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Irony and joking in ethnographic fieldwork: Reflections from Santo Antão Island (Cape Verde)

Martina Giuffrè
Università di Sassari

Abstract: In this essay I address the crucial role of irony and joking in anthropology with a focus on the ethnographic relationship. My starting point is field research carried out from 2001 to 2004 on Santo Antão island (Cape Verde), specifically Ponta do Sol. In Cape Verdean practice, jokes and irony represent customary communicational modes and important tools for building relationships: the ultimate means of achieving "cultural intimacy", they are used almost as rites of initiation to bring newcomers into the community and at the same time to manage ambiguities. Indeed, it was precisely through irony that my interlocutors were able to perfectly capture my ambiguous insider/outsider position. In this specific ethnographic context, the ironic relationship is understood as both a key communication tool in the ethnographic encounter and an unusual rite of passage: although strangers/anthropologists can only be accepted if they become Cape Verdean to some degree, in reality they are never really able to complete this passage. The essay briefly reviews irony and joking in anthropology and focuses on aspects of ironic interactions in Cape Verde that are linked to intercultural relations in the ethnographic context as a site of uncertain communication. I stress how, especially in intercultural contexts, the ambiguity of irony represents not a barrier to communication but rather a key element of understanding between anthropologists and informants as well as a significant heuristic device.

Keywords: Irony, Joking, Ethnographic Encounter, Rite of Passage, Cape Verde.

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Introduction

For several decades now scholars have characterized the contemporary moment as the "age (or culture) of irony" and identified irony as the main cultural characteristic of the entire postmodern condition (see Fernandez, Huber 2001)[1]. As Friedrich has noted, irony is always with us, implicated in the nature of power and time, culture and language, tropes and tragedy (Friedrich 2001). In this essay I address the crucial role of irony, humour and joking in the ethnographic relationship.

After a brief overview of irony and joking in anthropology, I focus on specific aspects of ironic relationships and joking in Cape Verde that are linked to intercultural relations in the ethnographic context, understood in this case as a site of uncertain communication. My aim is to stress the fact that, especially in intercultural contexts, the ambiguity implied in ironic relationships does not represent a barrier to communication; rather, it constitutes a key element of understanding between anthropologists and informants as well as a significant heuristic device. My starting point is field research I carried out from 2001 to 2004 on the island of Santo Antão (Cape Verde) and specifically Ponta do Sol, a small fishing town on the extreme western tip of the island of Santo Antão in the Cape Verdean archipelago. The archipelago consists of ten islands divided into the southern, Sottovento, and northern, Sopravento groups. The islands were uninhabited until the 15th century, at which point Portuguese colonization transformed them into an outpost for African slaves coming mainly from West Africa. As a result, the archipelago quickly became an important intermediate stopover in the slave trade between Africa and South America. Cape Verde later gained independence in 1975.

Santo Antão has a population of 47,000 people and an economy based mainly on fishing and agriculture, in particular the cultivation of corn, sugar cane, bananas, *manioca* and beans. In recent years tourism has become increasingly important and, last but not least, migrants' remittances also represent an important component of islanders' income. Today many Cape Verdeans work in commercial and tourist sectors as well as the service industry.

1. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the invaluable suggestions they provided. Their reviews helped me to improve this article, granting me the opportunity to radically rethink it: in particular, they suggested I enrich the ethnographic component and address the crucial question of how, as an anthropologist, I could ever be sure I had understood local forms of irony without the possibility of misunderstandings. At the same time they invited me to more fully develop the idea that the process of understanding local practices of irony might be described through reference to the notion of rite of passage.

The main focus of my research was gender relationships and intergenerational challenges. During my three years of fieldwork I had the time to mix with community members, visit their houses, participate in their familial lives, attend parties and other formal or informal gatherings, make friends with the women and learn Creole (Giuffrè 2007). My long stay in Cape Verde allowed me to become deeply involved in the life of the community. Further, I was living with a Cape Verdean partner in that period, which had the effect of inserting me directly into a web of family relationships while at the same time placing me in a very ambiguous position, as I will describe. I immersed myself in this experience as someone who feels a 'resonance' with the other, in Wikan's terms (1992). The resonance Wikan speaks of is not something mystical but rather an element of anthropological practice; based on practical attitudes and embedded in concrete behaviour, it represents a way of sharing the world with Others (Fabietti 2005; Piasere 2002). Therefore, I consider it extremely important that laughter, humour and irony be included as key elements in sharing the emotions that are part of ethnographic practice. During this period of fieldwork I carried out more than 100 qualitative interviews with men and women of different social classes, ages and lifestyle groups. I also collected four life histories from women of different generations and carried out participant observation at many social occasions, such as festivities and informal meetings. I developed dialogical relationships and approaches with the people I interviewed. This text is based on my interpretation of these data.

In Cape Verdean practice, jokes and irony represent customary modes of communication and important tools for building relationships and testing newcomers to see if they should be brought into the community. The importance of these practices lies in the fact that they constitute the ultimate means of achieving "cultural intimacy" in the sense developed by Herzfeld, that is, "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality" (2005: 3); in other words, joking and irony both provide the unwritten rules of acceptable behaviour and generate a feeling of complicity. At the same time, it was precisely through irony that the Ponta do Sol residents with whom I interacted perfectly captured the ambiguous insider/outsider position I occupied as an anthropologist.

In this specific ethnographic context, I understand the ironic relationship as a key communication tool in the ethnographic encounter and a specific and unusual type of rite of passage that the stranger/anthropologist, who to some degree is expected to become Cape Verdean in order to gain acceptance, must undergo but can never really complete.

Irony and anthropology

As George Marcus has argued, irony[2] tends to develop more under certain historical conditions; historically, these conditions were provided by colonialism, currently they are provided by globalization. In particular, the crises of the macro-narrative and representation have provided a powerful impetus for the development of irony. As Marcus states, "the basic condition that stimulates the widespread predicament of irony is an awareness of existential doubleness, deriving from a sense of being *here* with major present transformations ongoing that are intimately tied to things happening simultaneously *elsewhere* but without certainty or authoritative representations of what the connections are" (Marcus 2001: 211).

