



ISSN 2336-3274 (Print) ISSN 2570-7558 (Online)

<https://edu.uhk.cz/africa>

## Road Crashes Involving Hiace Vans in Cape Verde

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### Recommended citation:

Horta, G. (2017). Road Crashes Involving Hiace Vans in Cape Verde. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 5(1), 83–107. Retrieved from <https://edu.uhk.cz/africa/index.php/ModAfr/article/view/172>



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## ROAD CRASHES INVOLVING HIACE VANS IN CAPE VERDE

**Gerard Horta**

**Abstract:** Based on ethnographic research carried out on the islands of Santiago and São Vicente in the fall months of 2009, 2010, 2011, 2014 and 2015, this article analyzes the social universe of interurban collective transport in Cape Verde. Its focus is the Toyota Hiace van, employed on certain islands of the archipelago since the mid-1980s, and it approaches the multi-causality of road crashes involving these vehicles through participatory observation made while inside them, in addition to conversations and interviews with passengers, former passengers, driver-bosses and salaried van drivers, passengers, police officers and state transport employees, senior officials and so on. Thus, it studies the antagonistic experiences brought on by the use of space by motor vehicle drivers, their passengers and pedestrians themselves. The different explanations for the causes of road crashes fit into the framework of urban transformation processes at work on the island, mobility and social dimensions of all kinds: van drivers' working conditions; pavement condition, road signage and lighting; the planning of van operation by the public administration; the driving supervision by police officers on the roads (or lack thereof), the van's technical conditions; the symbolic status of drivers; road culture and motorized driving culture in Cape Verde, etc. In short, all these factors interrelate through the daily experience of van travel by Cape Verdeans.

**Key words:** *Cape Verde, Road Crashes, Interurban Transport, Urban Planning, Motorization*

### **Vehicle traffic, interurban transport and spatial experiences**

The large number of factors causing van crashes on Cape Verde roads shows the merging of different social processes and the very heterogeneous experiences of streets and roads (see an earlier

introductory outline in Horta 2013; and the ethnography by Horta and Malet 2014). Over and above the public standardizations of vehicle traffic, the uses and daily appropriations of space by drivers of all types of vehicles and even pedestrians tend to be antagonistic. To understand the causes of road crashes we must bear in mind the diverse social dimensions that will be referred to in this article: a) first of all, we must stress the distinct ways in which space users are represented and their patrimonial appropriation of streets and roads (drivers, passers-by, peddlers, children, etc. conceive space differently); b) the relationship between road crashes and the Hiace ownership system; c) the absence of trade unions and civic associations to defend the interests of van workers and their passengers; d) the lack of a public collective transport organization that truly acts within the many fields affecting van operation; e) the fierce competition among van drivers for passengers; f) the labor conditions van drivers are subjected to (and the relationship between working conditions and alcoholism or drug addiction); g) the most wide-ranging technical issues (pavement type; lack of signage and lighting; the role of the highway patrol; the role of speed bumps; the shift in the center of gravity of vehicles when overloaded with passengers or goods, etc.); f) social risk perception as regards “good” and “bad” driving; and, finally, g) cultural and symbolic van construction.

In Europe and North America, as in Africa, the state bodies adopt various types of measures to deal with road crashes, with significantly varying degrees. The analyses carried out in Africa with respect to accidents and the benefits of road education are from western perspectives. These perspectives have been summarized by Buxó (2010: 330–336) who distinguishes among technological measures (improvement in road infrastructures and signage), regulatory ones (laws being rewritten to address road traffic transformations) and punitive ones (the penalty-points driving license, fines for not wearing seat belts, etc.), as well as awareness campaigns run by public bodies and global agencies, (to which one must add the car industry’s efforts to improve the safety devices of the vehicles. This Catalan anthropologist suggests promoting road culture in public space, and cites the example of going through a red light, which, far from being a simple infraction, goes against the meaning of democracy. As we see it, the debate sparked by this viewpoint reflects the same discussion taking place in urban anthropology with respect to the concept of

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public space as an absolute ideal, yet is too far removed from the conflictive dimensions of any hierarchical society.

