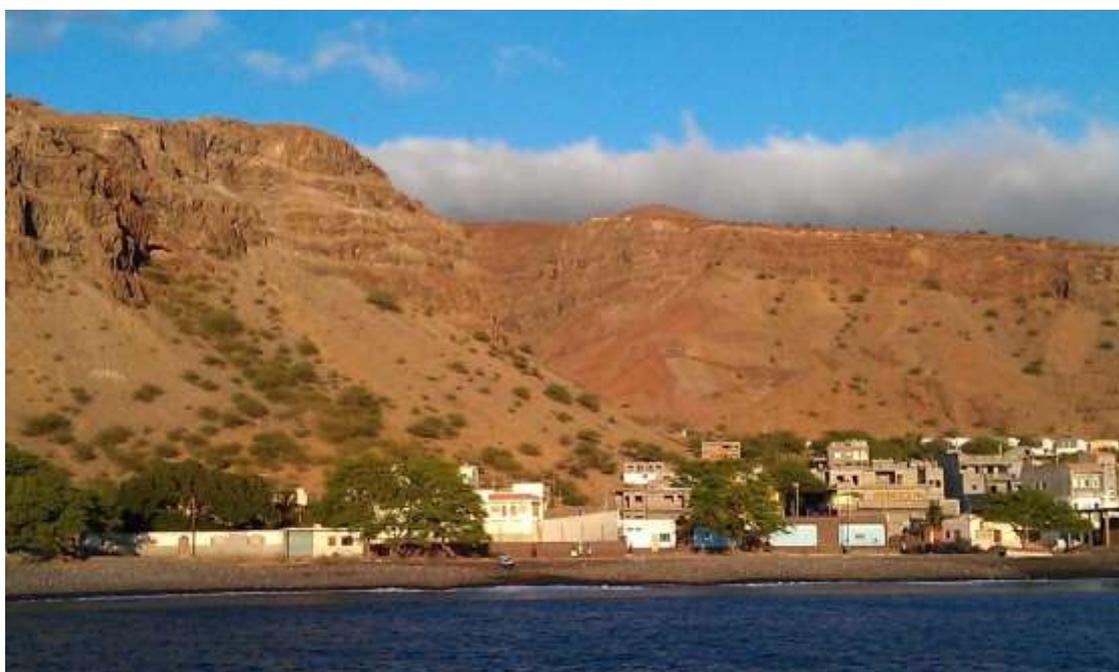


« Live for the future – Long for the past », as seen tagged on a wall in Hillsborough, capital of Carriacou Island on the border of the Caribbean Sea.

Back to the future, as it has been a month and a half since we left Cabo Verde, a month since we started exploring the West Indies. Most of the ancestors of people living nowadays in the Antilles came through the islands of Cabo Verde, which were used as a depot and cropping zone as only the strongest, the healthiest and the more docile could survive the awaiting before crossing.

Out of the ten islands of the archipelago, we visited four of the Barlaventos group (leeward). We deliberately left the southern ones famous for active volcanism which makes them unfit for anchoring. Each one has its own personality.

L'Ilha do Sal, rock, sand and salt is cut in half: the south is dedicated to tourism, a recent airport welcomes tourists out of low cost flights and sends them to get sunburnt on the beach. The north is the "No stress" part. Palmeira is a large anchorage, the only one well protected and as always in this kind of environment, cruisers go along fishing boats and cargos; being a Saturday, the authorities are in no hurry to do the stamping, providing the opportunity to go to Espargos capital of the island, where fish bought right at the docking of boats are sold in large dish pans at crossroads.



Tarrafal anchorage on the island of Sao Nicolau sheltered us for a few days. This mountainous island is humid. Despite being rich by its fruits, vegetables and sugar canes it stayed out of any economic development. In the 19th century, it became the center of the intellectual and spiritual influence of the archipelago. The Cabo Verde seminary was settled in Ribeira Brava the main city of the island, in the house of the Governor's son back from his studies in Europe. The school attached to the seminary educated many island inhabitants which later became civil servants or priests in Portugal. This small town became the initiator of the evangelization campaign in West Africa by Portugal. The seminary was closed when Church and State were separate by the new Democratic Republic of Portugal at the beginning of the 20th century. The building was converted in a reception center for political refugees and the bishop flew to Sao Vicente.



We were ignorant of these facts but we succeeded in our mission through the religious community of the island. In exchange of services, a friend and doctor entrusted us 4 box of medicine to give where they were the most needed. They contained day to day medicine and a few “atomic bombs” more difficult to find.