There is great deal of literature available[3] on humour and jokes (Sarnelli 2000), but in this context I will address only the literature most relevant to my research focus. In many publications, scholars have argued that irony is related to risk (specifically, that laughter is actually provoked by the presence of risk) and explored laughter as a way of releasing or regulating tension in ambiguous situations. Studies have also investigated how laughter can become a language of power or, on the contrary, a symbolic tool for opposing the exercise of power[4], a "weapon of the weak" "providing space for subordinated persons to voice resistance, imagine alternatives, build community, and mobilize for better times" (Scott 1985: 17) under conditions of political inequality such as those inherited from colonial systems, as can be seen in the case of Cape Verde. In this way irony can contribute to building relations of solidarity among the weak. Anthropological studies have also highlighted some important characteristics of humour and ironic relationships, finding that they are polysemic, historically and culturally driven, and vary not only between different inter-

2. I use the term irony in its broadest sense, that is, including both performative and linguistic aspects.

3. For an in-depth overview of anthropological approaches to joking, laughter and irony see Sarnelli 2000.

4. This can be seen for instance Orbldik's case study (1942) concerning intercultural humor in Czechoslovakia at the time of Nazi occupation, during which humor became a precious resource for strengthening internal cohesion and a symbolic weapon that, in the end, made it acceptable "to lose one's life for laughing". While taking into account critical interrogations of both a "totalizing vision of societies" and the ascription of agency and resistance (Steinmüller 2013), and noting that we must face the fact that social realities are permeated with ambiguity and continuous negotiations, in some cases irony can be seen as a form of resistance, a tool for encompassing and controlling ambiguity, and such renegotiations as a "valuable resource for inciting the moral and political imagination against whatever is given, assumed, or imposed" (Fernandez, Huber 2001: 1). Indeed, people can use irony in situations of unequal power to provide "an alternative reading of a situation, while evading the challenge of direct dissent and protecting themselves from censorious response" (*ibidem:* 5). On this issue see also Sarnelli 2002; Zerilli 2003; Aime 2010; Giuffrè 2007, 2014.

cultural settings but also within a single culture[5]. Moreover, as Geertz highlights, ethnographic research is ironic in and of itself due to the fiction of fieldwork, which is never completely convincing to any of the participants involved; indeed, there is always a moral tension and ethical ambiguity in the encounter between anthropologist and informant (see Imbriani 2014; Geertz 2001). As Imbriani notes, Geertz uses the phrase anthropological irony to refer to

> […] the gap between the expectations, desires, knowledge, strategies, and feelings of the characters that play out in the ethnographic scene: this distance is sometimes evident, sometimes latent, and it drives people to act "as if," in keeping with the game, managing discomfort or misunderstanding whether they like it or not, or giving in (as sometimes happens) to refusal and the urge to escape (2014: 3)[6].

In this sense, the various social actors involved in the ethnographic encounter almost always end up defining it differently and misunderstandings are to be expected, even regarding the figure of the anthropologist him/herself (see also Imbriani 2014).

Moreover, as Steinmüller has noted in reference to Rorty's idea of ironic redescription

> one might reach deeper layers of shared knowledge that are based not on abstract definitions, but on shared experience […] everyday talk and everyday action are often *uneigentlich*, they are not "literal" in the sense that they have a single interpretation, a single possible re-description. Such an interpretation of irony implies that it is not "merely" rhetorical (2013: 11).

This conceptualization of irony is developed in two important volumes: *Irony in Action* (Fernandez, Huber 2001) and *Illness and Irony* (Lambek 2004).

The highly significant *Irony in Action,* one of the first comprehensive anthropological publications on the subject, analyses irony not only as a feature of methodological concerns but also as an object of anthropological inquiry. As the authors underline, anthropology can be seen as an ironic discipline that uses the process of estrangement to offer alternative perspectives, thereby making "the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (Fernandez, Huber 2001).

In the second publication, Lambek (2004) distinguishes between rhetorical irony and situational irony and emphasizes that anthropologists often take both situations and the statements of their interlocutors too literally, as if ordinary people could not access the relativistic and doubtful perspective that is the privilege of intellectuals.

5. It is important to highlight the internal cultural dimension alongside the intercultural one. Furthermore, historical trends should also be taken into consideration: according to Abbot (1979), fear of ridicule has diminished since the sixties and today self-mocking is a positive and socially accepted behavior (see Sarnelli 2000).

6. Translation mine.

Steinmüller's proposed concept of "everyday ethics" helps make sense of this phenomenon: the way people deal with such situations depends heavily on the contingent circumstances of the everyday. In his research in China, Steinmüller, following Rorty's perspective, focuses on the "décalage between different moral frameworks and contingent situations […] as an exploration of all the different ways in cui these opposites meet each other: in confrontation, irony and (mis) representations" (2013: 12). This approach of casting the anthropological encounter as deeply ironic in and of itself provides the framework for my approach in this essay. I would argue that irony remains a relatively under-explored issue in anthropology and that it is very important to pay attention to irony, joking and humour in ethnographic fieldwork as a local resource for gaining insight into local life ways[7].

Irony, joking and the act of making fun of others play an important role in encounters between cultures in that they make it possible to express differences while simultaneously helping to defuse them, allowing these encounters to succeed precisely in that the characteristics of "insincerity, hypocrisy and self-deceit" are clear to those involved (La Cecla 2003). Joking is a deterrent to tension as well as a tool to "dramatize and smooth out closeness and allow us to put our identities at risk" in a way that is reciprocal and calculated. Making fun of others works to render the contours of intrusiveness broader and clearer: the Other encroaches, but under controlled conditions (*ibidem*: 97).

In his study of the local market in Naples, Sarnelli highlights how important it is for the social actors who frequent the market to know how to "play the game" and describes how the Senegalese immigrant vendors use joking relationships as a strategic means of pursuading Neapolitans traders to include them; indeed, their behaviour represents a playful way of becoming "a bit Neapolitan"[8]. Sarnelli notes that the Neapolitans traders only allowed those Senegalese who maintained ongoing joking relationships to set up a fixed position in the market. Otherness in this sense is encoded as a game that becomes a symbolic strategy of territorial control (Sarnelli 2002). As Fernandez and Huber state, "irony is a questioning of established categories of inclusion and exclusion, and the ironizer is he or she or that group who has been detrimentally categorized, and bound thereby to contest through irony the adequacy of such categories" (2001: 9).

7. "Many ethnographies have been insensitive to irony although much of cultural anthropology and sociolinguistic centers on experience marked by the kinds of flux and gaps and discontinuities that are so often called 'ironic' […]" (Fernandez, Huber 2001: 29-30).

8. The game often consists in a ritual exchange of insults in a strong spirit of competitiveness in which the winner is the one who has the last word and the most support from the bystanders. The most popular of these jokes includes a fake theft or seizure of goods held by a Senegalese person, carried out by a fake policeman, or the attempt by Senegalese vendors to scare the Neapolitans by making sudden, loud noises, such as by kicking a box of fruit.

For those coming from outside, such as immigrants or, in my case, the anthropologist, there is even more effort involved in reorienting cognitive maps and taking on new codes of reference. Often the encounter leads to cultural misunderstandings and confusion. This is disorienting but inevitable.

As Steinmüller points out in reference to his research in China

> these ambiguities appear particularly salient when people are confronted with an outsider who wants to enquire precisely about such things. Covertness, embarrassment, cynicism, and irony are communicative strategies that make it possible to acknowledge both sides of the contradiction, to avoid confrontation, and to maintain communication (Steinmüller 2013: 22).