Buxó sums up the leading causes of accidents with casualties by referring basically to distraction, driver inexperience, alcohol and drug consumption, fatigue and drowsiness, speeding, rule violations, illegal maneuvers, invading the left lane, and road conditions. True, her study stems from the analysis of European and North American contexts. If we limit ourselves to Cape Verde, we can consider what occurs with the broad spectrum of social determinants triggering each factor. By this I mean the precarious nature of the van drivers' employment; apathy by the public administration to road maintenance by both the State and foreign companies; the high level of competitiveness among drivers in a context of poverty, and the lack of passengers... Now then, can "civic learning" succeed in a social framework where most van drivers withstand a situation of exploitation that gives rise to all types of anomic driving styles? To paraphrase Davis (1993), how can we strike a balance between the safety of some (motor vehicle drivers and passengers) and their potential for endangering others (those on foot)?

We then look at what we believe to be the most relevant factors of traffic accidents on the island of Santiago involving vans, known there generically as *Hiaces*. And let's keep in mind one detail: Josep Coll, a United Nations employee in Cape Verde, told me in Praia, the capital city (10/12/2011), that workers on this island have no insurance coverage at all should they travel by Hiace.

### **Multi-causality of road crashes involving vans**

Classifications of injuries and deaths tend to lump motor vehicle injuries into the "accident" category. Here we take the causes of these accidents to be material or circumstantial factors –in other words, social ones– which increase the possibility of that phenomenon taking place (Tapia 1998: 138, based on what Hill established in 1965). If we compare motor vehicle mortality rates, these are far more staggering in African societies than in their industrialized Western counterparts. Statistically speaking, road crashes on this planet kill over 1,200,000 people annually: 250,000 in 1980; 900,000 in 1990. In April, 2011,

the WHO estimated the number of deaths prompted by road crashes in Cape Verde in 2010 to be 79 persons –3.71% of the annual deaths– and the tenth cause of death, ranking 69th worldwide. According to data from the WHO itself (2009), that year there were 267 road crash fatalities per 100,000 motor vehicles in Cape Verde, 7,900 deaths in Rwanda; 7,100 in Mauritania; 3,528.6 in Uganda; 1,239.3 in Sudan; 1,041.9 in Nigeria; 957 in Angola; 580.6 in Mozambique; 398.6 in Morocco; 262.4 in Namibia; 233 in Ghana; 208 in South Africa; 188.4 in Egypt; 15 in Portugal and in the USA; 10 in Spain; 7 in the United Kingdom; and, in other island territories, 1,092.3 in Papua New Guinea; 606.1 in the Philippines; 312.2 in Samoa; 226.3 in Cuba; 221.3 in Sri Lanka; 210.4 in Indonesia; 176.8 in the Bahamas; 106.9 in the Seychelles; 65.4 in Jamaica; 64.9 in Barbados; 23.6 in Cyprus; 11 in New Zealand; 6.8 in Japan; 5 in Iceland; and 4.6 in Malta.

Compared to other Portuguese-speaking areas –where *Hiace* use is customary in interurban collective transport– and to other island contexts, it seems that the Cape Verde data are not the most alarming. Nonetheless, we could also discuss the reasons for these accidents and, hence, the extent to which many could be avoided. Decades ago, Smeed (1974), followed by scholars such as Adams (1985), related the percentage of road crashes to the greater or lesser degree of motorization. Indeed, if the morality rate per vehicle for Rwanda or Mauritania were the same in the USA or the United Kingdom, then millions of people would die there every year.

Moreover, when analyzing the reasons for the road crash rate, we are not helped in the slightest by its “medicalization” –which is to say, the social phenomenon of road crashes being understood as an illness, plague, epidemic, trauma, pathology, anxiety or pandemic. The quantitative epidemiological literature on road crashes is as far removed from our approach as it is futile in terms of prevention: indeed the list would be unending. The scant epidemiological contribution to awareness of the relationships between a specific society and its way of tackling urban renewal, motorization and road crashes is compensated by certain studies with greater heuristic openness. See, for example, the analyses by Verrips and Meyer (2001), Mutongi (2006), Gewalt, Luning and Walraven (2009), Klaeger (2009, 2012 and 2013), Kalikiti (2010) or Lamont (2010, 2012 and 2013). See also Horta and Malet

(2014) for a territorialized compilation of the studies on a driving culture, vehicle motorization, road crashes and roads in Africa.

