in Portugal was transferred to *São Tomé* and *Principé* and a rigid

social structure imposed from outside. The interests and frequent

inflexibility of this social system was also to be defining in the struggles

and motivations of those who were to later live on the islands.

The first *donaterio, João de Paiva,* established a settlement at *Ponta*

Figa on the north west coast which was, according to Garfield

(1992:10), "a series of tents", and whilst surviving did not flourish.

Paiva died in 1490 and was succeeded by *João Pereira* – one of the first

settlers, who became the second *donatario.* He held office until 1493

when "the King decided to grant the *Doação* of the island to *Alvaro de*

Caminha" (Garfield 1992:12). To meet the need for labour, *Caminha*

was granted the right to "seize and carry to *São Tomé degradados*,

criminals condemned to jail or exile for various crimes" (Garfield

1992:13-14). Garfield continues that, "The decree strongly suggests that

Caminha was empowered to use press gangs to get his labourers – not

only criminals but also prostitutes and others among Lisbon's undesirables" (Garfield 1992:14). As Garfield states, perhaps a little laconically, "From the beginning, therefore, *São Tomé's* white population was not a type given to obedience or to making an honest living by their own labor" (Garfield 1992:14).

The third Donaterio..

On his arrival in *São Tomé* in late 1493 (Garfield 1992:18), *Caminha* moved the settlement, referred to simply as the *Povoação* (settlement), to the current location of today's capital on the shores of the wide but shallow *Baia de Anna Chaves.* The bay acted as a genuine harbour and the location allowed access to the flatlands in the immediate surrounding areas. He experimented with the growing of various crops. The fertile soils, good rainfall and tropical climate meant that the sugarcane flourished, but wheat, which he also tried, was unsuccessful (Garfield 1992:18-19).

On the Azores and in Madeira the plantation economy had been used

successfully and it was thus perhaps not surprising that the model was to

be attempted again in *São Tomé*. The heavy labour required was sought

from the slave trade. "The slaves brought to the island, like most of the

others taken by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, came from the

Kingdom of Congo, with which they had established contact at about the

same time that *São Tomé* was discovered" (Garfield 1992:16). Like the

administrative system of *donatario* the economic one of plantation

economy was an import both in its conception and in its labour.

Once production had commenced sugar in *São Tomé* was "produced in

huge amounts" (Garfield 1992:72). "By around 1555, there were sixty to

eighty sugar mills on the island, producing about 150,000 *arrobas*

(2,150 tons) of sugar per year. Most of the crop eventually found its way

to Antwerp, where it was sold into the general European market"

(Garfield 1992:72). Yet despite the quantities produced, "São Toméan

sugar was of poor quality because the planters were never really able to

dry the sugar sufficiently to give it the fine texture that would command

high prices in the world market" (Garfield 1992:71). Garfield continues, "São Toméan sugar, therefore, gained a commanding price in world markets in the sixteenth century due to its abundance and cheapness, rather than because of inherent quality" (Garfield 1992:71-72).

If slaves were brought to provide labour for the newly established plantations, *São Tomé's* position between the Congo, the Portuguese port of *Elmina* on the West African coast and Brazil meant that the island also became an important trans-shipment point for slaves travelling to the new world and this role became another central aspect of the island's economy. The importance of the islands to economic and social forces that existed elsewhere, led to the establishment of a society that whilst particular and local was also modern in that its economy was based on the needs of an international market.

Administration

There were other effects on the island that enhanced the essential cosmopolitan and global inputs to its structure. Its geographical location

of *São Tomé* had other effects. The high death rates on the island,

particularly of new arrivals from Europe meant that the population could

not reproduce itself and relied instead on a constant immigration of

people both from Europe and from Africa. The low life expectancy of

those, particularly from Europe, meant that people were reluctant to be

posted there. Even in the nineteenth century European settlers suffered

an annual death rate greater than one in ten (Hodges & Newitt 1988:53).

As a consequence many of the administrative positions remained vacant

for long periods. It also meant that maintaining the population was a

struggle, with prisoners from Lisbon jails and orphans being taken to the

island to boost the population. The importance of these external arrivals

to maintaining the population led to a fractured and divided society. The

donaterio system meant that power was concentrated and could be self-

serving. Moreover the distance from Portugal frequently made external

supervision difficult. Consequently group identity and relations with

others acquired huge significance.

Society

Many of the characteristics of the society on the islands found

throughout its history were thus there from the start. It emerged as a

society characterised by hierarchy, complexity and marked divisions.

The local particularities emerging in a society that was characterised and

had emerged out of the model of other Portuguese colonies. However,

the stratified society that was imposed at settlement with the *donaterio*

at the top, an administrative class beneath and slaves at the bottom, was

also complicated by other categories. Freed slaves was one, forming a

separate group - the *forro.* As were the offspring of relations between

European settlers and slaves called *filhos de terra* (sons of the earth).

Amongst the European settlers those descended from converted Jewish

settlers, who had been shipped there as children from Lisbon in 1493

with *Caminha*, were termed *Novos Cristãos* and were never fully

accepted by the other Christians on the island.

The small size of the population and island combined with the isolation

and difficulty of leaving must have given life on the island a hot-house

feel. There was little escape from the various power struggles that were going on. The social structure was moreover an outcome of social and political changes that were occurring elsewhere. After slavery was abolished in the Portuguese colonies in 1858 and contract labour was introduced many of the labourers came from Angola and Cape Verde islands. Called *servicais* (and their descendants born on the island *tongas*) they were looked down on by the *forros* who compared the contract nature of their status unfavourably to their own 'free' status. People on *São Tomé* would tell me how *tongas* would be shunned by *forro* children at school. However with the virtual end of the plantation economy at Independence, along with the ending of contract labour some years before in 1970, such divisions ended.

The colonial social structure had been imposed and whilst many of the old social categories ended with the virtual ending of the plantation economy at Independence, many of the ideas and evaluations that people had made from them were to continue. A separate group with disputed origins, who possessed a different language and in colonial times lived a

separate existence in the inaccessible south of the island independently

of the *Povoação* and the Portuguese administration, were the *Angolars*.

Angolars

According to some sources, the *Angolars* are the descendants of

survivors of a ship that was wrecked carrying slaves from Angola on the

Sete Pedras rocks off *São Tomé's* coast (Seibert 2007:112). Yet others

dispute this saying that they are descendants of an indigenous population

living on the island prior to its discovery by the Portuguese. A third

theory argues that they are the descendants of runaway slaves – a

maroon community. The three theories are compared by Seibert

(2007:105-126).

Whilst noting that the shipwreck theory was convenient to the settler

community in explaining the presence of a community living outside the

administration, Seibert argues that given the location of the supposed

wreck and the distance to the shore – about 4 kilometres - and the nature

of the currents that surround them, it seems hard to imagine anyone

would have managed to swim such a distance and survive (Seibert 2007:124).

The second theory that the *Angolars* are descendants of a population that was living on the island prior to the arrival of the Portuguese is proposed by some. Gilberto Freyre wrote that the islands "already had their black population" (cited in Seibert 2007:116), but Seibert notes that he does not support this assertion with any documentary evidence. The final theory that they are the descendants of runaway slaves is, according to Seibert, "largely based on linguistic, historic and genetic data" (Seibert 2007:119).

The separate language of the Angolars, *lunga ngola*, has been studied by various scholars. "According to Maurer's linguistic analysis of the lexicon of the *lunga ngola*", Seibert writes (2007:120), "the Angolar Creole, 65 per cent is derived from the Portuguese, one per cent is of *kwa* origin, 15 per cent stems from *bantu* languages and the origin of the remaining 20 per cent is still unknown." Seibert continues:

"Hegermeijer's theory that the four Creole languages spoken in the Gulf of Guinea region [including *lunga ngola*] genetically have a common origin in a proto-Creole that developed in the early sixteenth century in *São Tomé*. This author comes to the conclusion that the first maroons already spoke this proto-Creole" (Seibert 2007:120). Such a conclusion would support the theory that the Angolars are most likely a maroon community.

Sugar

From settlement and throughout the early sixteenth century the production of sugar prospered. The fertility of the soil with the plentiful rainfall and sunshine meant that sugarcane grew well and for a short period *São Tomé* was "the world's largest producer" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:19). Yet not all was well. The rise in production of Brazilian sugar, where land was plentiful and whose drier climate meant that the sugar cakes could be dried and stored correctly, meant a competitor capable of producing large amounts of better quality sugar. *São Tomé* simply could not compete effectively. By 1580 *São Toméan* sugar "brought only half

the price of Brazilian sugar and less than a quarter that of the superior Madeira product" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:20), and by 1600 the island was exporting only 857 tons of sugar.

"The decline of sugar production plunged the islands into the *poussio* or fallow period. This lasted over two hundred years as far as export crops were concerned" (da Costa 1992:113). Subsequently agricultural production turned to subsistence production. *São Tomé* got by during this period by "servicing the slave trade" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:24).

As well as the economic downturn, the island was subject to internal and external threats. Isolated and remote, *São Tomé* had problems that extended beyond a lack of administrators. It was hard to defend from external attack and was subjected to English and French pirate raids. The capital city was sacked and burnt by a French pirate in 1567. Such insecurity speeded up an underlying trend of relocation to Brazil by sugar growers, as Hodges and Newitt put it: "These repeated assaults on the islands, with the loss of buildings and the fixed capital of the sugar

mills, had the effect of causing the sugar growers increasingly to transfer their activities to Brazil, which was more secure and where there was virgin land to be developed" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:21).

There was insecurity on the island as well with recurrent revolts in 1517, 1530, 1547 and in 1574 by slaves rising up against the oppressive working and living conditions. The most serious unrest was in 1595, led by a charismatic figure named Amador. "The upheaval known as the 'rising of Amador' represented the largest attempted revolution that *São Tomé* was ever to know. Its roots included the constant exploitation of the island's slaves, the fact that communities of escaped slaves existed in the *matos* (forest), the example set by assaults of previous escapes and the Angolars, and finally the grave political and social divisions within the *Povoação* which made any united effort to suppress the menace beforehand almost impossible" (Garfield 1992:137).

In 1599 it was the turn of the Dutch to attack *São Tomé*. They returned again in 1612, and in 1626 "plundered the shipping in the bay of *Ana de*

Chaves and for the next eight years scarcely a single Portuguese ship reached the island" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:22-23). In 1641 the Dutch, who were in a war with the Portuguese over the latter's empire, sailed from Angola under *Cornelus Jol* with the intention of taking the island. They landed south east of the capital at *Santa Ana* and following a naval bombardment from the sea, occupied and plundered the town. The Dutch stayed in *São Tomé* until 1648.

During this time there was a modest improvement in the economic fortunes of the island as the occupation enabled trade with Dutch merchants (Garfield 1992:270), and following the Dutch military departure in 1644 such trade continued for a while with Dutch merchants who had stayed behind. But this ended when they left as well in 1648 and *São Tomé* was formally returned to Portugal by treaty (Garfield 1992:279).

Cocoa and coffee booms

Some two hundred years after the collapse of sugar exports there were to be two further economic booms. Both were based around cash crops and both once again transformed the economy. One was in coffee and the second in cocoa. The start of the first – the coffee boom – can, according to Hodges and Newitt "be almost exactly dated to 1855" (1988:28). The "ending of slave imports by Brazil in the 1850s [had] left Portuguese ships and capital lying idle" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:28-29), and new investment was made in *São Tomé*. Throughout the years "1855 to 1875 the great coffee estates (*roças*) were laid out by pioneer entrepreneurs, many of whom were local men or had Angolan connections" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:29).

Production peaked in 1881 when "2,416 tons [of coffee] were exported. Thereafter, coffee production began a slow but inexorable decline" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:31-32). "Coffee growing was labor-intensive and this, together with the falling price, meant that it was increasingly

superseded by the more easily grown cocoa" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:32).

The cocoa boom followed a similar pattern to that of coffee but was much more lucrative and substantial. "Between 1900 and 1910 *São Tomé* accounted for approximately 15 per cent of the world output of cocoa" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:33). The difficulties in acquiring sufficient labour re-emerged as a recurring problem. The *forro* population was an obvious source being already on the island and often without employment or engaged in subsistence living. Yet for the *forro* (descendants of freed slaves) *not* working on the plantations was a symbol of their freedom. As Hodges and Newitt describe it: "They marked their status by refusing to work on the plantations; so much did this become a symbol of their freedom that many preferred living in destitution to earning a wage on the *roças*" (1988:37).

The ending of the cocoa and coffee booms

By the 1920s production in cocoa had, as with the coffee boom before it, peaked and was in long-term decline. 1925 was the last year in which more than 20,000 tons were exported (Hodges & Newitt 1988:33). Cocoa declined for broadly the same reasons as coffee: declining fertility of the land, pest infestations and uncertain rainfall all had an impact, lowering yields. Meanwhile, falling world prices for cocoa discouraged re-investment (Hodges & Newitt 1988:33).

The high labour needs of production had to be met against the backdrop of the high mortality rates amongst plantation workers that had been a feature of *São Tomé and Principé'*s history. As Hodges and Newitt describe: "Although the islands imported 90,000 labourers between 1876 and 1909, the total population only rose by 30,000 – 40,000" (1988:52). They continue: "São Tomé always had a reputation for being extremely unhealthy" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:52). "The problem was brought to public attention by Manuel Ferreira Ribeiro, who held the post of Head of the Public Health Department three times between 1867 and 1894. He

showed that between 1868 and 1878, deaths exceeded births by 47

percent. The annual death rate he calculated at 39 per thousand for the

island as a whole, but 53 per thousand for the town. For the white

population, he recorded death rates as high as 105 per thousand.

Numerous epidemics added to the problem with epidemics particularly

of smallpox in 1861-1862 and in 1877" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:53).

The high death rate produced a lack of labour that was exacerbated by

the reluctance of the *forro* to carry out plantation work. The ending of

slavery in 1875 had meant an ongoing labour shortage for the *roças.* The

response had been to recruit contract workers from other Portuguese

colonies. The numbers that arrived were large.

"Between 1902 and 1928, 99,821 contract workers came to *São Tomé*. In

the years from 1928 to 1958 another 84,397 indentured labourers arrived

on the archipelago" (Seibert 2006:50). The large number of arrivals

changed the population profile significantly but the two main groups –

forro and *servicais* -- lived separate lives. The contract workers

(servicais) lived in barracks on the plantations, whilst the *forro* lived independently in small settlements, engaging in subsistence agriculture, and in the city.

Seibert notes that: "The labour decree of 1903 fixed the daily working hours at nine hours a day, except on Sundays when the workers were supposed to work five hours. Between 9.00 p.m. and 5.30 a.m. the *servicais* were shut in their barracks. Until the 1950s workers were not allowed to leave the estates freely outside working hours" (Seibert 2006:51-52). Moreover: "Until 1909 the repatriation of the contract workers at the end of their contract was rarely honoured. Mostly the contract was extended by the planter without the consent of the labourer" (Seibert 2006:52).

historical legacy

The history of the islands were thus one of often rigid social structures imposed from outside in economic systems that were determined by forces external to the islands. It was the state of the market and the rise

of competition elsewhere that ended the sugar boom. Coffee and cocoa were similarly at the mercy of world markets.

In addition the social realities imposed were harsh and oppressive and the international climate in which the islands had to survive uncertain. The distance from Portugal and the seeming powerlessness to influence these processes meant a certain resigned acceptance.

Social distinction

The ending of contract labour in 1970 meant the ending of the essential distinction between *servicais* and *forro*. Both were now 'free'. Yet whilst the term *forro* is used by those who are the descendants of freed slaves, those who were ex-*servicais*, or whose parents were, often identify with the place of origin outside the archipelago. They will state: "I am Angolano" (from Angola), or "Cape Verdeano" (from Cape Verde islands), and many add, "and I am also *São Toméan*" or "*Principéan*".

"We are all *São Toméan* now", was how one taxi driver on *São Tomé* put it to me with a large smile. Yet whilst the old social distinctions have disappeared some are still mentioned. On *São Tomé, Angolars* are particularly noted as different as they have their own language and lifestyle, and those who are *forro* regard themselves as different from *Angolars.* The large numbers of contract workers that arrived on *Principé* from the Cape Verde islands means that *criolou* - a Portuguese creole that developed in the Cape Verde archipelago - is the most widely spoken language on the island along with Portuguese. The few who speak *dialecto* – a different Portuguese creole that developed on *São Tomé* – are noted by people as coming 'from *São Tomé'* where this creole is widely spoken. There are a very small number of older people who speak *Lung 'ie,* a third creole of Portuguese that developed on *Principé*.

On *São Tomé* it is *dialecto* that is most widely spoken. Almost everyone also speaks Portuguese and will switch readily between the two. The *Angolars,* with their separate history, developed a separate language

lunga ngola which one can hear readily in places such as *São João dos Angolares,* a small fishing village on the east coast of *São Tomé*.

Twentieth-century history

A coup in 1926 in Portugal saw a military government in Lisbon and administrative changes to the islands which were now to be run through a Governor and a Council. A legislative council was added later (Hodges & Newitt 1988:42). Despite reforms, there remained labour shortages on the plantations. In response to this the Governor "advocated a scheme for taxing the free inhabitants of the islands in order to force them into the labor market" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:44). Yet independence from employed labour was held to dearly by the *forro.*

Following the use of forced labour on construction projects, it was rumoured that the administration would force the *forro* to work on the plantations. During the social unrest that followed a man died during an encounter with the police in *Trindade*, a relatively large village in the north of the island. A subsequent demonstration by *forros* from nearby

Batepa, a few kilometers away from *Trindade*, in response to the death

was followed by violent suppression by the authorities and the death of a

police officer, which led to further suppression and violence. "In the

confused events of early February 1953, large numbers of people were

indiscriminately killed. Some allegations were made that 2,000 had been

massacred, but later a figure of 1,032 became widely accepted" (Hodges

& Newitt 1988:44-45). Many people were detained at the northern *roça*

of *Fernão Diaz* and subjected to forced labour. Following Independence

in 1975, the events of 1953 are commemorated annually by a march and

ceremony on 3 February.

Hodges and Newitt point out that the authorities in Lisbon took a

"serious view of the panic and the lack of discipline shown by the

authorities [in *São Tomé*]. A number of individuals thought to have been

responsible were jailed or removed from office in the years immediately

following. The massacre, however, became an inspiration for young

Santomean writers and intellectuals and played a role in politicizing many of them in the 1950s" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:45).

Seibert comments similarly: "Retrospectively Santomean nationalism viewed the traumatic experience of the massacre in 1953 as the beginning of a new period which led in 1960 to the creation of the *Comité de Libertação de São Tomé e Principé* (CLSTP), the archipelago's first anti-colonial organization, constituted by elite *forros* in exile" (Seibert 2006:88). It was, Seibert notes, in September 1960 that "two Santomean students from Lisbon *Miguel Trovoada* and *João Guadalupe de Ceita* [together with four friends] agreed to create the CLSTP, [a committee that in 1972] was reconstituted and renamed *Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Principé* (MLSTP)" (Seibert 2006:99).

Seibert further notes that: "Prior to the Portuguese carnation revolution of 25 April 1974 the MLSTP did not carry through any action in the archipelago" (Seibert 2006:100). It was based outside the country, first

in *Santa Isabel* on *Bioke* and then in *Libreville*. Unlike Angola and in particular Guinea-Bissau where armed uprisings and in the later case a long lasting guerilla war, was waged against Portuguese rule, no such uprising took place on *São Tomé* or *Principé* immediately prior to independence. There had been plenty of uprisings against the colonial administration but it was events in Lisbon that were definitive. When the dictatorship fell in 1974 in Portugal the MLSTP was "taken by surprise" (Seibert 2006:101).

São Tomé and Principé since independence

"Influenced by the decolonisation process in the 1970s in general and in Portuguese Africa in particular, *São Tomé and Principé's* ruling party opted for a political and economic model that was guided by the Soviet example", Seibert explains (2006:121). It adopted close ties with the countries of the Socialist Bloc during this period, instituted a one party state and accepted foreign advisers from Cuba. Young people were sent to study abroad mostly to countries of the Socialist Bloc with many going to Cuba. On their return many found employment in the civil

bureaucracy or state owned enterprises. Other policies were based around the socialist model including the emancipation of women. Additionally, "the government granted equal rights to the plantation workers. As a result the people from the plantations could interact more freely with the *forro* society" (Seibert 2006:131). Schools, hospitals and clinics were nationalised as were the medium and larger *roças.*

Fears of foreign invasion – there had been attempted invasions of Benin in 1977 and an attempted coup in Angola – led to the government to ask "other African Lusophone countries for military support" (Seibert 2006:144), and "in March 1978 both Guinea-Bissau and Angola sent soldiers to *São Tomé*.

While the small Guinean contingent of about 100 men left *São Tomé* in May 1980, the FAPLA troops [Angolan], whose initial 1,500 men were gradually reduced to 500, remained in the country until early 1991 when the first democratically elected government asked them to return home" (Seibert 2006:145). In 1989 the government announced the abolition of

the one party state model, liberalised the economy and allowed

opposition parties. The first multi-party elections were held in 1991.

Whilst Independence brought many changes, a new government, the

virtual ending of the plantation economy and the movement of many

from the rural areas to the capital and small settlements, other things

remained unchanged. Whilst some social distinctions ended, the ways of

life that made them meaningful no longer existing, other signs shown

and aspirations held remained unchanged or were fiercely held to as a

response to what had gone before.

Summary

From the complex and often brutal history of the islands several

important themes emerge. The importance, indeed defining, influence of

outside global economic and political influences is surely one, but also

the sense of powerlessness that such forces imposed on those who lived

on the islands. Social categories were imposed, social mobility was

impossible for many, forms of work defining in social terms, life

expectancy short. The response was often violent revolt, of assertion back, but those factors and 'signs' that had demarcated social roles – working on plantations, the place of residence – remained important after the plantation system ended.

Many though would have adjusted as best they could to forces that seemed and indeed were beyond their control - as indeed the whole island's economy and political history often was. The sense of adjustment to difficulties and differences that were inevitable is still present in *São Tomé* and *Principé,* but so is a sense of forceful assertion back on an often impartial world. Redemption is found in friendship in which the need for a sense of self that is of value is recognised in responses that have some certainty and that recognise the other's expressed needs. The strategies adopted, as I hope to show, are various, but they include; accommodation, assertion and social awareness. Yet it is perhaps in the last, social awareness, that a sense of structure and meaning is found. In an uncertain world in which change is difficult it is in the expected responses of others that a degree of control and certainty

can be achieved. Whilst the assertions of others may have to be adjusted to, the presentations of self made and the responses expected back can be fought for, struggled for and asserted.

The particulars of the interactions that I witnessed and encountered may have been responses, as Geertz describes it, to "the hard surfaces of life – ....the political, economic, stratificatory realities within which men are everywhere contained,.." (Geertz 1993:30) but the goals people set and hope for could perhaps be discovered through an impressing of such hopes into the world. Yet ultimately it is in direct experience of the world, of assertions acknowledged and gifts received that represent something more – a social connection made – that people find their sense of self and place in the world. As I hope to show the legacy of what went before influences much of the present, if only by *what* is rejected or its overcoming being celebrated.

A police bike passed lights flashing. "Es o president" (it's the President), said my neighbour, a female police officer seated in the car beside me. It was followed by a large car and then a truck full of soldiers. Shortly afterwards, as the entrance to the site of the commemoration came into view, our driver turned, "sair sair" (out out) he said. We all rather hurriedly climbed out of the oversized sleek 4 by 4. The drop to the road was considerable as was the hike in temperature, as we left the cool air-conditioned comfort of a diplomatic vehicle for the heat and dust of the road. The female policia *(police officer) dropped the copy of the journal* 'Foreign Policy' *she had been looking at discreetly onto the floor. She had been reading '100 greatest thinkers for 2010', I noticed, glancing occasionally to see if the driver was noticing her doing so. The photographs of the inside of buildings had also caught her eye and passing the new houses being built in the area, she murmured to her fellow officer in the front seat, "Oh to live in a lovely new house."*

Now she quickly put her traffic police armband - with a large black T - back on. The other two officers also climbed out and, hurriedly replacing their armbands and pretending everything was normal, began ambling along the road. I thought this was my chance, as whilst hanging around with police was okay, socially anyway, I was not sure how their senior officers would take it.

So I wished them all a good day and hurriedly set off on my own in the direction of the festas. *Meanwhile our driver drove on. His extreme clean cut, highly manicured look and well tailored suit spoke of diplomat - most likely an ambassador - from some African state, I thought, although he had never introduced himself. He had stopped to offer us all a lift on the dusty road from Conde, but now as we were nearing the* festas *and commemoration he was less happy giving a lift to three police officers and a foreigner in his vehicle and had asked us all to get out quickly.*

The commemoration that we were all heading to occurs every year at the old roça of Fernão Diaz and memorializes the suffering and death of detainees from the uprising of 1953. Following the massacre of Batepa near Trindade many people were detained by the authorities at the roça in the very north of the island and subjected to forced labour and torture; many perished. The commemoration acts both as memorial and, as I discovered, a political event that celebrates and reminds of the overcoming of such oppression.

The initial uprising was caused by a rumour that the forro *would be forced to work on the plantations thereby losing their highly prized 'free status.' The Authorities were looking at ways of improving the chronic labour shortages on the plantations at the time. Their subsequent reaction to the uprising was brutal, and those held at Fernão Diaz were held in chains; many were made to "empty the sea" by carrying sea water from the sea to the top of the beach.*

As I approached the site of the commemoration, now alone once more, I was struck by the number of police as well as soldiers standing at the corner of buildings, on balconies or guarding road junctions. There had been a few at the junction in Micolo but there were many more here. This was clearly an important event. I had never seen so many police at one place before in São Tomé.

I wandered into the enclosure, which was now crowded, without being stopped, passing more police and high ranking military officers who studiously ignored my presence as if a foreigner being there was absolutely normal. In fact, other than the priest performing the mass, I did not see another European, but was carefully and politely left to wander undisturbed.

On my right was a series of statues and paintings showing the imprisonment and torture of those who had risen up against the Portuguese in 1953. The paintings were graphic and poster-sized and had been placed against an old warehouse that made up one side of the space. There was also a larger than life-sized plaster of Paris statue of figures in chains. Closer to the sea, chairs and tables had been placed on the grass, shaded from the sun and screened off by material suspended and stretched from poles driven into the ground. People were serving hot food and drinks, and others were sitting chatting to their friends and waiting for the ceremony to begin.

It started with a mass. The priest began announcing into a microphone: "Mr President, Prime minister, Members of Cabinet, Head of the Armed Forces…". I realised everyone of importance was there, the whole government seemingly, including most of the diplomatic corps. The line of vehicles with diplomatic plates parked nearby made this clear. At one point the public address equipment broke down and the priest looked somewhat embarrassed trying hurriedly to restore normal service. Everyone laughed good humouredly at this interruption to the proceedings.

I looked around as senior looking people were chatting and shaking hands with people they knew. It was relaxed and very informal. It was a hot day and after taking in the ceremony I headed to the pier where wreaths would later be thrown to commemorate those who had died. The pier was a central icon on STV (São Toméan TV) reportage of the event, as indeed it was of the event itself.

Passing the dais on which the mass was coming to a close I passed another security officer. She was standing under a suspended cloth, which gave shade from the sun, in military fatigues. Wearing dark sunglasses and looking relaxed and happy, she appeared to be enjoying the passing crowds. From her wrist, where a handbag would be held on other occasions I imagined, dangled a modern looking sub-machine gun. I wondered at this seeming disjuncture of relaxed Sunday-picnic style combined with military hardware and realised that as well as providing security she was also a symbol of power.

Chapter 2

Other plantation economies

Introduction

São Tomé and *Principé* were not the only plantation economies

established by European colonisers, indeed as I mentioned in chapter 1,

the economic model was based on the already established and successful

growing of sugar in the Azores and Madeira. Yet these operations were

themselves based on a tradition of sugar growing that extended back

much further, but had been developed on settled Atlantic islands.

Greenfield writes: "In... a series of experiments, the plantation system,

now combining African slaves under the authority of European settlers

in a racially mixed society, producing sugar cane and other commercial

crops, spread as island after island [the Madeira Islands, including

Madeira, La Palma, and Hierro; the Canary Islands, including Tenerife,

Gran Canaria, and Fuerteventura; the nine widely scattered islands that

compose the Azores; the Cape Verde Islands, including Boa Vista, Sto. Antão, and São Tiago; São Tomé and Principé] was integrated as part of the expanding kingdom" (Greenfield 1979:116, cited in Mintz 1985:30-1).

As Pons (2007:12) elaborates: "Sugar prices had been rising in Europe since 1510", and there was sufficient demand for the prolific production that existed on *São Tomé*. Others were though also noticing. In the 1510s the Spanish were building sugar mills in the Caribbean on islands such as Hispaniola and the island of Puerto Rico for instance, as Pons (2007:12) puts it, at the time "producing sugar looked like a promising venture". Its implementation in Brazil would though provide competition that would threaten and eventually create a crisis for both the Caribbean producers and those in *São Tomé* and *Principé*. Pons notes that, "In 1575 there were only 55 plantations in Brazil", a number which increased to more than 200 at the beginning of the seventeenth century and, "with virtually unlimited land, the Brazilian sugar industry became the largest in the world at the end of the sixteenth century,

surpassing the combined production of the Portuguese Atlantic islands and the Spanish Antilles and flooding the European market with more than 25,000 tons of sugar per year" (Pons 2007:24-5).

Hence, whilst in the sixteenth century the Atlantic islands, which included *São Tomé* and *Principé*, were taking over as major producers of sugar from earlier established producers in the eastern Mediterranean and north Africa, their dominance would be temporary and ended by production elsewhere in the Portuguese empire. The process saw production of sugar increase in volume as well as move progressively westwards and finally south west to Brazil.

The plantation economy on *São Tomé* and *Principé* was thus part of a much larger regional, global and temporal process of tropical cash crop production and supply to mostly northern non-tropical markets as well as to local ones. Yet it was, as a project, also secondary to the political ambitions of Portugal for it allowed colonisation of a distant place to be economically viable and for the establishment of a settled population

that could be administered effectively with all the strategic implications that came with this. As Greenfield (1979:116) describes it, "..sugar cane and the plantation did enable the government of Portugal, once it had committed itself to the policy of commercially oriented expansion, to have settled, at the expense of private citizens, island bases that gave her control of the South Atlantic and made possible the rounding of Africa and trade in the East". Moreover, economically successful plantations could, through judicious taxation, become a source of revenue for the Portuguese crown thus further enhancing their relevance to the Metropole.

From the outset, the settlement of *São Tomé* and *Principé* had been thus defined by meeting ambitions that had originated elsewhere. Initial settlement was, according to Garfield (1992:287), to assist in securing a safe passage to India. Subsequently continued colonisation of the islands oriented the economy and society to supplying tropical products for a demand that existed in Europe and through the trans-shipment of slaves to meeting the need for labour in other Portuguese colonies. The islands'

development was shaped through meeting these external needs and relations. Yet there were local factors as well. The climate and fertility of the soil on both islands was conducive to growing sugar cane, which flourished. Production was prolific. Yet its end, as its beginning and existence, depended on the state of supply in relation to demand on world markets for sugar of the kind produced in *São Tomé* and *Principé*. As this changed at the end of the sixteenth century, demand for *São Toméan* and *Principéan* sugar fell and it was this – rather than a fall in production on the islands *per se* - that ended the sugar boom. Far from being isolated tropical islands, the economy, social development and well being of those who lived on the two islands was acutely effected by their relations with elsewhere.

The specifics of a production model

The growing of sugar cane is labour intensive, yet to be profitable the cane must be grown, processed, shipped to market and sold. To cover its transport costs and to sell it at a profit, production costs thus need to be kept low. This was done on *São Tomé* and *Principé*, as elsewhere,

through the use of coerced slave labour. There was even a precedent for this for whilst as Mintz (1985:28-9) notes, the "decline of the Mediterranean sugar industry has traditionally – and for the most part correctly – been attributed to the rise of a competing sugar industry on the Atlantic islands and, later, in the New World".

He continues that the geographer J. H. Galloway believes it was "..warfare and plague, with the resultant declines of population, [that] hurt the sugar industry in Crete and Cyprus" (Mintz 1985:29): "..in [Galloway's] opinion, it was the expanded use of slave labor to compensate for plague-connected mortality that initiated the strange and enduring relationship between sugar and slavery" (Mintz 1985:29). Such a model of coerced labour, which may have begun in the eastern Mediterranean, was experimented with by the Portuguese in their Atlantic possessions and was then utilised once more in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Demand for sugar

The demand for sugar in Europe was well established by the time of the settlement of *São Tomé* and *Principé*. Indeed sugar had been known in Europe for some hundreds of years already. Mintz (1985:79) notes that sugar was "first introduced into England around 1100 AD" and "was grouped with spices". Yet, "long before most north Europeans came to know of it, sugar was consumed in large quantities as a medicine and spice in the eastern Mediterranean, in Egypt, and across North Africa" (Mintz 1985:80). The Crusades improved knowledge of sugar amongst Europeans, yet the small amounts available in Europe at this time, originating in the eastern Mediterranean area, meant that it remained a luxury for the wealthy and powerful.

As Mintz (1985:82) puts it "The quantities involved must have been very small: only royalty and the very rich could have afforded sugar at the time", noting that "in 1226, Henry III requested the mayor of Winchester to get him three pounds of Alexandrian (Egyptian) sugar, if so much could be had at one time from the merchants at the great Winchester

fair". The amount purchased gradually rose with time. Mintz also notes that 'Bishop Swinfield's household account for 1289-90 mentions the purchase of "more than one hundred pounds of sugar – mostly in coarse loaves..."' (Mintz 1985:83).