During fieldwork, the anthropologist

> is forced to recognize the ironies of his own attempts to empathize with others and ultimately of his trade as a "professional" observer and writer, and even of his own existence. If ethnography can include ironies of re-description in Rorty's sense, the experience of fieldwork invariably includes irony of embarrassment in Herzfeld's sense. Irony always cuts both ways, and as such it has an equally unsettling potential for the participant observer (*ibidem*: 229).

Indeed, if anthropologists hope to empathize with the people and groups they interact with, they must understand the jokes these actors perform. This understanding can only be attained through "impregnating research," that is to say research in which the anthropologist incorporates ethnographic experience[9] by "living-with" the research participants. It is this research approach that leads to knowing "what people laugh at". "Laughing with" people is perhaps one of the most powerful devices for achieving inclusion in another "culture".

The pervasiveness of irony on Santo Antão island

In Cape Verdean Creole, irony is called "ironiâ" o "runiâ", a term derived from the Portuguese. Irony is present in all spheres of social life and joking is the most common mode of interaction between people.

The people of Ponta do Sol frequently use the term "brinkadeira", which covers not only ironic jokes and teasing but also gestures and behaviour such as pinching

9. In his essay *Etnografia come esperienza*, the anthropologist Piasere (2013) relates a very meaningful story about this issue: during a conference of anthropologists, one anthropologist told a funny anecdote related to his long experience among the Roma. The only audience members who laughed were those who had likewise spent extended periods among the Roma, as they were the only listeners capable of understanding what really constitutes a humorous situation according to the Roma.

someone's bottom, making facial expressions, making movements of a sexual nature and performing particular types of dance. In discussions carried out during meetings at my interlocutors' homes, locals often expressed the importance of a relational mode involving reciprocal ironically bantering and addressed the topic of "what we laugh at". It was clear that irony was the yardstick of inclusion and sharing even in situations involving foreigners, despite the fact that such outsiders were unable to understand the shared irony. While managing a pub/restaurant together with my Cape Verdean partner, I repeatedly observed joking or teasing directed at the tourists, who were automatically excluded from the group "us Ponta do Sol locals".

During my time on the island, many of my friends reminded me that people who do not know how to joke will never get along in Cape Verde. Whenever I was upset by something, people pointed out that, on Santo Antão, you have to know how to engage in "brinkadeira".

Even my partner occasionally criticized me, especially in the early part of my stay in Ponta do Sol, teasingly informing me that "Bo è muito suscetível…" ("you are too sensitive") and explaining that the community took a negative view of being touchy, of not knowing how to joke and make fun of oneself.

Brinkadeira is an essential element of community life: individuals are expected to laugh and joke at every opportunity. On one occasion Rosenda, a young women from Ponta do Sol, explained to me that she and her best friend got along because: "ela gosta de brinkar comigo"[10]. Often, the quality of knowing how to perform brinkadeira was taken into account in evaluating people. A 'good person' was often a person who "gosta de brinkar".

In the case of Santo Antão island, irony and joking actually seem to represent a form of resistance to the power imbalances or unequal relationships (based on social class, skin colour, gender, etc.) inherited in part from Portuguese colonialism. This resistance takes the form of both excluding/defending against that which is external to the community and exorcising stereotypes. One of the topics that figures most frequently in people's joking, for example, is that of skin colour. Given that Cape Verde is a post-colonial nation-state with a Creole population composed of very different physical types, the issue of skin colour is highly sensitive. Locals often use humour to engage with this sensitive subject, for instance by joking about the blackness of individuals. On many occasions during my stay in Cape Verde I heard people making fun of one another's skin colour or witnessed adults tease children in this way. For instance, my Cape Verdean partner used to tease the little boy he was

10. "She likes to joke with me".

fathering at the time[11] by saying: "ma bo è preto, bo è feio, feio!"[12]. I even observed some men joking with their partners about their subordinate female roles, as my friend Djon used to do with his wife Ernestina, thereby almost flattening social and gender differences while at the same time reiterating them. On other occasions local people used joking to assert counter-stereotypes about non-Cape-Verdeans. Several times, for example, people laughingly told me that white people are all the same and that it is hard to tell them apart, the same stereotype that is often applied to black people by whites[13]. Alternately, people jokingly turned to me, laughing, and told me "you're good even though you're white!" In this way people speak playfully about issues that are thorny or awkward for the community such as social differences, gender and power disparities, seeking to deal with them through joking[14].

As I have mentioned, the three years I spent living in Santo Antão and developing intimacy with Cape Verdean people allowed me to gain an (at least partial) understanding of their humor and ways of joking through an "impregnating" approach. And yet how can anthropologists be absolutely sure the pictures they develop are accurate and not based on misunderstanding? Beyond the impressions they form and the feedback they receive from interlocutors, how to ascertain that they have truly understood the irony of another culture? Notwithstanding the inevitable possibility of error, there were multiple clues that led me to be reasonably sure I had understood the local form of irony. Irony may express the opposite of what the person really means to say, but it is not difficult to distinguish from the context and the person's attitude whether the statement is meant literally or ironically. For example, as in the instance I describe below in which one of my main interlocutors laughingly told me that I, poor thing, had no one to help me at home, she knew perfectly well her statement was untrue because it was her own niece I had hired to help me with the cleaning. Recognizing irony and joking is not simply a matter of distinguishing the literal meaning from the metaphorical element that is often part of an ironic ex-

11. In Cape Verde there is a widespread practice called pais de criacão, a sort of fostering in which individuals (often wealthy) raise the children of the poorest families, though they are often not kin related (Giuffrè 2007).

12. I have left some significant expression in Creole, providing the translation in footnotes. Here: "You are black, you are very ugly!"

13. There are white Cape Verdeans, but of course these locals are not part of the intended meaning of "white people" in this case.

14. Sometimes joking together serves to nullify differences in status and belonging. Aime describes a similar situation in Timbuktu, where teasing, irony and insult among the konday (spontaneous forms of associations), even those of different ethnicities, is used to produce equality, build relationships and deal with diversity, providing a vision of democratic society in a strongly hierarchical setting (Aime 2010). See also Gates 1988.

pression. Sometimes, in fact, the literal meaning coexists with its opposite, as in the example described above of patting a beautiful dark-skinned child while saying "bò è preto preto, feio feio": the statement refers to an actual feature (blackness) but in the form of a stereotype, and the speaker goes on to overturn the negative connotations of the sterotype through an ironically affectionate statement that reverses the literal meaning of the words. Furthermore, verbal communication is accompanied by non-verbal forms of communication such as facial expressions, body movements and tones of voice that one cannot help but recognize after having spent so much time with the speaker. Indeed, it was this set of signs I interpreted to understand, for example, that when people told me I was pale, while not actually asserting a falsehood, they were good-naturedly making fun of me by assigning me a counter-stereotype.

