

Buying and Selling Between Different Worlds: The Rabidantes from Cape Verde¹

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Although traditional markets are not a new topic in anthropology, only recently global commercial exchanges have become a concern among anthropologists. More specifically, mercantile spaces which do not fit in the logic of formality and of dominant practices in the contemporary economy have attracted the attention of many researchers, who have identified informal flows in markets worldwide and particularly in piracy centres and in street-vendor markets. This study focuses on the configuration of the commercial route between Cape Verde and Brazil created and maintained by the so-called *Rabidantes*, street vendors from Cape Verde who operate at the borders between the two countries through an intense circulation of commodities. These commodities are produced by informal entrepreneurs in Brazil and sold in markets in Cape Verde. The article offers an analysis of the paths taken by the flow of people and goods, and of their contextual meanings.

Keywords: Street vendors, informal entrepreneurs, 'popular globalization', formal and informal legitimacy.

Introduction

Scholars from different perspectives and approaches have analysed economic practices that do not fit legal or formal structural frameworks.² Discussions about the dichotomy between informality and formality, the nature of the two and the possibility of the distinction between them becoming blurred reveal the complexity of these practices, especially when they are analysed in the context of the contemporary transnational flows and movements of commodities.

My aim in this article is to discuss some of the studies that deal with flows of people and commodities drawing on my research in the recently established commercial route between Cape Verde and Brazil. This route has been created and maintained by the so-called *Rabidantes*, street vendors from Cape Verde who operate at the border between the two countries, dealing in commodities produced in Brazil by entrepreneurs who operate outside the formal sector of the economy and sold in the Cape Verde markets. The discussion of the importance and amplitude of this commercial route in local contexts will help to understand the paths taken by the flow of people and goods and the meanings that these people and goods have in this setting.

Over the last few years, anthropological debates regarding mass production activities have been cast in a broader discussion on the phenomenon of globalization. In this context, Brazilian anthropologist Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (2006) has reflected on what he calls 'popular globalization', or 'non-hegemonic world system'. He has examined popular groups as agents actively participating in this process either because they consume global goods or because they engage in the circulation of products which symbolize cosmopolitan modernity. There is

¹ This article expands on a paper that I presented at the international interdisciplinary conference on 'Issues of legitimacy: entrepreneurial culture, corporate responsibility and urban development' (Naples, Italy, September 2012).

² Some of these approaches can be found in Geertz (1963), Machado da Silva (1971), Oliveira (2004), Machado (2005), Hart (1973), Rabossi (2004), Pardo (1995, 2012).

an established tradition, in anthropology, on the relationships between the legal and the illegal and between the licit and the illicit.³ By bringing dualities such as legal-illegal and licit-illicit into the debate, Ribeiro opts for the '(il)licit' category to illustrate activities which are socially licit, yet formally illegal.

This non-hegemonic system maintains relations with the hegemonic system and is sustained by thousands of poor people who make a living as street vendors, sellers and smugglers, among other activities. According to Ribeiro, popular globalization, which is part of this system together with the 'illegal global economy' (including organized crime), involves products such as global gadgets and copies of super logos, people who operate in distribution and marketing (commercial diasporas, street vendors and smugglers) and markets, which function as trade hubs in the system (including fairs and some mega-centres such as Caruaru, Ciudad del Este).

The case of the *Rabidantes* carries some characteristics of what Ribeiro calls popular globalization. As they mediate commercial contexts that could be seen as 'hubs' in the system, the *Rabidantes* are formally illegal, socially legitimate, popular and global. However, their analysis brings out some elements which are not included in Ribeiro's definition; in particular, many products involved in the flow are manufactured locally, are not imitations of famous brands and cannot be described as 'global gadgets'. Taking into account these new elements in the context of popular globalization is one of the challenges faced in the present study. I believe that focusing on the flow rather than on the places where products are purchased and sold, our analysis may stimulate a new perspective on this phenomenon.

I will first discuss the ethnography and then will resume this theoretical discussion. However, before proceeding, a caveat should be noted. The reflections and data presented here originate from an initial study which can be expanded and investigated further, also ethnographically. The material that has been collected so far⁴ raises relevant questions that provide guidance for continuing the research. The argument that I make here should therefore be intended to be under construction and open to readers' comments and contributions.