From a qualitative standpoint, Ramos (2011: 9) asks whether pathologies associated with road trauma are on a par with those produced by war trauma, and proves the different ways in which they are injected into processes of human subjectification. What's more, Melnick (2010), like so many other investigators, alerts us to the World Health Organization and the World Bank's growing interest in road crashes in "developing" countries. Lamont (2010: 4; and 2013) sees a worrying process of medicalization in this attention – "epidemic on wheels", "disease of development" – which really distracts us from causalities linked to material want and inequality. It also means that Africa is still viewed as a sickly, endangered continent which must be rescued –yet again– by the healing and rationalizing virtues of western (colonial) powers. In contrast with the latter, Harvey and Knox's ethnographies (2011) on road construction in Peru, and Dalakoglou's (2010) on the border between Albania and Greece, analyze the interpenetration of socio-cultural "modes" or "codes" for preventing road crashes.

According to the *Direção-Geral de Transportes Rodoviários* (Directorate-General of Road Transport), lawsuits involving road crashes in Cape Verde in which Hiaces are recognized to be at fault show the following figures throughout the archipelago. For the period of 2006–2011: 56 (2006), 52 (2007), 68 (2008), 52 (2009), 34 (2010) and 24 (2011). Of these 286 cases, 18 occurred on the Barlavento (northern) islands and 268 on the Sotavento (southern) islands. The total cost came to 30,423,583 escudos. According to data from the very DGTR, Hiaces were damaged in 389 accidents in the 2005–2011 period.

The more or less recurring modes of accidents involving Hiaces in recent years are as follows: a little boy struck by a Hiace coming from Txada São Filipe at top speed, resulting in the fracturing of both his legs (A Semana 2011); a young bicyclist fatally hit one Sunday night –pedestrians and drivers alike consume more alcohol on weekends (A Semana 2010); two persons injured after a head-on collision between a Hiace and a motorcycle when the Hiace abruptly U-turned right in the middle of the road (Notícias do Norte 2011); one dead and two seriously injured after the vehicle toppled 20 meters down

a ravine (Notícias do Norte 2011a); a little girl killed while crossing the road at a curve (A Semana 2011a); a little boy struck after a collision between a Hiace and a taxi (A Semana 2011); the hit-and-run death of a 50-year-old man at the Somada turnoff towards São Miguel, at 10 p.m., although the driver was apprehended the next day in Cadjeta (Inforpress 2011); 13 injured –three seriously– when the Hiace overturned at a curve, supposedly owing to mechanical failure (A Semana 2012b); one seriously injured and 15 only slightly in a crash between a Hiace and a taxi (A Semana 2012); a passenger injured after the vehicle overturned and veered off the road (Notícias do Norte 2012); one little girl fatally hit while crossing the street in Tchon Bon –then dragged 30 meters by the speeding Hiace – and another killed in Picos, when the Hiace driver darted backwards without warning (A Semana 2012c); a passenger seriously injured after a Hiace crash (Inforpress 2012); a man knocked down one Saturday night when crossing the road in Cruz Grande –between Txada Lém and Somada– with the impact hurtling the body more than seven yards (A Semana 2012d); a late-night head-on collision between a motorcycle, whose driver died and passenger was seriously injured, and a Hiace, whose driver and the woman accompanying him were slightly hurt; in fact that same weekend four more drivers were taken to court for road traffic violations: two for drunk driving, another for assaulting a police agent and finally yet another for running a person over (A Semana 2012e); the running over of a 38-year-old woman in Santa Catarina who was crossing the road (A Semana 2012f); the deadly hitting of a 71-year-old man –on February 21, 2009, with the trial being delayed three years –, due to a blowout according to the driver, yet to the Hiace’s high speed according to the plaintiff (A Semana 2012g); a 41-year-old man fatally struck in Txada Tenda at dusk, when the driver accelerated while performing parking maneuvers, running over the pedestrian opposite him; a Hiace careening into a man in Tchon Bon (A Semana 2012h) –six months later, the guilty driver was sentenced to two years and six months of prison and ordered to pay 500,000 escudos (\$5,000) to the victim’s family (A Semana 2013); eleven injured –with varying degrees of seriousness– when a parked Hiace’s brakes failed, while the driver was fixing a battery problem, causing it to fall down a ravine (Cabo Verde Directo 2013). This selection of news items summarizes the predominant typology of van crashes. We can confirm an elevated rate of pedestrians struck down, many of whom