Moreover, the most important evidence that I had understood local irony was the fact that my communication was "successful" and I was included: beyond the misunderstandings and ambiguity associated with my position, the locals recognized me as one who understood and knew how to participate in "brincadeira", unlike tourists or other outsiders. This understanding was demonstrated by the fact that I was in tune with others and not disoriented at the end of a satirical joke as well as the fact that Ponta do Sol locals themselves told me that I was a white person with whom they were able to joke and who understood their humour, partaking in the cultural intimacy I mentioned earlier. Therefore, it was locals who asserted that I too was a little bit Cape Verdean in that I was able to understand their way of joking and "gosto de brincar", which would not have occurred if I had not understood their practices of irony.

Irony as a rite of passage

As an anthropologist, the process of becoming part of the community I was studying came to constitute a rite of passage (separation, margin or limen, and aggregation) in the sense posited by Turner. According to Turner, ironic relationships are a ritualized form of "social drama" in which laughter not only plays a regulating function but also represents a "liminal" moment, that is to say, a moment of creative potential that serves to generate new relationships and an agent of change that gives rise to new forms of identity.

I would argue that, in my case, playful and ironic interactions were a liminal moment in a rite of passage in which I went from being a foreign, white outsider to being a half-Cape Verdean insider/outsider. In his theory, Turner attributes strong significance to conflict and crisis within the rite of passage: he sees the liminoid stage as a highly creative moment that often gives rise to new situations and ways of be-

ing. Thus, in the transition from foreign to almost-Cape Verdean, I passed through all the phases of a classic rite of passage. To illustrate this shift, I draw on my field notes and an interview I conducted with Maria Giulia, a 73-year-old woman who acted as one of my principal intermediaries and recounted her life story for me. In this interview, I asked Maria Giulia to provide feedback on our past three years of doing research together. The interview took place on my veranda and, as we will see, Maria Giulia immediately began joking about my role as an anthropologist.

Separation and the danger of that which is outside

In the first phase, which could be defined as "separation," people mainly kept me at a distance. Even though I was the partner of a Cape Verdean man from the very beginning, others treated me with formal courtesy while largely ignoring me.

It took quite a while for the people of Ponta do Sol to begin considering me partially one of them. At first, people looked at me and giggled but did not speak to me. Often groups of locals joined in laughing at me but, when they observed my expressions and saw that I was not laughing along, they mainly avoided me.

The first three months I felt very isolated because, although I was able to understand the basics of Creole, the fact that I did not understand how to joke with people meant that most locals preferred to avoid me. The only people who did speak to me were a few local women, such as Ernestina, who went on to become one of my main interlocutors.

Moreover, coming from Italy, I was in effect a representative of *Terra Longe*[15], the Outside, which is seen as a threat and agent of contamination: as Ernestina told me, people are not supposed to talk to strangers from that outside world. Ernestina did not want to be seen talking with foreigners because such interaction would have been viewed negatively; she often sought to speak to them secretly, but never publicly.

The ambiguity of the *Terra Longe* clearly emerges in the imagination of the people of Santo Antão. One particularly significant example of this is the version of the story *A historia do cavalo de perna quebrada*[16] that my interlocutor Bibia recounted for me. This story relates the adventures of a boy whose horse has a broken leg. He goes to the *Terra Longe,* where "tem gente gentio, gente gentio estava comer gente" (*ivi*)[17] and, after having a series of adventures, returns a victorious hero. The *Terra Longe* is thus depicted as a place full of dangers and monstrous people, and an

15. Meaning literally "The Far Land", this term is used to refer to the outside world.
16. "Thea story of the horse with the broken leg".
17. The little horse with the broken leg would take him to the *Terra Longe*, in the *Terra Longe* there are "savage people and savage people eat other people".

individual who travels to the *Terra Longe* is seen as a kind of hero who has undergone a rite of passage and returned victorious[18].

The figure of the *Terra Longe* inhabited by *gente gentio* is a recurring theme in Cape Verdean literature and traditional tales (see also Bettencourt 2001) and refers both to people who come from other places and those who exist outside established conventions and standards. For example, in *Famintos* by Luis Romano, Fina Candinha goes crazy following the loss of her child, and because of her madness she becomes a "beast of Terra Longe" […] "and the Terra Longe is full of wild people" (1983: 236). This idea of the outside world as ambiguous and extremely dangerous is a also recurring feature of the villains in Cape Verdean traditional tales and popular imagination, such as *bruxa*[19] or *massong*[20],who are always identified as coming from outside; in the case of spirits or mysterious forces, the evil element is described as originating in another world, an imagined elsewhere.

Locals who have remained on the island even view migrants living in the *Terra Longe* as deeply contaminated, for better or worse. The migrant, by constituting a link with the outside and embodying the transition between here and elsewhere, becomes a deeply ambiguous figure for those who remain, an insider/outsider who is necessary yet dangerous, admired and envied yet frequently judged and criticized (Giuffrè 2007). Significantly, locals use irony to emphasize the insider/outsider status of returning migrants.

One example of this is the ironic nicknames attributed to returning migrants by those who have remained in Cape Verde: women who have migrated to Italy are called Fiat, as in "Here comes the Fiat" to indicate the large number of returning migrants (*Fiat* is the make of car most widely sold in Cape Verde), or the name of a fruit that ends up rotting on the ground because the tree had produced too much of it.

This theme of the ambiguous relationship between those who leave and those who remain is also apparent in the verses of Cape Verdean *mornas*; for example, the following verses make fun of women living in Lisbon who return for vacation and ostentatiously walk around in way that is perceived to be proud and pretentious: "seu

18. The Outside represents both danger and added power, even in the sense of prestige, a new symbolic force that is acquired at the same moment that the individual is "contaminated"; for this reason, those who remain (stay behind) attribute great power to those who succeed in dominating the outside world and return victorious, as "heroes", from Terra Longe. A variation on the theme of "gente gentia que come gente" as a lullaby for children is reported by Sobrero (1998: 295).
19. Literally "witch".
20. In Cape Verde the *massongos* were mainly traders and large landowners who belonged to a secret society predominantly male; those who attended, were believed to have made a pact with the devil by selling his soul in exchange for power and wealth.

andar ta spincá/ que se manera ingraçadinha/ el ta mute vaidozinha"[21].

The anthropologist Rodrigues (1994) has observed that these verses express criticism of those who return and display a sense of superiority ("Jà'l bem de stranger/ jà'l gastà se d'nher/ Jà'l bem inganà es coitadà")[22]; other verses describe how Cape Verdean immigrants to the Netherlands, on returning home, show off their acquired wealth and exude presumption and entitlement, even though other Cape Verdeans see them as foreigners. Furthermore, those who remain at home refer to returned migrants with nicknames such as "Dutch" or "American"; these nicknames express ambiguity in that, in terms of social representation, they emphasize the idea that migrants "have become Other". At the same time, they also indicate recognition of the success migrants' have achieved through their migration and the fact that the migrant is still part of the community, perceived as "a concrete and limited holos" (*ivi*).