Sugar was thus well known and demand well established in Europe when the Portuguese began experimenting with plantation production on their Atlantic possessions. With known supplies of labour assured from the ongoing slave trade, plantation production as an economic model was able to supply known and assured markets with a certain confidence in production and production costs. In the case of *São Tomé* and *Principé*, its implementation meant the economic rescue of an impoverished and previously economically unsuccessful colony, for it was the third donatario, *Alvaro de Caminha*, who introduced it to the islands after a relative lack of success in the preceding earliest years of Portuguese settlement.

Yet the production of sugar on the islands had other effects for it effectively integrated the islands economically with European markets, just as the trans-shipment of slaves would connect them with other parts of the Portuguese empire. As a process it formed and deepened economic and social relationships that would define and form the society that emerged on *São Tomé* and *Principé*.

The plantation model proved to be hugely successful and was repeated by different competing European colonising powers. It offered a way of occupying territory and providing revenue for settlers and the crown of the colonising country. The accumulation of capital that such an arrangement offered also financed the economic development of their associated metropolitan areas. Such a process has also occurred within nation states. The southern United States and northeast Brazil are two such regions both of which had plantation economies that had a relation of supplying commodities and revenue with respectively the north eastern States and the São Paulo – Rio de Janiero 'axis' with such revenue aiding the economic development of these 'metropolitan' areas

in a manner similar to how the accumulation of capital from colonial plantations aided the development of European metropoles. The similarity of the effect illustrates the importance and centrality of the economic model and its economic (and social) consequences, in comparison to the political specifics in which it operated.

The model has been adopted widely and Beckford (1972:14-15) notes that plantation economies are found in the Caribbean, in Latin America, on the African continent, in the Indian Ocean (on the island of Mauritius, Reunion and Comores), in Asia and in the Pacific. He notes, for instance, eighteen places in the Caribbean and Latin America alone; Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Antigua, St. Kitts, Guadaloupe, Martinique as well as several others. In the Indian Ocean, Reunion and Mauritius are both plantation economies and in Asia; Sri Lanka, Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines. Yet he also notes differences. In some colonies the plantations constituted the bulk of the economy and dominated the society, whilst in other places they remained as separate enclaves – Beckford mentions Liberia as an

example - and in still others they acted, as I have already mentioned, as regional entities within a much larger national economy and society.

Yet despite their geographic dispersal and different political and social contexts, as enclaves, nation-states and national regions, plantation economies possess many similarities. The locations are, for instance, mostly tropical and their products are often mostly or exclusively for export to non-tropical (mostly more northerly) markets. Their economic production goals are implemented through the use of coerced labour often imported to under inhabited land or where there exists insufficient labour for the labour intensive process of plantation production. The mode of implementation -- that it is coerced and that it involves the establishment of rigid social hierarchies along with recognisable and lived social distinctions -- establishes moreover a social language of evaluation.

Beckford (1972:53) notes that "all types of plantations have certain things in common: they cover relatively large areas, numerous unskilled

workers are involved, decision making is highly centralized, the pattern

of management organization is authoritarian, and workers and decision

makers are separated by social and cultural differences". He continues

that, despite differences, "the particular pattern of economic

organization associated with any one type is a variant of a general

pattern which ensures effective communication from the decision

makers at the top to those below who must implement the decisions.

Authority and control are inherent in the plantation system" (Beckford

1972:53).

It is this coercive and imposed quality that many plantations share for at

their centre they are economic ensembles and, "since the community

owes its being to the unit of production, it follows that its social

structure and the pattern of interpersonal relations will be a reflection of

the type of economic organization that governs production" (Beckford

1972:53-54). For it was productive success that was sought and the need

to meet demand elsewhere that drove the constituting social relations of

plantations. These relations were moreover imposed and rigidly

enforced. It was not just that workers were slaves, then later contract workers, but their activities and work was overseen and positioned in a rigid social hierarchy.

These different social positions were moreover not just made clear in how people related to each other but expressed themselves in other ways, such as the standard of accommodation provided. This differed significantly from the crowded and often squalid accommodation of the workers to the magnificence of the owner's house, with middle management living in something in between - more commodious than the workers but more modest than the owner's residence. These practical differences were an expression of evaluations that were part of the production 'model' and had physical and practical reality for those forced to live with them.

Such differences and the associated evaluations they constituted, were part of a social language that made up plantation life and would have a lasting impression even after Emancipation. For social mobility and

aspirations would be understood in terms of the signs and evaluations formed in the coerced plantation era. Such evaluations extended to the language spoken which was often of the coloniser, or a derived creole thereof, and as Thompson (1939:211) puts it, "... Language is bound up with the system of social control. With its acquisition there tends to develop at the same time an acceptance of the situation".

Thus, everything from work roles to accommodation type, material provisions, spoken language and the 'language' of social forms was provided, indeed imposed. This encyclopaedic provision of experience for those who inhabited plantations resulted in an experience that has been described by Beckford (1972:55) thus: "The plantation is a total economic institution. It binds everyone in its embrace to the one task of executing the will of its owner or owners. And because it is omnipotent and omnipresent in the lives of those living within its confines, it is also a total social institution. Social relations within the plantation community are determined by the economic organization that governs

production". Total institutions have been defined by Goffman (1961:11) "..as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life".

Yet resistance occurred. Nearly every plantation society had the same issues of resistance with both marronage communities (those who had run away setting up independent communities) and revolts both from inside the plantation and organised from without. Moreover there was cultural resistance, for not every aspect of the workers' cultures was extinguished and much assimilation and mixing occurred, with authentic social practices from the migrant workers homeland being mixed with the social practices possible on the plantations. All of these characteristics are in evidence in *São Tomé* and *Principé*.

Moreover, the reliance on slave labour from Africa and the use of European overseers had a further consequence for it meant that social distinction in European colonies on the Atlantic islands of Portugal as

well as in the Caribbean and Latin America took on ethnic and racial features. Beckford notes (1972:63), "Slave plantation society.... had certain distinctive features: a caste system based on race, rigidly stratified social structure based on occupational status on the plantation and divided along race and color lines, and cultural plurality with integrative elements deriving from the common destiny to production of the crop for everyone in the plantation community".

Beckford also notes that after Emancipation, "what limited social mobility... [ex slaves] could achieve.... depended in large measure on the extent to which they could succeed in divorcing the culture of black people and assimilate that of the whites" (Beckford 1972:64). Social aspirations were measured in the terms of categories that had been lived and that had had very real meaning on the plantations. Social mobility was thus a process of successful negotiation of these categories as understood in lifestyle, occupation and presentation: categories which were essentially of the coloniser and thus mostly European. As Gibson (2003:17) describes it, referring to the French Antilles, "Speaking

'proper' French is a symbol of authority". He notes, referring to

Martinicans who were in France, "Here was a group of people who had

grown up speaking, thinking and looking French. How could Antilleans

look French? Because they believed they were, having fully internalized

French culture" (Gibson 2003:17). Yet whilst the Antillean may have

arrived in the metropole *seeing themselves* as French, the interpretations

made by others there could be different. Gibson refers to how Fanon,

who came from Martinique, wrote that in France "I discovered my

Blackness, my ethnic characteristics" (Gibson 2003:5 quoting Fanon

(trans)1967:12).

Hence whilst an international institution in terms of its formation,

plantation society was inherently local in its interpretation. Indeed it was

local realities lived that had made the imposed and foreign-derived

social forms meaningful. As Beckford states, plantations' "establishment

necessitated bringing together enterprise, capital, and labor from

different parts of the world into new locations. Internally it developed as

a total institution and externally it continued to depend in fundamental ways on the outside world" (Beckford 1972:37).

Whilst then often separate and isolated from surrounding communities and defining itself in its own terms, plantations left few other options available or even knowable for their inhabitants. Yet this did not mean that plantations were not also connected and influenced by international relations, events and qualities. Indeed they were formed by them. Thus whilst social relations may derive from an almost feudal hierarchy, their existence and *raison d'etre* derives from market forces, making plantation societies curiously modern. It was after all the economic needs of production to supply a demand elsewhere that drove the totalising aspects of plantation life. Moreover the realities and interpretations that they have formed live on and as I describe in chapter 7 can be seen today in the aspirational hopes of some and in the interpretations that can be made of foreigners.

The value of sugar

It was sugar's value in Europe that was the ultimate economic driver behind the plantation's economic (and thus social) model. According to Mintz (1985:81), "various explanations have been advanced for the popularity of spices among the privileged of Europe, particularly the chronic scarcity of winter fodder before about 1500, which led to heavy fall butchering and the consequent need to eat meats that were cured, salted, smoked, spiced, and sometimes rotten. But perhaps it is enough simply to remind ourselves how pleasantly aromatic, pungent, and salty, sour, bitter, oily, piquant, and other tasty substances can relieve a monotonous diet. And spices can also aid in digestion".

Pons (2007:1) argues thus: "Spices and salt were especially important in Europe, for they were used in preserving meat at the beginning of winter when green pastures dwindled and livestock were slaughtered. As meat was a necessary staple for armies, spices were of great strategic value". He notes also that there were "two major spice trade routes connected Europe to Asia and its spice production centers. The Venetians

controlled the northern route [and] the Genoese controlled the southern

route" (Pons 2007:1). Whilst the Portuguese, by rounding the Cape of

Good Hope in 1498 and sailing to India opened up a third spice route

that avoided these other two, sugar as a 'spice', that was grown nearer to

Europe and then to the west of the continent, offered a means of

circumventing easterly trade routes completely.

Sugar was useful to Europeans in other ways. Mintz describes its uses as

follows: "sucrose [sugar] can be described initially in terms of five

principal uses or "functions": as medicine, spice-condiment, decorative

material, sweetener, and preservative. These uses are often difficult to

separate from one another" (Mintz 1985:78).

Gradually sugar was to become so ubiquitous as to be referred to

separately as a commodity that contrasted other flavours. Mintz writes:

"sweetness (…) is counterposed to other tastes of all kinds (bitter as in

"bittersweet," sour as in "sweet and sour," piquant as in "hot sausage"

and "sweet sausage"), so that today it is difficult to view sugar as a

condiment or spice" (Mintz 1985:80). Moreover as other tropical products appeared on European markets sugar was often consumed in association with them – tea, coffee and chocolate for instance. Yet if sugar use was complex it also acquired a rather different value derived directly from its scarcity and expense, it became involved in social forms that indicated social status and its use thus was destined to become aspirational amongst Europe's middle classes.

Its widening and changing use, and its increased availability means, as Mintz points out, that today "we are accustomed not to thinking of sugar as spice, but, rather, to thinking of 'sugar and spice.' This habit of mind attests to the significant changes in the use and meanings of sugar, in the relationship between sugar and spices, and in the place of sweetness in western food systems that have occurred since 1100" (Mintz 1985:80). However, "toward the end of the fifteenth century, when Atlantic-island sugar production was supplanting North African and Mediterranean (...), sugars were still costly imports; and though they were becoming important in the feasts and rituals of the powerful, they were still beyond

the reach of nearly everyone – luxuries, rather than commodities" (Mintz 1985:84). It was around this time that production on *São Tomé* and *Principé* - late starters for Atlantic islands, for they followed Madeira and the Azores – grew and for the next century they would produce sugar in huge amounts for their size.

Yet as availability of sugar on the market increased, prices were to fall changing production pressures and favouring those with the lowest costs. The relation between what was desired – for a variety of reasons – in Europe and outcomes on the ground on Atlantic and Caribbean islands as well as in Latin American plantations was strong. Yet this relationship was reflexive for as production increased in these places the changing availability was to have a large impact on how sugar was perceived and how it was consumed in Europe. Sugar was, to quote Mintz (1985:86) once more, "transformed from a luxury of kings into the kingly luxury of commoners".

Yet if production, its quantity and to a certain extent its quality, had an effect on Europe and other metropoles, and if metropoles altered and created social forms in their colonies or peripheries, through the initiation and imposition of an economic and social model – the plantation economy – that sought to meet their needs and desires, there existed also another group that came to be effected by this 'relationship'. This was those who fell in its shadow, for plantations often have a significant effect on the economies that surround them. In some small islands, such as Barbados, Antigua, and St Kitts available land that was not already owned by plantations "was in very short supply" (Beckford 1972:90), greatly restricting the options open to those who did not work on the plantations. After Emancipation ex-slaves without access to land struggled to become independent producers and were faced with either continuing with low wage plantation work or engaging in petty trades and subsistence living. In contrast, in other places "where more land was available the ex-slaves were able to establish themselves in independent cultivation and the plantation had to introduce measures to secure their continued labor services on a wage basis. These measures included (…)

legislation which made it difficult for black people to secure land and

taxes which would force them to work for wages to secure cash for

payment of the taxes" (Beckford 1972:90). The plantations thus

continued to have influence over 'other options' and the potential

development of a separate economy.

Beckford also notes that despite differences at Emancipation between

plantation areas of the New World, "..the theme was the same: the

plantation owners made it difficult for the ex-slaves to secure land of

their own and introduced measures to force them to continue working on

the plantations" (Beckford 1972:92). The same issue, namely plantation

owners attempting to secure workers forcefully, led to the rumours of

imminent forced plantation labour that caused the disturbances at

Trindade and *Batepa* on *São Tomé*.

In the United States, Beckford (1972:92) writes that, the "system of

forced labor in the U.S. South gave the ex-slaves only a slim chance of

escaping the dreaded fate of continued work on the plantations". He

continues: "The choices which black people faced in the circumstances were: migration, continued work on the plantation in the condition of semi-slavery, and starvation" (Beckford 1972:93-94). The coerced nature of labour on many plantations was a feature that was often shared and continued after the ending of slavery in different forms which included; scarcity of other available options, legal frameworks that set taxes and ownership restrictions, and the use of contract labour.

As central and as common as the coerced labour was the response to it with marronage communities and revolts a recurring feature of plantation societies. Such communities were regarded as a threat by plantation owners both in the Caribbean where maroon communities were well established and also in *São Tomé* and *Principé* where armed insurrections by slaves on plantations as well as, on *São Tomé*, raids by Angolar communities outside them occurred regularly during the Sixteenth Century.

As Moitt (2004:53-4) points out: "All over the Caribbean, evidence of marronnage abounds from the seventeenth century onward. In Barbados, the planters drafted a security plan in the 1640s in response to fear of a potential general revolt by the enslaved that they believed maroons had been in the process of organizing". Moitt notes slaves escaping in Surinam from as early as 1650, and that there were raids in the French colony of Guadeloupe "who raided plantations at night for arms and food" (Moitt 2004:55). Such raids on plantations also occurred regularly on *São Tomé* in the Sixteenth Century and more recent acts of resistance, and their brutal suppression, form the framework for the commemoration held annually at *Fernão Diaz* that I describe in the first chapter.

Summary

Plantation economies can be found dispersed throughout the world, but are located overwhelmingly in tropical locations and are the consequence of imposed social relations arranged around economic production. The centrality of the economic model and in particular its

driving motive of increased production along with the mixed and frequently relatively recent arrival of peoples, means that the social relations formed often have similarities. A hierarchy of rigid economic roles with qualitatively different lifestyles, levels of hardship and relative power associated with them, along with a common spoken language constituted a shared lived reality that continues to shape behaviour even after the initial coerced social relations have changed.

The consequences of a plantation economy are extensive, not least in terms of the mentality and evaluatory signs that come to be accepted. Social practices continue to be measured and assessed qualitatively by how they were lived in a coerced plantation era. For whilst slavery is perhaps the most overt form of coercion, and something ending at Emancipation, other forms, more covert, including economic opportunities, availability of land, the legal framework within which people must live and continued evaluations of people and occupations, means that many of the social relations continue, even if in modified form, after Emancipation and independence. In fact, as will be shown,

the political changes of independence and the official ending of

colonialism may not change the essential and central economic relations

that formed, drove and reproduced many of the social relations to start

with. Nor the contradictions that a rational quantitative monetary

economy may place on the preferred ways people seek to act

economically.

Chapter 3

The anthropological project

introduction

Anthropology sets out to investigate and understand social worlds often

very different from that of the researcher in often very different

geographical *locales*. This difference has changed with time, or rather

the understanding of what constitutes difference has changed, but it

remains the case that anthropology is about understanding and possibly

interpreting how *another* lives.

Yet an interest in others and especially in difference is not *unique* to

anthropology. For instance, Weiner argues that: "Psychoanalysis and

anthropology were both products of the late nineteenth century" (Weiner

1999:234). They both, Weiner argues, "placed *alterity* not at the fringes

or borders of Western life and consciousness but at the core of western

culture's own self-construction and self-theorization. The recognition of what Foucault called the essential doubleness, or what we could call, following Lacan, the 'otherness of one's self' is how both anthropology and psychoanalysis begin" (Weiner 1999:234).

Moreover anthropology overlaps broadly with other disciplines not just in its interest in difference but in its area of study. As Thomas puts it: "The discipline has always shared ground – or disputed ground – with neighbouring disciplines such as sociology, law, psychology and religious studies" (Thomas 1999:262). The social processes and meanings that anthropology study, "have never been exclusively anthropology's own" (Thomas 1999:262), and indeed writing about how others lived has been a practice since ancient times with writers, such as Herodotus, recording their observations and experiences of travel.

Yet what is unique to anthropology is the way it sets out to obtain its data, recording personalised accounts based often on long-term stays in the 'field of study'. Moreover such 'ethnography' also attempts, at least

often attempts, to be more than a rambling collection of experiences

recorded and more than a traveller's account; rather, for the most part, it

seeks *also to persuade and convince* its readers and audience that what

it has recorded *is* knowledge and *has* value. Anthropological text is thus

not neutral. Rather it has intentions. It is *a social act* in itself.

But what is knowledge?

Rabinow points out that, "beginning in the seventeenth century,

knowledge became internal, representational, and judgemental. Modern

philosophy was born when a knowing subject endowed with

consciousness and representational contents became the central problem

for thought, the paradigm of all knowing" (Rabinow 1986:235).

Represented experience could potentially be communicated and

recognised by others. It could be explained in terms of a larger

consciously reflected upon framework that had been

separated from the experiences themselves (that are personal and

specific) and the social relations in which they occurred.

Representations *of* experiences are both accessible and atemporal. They last in a manner that the original experience does not. They are communicable to those who were not present and had no connection to the events or social relations in which the experiences occurred. In this way the experiences are removed and are detached from their specifics; and as representation the experiences represented can, like a commodity, be transferred and possessed. They have been 'objectified', interpreted in a manner where their specificness to a subject has been removed.

Anthropology seeks more than just this, however, for it also seeks that the representations it communicates are recognised *as knowledge*. "The 'seen'," as Hastrup points out, "has had the stamp of cultural authenticity, and eventually of anthropological authority" (Hastrup 1995:47). As a perceptual tool it was, Hastrup points out, "in the Enlightenment when vision became omnipotent. Insight became equated with what was in sight" (Hastrup 1995:47). The predominance of vision - for something to be in sight to give insight - ironically does not mean that all aspects, or indeed any aspect of the object seen, is known.

Rather what is known, or at least experienced, is what is observed, but this is a perception only and is open to interpretation, the limits of which any optical illusion or card trick attests to. Yet dispassionate observation is the methodology of science and of legitimacy. That data should be collected in an objective manner free from subjective bias by an external dispassionate observer is a methodology that allows access to what is particular of the object studied rather than particular to the observer observing.

This view that observations need to be objective to be recognised as knowledge stemmed from a view that there is a real world to be observed and that the legitimate role of anthropology was to observe it. Yet anthropology seeks to understand the world in ways other than are just accessible through observation. Rather than seeking to exclude the particulars of the observer, it seeks to include the particulars of those it observes. It seeks to understand what people make of the world rather than just what they see in it. It is interested in the meanings and interpretations that they have of it.

When watching a card trick a viewer may not know what *really* happens

with the cards – or he or she may – but what is significant is what the

performer intends and whether the audience gets it. Rather than seeking

what really happens, as a natural science would attempt to do,

anthropology is interested in what people make of it and how they

communicate this to others. It is, in short, interested in what the

performance *means* rather than what it *is*. It is how the events and the

interaction are *interpreted* by those involved and placed perhaps in a

larger already known framework. It is thus a different form of knowledge

that anthropology seeks to that of seeking the properties of objective

material reality.

Moreover much of this knowledge is not openly verbalised. As Hastrup

notes referring to Fabian:

> "Fabian wants to draw our attention to the fact that 'about large
>
> areas and important aspects of culture no one, not even the
>
> native, has information that can simply be called up and
>
> expressed in discursive statements' (Fabian 1990:6). In other

words most cultural knowledge is stored in action rather than in words. It is enacted rather than spoken and may not be consciously thought about at all" (Hastrup 1995:82).

This is the theme that was discussed by Jackson who notes that meaning emerges out of the framework of lived experience. For Mead such meaning is prior to language and exists in the social interactions of which language is but a one formal aspect.

In consequence

A researcher hence needs to become aware of and familiar with as much of this framework - the setting, gestures and verbal responses, as Goffman describes them - of the lived experience that communicates meaning to others whilst also maintaining a sufficient distance from them in order to perceive them as objects of experience and thus communicable to others. Anthropology's methodology for doing this form of research has been through extended periods of *social immersion.*

For anthropology, the challenge faced is not knowing a card trick to be a trick *really,* but knowing how others act in response to it, even if they know also it is a trick. Anthropology's goal is not to determine primarily whether a trick is a trick, but rather what people make of it. It is the interpretation of the social act of playing with cards that interests anthropology. It is to become accustomed and familiar with these 'referents' that anthropological fieldwork is conducted over an extended period within the social 'space' of those studied.

As Moore describes it, "Anthropology is based on the irresoluble tension between 'the need to separate oneself from the world and render it up as object of experience, and the desire to lose oneself within this object world and experience it directly' (Mitchell 1988:29)" (Moore 1999:7).

As Hastrup describes it: "[We] have to comprehend meaning as it emerges in practice. In ethnography as in culture there is no external standpoint of knowing. Knowledge is inherently reflexive" (Hastrup 1995:82). It is inherently a lived experience existing in the gestures and

interactions of those involved. Moreover it is also frequently normative,

for people expect to be able to understand the other and what they mean.

They will reward those who act as expected and sanction those who do

not.

Responses are a constitutive part of this social process. It is in order to

understand these norms that a close and long term relationship and

experience with the field site is essential. The specifics of this

relationship has been commented on by Jackson. He describes how he

had climbed a local hill near to his field site in order to 'get things into

perspective' (Jackson 1989:8). Yet arriving there to a place that no one

ever ventured Jackson realised all he had done was to remove himself

from the location where everything meaningful occurred, namely the

streets and houses of the village itself, and that it was by living in the

village amongst the people that he would learn what held meaning rather

than by having a wholly outsider observer status with it. Yet it is the

objectifying of one's own experience that allows it to be rendered up and

described using the signs that constitute text.

Much debate in anthropology has stemmed from the dynamic of this tension, of how to achieve legitimate data that will be recognised as valid by anthropology's readers and audience, and yet how to obtain it in a manner that reflects what happens on the ground. Then there is the issue of presentation - of how to present the information found to anthropology's audience.

A changing assessment of text

The rise of discourse analysis in the 1970s questioned the passivity and neutrality of text as representing the world. As representational of the world, text could form *how* the world was recognised and interpreted. Yet rather than being wholly derived from the world it could be referent to itself. Saussure's work on the arbitrary nature of the sign saw language as a system that was internally referent and essentially independent of the world outside. As Holdcroft describes Saussure's point, "..a language is a system of signs, and that the signifying features of a sign depend on its intralinguistic relations to other signs belonging

to the same system rather than on its extralinguistic relations to pre-

existing objects or ideas" (Holdcroft 1991:66).

The idea that language had its own structure that was independent of the

world and not just derivative of it, was critical for it changed how people

understood language from something which describes the world

passively and derivatively into one that describes it actively and places

meaning and values in it through the associations and the referents that

are of the language rather than of the world. Language forms how the

world is interpreted, influencing how people relate to each other and

how people and actions are valued. Moreover the distinction between

experience and representation – text as metaphor - was no longer

assumed but questioned. As Csordas puts it:

> "The radical epistemological move was that representation does
>
> not denote experience, but constitutes it. This move closes the
>
> gap between language and experience, and thereby eliminates a
>
> dualism, but does so not by transcending the dualism but by
>
> *reducing* experience to language, or discourse, or representation,

implying that to ask representative of what is fallaciously

essentialist" (Csordas 1999:183).

Suddenly the goal of anthropological research, and the assumptions that

informed the accumulation of knowledge had changed. To pursue a

single view of the world was to assume that such a thing existed to start

with rather than the world being composed of multiple differing

narratives all of which were meaningful to those who utilised them, but

all of which might be different and at times conflicting. In the new

postmodern world *there existed no overall narrative to be found.* Instead

numerous differing narratives competed with each other to try and

establish differing frameworks of social relations. The goal of finding a

unified form of knowledge had disappeared.

It was the hugely influential publication of Lyotard's *The Postmodern*

Condition in 1979 that brought this form of critique to a wider audience.

As Woods puts it, "Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* directly

challenges the two great Hegelian metanarratives allegedly underlying

the philosophical position of Habermas namely, the goal of the ultimate emancipation of humanity and the speculative aim of achieving a unity of knowledge" (Woods 1999:34).

In contrast to the essentialism of earlier epistemology, meaning became constructed by discourse and discourse was knowledge. "Foucault has proposed [that] truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Rabinow 1986:240). The increased awareness of the specifics of the symbols used, of their history, and that "truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it" (Rabinow 1986:240) meant a recognition by some that symbolic systems were not *essential.* Rather they were constructed. Foucault proposed that the narrative contained descriptive associations that were a component of the text rather than being of the world and represented in the text. The use of text thus asserts relations and qualities into the world that are inherent primarily in the text and in the text's social history.

An increased awareness of the constructed nature of social meaning

meant that much anthropology moved away from searching for 'facts' as

social entities in the manner that Levi-Strauss had looked for them in the

1940s – and searched instead for interpretations. Whilst such

interpretation was advocated by many, it was Geertz that applied it

particularly in social sciences relying on *thick description,* a method of

describing people's actions in great detail in order to elucidate them.

Such description allows the context and the associations within which

people's actions are carried out to be conveyed better. It conveys some of

the 'narrative' within which the actions make sense. Yet as Geertz points

out thick description is still an interpretation, for it is neither the

experience lived nor is it a reflection of it recorded in a neutral way.

For as Geertz describes it, "..anthropological writings are themselves

interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot" (Geertz

1973:15). He continues, "They are, thus, fictions; fictions in the sense

that they are "something made," "something fashioned" - the original

meaning of *fictio* – not that they are false, unfactual, or merely "as if"

thought experiments" (Geertz 1973:15). Moreover if some of this meaning as knowledge has never been consciously thought about, recording it may mean making an interpretation of what the researcher has found with little, if any, explanatory input from those to whom it seems so natural as to remain unexamined.

Yet if there was an examination of the relation of narrative to knowledge and meaning, there was also a change in the priority given to it, as Lyotard argues, "The decline of narrative can be seen as an effect of the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War, which has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means; it can also be seen as an effect of the redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism after its retreat under the protection of Keynesianism during the period 1930-60, a renewal that has eliminated the communist alternative and valorised the individual enjoyment of goods and services" (Lyotard 1979:37-8). As Lyotard describes it the emergence of global capitalism had produced not just 'the blossoming of techniques and technologies,' but offered numerous consumer goods to the public.

The consequence was a change in valuation from a single desired end to the processes and means of arriving - with multiple possible endings. It meant that rather than *a narrative* that defined and acted as knowledge, different and multiple ways of communicating emerged as having validity. Those writing ethnography thus needed to be aware of these new expectations and evaluations if their work was to remain legitimate within a changing discourse and retain its status and also its ability to persuade.

In response many anthropologists eschewed theory or summarising as ethnocentric and sought to record experience more from a Husserlian 'natural standpoint' without commentary. They turned from "informative to performative ethnography" (Hastrup 1995:82), hoping that participation would enable the researcher to become better aware of the discourses and categories of the other and to perceive significances that were meaningful but may not be disclosed verbally in interviews.

As Pratt writes: "At times one still hears expressed as an ideal for ethnography a neutral, tropeless discourse that would render other realities 'exactly as they are,' not filtered through our own values and interpretative schema" (Pratt 1986:27). It is perhaps towards this idealised end that some ethnographers have sought a different method of conveying ethnographic data that is seemingly less overtly interpreted by the categories and representations of text. They have turned instead to recording sound or video as being more 'authentic' than the representational and interpretational qualities of text so clearly embedded in the social forms and history of language.

Yet as Jackson's description of climbing a nearby hill to get things into perspective shows it is likely that any standpoint would preference the researcher's own unconscious preferences and as Pratt indicates there is no tropeless neutral perspective anyway all perspectives have a specificity. Moreover the apparent absence of interpretation does not mean that the audience will not make their own interpretations of what is portrayed using their own socially specific recognitions. The

anthropologist has merely shifted responsibility from the researcher partially, and only partially, to the audience to make what they will of what he or she has produced. It is thus still an interpretation on many levels as Geertz pointed out.

Moreover video as a medium is not neutral, it constitutes representation, an artifice. Whilst not the formal abstract representation of text with its cultural and ethnocentric history and specifics, video is separated from the scenario in time and context and the act of recording pictures in real time is bound by its own social norms and history. Video has camera angles, focus and choice of scenes recorded and finally it has usually editing. It is thus a construct in many of the ways text is. The images are chosen not by the audience but by the researcher for the most part and the same is true of sound. Moreover even when the scenes are chosen by those being studied it will need to be presented to its audience in a manner that is understandable to them. It remains thus an interpretation of one for another.

It is never possible to know *really* what another thinks or senses or

recognizes, and thus the meanings they are making of the world. The

claim that this is possible is to assume an unproven universality to

human experience and to imply that people can, through representation

or imagination and evocation, approach such experience of another in an

'essential' way. This seems unlikely and fanciful. Yet recorded

experience, in whatever medium, *is recorded* and may thus be

recognised and interpreted – as a work of art might – by an audience or

reader as part of a larger framework, but a framework that is of the

audience or the reader's own.

If a unity of knowledge is not possible, for the scripts that constitute it,

as communicable representational forms, are various and form how we

interpret the world, then the purpose of knowledge changes. Rather than

seeking a progressively expanding and unifying narrative – the 'Hegelian

metanarrative' that Woods describes - increased knowledge means

understanding multiple and competing narratives.

Saussure's work on the structure of text recognised that narrative *is not* a reflection of a single reality that is wholly external to itself, but one that acts both internally as well as reflexively with the world and one which has historical forms embedded within it. It is the teasing out of these intertwining themes and influences that discourse analysis sets out to accomplish. By understanding how language forms the world – and the world language – it may be possible to understand both better.

For the inherent internally referential structure of text not only refers also to the world but by doing so asserts structure on it, as through describing the world it forms how people interact and value it. This realisation means that anthropology is not a passive reflection and interpretation of the world. Rather the relation is different; it is reflexive. Anthropological text, along with other texts, have the potential to influence how the world is experienced.

A changing world..

By the 1970s the colonial era was mostly over and the unifying

progressive narrative that had explained and legitimised the colonial

project of metropolitan dominance over its colonies with its implied

evaluatory hierarchy was increasingly disparate from reality on the

ground. There was a need for a new narrative that would explain and

legitimise this new state of affairs. Moreover within an increasingly

global capitalist system the need for member states and their citizens to

make purchasing choices meant also a need for increased, and

expressed, agency and self-definition. This fitted with the new era of

multiple narratives whose profile was enhanced by the emergence of

post-colonial literature. Often written by those of the newly independent

colonies, or with ancestry there, the new genre covered identity and

authenticity, and the issues of *assimilation, racism* and preconceived

views. Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea (1966)* is one of the more

celebrated literary examples. A story based as a prequel to Charlotte

Bronte's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre,* it describe the story of a creole heiress

who marries an Englishman and moves to England.

Published a little later *Edward Said's* influential *Orientalism (1978)* examined how the concept of otherness assisted western views of self and the colonial project. *Said* contends that the west's view of itself was formed in part by the construction of an 'other' that acted as a contrasting opposite. This both justified western dominance and inhibited self-expression by the colonised who were obliged to express themselves in terms formed by the dominant western discourse. The book acted as an influential critique of this 'norm'.

It was in part to escape from this heritage that anthropology sought to produce ethnographic texts that were, in a similar tone to the post-colonial literature, self-defined or at least co-authored. Researchers strove, like the literature did, to produce ethnography that inscribed experience in local terms and referents, "replacing the kind of ethnography where the ethnographer determines the questions and notes the answers, with a kind of ethnographic communication where 'the ethnographer does not call the tune but plays along' (Fabian 1990:19)" (Hastrup 1995:82).

Yet such self-definition and the presence of multiple texts does not mean that there is no place for theory. As Moore points out, theorizing is inevitable and cannot be avoided:

> "Valuing cultural difference requires theory; assessing the connections between forms of cultural difference and hierarchical relations of power requires theory: linking personal experiences to processes of globalization and fragmentation requires theory. That is why anthropological theories, while they must be grounded in the particularism of lives lived, can never be isomorphc with them" (Moore 1999:7).

There remains thus a complex relation of distance from as well as closeness to those that are studied. It is 'the irresoluble tension' of anthropology that Mitchell, quoted by Moore refers to (Mitchell 1988:29), (Moore 1999:7).