Cape Verde and the Routes

The Cape Verde archipelago is made up of 10 islands with differentiated topography, soil and climate. It was originally inhabited by Portuguese people and by a large number of Africans from the nearby West African coast, who were brought here to work as servants. Over time, a Creole society evolved as a product of the complex mixture of people from different ethnic, religious and linguistic origins. The country played a key role in the Atlantic and African coast trade; its role as 'mediator' in a system of inter-societal exchanges was the basis for its social reproduction. The lack of a local productive system which could meet the subsistence needs of the inhabitants of these the isles made Cape Verde particularly vulnerable to the hunger brought about by the periodical droughts.

³ On this issue see Pardo (1995 and 2000), Pardo (ed. 2000) and Pardo and Prato (eds 2010).

⁴ I wish to thank the *Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada* (IPEA) for the financial support that made possible the first data collection in Fortaleza in April 2010.

The Cape Verde archipelago was discovered by the Portuguese in 1460. At first, the geographical position of the islands, that is, the distance separating them from the Portuguese kingdom, was considered a negative factor for colonization. They were also located in a non-strategic geographical position as they lay too far south in the world known to the Portuguese. Another negative factor was their location in a warm and dry zone, which made it impossible to cultivate Mediterranean products such as wheat, rye and olives.

The island of Santiago (the main island in the archipelago) was scarcely inhabited until 1466. However, that year changes started taking place, as a document was circulated which allowed people based in Santiago to trade with riparian societies of the African continent and Europe. This commerce was considered illicit unless it took place under express royal authorization. The aforementioned document was thus of critical importance for the Santiago settlers. Now, being in Santiago meant having the right to practice trade between Europe and Africa. As this juridical prerogative made the island attractive, it became an immigration pole and its strategic value was re-classified.

The improvement of the infrastructure in Santiago turned the island into an important supplier of drinking water, food, fruit, salted meat and turtles. This also made it possible for ships to avoid long voyages to southern Africa. It should be noted that for several years there was no other safe point for re-supplying ships. Thus, in the late fifteenth century, these new facilities, in conjunction with European trade interests based on slave labour, enabled the entry of the archipelago into the world trade currents. At this time, the economy became more diversified and, in addition to slave traffic to southern Spain, Algarve, Madeira Island, Antilles, the Americas, France, Italy and England, two new cultivations were introduced; the cultivation of sugarcane for the commercialization of rum along the African coast and the production of brown sugar for local consumption and exports. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, *lançados*⁵ came to dominate the coastal trade between the Senegal river and the region known today as northern Sierra Leone. The difference between these trading agents and those who preceded them consisted in the reduced freedom to trade caused by the measures established by the Portuguese government, which resulted in severe trading losses. In order to survive, there was no alternative to disregarding all trade-related laws imposed by the Portuguese state.

So, despite Portugal's apparent indifference, the Cape Verde islands grew in importance thanks precisely to their location, acquiring the status of a viable commercial route. This contributed to their demographic growth and to the development of relations with other contexts, which has influenced the history of emigration that currently characterizes this society. Cape Verde was thus born and became gradually stronger as a commercial route (though, from the start, largely informal) animated by traders and the flow of commodities. This aspect has been overlooked by commentators, who have instead focused on emigration, paying no attention to the origin of the flows of people connected to intercontinental trade.

⁵ This was the collective name given to Christians, Jews, New-Christians and mestizos, who settled in African ports to trade without royal licenses and were considered lost to Christianity and to European civilization.

While I do not wish to establish a direct relation between the two, I do believe that taking accurately into account the historical dimension will make it easier for us to understand the configurations of the phenomena under study here. Analysing the contemporary flow of commodities in the daily lives of the *Rabidantes* against the broader historical background may raise questions, as well help us to identify the social significance of the circulation of objects (Appadurai ed. 2008) in forming a nation that is strongly influenced by its relations with 'others'.

The *Rabidantes* and their Trading Flows

The Creole word *Rabidante* means to 'sidestep', to 'free one's self of trouble', and is used to indicate someone who is skilled at convincing others. This word is used to address people who trade in the Cape Verde markets (mostly in the Sucupira market)⁶ located in the country's capital, Praia city. The *Rabidantes* are mostly women traders with keen negotiating skills. These street vendors were studied by Grassi (2003) with the aim of understanding their entrepreneurialism and their place in the ongoing processes of change in the relations among social stakeholders and between them and the institutions. Grassi's additional goal was to discover how this phenomenon influences Cape Verdean development and its place in the global economy (Grassi 2003: 29).