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were children. Ultimately, walking along the roads poses a daily risk to all of them (for a panoramic study of this terrain, see Tapia (1998); for an analysis of spatially segregating drivers from pedestrians, see Buxó (2006: 50–51). Moreover, it has been seen that a serious van accident is usually a matter of the greater the passenger load, the deadlier the consequences. The majority of van drivers in accidents were young, some without a license and many of them under the influence of alcohol –especially during working hours and on weekend nights. Bicyclists are another type of victim (although there are very few on Cape Verde roads), as are motorcyclists and naturally the van passengers themselves. There are times when van technical failures triggered by problems with the brake system are blamed. Nonetheless, overturned vehicles –and head-on collisions– tend to be the result of bad driving, pure and simple.

Trials and driver convictions have been on a gradual upswing in Cape Verde: what in the past was apt to conclude now and then, if at all, with mere court declarations, over time has drawn more severe punishment by the legal authorities, who, should they discover the accused to be driving without a license, are more inclined to hand down prison sentences.

If vans are involved in the vast majority of accidents on the roads of Santiago –where many more vans than automobiles travel–, in urban contexts the proportion is more even. A study has established that 98% of traffic accidents in Praia involve vans and taxis (A Semana 2012a). And yet it never ceases to amaze how scant the media coverage of van crashes is in relation to their empiric involvement.

What’s more, although accidents and incidents of varying degrees of seriousness take place every day –Lamont (2012) terms this process “*industrial catastrophe*” in his study on Kenya–, rarely is there any media follow-up. Safety campaigns are very sporadic, limited, for example, to van supervision during major celebrations, whether local or highly traditional –such as Christmas and New Year’s–, or on summer weekends, especially in order to administer the breathalyzer test (Expresso das Ilhas 2012; 2012a). In the first two weeks of November, 2013, the DGTR and the National Police announced an increase in the oversight of illegal transport of people in pickup trucks –Toyota Hiluxes– owing to recent crashes, with fatal victims included.



As for the DGTR, in late 2013 its director-general João José de Pina assured that in the immediate future the police would be very strict with regard to failure to comply with established traffic regulations, planting responsibility on Hilux drivers –and the very culture of Cape Verdean people–, who, he claimed, were fully aware of the risk to which they were subjecting so many. Pina referred to accidents prompted by the Hilux as “*a devastating evil on our roads*”, and recalled the Cape Verde government’s goal to reduce the road crash rate by 50% until 2020. In the same month of November, 2013 the government decreed the annual commemoration, every November 30, of “*Dia da Segurança Rodoviária*” (Road Vehicle Safety Day) with the aim of making drivers, pedestrians and users –which is to say passengers– aware of the dangers lurking on the roads (A Semana 2013b).

Some days later –11/18/2013– the WHO’s Cape Verde office issued a press release reporting on the “*Marcha em memória às vítimas dos acidentes rodoviários*” (March in Memory of Vehicle Accident Victims) held hours before in Praia. The silent march (yet not entirely: in the midst of it journalists questioned Pina as director of the DGTR) was organized by the *Ministério da Administração Interna* and the DGTR as a tribute to road crash victims and to promote worldwide road safety (traffic accidents are the world’s leading cause of death among young people of 15 to 29 years of age, and provoke millions of injuries every year, something that “overloads” public health services). Behind Pina were representatives of the police, driving schools, the *Ministerio da Educação*, civil defense services, the WHO, etc., with the presence of elementary school teachers and pupils. The march concluded at a sports arena with a simulation of first aid services to an accident victim by a Civil Defense officer –surrounded by four people– while hundreds of students watched the exercise. Those heading the march carried a banner which invoked: “*Mortes na estrada. Vamos travar este drama! Dia Mundial em memória das vítimas da violência no trânsito*” (“Road deaths. Let’s stop this drama. International Day in memory of victims of traffic violence”). For his part, José Gonçalves, an expert on prevention and road education –and owner of a driving school– raised the awareness of his students, who were entrusted with conveying the aims of the event to parents, family members and friends: to console surviving victims and the families of the dead, and to call on youths, particularly drivers, to modify their traffic behavior.