These phenomena contributed to my being viewed with suspicion as a result of the fact that I came from the outside world; furthermore, in my case there was also a misunderstanding that exacerbated the situation. My first intermediary was a woman named Lucia who worked as a maid in Rome. When she accompanied me on my first trip to Cape Verde and introduced me to the community, she told everyone that I was a journalist because she thought it would grant me greater importance. In reality, however, this false information contributed to my exclusion. People feared me, imaging that if they talked to me I might report what they had said on television or in the newspapers. It took me several months to convince people that I was not a journalist. There were a few individuals who supported me in this early period, including Lucia and Ernestina, who enjoyed speaking with foreigners. In the end, they served as mediators between the outside and inside and doubtlessly provided me with crucial support and assistance. However, the Cape Verdean who really provided me the "key" to inclusion in the community turned out to be Maria Giulia. During our daily visits, she taught me the day-to-day importance of irony and joking while at the same time repeatedly testing me. In so doing, she acted as both a research aide and the real officiant of my particular rite of passage. Another person who introduced me to "brinkadeira" was my partner. The crucial factor in my understanding the key to inclusion was not the status I acquired by living with him so much as the way he helped me understand joking practices.

21. "Her superb walking, with her graceful manner, she become so vain".
22. "Already came from abroad/ came to squander his money/ come to deceive them, poor them".

The liminal phase: challenges to overcome

During this initial period I was therefore excluded by the community and generally felt like a *cabongas*[23]. Even though I went to the pub with my partner or was invited to celebrations or people's homes thanks to my intermediary Lucia, nobody offered me a closer, more intimate form of relationship. At one point, however, people began to test me. In particular older women, often considered the guardians of access to local identity (Giuffrè 2007), engaged in a practice that appeared odd to my eyes: they constantly provoked me and then watched to see how I would react.

I found an interesting example of this in my field diary that took place the first time I visited Maria Giulia's house, on March 28, 2002:

"(Entering) Maria Giulia and one of her friends, Nha Dindinha, were making *brincadeira*, sexual jokes, and the latter pinched me on the hips. Maria Giulia lifted her skirt, showing me her underwear …"

My perplexity made me ugly to their laughing eyes, at the time. I would define this episode as a sort of test associated with an initiation rite, a test conducted to ascertain whether or not I was ready to establish a more intimate relationship with them.

In that period I was beginning to collect Maria Giulia's life story and so I began to visit with her on a daily basis. As she recounted her long story episode by episode, the ironic register emerged more and more clearly as a result of our increasing closeness and intimacy or, perhaps, increasing receptivity on my part. Even her more moving and dramatic accounts were interspersed with jokes. She never failed to emphasize the fact that she had always used joking as a way of gaining acceptance in new contexts and that playfulness, irony and joking were a typical Cape Verdean mode of communication, an essential tool for making friends and being considered part of the community.

The turning point: temporary re-aggregation

Little by little, without even realizing it, I began to understand and take on this mode of communication. There was no decisive or dramatic proof of this shift but, similar to the experience Geertz famously describes during his fieldwork in Bali, at some point something changed and I began to understand "what Cape Verdeans laugh at". I still remember the day when, during a visit to Maria Giulia, I found myself understanding their jokes and 'laughing together' with the other women without even realizing it. From that point on, women began to invite me to socialize and

23. A creole term meaning someone who "doesn't understand anything".

drink *pontche*[24] with them. I became aware of this turning point during a particular episode, recorded in my notebook on April 10, 2002, that took place while I was visiting with Ernestina and Vitoria, two of my interlocutors:

> About three months after my arrival we were sitting on the veranda of my house to chat. At some point Ernestina jumped up and said: "Martina, Vitoria, look, there are white people!" "Look they are tourists" We turned and saw two tourists who were walking along the waterfront. Ernestina points out that they were very pale and we started to giggle at them (it should be noted that I was at least as pale as they were). Involving me in this scene in which others were identified as foreigners gave me the feeling of being considered one of them, 'part of the landscape'[25].

As a matter of fact, for many locals being Cape Verdean depends not on having been born in Cape Verde but rather "being part of the landscape", as they say. For example, a boy from Ponta do Sol who had a relationship with a tourist told me that it was the first time he had ever been with a white woman. When I pointed out that actually he had already been with a white girl who had lived for many years on Santo Antão, he gave me a quizzical look: "Mas ela è caboverdiana!" ("But she is Cape Verdean!"). Indeed, having lived on the island for many years, she was no longer considered foreign.

I had become part of the landscape and so was able to join in making fun of foreigners or returning migrants along with the other women. This joking focused on physical traits such as 'the fatness of migrants', their 'way of dressing' or 'the whiteness of their skin', all practices employed to emphasize 'the Otherness of foreigners'.

In this passage from foreigner to almost Cape Verdean, the key step was understanding irony: after a while, Oracio, an interlocutor with whom I spoke frequently, told me: "Now people are starting to see you as a local, as a Cape Verdean, and not as a tourist. You speak Crioulo and you know how to joke with people".

Alongside my ability to speak Creole, it was specifically my ability to joke that allowed me to successfully "become Cape Verdean". Maria Giulia highlighted my challenge as follows:

> …and then she came to see me, but I am not a beauty… I am ugly, I am black, I am poor, I don't have a place to go when I die, but she likes me, I don't know why…she likes me and I don't know why…I have nothing to offer, plus I am ugly but nice because I like to joke, I live for jokes, I'm crazy about joking, I live so I can strive to be nicer, I wanted you to become nice, too – when you arrived you weren't nice but now you are (laughing) I have nothing else to say…

24. Drink made by mixing *grogue* (a sort of brandy) with cane sugar, honey and lemon.
25. In a similar way, Steinmüller (2013) notes that the turning point in his fieldwork that showed that he had been accepted by the community was when his name appeared on the list of helpers for the ritual to inaugurate Yang Minghus's family's house.

Our friendship grew thanks to my ability to share her sense of humour, as Maria Giulia highlights in her final comment that, in the end, I "became nice". "I live for jokes", Maria Giulia states. While I did not initially comprehend her way of joking, over time I grew to understand and "became nice" thanks to the fact that I was able to share the world of Cape Verdean irony with her. As she explained: "One has to come in little by little, slowly; I go to São Vincente, I don't know anyone there, I have to start joking in order to get in."

This initiation was enacted through joking or, to use Turner's term, a liminal moment that involved not only a shift of status from foreigner to Cape Verdean – a simple transition – but a highly creative, critical and engaging act, a "true variety of cultural creativity" (Turner 1986: 61) that gave rise to new identities and generated a new equilibrium and set of practices. It was precisely our relationship that began to take shape through joking, a relationship built gradually over time thanks to irony and sharing.