By making the transition from economy to anthropology, Grassi brings a wealth of data about the market (known as an informal market) and its importance in the economic and political constitution of the archipelago. In a context in which 'everyone negotiates deals', she goes deep into the Sucupira market to try and understand the dynamics of the deals made there. The material analysed by Grassi tallies with many ethnographies about popular fairs and markets – marked by solidarity, organization and friendship, which reinforces my argument that the universe of the *Rabidantes* fits in the broader context of 'popular globalization'.

The *Rabidantes* are regarded as agents who are active in the process of global circulation of commodities, resulting in the circulation of products among many frontiers. They travel among countries such as the United States, Portugal, France and Brazil to purchase goods. In addition to selling on the archipelago's islands, they 'export' to nearby African countries such as São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. Thus they secure a place in the global economy, either as producers or consumers.

The products in which they deal are generally men's, women's and children's clothes, cosmetics, shoes, accessories, bed linen, tablecloths, towels and domestic utensils. These products are purchased during periodic trips to some of the listed countries; they can also be received in packages sent by relatives living in large centres in the United States or Europe. The commodities are sold on either wholesale to vendors from Cape Verde and from other countries or retail; usually in the Sucupira market but also in their own households turned into small stores.

⁶ The name 'Sucupira' originates from the Brazilian soap opera *O Bem Amado*, which takes place in the fictitious town of Sucupira.

For about thirty years Brazil has been a shopping destination. In particular, São Paulo,⁷ famous as one of the most popular global trade hubs, has been the focus for the *Rabidantes*. The trip was expensive and long – women had to leave Cape Verde, proceed to Portugal and then on to São Paulo. Because of these difficulties, they had to make the best of each trip; so, during each trip, they would shop in two countries or, when this was not possible, they would just purchase fewer products. The trips were few and far between, taking place only once or twice a year. It is also worth noting that, though Brazil is not a destination country for Cape Verdean migrants, it enjoys privileged standing as a shopping destination for the *Rabidantes* because of the quality of its products.⁸ I was often told, ‘it is Brazilian products that clients like the most’.

In 2001, with increased communication between the two countries, both the intensity of trading and the shopping destinations changed for these women. The Cape Verdean airways company (Transportes Aéreos de Cabo Verde – TACV), in partnership with a Brazilian company (VARIG), established a weekly flight connecting the two countries directly in three and a half hours. Originally, the flight connected Sal Island to Fortaleza in the Brazilian state of Ceará; today, it operates between Praia city and Fortaleza. Given the proximity between the two countries, travel costs decreased⁹ and the shopping destination changed to Fortaleza, previously unknown to the *Rabidantes* and currently a great centre for ‘good’ Brazilian products.

The impact of trade between the two countries is reflected in the statistics. It is estimated that in 2003 the *Rabidantes* bought 400 tonnes of commodities produced in Brazil and spent 5 million US dollars. Approximately 150 *Rabidantes* disembarked at the Fortaleza airport and, on average, each of them returned to Cape Verde with fifteen suitcases, having spent approximately 10 thousand US dollars in cash.¹⁰

A newspaper article, which I found in Ceará, highlights the importance of the *Rabidantes* in the state’s economy. Under the title ‘Their Paraguay’,¹¹ the article compares the arrival of the *Rabidantes* in Fortaleza to the important flow of Brazilians called *sacoleiros* (see n. 6), who shop in the neighbouring country and then re-sell in fairs in many Brazilian cities. It will be useful to quote from this article at length:

⁷ More specifically, the 25 de Março Street in São Paulo.

⁸ I understand that the *Rabidantes*’ entry in Brazil is connected to the flow of Cape Verdean students who come to study in Brazilian universities thanks to an agreement between Brazil and Portuguese-speaking African countries. However, this connection between flows needs to be verified through empirical research.

⁹ On average, a round trip ticket now costs 500 US dollars.

¹⁰ These data were extracted from the SEBRAE/Ceará website:

<http://www.sebrae.com.br/sites/PortalSebrae/ufs/ce?codUf=6>.

¹¹ For Brazilians, Paraguay is an important centre for the sale of falsified electronic products. The country is ‘invaded’ on a daily basis by Brazilian vendors, known as *sacoleiros* (literally, bag people); that, is the Brazilian version of *Rabidantes*. These *sacoleiros* cross the border between the two countries to buy these products and sell them in fairs across Brazil. The border between Brazil and Paraguay is the object of many studies; see, for example, Rabossi (2004) and Machado (2005).