At this occasion, we get acquainted with the status of out of date medicine. Well nothing to be proud of:

- all medicine has a best before date, which doesn't stand for the age of the molecules, but is related to a stock rotation logic,
- pharmacists or laboratories refuse to engage any discussion about the molecules stability beyond this date – it is clear that some of them become inefficient (like antibiotics), some remain stable (like of morphine sulphate), as others degrade (like beta blockers)- this information is simply unavailable,
- out of date medicine (in Europe) should be destroyed, no question of sorting them and send them where it is the most needed under the strong argument : if anything goes wrong laboratories cannot take the blame (understand, it is necessary to maintain high profit in poor countries)
- The consequence is that one after the other associations previously engaged in delivering much needed medicine quitted under menace of trials, etc...

The mission: to do our best to deliver four precious boxes of medicine beyond the Atlantic Ocean.

We acted with the caution of two beavers: our first approaches raised a genuine interest in many individuals, some looking reliable, others not so, all kindly assuring to play as go between... More disturbing, we get the information that doctors and/or nurses and/or druggists may be indelicate ("they are going to sell them").

In the sleepy town of Tarrafal, the need is obvious without the corruption associated to big towns. Finally we decide to go to the priest, thinking that he may be interested in the process but that we could credit him with some moral sense. Head to church: Please come back "mas tarde". Half past midday, he is having lunch in the presbytery with, as we understood later, the church warden, his half-retired predecessor, and an Italian parishioner. All this bunch start discussing using a strange language, a mix of Creoulo, Portuguese, Spanish, French and poor English. The interest is obvious, we are happy one cannot steal the boxes without the others seeing him. Finally they agree to take it all saying they will manage giving the simplest stuff directly to sick people and the rest to religious nurses which have a dispensary. That would be better if no one sees us crossing the entire town with our boxes, we got an appointment for tomorrow 9 am with the church warden. He will get us with his car by the beach and will do the over ground transportation. All went as expected, local kids affected to the keeping of tenders left on the beach could not believe their eyes, seeing two "arrivado" putting boxes out of a cruiser on the back of an immaculate 4WD helped by notorious people, etc..., well we had a good laugh.



We had spent a large time sorting all that was in the boxes in order to isolate the hard stuff (morphinics, cortisone, etc...) and make it easily identified. We left clear instructions to the Padre (and well understood) not to play with this specific pack without medical advice. Taking the time to have coffee with the church warden and retired priest, white goatee and half-blood, we discover the organization of the order of Capuchins in Cabo Verde, what one and another do... and bye-bye....



What have in common, Somalia, Eritrea, Soudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Senegal, Mauritania and Cabo Verde? All these African countries are located on the 15th parallel, the trans-Saharan route of caravans since biblical times and the new way of the Cocaine traffic from South America to Europe.

What have in common Ghana and Cabo Verde? These two countries are economic success stories of the African continent with a high level of alphabetization, high GDP per capita and satisfying health indicators, but deeply lost in the corruption due to drug trafficking at the same time.

Europe is the second largest cocaine market in the world with 36 billion USD a year, right behind the USA with 40 billion a year. Since the beginning of 2000, the US market decreases as repression towards Mexico is hardening. The European market is then developed, taking advantage of the road across Venezuela and the "open" status of the French and Dutch West Indies-illustrated through the rising crime rate starting in the middle of the 2000 years. Same causes producing the same effects, Europe began setting ways to fight the traffic through the West Indies in order to limit it. Nowadays, the road goes through West Africa, where part of the money is laundered (making all these new economies to flourish), and then transit through the Sahara desert to North Morocco and South of Spain... done deal. The European Community not wanting to appear defeated thinks of giving to Cabo Verde a special status of EU member- once again an outpost.



Mindelo, capital of the island of Sao Vicente had been described to us, as easy to live with notes of Saudade made popular by Cesaria Evora escaping from bars along with the smell of ganja. It is not what we found. True, rastas do not watch for customers anymore and a gorgeous fish market still exists but the town seems to have lost its soul: dope is not far, tiny pupils, tension, vigils and barriers around the harbor zone, beyond, a virtual frontier not to cross, in some deserted bays, a high speed motor boat come to explain that this a new marine reserve and that you are not supposed to stay overnight or the elder son remains discreet on the financing of his new 4WD.



At last, the island of San Antao right in front of Mindelo, a rock fortress lost in the clouds, unreachable. The easiest way to go visiting is to take the ferry (when it is not out of order or under repair, in that case you take a fishing boat where any passenger is free to check the number of lifesaving jackets related to the number of passengers) and to cross the channel like a crab in approximately one hour.