Even later, after I had learned how to joke, Maria Giulia continued to tease me over and over, as if I needed cyclical rites of passage to reaffirm my acquired Cape Verdean-ness. In one of our interviews, for example, she told me "Do you know what?… *Bo è doida*… *doida*… *doida*… you are more than *doida*[26]… and now I'm going to make a cake and not give you any…"

It was not only Maria Giulia who continually tested me, however. There were many episodes in which women made fun of me, which often led to strengthening existing social relationships and establishing new ones. From time to time women made fun of me because of the colour of my skin, saying that I was as pale as a sick person; for not feeling ready to become a mother at thirty years old, an age at which most of them were already grandmothers; for not knowing how to cook typical Cape Verdean dishes, and so on. In this way women performed strategies of inclusion/exclusion and distance/proximity, using joking to create a liminoid situation in which norms were suspended, rules and roles were overturned and new relationships were formed or existing ones fortified. Obviously, the success of these tests depended on my response to their joking provocations.

In ironic relationships between people of different cultures, there is often an initial period of displacement and misunderstanding caused by jokes that develops into an understanding of the implied irony in the relationship, which ultimately leads to common ground that can give rise to deep insights. In my case as well, I needed time to move from displacement to full participation. As previously stated, a *conditio sine qua non* of becoming part of the Cape Verdean community was understanding and sharing locals' sense of humour/irony. At the same time, as I have shown,

26. "You are crazy… crazy… crazy… you are more than crazy…".

irony and joking relationships can be used as a means of controlling the Other in which the newcomer is subjected to continuous rites of passage in order to reiterate his or her membership, as if to say "yes, you are still part of the community".

Indeed, in my case the liminal phase never ended in a full re-incorporation into the community. Rather, I was constantly tested and relegated to the status of insider/outsider through irony in a way that said, "you are one of us, but not exactly like us". This was also evident in everyday practices, where my otherness/belonging was continuously addressed through irony. For example, I was included in locals' teasing of tourists, thus implying my ability to understand irony in relation to strangers; at the same time, however, this teasing reiterated, again ironically, that I might transition back into foreignness at any moment.

I would argue more generally that anthropologists never truly complete the rites of passage requested of them, leaving them in a state of temporary inclusion that might slip back into marginality at any moment. When anthropologists do succeed in achieving inclusion, it is a conditional form of inclusion: their position remains ambiguous and liminal. In my case, this ambiguity was made particularly evident by the fact that my identity was hybrid, mutable and multifaceted, continuously shifting in both my own eyes and the eyes of my friends. Many elements conditioned the ways in which I related with my informants: I was at one and the same time seen as a foreigner, a curious personage, an adoptee into the culture, a white person, a student, a researcher, a professional, an Italian, a friend-confidant, a part of the family, a daughter-niece, and an intermediary for communicating with relatives who had migrated to Italy.

This ambiguity was due to the fact that I asked questions as an anthropologist but locals answered me as a Cape Verdean. Conversely, at times I asked as an adopted Cape Verdean but they answered me as an anthropologist. However, as the partner of a Cape Verdean man I was often seen more as a Cape Verdean woman than as a researcher, in part thanks to the fact that, for a lengthy portion of my stay, both locals and I thought I would remain living there forever.

From irony as a shared social practice of complicity to irony as a way of capturing ambiguities

As I have described in relation to Cape Verde, laughing together is also a shared social practice, a way for people to recognize common cultural ties, and thus an important act of intercultural communication. Laughing together creates a space for communication in which people can test themselves without encroaching too much on others, which makes it ideal for testing limits. Laughing becomes an act of complicity and reciprocity. As Steinmüller highlights, "embarrassment, irony and all that

is said as an aside are not understood by everyone, and so they re-produce the boundaries of a community of complicity" (2013: 228).

Through my constant mistakes and misunderstandings, I gradually learned to join this "community of complicity": on multiple occasions I was included in the "Us Cape Verdeans" group when dealing with tourists and foreigners passing through Ponta do Sol or coming to our pub/restaurant. On other occasions I was included in the "Us women of Cape Verde" group when my female friends and I discussed men and their behaviour. Several times, my friends and family or returning migrants came to the town, my partner and close friends asked me to show these "outside eyes" the best of Ponta do Sol, not lingering for example on less pleasant aspects that might show the village in a bad light, such as a drunk man or the inadequate plumbing that forced some residents to use the road instead. "They shouldn't think we are underdeveloped!" they told me. Nonetheless, they often addressed the subject of Ponta do Sol's underdevelopment in conversations involving only local residents.

In the interviews, my interlocutors repeatedly addressed the importance of humour as a relational and communicational strategy that is key to empathizing with others. Indeed, irony is one of the elements that characterized the majority of Maria Giulia's speech. Thanks to the ambiguity implied in the act of joking, Maria Giulia was able to use irony to express the ambiguity of my position. Speaking about my "social status", she affirmed: "Martina cooked, traded at the bar, she had to wash her clothes as she did not have a servant…she is poor, she doesn't have money to hire a servant… (laughing), she is Italian but she is an 'italiana quebrada'[27] she doesn't have money… (laughing)".

When Maria stated that I was poor and could not afford to hire a servant, she was making fun of me, because she knew that I actually did have a housemaid for the entire length of my stay. In reality, Maria Giulia was indirectly ranking me, telling me that I belonged to the wealthy class. By defining me as a "broken Italian", she was saying that I was not as rich as other Italians, while at the same time positioning me among the wealthy component of Cape Verdean community, as if to say "you belong to the Cape Verdean rich". Maria Giulia was referring to the Cape Verdean wealthy, however, not wealthy white tourists. As an Italian I was poor, but as a Cape Verdean I was rich: it all depended on her point of view and the social group in which she located me. Our emotional relationship was reciprocal and clear. Once we shifted outside the sphere of friendship, however, the ambiguity of our relationship emerged: "I am not a beauty… I am ugly… she likes me but I don't know why…". According to Maria Giulia, our friendship was justified by her pleasant and likeable

27. "A broken Italian".

manner…on a professional level, however, she expressed puzzlement about what I might possible see in her. She essentially asked, why are you so interested in me? Although the misunderstanding is already apparent here, it later became even more evident:

> I already took her to Garça, São Pedro, we already went to Porto Novo, to the feast of São João, to Paul and to the feast of Santanton […]. She came here, I made a cake, and she watched me the whole time, like a pau de mirão[28], to learn from everything that I was doing, but she learned nothing, she doesn't have the brains to learn, I made bread and she watched me the whole time, I made a cake and she watched me the whole time, I put the cake on the plate and she kept looking, but she never learned to make one, she doesn't have the brains, she has looks but no brains… [laughing] she's got no head… she doesn't have the brains…

She continued:

> I don't know if it's because of love that she's not learning much… but she came in the morning and left at noon, I made a cake and she used to watch me the whole time, I was preparing the cake and she kept looking at me, I cut the cake and she was good at eating it (that was all she was good at)!!! 'Cause she is manhenta[29].. [laughing]…[…]. I showed you the roscas[30] that I make, and the different guitar shaped biscuits, … I make prayer beads to carry on your shoulders and showed you how they're worn, while seated I showed you how to put them on so that when you go back to Italy you can do it too if you want… but you don't do it né gaita[31]… [laughing] 'cause you don't know how to make them…[laughing] you made me sit for hours and made me talk so as to be able to carry on your work…so what else would you have liked me to do for you? I showed you the tostão[32][…] in order to talk to you and to be able to carry on your work…so what else would you have liked me to do for you ?