'Every Friday, approximately 150 women gather in the departure area, creating a frightening scene. Surrounded by luggage of all sizes, they create jams never before seen in the Fortaleza international airport. This confusion is a reflection of a recent phenomenon in which *bag ladies* from Cape Verde are the protagonists. After a direct flight from Sal Island to the capital of Ceará state was established, these women started crossing the Atlantic to buy everything: underpants, bikinis, jewellery, sandals, dresses and even household appliances of questionable quality which they would sell at the largest street fair in the African archipelago, called Sucupira after the soap opera *O Bem Amado*, already broadcast there (...) Their travel schedule is very tight. They face a marathon of up to twelve hours-worth of shopping, visiting at least ten stores in one day. (...) Most purchases are made at small backyard clothes-making companies at the outskirts of Fortaleza. The bag ladies are known as *Rabidantes* (translated as 'saleswomen'). These *Rabidantes* usually buy from seamstresses and craftsmen who are not registered in Ceará. It is cheaper that way. In an improvised lingerie factory in the backyard of a local house, the average number of pieces sold in a week is 10,000. There are no receipts, and payments are cash-only, on the spot and in dollars. In order to avoid the IRS, small stores get receipts from larger companies. No bag lady travels without some kind of document with the amount paid, for fear of having the commodities apprehended at airport customs areas.'

(Veja magazine, 15 December 2004: http://veja.abril.com.br/151204/p_086.html)

The impact of the *Rabidantes* border trade on the local production in Fortaleza is the main focus of several magazine articles that I found in my initial efforts at data collection. It is difficult to estimate the number of backyard clothes-making businesses linked to this transnational trade; however, during a visit to Fortaleza, I observed at the outskirts of the city a considerable number of small family-based businesses in the backyards of houses, producing lingerie, bikinis and clothing in general. In our conversations, these producers often said that their dealings with Cape Verdean women were at the origin of their businesses. Most clothes-making businesses that I studied were indeed started in 2002, 2003 or 2004, which tallies with my informants' reports. These were the golden years in the trading between the two countries. They had an impact on the so-called formal trade. According to data collected in Sebrae-Ceará, in 2005 the Cape Verde-Fortaleza connection was responsible for transactions in the order of 5 million US dollars; in 2002, goods were exported from Ceará to the archipelago for a value of 140,000 US dollars. It is worth noting that these are official data; they do not account for the total volume of the *Rabidante* trade. They do, however, reveal an interesting aspect: given the Cape Verdeans' buying potential, formal trade took advantage of the informal trade and commercial relations with the archipelago intensified.

The long quote given earlier from the *Veja* magazine brings out other interesting issues that need attention. For example, I note the translation of the term *Rabidante* into *sacoleira* (literally, bag lady; pl. *sacoleiras*), which reflects both the way in which these women are

regarded by Brazilians and the importance of their commercial dealings for the city of Fortaleza, which becomes ‘their Paraguay’. This is not accidental; these women’s classification as *sacoleiras* carries a series of stereotypes that Brazilians attach to people from the lower tiers of their society who smuggle products across the border between Brazil and Paraguay, which are then sold informally in street fairs in Brazil.¹²

During an exploratory field trip in April 2010, I recorded in greater detail the way in which Brazilian vendors see these women. According to their descriptions, the *Rabidantes* are from some place in Africa or any other poor and small country; some informants even confused Cape Verde with Haiti when trying to explain where these women come from. They, I was told, are all black or mulattoes, speak a different Portuguese than Brazilian Portuguese and when speaking among themselves speak a ‘weird’, unintelligible language. Moreover, they are said to be inconsiderate, even rude when negotiating prices. They were described as professional hagglers who, according to my local informants, ‘whine too much’ in order to bring prices down. The upside, I was told, is that they pay cash, often in dollars.

These views bring out the ambiguous image of Cape Verdean women among Brazilian producers and salespersons. On the one hand, they personify Brazilians’ stereotypical perceptions of Africans and of Africa as a place of extreme poverty and savagery; for example, I was asked if the house where I lived when conducting research in Cape Verde was on top of a tree(!). On the other hand, the *Rabidantes* have a buying power never before seen in Ceará, with the exception of European tourists, who are ‘rich and well-educated and spend time in good hotels by the sea in the capital’.

