

## Martine Blanchard. *Celles qui partent pour une terre lointaine; Récits de femmes capverdiennes migrantes en France, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2017.*

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If migration is a Cape Verdean “philosophy”, a way of life and a distinctive cultural marker of a creole nation, then the stories of migrants testify to the challenges, opportunities and perilous ups and downs. These stories have been presented in different forms, as in poems, essays, memoirs, biographical novels, anthropological life histories and documentaries. Readers cannot help being nostalgic and sentimental, they will empathise with the migrants:

*Beaucoup de Français aussi se considèrent différents de nous: il m'est arrivé d'avoir des patrons qui me donnaient pour les repas des assiettes e des couverts en plastique. Ce n'était pas par peur que je les casse, puisque je lavais leur vaisselle en porcelaine! C'était par racisme! (134)*

In this instance, it is as if we heard the voices and saw the faces of the Cape Verdean migrants who, in their individual ways, live and sustain a transnational diasporic dream. They assume, nevertheless, multiple belongings: “*Dans ma vie, dans mon cœur, dans ma tête, je suis profondément Capverdienne et je suis profondément Française et je suis profondément Européenne*” (251). Readers who are new to this Atlantic archipelago in the Sahel region, which is a “*culture mi-européenne, mi-africaine*” (225), may hold the opinion that its inhabitants are narrow-minded and that their imagination and notions of the world are limited by geography, climate and other circumstances. *Celles qui partent pour une terre lointaine: Récits de femmes capverdiennes migrantes en France* will prove them wrong. Written by Martine Blanchard, an experienced French language professional who chose to sojourn in Cape Verde for a long decade, from 1980 to 1990, the book consists of the stories of eight courageous Cape Verdean women, told in French and in their own words.

From an academic point of view, Blanchard’s approach is rather peculiar yet inspiring.

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Ethnologists and anthropologists will find her methods familiar. For starters, she met her informants in Cape Verdean associations in the Paris Region from the late nineties onwards – i.e., some years after she left the archipelago and just as she returned to France – and took advantage of celebrations and feasts to befriend Cape Verdeans. They all share some characteristics: they were born in Cape Verde and passed their childhood on the islands, the majority in rural Santiago; and they emigrated alone with little help for different purposes. Humbly admitting her imperfect command of *Kabuverdianu*, or Cape Verdean Creole, Blanchard explains her choice to record the life histories in French, with minimal language correction afterwards (15-21). Her objective and that of the interviewed women coincide, and that was to record several personal journeys through life for the benefit of the women's family and children, younger generations of Cape Verdeans, and readers like us. One of them explains:

*Je t'ai proposé d'écrire mon histoire parce que j'ai aimé ton projet de raconter la vie de femmes capverdiennes immigrées en France. Et c'est aussi parce que je souhaite laisser des traces à mes enfants de mon parcours qui n'est pas classique. (116)*

The author is very stringent with the accuracy of the information she transmits, recording, sharing and confirming with the participants in multiple sessions. Her reliance on their cooperation is total and her trust in their words is firm. The life histories concern migration and memories of Cape Verde in childhood days. About the Portuguese wintry weather, one recalls a fun discovery:

*En hiver, il faisait froid. Pour moi qui venais du Cap-Vert, il faisait très très froid. Un jour, je me souviens, j'étais devant la porte et j'ai vu des grains blancs tomber par terre. J'ai dit à ma sœur: « Regarde, la voisine est en train de jeter du riz par la fenêtre! » [...] En fait, c'étaient des grêlons! (38)*

Then, those from the humanities and arts school may appreciate *Celles qui partent pour une terre lointaine* just as much, for the stories are surprisingly sweet and lyrical. If they analyse Blanchard's book taking it as a memoir-styled novel with eight heroines, they will admire the complexity and density of the almost adventurous and mesmerising experiences verbalised in dramaturgical tones and expressions. Going by boat to Dakar, Senegal, one exclaims:

*La traversée a duré six jours. Oh là là! Six jours en mer! Un martyre! Je croyais que j'allais mourir parce que j'avais le mal de mer! Je n'avais jamais pris le bateau même pour aller dans mon île natale de Santo Antão! [...] Je pensais: je vais mourir, comme cela, ce sera fini! Je ne supportais plus le martyre de la mer! (25)*

In the book we find more many adventurous episodes related by Cape Verdean women who reflect on their migration experiences.

Besides the above merits, Blanchard's work is a worthy read content-wise. It is the fruit of a foreigner's gaze; of her prolonged exposure to the people and culture in question; and of her professional, pedagogical and critical perspective on subjects of migration, women's

welfare, ethnic and racial relations, public policies, work opportunities and world mobility. It is a precious example of high-quality writing that gives pivotal importance to how Cape Verdean migrants live among and interact with locals and other migrants from different origins, especially the Caribbean, Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa. While some readers are already familiar with Cape Verdeans and their stories in the United States and Europe, it is rare to learn about how Cape Verdeans negotiate their connection with the African continent and position in a black and white world. *Celles qui partent pour une terre lointaine* demonstrates that Cape Verdean women – contrary to the traditionalist and conservative personae that are often projected on them – navigate the Global South and the Global North with an open mind. Take the following example:

*Je garde le souvenir de beaucoup de convivialité et de plaisir de vivre ensemble! [...] Il y avait des Arabes, des Noirs mais aussi des Français. [...] Ma meilleure copine, Hafida, était Marocaine, j'avais aussi une très bonne copine qui était Portugaise, une autre super copine, Caroline, qui était Italienne, une meilleure copine, Laurence, qui était Française, Sonia, elle était Antillaise. (248)*

Not all episodes are glorious, but every test in life strengthens the test-taker. There are numerous references to the genuinely multicultural composition of the community, friend and professional circles as well as immediate family. Having studied medicine in Algeria, one woman recalls, “*Nous avons donc commencé à parler le français avec les Africaines... habillées en Africaines... par les Africaines!*” (78). Furthermore, the women incorporate their experiential gains in the food they cook and the way they run the family and treat their children. There are also fundamental changes to their attitude and frame of mind more generally.

The only caution for readers is perhaps that the participants volunteer to take part in Blanchard's project and are active members of migrant associations in the Paris Region. They cannot, therefore, speak for and represent all Cape Verdean women. For instance, they tend to be more eloquent and, in a few cases, relatively well-educated; they have travelled more, worked for longer and are financially stable; and they have had multiple relationships and their children are mostly grown adults. Even so, *Celles qui partent pour une terre lointaine* is a valuable addition to the current corpus of knowledge on Cape Verde. It testifies to the ferocious hope and optimism of Cape Verdean migrant women. It is a courageous ode to Cape Verde, their country of origin and eternal, loving home. Blanchard's work is amphibiously situated between humanities and arts on the one hand and social sciences on the other. It will also be highly relevant for those interested in migration, gender or global studies.