Yet anthropologists have also had to adapt to a new expectations from its audience of what it was to communicate if their discipline was still to be seen as *acceptable social practice;* and find a new mode of presentation that allowed for much more self-definition by research subjects, if what they described was to be interpreted as legitimate. This shift in practice was driven not just by a change in what anthropology's audience was seeking, but it came also from the ethnographers themselves, who were also reassessing anthropology's role and place in a changed global landscape. If anthropology was to remain as a discipline with some authority within the changed 'language games', it needed to renegotiate its relation both with its audience and with its subjects of study. Much of the ethnography that was co-authored and less overtly interpretative was initiated by the researchers who were trying to place their work within these new *language games* of a post-colonial epoch.

In an era in which a market economy had emerged as dominant and in which its actors should be self-determining, the importance of such self-determination needed to be represented in the texts that described those

actors' social worlds. The new economic needs set a new legitimacy, and the need for such legitimacy in the eyes and ears of its audience and readership meant that anthropology needed to place these 'language games' into its methodologies and forms of presentation.

Conveying ethnography to the reader

Yet if anthropology is interested in recording experience that is authentic, it is also a process of conveying it in terms that a reader will understand, is familiar with and can recognise or at least relate to. I mean by this that ethnography must be detailed enough for the categories of research subjects to be situated in a framework *that makes sense* to a reader. Yet this process makes assumptions, both that there exists such a framework to be explained to start with - that the people studied seek meaningful recognitions in their social actions that are accessible - and that such a framework can be conveyed *somehow* in a meaningful understandable way to anthropology's readership or audience.

Yet if differences were now appreciated, many assumptions remained.

The methodology of participant-observation still assumed that access to

the categories of others was possible and that what was recorded can in

some sense be accessible by readers. Postmodernity brought an

understanding that meaning is derived from a variety of discourses

which operate separately from each other and are essentially self-

referential. They are inherently meaningful *in themselves*. Yet whilst the

relation to the subject studied and also to the audience to which

recordings are presented have changed substantially, anthropological

research remains the experiencing and recording of ethnographic data in

detail: this has remained the *leitmotif* for what anthropology is.

Differences in defining boundaries of discipline

That anthropology is different from other disciplines was described by

Pratt in her article 'Fieldwork in Common places' (1986). Pratt

discusses a popular book by Florinda Donner, *Shabono: A True*

Adventure in the Remote and Magical Heart of the South American

Jungle (1982), and suggests that part of the reason why Donner was so

criticised for her book was that rather than being simply inaccurate there

was great ambiguity regarding which category the book should be

placed in. Taken at first to be anthropology it was then queried *whether*

the author had really done the fieldwork. This questioning of the

methodology emerged, Pratt's argued, as a questioning of whether the

work *could be anthropology.* For without the fieldwork it would be

something else.

As Pratt points out the book still had value even if Donner had done no

fieldwork and if she had then it was not surprising that the experiences

she wrote about were similar to what others, who had worked in the

same area, had stated. The charge though that some made against

Donner was of plagiarism of using others fieldwork to write her book.

What seemed, she suggests, to be really offensive to people and what

caused the controversy was perhaps not whether the book had value but

that the text fell between numerous *different categories*: part supposed-

anthropology, part a story of personal development, and part novel. The

critiques converged on a single primary one, that without having done

fieldwork the text *could not be anthropology.* The implication is that

anthropology is essentially method and if the method is not carried out it

cannot be anthropology. In this way anthropology mimics science in

being viewed as essentially knowledge obtained through the practice of

a specific methodology. For anthropology though such method would be

the practice of long term fieldwork and a familiarity with the subject

matter that forms through such engagement.

The role of the ethnographer

Whilst ethnographers have attempted co-authored works and used other

modalities of recording such as video and sound recording, the role of

the researcher is frequently central. The impossibility of recording

everything means that all recording is *a selection,* even video or sound

have temporality and location, as does writing. All such data requires

subsequent recognition and interpretation that needs to be placed in a

framework *that makes sense.* Often many of these decisions are carried

out by the researcher and it is this need for subjective input by the

researcher that means that ethnographic fieldwork usually takes place

over an extended period of time. There have been studies where the subjects have, for instance, done the filming – making video diaries, for example, of their lives - and even contributed to the editing, but even in such cases the choice of whether the study is carried out and the raising of the necessary funding for it, has been made or organised through the researcher. In consequence the input from the researcher is often both defining and substantial in any study.

It may be that those studied communicate enough in representations for the researcher to identify and recognise something that they are already familiar with; or it may be that through experience accrued through a long-term stay a researcher *becomes familiar* with the actions that communicate meaning; or it may be, as Cezanne puts it, that we simply find some things in the world and respond to them in a certain way, for we recognise things in them we can relate to that are familiar to us. Yet such recognition is rather different from essentialism. For recognising familiar things is merely to relate to the experience of the thing rather than to the things themselves.

Yet as Gardner asserts, fieldwork continues to have an intrinsic value despite these limits and tensions (Gardner 1997:x):

> "Despite my qualms I am glad that I persevered with my fieldwork, for I am convinced that anthropological research is vital for our understanding of each other. It is, however, a highly subjective art, for knowledge is generated and validated through individual experience, producing narratives which may say almost as much about their writers as they do about the groups they supposedly represent. This is not necessarily a problem, so long as anthropological authors admit both to their privileged positions and their subjectivity, to the way in which their own stories have become interwoven with those of the people they are describing."

That 'understanding' each other better is worthwhile, is an unexplained assumption of Gardner's text, but if understanding *is* worthwhile then anthropology has purpose in contributing to moving towards this goal. Yet such a goal is also one that ultimately can only ever be partial.

Hastrup is positive though in her assessment of anthropology when she states,

> "..there is such a thing as a distinct anthropological project, the object of which is to provide ground for comparison and generalization of social experience on the basis of concrete ethnography. The distinctiveness of ethnography lies precisely in its experiential character, which allows for a recognition of both difference and unity. While inhabiting different worlds and projecting different desires into our world, we share the capacity to experience relativity. This is the backbone of anthropology, straddling the gap between the particular and the general" (Hastrup 1995:x).

The search for an ideal essentialist view of the other may be a distraction from anthropology as social act. Whether ontologically what anthropology seeks is true may be less important than whether it convinces its audience – at least in terms of being a successful social act of communication. As *a social act* the importance is *to convince* and the

morality of how this is done or what is proposed is a different argument.
It may ultimately be a card 'trick' but if the audience is convinced by it
then it has succeeded *as social act*.

Yet if anthropology were to accept openly its card-trickiness it must also
accept both more difficulty in convincing readers of its importance and
lower prestige as a discipline. For card-trickiness stands outside of the
dominant and often essentialist narrative of much legitimating discourse
and whilst scientific theories are essentially card tricks also, they
possess a legitimacy secondary to the methodology of their testing.
Something which anthropology is rarely able to do. Anthropology has
striven to avoid such lack of importance both by arguing that it sought
'social facts' and then dismissing these and replacing them with
interpretations – and arguing that it is not the 'facts' found but their
meaning for the audience and participants that mattered.

The emergence of prioritising text and signs led to changes in methodology and in presentation with more direct and evocative ethnography that sought greater authenticity and thus pursued *legitimacy by different means,* but with the same goal that what anthropology describes has a close and significant relation to what is there, whether this is presented as 'fact', interpretation or authenticity.

Consequences of the new interpretations of difference

The new awareness of multiple perspectives and plural realities has meant that differences - the tension that powers anthropological study - are recognised as occurring throughout societies. There is no longer a need to travel far geographically to find a field site with discernible differences to study, for 'others' with different perspectives can be found much nearer a researcher's home.

Such differences of perspective are also present in *São Tomé* and *Principé,* and yet I did find *some* actions and expectations that were shared *often* and others that were shared *rarely* and yet others that were

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subject to near *constant* dispute and difference. People do act in a manner that repeats *sometimes* and can be perceived to have similarities both between people and with the same person over time. Yet what also emerges is that any such shared 'code' in actions and language is also subject to wide differences of interpretation and that these occur frequently. Some of what these similarities and differences are I hope to describe in the following pages.

Fieldwork in São Tomé and Príncipe

I have outlined how the project of anthropology needs to build and maintain a relationship with its readership and audience that is sensitive to how that readership and audience judges validity and how it makes claims to legitimacy. I have also discussed how anthropological research requires a relation to its field of study that is active, prolonged and immersed if it is to acquire a degree of access to the experiences and meanings of those it attempts to study that will be recognised subsequently as anthropology. Yet anthropology is also a persuasive act

that has changed over time and is evolving in response to changes in other legitimating 'narratives'. I now intend to describe what I did during my time doing fieldwork.

On arriving

I had decided that rather than learning about *particular people* in depth and then attempting to say something about the society more generally, I would instead seek what aspects of social actions were often shared *by many*. What responses and possibly adjustment strategies were common. In a society such as *São Tomé* and *Principé*, a society marked by difference in which people have arrived historically from so many different places, what struck me as interesting was how people managed anyway. It was how they adjusted to the social and personal differences encountered and managed these differences in a way that enabled them to get by and survive. It was this management and social adjustment that came to intrigue me and it was to understand this better that I sought to experience as many encounters as I could. Whilst I also got to know some people well and these relations developed and changed over time

much of my ethnographic data came from the multiple encounters and incidences that occurred as I moved around *São Tomé* and *Principé*. I looked to see what amongst these encounters were shared and common, what responses and strategies occurred repeatedly and that I could genuinely state were *of* the place.

By pursuing a research technique of getting to know only a few well all I would be able to say would be something about those in particular I had got to know. To say something about the society as a whole would require an inferencing up based on the assumption of a unity of perspectives and meanings that I had not shown to be present. Whilst such data is good on validity, its generalizability and reliability – in the sense that it can be repeated and found in other encounters - has been queried by some, for instance Davies (Davies 1999:84-5). It was thus numerous encounters and the data I derived from them that I sought primarily.

If I was seeking to know something that was then *of the place,* that would distinguish it and be a quality that could be associated with it, I needed to find qualities that were both shared and common. To discover *these* though I needed direct experience of numerous encounters with many different and unconnected people and note how they acted and responded, recording expectations of obligations deemed owed and adjustments to differences and responses encountered.

To obtain such data I visited as many different places as I could on both islands enabling multiple meetings to occur and endeavouring to witness numerous instances of how people adjusted and interacted with each other and with me. Whilst many of these meetings would often be superficial at least they would be numerous and any patterns, if present, would emerge from a data set that was multiple. Yet I would not infer a general unity of knowledge found. I would not make a claim that this constituted an essentialist comprehensive understanding of *São Tomé* and *Principé,* or that it *showed* something universal. Rather it was a

collection of noted responses that were common and often shared. I accepted both that the data I collected would frequently also contain differences and that it would inevitably also be partial.

I met people thus in the capital, in the fishing villages along the coast and on the *roças* (plantations). I let *São Tomé* and *Principé* define what I recorded, at least partially, by recording, firstly, *what people appeared to regard as important*, and, secondly, *that which repeated* again and again. In this sense the people I met co-authored the study. Yet it was *my recognition* of local responses and actions *as significant* and important to others that led me to record them, for I noted some things down and not others. My recognition of what was significant and to be recorded was based on what was startlingly and unexpected to me *and* that seemed to be of importance *to the people I met*. Perhaps they had invested a lot of time and effort in conveying a point or in making a social presentation. Or perhaps there was a significant emotional reaction to some effort's success or failure that made me realise that the response or social endeavour mattered to the person involved.

There were then these two aspects of recording data – my own

identification of importance revealed by the other and my own

identification of qualities that appeared remarkable, and were thus

noticeable and noticed, by me. Yet recognising the role I played in

selecting what was recorded does not invalidate the data, for

anthropology is as Gardner pointed out, "..a highly subjective art"

(Gardner 1997:x). Ethnography is then a conversation with a place that

elucidates qualities of it for the reader or audience.

Yet anthropology is powered by the study of difference between the

researcher and those he or she researches. My recording of things that

made an impression on me because they were, at least to me,

remarkable, constituted also a recognition of this particular quality of

the relationship between researcher and the place and people studied.

Whilst my recordings would, at times, be of the assertions made by

others, who may also have explained and argued their case, on other

occasions no explanation would have been given and I would write what

amounted to a description. On still other occasions, I would ask people

if they would give an explanation for me of social actions I had

witnessed. My data thus consisted of a collection of recordings that had

arisen out of my own observations, responses asserted and at times

explanations given. They had all appeared significant though in some

way.

Yet this relationship was also a reflexive one for if what I recorded were

often my reactions to *São Tomé* and *Principé,* it was also the case that

many of the events noted were also the responses of people living in *São*

Tomé and *Principé* to me. It was a recognition by others of my

difference for them whether in the social actions I carried out, or did not

carry out, or simply my presence.

Yet I was not part of everything I wrote about, for I was also witness to

other things which I saw or heard or that were related or explained.

However whilst I did also record data that was overtly less remarkable,

the points I noted most particularly, highlighted perhaps, remembered

definitely, were the ones that emerged from the background and had thus

'visibility' to me because of their difference to *my own expectations.*

Indeed some responses were simply too 'in your face' not to be noticed

and often it was these responses or actions that were the ones that I

wrote down. In contrast, other things that did not appear so striking, but

might have held importance, were less likely to be recorded. It was not

that I expected things to differ starkly, although some times they did,

from what I expected, it was that I inevitably *noticed them more*. They

were more *distinctive* to me. This granted a certain quality to my

recordings.

Sometimes it might have been that the encounter or experience had an

emotional impact and urgency or it might have been that the words

spoken on that occasion summed up something that had been in my

mind for a few weeks: that it crystallised a sentiment, an evaluation or an

action that had repeated many times and was now being summarised in a

few words spoken. Such qualities determined that I recorded the event,

the meeting or social action.

As part of the process of convincing others, I realise that a reader might

not be very interested in how people on the islands responded to me, a

foreigner, preferring perhaps to know something of how people

responded more with each other. Whilst this surely *is* a search for an

essentialist unity that may be only partially present, the search is also

possibly disingenuous for *São Tomé* and *Principé* have from their first

recorded settlement been a place of foreigners arriving, interacting and

at times assimilating with others, both 'foreign' and 'local'. The islands

history of large immigration from the African continent and the

European one has meant that how people interact with a foreigner is

something that is a quality of *São Tomé* and *Principé* social life and

always has been. The islands have had and continue to have a close and

ongoing connection with foreigners who historically have settled it and

populated it.

Moreover other foreigners have invaded it, traded with it and at times

abandoned it. The islands are full today of people who call themselves

Angolano (Angolan) or *Cabo Verdeano* (Cape Verdean) as well as *São*

Toméan or *Principéan.* Foreigners, whether from Europe or from Africa,

and their relation to those who live on the island are an essential and

ongoing aspect of life in *São Tomé* and *Principé*.

Moreover whilst *São Toméan* and *Principéan* sense of self is partly self-

referential it is also *referential with other places and other people.* A

quality illustrated so well by the man, who I describe in the next chapter,

who stated that "All the people should come to *São Tomé* to see that *São*

Tomé is a good country" for it is in others responses, including

foreigners responses, that *São Toméans* and *Principéans* see themselves.

The recording of data that is a response to a foreigner is thus a valid

anthropological focus *in itself* and is not missing a more essential feature

of *São Toméan* and *Principéan* life for it *is* an essential feature. Yet it is

also true that people *mostly* interact with people who live there more

permanently. Yet this data is not completely obscured from a researcher.

Some of the data I collected reveals, I believe, something about what

was shared between people when no foreigner might have been present, for at times people forgot I was there or had not noticed. I was witness to many encounters and observed changes in how people behave when they met others and, similarly, what was in dispute between them.

Such 'indirect' data may be both more indirect and somewhat more obscure than data collected from encounters one is a direct part of, but they still have some validity. There is no obvious solution to this inevitable distance anyway. As Moore points out, quoting Mitchell, it will always exist as a tension between what is recorded *from the outside* as observer so one can 'render it up as object of experience' (Mitchell 1988:29 in: Moore 1999:7) and what is learnt from being a part of the interaction as participant - 'the desire to lose oneself within this object world and experience it directly' (Mitchell 1988:29 in: Moore 1999:7). Moreover, even as a participant one's status as someone who is foreign does not disappear and indeed noticeably alters at times how people behave and act.

Whilst I did get to know particular people, whom I describe in more detail in chapter 4, that which I learnt from such specific relations I use to illustrate the more general patterns and particulars that I saw emerging out of the everyday encounters I was having. I was intent less on getting to know particular people (and have altered the names of those I describe in this study to preserve their anonymity). Rather I took note of what was emerging as a gradual patchwork from interactions in general. These general patterns became, over time, a conceptual framework and it is this that I wish to present as my ethnographic understanding. Some things held general importance: they were repeated with urgency. Other things did not and yet others were at times disputed.

Location of encounters, settlements visited

Whilst historically the *forro* (descendants of freed slaves) lived separately from the *servicais* (contract labourers) of the *roça* this is no longer the case with many *forro* knowing people in the *roça* and those from the *roça* moving and living in the settlements. In chapter 1 I mentioned that following Independence "the government granted equal

rights to the plantation workers" (Seibert 2006:131). This allowed

greater intermingling between those who lived on the *roças* and those

who lived in the settlements. The *roças* still form communities and

people will often identify themselves as being from a particular *roça,* but

this does not stop people having friends living elsewhere or those who

live in the small villages and settlements visiting and having friends who

lived at the *roças.* Whilst there are undoubted important differences

between the different types of settlement, a legacy of their differing

histories and differing current economic life, there are also many

differences between the *roça* and between the settlements. Some *roça* are

very poor with little or no work and people living a subsistence

existence. Others act as residential places with people more integrated

socially with surrounding settlements - finding perhaps work and having

multiple social connections with people outside.

Whilst people will travel from the *roça* to find work elsewhere at times,

there is also movement in the other direction with people from the

settlements and local towns commuting to the *roças* to work as, cleaners,

teachers and cooks for instance. Most of the larger *roça* have their own

crèches and primary schools and some of the people who work in them

come from outside. Hence whilst *roça* and the settlements have

historically been separate this is no longer the case and many of the

most striking differences one encounters can be between different *roça*

and different settlements for they vary considerably in economic well

being, atmosphere, security, size and transport connections.

Many of the overt visible problems that occur on *roça;* lack of

employment, a certain listlessness and variable security also can be

found in coastal villages and the capital. In contrast, some *roça* provide

employment, at least for some, and enjoy a sense of community.

Settlements – often near the capital - can be relatively prosperous and

some have an astonishing degree of community and security hard to find

in 'western' countries. Fishing villages though are often very poor to the

extent that people living on the *roça* will comment and lament on the

poverty of such villages in contrast to the people who live on the *roça.*

In *Desjelada,* an area I say more about in the next chapter, the taxi driver I was with left his car open and explained that it was a safe area and that the vehicle would be safe. "The people would make sure of it," he said. The same was true of certain areas of the capital. Yet not everywhere was the same. Thus whilst there were differences all over the island and one of the distinguishing features was the type of settlement the place was, coastal village, *roça* or inland settlement, there were other factors that were important in determining the quality of life and opportunities offered to those who lived there.

My study was though about interactions and the qualities of them that were shared and repeated, rather than the qualities of the places I visited, and I thus looked for interactions in *all locations*. Whilst I did record the time and location in which such meetings and social actions occurred and noticed a clear association between what was often sought and the economic well being of an area, I did not focus on any particular type of settlement but looked instead for what was shared in interactions and responses between them.

Role of the researcher

I was part of the process of recording. This seems inescapable and better recognised, accepted and acknowledged. Rather than a disengaged observation of others experiences many of my notes were about experiences that I was a part of directly, and which had occurred to me, or that I had initiated, perhaps inadvertently, or were witnessed by me. It was my responses and observations that were to be noted as well as others' explanations of them. Whilst I searched for and noted others' analytic terms, and sought actively the explanations others made of events, I was aware that, as noted earlier, it may nevertheless be the case that large areas of meaningful action can nevertheless not be "expressed in discursive statements" (Fabian 1990:6).

The quality of the data collected

I recognised that the data I sought would be partial, incomplete and at times in conflict with other interpretations that could equally be regarded as being of *São Tomé* and *Principé*. What unified my notes was that they were all recorded by one researcher, myself, over six months

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spent in *São Tomé* and *Principé*. They constitute a piece of text that thus bears more similarity to a work of art than of science but is no less meaningful for such a qualification. I accepted that my data would not provide a unifying comprehensive understanding. There would also be differences within it but if similarities emerged often enough from sufficiently different and unconnected encounters then I could say that the data collected was *of the islands*.

The reader

In addition to making my initial recordings I also need to persuade the reader of the validity of my findings. My note-taking took a number of forms. I recorded extensively, noting sayings that repeated and events that bore similarities. Sometimes I wrote descriptive pieces or narratives that filled in background and marked out context more fully. Since I eschewed an objective perspective, or rather I realised the limits of one, I can make no claims that my findings are objective. They are observations of actions and of shared responses - and of others which were disputed - that repeated themselves on a number of occasions.

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How deeply immersed?

Following my initial realisations of what appeared to matter to people in *São Tomé* and *Principé,* and that was sought after by them, my methodology became like a walk down a street with a notebook. Whilst I did ask people to explain sometimes at length and in detail what they thought about various aspects of life in *São Tomé* and *Principé*, my prime methodology was to seek what appeared to matter to people. What was it that caused them to become excited. What was it that they would spend time and effort to achieve.

Rather than structured interviews - the agenda of which had been decided by me - it was the people I met in *São Tomé* and *Principé* that decided what would be shared and how. I would participate, doing what locals did, taking local shared taxis and sitting sometimes in a corner of a market or a taxi *paragem* (stop), sometimes for hours at a time, waiting for taxis and talking to people and watching the patterns of interaction. I bought local food, got to know taxi drivers, interacted with bureaucracy, and found a place to stay.

My research technique was, then, one that approached the classic participatory observation technique of social immersion and yet I found, by necessity, that my participation would have its limits. Whilst I made a point of walking with guides on visits to plantations (*roça)*, and utilising motorbike taxis (*motos)* and the shared minivans that acted as taxis, the development of relations with people varied considerably. As Granovetter points out "Most intuitive notions of the "strength" of an interpersonal tie should be satisfied by the following definition: the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the recprocal services which characterize the tie" (Granovetter, 1973:1361).

The structure and goal of sociality in *São Tomé* and *Principé* was such that strong ties were sought and this could entail large amount of time being expected with emotional intensity and intimacy hoped for or sought. In consequence some relations were not straightforward and became complicated rather quickly as people held unrealistic expectations. Moreover as someone who has lived in Europe where a

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sense of autonomy and separateness is part of the social self. That the

self is essentially "indivisible and individual" (Mauss 1985:20) the goal

of some social interaction could feel and seem intolerable and

overwhelming. It was part of my experience and time in *São Tomé* and

Principé that I had to learn *how to manage* these expectations. I had to

decide what kind of relations I wanted and could successfully navigate,

which did not involve expectations that were either wholly unrealistic or

entailed levels of intimacy that were unmanageable or uncomfortable to

endure. There were plenty of difficult and complex relations to manage

as it was and so sometimes I had to break off contact with some as the

relationship was heading in an unknown and – at least to me – unwanted

direction. Further interactions would I had come to learn mean

increasing expectations and increasing disappointment when they could

not or would not be met.

Such disappointment could result at times with people becoming angry

or threatening. In consequence, it was necessary to manage other

people's expectations, not all of which were realistic, and the

requirements of personal safety and a certain amount of necessary autonomy to gather the data – especially as I was seeking numerous encounters - meant that I determined that participation had at times *to be qualified.* A certain level of disengagement and distance was thus often necessary – even if for very different reasons than to acquire a disengaged, objective perspective.

Yet even this *non-participatory observation* was potentially 'local' in that I had seen others do exactly this in the shared taxis where people would be forced together in a small space and would often act with a certain reserve and a sense of distance from each other. I became aware of how presentation to others was important in forming the quality of social relations for I came to appreciate its enabling qualities and how even minimal social contact and interaction could be used to explain requests and form expectations.

In the next chapter I give an example of how simply travelling together in a shared taxi was sufficient to change how people relate to you: what they feel able to do and how they explain it. The reason people were distant in shared taxis remained for a while obscure to me, but I began to realise what happened to me if I did not observe some kind of distance or disengagement myself, and how when I engaged in a conversation people's expectations changed radically. How they hoped for a gift or they hoped for your mobile number. How through engaging in conversation, the expectation of a personal relationship was formed and how people would at times pursue it.

Moreover I saw how this happened *to others* who did the same. I witnessed how some shared taxi journeys had a completely different atmosphere when people *already knew each other* and I witnessed the strength of normative evaluations that could be communicated to others. Moreover I knew that seemingly external factors could be associated with altered interaction. How some journeys that occurred at midday on a hot day could be quiet with everyone almost somnolent, paying

wordlessly and saying nothing to each other, and yet those that occurred at night, especially if returning from a *festas* could be lively with people singing and speaking to strangers freely.

Travelling in a shared taxi was though a commercial arrangement. People paid fares to do so. The social distance I often observed in them, I came to realise, supported the necessary impersonality needed for such a commercial arrangement to occur. An arrangement which through a degree of impartiality and social distance allowed equal access. Maintaining a degree of social distance is a *São Toméan* and *Principéan* social strategy. Engaging in it myself at times was thus not 'foreign' to the place.

Summary

In seeking to discover general patterns of interaction, attitudes and expectations that were shared, I travelled to all parts of *São Tomé* and *Principé*, recording encounters that might occur along the way,

becoming more and more familiar with how people interacted, both with me and with each other. I was looking for commonalities: for those things that are shared. I found them in interactions.

My methodology in acquiring 'data' and my chosen method of writing up is thus not 'postmodern' in the sense that I do not see the narratives as independent of history, but it is not wholly modern either, for I do not accept that there exists a unity of knowledge that lies there to be discovered in *São Tomé* and *Principé*. The islands are simply too diverse and complex for that. Rather there are numerous narratives, descriptions and explanations that occur simultaneously and are often in dispute, but are also sometimes shared.

The events and social actions that I recorded often stemmed from my initial lack of awareness of some social meanings, which by not observing them in my actions would be urgently pointed out to me. Yet people would also describe and explain meanings that were not initially apparent to me as existing at all. It was thus how the *São Toméans* and

Principéans I encountered interacted with me that became the prime

focus of my recordings, even while I did not exclude how they interacted

with each other. Yet what I came to record was influenced inevitably

substantially by my own set of norms acting as an inverse selective

mirror.

Chapter 4

Uses of social relations:

maintaining norms, and the theatre of presentation

A dramatic start

Passing through the streets near to the *Praça do Independência* in the

centre of the capital on my first day on the island, I was called to by a

man. He had beckoned me vociferously and ran across the road to meet

me. It was late afternoon and still hot. I stopped to hear what he had to

say. Sweat was running down my face and as I stood in the shade of one

of the buildings he began, "You were here earlier," he said. "Yes," I

agreed. I had been walking past and had carried on somewhat hurriedly

due to the number of men beckoning me to exchange money. "Why did

you not greet those who were calling out to you?" he asked me enraged.

He went on to roundly berate me at some length for not warmly

returning the social greetings of strangers – many of whom were still

there, nodding and looking at me as he spoke. "*São Tomé* is a good

country", the man explained insistently. "The people here are good. It is

not okay, not to respond to people if they ask you or greet you. If they

say hello then you should say hello back. Why not?! The people here are

good!" Clearly troubled he persisted for a while in this vein until

convinced that I had understood him. He then returned mollified a little

to where he had been sitting across the road. There was a certain

insistence, that I noted again many more times, for a response if one was

called or spoken to. *It was expected* and not to give one was disliked and

unsettled people.

Discussing the work of Garfinkel, Heritage notes that responses are

expected to greetings made. "Consider, to begin with, a situation in

which a social actor is walking down the corridor of an office building,

interactively disengaged from any others on the scene. From the moment

this actor is greeted by another, his or her circumstances are radically

reconstituted from a situation of mutual disengagement between the

parties to one in which some, at least minimal, engagement is proposed

by the other. At this initial and elementary level, the first greeter's action

has reflexively reconstituted the scene. Moreover, this first greeting

transforms the scene for both parties – for the greeter (who moves from a circumstance of disengagement to one of engagement which he or she proposes, via the norm, will be reciprocated) and for the recipient of the greeting (who must now deal with this reconstituted circumstance)" (Heritage 1984:106).

If a greeting is made the framework of expectations is thus 'reconstituted' and the expectation is that a response *should be returned*. Yet the man had *explained the reason* why I should respond in terms of the quality of *São Tomé*. It was because it was a good country that I *should* respond, for as he had put it "Why not??" The two were associated for him. My response (or lack of it) reflected the quality of those making the greeting. Their sense of self was in the interaction and my efforts were not seen as fitting to how *São Tomé* was.

That there existed such a sense of appropriateness was something that would be shown to me many more times. As Durkheim perhaps would have explained it, the social world is a moral one and is full of

evaluations. Moreover in *São Tomé* and *Principé* evaluations reflect on the other across the dialogue of the interaction. What is expected and hoped for, or used to justify or explain, changes as the social relation within which the interaction is occurring changes, and this happens whether the interaction is in an established social relation that is developing, in a greeting made to another or in time spent in a vehicle together.

changing/ enabling possibilities

One day was memorable for being hot, not so special in itself for *São Tomé*, but having got a regular west bound taxi to *Santa Clara* from the capital I got out and then waited seemingly ages for another to *Desjelada*. *Santa Clara* is a small pretty village in the north of *São Tomé*, its central area dominated by a small church, a primary school and a shop that looks unchanged since colonial times. The village is sited on a road junction with one fork heading inland and uphill to several *roça* (plantations) built on higher ground whilst the other continues to the west of the island. I waited in the shade on that hot

morning before finally, a shared taxi going in the direction I desired,

stopped and I got in. The busy minivan was heading inland and passed

right through *Desjelada*. The journey was to be memorable for I missed

my stop. The road, as so often in *São Tomé,* travels through forest before

arriving in the leafy pleasant suburban area that is called *Desjelada*.

Newly built homes jostle with banana plants, the occasional parked

vehicle, areas of forest and scrubby open grassy areas where teenagers

play football, people hang out on benches for hours at a time, doors are

seemingly left open endlessly and women walk, as they do everywhere

in *São Tomé* and *Principé,* to the nearby washing point to wash clothes

and talk. This is a more prosperous area than elsewhere on the island, its

proximity to the capital and location in the northern populated region of

the island no doubt assisting the opportunities available for the people

there.

Sitting inside the crowded taxi I stayed in the vehicle as it snaked uphill.

Noting that I had passed my stop I got out at the next one and started

walking back down the hill. My journey was interrupted though by

shouts from people on the road. A woman wants to speak to you they said. Turning I saw a woman who had been in the same vehicle calmly walking down the road. I waited for her to catch up with me. There was I sensed an expectation that I should wait. The people on the road certainly expected it, for as they said she wanted to talk to me. It was an assertion, or at least a revealed intention, that the woman had made to others and like the men who had greeted me in the streets near to the *Praça do Independência* there existed an expectation that I would respond, so I waited.

On arriving, a little breathless, she said: "As we were in the same taxi together I thought it would be okay to ask you if you need help for you seem to be lost?" It was true that I did not know the area well and that I had not recognised the place I wanted to go, but what interested me about her comment was that she was introducing her offer of help by referring to the shared journey. It was as if this had changed the quality of the social relations between us.

Another occasion when a social action was explained by a specific

connection already present occurred one day when I was walking into

the centre of the capital along the wide marginal. The crash of small

waves breaking on the beach on my right nearly drowned out a voice

calling from behind me. '*Branco,'* I turned. There were two men sitting

on a motorbike hailing me. One, an off-duty, but still in uniform,

policeman, asked "Can you give me some money for I need to get home

to *Neves* and I don't have enough petrol." He opened the tank and looked

at the rather minimal amount that just covered its base. He said *he*

recognised me, which is why he had stopped. I did not have any spare

cash and told him so, and this was politely accepted and I was wished

good day. The bike moved off in search of someone else.

Such social connections, even superficial ones, enabled other

interactions to occur and could be utilised to explain and justify an offer

of help or a request made; after all "we travelled in the same vehicle so I

thought..." or "I recognised you so I stopped...".

expectations associated with the quality of social relations can be

utilised strategically..

Walking into the centre one day from the place I stayed, I passed some

men working to enlarge the offices of an air-conditioning business in a

nearby street. One of them noticed me and beckoned for me to come and

see what he and his men were up to. He showed me around, carefully

explaining the extension that was half renovated and the upstairs floor

that was being added. Finally, he asked whether I might have something

for him, a gift. His actions were seemingly directed by this hope of

possibilities offered after he had interacted with me, of possibilities that

were less likely to be present before.

That social connections formed like this could be used and were

associated with obtaining material goods whether preplanned or utilised

opportunistically was illustrated once more when on *Principé*. I had

arrived at the *roça* of *Sundy* and was met by a man who wished to show

me around. After showing me various old buildings around the central

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area of the *roça,* he asked me what football team I supported.

Remembering seeing *Porto* playing on the television in the capital of

São Tomé, I said "*Porto*". "Me too!!" he exclaimed. He then asked me

for a mobile phone, "so we can discuss the football scores of *Porto*," for,

as he put it, "Now, we are *amigos!*" (friends). He did not elucidate if this

was due to our supposed shared support of *Porto* or if it was because

having shown me around he felt he now knew me a little and my

obligations to him would have changed somewhat.

social directionality

Such awareness of the social dynamics and associated obligations can

give a direction to social actions. It allows people to form and create

goals secondary to an interpretation of the possibilities available and

people can then orient their social actions towards achieving these goals

in a more or less explicit manner. Whilst the motives for the man

enlarging the air-conditioning business were fairly clear, it was less clear

in the man showing me around the *roça* of *Sundy* and indeed the

potential advantages may only have occurred to him later.