So, for Brazilians, their origin quite apart, the *Rabidantes* are hard to bargain with but represent good business opportunities and are therefore clients worthy of good treatment and priority in filling orders; particularly in view of the volume, frequency and form of payment (cash) which characterize their purchases. Because they know the Brazilian market and the stiff competition among suppliers, they use strategies of disqualifying products to get lower prices. Furthermore, in the knowledge of tensions and opportunities involved, during the haggling process Cape Verdean women take advantage of Brazilians’ preconceptions about them. The fact that they come from a small and poor African country often justifies the demand for a lower price. Competition from other Cape Verdean women is another bargaining chip. The alleged low quality of the products is a point of tension in price negotiations. The fact that the products are sold in fairs and originate from clandestine factories carries risks for the Cape Verdeans who transport these products across borders and these risks appear to justify lower prices. Overall, however, everything seems to indicate that these are good deals for all involved.

Among the Cape Verdeans whom I met in Fortaleza, Mrs Margarida made an interesting case study as she seems to illustrate well key aspects of this transnational trade.

¹² Rabossi (2008:163) claims that although the *sacoleiro* category is generally associated with buyers who shop in Paraguay, it includes all those who shop in one city to sell products in other cities or in their home towns. The *sacoleiro* category refers to commercial practices which involve travel and profit expectations derived from differences in prices or in the availability of products.

Mrs Margarida has had commercial relations with Brazilian traders for over ten years. At first, she travelled to São Paulo via Lisbon once or twice a year. In 2001, when the direct flight was established, she began going to Fortaleza to buy from factories through links with fashion brokers.¹³ Over time, she identified and became familiar with the best shopping locations, the best factories and the Brazilian way of doing business. As a consequence, she changed the place for negotiations from factories to fairs, thus becoming less dependent on fashion brokers. According to her, Brazilians are 'smart alecks'; the *Rabidantes*, she explained, have lost much money in Brazil in the form of orders paid upfront and never delivered, paying for higher quality products but receiving lower quality ones and having goods seized by corrupt customs officials.

Currently, the *Rabidantes* are experiencing two major difficulties. One is linked to the lower dollar-real exchange rate, which considerably decreases the profit margins. The other is raised by large numbers of Chinese traders coming to sell products in Cape Verde. Chinese stores sell extremely low-priced products and are in direct competition with the *Rabidantes*. These two factors have had a significant impact on the informal trade between the two countries; since 2008, lower volumes of commodities crossing borders are reported and many backyard factories in Fortaleza have closed down. In spite of these difficulties, however, Mrs Aparecida and her peers from Cape Verde continue coming to Brazil, which, raises the question, why?

Client demand is a decisive factor. Clients like products from Brazil, finding them attractive, original and of high quality. As good negotiators, when playing the role of saleswomen, the *Rabidantes* emphasize these attributes, while using the opposite argument when buying. As mediators between two universes, they manipulate the different values attributed to a commodity to maximize profits. On reaching Cape Verde in the hands of *Rabidantes* as 'Brazilian products', the same products which are known for their low quality in Brazil – being produced in textile factories which have no 'name', marked by the symbol of informality and by the 'for-the-masses' label, and sold in fairs – acquire a positive identity and become positive symbols which Cape Verdeans associate with their 'brother country' – the country of soap operas, creativity and 'quality'.

These local traders believe that the Chinese have not yet 'put an end to them' because of the quality of Brazilian products. Mrs Aparecida said, 'People in Cape Verde like products from Brazil. They know that, in addition to looking good, things there are high-quality, unlike Chinese products! There is also one more point – doors have not been closed for good because the Chinese cannot copy everything. Brazilians are very creative, there is something new each time we come and, since clients like novelties, we can sell before the Chinese can copy.' In order to survive competition from the Chinese, Mrs Aparecida uses a strategy of

¹³ These professional brokers were originally taxi drivers. They pick up Cape Verdeans at the airport, transport them to the hotel, assist with their shopping and generally remain at the beck and call of these women during the entire week, taking them to factories and mediating negotiations and orders. The *Rabidantes* do not pay these brokers, whose services are a courtesy offered by factories to Cape Verdean clients. Brokers get a 10 percent service charge for each sale.

buying smaller amounts and coming more frequently to Brazil, up to twice a month, spending 7 thousand US dollars on each trip.