She always joked when talking about my role and my position as a way of expressing that she did not understand what I was doing. In this way the ironic relationship also indicated an intercultural and interpersonal misunderstanding. It was mainly through joking that we were able to convey our divergent perceptions and address the insider/outsider status typical of anthropologists (in my case, both a Cape Verdean acquired friend/niece and a foreign anthropologist). According to Emerson (1969), the language of joking is the only language that allows one to express critique, thanks to the paradox through which a joke both affirms something and denies it at one and the same time.

28. "Statue".
29. "Astute, she has bad habits".
30. A candy, cookie or bread typical of Patron Saint feasts that is made in certain special shapes (for examples guitars, fish, dolls).
31. "Not at all".
32. The Cape Verdean currency prior to Independence (1975).

These excerpts from my interviews clearly show that Maria Giulia viewed my continuous observation as strange and nonsensical. "She would always watch me, but she didn't learn much, she doesn't have the brains for it", Maria stated. My observation was incomprehensible in her eyes because, since I did not go on to do the things I had observed her doing, it did not seem to be directed towards a practical end. Why spend so much time watching me make the *Romaria*[33] sweets if you have no intention of making and selling them at the Patron Saint celebrations? Why ask to see how the prayer beads and the *romaria* sweets are made if you are not going to make them yourself? Maria Giulia seemed to wonder.

At multiple points during our interview Maria repeated the phrase *ela estava sempre em cima de mi* (she was always watching me) and added: *como un pao de mirão* (like a statue). Maria taught me and let me observe her to help me with my job, because of our friendship: "you made me stay in the house for hours and hours and made me speak in order to do your job…what else would you have liked me to do for you?" Nonetheless, the meaning I attributed to our work together seems to escape her. In reality, I was fairly sure that I had explained it quite thoroughly and that she had understood my explanation. However, it was also obvious that I did not understand her perception of what we were doing in the time we spent together at her house. It was also unclear to her who my work was intended for. As Maria Giulia said:

> At the beginning I couldn't understand, but then she explained it to me and I helped her, I helped her and I believe that her fellow Italians liked it, Italian people liked it and especially your professor, because he's interested, but now I don't know what to do with you anymore… Who's going to read it?

It is obvious that the anthropological profession is not as clear to our 'informants' as it is to us anthropologists, with the exception of certain cases such as the indigenous South Americans who, as Fabietti writes, "tired of the continuous attention that anthropologist gave them, eventually put out signs that said, 'we no longer accept anthropologists'" (Fabietti 2005: 65)[34]. Informants strive to classify anthropologists in the appropriate category (Wagner 1981), but this is not always a simple task. As La Cecla states (2003: 80), anthropologists are always at work with intercultural trans-

33. Feasts of Patron Saints.

34. Another relevant body of literature is that written by authors who belong to minority groups, often the "object" of studies, "who comment ironically on the role of anthropologists as connected to imperialist policies". I refer for example to authors such as Edwaard Said, Talal Asad and Valentine Mudimbe. The work of Vine Deloria jr. (1969) is of particular relevance. In chapter four of "Anthropologists and Other Friends", the author writes: "But indians have been cursed above all other people in history, Indians have anthropologists" (Vine Deloria in Fernandez, Huber 2001: 20).

lations that are continually recreated and called into question. Their position is extremely precarious and often difficult to explain (why should somebody who only wants to observe and live among us be accepted? What is his/her job?). How can the role of the anthropologist within a group be justified?

The answer that Maria Giulia herself gave about our work – that it would be used by my professor and the Italian people – indicates that she believed she was speaking to an important audience and that this act of communication transcended the interpersonal to become public in scope.

This interview, along with ethnographic material I collected, gave me many insights to reflect upon; at this point I would like to explore a few of them. First of all, by stating that she was motivated to help me with my work, Maria Giulia attested to the importance of empathy in the dialogic relationship. This kind of empathy is not ethnocentric; rather, it is "analogical and reflexive", a kind of congeniality or fellow feeling that Chiara Pussetti describes as a "contamination of emotions" that occurs "through the continuous reformulation of one's own experience and categories, active participation, open-mindedness and patience" (2005: 22). It is precisely this "contamination of emotions" that Maria Giulia referred to in describing our like-mindedness. Secondly, Maria Giulia repeatedly made statements confirming (once again) **t**hat humour is a constitutive element of Cape Verdean culture and key social strategy (indeed, the practice of *brincadeira* is sacred). As in the case of Cape Verde, frequently anthropologists are only able to enter into other cultures by joking with the members of that culture, and this involves risking their own reputations. Certainly all anthropologists have had the experience of being mocked by their hosts during their initial stay in the field as a result of not having performed the "right behaviour" in specific circumstances, and this mocking is often utilized by hosts as a way to "soften the critical aspects of settling in at first" (Colajanni 1980: 403)[35]. This appears to be a paradox. As I have noted, near the beginning of my time in Cape Verde, people laughed at both my behaviour and me as a person. Although at the time I did not understand why, looking back I realize that it was indeed a way of making make me feel that I was held at a distance, which was followed by social testing; however, at the same time it was probably also an effort on their part to include the Other. "You were not nice, but slowly slowly I was able to make you nice" Maria Giulia told me. Humour, in any case, should always be read as part of a specific cultural context wherein multiple and diverse meanings are being utilized sim-

35. On the subject of research participants mocking anthropologists, see Colajanni 1980; Geertz 1973; Clifford 1988; La Cecla 2003; Steinmüller 2013.

ultaneously[36]. In the case of Cape Verde, as mentioned earlier, appearing ridiculous and silly facilitates communication in that it renders the foreign "human" and therefore less threatening. At the same time, joking serves as a relationship-building strategy. As I have shown, Maria Giulia and my other interlocutors used joking as a strategy for connecting and building intimacy, like a rite of initiation that tested the newcomer, expressing the idea that, "if you are able to joke like us then you are one of us". Moreover, by stating the opposite of what one really means in such a way that the listener understands the true meaning, which presupposes complicity and common ground wherein the communicative reversal is clear, irony is well-suited to expressing elements of ambiguity in which any statement can become its opposite, partly true or partly false, depending on the setting.