Germany gave subventions to Sao Vicente, France to Sao Nicolau and Luxembourg to Santo Antao. The ferry docks at Porto Novo all new concrete (even escalators – one is dreaming). Higher in the mountains we find the illustration of the dilemmas that ONG might encounter (remember how the aid granted to Haiti can be unproductive if delivered by a UN soldier infected with cholera). In 1997, in a village attached to a rock peak and surrounded by terrace agriculture, 40 minutes from Ponta do Sol, Luxembourg brings money and builds a 'sanitary center', and the traditional fountain is replaced by a building enclosing a wash house, toilets and showers... 15 years later... the village square which was then covered in concrete is empty, people meet around a new fountain with water out of the stream, pee downriver and the 'sanitary center' is disused.



The deep northeast valleys (Ribeiras) rimmed with pine trees (replanted thanks to funds from Luxembourg to compensate for deforestation but neglecting that pine needles, favor water recuperation, but because of their acidity prevent the formation of humus essential for the flora diversity), eucalyptus or mimosa are historically cultivated and inhabited. The southwest is isolated, wild, it is advise to go with caution.



At the docking of the ferry, an aluguer (taxi) leaves us at Villa das Pombas at the beginning of Ribeira do Paul, that we walk up to the village of Manuel dos Santos right under the crater of “Cova Paul”.

The day after, a drop of more 500 meters to climb on a mule cobblestone track built by slaves generations -under first jews/portuguese colonists orders (sacked from Europe during Inquisition), then solo Portuguese when the profitability of slave traffic became obvious- among sugar canes, pawpaw trees, mango trees, coffee trees, beans, squash or cress.

At bends in path which goes round in circles, climb along the cliff, some old beaming ladies propose a glass of “grogue”, the main production and drunk almost totally on the island, then a grandfather tells us that he used to work in the port of Rotterdam and that this spring he goes to New York to see his daughter. Now we know who are these travelers, so different from shabby tourists or business men in a hurry: visitors.

Statistics disagree but the expat community of Cabo Verde is more numerous than the archipelago population, the main welcoming country being the USA. The money sent to the country (remittance) represents 20 % of the GNP.



The path goes up, up, cross clouds and suddenly leads into the crater : sun, calm, green, cows whose bells tinkle, we could think we are in high mountain pastures. The altitude is higher than 1 400 meters. We are out of time.



The stroll around the crater is about 3 km long, at the end; there is nothing, or void falling into the Ribeira del Torre, the next valley. The descent on the North east side is breathtaking through clouds and incredible landscapes. We notice the small village of Rasa Curto (few houses on a ridge), Torre rock, the valley going down to Xoxo (to pronounce Chu Chu) then slowly snaking to the sea where lies the main town of the island Ribeira Grande.



A few kilometers west, lies the seaside resort of Ponta di Sol with crumbling desolate concrete hotel structures and its disused airport. All development stopped, the only activities are fishing or few tourists restaurants. The sea is so harsh that on each fishing boat a man is dedicated to watching the sea to say when they can get over the wave at the entrance of the port. Then women sell the fish at a fixed price, each with her specialty (grouper, tuna, jack), profits (including selling plastic bags) are put in common. Out of town, we glimpse another illustration of this community economy : pigs stocking (community pigsty in the global infrastructure but individual speaking of containment stalls).



Because of its black cliffs the island of Santo Antao is a true fortress inward looking, closed to the sea. Its inhabitants are landlubbers and sedentary. They seem to live confined in their village without television, without internet and without mobile phone (which is utterly different in West Africa) and very rarely moving. Few people walk the narrow roads, so different from what we saw in Ethiopia, a country of pilgrims and nomads which gave birth to numerous marathon runners. The route of Corda which crosses the island from north to south and goes along the Delgadim track is deserted to the profit of the new tarmac road larger and going along the coast, which increases the isolation of high villages.



The only way of development promoted by politics and locals is tourism. Surprisingly, investments by foreign firms or local implications look very low. The lack of reality is obvious, as if one seek to generate a speculative bubble at the end of the world. All prices are disconnected from the local incomes and still high for tourists, from a pound of tomato to a plot of land, a fish dish or a taxi ride, as if one would like to create two economic levels without any proper offer before tourists become too numerous.

Mindelo, December the 12th, 12 o clock, sailors walk the pontoon, and talk the talk, round conversations, unusual weather forecasts, auspicious circumstances, etc ? To Go or Not To Go ? For us, it will be simply let's go to Bago ☺. You know how it went.

Best wishes, Sanity and Sobriety

Stéphanie / Christophe

Bequia – Saint Vincent et les Grenadines

30 Janvier 2014

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