The above remarks seem to contradict the belief that this is a decadent trade. This apparent contradiction drove me to investigate further. One possible answer, given by Mrs Aparecida, is that the number of *Rabidantes* who continue to make the trips has decreased significantly and wholesale deals seem to be the alternative for these vendors, which lead us to other dimensions of this flow and to other frontiers. This is supported by TACV data and by my own observation; for example, during one of Mrs Aparecida's trips, in which I joined her, only about thirty *Rabidantes* were in the plane. In addition to Mrs Aparecida, during my stay in Fortaleza I accompanied six other Cape Verdean women in their shopping trips. All followed the same pattern in terms of frequency of trips and products purchased. The leading products were bikinis, bought in very large quantities. It was April, near summer in Cape Verde, and Brazilian bikinis were the most sought after by clients. I observed how, as orders had already been placed, on reaching Cape Verde, all my informants had to do was to distribute the goods wholesale to their clients in Santiago and other islands. They also sold products retail on stalls at the Sucupira fair. Their clientele, however, includes also non Cape Verdeans, as they also sell to other African women in countries such as Senegal, São Tomé, Príncipe and Guiné-Bissau.

The existence of different routes and destinations for commodities outside the archipelago makes this case even more interesting. In addition to mediating frontiers between Brazil and Cape Verde, the *Rabidantes* operate at other frontiers, not as consumers but as saleswomen for Brazilian products in various African settings. In view of these dynamics, I asked what were the implications both for the people involved and for the goods that were traded.

Perspectives

The universes in which the *Rabidantes* move seem to share interesting similarities. In Brazil, they negotiate with trading partners from the large number of people who do not have formally registered businesses and their preferred shopping locations are fairs and markets; places which are also informal in nature. Similarly, in Cape Verde they sell Brazilian products in fairs or to other women who sell them on in other fairs or from their houses. However, there are also significant differences between the two settings which direct us to examine the fluid nature of the formal/informal and legal/illegal categories (Pardo 1995, 2012). For example, when dealing in untaxed commodities, the *Rabidantes* are at risk of having them confiscated, a risk which is lower once they cross the border and step on Cape Verdean soil, where values attached to formal legal rules are different from those in Brazil.

However, moving beyond the discussion about the relativity of these categories, which has been extensively debated by contemporary researchers, I am interested in reflecting on the circulation of products made in Brazil and put into circulation by the *Rabidantes* in different frameworks of values, to use Appadurai's term (ed. 2008). More precisely, I am interested in how objects produced in backyards at the outskirts of Fortaleza become 'Brazilian products', circulating in different cultural contexts, and in an analysis of the paths in which their value

acquire and re-acquire meaning according to contested wishes and demands. It is important to follow the trajectories of both these women and the products in which they deal and understand their strategies in negotiating the attending values.

We are faced with transactions that take place across cultural boundaries and in which there seems to be an agreement about prices and a minimum set of conventions in the context of the transaction itself. However, it is key to understand that these transactions involve intercultural exchanges based on perceptions that are profoundly different from the values of the people involved and the value of the objects which are traded or negotiated. In order to grasp these issues, inspired by Kopytoff (2008), I believe that we must look at the flow of the *Rabidantes* and the objects that they put into circulation from a process-oriented perspective that takes into account the different perceptions that the actors have of these objects. An initial analysis of the bargaining process and mutual classifications, which the Brazilians and Cape Verdeans use at the time of negotiations, points to interesting issues and raises some questions.

When considering the universe of the *Rabidantes* as a ‘case in between’ and these women as mediators among several frontiers, is it possible to learn a little more about the implications of circulating objects among the people who live in societies with different market systems? Are the desires and demands for these commodities limited to the people who live in the different contexts in which they circulate? What does it mean for an object to acquire the *status* of ‘Brazilian product’ when entering Cape Verde? What *status* is acquired when leaving Cape Verde? Furthermore, what *status* do these products give to those selling and buying them?

As I made clear at the beginning of this paper, I am faced with questions which only ethnography can help answer. These questions are inspired by the study of the *Rabidantes*, who move between borders putting commodities into circulation but also putting into place an elaborate process of exchange of information between cultures. In buying and selling, the *Rabidantes* mediate products and their consumers and play a double role of buyers and sellers (consumers and traders). In this game, they mobilize and add value to what they buy and sell, thus interpreting the cultural values and desires of two different worlds and capitalizing on such values and desires.

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