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Field Trip Cabo Verde - Cha das Caldeiras  
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Summary of the research report on:

**“The processing of experiences with Pico do Fogo in Cape Verdean music”**

**The Volcano in Cape Verdean Music**

Only weeks after the eruption of 2014/15 people of Cha das Caldeiras returned, regardless of the dangers that were still very present at that time. Rather than being perceived as merely the source of the destruction of many homes in the villages Portela and Bangaeira, the volcano “Pico de Fogo” is seen as the origin of the good life they can have there. The risk they have to live with stands in conflict with the benefits for their livelihoods that they are very grateful for (e.g. fertile lands, wine production, tourism) (Texier-Teixeira et al. 2014).

The important meaning societies ascribe to the volcanoes they live with, can be the cause of the creation of oral traditions (myths, stories) and their integration into cultural practices, like art or music (Cashman/Cronin 2008: 413). In this research project it is to be investigated how this applies to the case of the inhabitants of Cha das Caldeiras:

*How are the experiences with the volcano and the area of conflict between fertile home and extinguishing catastrophe presented and processed in Cape Verdean music on Fogo?*

**Theoretical Framework**

Pierre Nora's concept of “*lieux de mémoire*” (places or sites of memory) serves as a theoretical perspective in this research project. With *lieux de mémoire* he describes mediums that serve as preservation of collective memories (Erl 2011: 37). Contrary to what the term implies, various things like historical events and monuments can be a *lieu de mémoire*, it doesn't necessarily have to be thought of as a spatial construct (ibid.). To count as a *lieu de mémoire*, the medium has to have a material, functional and symbolic dimension (Nora 1990:

32). To fulfill the material dimension the medium has to have a material component, which is not to be reduced to tangible objects, but also includes elements like moments of silence. The functional dimension is fulfilled, if it has a relevance for society, for example through structuring processes or evoking certain memories. To have a symbolic dimension, the medium has to be used intentionally to preserve these memories (ibid.).

Elisa Tavares describes Cape Verdean Batuku songs as a *lieu de mémoire*. Here events and experiences of the past and the present are mixed with hopes and expectations for the future and can thereby be processed (Tavares 2016: 261). In this research project music about the volcano is looked at as *lieu de mémoire* and it is examined, how the presentation and processing of experiences happens through the use of it as such.

### **Volcanism and Culture**

There are other case studies of societies living in volcanic areas, where people returned to their homes shortly after an eruption (Bachri et al. 2015: 277).

For them also, the benefits of living with the volcano outweigh the costs in the longterm. Rather than being feared, the volcano is portrayed as a beneficial entity, with the best for the people in mind (Kelman und Mather 2008: 191). In many cases, the experiences with the volcano are subject of oral traditions. The inclusion in these oral traditions is used to pass down experiences to other generations and to find explanations for past events, that make it easier for people to process what happened (Cashman/Giordano 2008: 408). In many of these stories, the volcano is personalized and possesses an agency. The eruptions for example can be interpreted as disciplinary measures of the volcano (Frömmig 2002: 1-18).

These oral traditions are often included in cultural practices like rituals, dances and songs (Cashman/Giordano 2008: 327). In the shared remembrance of past events during cultural festivities, collective memories are (re-)formed and the solidarity between the participants grows. In this way music can be an element in the shared processing of experiences (Hill 2014: 151).

## **Cape Verdean Music**

Some examples of popular styles of traditional music on Cape Verde:

In Morna, nostalgia and melancholy is transported through the romantic and philosophical lyrics (Lobban 1995: 78). Cesaria Evoras song “sodade” (longing for something that is gone) is one of the most famous Morna songs. Coladeira often involves social commentary, fast and danceable rhythms and light and humorous lyrics (ibid.: 76f.). Batuku is a rhythmic music played by women. The lyrics offer them the possibility to express critique about their living conditions (Carter und Aulette 2009: 130).

## **Methods**

Six expert interviews were conducted to gain information on oral traditions about the volcano, traditional music on Fogo and the relationship of the people in Cha das Caldeiras to their volcano. All interview partners have a connection to Fogo in common. They either have lived in Fogo all their lives, currently moved there or just moved away. Some were selected based on their expertise in music and some because of their (historical) knowledge of Cha das Caldeiras. The content analysis method of Mayring was used to structure the results of these interviews.

## **Results and Discussion**

The experiences with the volcano do appear in Cape Verdean music. There are many songs with reference to the volcano as national symbol, but there are also songs specifically related to volcano-related phenomena. For example after the eruption of 2014/15, many new songs in different styles of music were made, even outside of Cha das Caldeiras. A personalization of the volcano as friend, father or chief of the family of Cha das Caldeiras takes place in the music. By describing the volcano as a trusted person, the focus is placed on positive aspects. Music itself is also used as a processing strategy. For one, knowledge can be transmitted from one generation to the next. It also serves as a form of expression of emotions: even sad songs convey a glimmer of hope in the end. So the focus on positive sides can be witnessed here as well.

The area of conflict between fertile home and extinguishing catastrophe is dissolved in Cape Verdean music. This occurs through the emphasis of positive aspects and the normalisation of

the risk. It also showcases the resilience of the population: the lyrics express, that they can accept their living conditions for what they are and handle them well.

### **Music as *Lieu de Mémoire***

The music about the volcano is characterized by a certain way of expressing the experiences with the volcano. This way of expression, which is a non-tangible material object and the used lyrics and instruments, make up the material dimension of a *lieu de mémoire*. It also is a form of processing past events and remembering them. The great meaning music in general has for the people is proven in its popularity and the fact, that almost every Cape Verdean can play an instrument. Therefore the functional dimension is fulfilled. The symbolic dimension is evident in the writing of songs during and after the eruption to express the thoughts and feelings connected the events and to preserve them for the future. This means, the Cape Verdean music about the volcano can be perceived as a *lieu de mémoire*.

### **Conclusion**

Contrary to the outwardly perceived area of conflict between the risks and benefits of living with Pico do Fogo, it doesn't exist for the interviewed persons. Their form of coping with the volcano-related experiences is presented in music. In addition to that, it has the function of processing experiences and transmitting knowledge. Since Cape Verdean music serves as preservation and transmission of music, it is a medium of collective memory and fulfills the criterias of a *lieu de mémoire*.

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