Yet goals are also formed by possibilities perceived and these change as social connections develop. In one encounter the man's goals changed as the conversation proceeded reflecting the changing possibilities available. I had finished climbing the road out of the small fishing village of *Abade* on the east side of *Principé* on a blistering hot day. Reaching the old *roça* a large grassy area extended out from the old patron's house to a U-shaped building that used to house the plantation workers and was now regular housing. I sat on the terrace outside the old patron's house and after a while a man came out. The old house was being converted into a guest house, he explained, and had already had its first guest. Sitting there in the shade he offered to sell me a cooled drink which I gratefully accepted.

He began by running through various tourist excursions which he could, he explained, arrange. On realising that boat journeys around the island and excursions to the *Pico* (peak of *Principé*) did not interest me he relaxed and began to talk about himself. He had come from *São Tomé,* he explained, where he had trained as a carpenter, but there are many

carpenters on *São Tomé* and so finding work was difficult. He had thus come to *Principé,* but found that work was scarce on *Principé* as well. He had, though, found some work assisting the renovation of the patron's house that stood behind where we were sitting. Yet for the most part he relied, he explained, on friends giving him food such as bananas to survive. He had also found a wife on *Principé* and was building a house near the road I had just climbed from the village.

Principé is calm, he continued, and a fine place. It lacked, though, the *movimento* (social events) of *São Tomé,* which he missed, and was as *frio* (cold) as Portugal. Moreover he did not have all the tools he needed. Going back into the house once more he came back with a trade manual and placing it on the table opened it carefully. He began to explain the tools he had and then, pausing significantly, the ones he did not have. Nothing was said directly but I was clearly being offered the chance to buy him the tools he did not have and this offer was being made after a simple conversation and explanation *of his personal circumstances* had occurred.

Through showing *the tools he did not have* he made his needs clear and visible, and thus offered me the chance to help him. Moreover this need revealed had, as in other encounters, occurred after he had spoken with me for awhile and a social connection had thus developed embedding the 'need revealed' in a different and perhaps more favourable set of expectations than it would be when we first met.

At the start of the encounter, when I had indeed been a stranger, he had after all engaged in a commercial way of offering me tourist excursions. The form and immediate goal that the conversation took had changed as it proceeded from commercial opportunities being offered to that of revealing need and offering me the possibility to help.

As social relations develop the explanations and justifications for social actions alter as well. The quality of the social relation determined the obligation deemed appropriate and the expectation of the other to help. The two were associated. If one changed then so did the other.

changing expectations...

Fairly early on in my stay I had found a taxi to take me to a small *roça* on the east coast south of *Agua Aze*. The driver was chatty and excitable. He filled up in *Santana* on the way south putting some water in the engine for it was a hot day. There was a competence to how he leaned out of the driver's seat across the space of the engine in front to top up the radiator. He knew how to keep an old car on the road and working. We arrived at the *roça* fine. He was shy about meeting the owners though who were French, but I took his mobile number.

I was to meet him many times more, but perhaps the most dramatic occasion was when I had returned to the capital on a weekend to find that the accommodation I thought I had booked was locked. No one was there and the office that ran it was closed. They had had a problem with the lock and had thus closed the building. I was standing on a corner about to cross and look for somewhere else when *Filipe*, the driver, passed in his taxi. He stopped the car even though he had clients in the vehicle and crossed the street to say hello. On hearing my story he said

he would be back to help me look for somewhere. A few minutes later he was, having dropped his clients, and we went looking for alternative accommodation. I found something quite quickly.

After this whenever he passed he would stop, wanting to know how I was getting on. Often his taxi would be full of people who had to wait as we had a short conversation. No one seemed to mind. On one occasion I met him waiting in the *mercado* whilst I was looking for a taxi. He wanted to know where I wanted to go and why I had not contacted him before. I told him of my destination and he offered to take me there. Bystanders had heard the whole conversation and interjected, saying that I should pay no more than 40,000 *dobras* for a journey that far and that the fare he was suggesting was too high. He also wanted to show me a room that was for hire in someone's house for 20 *euros* a day, but when we arrived he could not find anyone at home.

At some of these meetings he would state, "Long time! Why did you not call me??" He wanted to keep having contact even though I had no need

of a taxi journey. He became so insistent that I should call him that some days after one such incident I did. It was just to say hello though, and he seemed happy about it though we talked only for a few minutes.

Such developing expectations were illustrated once more in my interactions with a *moto* driver. I met *Jorge* sitting on his motorbike in a line of other *motos* for hire in the central *mercado*. He looked bored and despondent. We talked for awhile but I did not need a ride anywhere that day. I was to meet him again some days later driving his *moto* near the *mercado*. He seemed very down and despite talking to me could barely bring himself to smile. Business was slow he explained. I will keep trying, he concluded.

Some weeks later we met once more by chance. He was sitting on his *moto* in a line by the *mercado* as before and gave me a lift across town. We arranged for him to take me to several *roça* inland that I had never been to. They were intriguingly all different. Some were very

economically run down and others more residential with people working elsewhere. Each one had a completely different atmosphere.

He also took me to *Praia Gamboa* and shortly after this invited me to a party that was organised by friends of his brother. The friends were neighbours and the small neighbourhood would organise parties every two weeks rotating around people's houses. *Festas* (parties) are very popular in *São Tomé*. The first time I went to one of these parties we struggled to find it for it was through *Jorge's* brother that he and I had been invited.

I ended up going to several such *festas* for they recurred every two weeks. The parties were held in someone's garden and people sat on plastic chairs eating shared food – everyone had brought a dish or two - and plenty of alcohol. There was music provided by the host from a CD player which failed on one occasion when the fluctuating power destroyed something in the machine. People sat around, talked, ate, drank and later on danced. The parties were good fun. People were very

friendly and welcoming. There was a good community feeling as well -

something that is commented on positively by many people in *São*

Tomé. It is a good country, people would say, because of how the people

live.

At the parties the community sentiment appeared to be expressed in a

sense that everyone was welcome and everyone should contribute

something. It was a continuation of the sense that friends "help each

other," but it was also a sense of belonging and of "being together". In

São Tomé people said "your neighbour is your best friend." They help

you, look after your children when you need to go somewhere or loan

you money for something when you are in dire need. People look out for

each other in this way.

Yet there emerged also a wish, as happened so often, that the connection

should develop. It was suggested that perhaps I would come and live in

São Tomé and I was shown houses that were for sale. That I might have

other plans was a cause of some disappointment and when my data

collection moved on to looking at other things which did not need a

moto for transport there was further disappointment.

developing social connections changes monetary expectations

I met *Vitor* when I took a taxi beyond *Santa Catarina.* Discovering that

the taxi was taking someone to *Ponta Furada* - almost the end of the

road - I stayed on. As there are very few taxis that go that far and as it

was already afternoon, I asked the taxi driver if I could stay with his taxi

and return with him when he made his way back. This would mean that I

would be able to get back to *Neves* that night and from there catching a

taxi to the capital would be easy. He had agreed and so I had gone along.

The passenger found the friend he wished to visit in the small overgrown

roça and everyone was invited to drink palm wine and sit in the small

courtyard of one of the houses. We spent most of an afternoon

discussing social meetings and the qualities that were expected and

hoped for. The man visiting from the capital talked about opportunism

and circumstances in romantic encounters. The taxi driver took an

opposing view. Speaking with passion and much animation he spoke

about the need for respect – that respect was central in all social interactions and he differed from the city man in placing a different emphasis on opportunism. Rather it was how someone spoke to another which was a matter of importance.

The people were accommodating, socially skilled and welcoming. I felt that it was an afternoon spent amongst friends. On the way back in the taxi two of the people who had been there showed me their small house which sat between the road and the shore just south of *Santa Catarina.* The taxi driver was chatty asking me to sit up in the front next to him.

On reaching *Santa Catarina* he stopped to pick up more passengers. Pulling the handbrake on, he changed from his informal and relaxed attitude into something much more assertive. People were shouting and arguing, demanding that large baskets and baggage accompany them on their journey, and complaining about the price. Now he would have to be firm, for this was his living.

I met him again some weeks later. Travelling on the same road heading

north to *Monte Forte* where I was staying I caught a taxi. On getting out

by the turn-off I went to pay the driver and realised it was the same man

who had taken me to *Ponta Furada*. He grinned. "Remember?", he

asked. "Of course," I said, "*Ponta Furada!*" He grinned again. I did not

need to pay him today, he explained, stating: "*Amigo!*"

I was to meet him once more at a *festa* at *Diego Vaz roça*. A fairly large

crowd had gathered to listen, eat, drink, watch *dança congo* and listen to

a band playing *socopé*. They also included songs from Portugal, which

were sung with a slight mocking and overly pronounced but good

humoured way much enjoyed by the crowd. *Vitor* was there and said

hello. I explained at one point that I was planning to return to *São José*,

a *roça* high on the hillside. *Vitor* said he would like to accompany me

there and gave me his mobile number. It did not happen though, for he

was always busy working driving his taxi when I called. Once more

though the wish to accompany me and to spend time together had been

expressed.

incorporation into monetary framework

Whilst *Vitor* had suggested accompanying me others could be more
insistent that social connections should be maintained and they had
different monetary expectations. This was the case with a *moto* driver I
had first met when walking along the sandy untarred track to the west of
Fernão Diaz beach. I had just left the ceremony of commemoration at the
roça of *Fernão Diaz* and was walking westwards back towards the main
road with a view to catching a taxi back to where I was staying. The
track meandered a fair bit between palm trees across the otherwise open,
flat and sandy ground but always headed westward and at some point it
would meet the main road which ran from around *Lagoa Azul* south
directly next to the sea.

It was though a hot day and my supply of water whilst sufficient was
limited and I had thus switched to looking for trails that would take me
directly to the much nearer *Guadalupe* when I saw a motorbike. It was
larger than many and was being driven slowly around and through the
bumps and holes in the track's surface. As it approached I beckoned the

driver. For some reason I took it for granted the *moto* would take passengers. There was something informal about how the bike was driven that made me think it would be for hire and was not being driven for private use. Whilst there were many *motos* on the island that were for personal use, there were also many that were utilised as informal taxis and they would at times drive around looking for customers.

The chance encounter offered me a possible way of getting back to where I was staying more directly. The bike stopped and so I asked the driver if he could take me to *Lagoa Azul* from where I should be able to catch a shared taxi on the main road. He agreed and I got on. He was called *Gilberto* and drove slowly at first along the sandy trail that passed well-managed fields of agricultural land before arriving at the small village of *Guadalupe* via a side road I had never been down before. Reaching the tar of the main road we headed through the centre of *Guadalupe* passing its small white church and couple of restaurants screened from the road by high hedges.

After that it was open country and the driver opened the throttle. On arriving at *Lagoa Azul,* a small inlet with a blu-ish tinge to its waters, he explained that onward transport would be difficult for at that time of day there would be few taxis leaving or passing. I nevertheless thought that I would find something, but quickly realised from the paucity of the traffic on the road that he was right. So I asked him to take me to where I was staying further along the west road. We stopped on the way in *Neves* to fill up with fuel and I was slightly astonished to see that nearly half of the money I had already given him for the first part of the journey from near *Fernão Diaz* to *Lagoa Azul* went on buying fuel. His profit margin was modest. We continued along the winding road as far as *Diego Vaz* the large *roça* where I was staying.

Given that he seemed to be a good driver and had a good bike, which was important on rough roads, I took his mobile number so that I could call him in the future should I need a *moto.* Yet it was a long time before I did. When I called it was from the *marginal*, the sweep of road at the top of the main bay in the capital, some weeks later. He arrived in

talkative mood. Where had I been? Why had I not called him before

now? I explained that I had not had need of a *moto*. He seemed not to

believe this and repeated that I should have called him. I was seeking to

go to a small place in the direction of the airport. Most of the journey

there was taken up though by him asking me where I had been and why

had I not called him?

As we arrived he asked if I would be needing a ride back. He seemed

edgy, unsure as if money was really tight and this had left him nervous.

You'll have difficulty getting a taxi back from here at this time of day he

explained. It was the same advice as before and as before I said I thought

I would manage. He offered to wait but I thought it would be okay. Of

course he was right; it was true that it was difficult to get a shared taxi

back from there so late and when I did try I found that the few passing

were all full and would not stop, but I was right also in that eventually in

the end I managed to find one.

The driver's expectations had changed as he had got to know me better.

He felt that I should have called him more often. There existed an

expectation that the relationship should have developed. Moreover he

hoped that I would wish to take *moto* rides and that I did not have any

need for many was a matter of some concern. That social connections

and material security, often expressed in monetary terms, were often

associated was to be illustrated many more times.

social connections and material security

Walking one day past the Miguel Bernardo *padaria* (bakery) I noticed a

man, who I knew, standing not too far from the entrance. He was a taxi

driver and had given me several rides in the past. He was holding a fan

belt in his hand that was clearly broken and swung as he turned to talk to

people passing. We talked a little and he explained that he was not

working today as he had a problem with his car. He showed me the fan

belt. "It is broken," he explained. It clearly was. A ragged tear had split

the belt. I looked at it and commiserated. "It is a lot of money to

replace," he explained. "Oh," I said. "Around 500,000 *dobras*," (about 20 euros) he said, continuing that he did not have such a large sum.

He was, he said, standing there hoping to meet someone who might be able to pay for a replacement. Whilst he did not ask directly I could sense where this conversation was leading. After some minutes of talking when I still had not offered to buy him a replacement belt, he did then ask me whether I would. I almost relented but decided I really ought to conserve my funds and so declined. We talked for a bit more. I explained that I would be leaving *São Tomé* in a few weeks and he wished me a good journey. I was to meet him again though, for some days later I saw him driving his taxi. Someone he knew had bought him a replacement fan belt, he explained, and so he was back at work. His strategy had evidently eventually worked – a combination of showing his need to passers-by and hoping that someone he knew, who might be in a position to help, would do so.

Social connections are thus utilised both to explain actions and to meet material needs. By standing there the taxi driver was revealing a need that would be recognised by anyone who knew him. For they would wonder why he was not driving his taxi and they would see the broken fan belt. That he felt he could rely on someone "who felt able" to help him was an expectation that both respected the other's ability to help – for there would be those who did not feel able – and illustrated a confidence in those who knew him that someone would.

It was similar to the off-duty policeman asking for money so he could buy petrol to go home. Yet if people position themselves so that already formed social relations will assist them in their need shown as the man with the broken fan belt had done others can set about forming the social relations that may help them.

Obligations from strangers

Sitting in a taxi heading for *Neves* one day I noticed a group of men fixing the road. They were filling in the potholes with gravel and laying

180

down new tarmac. An older man, who seemed to be the foreman, hailed

the taxi to stop. He spoke to the driver, explaining that he and his men

were helping drivers, such as him, by repairing the road. "We are

working hard under the hot sun!" he said. So could the taxi driver help

him by giving a small gift of money so that he could buy *sumo* (juice)

for himself and his workers? The taxi driver agreed and leaning over

found a 10,000 *dobra* note in the ashtray, which is where he stored the

collected fares, and gave it to him.

arguing 'con força'..

Yet whilst obligations owed can be argued for, as on this occasion, or

can be an expectation asserted implicitly by revealing your need to those

"who feel able" to help, as the taxi driver with the broken fan belt had

put it, there exists also another option. Walking through *Trindade,* a

relatively large village inland and of a much higher altitude than the

capital, an old woman came up to me and asked me for money so she

could get home. I gave her some, but after talking to a taxi driver she

came back and said that she needed more. "This is not enough," she

explained "for my taxi home. So give me some more!" She explained her request in terms of her need. I refused for I had already given away money to several people that day. She flew into a rage, screaming and berating me. I edged away and walked to the place where the taxis are pulled up in a short line awaiting customers wishing to travel into the capital. As I arrived at the taxi's door she screamed, "See! See! He has money! He is taking a taxi himself!" Someone opened the door for me so that I could climb in with some dignity but the woman continued to berate me outside on the street.

It would seem that the old woman believed that the money was *owed her* for she had *expressed her need* and yet I had refused her second request. Her outrage at my refusal to act on these, my social obligations to her as she perceived them, were seemingly not agreed upon by everyone, however, for there was the man who had held the door open for me and another who gave a thumbs up sign to me indicating 'all okay'. For them, whether I gave money or not was a matter that was for me to decide.

For the old woman who *had* expressed a need, my actions were though outrageous. As she explained it, I *had the money* for I was taking a taxi myself. There was no problem then about me *being able* to give her some more. The issue was *that I would not.* Her evaluation of this was unequivocal. She screamed abuse and made a scene. If requests are often expressed as needs revealed, or in the case of the old woman demanded, then duties stemmed also from an assessment of possibilities offered. "He has money!", the woman had stated clearly "He is taking a taxi himself!" and thus I ought, in her opinion, to give some to her.

A similar expectation of an obligation owed for a material response to an expressed need occurred on *Principé.* I had been walking along an old colonial road on the east coast of the island with a guide when we arrived at a large sweeping bay. Walking along the shore we entered the small fishing village of *Lapa.* A collection of wooden houses stretched a short distance back from the sandy beach on which many fishing canoes and slightly larger wooden boats had been pulled up. Sitting on and

around one of the boats was a group of fishermen. They greeted us and one of them asked me for money.

When I hesitated another said "Maybe he does not have money." "He has money!", said a third laughing, "So," they continued, "you can give us some." Everyone nodded and looked pleased. My refusal was met with consternation and alarm. I had money, they assumed this, but was refusing to give any to them! The guide and I left, but on our return the fishermen were still there and a vociferous argument developed with them demanding that I should give them money so they could buy palm wine for they desired this, and me politely declining. Like the old woman they explained their request in terms of their need – the desire for palm wine - and assumed, like the old woman had, that I had the money. Moreover that they were disappointed and outraged by my refusal seemed clear. We left as they continued the discussion between themselves.

Whilst there were no previous meetings that could be called on to either explain or justify the requests they had made, those requesting had utilised need expressed and asserted into a social world interpreted by the possibilities offered. "He has money," said both the old woman and the fishermen and thus he should give some for we have need of it. That I did not give them any was a matter of much consternation.

That it was the material aspect of encounters that mattered, at least to some, was also the opinion I overheard in a shared taxi from *Neves*. One passenger noting my presence in the vehicle and perhaps having seen me before in *Neves,* asked another what I was like. "He is more or less okay for sometimes he gives and sometimes he does not," was the equivocal verdict. I was not completely good, but not completely bad either; the judgement rested on whether I gave or did not.

changing economic circumstances

If one could be judged on one's response to requests made, the requests changed as the needs of the asker altered. This was the case with one

taxi driver I got to know, called *Jaoquim.* The changes evolved more

slowly than with some others and reflected his changing economic

circumstances as well as length of time he had known me. I had first met

him when he stopped his taxi in the capital to ask me if I wanted a lift

somewhere. I declined on that occasion but I was to meet him again and

he gave me a number of rides and showed me around many *roça*. He

drove an old yellow taxi that had been repaired and repainted many

times. Inside the interior panelling had long gone and the doors and

floors all revealed the pressed steel sheets of the chassis. The worn

metal looked like it had seen many feet. The engine worked well though.

One day, whilst visiting several *roça* up a hillside near the capital, he

commented - as he made a five point turn into a particularly sharp and

narrow junction, which was also on a slope - that the car "was good". He

patted the steering wheel. "It works well," he said. The car jolting over

the stones reversed back up the slope before edging nearer the entrance

and a correct alignment. It was to prove a fateful pronouncement for an

amigo (friend) of his was to crash the vehicle beyond repair a matter of weeks later.

He had numerous connections on the island who regularly gave him work, seemed to offer him advice, and on occasions worked with him on commercial arrangements. "They know me," he explained, "and if there is a tourist who needs to see some place or to hire a taxi for a day they ask me to do it for they know I am reliable." Indeed he seemed to have a good idea of what tourists wanted and how to deal with them. This made him popular with the tourist agencies in the capital, he explained. He knew, for instance, to be on time, for tourists "don't like it if you are late," he explained. He mentioned how he had taken a German woman, who was only on the island for a few days, but wanted to see it, on a day's tour that encompassed the whole island and how she had been very pleased.

On one of the rides in the capital he gave me, I asked about *Bombaim,* a well known *roça* close to the centre of the island. I hoped to visit it at

some point because it was located in the central area of the island in a zone that had primary rainforest, unlike much of the coastal areas of the island which were now secondary forest. "I can take you there," he explained, "for 20 *euros*." It was though out of the way and not near one of the main coastal roads. He would borrow a four wheel drive, he explained, that would take us there better on the rough road. He was looking at me all this time trying to ascertain something from me. How had I reacted? What did I want? What would I do? Leaning back a little later he relaxed and offered to show me around the whole island on a day tour as he had done with the German tourist.

On another occasion, as he brought me back from a *roça*, he told me about a room. It was, he explained, in a friend's house and was for hire. The price was reasonable. It had shower, air conditioning, a cooking area – everything that 'a tourist' would need, he explained. I thanked him and remembered the offer.

I did not see him for awhile but his number remained in my notebook and when I wanted to go to *Bombaim* I called him. I had left the place I was staying and waited in a central restaurant with my bags. The restaurant was on the first floor so as I waited leaning over the balcony I saw the car pull up some minutes before our appointment. We left, exchanging his yellow taxi for a small four wheel drive jeep that would manage the road better. The vehicle belonged to a friend he explained and was parked in a driveway of a suburban street.

Jaoquim arrived at the end of the weekend to collect me in the same four wheel drive and on arriving back in the capital, took me to see the room he had offered me before. It consisted of some rooms in the driveway of the same house that the small four wheeled drive vehicle had come from. The rooms were small but comfortable and in a good neighbourhood and I eventually took them; but before this he wanted to show me another which was in *Desjelada* and belonged to his girlfriend.

We sat in a large wooden house in *Desjelada* that was crowded with possessions as *Jaoquim* talked to his girlfriend and two other friends. The house was fine but it looked like I would be causing a lot of work for his girlfriend who would have to move out to allow me to move in. I opted for the place in town which worked out very well.

Some time after this I arranged to visit several *roça* in the north of the island not far from the capital. We went to four. They all differed. Some were economically very depressed with the people who lived there having no work whilst others were active growing mostly vegetables for sale in the capital. After visiting these places we went to another that I had visited on my own by taking a *moto* there. It had been recommended by some people who owned one of the small restaurants in *Guadalupe*. It had a beautiful but ruined patron's house, which stood magnificently looking out on a grassy patch and lines of still occupied workers' houses.

We visited a small cafe nearby, built near the road out of planks. It was a large stall really, with two benches covered by a tin roof on which around four people could sit comfortably. He bought me and the woman who ran it a cool drink. It was the *roça* at which he stayed and, as he explained, he knew everyone there. It was sitting there that he had said, "Here in *São Tomé* we live in community."

It was as I got to know him better that he began asking me for loans, explaining that he would repay me on a later occasion or that it would cover a future fare which it always did. I was becoming part of his financial network. The sense of which was exacerbated by the very business-like way he went about many of his conversations. He seemed used to speaking with foreigners and had a good idea of what might interest them.

I would sometimes see him in a packed car with a collection of young people his own age. A friend of his lived in *Praia Gamboa* and I once saw him driving past there in a car full of laughing people - a mixed

company of young men and women who looked like they were on their way to a party.

Some of our journeys were punctuated with quick stops as he would reverse and get out to speak with a young woman he knew. This was particularly the case near to the *roça* where he stayed and thus knew lots of people. Yet he knew a lot of people seemingly everywhere and was friendly with the cafes and record shops that sold the music of *socopé* - a common musical form played on guitars - that visitors, particularly from Brazil, were often interested in. Journeys could thus also be punctuated by quick stops as he went to ask about where bands might be playing or if the shop held a copy of a sought-after recording. He was also quite generous with his earnings at times giving money away to beggars in the capital as we passed.

When I went to *Principé* he asked me to take a photo of a certain *roça* for he had relatives who used to live there. He had forgotten all about it

when I returned to *São Tomé* five weeks later though, and seemed

uninterested when I reminded him of it.

There existed, as there had with so many others, an expectation that the

relationship would develop and he became upset because he did not

become a closer friend of mine. I once overheard him bitterly

complaining about this to the woman who had become my landlady - the

owner of the rented room he had found for me - who was a close friend

of his. It was an expectation, I came to realise, that one's social

connections should develop and if they did not, it was a common cause

of disappointment.

The last time I saw him was on the *marginal* when a motorbike pulled

up behind me. It was large with huge exhausts and a low centre of

gravity. Driving it was *Jaoquim*. After his friend had crashed his car he

was reduced to driving a *moto* and surviving on the lower earnings.

Fortunately he seemed to have access to at least two bikes. I suspected

he used his numerous connections to secure their use. He was chatty,

overly so in fact. He asked me outright for money, which on reflection I realised he had never done before. He had asked for loans in the past, and always repaid, but never before for a straight gift. He now had the attitude that it was something he was entitled to for he knew me, and a refusal on my part would be uncharitable. I wondered though if the young woman sitting on the back of the bike had something to do with it as well.

The woman may have been a client of course, but it emerged they were going to a party and he wanted the money so he could buy a drink for himself and her. "We will drink thinking of you," he explained. Whilst I had mixed feelings I felt I owed him something for he had introduced me to many things in *São Tomé* and the great room in which I had stayed for three months had been discovered through him. I gave him some small notes. He smiled, thanked me, and drove off satisfied. Whilst he had expectations of me I realised that I also had at least some sense of obligation owed and many of my difficulties and negotiations in relations were about navigating between what seemed reasonable to me

and what seemed reasonable to the other. My sense of what was feasible

and realistic existed often in tension with what was aspirational for the

other.

differing evaluatory interpretations

Not everyone expected material goods to be a part of social connections

and some were more interested in the acknowledgement or connection

itself or saw the material aspect as primarily a reflection of the quality

of the connection. These differences often could be seen to be associated

with the material conditions of life lived by the person. Yet on one

occasion I experienced two very differing opinions expressed in the

same location and encounter by different people sitting next to each

other. It was at *Praia Gamboa.* I was at the top of one of the beaches

when I met, sitting under a tree, two women. We talked for a while. As I

was leaving one of the women commented to her companion that it was

nice that I had stopped to speak with them. Her friend disagreed. She

turned to her companion and exclaimed unhappily, "But he gives us

nothing!!" Her friend conceded this might be true, but still thought it

was fine that I had stopped. The second woman was, though, unmoved, and vehement in her assessment that without any material goods being given the encounter was valueless.

The first woman was not alone though in being seemingly uninterested in the material aspect of encounters, evaluating them in terms of the social connection. I met *Ricardo* simply walking along a road in the west of *São Tomé*. He was going to the shop at a nearby *roça* to buy some batteries for his torch, he explained. For he worked as a security guard for some holiday homes on the west coast of the island. The place was well known for being the reputed site of the first Portuguese landing on the island and used to have a restaurant that had closed due to bad debts according to locals. Its empty car park had a forlorn look for the concrete seats that had once been at the base of trees had been broken and stolen to be sold. The space was now empty and the broken concrete paving was covered in layers of leaves from the surrounding trees. The holiday homes were visited sometimes at weekends, but otherwise the place had a permanent out of season feel.

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He lived in a small stilted house not far from the holiday houses. It consisted of two small rooms raised about a meter above the ground with a short series of steps up to it - a few square meters in total. He was building another up the hillside that would be more spacious when finished. I had seen it. The stilts and foundation, as well as the roof were in place. The walls were for now absent other than the skeleton, but you could see where the verandah would be as he proudly pointed out. It was however expensive, and the work was thus slow, progressing whenever he had sufficient funds to further an aspect of it.

He was relatively straightforward and was not interested in financial gain or gifts. In fact, I struggled to pay him for his help in guiding me to various *roça* in the west. Before his present role he had worked as a soldier in the capital for two years, but did not like it. He would not have liked all the being ordered around, I came to realise. There seemed little to do as a security guard though and he had not been paid in nine months. Yet he stayed for the house he lived in came with the job.

He agreed to show me around several of the *roça* nearby and we visited these on different visits, meeting often early in the morning when it was still cool. Climbing uphill to where many of the *roça* were, from the road, was hot work and he wanted to be home by 11am – too much sun otherwise he said.

He had no time for the complications and suspicions of others we met *en route*, dismissing their remonstrations as so much nonsense and explaining to me to pay no attention. He walked fast and I struggled at times to keep up with him in the heat. He liked *jacka* fruit and often took short cuts between loops of the paths as if the main route that usually wound uphill was too slow. On the day we went to *São José*, a *roça* located high up a slope on the west side of the island, we stopped on several occasions to collect and eat *jacka* fruit. *Ricardo* would look at the fruit that had fallen on or near the path. He was looking for one that had not been there too long and was thus not rotten and would still be good to eat.

On finding one suitable he hacked the large green fruit open with his

maschii (machete) and we sat down on the path to eat *jacka*. The fruit is

delicious, sticky and sweet, and is very popular on the island, being sold

in the capital, beloved by school children as well as everyone else. The

chewed flesh is either eaten or spat out.

On arriving just below *São José* the view is stunning. As the highest

roça on the west of the island one can see much further out to sea than is

possible lower down. "*muito agua*" (much water) was *Ricardo's* simple

comment. He was right. Blue ocean was visible in a wide sweep before

us extending unbroken for miles. *São José* was small but very pretty.

After only a short stop we returned to the coast road at the bottom of the

mountain for it was already getting hot.

He was married to a young woman whose family lived nearby in *Maria*

Luisa roça a twenty minutes walk up the hill, and they had two children

who went to the primary school along the road to *Neves* about 30

minutes away. On one of my visits I arrived at his house and saw no one

around. It was quite early so I stayed at a distance and called his name.

His wife emerged from the house to explain that he was working in a field nearby. He appeared and after saying hello asked me if I would like to have breakfast before we set out to visit one of the *roça*. When I said yes he picked up a *maschii* and walked perhaps 10 meters to where a banana plant was growing. With a couple of swipes he managed to chop a large bunch of fruit from the plant. Removing several he gave them to his wife, who proceeded to fry them in a small pan over a fire outside their house.

It was apparent that despite his low, or nonexistent, pay it was possible to live there for the forest and land nearby provided where his work did not. Unlike *Jaoquim* who worked in the commercial sector *Ricardo* seldom mentioned money and paying him for guiding me to *roça* was always an awkward and hurried affair. Reluctantly and rapidly he would pocket his payment somewhat embarrassed. I got the feeling he did not really want the money, but accepted it to keep me happy with a

'foreigners are like that' shrug. He appeared to be happy just to show me around the *roça* he knew.

Yet *Ricardo* did have expectations also. He remarked on occasions why I had not called him for a number of days and was wanted to know when I would be returning to the west where he lived. He was in this way like the *moto* and taxi drivers I have already described *Gilberto* and *Filipe*.

importance of social recognition

He was far from the only one who seemed more interested in a social connection than material gain. Walking up a dusty track in *Neves* towards the main thoroughfare some weeks later, a group of young men called out to me. "*Tudo bom amigo?*" (All okay friend?) "*Tudo*" (everything), I said. One of them explained that he had seen me on the beach as he had passed in a fishing canoe at *Anambo* further south along the coast and recognised me. Indeed it was true, I had been sitting there earlier.

"*Ja!*" he replied and then departed with his friends. There was though a seemingly important emotional component to the returned greeting. The *Ja!* was an acknowledgement but it also brought a broad smile. There was a clear satisfaction derived from *being recognised* and acknowledged positively. He had recognised me and just as important I had recognised him. His greeting had been reflected in a response. The expectation that his greeting would be met had been fulfilled.

Moreover he had explained it by stating that he recognised me just as the off-duty policeman who had asked for money for petrol so he could get home had done. It had been acknowledged and the encounter had thus *been experienced significantly.* The man had formed a specific if superficial connection and unlike the man in the streets near the *Praça do Independência* I had acted as he had hoped and he had thus evaluated the encounter differently. The acknowledgement had differentiated me from a complete stranger. Such social connections, recognitions and acknowledgements matter on *São Tomé* and *Principé*, as I was to discover many more times.

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time and space

As Bakhtin pointed out social perceptions occur in time and space (Holmquist 1990:21) and people reveal a social awareness of how space and time offer opportunities and possibilities to them. The man with the broken fan belt had stood at a certain point in the marketplace after all aware that many people would pass. The off-duty policeman had *driven around* seeking encounters. The need for interactions to occur meant there existed a need for one's own 'visibility' to make this happen. The need had to be shown. It had to be expressed to those who might help. The taxi driver had shown his need by holding the broken belt in one hand, whilst the off-duty policeman had asked me directly, but then gone on to *show me* the low level of fuel in his petrol tank. It revealed and expressed his evident *need*. An expressed request that had been justified further by his explanation that he *recognised me*. Needs expressed or shown act as assertions into the moral framework of society in which it is hoped and expected that others 'who feel able' or who are able will respond.

Yet encounters *are events* and despite planning and optimisation in space and time, events just happen. The taxi driver could not control who would pass. He just knew that by standing where he did it was likely that many would. The old woman in *Trindade* did not plan for me to be passing when she needed to get home either, she just made use of the opportunity that my being there gave her. Similarly by driving around the off-duty policeman searched for encounters to happen. There was an element of *opportunism* in all these interactions that was based on an awareness of the social world and of the possibilities it offered.

Visibility

I have described how people have revealed their needs and at times promoted their chances of achieving them; either by showing them in some way, making a request or a demand, arguing that there exists an obligation owed, or changing the quality of a social connection so as to enable and make more likely some form of assistance. Yet such interactions need to occur to start with and people's needs require to be revealed and expressed for any outcome to occur. How 'visible' you are

therefore matters and is discussed by Goffman who notes, "..the issue of 'visibility' of a particular stigma, that is, how well or how badly the stigma is adapted to provide means of communicating that the individual possesses it" (Goffman 1963:64).