As mentioned above, it is precisely by using irony to describe me that Maria Giulia was able to so effectively capture my ambiguous position of insider/outsider, simultaneously a privileged West European (yet not as rich as other Westerners) and a foreigner, almost (but not yet) ready to become Cape Verdean: you are too Cape Verdean to be a Westerner – she seemed to say – but too western to be Cape Verdean. At the same time, however, she recognized that I belonged to a common space, the space of being Cape Verdean, in which irony was shared and understood.

In the Cape Verde ethnographic context I have described, jokes provide heuristic opportunities for expressing differences, misunderstandings and ambiguities as well as reflecting upon these elements, and this capacity appears to be one of the most interesting elements the ethnographic encounter offers its participants. If we view the ethnographic relationship as a space in which emotion and resonance are the prerogative of both the anthropologist and the informant, in which there is a condition of reciprocal exchange and awareness in the attempt to construct a common universe of reference, we embark on a difficult and extremely complex path that is inevitably open to misunderstandings.

Although I was initially discouraged, over time I learned that misunderstanding can be quite meaningful and important for discovering aspects of meaning and nuances that would otherwise have remained hidden. In my interview with Maria Giulia, I was able to grasp the heuristic potential of misunderstanding that emerged through humour with particular clarity specifically because joking led me to more fully comprehend my informant and her culture. For one, it was joking that allowed Maria Giulia to express her image of me, an image conditioned by the inextricable web of my multifaceted belonging (both Cape Verdean and anthropologist) in which

36. In many cultures, for instance, laughter and jokes are only possible among friends, serving to strengthen internal ties. One of these is the Aymara in Bolivia, as described by the anthropologist Miracle (1991), for whom joking is only allowed among friends and acquaintances; for the Aymara, to engage in these behaviors in front of foreigners would be deemed offensive.

the former identity enveloped the latter, thus highlighting the discrepancy between my own self-representation and her perception of me. As I have noted, my point of view was that of an extremely participatory anthropologist… in contrast, Maria Giulia's portrayal of my role more closely resembled the stereotype of a positivist anthropologist who observes from afar without participating. This moment of dissonance revealed an essential trait of Cape Verdean culture in which "knowing" means first and foremost knowing how to make things (see for instance Jackson 1983). For Maria Giulia, therefore, understanding feminine identity depended on understanding practical tasks: in order to understand Cape Verdean women, it seems, I had to engage in their feminine practices. Maria Giulia was telling me to "take a mental leap". In so doing, she was inviting me to put aside my Otherness: she knew that my research aims were not limited to entering the practical domain of femaleness, that my fieldwork did not simply comprise experiencing my womanliness through doing. Instead, it was precisely by observing without the intention of doing that my Otherness became manifest. In this case, however, Maria Giulia was criticizing me despite my accepted Otherness, making fun of me but without insulting me (I did not behave like a Cape Verdean woman, she observed); at the same time, she was letting me know that she considered me one of the locals because I was able to share in their jokes. Through this misunderstanding, Maria Giulia unwittingly gave me an anthropological lesson and the chance to reflect upon a mistake that I had risked committing: failing to take into consideration the practical side of Cape Verdean culture.

Conclusion

As I have shown, irony, joking and humour are key issues for anthropological practice and field research. Although scholars have made important strides forward in last two decades, irony still remains a somewhat under-investigated topic in anthropology. As scholars have shown, irony also represents a practice of resistance that is enacted in particular in the face of discrimination or in response to asymmetric power relations such as those, which, to a greater or lesser degree, characterize the relationship between anthropologists and their interlocutors. As many scholars have pointed out, irony is also a way of resisting/excluding the Other, those who come from Outside; at the same time, however, it is also a way of testing the outsider's suitability for inclusion.

In Cape Verde, the anthropologist coming from the outside world is an ambiguous figure: on one hand this Otherness inspires distrust and fear, so that irony directed at such outsiders is a way of both isolating them from the community and reaffirming the holos. On the other hand, humour is a way of making outsiders less dangerous, of humanizing them and thus facilitating their inclusion. And yet this inclusion depends on the Other (and thus the anthropologist as well) learning to share the

communicative mode of the community in question. In Cape Verde, this entire process, from exclusion to inclusion through irony, can be seen as a rite of passage that is continuously reproduced without ever reaching a definitive conclusion, thus allowing local people to manage the ambiguity of the Other without dissolving it.

However, the ironic practices locals engaged in with me, practices that set the challenges I had to overcome as part of the rite of passage for determining my inclusion in the community, worked to both include excluding and exclude including.

At the same time, their joking thus appears to have been a useful strategy for managing the ambiguity generated by my presence, casting me into a kind of liminal state in which I was considered neither completely foreign nor completely part of the community, an insider/outsider whose insider status was subject to recurrent testing. With my inclusion in the community constantly called into question, there was a continual risk that I slip back into a liminal state: too Cape Verdean to be Italian but too Italian to be Cape Verdean. The inhabitants of Ponta do Sol thus appear to have used irony to manage the liminality of the Other while at the same time preserving their "cultural intimacy".

Moreover jokes, humour and irony can play a fundamental role in the encounter between different cultures in that they reaffirm differences while at the same time downplaying them, allowing the encounter to take place precisely because the "insincere" character of the communication is explicit. Irony in particular provides a means to vocalize ambiguities in the ethnographic encounter, as it allows the anthropologist and interviewee to establish a relationship based on humour in which implied or unspoken meaning is mutually understood. As my experience in Ponta do Sol indicates, irony and joking are fundamental instruments for managing the forms of difference that inevitably involve ambiguity**.** Finally, as indicated by the feedback from my interlocutor Maria Giulia, humour is also a key element of intercultural communication that can potentially aid us in managing the emergence of a zone of misunderstanding: in the context of an ironic relationship, such misunderstanding has the potential to be meaningful and fruitfaul, allowing us to discover different ways of experiencing intercultural encounters. These discoveries in turn suggest new paths, intuitions, and precious insights that can be developed and incorporated into anthropological discourse.

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Martina GIUFFRÈ is a Researcher in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Sassari. For years her research has engaged migration and gender issues as well as oral sources, while more recently she has focused on Roma issues. She has taught at many universities: "La Sapienza" University of Rome, the University of Florence and the University of Naples "L'Orientale." She has conducted extensive fieldwork in Cape Verde, Australia, Italy, Romania, Spain and Belgium. She has also coordinated a number of cultural events and national and international projects. Since 2010 she has directed the CISU editorial series "Migration".

Martina GIUFFRÈ
Università di Sassari
martinagiuffre@yahoo.it

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