The taxi driver with the broken fan belt had made his need obvious to those passing and such social awareness was also apparent amongst the men who sat atop the wall that lined the bay around which the capital had been built. I would often see them sitting there, the broad flat top making a comfortable seat for people to sit on. They usually sat in groups, but sometimes were alone. They would often be there for hours at a time, sometimes talking amongst themselves. Occasionally I would find a group drinking beer, which one of them, often a woman, would be selling. Such groups were often highly animated and would call out good-humouredly to passers-by.

People explained that they sat there to stay cool in the light breeze that comes in off the sea. Certainly sitting on the wall is a pleasant enough

spot for the large broad leafed trees that line most of the bay give plenty

of shade and the onshore breeze is cooling, but what struck me also was

that the people all sat facing inland. The sea did not interest them. They

looked instead at the traffic and the passing people. Whilst people would

mostly pass without any interactions occurring, it was clear *that the*

sitters noticed people passing and that they noticed that the passers-by

had noticed them. Sitting atop the wall offered the chance of existing

socially in the hurried reactions and responses of those passing and in

being seen by them. It offered a way of experiencing the self in those

hurried responses and thus to experience oneself significantly. For it was

through interaction that the self came to be known, as 'object' seen in the

other's responses.

The awareness of one's visibility extended though beyond being visible

on the island and being acknowledged by passing people for one day

passing I was called to by a man I met sitting alone on the same wall.

"Good day," he said, "All good?" and then he asked "Do you like *São*

Tomé?" I assured him that I did. "All the people should come to *São*

Tomé to see that *São Tomé* is a good country," he said.

If 'all the people' came, I realised, then *São Tomé* would be seen and thus

be experienced by many. Moreover those experiencing it would be

foreign. *São Tomé* would thus be a constituent part of an interaction with

many people who were foreign. Both by being experienced and the

social interpretation made of those involved in doing so are recognised

as significant. Hence by 'all the people' coming to see, *São Tomé* would

indeed be experienced and thus evaluated significantly.

To be 'visible' in this way to others can take other forms. Walking near

the *roça Monte Forte* near the beginning of my stay I often encountered

a man who herded cows. On several occasions he had asked me

insistently to draw him with his cows and so one day as I passed near the

beach I came across him again and offered to do so. Finishing the pencil

sketch I tore it from my notebook to give to him. "You keep it," he said,

adding "What would I do with it?" His interest was that there should be

a drawing of him and his cows in the world: that his life and presentation

to the world had made an impression, that it had reflected something of

him. He had seemingly no wish for the drawing itself, for, as he said,

what would he do with it.

My drawing;

Evaluation and experiencing of self

Yet if such 'visibility' allows the self to become known to others and thus also to the person, it is also a social interpretation. In this chapter I have noted how *Ricardo* was dismissive of some of the demands of others, a dismissal that others also on occasions asserted. Demands were not always to be taken seriously. Their significance was a social interpretation that took account of the other and of the demand itself. People seek a social experience that is both meaningful (as recognisable) and that fits within a moral framework that they perceive as desirable.

relations with money...

How money is used and what is expected varies with the relations in which it is utilised. With *Ricardo* I struggled to pay him and he was seemingly reluctant to allow money to be a part of the relation. It was the same with *Vitor* who after we had spent an afternoon in *Ponta Furada* did not want to be paid for a second journey I made in his taxi at a later date. *Gilberto*, in contrast, wanted to know why I had not called

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him more and why I had not wanted more *moto* rides from him. I was being incorporated into his financial support network. This was even more the case perhaps for *Jaoquim*, who as he got to know me began asking for loans.

Yet these differences in expectations also reflected differences in the material circumstances of lives lived. For *Vitor* had a successful taxi business and could afford, I suspect, to give the odd person he knew a free ride. *Vitor* had a minivan after all and ran it along the busy west coastal road that had many people wishing to travel from settlements and *roças* to the local markets of *Neves* and *Santa Catarina*. It meant *Vitor* could fill his minivan every day, several times travelling back and forth along the road and unlike a car that could take at best eight or so passengers a van could carry twelve, fifteen or even more, passengers, along with a large amount of luggage for the market. Whilst people would pay a small fare each, the number of passengers he was able to carry meant that these added up and meant also that as long as he could keep the vehicle running he had a steady income.

For *Jaoquim* it was different. He had a car and finding passengers for it would have meant mostly waiting in the *mercado* (market) for passengers and this could take hours for there was much competition and long queues of taxis for busy destinations. Hence whilst he would earn something it would be less than running a minivan along a busy route. After his car was crashed the situation would have deteriorated significantly, as the earning potential of a *moto* which carries just one passenger at a time – or at most two – is much more limited, and at this point he asked not for loans but for help. Moreover there is also much competition in that there are many other *motos* as *Jorge* was to point out when he lamented that business was slow. To find passengers could mean long waits in the *mercado* or driving around looking for them using expensive fuel. *Gilberto* was in this position as well and indeed had been driving around looking for passengers when I met him.

In complete contrast, *Ricardo* had no minivan, taxi or *moto*. Indeed, until his boss gave him a second hand one, he did not even have a mobile complaining that they were too expensive and yet he was not interested

in money and sought none from me. Indeed he was reluctant to be paid

for acting as a guide. He was though a rural dweller and had a wife with

relatives nearby. He thus got by almost without money, surviving on his

social connections and the plenitude of the environment in which he

lived.

The only time I ever met him planning on buying something was when I

met him walking along the road to buy batteries for his torch. Whilst I

am sure *Ricardo* spent money on other things and had clearly spent a

fair amount already on his partly built house, with quite a lot more

expenditure needed to finish it, he seemed unpressured in acquiring

more, seemingly confident that one day the house would be built. He

lacked thus an urgency for money in the way that *Gilberto* showed or

Jaoquim seemed to plan for.

Indeed the degree to which someone was embedded in the monetised

economy and their need to obtain it to meet survival needs seemed to be

associated with what they expressed in the social assertions. Such

differences in attitude and goals sought in interactions could also be observed in what was requested. For whilst the man in the streets near the *Praça do Independência* had sought acknowledgement, others would ask for some 'thing' and whilst such differences in requests made occurred everywhere it became apparent that in some places people sought one more often than the other. In particular, it was often in the poorer areas that people would more often ask for material assistance, for some 'thing,' whereas those coming from richer areas were often more interested in social acknowledgement, which may at times include acknowledgement of social distinction and difference.

In *Santa Catarina*, a poor fishing village, thus nearly every request was for money, whilst in the capital requests were more often for acknowledgement. The differing goals sought appeared to express the differing material and social circumstances of those who were asking.

Interestingly the two could be linked in people's explanations. Visiting a plantation in the west of *São Tomé* I was sitting in the small kitchen of a

man's house eating the boiled banana and fish that he had given me whilst my host lamented the poverty of the nearby fishing village of *Santa Catarina.* He stated finally, "But they are *Angolar*!" It was an explanation of difference. The lifestyle of those at *Santa Catarina*, who mostly fished from canoes and made little money from it, meant that their economic state was parlous and their clothes, mode of transport and houses showed it. In contrast, whilst not rich, the man at the plantation managed to run a motorbike, not something many in *Santa Catarina* would be able to do. Yet my host *explained* these visible economic differences in terms of a *social* difference between them.

social distinction

Yet if material differences were explained in social terms, they could be used also to form social differences. It was a strategy adopted by many. The large *SUVs* (Sports utility vehicles) that some drove were as one man put it "for the social distinction". It was because others did not have them that they acted as a sign for those who did. The meaning lay not in the vehicle as such but in the relation and social difference indicated by

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owning them. The vehicles acted as a presenting sign that *in contrast to those who lacked them* showed a social difference that emerged out of a displayed economic difference.

an attempt at presentation to form a desired self

Such shown differences alters how the self is experienced by changing the responses the person receives back from others. I was to experience another such attempt at presenting a desired form of self when I visited the large and much photographed plantation of *Augustino Neto* in the north of *São Tomé.* Shortly after arriving I encountered a man who insisted on showing me around the garden and the large and rather grand old patron's house. The man was short, but fairly well dressed, and said that he lived nearby. We walked around the large garden with its great views of the capital below before climbing the sweeping steps of the patron's house. The tour was a considered and rather slow one. Points were made deliberately, my reactions and responses tested and awaited.

Afterwards, feeling somewhat relieved that it was now finally over, I sat in the garden outside to wait for transport back to the Capital. My guide left announcing that he was going home to shower. He returned a short while later though with neatly combed hair and wearing a clean ironed shirt, polished shoes and pressed trousers. Drawing himself up to his full height he looked down at my slightly shabby and dusty attire; my shirt crumpled from the sweat of travelling in a cramped shared taxi earlier, my trousers covered in dust from the road when riding on the back of a motorbike later on, and my shoes worn and much used. In contrast, my former guide was clean and impressive. He seemed satisfied that his appearance was so much cleaner and smarter than mine. My reaction was not what he had hoped though. He clearly felt that I *should* be impressed and seemed somewhat disappointed that I was not. Rather I was reacting with some resignation to his, as I saw it, attempted manipulation.

My response seemed to pose a problem to him. He was not content. He had made an effort after all highlighting the differences between us, our

different appearances – him now clean and smart compared to my own rather travel worn appearance - and our differing levels of knowledge about the patron's house and gardens. Through his assured and deliberate tour he had revealed how he was able to enlighten me and yet I was not reacting to these differences shown in the manner that he clearly hoped and *appeared to expect.*

If my responses were not what he hoped, the man's desired social experience of self required recognition to be realised. Moreover its evaluation was based on *the difference between us* being shown. His cleanliness was meaningful for when he compared himself to me he was the cleaner. It was part of the social process between us and as such significant in itself. Moreover I was foreign and this added a further significance to the interaction. Yet it would only have formed a desired sense of self for him if I had responded to it *by being impressed* and thus acknowledging his presentation made.

Social presentation manifested itself in other ways. Where you lived

could also be interpreted as a sign that others would recognise. Sitting

on a *bank* (bench) near the small fishing village of *Praia Gamboa* close

to the airport one man had told me how he did not like where he lived.

Having bought land after a party where a man offered him some, and

built a house, he realised that the location on the edge of a fishing

village meant that people regarded him as *Angolar* and; as he said, "But

I am *forro* and I do not like it that people think I am *Angolar"*. In this

instance it was not economic differences being explained in terms of

social particularity but the *location* of his house that was acting as an

indicator of it.

People's responses to me

That signs shown matters to people was revealed once more when on

another occasion I encountered a response to my own appearance.

Leaving early to catch an early morning taxi to the capital I had taken a

short cut through some long grass. The grass was damp from early

morning dew and I arrived at the roadside with damp trousers. As the

sun rose they would quickly dry but passers-by were to my surprise concerned and somewhat perturbed. My spoilt appearance evoked much sympathy from those walking along the road.

On my return that afternoon I was to find the grass cut to ground level on both sides of the path I had taken. Appearances matter because they are signs shown and signs which form how others respond to you. It was that people would think badly of me because of my spoilt appearance and thus I would have a poor experience of self that had caused so much concern amongst the passers-by that morning.

A further example occurred at a small cafe not far from the airport. It was a hot day and I had stopped there to buy a cool drink before finding a shared taxi back to the capital. The young woman, who worked at the cafe, came out and after awhile said "No thinking!" She waved a finger at me. "Do not think!" she continued. It was quite friendly, but clear. I was not to think. I asked her what was wrong with thinking and she replied, "If people see you thinking they will think you have problems in

your life. Do not think!" She then stood upright and held her head back.

"Stand like this," she said throwing her shoulders back, her head up and facing out towards the airport runway on the other side of the road. "Do not think!"

She was not the only one to be concerned that I would be seen thinking for teenage boys in the capital would sometimes run up and shout "*Fixe!*" at me (colloquial slang meaning something akin to 'cool!' in English) and then see if I had stopped thinking. Satisfied, they would smile and run off. It was friendly, but like the young woman at the cafe near the airport, they were happier when I was not obviously thinking.

Social norms

Yet such 'responses' to the signs that are 'shown' to others goes beyond concern at times. Having greeted me the men in the streets near to the *Praça do Independência* expected a response – and one of a certain quality. Their expectations were moreover *asserted.* The old woman at *Trindade* clearly felt that I should give her more money for she needed it

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and had expressed this. The expectation was clear, as was the evaluation.

Whilst others disagreed with her, many expectations could be widely

held. I would overhear conversations on street corners in which people

would lament or assert how another had or should act. As Goffman

argues, "A social norm is that kind of guide for action which is

supported by social sanctions, negative ones providing penalties for

infraction, positive ones providing rewards for exemplary compliance.

The significance of these rewards and penalties is not meant to lie in

their intrinsic, substantive worth but in what they proclaim about the

moral status of the actor" (Goffman 1971b:95).

Goffman statement describes well the conclusion of the woman in the

shared taxi from *Neves*, who had said that I was "more or less" okay for

I fulfilled people's expectations partly. I sometimes gave, if, at others, I

did not.

evaluative framework

There exists then a complex framework of expectations and evaluations.

Yet the knowledge of how others are likely and expected to respond to

signs shown means people are able to project into the future a desired

state they wish to attain and devise a strategy to achieve it.

progression of social relations over time...

Laurent was a *moto* driver who I met him for the first time when I was in

the west of the island. He gave me a lift further south. I was to meet him

again for he was to take me to *Neves* along a very rough track when I left

Monte Forte roça for the first time, balancing my bag on the petrol tank.

This was common practice in *São Tomé,* but I never fully got over my

amazement at the skill with which it was carried out. After this I kept

meeting *Laurent* whenever I was in the west.

It emerged that in the mornings he made deliveries for people along the

main west road taking sacks of agricultural produce and things people

wanted transported. After that he would wait for passengers often in

Neves by the taxi stop which was close also to the market, or he would pick people up along the road who were seeking transport mostly to *Neves* but also at times in the other direction towards *Santa Catarina.*

On one occasion I was walking along the road in the direction of *Anambo* from *Diego Vaz* when he passed. Expressing horror that I was walking, he said that he would make the delivery he was carrying out to *Maria Luisa roça* and return. He drove off but some minutes later he was back and drove me the remaining distance to *Anambo* refusing to take any money for a fare.

On another occasion he was sitting with a large group of young people at the side and on the tar of the empty road. It was quite far south, fairly near *Maria Luisa*, and traffic was very light with just the occasional vehicle heading down to *Santa Catarina*. People would hang out as they did all over *São Tomé* and they were always very sociable. They invited me to join them. So I sat for awhile with them.

I was struck by how the connection had developed. He had taken me to some places on a commercial basis and then as I would meet him on the west road he would say hello as he passed. Now I was being invited to join him with his friends and he was refusing to take payment for giving me rides.

That the connection should develop was though an expectation widely held. *Filipe* and *Gilberto* were insistent that I did not call them sufficiently often and *Jaoquim* became upset that the friendship did not develop further. Others were more relaxed like *Laurent* and *Ricardo*, although *Ricardo* also hoped that I would visit and wondered what kept me in the Capital.

Getting to know people means being incorporated into a network of help. *Filipe*, now he knew me, helped me find a place to stay. *Vitor* wanted to accompany me back to *San Jose*. Thus as well as being incorporated deeper into material and financial networks and into social

networks of ever deeper expectations, one also becomes enmeshed in a

network of mutual help.

envisaged goals – a good life

I was to ask several people what they viewed as a good life, what

motivated them and what they sought. Their answers varied in detail but

the general themes were similar. One man put it that, "Here is the same

as everywhere. People want a good life." When I enquired what this

would entail, he said "a nice house, a good job, a wife and children and

to be with good friends." Others said simply to be with your friends or

to live tranquilly.

One of the women who sat outside the school selling sweets and small

items near to where I stayed in the capital asked me one day if I had

family – a wife and children. I explained I did not. She said that I should

arrange it. That it was good for when you are old "they can work and

you will eat." I had heard this before from several people. That day we

spoke for quite a long time and she wanted to know if I was going to

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make my life in *São Tomé*. Several others had asked the same. They all

hoped I would say yes. People would point out suitable houses that were

for sale. I explained not, but she clearly thought that making a life in

São Tomé was good. Later I asked her what a good life would be for her.

She enthusiastically replied, "In *São Tomé* and *Principé* people wanted

to live in good health with family – a normal life. This was what

mattered to them."

I spoke with *Jaoquim* also on the matter. Sitting in a small restaurant,

one afternoon, we discussed life in *São Tomé* and in particular what a

good life would consist of. He described it as one in which you "would

not have to work, but could enjoy yourself socialising, going to the

beach, partying and eating out. You would have a car, a nice house and

so on." A school teacher was more serious stating that "a good life

entail a salaried job, a wife and children." I asked him whether friends

mattered as so many others had mentioned them. He replied simply that

of course everyone wants to have good friends.

Summary

In this chapter I have hoped to give a brief introduction to some of the

people I met and got to know and to show how, as the relationships

developed, expectations changed. Often there was a material aspect to

the relationship and this, in terms of obligations expected and at times

asserted, changed with the changing quality of the relationship. The

change might be away from the impersonality of the strictly commercial.

We know you, they explained, so you do not need to pay. This was

Vitor's attitude. Or, for those with *less material security*, it might be

from a strictly commercial to a more dependent material relation. We

know you, they might say, so you must help, even if it is only a little,

with our expressed *need. Gilberto* and *Jaoquim* held this approach.

That the expectation of material obligation, to revoke it completely or

rely on it more, was associated with developing social connections was

though widely shared. Material assistance was often associated and seen

as an integral part of social connections. That knowing people assists the

likelihood of them offering you something was an association that was

held by nearly *everyone. Amigos* (friends) help each other. It was the

explanation given by a somewhat inebriated man sitting on a bench on

Principé in response to my question as to why he wanted to be an

amigo. He had been asking me many questions about where I lived,

where I was staying, where I was going and I had eventually asked why

he wanted to know all this. "So we can be *amigos*! (friends)" he

exclaimed somewhat outraged. Now I was asking why he wanted to be

an *amigo*. "So," he replied, with an attitude of one talking to someone

rather simple so obvious was the reason to him, "we can help each

other!"

Even seemingly superficial encounters altered the expectations people

held. Requests would be explained and justified because people said

they recognised you, or that you had spoken before. Similarly help

offered was explained in terms of social connections already made, such

as the shared taxi journey to *Desjelada*.

Yet if knowing others enhances opportunities to receive and offer help and assistance how people set out to achieve this and with whom can vary. Social interaction on its own enhances and deepens a social connection, but the form of connection varies with the content of the interaction. Presentation to others is thus important. Not to think, or at least to be seen to be thinking, and to have clean and dry clothes, illustrate these concerns. Yet if presentation influences responses made there exists also a framework of expectations as to what those responses *should be*. How the other should respond to the assertion made.

Whilst greetings made may seek a response directly, requests for material goods can, at times, be left to those who "feel able" to help. At others the requests made are direct and forceful, rather than implicit, the need may be revealed and shown as in 'implicit' requests, but the assistance is expected and demanded. The different strategies allow for different qualities of social relations in the future and reflect different qualities of social relation in the present. The taxi driver with the broken fan belt had confidence that someone he knew would assist his shown

need - an assumption that proved to be correct. In contrast the old woman was more forceful, justifying her request with the observation that I was "taking a taxi myself".

Yet if asserting needs takes differing forms and styles other factors can be utilised to increase the chances of help arriving. Your 'visibility' matters. The taxi driver had positioned himself carefully in the market so that many people would notice him, so that he would be visible to others and thus increase the likelihood of someone helping him. The sitters on the wall of the marginal were doing something similar, along with keeping cool in the onshore breeze, they were visible to those passing and were aware of this, becoming significantly experienced in the glances of people passing by.

Others, realising that interaction enables things to occur, as the shared taxi journey to *Desjelada* illustrated so clearly, attempted to form a social relation with you before asking for something. This was what the man renovating the air-conditioning business had attempted and was

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possibly the strategy of the man at *Sundy* as well. Such changes are

moreover the usual expectation in social relations that develop over time,

as *Filipe* and *Jaoquim* changing expectations illustrate.

In contrast, the man repairing the road had argued directly for an

obligation owed. His persuasion was to present a relation between road

users and those that repair them and that as one was helping the other

assistance of some kind should be given. It was a strategy that included

some coercion or at least hinted at it.

Yet if achieving material assistance was a goal for some, the man at

Augustino Neto had a very different one. Rather than material goods it

was social distinction formed by contrasting our differences that

interested him. Yet this would only become significant *if it was*

recognised and thus become part of the reciprocity and social interaction

between us. As I had not recognised his 'theatre' in the way he had

hoped, being neither impressed by his tour nor by the smart shirt and

pressed trousers he wore, the man was left feeling despondent and he

reacted with some consternation. His efforts, it appeared, had failed.

The points he had made had moreover been asserted clearly. He had

pointed out and illustrated his knowledge of the house slowly and

carefully. It was difficult not to notice that *he knew things which he was*

showing to me that I was ignorant of, just as it was harder not to notice

his smarter appearance compared to mine. The interaction comprised

thus a *comparison:* his knowledge and appearance being shown as

superior to mine.

Assertions and the responses to them are though situated socially and

are interpreted as such, for people assess both what is being said and

who is saying it. Some assertions are simply brushed aside as

unimportant or ridiculous - the arguments being put forward not being

taken seriously, whereas others can be taken very seriously indeed. I

described in this chapter how on one day I had walked through the

village of *Lapa* on *Principé* and encountered some fishermen. My

companion that day did not take their demands for money seriously and said to pay no attention. *Ricardo*, who acted as my guide on the west side of *São Tomé,* often made similar pronouncements. Yet the demands of others - those in a position of authority or known to the person – could be taken very seriously.

As I have described such interpretations are also part of a framework of expectations that have associated evaluations - some responses producing approval and others consternation. Yet if there are expectations and evaluations of responses, the assertions made can be seen to be associated with conditions of life lived. Those with more material security seeking more often acknowledgement whilst those less materially secure seeking more frequently material goods. Such demands are though clearly aware of the perceived social possibilities. The old woman in *Trindade* had said 'See he has money!' and the fishermen at *Lapa* assumed this.

The apparent enmeshment of people into a network of expected responses consequential to assertions made, and of assertions that emerge from conditions of life lived and the interpretations of social possibilities, had at times a highly normative component. Moreover, given the importance and dependence many had on their social relations, their quality and continuance, it was likely that such evaluations would be highly effective, as indeed I witnessed when the fishermen at *Praia San Paulo* placed a fourth fish in my bag, an incident that I describe in chapter 8, or the taxi driver conceded to the argued obligation of the man repairing the road on the way to *Neves*. Such assertions have influence as the consequences to future social relations *might* be significant.

The uncertainty of the outcome on future social relations means that people could place a lot of value in their ability to argue their case and be socially effective in their assertions. Yet as the journey to *Desjelada* showed so clearly and as the off-duty policeman who wanted money for

petrol to get home revealed, knowing someone even if it is only a little

changes what is possible and what is deemed owed.
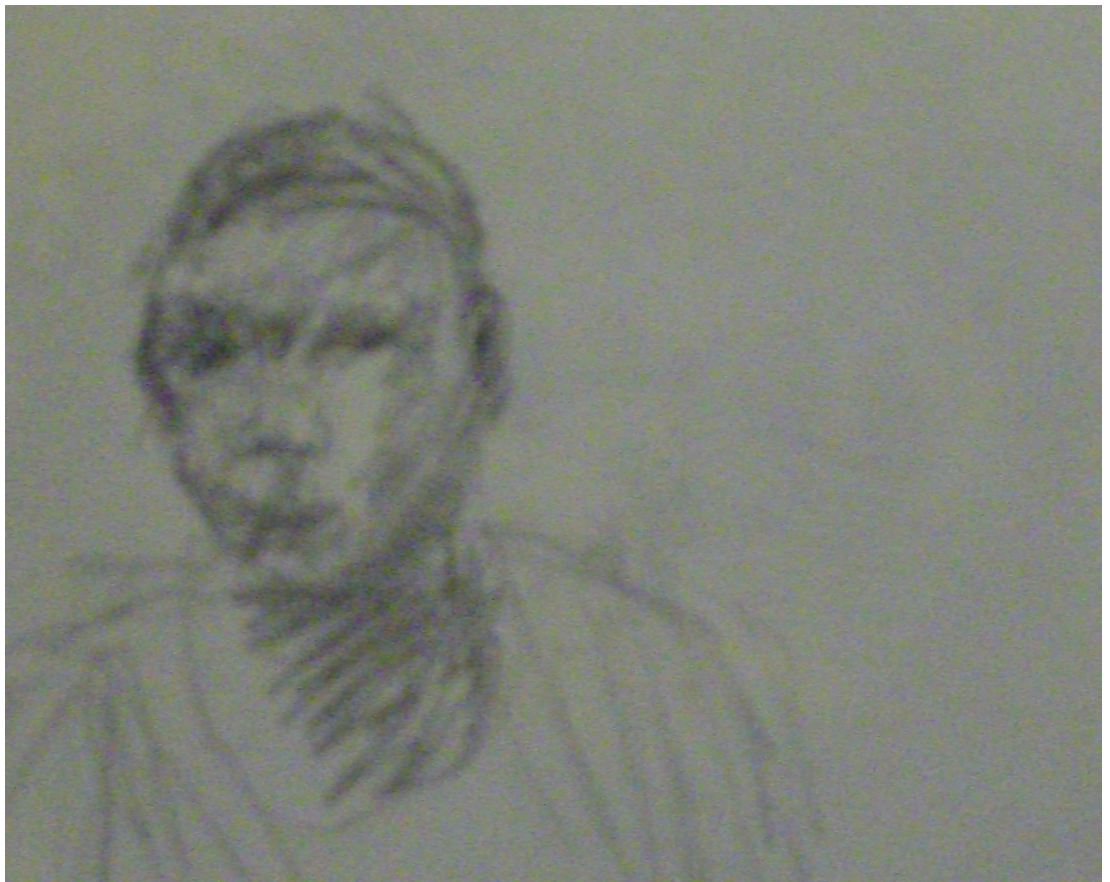
Chapter 5

Poetics of experience

specifics of the place

There was a certain brutality that one could notice at times. The
roughness of life, its impartiality to people's feelings and needs meant
that many faced the world with a certain resigned defiance. There was a
way in how some grabbed items and held them in their hands turning
them over with a sense of angry defiant dominance. '*Força!*' said people
as a farewell but it also stated a desired mode of relating to the world.
One of impressing oneself upon it and making an impression in its
surface, of bending it to your will.

Walking one day along a forest road in the west of the island of *São
Tomé* I heard the loud 'hack', 'hack' of knife on wood as someone cut
deep into a tree and I was struck by the realisation of how in *São Tomé*
and *Principé* people's relationship with the environment around them

can be one of *profound assertion*, in which people try to impress their will upon it and leave their mark. The deeper the impression made the more effective is likely to have been their mark making. I described in chapter 4 how the housekeeper had said, talking about *puita* drumming, that if the drummers drum *con força* (with force) "many people will come". Rather like the social world, making a deep impression on the physical environment was likely to be one that showed the work and effort of the person more *significantly*.

There was moreover a personal quality to people's actions on the environment just as there was one in the social world. With little mechanisation people assert change through the use of small hand held tools. The most ubiquitous by far is the *maschii* - a large half meter long knife. It is carried by almost everyone in the rural areas, from young boys to elderly women. The broad steel knife usually has a wooden handle, unless lost, and is carried in one hand or balanced on top of people's heads. It is used widely for cutting through vegetation, opening coconuts, lopping through branches obstructing paths, harvesting

bunches of bananas or even chopping down whole plants. If it rains, large banana plant leaves would for instance be cut by *maschii* to act as an umbrella. When it stopped raining the leaf, which is broad and makes an effective umbrella, would be discarded. *Maschiis* can be used also to ring trees so that they defoliate or to cut them down altogether. Such a hand held tool is most effective at cutting when used with some force and I had seen people hack into trees to fell them using a *maschii* vehemently and repeatedly.

Maschii were also used on trees even if there was no intention of felling them. Many trees along the paths in *São Tomé* and *Principé* carry deep cuts and scars made by people cutting into them with their *maschii* as they pass. When I asked why people did this my companions shrugged and could give no clear reason. I had seen it done on many occasions though, and the cuts could be quite marked.

Sometimes people would embed a *maschii* in a tree whilst they went to do something else and come back to pull it out of the bark on their

return. At other times people would just hack at the tree whilst waiting perhaps for a taxi at the roadside or when stopped to talk to friends. It had the appearance of a displacement activity, but it also illustrated an attitude of asserting oneself on the environment.

Such asserting could take other forms. Ascending a steep path one day from the shore on *Principé* the man I was with began to move stones because "they were in the way" as he put it. Yet I could not see that they were particularly obstructing our climb. "What about this one here," I said indicating another stone in the middle of the path that he had left alone. "Oh that one is fine," said the man although I could see no difference between it and the ones he had been moving. There was, I realised, a different aesthetic being practiced.

Such assertion into the world may be a response also to the impartiality of the world. The importance of interaction and dialogue for producing significant experience may also be what motivates people to assert themselves into the world. By doing so they are forming an interaction

with it. Such assertion emerges also from a repressed and denied longing for something else, for a certainty and a sense of belonging that the world rarely provides. In some of the small villages people sit on the porches of their houses with a strange anxiety on their faces. It is one that ignites into a desperate plea for assistance at times or for some thing to be given, as if holding some 'thing' will mean more than a promise could or an idea would. It would sit in their hands and provide *certainty.* For it had been given by someone and this *meant* something. It meant both acknowledgement of them by someone and thus confirmed their reflection in the social world and it held value as a material thing in its own right.

Yet mostly this did not occur and so they sat, a fierce anger and anguished pain etched in many faces. It was half denied and half accepted. 'This is normal life!' people would say with only a partially concealed contempt. They had normalised it and many identified with it too.
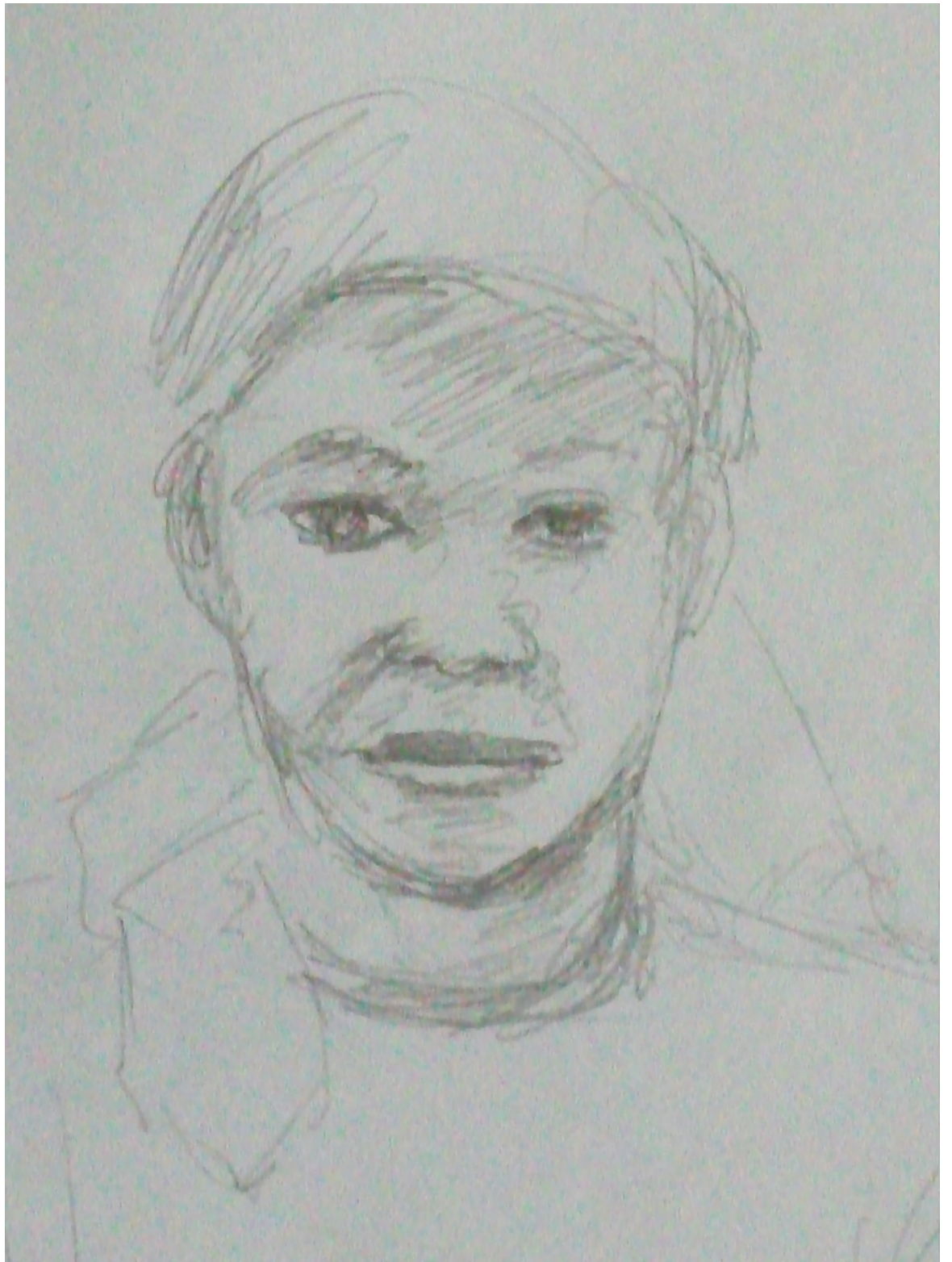
Yet there is more or rather there is very little. In some of the small places there is little that happens, little that would give people a sense of significance anyway. Other than cooking and fishing and collecting fruit, there is little people can aspire to, or hope for and so they sit and wonder and adjust as best they can.

Their response is either to form significance somehow through assertion into the world or to adjust. They thus assert and through making an impression in the world that will reflect them in the dialogic of interaction between themselves and the world, they attain a significance in their experience. Or they can adjust through distracting themselves in some way. They can get drunk, very drunk until the world in but a blur and their place in it something of less immediacy and concern. Or they can 'be with' friends as their assertions in the world will then be acknowledged favourably, their place assured and the anguish and anxiety that comes from being alone and without significant interaction assuaged.

People adopt strategies thus to how to deal with the world and how to exist within it. For many a high degree of uncertainty dominates their lives. Income from work can be uncertain, but also friends and social connections are not always as reliable as people would wish, for, as people will say, it is often 'up to them' or a matter for 'those who feel able' to meet needs and hopes that are expressed. In consequence people strategise. They will increase their chances of obtaining a useful interaction with a good outcome by managing their social relations, adopting effective strategies towards others in their presentations, choosing their physical (and social) locations in time and space and making use of opportunities that come their way. The particular strategies adopted vary. Some choose to build social relations through continued interaction whilst managing their own disappointments through social adjustment. Such a strategy was adopted by the man I met on *Principé,* whom I describe in chapter 1, who said following his rejected request "It's okay." Others rely on the moral framework being recognised and their assertions, often made *con força* (with force), being met. Still others reason and argue for the existence of an obligation not

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obviously present utilising more widely held ideas and the lack of certainty that the other holds in the eventual outcome. It is often an assertion of power carefully staged into the social world.

Living on an Equatorial Island..

If the social world is particular there exist also qualities that are particular to the island. Walking into the centre of the capital on *São Tomé* one day I came to a small restaurant near the *Parque* (park). Most days were hot on *São Tomé* but this day was exceptional. It exceeded the usual blistering heat, that I had become accustomed to, and was instead a heat heavy, intense and oppressive. Inside the restaurant I found the staff asleep or nearly so. At the back a man sat, his head resting on the table. On seeing me he exclaimed, "It is so hot. There is so much sun! One can do nothing!!" He then placed his head back on the table and came close to falling asleep. Sweat was running down my face as the air hung sultry and humid in the normally airy place. I tried speaking some *dialecto* (the creole widely spoken on *São Tomé*) at which the man's interest picked up a little. "*Nosso lingua!!*"(our language) he exclaimed

rousing himself sufficiently to get me a cool drink. I did not feel like

eating much, the heat removing my appetite and so sat in a shady corner

relieved to be out of the sun for a while.

On another day also around midday I went to a different cafe – a small

place on the road to *Madre Deus,* a small village now a suburb of the

capital. The woman who ran the place was fast asleep on the floor lying

behind the counter. I crept out deciding to return later when it was

somewhat cooler.

It was the same on *Principé.* On a very hot day there in *Santo Antonio,*

the capital, I went to a small guest house. On arriving I found the man

completely asleep across the table. Lying on the floor stretched out

seemingly comfortable nearby was his dog, also fast asleep. I again left

quietly.

The heat effects how people act, how they behave. It alters the mode and

poetics of behaviour. On hot days people sit in the shade on benches and

in doorways, under bushes and trees, under the eves of buildings and even on chairs placed under their houses, which are frequently built on stilts. In the capital people gather to sit in cool places that are shaded and have a cooling breeze, for it is hot. The roads seem emptier or maybe they are just quieter with less conversation.

The heat changes how one thinks. At midday one produces the wrong change. One cannot remember something easily remembered in the morning. Conversation is reduced to the minimum required, a few words, a nod of the head. People sit mute. It is hot, very hot. Later it will be cooler, but for now it is hot and to speak – everyone recognises this – is to expend unnecessary energy.

In the shared taxi people stare into space. They pay wordlessly. The driver grunts, nods his head. In the post office the woman takes my letter wordlessly, weighs it, says simply "*quinze-eey*" (15,000 *dobras*). I pass the money over, the stamps come back. I paste them onto the letter with paste from a pot and pass the letter back, which is accepted with a

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nod. Nothing else is said. The one word being the extent of the

conversation. Everyone accepts that, at least for now, it is too hot for

anything else. The temperature has changed the poetics of living. It has

changed the modality of them and possibly the number of them as well.

For whilst some may sleep and not interact at all whilst doing so, others

still work in post offices and drive taxis. Yet they do so differently. The

letter still gets posted, the actions required to do so occur, but fewer

words are said. Taxis still operate, it is just that conversation in them is

often minimal.

Yet the temperature, if modifying how people interact and how much,

also modifies *when* actions occur in the day, for some times are even

hotter than others. The heat peaks at between 1 and 2pm but it can be

very hot from 11am to 3pm. Many shops close at midday and reopen at

3pm. The heat determines that I get up at 3.30am to catch a 4.30am bus

so I can be at the shore by 6.0am so that I can walk with a guide to visit

a plantation *before it gets hot.* That is before the sun has risen so high

that everyone says: "There is so much sun. So much heat!". The heat

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influences not just when people wake up and go to sleep but how they

behave whilst awake, how social they are, how much conversation there

is, whether they sit together on a raised bench to stay cool and be

together or not. The heat modifies how people act and how they explain

their actions. People respond *to it*. It is the heat that has asserted itself

onto them.

Diverse Topography

Yet heat is not the only aspect of the island to have an effect on how life

is lived. The topography also alters what is done and where. It structures

what activities are possible and at what cost to those doing them. This is

an effect that has a historical legacy for it has influenced what people

have done in the past as well as the present. The mountainous

topography has not just altered where settlements have been placed but

where infrastructure has been built to allow access to them.

The Portuguese often placed settlements, and in particular it seemed the

manager's house of plantations, on the crest of ridges which allowed, in

an era without air conditioning, for the extra wind of such a spot to cool the building and those inside. It was the topography and the anticipated heat that was considered in the choice made.

Plantations also needed to be sited where there was suitable land. Many are thus located on the lower slopes and the plantations extended during the height of the coffee and cocoa boom along both coasts east and west. In the nineteenth century these settlements moved their produce for export to the *Povoação* (the settlement) by using shallow bottom small boats that would pull into small jetties along the coast. A network of narrow guage railways was also built which ran independently of each other ferrying the crops to the jetties where they could be loaded onto barges.

The roads that are now present on the island were built much later and connect the settlements along both coasts. Whilst the north of the island is served by a network of roads that connect the series of small settlements, along the east and west coasts there was a single main road

that ran mostly next to the sea. For those who lived there how far up the hillside their settlement is located often determines the length of time and difficulty in reaching one of the coastal roads. Whilst in some places the land is flat in others it is not and in consequence the road undulates and bends as it goes past various outcrops of rock, skirts headlands, drops into gullies, traverses wide bays and then leaves them. The main roads along the east and west coast run mostly close to the sea connecting the population centres many of which were on or near the coast. Not all though for plantations were also sited where there was available land and some are on higher slopes and are accessible only by a winding track that leads up from the coast road.

The consequence is important as the coastal villages and *roças* of *São Tomé* in general have a better connections and are more regularly visited by passing shared taxis than those up the hillside, which especially in the west of *São Tomé* require for the most part a walk of some distance – perhaps an hour or more - to reach the same road and *then* wait for a shared taxi ride. The larger populations of the bigger *roça* provide also a

greater economic incentive, for taxi drivers are guaranteed more custom. In consequence the larger *roça* that are closer to the road may have shared taxis that arrive and leave every 30 minutes or so and arrive and depart directly from inside the *roça* itself rather than the nearby road. This ease of access affects the effort required in making commercial transactions and transporting goods to the local market outside the *roça.*

These geographical and transport considerations matter not just to what you can do or how easy it is to do it but also how you feel about doing it and how you feel about being there. The *roças* that are higher are not just cooler - a product of the higher altitude - they are also calmer, more tranquil and feel remoter. The road is further away. There is no through traffic, unlike the plantations or small fishing villages that lie on the road and the absence of traffic that passes *en route* to some other place changes how the place feels. The sound of hens seems louder, for there is less other noise. Such *roça* are often smaller and the fewer people and extra space means that tall plants such as banana often grow close to people's houses, providing shade. The gardens seem more individual as

if less likely to be trampled on, less likely to be viewed or looked over.

Such *roça* are more self contained. If the differences in communication

affects both ease of access and cost with outside markets it also affects

how life is conducted and how it feels.

A view of the environment..

Yet if the island asserts itself onto people its heat changing how they

behave and its rugged topography influencing where roads have been

built and where settlements located, people also have asserted

themselves on the island not just in building roads and siting settlements

but in an on-going relationship with it. How the landscape is viewed was

hinted at to me when I was on *Principé*. I was travelling to *Ponto do Sol*

for the first time along the road from *Santo Antonio* sitting on the back

of a *moto*, the road wound up from the capital onto the western plateau

of cultivated and mostly settled land, passed houses with small gardens

and old colonial *roça*.

After driving past *Gaspar* an old *roça* that now has houses that have been constructed nearby, the road reaches forest. "From here on," said the *moto* driver, "it is *matos sol"* (only forest), "there are no people living here" he continued. He had described the forest by what it *lacked* I realised. That there were no people. The statement reflected, once more, the importance given to social relations in *São Tomé* and *Principé* and their absence became the primary quality by which to describe the forest as '*only* forest' for "there are no people living here".

Yet if the forest we were driving through was *matos sol* it was different when we arrived at *Ponto do Sol,* for nearby as I walked down through the forest later towards the sea people explained that that this area of forest was *roça* (plantation), an area that had been 'cleaned' of its fallen leaves and branches, so that people could plant crops there beneath the towering trees on the cleared forest floor. The *matos,* people explained, begins over there where the ground was still covered in leaves and branches.

It was the effect of people's work upon the *matos* that was being recognised in describing it as *roça* and the term 'clean' was stated with approval. It was an evaluation that was similar to how people's responses could be evaluated. People were recognising the work and effort *of others* that had become visible in the now 'cleaned' *matos* that had become *roça.* It was a process that reminded me of the actions I had seen of road workers. People were often employed, with foreign funding as a means of providing employment, to clear the verges of the roads: cutting back the grass and removing excess vegetation. I would see them stooping and hacking at the grass with large machetes or smaller hand-held scythes in rhythmic sweeping motions. After a while they would stop, stand back, wipe away the sweat from their face perhaps and survey what they had done. Later they would cut some more vegetation here and there until they were satisfied. There was a final point, though, when the work was deemed completed, when the road edges were cleaned of long grass and tidied up and then the worker would move on.

The *cleaning* of road verges or of the *matos* is thus more than just

environment changed, it is also a reflection of the consequences of the

trabalho (work) of those involved. In recognising an area or road verge

to be 'clean' people are also making an evaluation of their own or others'

work and recognising the effectiveness, or not, of these actions. People

can 'see' the effects of their or others' actions in the landscape. They can

see it as an impression made and they make an evaluative judgement

about this *choosing when* it is ready to move on.

Such experience acts, moreover, as a reflection of the person in the

world. Their efforts are reflected in the world in a way that is similar to

the responses made by others to assertions made. Yet it may be more, as

the constant sweeping of garden paths and the verges of roads reminded

me of the combing of hair or of its plaiting. There is a rhythm to it. It

exists as if it were a displacement activity, but done in its own right. Just

as the combing of hair is more than its untanglement, its ordering, but

also constitutes and is experienced as an increased awareness of self,

formed through one's own actions acting reflexively on oneself. The

sweeping of paths and road verges is an ordering of the environment and one that allows the actions of the person to become visible in the environment as seen and recognised by themselves and others. Such making clean acts as a reflection of the person enacted in the world.

Such socialising of the environment, of making it meaningful to people could also occur through use and social action. Whilst often marked in some way by previous human actions many places held 'meaning' in that they were recognised as being the places where certain activities occurred. At the market place in the capital, for instance, space is arranged quite carefully and without the presence of any visible signs, everyone knows where everything is or should be; *motos* one place, fish another, cloth somewhere else, bananas another and so on. It is also the case on the road outside the capital where people know where the stops for the shared taxis are and, although otherwise unmarked, can direct you to the correct corner or shade of tree. The activities are marking the environment and making it socially meaningful.

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Time

Arriving one morning at the central *mercado* near to where the municipal buses left from, I noticed a small crowd of people were already there. The bus I was hoping to catch was going to be crowded. I had arrived early and unsure exactly of its departure time asked people if they knew. "*Ainda*" (not yet) was the reply. Whilst this did answer my question, it was not what I was really seeking to know, which was how long I still had to wait and whether I could go away and return. I asked some other people if they knew the hour of departure. "*Ainda*" came back the reply again, now from a vocal small crowd. "It has not left yet," explained someone kindly.

I was relieved that I had not missed it, but was still hoping for more precise information. I found someone else and asked if they might know the hour of departure. She looked quizzically at me: "By the clock??", she queried astonished. Why would I want to know that?

I explained that I was hoping to depart and return. Someone else

nodded: "*Vai ven*" (Go come), she said. *"No problem"*. What was

striking about these encounters was that the information offered was

how the departure would effect my relation to the bus. Whether I would

catch it or not. It was specific and personal. In contrast, time 'by the

clock' referred to something else, namely the time as stated by a clock

and whether this relocated to the bus departure would depend whether

the bus left using time 'by the clock' or not and it was thus a less direct

relation. The one that counted was the one people had stated namely that

the bus still had not left.

In *Ribeiro Afonso* it was a similar story. I had gone there to see the

Festas de San Isidro, a celebration that began with a Mass and

procession. Asking people when the Mass began they said, "Soon".

When I continued hoping for something more precise, they responded a

little defensively that it was still to start. Events, I realised, were

described by people in terms of how the time of its start or end relates to

them. Whilst it *can* be described in terms of an objective external

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publicly owned axis along which events and people can arrange their

activities measured quantitatively – time by the clock -- it is more often

described in how people *relate to* and experience it themselves *directly*.

Yet if people describe time in this manner as how they experience it,

such a relation to it can also be reflexive and specific. For the start of an

event is something that belongs to the event primarily and to others only

in terms of their relation with the event.

Thus asking for the time – by the clock – of an event is at times

questioned because people want to know what relation you have to the

event to know something so particular about it. For when it starts is not

public knowledge that can be stated in terms of a publicly owned and

openly accessible framework - time by the clock - but something of the

event - and access to this is a consequence of someone's relation with it.

Why, they wonder, can you not wait like everyone else, for the event will

start when it chooses to and that is not yet. People can thus find

someone asking for the time *by the clock* as slightly impertinent.

The abstract and disembodied sense that time "by the clock" invokes as an idea that exists separate from events, strikes many as surreal for it does not relate directly to people's experiences in the same way as a descriptive term such as 'Not yet' does, stating clearly that you can still attend its start. Time by the clock gives no sense of your relation to the event. Moreover it is definite and seemingly unnegotiable and thus removes a sense of ambiguity so useful in relations with people and events.

Yet whilst all this is true it is also the case that many people have watches and even more mobiles from which they can check the time 'by the clock'. Moreover, some things such as municipal buses that leave twice a day from the central *mercado* do so mostly on time and some people will tell you the departure time 'by the clock'. The consciousness of time is thus mixed. Most people though communicate time to others in a personalised way in terms of their own experience of it and how they relate to the things time is being asked about. In doing so they also show a preference for describing it qualitatively 'soon,' 'not yet,' 'later'. In

contrast, time by the clock is always a quantitative description that leaves less room for a personal relation to what is being described or any sense of negotiation, change or qualitative description. As a consequence people can find it a rather bizarre and surreal way of describing time.

Summary

People's relation with the island, rather like that with the social world is one that is reflexive. The island, through its heat and topography, asserts itself on the lives and actions of the people living there. It determines how they live and when certain activities occur. Yet people assert themselves on the island as well, 'cleaning' it of leaves and branches, felling trees in some places and marking them. Such changes alter the island and act as a way of making the person, through their work and effort, visible in it.

Such effort not only makes the island available for human use, by converting *matos* (forest) to *roça* (plantation), but through the tidying of

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road verges and the clearing of vegetation and stones from paths, acts to grant it an aesthetics that can be seen and recognised. It is through work on the environment that it moves from being *matos sol* to being a place with recognised socially formed meaning. It is a recognition of a dialogic, of an interaction between people and things, that has changed the things and thus given them meaning. Forms that *reflect* the actions of people who made them. In this way the relation with the environment is similar to that with the social world, for the assertions have an impression and people can experience their self as efficacious in seeing their work in the changed environment and they can note the work of others in a similar way also in the environment. Their interpretation is, just like the social world, particular and described in evaluative terms.

On meeting Luis.

Luis stood on the road. He leaned forward towards me. He was not drunk today but had smoked his cigarette right down to its filter. It stayed there jammed between two fingers that he used to gesticulate and jab with. Naked to the waist, his lean frame glistened with the dust of the road and sweat of the afternoon sun. His eyes yellow and a little jaded still held some brightness. He must have been a somewhat excitable and mischievous, if

likable, child I suspected. He twisted and turned as he gazed at me like

someone trying to escape a tight fitting jacket. He was full of plans for how

we would go to Maria Correira a roça in the south. We would have to sleep

in Santo Antonio, the island's capital, he explained, not here. He surveyed

my face as if looking for clues. Did I understand what he was suggesting

and did I agree? Was there hope for him, Luis, there in those eyes of mine?

The rising panic that I might refuse and he be left with trying to find another

way to generate some money was suppressed quickly. He played a face of

calm but beneath was troubled. "We could go next week", he suggested.

"Luis" I explained "I am leaving in two days." He took the news badly like

being told of some family misfortune. "Oh", he said. "We are amigos," he

continued if I was leaving how could we be amigos anymore?

I had no answer and he looked disconcerted. Swallowing hard he leaned

towards me and said in a low voice that was almost a whisper but was too

loud for that, "Have you nothing for Luis?"

It was almost too much. We had had such encounters before, him jabbing

his fingers and oscillating between aggression and imploring usually for

money to buy a cigarette, just one cigarette, a 5,000 note would do it and

me wondering how to disentangle myself and whether and how much to

give him. It always ended somehow awkwardly never smoothly like there

were unfinished things to discuss to reconnoitre. This time was no different.

I thought he would say "It's Okay" and walk away, although it probably was

not, like he usually did, but today he did not. Finally he just left. I was at a loss. I thought of giving him the biggest note in my pocket and had settled on one, even put it into another pocket to present to him unconditionally without words as an oferta (a gift) when I next saw him.

He was laughing and grinning though and riding a motorbike, not his I noticed, too fast when I next saw him. Clearly he needed no note from me. Indeed I was forgotten for now it was speed and the joy of being free and being able to travel, to move from a to b without restrictions. There was no tight fitting jacket to his movements now just laughter and a large grin. The note stayed in my pocket, but next time, next time its your note Luis I thought. I had no idea if it was the right thing to do.

I reached the turning in the road and the house appeared across the open stretch of scraggy grass. Low and brightly coloured it acted as a backdrop, a final closing piece of scenery to the grass in front. On one side, at the wash point, women were washing clothes and sheets which they left neatly pulled out and stretched to dry on the grass.

I walked across the large open space and into the garden of the house. The fence acted as a form of demarcation line between two worlds. They were linked worlds of course, children ran back and forth regardless, chickens pecked both sides of the fence and hopped through its gaps and yet it was a form of boundary. The space felt different on the other side. I climbed the steps of the house and went into its living room. The sea breeze cooling me

as I walked across its bare floors to emerge on the other side, where a

sweeping view of the Atlantic lay before me. Flanked by low hills it

stretched to the horizon. One could look down the seemingly precipitously

long way to the praia (beach) hidden by trees below.

Chapter 6

The architecture of experience

explanations and assertions made...

In my recordings of experiences I noted that some responses repeat

again and again. At times people would say things that were word for

word the same or almost so. "Children are good" almost no one

disagreed with this. "*São Tomé* is a good country for the people wish to

live in peace, tranquilly". This was said again and again. "No wars, no

fights in *São Tomé*". These were sayings I

was to hear many times over.

They were the patterns and possibilities that Jackson was referring to

(Jackson 1998:16). Yet such sayings were not just statements, they were

also evaluations or they expressed preferences, "We prefer to co-operate

[in business] with people we know" or "So far! So much sun!" People

evaluate the world and how they act in it. They make a judgement of

certain actions as to whether they are good or not, better or worse than some other action or response experienced. The evaluation is qualitative and personal – though often shared. It expresses itself as an emotional response, as a *"Ja!"* said with satisfaction for instance, or as the emotional expression of a response, of *how* it is said or enacted. It is the broad smile that follows a successful conversation or the disconsolate look of one than has not gone as hoped. It is a response to the world which reflects back on the world and acts as a part of an ongoing and dynamic relation that the person, as actor, has with others.

This is true of the physical world as well as the social, for as I describe in chapter 5, the physical world of land, trees and forest is marked by people's assertions on it and these marks and changes are viewed, interpreted and evaluated. They are 'seen'. In this way they carry meaning for they *represent something* that is more than just the tree, the forest and the land. It is the work of people - others or the self – acting in the world. The marks make those who form them visible and apparent to others. They enter the experience of others and are part of that

person's interaction with the world. The person thus exists significantly for they have made an impression in the world that effects others.

Yet the marks and impressions connect those who make them in a significant way with something much larger. By becoming part of others experiences, whether this is through the impressions made in the physical world or through signs formed in the social world, people's sense of isolation diminishes. They are recognised and in a manner that holds significance. The anxieties of having to survive alone are lost in being in interaction that reflects and acknowledges them. 'Being together' with others is thus valued very highly by many.

Returning to *Ponto do Sol* along the road from *Daniel* on *Principé* I came across a woman standing close to the road. On seeing me she greeted me and we talked before she turned and indicated the women working at the washpoint nearby washing clothes. "Isn't it a beautiful sight?" she said continuing, "All together". Such an evaluation of togetherness was repeated in differing ways by others. Meeting *Jaoquim*

one day sitting on a roadside near to where I lived in the capital I asked

him how he was. He was eating grilled snails and talking to two

companions. "I am fine," he said. "I am here with my friends, so *I am*

fine." It was definitional for him that being with your *amigos* (friends)

means *you are* okay. It conveyed the same certainty as the statement

made by the woman sitting beside the school who had stated that "if

your feet and hands are fine then *you are* fine".

It reminded me moreover of what the man I met on the road to

Augustino Neto had said that "if you live in your own house with a

woman and children then you *have* a good life." These were assertions

that defied argument and stated the world to be a certain way. They

asserted an evaluation that when recognised was defining. Through their

recognition and acceptance a particular view of the world was

established - a view that evaluated social relations highly, that

recognised being with others as beautiful and good, and that saw

significance as making an impression in the world - social or physical.

differences expressed

Evaluations were often shared, yet there were at times also differences expressed. I have described in chapter 4 how two woman sitting at the top of a beach near *Praia Gamboa* held seemingly opposing views; one liking that I had stopped to talk to them, the other complaining that as I had given nothing to them the encounter was without value. The two views though were both consistent with views that had been expressed by others. That material gifts given mattered was also, for instance, what the women in the shared taxi from *Neves* had said to her companion that I was more or less okay, "for sometimes he gives and sometimes he does not" and the opposing view that acknowledgement of others without giving a gift was okay, was also the response of the young man in *Neves,* the person who had said "*Ja!*" and was clearly content with my greeting him - a view held by many others who sought seemingly nothing more than acknowledgement to their greetings made. It was recognition that their assertion had made a mark in the world.

Yet these different views also shared an important feature namely that gifts given and acknowledgements warmly made are also recognitions of the assertions of others and they both share the evaluation that *the response mattered*. For it is the quality of the social interaction that they illustrated – however expressed – that was valued so often by so many.

Yet some seek more than just a warm acknowledgement or simply a gift received, they seek a particular kind of acknowledgement that will reflect them and show them in a desired and aspired to way and they *use signs* to achieve this. Yet these need *to be recognised and acknowledged* to have their particular effect for they need to be a part of the social interaction. The *SUVs,* driven by some, can only act as signs of *social distinction* if they are recognised and evaluated by others in the way hoped for. Whilst recognition by the owners may be potentially interpreted by them as a qualitative experience of self in the world, it is their recognition by others that makes them signs that distinguish socially and thus part of the self as lived.

This was what the man at *Augustino Neto,* for instance, who I describe in

chapter 4, had sought with the signs he presented – a clean shirt and

smart appearance. His lack of success in obtaining the desired response

had resulted in his consternation. The signs shown themselves were not

sufficient in themselves for him, it was *a social response* he was

seeking. It was that these signs would be acknowledged in the social

interaction and thus be a reflection of his self as object in the world.

The significance of such 'reflection' is such that it forms a frequent

mechanism for a more general evaluation of people and things, for as

people say "Something must be good if it is experienced as good." It is

an evaluation that is directly experienced, that is known without being

thought about.

preferences

As I describe in chapter 1 people hold a preference for direct experience

over thinking about things. They may assert into the world in an attempt

to experience it in a certain hoped for way, just as they do with the

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physical environment, but it is through the responses to these

expectations asserted that the signs shown have effect and that they thus

acquire meaning and significance. For it is through the qualities of the

responses received that the actor comes to be evaluated. What responses

are and what their qualities are is thus a matter of much import to many.

social actions..

Yet it is not just that social responses to signs asserted are hoped for,

people also hope that *the actions* of others will be both recognisable and

what they expect. For this allows a sense of self to be reflected not just

in the responses made to them specifically but also in a sense of normal

social action around them which will indirectly reflect them in ways that

they both hope and expect. I discuss in chapter 8 how fares and prices

can be monitored by others, but how such fares are paid is also at times

commented on and an evaluation expressed. On one occasion unsure of

the exact fare for a shared taxi journey I stood for a moment after I had

paid to see if the driver was happy with what I had given him. "It's

over!" shouted another passenger "leave!" She clearly thought that I

must have reasons for wanting to speak with the driver further, which I

did, but she may have suspected it was for reasons other than to ensure

the correct fare had been paid. Through interacting I was establishing a

personal relationship with the driver that might allow me preferential

treatment in the future, rather than the impersonal overtly commercial

and thus fair interaction everyone else was engaging in. She did not

think this appropriate. It was not just that it undermined the commercial

relationship between driver and passenger, carefully supported by

everyone else, but it was not the expected and approved of way to act.

It was the same in the bank where I once said "*Obrigado*" (thank you)

after being handed local currency for money I had given to be

exchanged. The man had worked hard on my behalf, but the astonished

and disapproving look from his colleague that followed my thanks told

me that he at least thought there must be more to it. Thus whilst building

personal relations is what people *prefer* to do, a preference that I

described in chapter 4, and what they often seek, within more

commercial encounters people do not see it as desirable *in others*. In

such commercial relations it is expected that the customers should 'support' the impersonality of the role and not engage in personalised interaction. Indeed as I suggest in chapter 8 such 'support' is essential if the impersonality that such transactions require is to be maintained.

People thus make evaluative judgements about commercial interactions and those engaged in them. They notice the price paid by themselves and by others. They notice the time spent at a car window doing so and whether the interaction is impersonal as it should be and so on. Such evaluations can lead to normative assertions, as the disapproving look in the bank informed me, the berating of the woman at the car window attested to and the desire of the *moto* drivers to be paid for much work away from the town and prying eyes asserted.

normative framework

There exists a marked conformity with many fearful of doing some things that others would regard as inappropriate for someone like them. Moreover it was not just commercial interactions that are subject to

evaluation. I described in chapter 4 how being seen to think is regarded as showing that you had 'problems in your life' and people will try at times to distract you from doing so. It was though deemed unfortunate, rather than inappropriate, as people tried to save you from yourself rather than berate you for doing so.

Walking is similarly regarded as an unfortunate sign shown. In the small village of *Gaspar* on *Principé* I was stopped by a woman and asked how far I had walked. I had just arrived from *Ponto do Sol* about an hour away along the forest road and was heading to *Santo Antonio* on foot. "So far!!" she tut-tuted in clear sympathy. To walk so far was a sign, at least to the woman, of clear misfortune. It was an opinion that others expressed also. At a small restaurant in the capital a waiter said he had seen me walking near the airport. It was true. I had been there. What was startling about his explanation was the enunciated horror with which this statement had been made. It contained a clear emotive evaluation. I asked him if there was a reason why this was a problem and he replied simply that walking was "not good".

It was the same when I got out of a shared taxi on the main road at

Praia Gamboa. I thought of walking the remaining distance to *Praia*

San Paulo to buy some fish. The shared taxi driver, who had brought me

there from the capital, said I should wait in the vehicle for he would take

me all the way to the beach, saving me the short walk from the main

road where I had got out. There was something horrified and offended in

his expression that I might actually walk the remaining two hundred

meters, that I got back into his taxi and accepted his offer of a lift for the

remaining distance. He parked finally right by where people sell fish on

the beach. I eventually walked a mere 5 meters. Someone at *Escolo do*

Campo on *São Tomé* elaborated finally: "*São Toméans* don't like to

walk", he said, "they prefer [to go by] car". It would seem *Principéans*

held similar opinions. Yet many *São Toméans* and *Principéans* did walk

long distances, to go to school, to market, to visit friends or to go

fishing.

It was something people did when there was no transport available or

when they could not afford a *moto* or some other means of transport.

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The woman, who had cleaned and salted fish in *Sundy* on *Principé* that I

describe in chapter 9, walked with them the hour and twenty minutes or

so to *Santo Antonio* to sell them in the market. Finding transport from

Sundy could be difficult, she had explained. She took a *moto* back

though using some of her profit. There would have been plenty of *motos*

waiting near the *mercado* in *Santo Antonio.* To walk was thus interpreted

by many, as showing that there were no other options available or that

you were too poor to afford another means of transport.

If people preferred to use transport they could be particular about the

type. It was not just that people who could afford it would buy SUVs

rather than ordinary cars but young men and teenagers who rode

pushbikes could be teased by others to "get a *moto*". When I asked why,

people explained that "a *moto* is good if you are a man."

People thus make evaluations of others actions as well as signs shown

and these are often communicated overtly through exclamation or more

covertly in the quality of ongoing social relations formed. The valuation

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and importance placed on social relations means that these evaluations

hold significance and such assertions from significant people could be

effective for people would change plans or desires expressed when they

became aware of the social consequences.

The fisherman on the beach at *Praia San Paulo*, who added an extra fish

to my bag after comments from the crowd of onlookers, was a good

example of this, but there were many others. How others would view

someone's actions was often defining for them. This extended also to

responses to signs shown for whilst SUVs, *motos* and clean smart

clothes all acted as signs to which others responded there existed also a

particularity to these signs. Others were *expected* to respond to them in a

certain way and were evaluated according *to the expectation.* Moreover

this evaluation was often communicated to them. The signs shown

derived from and were asserted into a framework of expectations that

was itself normatively asserted.

Yet if people live within such normatively asserted social evaluations of them, they also utilise such a framework expected themselves to make their own evaluations of social life and it is this reflexivity and engagement – with at times differing points of view – that makes social life lively and contested.

Formation of experience

There exists thus a chimeric aspect to experience. It exists as a product of assertions made and as responses to those presentations. Yet the reflection is not assured, for as Mead described, the self is a social experience and it is how the other responds to you that determines how the person will experience themselves and this means that people are dependent on others for the responses that they make. The self as experienced is subject to interpretation by another and their response. It exists dynamically in interaction. It exists, as Bakhtin would suggest, as a dialogue, of an assertion made being recognised and reflected back. People exist within a series of such dynamic interactive and mostly

ongoing social relations that provide significant experience through recognition and response and the self is experienced dialogically in this way.

Yet such interaction also possesses directionality in time. There are goals people are seeking. They hope for reciprocity and reflected responses in the present that evaluate them or the place well, but it is a certain quality of response that is sought and which may differ. Yet people are prepared, at times, to adjust to an uncomfortable and disappointing present in order to achieve such a future.

This orientation of expression towards the future gives people's social presentation a particular quality for rather than expressing current, or just past states, they are often oriented towards *forming* future ones. That such futures are evaluated more highly than self-expression is in effect placing a higher value on the quality of continued and future social interaction. Yet this does not mean that people do not at times also self-express, for there are occasions when people will assert, at times

strongly, how they feel about the immediate past whether the other who has caused the response – hurt or approval – is present or not.

Whilst people may adjust to an imperfect present, the absence of significant experience may also lead to people coming close to despair. For without such relations or reflections from the world that signify significant social relations or a social role such as, for instance, working as a carpenter, a teacher or a cleaner, there is no significant reflection of themelves in the world and people become depressed. They hold their head in their hands and declare "There is nothing!"

Summary

São Toméans and *Principéans* have thus a specificity to their experience, an 'architecture'. Some aspects of their experience are prioritised and are recognised by many *as significant.* People get angry and upset about it. They cross streets to shake strangers hands when it is what they hope and they lament at length with others when it is not. They go home change and shower just to obtain a response from another that is desired.

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These experiences matter. Yet it is also who responds that counts. Some will just shrug and explain that the assertion being made is ridiculous and the anger expressed unjustified. *Ricardo*, who I describe in chapter 4, had little time for some of the arguments people made to him and some taxi drivers would simply shrug at the demands people made of them. It depended, in part, who was making the demands as well as what the demands were. It was an interpretation of the social world that was being made.

Yet the importance placed on such evaluation and adjustment is not absolute, there were plenty of incidents and occasions when people would dispute an interpretation or they would try to assert an alternative interpretation. Meaning and the significance that follows from it is thus also about power, strength and effectiveness of persuasion. Life is like an act from *Tchiloli,* a play acted out by several groups on the island, in which many of the participants wear masks. For in the play, dialogue, threat and movements that aim to confuse and destabilise the assuredness of the other, even if only a little, are used. The man

repairing the road to *Neves* did not say what he would do if he was not given a gift by the taxi driver, but by his tone, his vagueness, his impassioned plea of righteousness, it was clear that something might happen if only in how the taxi driver was evaluated by others or difficulties that could so easily be avoided.

Yet if social life has directionality from people pursuing such goals, there is also a further aspect of *São Toméan* and *Principéan* experience and that is how these goals are formed and sought. For their seeking emerges out of a series of signs and actions that are widely shared and recognised and this goes beyond the asking for gifts. People assert their interpretation of social actions and signs shown and they both notice those who deviate from what they expect and often will assert their evaluation or express it to the other.

Assertions recognised by others are viewed as significant experience and achieving them in a desired form requires a shared recognition of the signs and actions being made. There exists a dependence on others thus

to act as hoped and an evaluation of them is consequential to their

response in a pattern that can be normative as well as evaluating.

At the plantation..

You were very drunk when we met, eyes glazed and yellow, trying to focus, stay sober and be reasonable. Fighting the alcohol, the doubts and the low self esteem, you battled to present a good front. Hoping it will mask you, knowing that it does not. There was nothing there for you, (or not enough), in that place of falling down buildings and no work. You knew it yet pretend it's okay. You will choose it, but it is not like how you make out it is. It is worse, much much worse than that. You gave up trying to change it though long ago I believe and now lassitude is your friend and alcohol your companion. Both are there and like the heat drain your energy and provide you with the reasons to continue. When the money is finished the alcohol will depart, like some false friend, but the heat of the place, that will remain.

You run scared of judgments, I can see that. Yet you wonder how I see you, wonder if I see you. You would rather that I did not see everything for you don't like that yourself. Yet we talk and pretend it's all okay. This pretense is an uneasy one, a fragile theatre. Its better to leave before the performance ends and reality starts. I wonder how many conversations have gone astray.

The women here march past quickly. They are abrupt. 'Bom dia' (Good day)

they say sarcastically like we would care about it. Bom dias (Good days)

belong elsewhere.

We edge cautiously along the paths feeling our way past the stares, the

long looks and the sarcastic good days. The main house once glorious in its

sense of style, its statement of symmetry and proportion still gleams from

under its coat of grime and partly burnt walls. The overgrown yard out front

displays a generously disdainful lack of care. Everyone who can leaves it

would seem. Those who stay do so because they have already given up.

Chapter 7

Aspirations, Hopes and Imaginings

foreigners are already known....

When I was staying in rooms in the west of the city I would often go in

the mornings to the central *mercado* to buy bread from one of the

bakeries. One day, as I was walking there and was a short distance from

where I stayed, a woman I had never met before crossed the street to

greet me. I did not know her but she had clearly decided that she wanted

to talk to me. She was wearing a white headscarf that held her hair in

place and was quite smartly dressed as if for church although it was not

a Sunday. She said, "*Bom Dia*" (Good day), and asked me how I was

and where I was going. "*Passear?*", (walking) she asked. I explained I

was off to buy *pao* (bread) in town. It was all very friendly. She waved at

her friends across the street from where she had come, and who were

watching. "*Meu amigo*" (My amigo), she said. Everyone laughed at this

little fantasy. "*Bom dia,*" I said to the two friends across the road. They

smiled: "*Bom Dia,*" they replied, grinning. They were delighted. "So

you are going to town to buy bread," the woman continued. We smiled

at this slightly surreal but well meant meeting. I said, "Yes", and then

we both nodded said, '*Ciao..we*', a friendly farewell used by many, and I

carried on.

That it was a first meeting meant that its quality was being determined,

could only but be determined, by what the woman thought I represented.

By the signs I 'presented' in walking down the street. Her expression,

'My amigo', implied a connection, which she seemed delighted in

alluding to, but in reality consisted only of her being in conversation

with me. It was an idea that was recognised and responded to positively

by her friends, who were standing across the street, much to the further

delight of the woman.

This rather surreal encounter illustrates rather starkly how signs shown

can elicit a response. It was somewhat different though from Goffman's

description in *The presentation of self in everyday life*, "When an

individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed" (Goffman 1971:13). Yet surely, I was thinking, I could hardly be *an amigo* after just two minutes worth of conversation. Yet maybe what was being recognised was not something 'real' but something else.

Perhaps it bore more resemblance to how Mitchell describes Europeans who went to Egypt in the Nineteenth Century to see the real Orient (Mitchell 1988). They though were disappointed finding a chaotic scene that did not reflect the Orient they had seen at exhibitions in London and Paris. The real Orient was not, they complained in their letters home, oriental enough. Was my encounter with the headscarfed woman a preconceived scene that was now being recognised when enacted, the recognition reflected back to her in the acknowledgements and 'applause' of her friends smiling from across the street?

Such a sense of the foreigner as already 'known' before encountered, as behaviours expected. That they, as a man driving his car in *Trindade* had insisted to me vociferously, swim on the beach on Sundays and would, as the couple in *Santana* would state, make a good Godparent or as a young boy I would meet had presumed, need directions to the seaside, are beliefs prevalent throughout *São Tomé* and *Principé*. Foreigners have qualities, desires and hopes and these are 'known' *already* or at least they are expected. Moreover when such expectations are seemingly met, there is a sense of satisfaction, of smiles for a scene is recognised, one that has meaning. Yet when they are not met, there is bafflement and anger, as the man in *Trindade* had shouted from his car one Sunday in clear frustration, a large SUV, that '*brancos praia Domingos'* (foreigners.. beach.. Sundays!). He was angry and seemingly baffled that I was in *Trindade* – a relatively large inland village – on a Sunday. Yet most others there held a different opinion stating that whether I was at the beach or in *Trindade* was a matter for me. That the man had *a clear expectation* of what foreigners were supposed to do was though clear.

He was not the only one who held clear ideas. Walking on *Principé* in

the direction of *Novo Estrella,* a *roça* in the raised eastern plateau of the

island, I came across a young boy at the side of the road. He talked to

me and without being asked began explaining the way to *Praia del*

Mare. It was his assumption that this was where I was heading and he

seemed happy to be a part of the solution to my supposed problem. I had

my own purpose though, that differed from that imagined by the young

boy, I was heading in the direction of *Novo Estrella* and then to *Abade*

further on.

Yet where did these ideas and associations emerge from? The history of

the islands had been one of oppressive and frequently violent

colonialism that had ended only in 1975. Since then the islands had been

living in a post-colonial era, but how 'post'? That colonialism has often

been replaced by neo-colonialism, economic dependency and a third

world identity is discussed by Stuart Hall (Hall 1996) amongst others.

The post-colonial may entail new political arrangements and in the case

of *São Tomé* and *Principé* differing economic and social practices, but

many of the important relationships with the rest of the world have changed only partially. Economic and at times technological dependency remain. Moreover people living on the island could still encounter foreigners and see that they were often relatively wealthy with access to education, opportunities and that some came to *São Tomé* and *Principé* on holiday.

It was in the village of *Santana* when I was walking from where a taxi had dropped me to the central part of the village near the church, that I was called to by a family sitting outside their house. Two adults and a small child were sitting on the steps of a small wooden dwelling. The adults looked like they might be the child's grandparents. They greeted me and beckoned me to come over. After talking for a few minutes they asked me if I would like to be the Godparent to the small child sitting next to them. There was, I realised, a certain expectation of qualities *that were associated with me.*

On a visit to another village I had, as so often in *São Tomé,* stopped to

buy a cooled drink at a roadside stall and another customer had begun

talking to me. We spoke for a while and he then showed me around the

village a little. On making a return visit to the same village I was to meet

him again. On this second occasion he explained that he worked as a

head teacher in the local primary school and showed me around the

school introducing me to his colleagues in the staff common room. I was

to meet him several times more. Our conversations in these meetings

were particular and based on the knowledge he had acquired of me.

His position meant that he also gave occasional interviews on the local

radio. During the *festas* of *San Isidro* I was in the village and after

watching the religious procession and meeting some people had gone to

a small place for something to eat, when the staff there told me that they

had heard me being talked about on the radio. It was the head teacher.

He had been interviewed on the radio and had, the cafe staff informed

me, been saying that he had seen a *branco* (a foreigner of European

descent) whom he knew dancing and this, they pointed out, would be

me. This was not true, I had in fact not been dancing, but it made good radio. It showed that a foreigner was interested in the *festas* and had participated in it as well. Moreover, it also showed to anyone listening that the head teacher *knew* a foreigner.

The possible significance of this last point was illustrated to me once more when one day he had offered to take me on the back of his motorbike to *Santana* some kilometers along the road, where he had to deal with paperwork for his school in the local government office. Climbing on the back of his bike we set off, at first seemingly in the wrong direction. He drove through the village and then along a longer back road that formed the national road north.

The reason for this detour was not at first apparent, but as we drove past a small cafe where friends of his called out to him I realised that he may have had a plan for me to be sitting on his bike whilst he passed the cafe. He stopped and turned the *moto* around casually to return the short

distance to speak to his friends who were sitting outside next to the street.

That knowing a foreigner might signify something significant was something that occurred to me once more when I noted that foreigners appeared in local music videos. Broadcast on the local STV (*Santomean TV*), which was watched in *Principé* also, many of these local productions had foreigners dancing somewhere in the background. They were not singing the songs or playing an instrument, they were though there somewhere. Were they like the fast cars and dreamy locations that also appeared in the videos something aspirational? Was this the reason why the headscarfed woman had smiled and said '*my amigo*' much to her friends approval?

There is a road, a rough track really, that winds uphill from the west coast road on *São Tomé* to the small *roça* of *Maria Luisa*. Some way up it a collection of new houses have been built. Climbing the steep track one day I met two young women walking down balancing crates of

Rosema beer on their heads - a brand brewed in *Neves* and distributed throughout the country. They stopped. One asked: "*Amigo onde vais*?" (where are you going?) I explained to *Maria Luisa roça*. "*Maria Luisa é longe!*" (Maria Luisa is far!), they both said. I asked what the place we had stopped was called. "*Maria Luisa em baixo*" (Lower Maria Luisa), they replied. " *Roça é mais alto e longe*" (The plantation is higher up and far), they continued. "*Ninguem mora la*" (No one lives there), said the second young woman.

"*Amigo*," said the first, "*Tiraste uma foto de nos na festas*?" (Did you not take a photo of us at the *festas*?) I replied that I did not have a camera with me that day so it must have been someone else. "*Um outro branco?*" (another European?) she asked. "*Sim*" (Yes), I said. She looked at me and nodded saying in a quiet whisper, "*Ele falou com nos*" (He spoke with us). She spoke the words quietly as if to say it loud would not be appropriate. A foreigner had spoken with them. It was, it seemed, significant. Just as it had been to the headscarfed woman and to her friends standing across the street. That it was well recognised

socially to others was perhaps what made the young woman instinctively lower her voice. It was okay for me to know and her companion but not anyone.

The head teacher had had fewer scruples of course announcing that he knew a foreigner on the radio. He though *was* a head teacher. What the two shared was a recognition that this was a significant sign that would be recognised by others as a performative act that held importance.

Yet if people see significance in knowing and being with a foreigner, the presence of a foreigner is also capable, as was perhaps illustrated by the young woman's lowered voice, of causing some unease. In *Trindade* at a religious *festas* I came across a man. He was eager to say 'Bom dia' (Good day) and shake my hand, but whilst doing so turned my palm strongly downward so that his was on top. He did this several times repeating the action before letting my hand go. It seemed to reassure him greatly. He never stated his motives but the reassurance that the gesture gave him was marked. Was it a response to a sense of powerlessness that

the meeting appeared to invoke *in him.* A sense that he had managed to reverse by forcefully turning my hand down whilst his remained on top? His gesture was marked, the force used pronounced. Yet he seemed content when he managed it.

A similar unease, that remained unrelieved, was stated by one young woman who was enlisted to cook at the *Escolo do Campo* (school of the countryside) for a weekend, as the regular cooks were away. I had hired a room there for some weeks in the west of the island. On being informed that amongst the people staying there that weekend was a foreigner she expressed reluctance to work as a cook. I was walking down the stairs inside the building, but as the window was open, I overheard the exchange. Others were reasoning with her, but she was adamant, finally exclaiming: "But I will still have to sit at the same table!" It was a cause of some concern to her. And though she did end up cooking that weekend, and even sat at the same table, she refused to speak to me directly. We had never met or had any interaction before and the response, like the headscarfed woman I begin the chapter describing,

came from the signs my presence showed to her, from the 'reality' that

the signs formed when recognised. For her, and in contrast to the

headscarfed woman, the signs recognised produced a negative response

that resulted in her wishing to disengage completely rather than claim

"my amigo".

During the weekend though her attitude changed and became less

hostile, but by then she had sat at the same table and thus the relation,

just as in the shared taxi ride to *Desjelada,* had changed partially. It was

now perhaps more specific based on knowledge of interactions, at least

in part, rather than 'known' realities recognised.

It was not the only occasion that I experienced such wariness from

strangers. Sometimes, though very rarely, people would cross the street

so that they did not have to walk past me or they might move where they

were sitting in a shared taxi so that they did not have to sit next to me.

Such occurrences were rare however. One woman though dismissed me

by stating, "He has no car, no *moto*, no companion. He has come here on

foot! On foot!! He has nothing!" Clearly being a foreigner was only one of several signs that evaluated you.

legacy of colonialism

As the colonising power, Portugal, was able to define the referents within which people had to live. In *São Tomé* and *Principé* this included the differing statuses of contract workers and *forro* (descendants of freed slaves) for instance. Yet it went further than this for it also formed the economic and social realities within which these categories had meaning. The relations of power with the metropole was also partly justified and maintained by this 'discourse' and its local representations. Such representations do not lose their power overnight at independence and even with new social and economic realities, the evaluations and the associations can remain. The impact of colonialism in forming a 'colonised' mind has been the topic of many writers, including Frantz Fanon.

Discussing Fanon, McLeod explains that it was French colonial ideology

that assigned Fanon an identity. McLeod writes, "Ideology assigns him

[Fanon] a role and an identity which he is made to recognise as his own"

(McLeod 2000:37-38). Certainly during the colonial era the societies on

São Tomé and *Principé* were markedly hierarchical, the categories

people occupied were clearly defined and this structure *was imposed*.

Whilst independence brought about a change in how political power was

administered and an ending of this hierarchical social structure, the

representations of the past would have been more difficult to change.

The range of expectations was thus perhaps understandably complex. In

a travel agency in the capital one of the employees explained to me how

the advantage of using a travel agent was that everything is arranged for

you. All the facilities and arrangements are booked and worked out in

complete comfort and a *factura* (receipt) is produced listing all expenses.

I realised that the *factura* was not being presented as an adjunct to the

package, rather it had a value *in its own right,* desirable and

advantageous to have. The receipt was being offered not as a supplement

to the core services that allowed people to manage their accounts, but *as a core* service itself. The arrangement allowed an ordering of the world which was being presented as self evidently better. The travel agent concluded her explanation by gesturing towards the market and the parked shared taxis. "Otherwise," she concluded dismissively. "You can use the public transport." "The taxis?", I asked. "Yes," she said disdainfully.

That everything was arranged for you meant a separation from the disorder and complications of having to make arrangements yourself. It suddenly struck me that this was similar to people I had seen on *Principé.* They appeared to be from the islands but had money and were driving around *Santo Antonio* in large 4 by 4 wheel drive vehicles clearly reluctant to get out. I did not have the chance to ask them why they did not wish to leave their vehicles, but it appeared to be a wish to distance themselves from the life of the street. Their attitude betrayed a reaction of disdain that was now being repeated for me by the travel agent in her flourish of dismissal towards the *mercado.*

There existed then an ordering which people saw as self evident – of some things that were inherently better. It was that order and separation, if you had the chance, from disorder that the travel agent assumed I, indeed anyone, would wish for. Otherwise she had indicated, and her gesture had a finality and a decisiveness to it, 'take public transport!' That this later choice was self evidently less attractive surprised me as I always rather enjoyed the discussions and frission of public transport, yet it was exhausting and could be difficult.

Yet it was not just order that foreigners were assumed to be interested in and to be thus associated with, sometimes I would be passed a used and very worn banknote and then people would think again, find a clean and newer one and pass this to me instead. It was as if the cleaner notes matched a foreign presence better. Perhaps because of the power of these imagined realities people often found me puzzling, for I regularly did not act as they expected. I did not fit with the expectations they had of me. Not only did I not know the normal expectations fully but I did things differently from them. That I did not visit the beach much

puzzled several people and that I did not hire a vehicle was a matter of comment by others.

Summary

The examples I have given show how foreigners are imagined. There is a clear idea of what foreigners 'mean', how they are recognised in a larger framework and this provokes aspirational hopes and wishes, in some, of association, imagined and recognised by friends, and fears and anxieties triggered in others who either wish to disengage or find some way of reasserting their own dominance. Such imagined realities go further than just a sense of threat or of ambition and hope though, they extend to what foreigners do, how they act and what they might be interested in.

The relationship with foreigners has been a long-standing aspect of the islands history. The colonial past will influence some associations, but people in *São Tomé* and *Principé* are also aware of the world as it is today and qualities that they see and imagine foreigners possessing are aspirational for some.

In *São Tomé* and *Principé* significant reality, the kind that brings out warm and positive emotional responses, rather than anger or despondency, is that which is recognised to *be* positive and to *have* a high evaluation as performance. It is because of this recognition that the performance has the impact it does. As Steuerman points out it was Lyotard who stated that "..modernity rather than postmodernity is the recognition of how little reality there is in reality (the *peu de realite*)" (Steuerman 1992:112). It is through the placing of reality into that empty space, through recognition, that the world becomes meaningful. It becomes recognisable. Not to act as expected is to empty the world both of order but also of meaning. It becomes unrecognisable, chaotic and empty. Foreigners are not well known mostly and thus are good targets for people to place their dreams and imaginings. What would a foreigner do in these circumstances? What would he or she think about that? These imaginings are heightened and given more significance though through the symbols that foreigners constitute and often, but not always, possess in the communicative landscape, such as cars, money, the possibility to travel and so on.

On the road from Daniel

I turned the corner and as I was leaving Daniel I was stopped by a man. Did I recognise him he wanted to know? He had been at a house just down one of the paths nearby two nights before at the evening of puita drumming. It had been dark and faces were only visible from the glow of the fire and whatever light came from the Moon. I did not recognise him but he could have been the one leading the singing. I asked him if this was so and he said it was.

He looked at me slowly and asked me how I found Princípe. I said I thought it was beautiful. "You like it?" he asked, the worn face with broken teeth looked closely at me as if trying to step past our apparent differences, as if trying to see what I really meant, who I really was.

"Are you staying with Jean-Claude?" he asked. I said I was.

He nodded slowly adding, "Yes he lives in that grand house." He seemed wistful as if he might like to live in such a grand place himself. He realised I sensed that there was a whole other world out there of which I was a representative and that it was a different bigger place perhaps better, perhaps not, and that he did not know it and a part of him I felt would like to.

"You live in Daniel?" I asked, but he lived at Sundy not at the house in whose garden the puita drumming had occurred. Somehow I was sorry for the house had dignity. It stood in its own ground next to the forest, whilst at Sundy the houses were small and all crammed together. There was little privacy. "Sundy praia?" (Sundy beach?) I asked hopefully. "No" he replied, "the roça."

Suddenly he asked "When are you leaving Princípé?"
"Tomorrow", I said.

We stood there looking at each other, different ages and different life experiences. The distance was large, but we could wave across the gap. We could still see that the other was human. "Então," (then) he said finally as if reaching some conclusion, "Boa Viage!" (Good journey!) The words came with a large smile. We shook hands and I left walking along the brightly lit path lined by fruitaria trees and coconut palms. The bright red earth somehow shocking in its intensity of colour. It looked like blood spilled on green earth. A large gash cut across the face of the island. It twisted and its edges were frayed with tree roots and fallen leaves.

Chapter 8

The place of money

Introduction

One morning I took a taxi to *São Paulo* near *Praia Gamboa* to buy some fish from the fishermen. *São Paulo* is a small beach known for its fish market. Boats, mostly dugout canoes but also some larger fibreglass vessels arrive mid-morning after very early morning fishing trips along the coast. There is a large building with refridgeration at the top of the beach, but many of the smaller boats simply place their catch on the sand and sell it to anyone passing. It was around mid-morning when I arrived and fishermen were unloading various sized and species of fish onto the beach from large wicker baskets. A small crowd had gathered. The crowd stood around talking and admiring the fish, some speaking to the fishermen and some buying their fish.

I wove my way to the front of the crowd, waited my turn and chose three fish. The man picked them up showed me them and placed them in a small plastic bag. '50,000 *dobras*', he said. The crowd murmured its pleasure. "Fine fish," people muttered. "Good fish," said one, "but only three for 50,000?" Others agreed. Someone said something to the fishermen, who reluctantly put another fish in my bag.

Yet, if this was a courtesy to a foreigner, I had noted similar things occur in shared taxis and at the market. In the taxis, notes were passed to the driver and change passed back as others waited. People *see* what change is returned and they *see* what money is offered. The price paid is public knowledge and through the whisperings and murmurings an evaluation *is sensed* of agreement or disapproval.

In contrast, the price for a *moto* – a motorbike – often taken solo, but not always, is more open to negotiation between driver and passenger. There are no crowds of onlookers to witness what is paid. It is accepted that ultimately the price asked is up to the driver and it is for the passenger to

agree or not. Yet often in the capital where there is much competition

between *motos,* journeys have similar prices and people will compare

and discuss them, expressing an opinion that the fare to such a place is

maybe high or fair. Outside of the capital where the distances of

journeys can vary considerably *moto* fares are more variable and are

often negotiated. Yet *moto* drivers, if they have taken you to many

places, may ask for payments away from a village or where people meet.

When I asked why, one driver explained that people, "will be jealous" if

they saw. Another driver, on *Principé,* on seeing a group of young men

approaching, placed his pay very hurriedly into his pocket. People are

aware that there may be social consequences if a large amount is seen to

be paid for a whole morning's work. Pricing and payments are thus

embedded in a normative framework that whilst frequently respected can

be and often are circumvented by discretion.

The sourcing of money

Most people in *São Tomé* and *Principé* do not have a regular job and

obtain what money they have through the sale to others of harvested

commodities. Such an informal arrangement is particularly common in rural areas where such products are readily available. People will go to the forest and collect bananas or the beach and catch fish, or the streams and catch fish fry, and then try to sell these harvested goods to passers-by from the roadside or take them to a local market. On *Principé* I met one enterprising woman who bought fish from fishermen on the beach, gutted and cleaned them in a nearby stream before salting them in heavy rock salt she had also bought, which dries and preserves them. She then placed them in a large bag which she carried the one–and-a-half-hour walk to *Santo Antonio* to sell in the market. The extra labour of cleaning and salting the fish gave them more value and a better price. She explained that on another occasion she had sent a large sack of salted fish with a friend on the boat to *São Tomé* where they fetched a good price for they are popular in the central market.

The amount of money gained from these activities is in general small and most people, as one bank worker from *Neves* described it, have "very little". Moreover many of the commodities offered for sale are

close to being universally accessible. In consequence, as someone explained, a seller is competing often with many others for a limited market and so if you, for instance, grow tomatoes to sell and have a good year it is likely many other growers will too. Prices will thus be low, reflecting the abundance of tomatoes available. Thus whilst you will have plenty of tomatoes to sell the price you will obtain for them will not be high. While if, in contrast, you have a very bad year, it is likely so will everyone else and whilst the prices of tomatoes may be thus high you will not have many to sell so your income is likely to be again low.

The same goes for harvested products such as bananas or fish. High prices are likely to either bring more suppliers on the market thus lowering prices once again or be a consequence of difficult access – for some reason - to the product itself meaning that sale volumes are likely to be low. The consequence is that incomes are in general low and often erratic.

People thus turn to other sources for assistance. The man at the *roça* at

Abade on *Principé* had explained how he relied on friends to give him

bananas and food as demand for his services as a carpenter was scarce;

while the man with the broken fan belt on *São Tomé* had hoped that

people he knew would supply him with a new one, which someone

eventually did. People thus rely not on a pile of cash, which they do not

have, but on the quality of their relations with other people and others

responses to them. *The material economy is for many embedded in*

personalised social relations - which perhaps explains the effort and

importance put into them by many.

One taxi driver who took me to the airport appeared far more concerned,

for instance, that I would spend time with him and his brother whilst I

waited for my flight than whether I paid him for his taxi fare. It was the

opportunity of establishing a social connection that interested him. Such

preferences have been noted elsewhere. Yang writing about the process

of forming and maintaining social networks of obligation in China,

referred to as *guanxi*, discusses how one worker, called *Jiang*, was asked

to carve a "pair of large seals bearing the name of his work unit" (Yang 1994:145). On being offered payment for his work he graciously declined arguing that, "To be paid is to be shortsighted, it is just 'business transaction in one hammer blow.' For *Jiang*, to accept money in payment is to close off his chances of establishing a long-term give-and-take relationship with his unit leaders. Money, then, is perceived as less of a gain and less secure than the social investment of incurring obligation and producing indebtedness, an action that will bear fruit for a longer time" (Yang 1994:145). Moreover "leaving a debt unpaid encourages the other to call in his or her debt with a request for help, thus rendering that person dependent on you and indebted to you. In other words an unpaid debt provides opportunities for further cultivating the relationship" (Yang 1994:144).

Such a scenario is similar to the desire people have in *São Tomé* and *Principé* to buy on credit from small shop owners. Such a request is an assertion that expresses a need, just as it would in a request to a friend or a stranger, and the seller's consent, if obtained, establishes an ongoing

personalised relationship with that particular seller. The opportunity thus

becomes available for developing a social connection as well as

obtaining goods that may be hard to afford.

Monetised exchange in contrast is "business transaction in one hammer

blow" (Yang 1994:145) as Yang points out. The indifference of

monetised exchange to the personalised and individual is noted also by

Simmel, who writes, "Money is concerned only with what is common to

all: it asks for the exchange value, it reduces all quality and individuality

to the question: How much?" (Simmel 1950:411). Elsewhere he

comments how "On the one hand, money makes possible the plurality of

economic dependencies through its infinite flexibility and divisibility,

while on the other it is conducive to the removal of the personal element

from human relationships through its indifferent and objective nature"

(Simmel 1990 (1978):297).

The reliance in *São Tomé* and *Principé ultimately* on social connections

for many people's material security has consequences for how people

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adjust to the monetised part of the economy. I have mentioned already

the use of *price monitoring* which allows for people to place some form

of *expectation* on the seller and thus return some of the qualities of usual

non-monetised social interaction to monetised exchange, but it is also

possible to notice the staging of a degree of social distancing which

allows for monetised transactions to occur in the first place. For

monetised transactions are things you do with people who are not your

amigos (friends). With *amigos* you waive fees and give surpluses away.

People need thus to act impersonally in monetised transactions so that

impersonal exchange *can occur*. Social life is staged in this way.

Commenting on the *Sio* people of New Guinea Harding notes that, "A

definite pattern of money uses is correlated with social distance"

(Harding 1967:229). He continues, "From an egocentric vantage, social

relationships may be seen to fall within a series of progressively

widening circles" (Harding 1967:229). He notes three "..first, the

restricted range of intimate relations encompassing one's family, close

kin, friends, and neighbours. Beyond this is a wider circle of distant kin

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and trade-friends. Third are.... commercial relations....modelled on European practices" (Harding 1967:229). Significantly he goes on to note that "Within the narrowest social range, transactions involving cash other than gift-giving are infrequent" (Harding 1967:229).

Similar qualities also occur in *São Tomé* and *Principé* where getting to know people often means a move away from the impersonal commercial exchange and towards either giving of gifts such as free journeys in people's taxis, an example I have given earlier, or a move towards greater dependency in searching for loans, gifts or more opportunities to make a monetised income such as occurred with *Gilberto* and *Jaoquim*.

Moreover people readily switch back to their non-monetised social networks when money runs out, as the man at *Abade* did when he could not find sufficient carpentry work – an example I describe in chapter 4. Social networks are also where people turn *in extremis* for loans when they need cash to cover, for instance, the treatment of a sick child. Yet

there exists another fall back for people when the cash economy is insufficient and that is the nature of the island itself.

The nature of the environment

It is possible to harvest commodities directly from the forest and out of the streams and sea, not just to provide a source of money through sale but also for survival. Both *São Tomé* and *Principé* are fertile islands with good rainfall surrounded by calm seas that contain many fish. Such an environment means that many commodities are available without the need for money. In *São Tomé* and *Principé* if you want to eat fish you merely have to go to the beach and throw a line in the sea. You may need to stand there some hours, but you are likely to catch something. Bananas grow almost everywhere and as long as you are fit enough to harvest them you may be able to exchange them, as an old woman in *Daniel* did, for rice with people you know. Also prolific are coconut palms. You need to be able to scale up an, at times, thirty meter high trunk to harvest them but at the top often twenty or more coconuts can be kicked until they fall to the ground below.

On *Principé* a lunch of crab began when a small group went to the beach in the early morning and collected crab off the rocks. People will forage for banana, coconut and bread fruit and many grow root vegetables such as *taro* and *matabala* (a root vegetable) in their gardens. Other items such as coffee and tobacco grow wild and I often met people out searching along the paths and roads of *Principé* and *São Tomé*. In consequence, it is possible, though difficult, to get by with very little money. Indeed many have to.

How money is used..

Yet there still is a need for some money. Rice and bread are popular, and both need, or their ingredients need, to be imported to the island and thus obtaining them, unless they are obtained through exchange or as a gift, requires money. Even that obtained without the direct use of money will though have needed to be originally purchased by *someone*. In addition to some important food items needing money, there are services that people require money to use such as transport, mobile phones and electricity. Then there are the purchase of non-comestible items such as

tools, radios and so forth. House construction is also a major expense with people saving money to hire the specialist skills of carpenters to cut the trees and make the required planks, often done *in situ* in the forest before being carried to the house site. Where there are the additional costs of construction and the purchase of imported items such as the metal roof. In consequence, for most, the economy is mixed, with money being used for some things whilst social connections and the environment provide people with a basic threshold of material security.

The value attributed to money..

Getting out of a shared taxi one day just before *Guadalupe* I began to walk up the kilometer or so side road that leads to *Augustino Neto roça.* A man on the road was going the same way and we began to talk. He lived in *Guadalupe* and was visiting a friend on the *roça* he said. He pointed out that the original name of the *roça* was *Rio d'Oro* (river of gold) which was clearly visible, as he pointed out when we arrived, on the ornate colonial gates of the plantation.

The name came from the huge amount of money that was made selling

coffee and cocoa from one of the largest plantations on *São Tomé*. The

man though was dismissive of those who had money stating "people

who drive cars and have money are idiots!" He continued, "if you live in

your own house with a woman and children then you *have* a good life."

Yet money retained it seemed some value for him, for he asked me for

some "to buy a cigarette" just before we arrived at the *roça*. It was,

nonetheless his social relations that he claimed to value most highly –

living in your own house with a woman and children.

Money and social relations

I have described in chapter 4 how social relations can form through

interaction and how this can enable other things to happen whether the

offering of help or the requesting of goods. Moreover the interaction

also contains an emotional aspect, a response that is evaluative and that

can be sought in itself as a form of desired social 'reflection' in others

responses. People will 'present' themselves in a certain way to obtain the

desired quality of response they seek, just as the man who acted as guide

at *Augustino Neto* had returned with a clean and pressed shirt and the woman, that I describe in the previous chapter (chapter 7) who stated 'my amigo', was also wearing an immaculately clean white scarf. Money in its use can have a noticeable effect on these processes. It can enable, through commercial exchange, social interactions to occur that would not have happened otherwise, and it can change the process of presentation - something that the *moto* drivers were so wary of when larger sums were involved.

Moreover its use constitutes a part of social relations. It can be given as part of people's expectations of what they expect of others producing an evaluation of them as part of whether they are in agreement with the social norms and expectations of others. Yet its showing as well as its use is like a greeting made. It calls like a gesture for a response. Like a gesture, money indicates something about the person. It is interpreted and responded to.

A visit to a small restaurant..

On a very hot day near the *roça* of *Novo Estrella* on *Principé* I walked

into a small restaurant and bought one *refridgerante* (a cooled drink). I

sat in the shade outside next to the road to cool off. I had just walked up

the hill from *Santo Antonio* and was now very thirsty. The area is

residential and it was quiet that day. Apart from a woman sitting alone

and eating a meal, I was the only guest in the small restaurant, which

had cement walls and a small terrace. Still thirsty I bought a second. On

buying the second the store worker's attitude changed substantially.

Whilst before she had been engaged and talkative she now became

formal and distant, it was as if my ability to buy a second drink now

made informality and engagement difficult. Another customer, who had

arrived and was also drinking a *refridgerante,* eyed me curiously. I was

to experience something similar in a shop in the capital of *São Tomé*. I

was planning on going away and had in anticipation changed some extra

money. On opening my wallet to pay for some purchases in the shop, I

revealed the cash and the attitude of the shop worker changed abruptly.

She also became cooler and dismissive.

A similar change in attitude occurred in another cafe also in the capital of *São Tomé*. I had bought a *galão* (a white coffee served in a glass) and a piece of cake. It was at a small place near a hotel used by foreigners, but the woman who served me gave me a strange look. I had I realised just spent 50,000 *dobras* (around 2 euro) on a coffee and a cake, a substantial sum for many people. It was a reality – a condition of life - that the woman wanted to distance herself from. Whilst the necessity of her job meant she needed to handle the money and provide change to customers, she adopted an attitude of formality and distance, *which formed after she had noted me buying a galão and cake.*

Money acts as a sign that informs how social interactions form and develop. On *Principé* in the small restaurant I had, I realised, revealed that *I was able to buy two refridgerantes, one after the other simply because I was thirsty.* The action had referenced me socially. The woman had interpreted it in a social way just as the man, whom I describe in chapter 4, at a *roça* in the west, had explained the poverty of those who lived at *Santa Catarina* – their financial means - in social

terms. Monetary spending power reveals the social conditions under which one lives, and so informs the perceptions of others regarding one's social belonging. It was this that made the *moto* drivers nervous.

Yet it was also the association between monetised transactions and impersonal interaction working in reverse. Rather than being impersonal with another *in order to conduct monetised exchange,* the money used, in the amounts of it I was using, had formed this impersonality by acting as signs shown.

In contrast, it was an attempt to reassert a sense of social obligation and reimpose expectations that those on the beach at *São Paulo* were attempting to do when someone spoke to the fisherman and a fourth fish was placed in my bag. In evaluating the price of the fish they were responding to it as one would to the 'presentation' of another in a personal interaction and judging it as to its appropriateness. It was a way of asserting a framework of expectations and social obligations on sellers in a market where they had the fish and the customers could buy

without knowing the fishermen personally. The interaction could be impersonal and the price could be potentially determined solely by the market rather than also by social expectations. The informal monitoring by the crowd re-asserted social obligations on the sellers that they should take account of buyers expectations. It was the same in the shared taxi where again informal monitoring of prices was also a way of re-incorporating the price being used in an impersonal commercial way into social expectations rather than the impersonality of market interactions. It acted as a way of adjusting to the impersonality of the market.

The prioritisation of the qualitative and personalised

The man I met on the road to *Augustino Neto roça* was not the only one who appeared to value social relations above money. Even if his statement about it was succinctly put, others held similar views in how they acted. Walking past *Pensão Turismo* one day in the centre of the capital, a man who worked as the cook of the small restaurant there was leaning over the balcony. He called out to me. "How was I?" he asked. I

told him "I am fine" and that I have been in *Bombaim* and *Neves* and

was now back in the city. This was received well and he nodded his

head. Then I asked if he was cooking. "Yes," he said. "Was it ready

now?" I asked. "Yes" he said. Yet I could tell that he would have

preferred if I had not mentioned his commercial role as cook. I said that

I might be back later. He seemed disappointed. He had wanted to use the

encounter to form a more personal connection, I realised, and I had

introduced commercial considerations into the conversation, that he

worked as a cook and that I might be back later to eat at his restaurant.

Eating there was how he knew me after all and it seemed a point of

common reference to me, but it was not where he wished seemingly the

conversation to have led for it is personal relations that are valued most

highly.

Yet money itself acts rather differently. Commercially its use outside of

building social relations *can be* short term. It can potentially provide

some material security *on its own*, although in the amounts most people

have this can only be partial. Yet it complicates and influences social

relations through acting itself as a sign shown. The importance of reflected responses in social relations remains though and indeed those with money often actively seek such acknowledgement from others using material goods, purchased with their money, to act as signs. Some of these; the SUVs, the clean pressed shirt, the immaculate scarf of the woman met in the street, I have referred to earlier.

In chapter 4, I describe how people will show signs or make requests to others for goods they *need.* Yet their behaviour indicates that the quality of the relation with the other – how well you know them and in what way – influences the extent of their obligations to you. In contrast you can use money with potentially anyone and the exchange value it represents is *measured by comparison to other goods* rather than to the subjective needs of the buyer, the quality so often emphasised in the requests and demands of those seeking material goods from others in *São Tomé* and *Principé*.

That money represented exchange value rather than qualitative

subjective evaluation made by a person, was a point recognised by

Simmel, who noted that the exchange of objects against other objects

"illustrates that it is not only valuable for me, but also valuable

independently of me; that is to say, for another person" (Simmel

1990:81). It is this disembedding of value from personal subjectivity and

its recognition in economic exchange that, Simmel argues, "..frees the

objects from their bondage to the mere subjectivity of the subjects and

allows them to determine themselves reciprocally" (Simmel 1990:80).

Yet whilst its use sidesteps a central aspect of important social relations

in *São Tomé* and *Principé -* the need for social relations to obtain many

goods - money has a direct influence on the quality of the relations

formed through acting as a sign shown.

Money is thus *not* separate from personal relations, but influences and

complicates them by both undermining their significance and

determining through its display and use their quality. Yet its intrinsic

value *is wholly* separate from personal relations for it is not subjective

value but exchange value which, as represented by price, derives not from depth of need expressed nor from the qualitative aspect of a particular relationship formed. Rather such *exchange value* derives from the recognition of value in economic exchange that is independent of personal subjective interpretation *and* it is *quantitatively* measured. It is this that seems to offend so many *São Toméans* and *Principéans,* who again and again seek ways of reasserting a qualitative and personal relationship over money and monetised exchange.

Adjustment to money

Most commercial activity involves relatively small sums being earned and as this is the position most people occupy, it has little effect in forming relative social difference. Rather it is viewed as a necessary, essential even, activity, but one of some tediousness as it detracts and prevents people from doing what they really want to be doing - engaging in something with more recognisable meaning. Something shown so clearly by the cook at *Pensão Turismo.* The *preference* for personal social relations over the commercial has meant that making money is

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regarded by many as an activity "for idiots", as the man on the road to *Augustino Neto roça* succinctly put it. Yet due to the partly monetised nature of the economy people do need to engage partly in it to obtain some essential goods.

People will try then to adjust to the need for and opportunities presented by earning money. They will convert them into ways of interacting that have more significance for them. Some utilise the opportunities presented by commercial interactions to forward a more personalised social relation, such as the taxi drivers who took me to the airport that I referred to earlier. The sums involved though in this incident and the likely earnings of the cook, who I referred to earlier, had I eaten at his restaurant, were relatively small and thus as a sign shown possessed few social effects in themselves. In contrast when *relatively* large sums are made they need to be either hidden, as the *moto* drivers sometimes did, or displayed. The choice being dependant on *what social effect* was desired. It was the social response to money as sign revealed that was valued and recognised as significant experience.

As a sign shown money is though *quantitatively* measured and derived

from the innumerable impersonal transactions of the market. Whilst

people often feel obliged to engage with a representative sign – money -

that shows no consideration to their qualitative evaluations, they *can*

choose how *they will relate to it*. I have described how *moto* drivers can

be wary of showing their pay, but people adjust in other ways. They can,

for instance, adjust by distancing themselves either through withdrawal

from social interaction, as I experienced in the small restaurant, or by

engaging but distancing themselves emotionally from money.

Bank workers, who have to handle large amounts of money, would

engage at times in this second form of adjustment. For whilst they had to

engage physically with the money they treated it with disdain, cheques

were chucked in drawers, notes handled rapidly and casually. The

relation they adopted to it could be surreal, engaging with it physically

but distancing themselves from its social and material meaning through

adopting an attitude towards it of rejection.

Alternatively, rather than just distancing themselves from money, people

will instead simply cancel it from the interaction. Hence people will

waive fares at times so that the relation becomes non-commercial,

cancelling its impersonality in fact, and explain such action by stating

"amigo" as *Vitor* had done – an act I describe in chapter 4. Or people

will monitor prices, thereby attempting to control the impersonal

brutality of the market that holds no concession to the expectations and

feelings of those acting within it. Through such monitoring people

attempt to reassert expectations and a subjective qualitative evaluation

into the interaction that is similar to the expectations of personal

relationships.

There is though a further adjustment strategy that some adopt towards

money and that is to obtain as much of it as they can. Rather than seeing

relatively large amounts as threatening to the quality of their social

relations they instead try to readdress the balance of inequality that

others having more money than them presents, by obtaining more of it

when they can. Their response is not one of rejection or stating that such

activities are 'for idiots', but one of emotional acceptance and attempted incorporation. They have incorporated the impersonal evaluation of money as sign shown and made it, to the extent that they seek more of it, more significant than the complicating effects possessing money in relatively large amounts can have on personal social relations.

Summary

The economy in *São Tomé* and *Principé* is thus mixed with material security being for many a consequence of personalised social relations rather than monetised ones. Monetised interactions while occurring daily for many are often only a part of many people's material economy. Money is used rather for specific items and in particular circumstances. When people wish to build a new house though then money in larger amounts is required, as it may be when someone is sick. Yet most people have very little. When there is an *urgent need* for unexpected large amounts it is on their social relations that most people rely for assistance. It is thus the maintenance and formation of these relations that people value most highly.

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The seemingly natural preference people show in forming such personalised relations means that money fits awkwardly with many peoples plans and hopes, for having it in any quantity can alter the quality of their social relations significantly by changing the process of presentation to others. Moreover obtaining it in relatively small amounts is empty, for the most part, of significance, unless received as a gift when it acts as sign shown.

Money is moreover quantitative as a measure of value and as a representative sign, its value emerges from the numerous transactions of the market. As a sign, except when given as a gift, money makes no concession to people's qualitative and personal evaluations and such seeming contempt and disdain towards such a central aspect of *São Toméan* and *Principéan* social meaning can be responded to by people who reflect the attitude back onto money. People can treat it with disdain too. Notes are chucked onto counters contemptuously in shops or stuffed into ashtrays without regard in taxis. In banks the large amounts handled means that such a relation of distance can reach surreal levels.

Yet this response is not universal and as I mentioned there are those also who adjust to money by accepting its impersonality and enumerative qualities and attempting to acquire as much as possible.

Money is neither evaluative nor personal: both of which are central to how people form and respond to social interactions in *São Tomé* and *Principé*. The relation people adopt to money is thus one of adjustment, according it varying degrees of incorporation into their lives but often seeking to re-establish both a degree of qualitative evaluation at some level and of personal connection in its use. The qualitative aspect can be re-asserted, as it would be in personal social relations, in price monitoring and the relational attitude adopted towards money itself. The man I met walking along the road to *Augustino Neto roça*, who I describe earlier in this chapter, had made his relation to money clear. He rejected it, or claimed to. Others were less emphatic, but that they were ambivalent about it was clear, wishing to establish their own qualitative evaluation of it.

People could also re-introduce a personal connection into commercial interactions at times by choosing people they knew to purchase items from. This was not universal however, but could also be a hope expressed at times by some sellers. Finally there was the establishment of credit to customers by certain shops.

Whilst many people use money everyday and seek to make it also, it often forms a somewhat tedious necessity to life as the more recognised and valued social actions are to form good quality social relations that will provide more consistent material security, as well as personal acknowledgement and self esteem. Money exerts powerful effects on *these* social actions. It enables encounters to occur that would not otherwise and acts as a powerful sign that influences the quality of the social relations that are forming. Both its necessity for many for living as they desire and the complications that its use can produce in social relations that are recognised as significant, means that many have a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards money.

Seemingly unable to alter its quantitative and universally recognised value, people instead choose how they will relate and evaluate it in a qualitative way. They thus attempt to adjust to its influence by re-asserting a personalised relation to money that includes a qualitative evaluation of it unconnected to its worth on the market. They attempt to incorporate it into the processes that form social meaning and significance. Yet money is essentially outside these processes deriving its significance and value from goods and services traded on the market. As a sign it is ultimately independent of personal relations for its value is recognised by everyone without any heed given to the quality of particular social relations. Yet as an amount shown it has a profound and immediate effect on the formation of these same specific relations. Money can thus complicate the relations that provide real material security whilst many also depend on it for certain goods they desire.

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Chapter 9

The economic consequences of the prioritizing of social relations

Introduction

As I explained in chapter 6, there exists a specificity to experience, to its evaluation. There is an 'architecture' that is dynamic and ongoing. Such a framework goes beyond recognition of signs shown, it includes evaluation of them and grants a directionality to social actions. Certain outcomes are actively sought and valued over others. They form goals people seek.

Yet these goals have consequences and as I hope to show in this chapter, they have economic consequences as well as personal and social ones. I have described in chapter 8 how money complicates the forming of social relations and that people's attitudes towards money can thus be

ambivalent with people often seeing it as a necessity whilst disliking the negative consequences it has for their social relations.

People will invest time and effort in forming and maintaining their personal relations which grant them both a sense of self and significant experience. As a man from *Guadalupe,* who I met on the road to *Augustino Neto roça,* said, "people who drive cars and have money are idiots" and whilst his view was particular many people spoke of how *São Tomé* and *Principé* was a good country because of the way the people were, of how they lived together. It is the quality of people's personal relations that measures for many whether people have a good life and also whether and how much they will enjoy material security. For these social relations matter much more to material security, for many anyway, than money which is mostly too small in quantity and too variable in its arrival to be anything more than a supplement to many people's living. Moreover money is seen at times to complicate the establishment and maintenance of these crucial relations and is thus often somewhat mistrusted.

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This particularity of evaluation with its focus on non-monetary goals has stark economic consequences, for it means that people will often give more priority to personal relations, than impersonal economic ones. The 'architecture' of experience and social relations also crucially means that how trust is established and maintained lies *almost exclusively,* though not entirely, in personal relations.

Giddens notes, "Trust, it might be said, is a device for stabilizing interaction. To be able to trust another person is to be able to rely upon that person to produce a range of anticipated responses" (Giddens 1988:276). In economic interactions particularly those involving co-operation and delayed remuneration such trust in the other is essential yet the 'mechanisms' for forming and enforcing it lie for most people almost exclusively in the quality of social connections. As one man explained "here we prefer to co-operate with people we know". It is in such relations that personal obligations and expectations are recognised as being owed and there are social mechanisms for enforcing them. In this chapter I hope to illustrate these points and show examples of how

people organise themselves economically using the particular social

'architecture' present in *São Tomé* and *Principé.*

The historical legacy

If the social 'architecture' is important to how people behave and act

economically, the legacy of colonialism is a major influence on it.

During colonialism the society was hierarchically organised and had a

strong and imposed structure. This mattered for it effected both how

people came to think and it informed their responses to it both before

and after Independence. With the exception of the *Angolars,* who lived a

separate existence, under colonialism people lived in a system where

their status and role in society was determined by others. Independence

came to be defined as an overcoming of this and it meant there exists

both a determination to self-define and to reject the working practices

and forms of work that the colonial system had imposed – in particular

working on plantations. As Hodges and Newitt remark: "[People]

marked their status by refusing to work on the plantations; so much did

this become a symbol of their freedom that many preferred living in destitution to earning a wage on the *roças*" (Hodges & Newitt 1988:37).

If plantation work was seen as servitude, freedom was to be one's own boss. It was to self-define. People sought self-employment or to work within social structures that they entered into voluntarily: that were both appealing and that aspired to their sense of desired identity. Yet with the rejection of imposed social structures, there was an absence for many of any social structures other than the social relations that they had formed themselves. It was thus to their personal social relations, so well recognised and valued positively, that many turned.

As I described in chapter 4, the quality of these relations hold importance for whilst some people will look to anyone they meet for help and assistance, utilising the social opportunities that come their way if they think there exists an opportunity, it is people you know *well* that are likely to help *most*.

Moreover to work *with your friends* is to carry on with normal life as recognised by almost everyone. It is to leave the imposed structures of colonialism and to live in a more desired way utilising, for economic purposes, social relations in which co-operation is both possible, recognised and expected. Indeed it will almost inevitably be *occurring already*. This has important commercial implications for it means that groups in which everyone knows each other well and in which the social relations are of good quality, are arrangements that are valued and seen as not just the way many people desire to live, but they are also often the only one in which successful commercial co-operation over a period of time is possible. With people that are known less well, or not at all, relations of obligation and trust may need to be argued for and asserted with no guarantee of success, as the man repairing the road who I describe in chapter 4 had attempted and eventually succeeded in doing.

It is through such presentation, that amounts to theatre at times, that obligations to others *can be formed*. They are formed through the arguments presented being *recognised*. In the case of the taxi driver on

the way to *Neves,* it may just have been easier to give the man a 10,000

dobra note (around 40 euro cents) than risk the discomfort, arguments

and potential problems of not doing so. Yet in doing so he was accepting

the validity of the claim being made. It was an encounter and a set of

arguments made that was not dissimilar from the perambulations and

long discussions and arguments made in *Tchiloli*. The play essentially is

an exploration and exposition of the enaction of power played out

through dance and long speeches, many of which can be improvised, to

the accompaniment of a small orchestra. Many of the actors wear masks

and whilst the story and many of the costumes are from Europe, the

music and dance are African in origin. That the play is about power, its

display and negotiation is unmistakeable.

For the foreman, whose men were repairing the road to *Neves* that I

describe in chapter 4, it was his arguments and presentation to the taxi

driver that proposed a relation of obligation that did not exist

beforehand. It was as if *Tchiloli* was now being played in real life. This

takes work and time. The foreman had to assert and argue his case and

there was no certainty of success. His performance required a mixture of cajoling and threat that he would not be happy and thus it might be difficult if his modest and reasonable request was refused. He moreover utilised in his appeal the modalities of experience that are preferred and have significance for people, namely experience that is personal, qualitative and directly asserted. He argued after all that he was helping drivers *such as the taxi driver,* the obligation owed was thus a personal one. He had framed the request using qualitative terms, for the road was, he stated, being *improved* and he and his men were working in adverse conditions - the sun *was hot*. Moreover he made his request directly expecting an immediate response. His request succeeded and he smiled at his success.

As in *Tchiloli* the arguments had been presented and the assertion of power hinted at and shown. Yet the outcome was far from assured. Hence whilst a successful assertion or request can bring a smile of satisfaction, in commercial exchanges that require co-operation over periods of time people rely and prefer relations in which expectations

and obligations are *already formed,* do not need to be argued for and are thus more secure. As Polanyi describes it:

> "The outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets" (Polanyi 1944:46).

The large institutions, such as banks and government agencies, need to operate in this realm of presentation and theatre as well. For they also, like the man repairing the road, need to negotiate with staff and outsiders *that are not trusted personal friends or family members* and need to form relations of obligation and trust with them that will be recognised. Yet such institutions have the resources to utilise signs that will enable such performances to occur with some degree of efficacy; impressive buildings, grand offices, large entrances. Yet in the private sector, outside of these relatively large institutions and outside of

personal relations, there exists no arbiter other than that of the theatre of

self presentation with its varied and uncertain outcomes with some

claims being recognised and others not.

Perhaps the most pertinent consequence of the particularities of the

architecture of social relations in *São Tomé* and *Principé* is that the

division between personal and commercial remains vague, indeed it

would not be to overstate the issue to say that they are, at least in terms

of economic co-operation, viewed often as being the same. To know

someone is to see them as a potential co-operator in material or

commercial affairs and not to know someone but to meet them means, if

it seems possible and if you have need, to engage with them to establish

a relation in which some form of material gain may become possible.

The material and the personal are associated in this way.

Yet monetised commercial relations can be impersonal. Indeed, as I

noted earlier, a degree of impersonality may be necessary for them to

occur. For if there exists a social connection any exchange would be

based on need expressed – fees potentially being waived or surpluses given away. In contrast, impersonality allows for monetary based exchange and equal access to the goods or services on sale. Yet for such a mode of social interaction to occur the roles involved need to be enacted and a degree of social distance maintained.

The monitoring of prices that occurred on the beach when I was buying fish and in the taxis may not be about impersonality though but about how people relate to the impersonality of a marketplace. The assertion of price expectations on the seller converts the relationship to one that more resembles non-monetised interactions, with expectations asserted and expected responses received.

Personalised engagement, on the other hand, would lead to the interaction 'collapsing' and becoming rather quickly a personal relation that is potentially particular and specific. It is this goal that *others* suspect when they see an engagement that is overly long, overly personalised or appears to seek in some way a personal quality to it. Yet

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of course in other circumstances – outside of the shared and directly

commercial - this is exactly what people seek and much importance and

significance can be given to forming and maintaining just these forms of

good quality personal relationships with their potential material benefits.

Whilst Independence may have brought the end of the colonial social

'architecture' of imposed social hierarchy and allowed people, who so

desired, to form their own economic relations of co-operation and

exchange, it did not sweep away the social architecture of how this was

to occur. Not only were social connections essentially personalised when

it came to successful co-operation but a legacy from the colonial era

remained as well. As *da Costa* points out during the colonial period, life

on the *roças* resembled a total institution with work, living space,

schools and crèches all being provided by the *roça* (da Costa 1992:119).

Leaving the *roça* was difficult even for contract workers and almost

impossible for the slaves who preceded them – although some managed

to run away. Hence, for workers on the *roças* nearly their whole

experience took place and was formed and governed by the *roça*. As *da Costa* writes, "The historical power of the plantation managers over the daily lives of whole communities has had the effect that even today there is a noticeable unwillingness to make decisions or take initiatives in many aspects of work and daily lives" (da Costa 1992:119).

Such a way of thinking acts against commercial innovation, but there is another factor as well that produces a degree of conformity - the assertions that people make in forming and imposing some sense of order into the world. These can be the arguments of obligations owed, such as that attempted by the old woman in *Trindade* or the arguments of the man repairing the road, who I describe in chapter 4.

The importance of social relations to people's material security means that people prefer to belong and be identified as part of a group than to act alone. They prefer perhaps to give a 10,000 *dobra* note to someone asking for it than not to, for this means that social relations will continue more amicably. People adjust to adversity and just as the man planting

pineapples on *Principé* had done stating clearly "It's okay" when I had no cigarette for him people will often adjust to the assertions made by others or respond to them in a way that will allow social interaction to continue potentially profitably – both materially and in terms of social acknowledgement and reflected significance.

It is a social strategy that was summed up by so many when they said "*São Tomé* is a good country because the people wish to live in peace, tranquilly", but it is also a strategy which has commercial consequences. For the wish to live tranquilly can also mean that people act so that they do not have problems with others and this can extend to querying or normative judgements of others actions. I used to draw whilst I was in *São Tomé* and *Principé* and people would at times comment on it. A woman in the capital on seeing me drawing on the *marginal* asked why it was that "I did the things of Europe here in Africa?" Others would say about my drawing "..that is okay but not for an African".

A similar normative assertion was made by an old man in the west who was adamant that I should not walk to the beach: "Sit here", he said, "and drink palm wine with us. Don't walk! This is Africa!" Such assertions matter for people will change their behaviour to ensure they do not have problems with others and thus economic activities tend to be those that people understand and accept as being appropriate to do. Running a taxi or small scale agriculture are thus popular. Growing vegetables for sale is okay also "if you are a woman" as one man put it but "not if you are a man".

One consequence of such evaluation and the need people feel for acceptance by others, is that economic activities are frequently copied. A small fleet of dugout canoes leave the fishing villages each morning all searching for fish that will be caught using small one man operated nets and sold into a limited market. Whilst this provides a living for many people and can be quite a sight to see, earnings are inevitably small and economies of scale are absent. The larger boats earn much more but require capital investment that many do not have. In economic

activity there can thus be too many suppliers of items that are acceptable to produce, grow or catch and people reluctant or unable to diversify from them.

Examples of co-operation

In chapter 4, I described how one taxi driver I knew on *São Tomé* had been asked by a friend if he could borrow his taxi. The friend had done so, but crashed the car causing it to be damaged beyond repair, or at least so that the costs of repair were so high as to be out of reach for the owner. It was a disaster for both. The driver and borrower of the car ended up in hospital and the owner – the taxi driver – lost a valuable source of income. He supported his family on his earnings and now had to manage without the car on the much lower income obtainable from driving a *moto.* Yet he explained his decision to loan the vehicle as being because it *was a friend* who had asked and thus he felt *obliged* to loan the car to him.

A similar relationship of trust which had a happier ending was a woman I met on *Principé* gutting, cleaning and then salting fish on a beach near *Sundy*. I describe in chapter 8 how she had walked with them to *Santo Antonio* and taken a *moto* back. She explained though how she had once given a bag of salted fish *to a friend* to take and sell in *São Tomé* where the market is bigger and they fetch a good price for they are popular. Such economic co-operation *between friends* was common and even expected. I described in chapter 4 how I became quickly included in one taxi driver's economic framework which developed, as I got to know him and as his own circumstances changed, from asking for nothing, to asking for small loans and then to asking for gifts. The association, I was to find, between friendship and material security was close and the same was true of commercial co-operation. As a *moto* driver explained people like to co-operate commercially with people they already know. Indeed commercial arrangements require trust if they are to be larger than one person in size. That the woman had given the bag of salted fish *to a friend* meant that she had some assurance that her efforts of gutting,

cleaning and salting the fish would be rewarded. The friend was likely to pay her from any sale on her return from *São Tomé*.

Examples of business ventures

Despite the frequent ambivalence towards money held by many, there are those trying to succeed financially, often running several businesses, mostly organised, perhaps crucially, within families; shops, often just small stalls, but sometimes larger, run at the foot of people's gardens, petrol stations run from a large container with several old wine bottles and a filter, and small restaurants built often at the edge of people's gardens, are to be found scattered throughout residential areas. Others still, forage; collecting fish fry in wicker baskets placed between stones in small streams or harvesting bananas from the forest or simply fish with a line from the shore or with harpoon underwater. They will then try to sell their produce.

The small amounts of money obtained can then be used to purchase desirable commodities such as rice. Those that do well financially,

enough to live in a cement house and have a car, are those who run several small businesses, I was informed. The advantage of this strategy is that it spreads the economic risks, for if one business is doing badly others may be doing better. As a strategy it also takes advantage of scaling up income whilst each 'business' remains small in scale. For one of the problems facing any business that hopes to increase in size beyond an operation that employs family and trusted friends is how to manage the relations of trust and obligation that a larger organisation would entail when an increased size would mean employing people *that you do not know so well.*

Whilst domestic staff were employed on this basis in households, running a larger commercial enterprise requires commercial *co-operation* not just payment of wages. One solution is to stay small, but expand by starting another small business using extended family. Yet often the 'start up' will be in competition with many others similar in nature and often in the same neighbourhood or street.

There were also people who would hire or rent out the larger fishing boats. Whilst most fishermen operated singly from a dugout canoe using a net that they cast close to shore, there were also larger fibreglass boats that could be 10 or 15 meters in length and had crews of 5 or 6 people. These acted as small communities. They often left the shore for several days at a time and the same crew would go out on multiple voyages. In consequence the crews knew each other very well. Issues of trust and co-operation were thus reduced for your colleagues have also become your friends. It was common to see such crews sitting around on the shore after work. It was moreover clear, after a few minutes of speaking with them, that they knew each other well and, at least for the crews I spoke with, there was a clear hierarchy. For many of the younger men would state an opinion and then turn to see what the older man - the captain and their boss - had to say. One could tell that in one vessel in particular, the older man was held in a lot of respect by the younger men whom I suspected relied and trusted on his greater experience of sea going. With five or six men in an open boat that travelled far from shore the dangers would have been real.

Yet the boat was often owned by someone onshore, the proceeds of the catch being divided by an arrangement that those involved had come to themselves. In some cases the owner takes all the fish and sells them wholesale, paying the crew and the boat's expenses from the sale, in others someone will rent the boat from the owner and then sell the fish independently paying the crew, the boat's rent and expenses out of the proceeds. In contrast to the crew, the relation with the owner of the boat might thus have been more distant, but the complexities of such negotiations were not discussed. It was a matter, people explained, for those involved.

Summary

As I described in chapter 4 economic and social relations are often intertwined with many people seeing a personal relation developing and being successful when material goods are given and exchanged within it. "Have you something for me?" may be a request for a material good, but it is also a request for social acknowledgement that denotes importance and significance in a social encounter or relationship. Others, less in

need of material goods directly, still seek social acknowledgement and recognition in greetings that reflect, and thus confirm, their social position. The goals sought whilst different both contain the idea of social acknowledgement and their differences act as if they were an expression of social and material differences lived. The associated needs that emerge out of such conditions are asserted into the social world and are seeking a suitable, appropriate and hoped for acknowledgement in it.

In this chapter I describe how the association of material goods, trust and obligations owed with personal relations means that these are often utilised in commercial enterprise where co-operation and trust are required. Whilst such relations can be formed outside of personal relations, they need to be argued for and will emerge, if at all, as a response to signs shown. Such 'theatre' requires work, time and has no certainty of outcome. Large institutional bodies, like banks and government departments, must also utilise such signs shown to form such relations as well. Important institutional heads sit in large offices and may not respond to knocks at the door immediately. People must

wait. Such signs and enactment show power and inform the other of how to reciprocate and respond.

Outside these institutions people lack such helpful props and utilise their own self presentation and signs shown as best they can or they use personal connections already formed, which is why they are so highly valued. Consequently, many commercial enterprises are small in scale, and often family based, as the personalised relations already established, or that can be formed readily in a small enterprise, allow for the co-operation and obligations required to run an enterprise successfully.

The importance of others evaluations though has meant that people often seek commercial activities that are seen as appropriate and acceptable. Conformity is further exacerbated as, according to da Costa, the nature of plantation life prevented people from acting innovatively or differently from the structure imposed by the plantation (da Costa 1992:119). Commercial enterprises are thus frequently rather similar in form and are often in competition with each other. A further legacy of

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the plantations is the perception of plantation work as servitude, which

has led many to move away from such work, although some still

continues. Instead people try to establish their own commercial affairs

often as extensions of their already established material support

networks.

Chapter 10

Conclusions: experience reflected

I went to *São Tomé* and *Principé* to look at ideas of belonging and social

difference and found that the importance of many of the old categories

had changed significantly, yet the society was full of importance. It was

not just the quality of others responses that people cared about. It was

how this reflected them and what it meant about them, where it placed

them in the society and what they could thus expect. It was how it

effected their relations with others.

Yet importance and significance emerge from and are perceived in

certain social processes. It is partly in the signs shown that illustrate a

response requested but it is also in the social processes, the

predispositions and the evaluations that are associated with them. It is in

how the intentions of people are ascribed and incorporated into the

structures and social actions recognised and thus granted meaning by

others. The significance lies in how these signs are interpreted and the interpretations reflected back by the respondents. It is then how these are themselves interpreted by the original actors. It is in how they relate to their interpretations, as Goffman alludes to, with regard to the roles and actions presented. People have a relation to what they regard as important and as significant.

The numerous sayings people would repeat at times almost word for word the same illustrated the commonality of many of the values held. Some were aspirational, some descriptive. They frequently expressed a sentiment or evaluation. Meaning as recognition stems in part from what people already interpret as appropriate and in part from how others assert their interpretations of appropriateness onto them. Meaningful experience is derived from assertions made and successfully acknowledged, of requests demanded or argued for that are acceded to. It has thus a chimeric quality partly already there in people's expectations and partly formed through their assertions *being recognised and acknowledged*. It is thus mutable, at least potentially, but also stable in

that there exists a majority view. Often it is process rather than destination, it is about how one should act more than the details of it.

One man insisted at a small *festas* on *Principé* that I should not dance under any circumstances. It was very important, he explained, that I did not for I was an 'ambassador' of another country, before changing his mind completely and insisting that I *had* to dance whether I wanted to or not. What mattered to him was that I did what he said rather than what I did. He wanted to feel he had *made an impression.* That his assertions were visible in the actions I then made; that I danced because he had insisted on it or that I had not danced because he had insisted on that. It was *this quality* of reflection that counted for him, of assertions made altering and marking the world. Just as sometimes people would want *something* without being clear about what. It was that some 'thing' should be given that was desired. It was the acknowledgement that the thing hoped for represented that counted. The horror of the second woman at *Praia Gamboa* who had complained that "He gives us nothing!", who I describe in chapter 4, had not stated what she wanted

me to give. What mattered though was that I had not given *anything*. It was the quality of the relation that counted to her, that was important and that mattered, and where significance is found.

People's sense of self is thus found through their interaction with the world. It is an experience of self that is aware of the social context and particulars of interactions, of the signs shown and manner in which they are shown. People make a social interpretation of the responses they receive from others noting who is making them and what *this means.* Just as they note the marks made in the physical world by themselves and others and recognise this as possessing an evaluative quality different to the unmarked world.

Whilst such an experience of self is an interpretation, it is also a response *to* assertions made by the person into the world, which can in content be seen to be associated often with the material conditions of life lived. The form and goal of the assertions being frequently material goods or acknowledgement. Yet it is not just a sense of self that emerges

from such social interactions, but people's sense of value – of themselves, of a place, of another – that does as well.

Such assertions made are moreover enacted in strategic ways that are socially aware to possibilities available. People can be opportunistic in both encounters made as well as in locating themselves optimally in time and space. Some reveal confidence in the efficacy of their already formed social networks, whilst others seek to form them through forceful assertion or persuasion. In particular there exists a strong desire to impress oneself into the world so as to make a mark that is visible and that will be recognised and responded to by others. In this manner people achieve a significant sense of self that is supportive.

I have uncovered some aspects of this process, in particular the 'conversation' people have with the world. How they fashion a relationship with the social world giving it value and recognising themselves reflected in language they have appropriated from it and that has been asserted on them. I have noted how there exists also a relation

with the physical world. That it becomes socialised and is made meaningful by actions and marks that have been asserted, at times forcefully, on it. I have noted also the importance of the intertwining of assertions and intentions, that are frequently normative, being received and presented. That they are asserted back into the world in a manner that can be various in strategy, at times respecting and adjusting to relations already formed, whilst also often predicting and aspiring to their future forms, and at other times setting out to persuade, coerce or assert a new form of relationship that meets and acknowledges through reflection their presentations.

Yet if the strategy adopted can reveal an interpreted awareness of what possibilities exist in the world, it also emerges as an expression – seemingly – of the conditions, material and social, in which the person lives. Experience then is connected profoundly with the world which exerts its at times 'hard surfaces' upon people and whose responses to these realities appear to reflect them whilst at the same time trying to overcome, deflect or change them.

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What I have discovered much less about is the aesthetic interpretation of

the social or physical worlds. Of why people state that 'being together' is

beautiful. Of why changing the physical world, clearing grass and

moving stones, '*cleans it*' or makes it satisfying to be looked at.

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