On the other hand, the scope of treatment of victims of accidents, their hospitalization, rehabilitation, labour and social reintegration, and the role of the courts has been developed in Horta and Malet (2014: 216–23). We interviewed victims, a Supreme Court worker, members of Cape Verde’s two largest insurance companies, and hiace drivers. Unfortunately, the conclusions are demoralizing: beyond the hospital emergency, the abandonment of the victims by the State is obvious. The victims do not have the possibility of counting in the medium and long term with public aid, and even less with the private one. Their battle after the accident consists in overcoming, individually and collectively, the misfortune experienced. The dispersion of survivors prevents collective judicial proceedings. In addition, the situation of extreme economic precariousness of the majority of the victims and of disinformation explains that no judicial proceedings are taken.

### **Reasons for road crashes involving vans**

In addition to speeding, passenger overload and drunk driving, there are other reasons for van accidents which we will now address. The order is unrelated to their degree of importance, given the synchronic superposition of factors that prompt road crashes on Cape Verde roads.

The first, one of the leading causes of van crashes, and almost systematically overlooked in all types of road crash studies, is the fierce competition among van drivers –particularly non-owners– in the area from Somada to Praia. The high seasonal instability of this line of work means that one van will have several drivers, and this creates chronic uncertainty and stress for them. It is compounded by precarious wage and working conditions: the general pattern does not cover driver sick leave (something which depends on each individual boss’s decision) or vacations (should they even enter the picture), and the workdays are very intense. All this raises the pressing need to make as many trips as possible, thus accounting for the breakneck speed of many vans and the driving risks taken along sometimes deficient road infrastructures.

Far fewer accidents take place in the areas areas of Cadjeta in the northeast of Santiago and Tarrafal in the north. This is because in those parts of the island van drivers usually own their vehicles and drive much more responsibly, free from the van bosses’ endless

pressure on their salaried drivers. Most accidents accumulate on the outskirts of Praia, where there is high vehicle transit and the drivers are salaried employees with poor labor conditions. In the area between Praia (in the south of the island) and Somada (in the center), there is staggering competition among drivers to obtain passengers and reach the destination quickly so as to embark on a new journey as soon as possible in order to satisfy the urge to earn, since they must pay the van bosses a pre-established amount of the daily profits. In a nutshell, the types of vehicle ownership and their link with working conditions clearly affect the way driving is undertaken.

Pavement conditions provide a second reason: many roads are made of cobblestones, following the Portuguese colonial model imposed on Cape Verdeans for 400 years. Despite the everyday presence of working men and woman walking along the shoulders, the roads are in poor condition in certain areas, especially in the mountains, where fallen rocks caused by irregular rainfall on this island have to be removed. Furthermore, the physical geography characteristic of a volcanic island like Santiago, with uneven terrain and numerous precipices, intensifies this propensity for accidents. Historically speaking, the abysmal pavement quality has led to countless situations in which, in an effort to avoid a bump, drivers invade the other lane, thus causing the worst accidents –head-on collisions– time and time again. Even though from 2009 to 2013 the main routes of Santiago were asphalted –not so on islands like Santo Antão (A Semana 2013a)–, how can one deny the dismal paradox that the higher pavement quality enables drivers to go faster yet, thus reaping an even more deadly crop of accidents)? The asphalted pavement of the main arteries thus appears to be a paradoxical incentive for greater speed as a risk factor.

A third aspect, linked to the second, is the lack of signage on the old roads: not only in the marking of continuous or broken lines on the surface, but also in the shortage of regulation signals, including traffic lights in populated centers and above all at access points. We have already referred to the issue of lack of maintenance of the scant signals –there are only two traffic lights in Tarrafal, a town of 10,000 inhabitants, which forces anyone wishing to get their driving license to do so in Somada, where there are more. In parallel fashion, road lighting is non-existent: Delcia, a municipal architect in Tarrafal, revealed how, one night years before, her father accidentally slammed

into and killed a dark cow. It is true that in the immediate future roads are to be gradually repaved throughout the island, and that the asphalt will be marked with continuous and broken lines. Will this mean meek obedience to such a graphic expression of road standardization? Not at all. Visionary indeed was the following exemplification of automobile behavior that Lévi-Strauss (1990: 670) called for so as to question the false conviction of so many anthropologists with respect to the supposed centrality of affectivity in ritual:

Besides, all these commentators, who see the emotional aspect of ritual as being central to it, and who expatiate on the anguish created by taboos, make one think irresistibly of some anthropologist from another planet who, in his monograph on Earth-dwellers, might describe the superstitious terror which prevents motorists from crossing the symbolic limit marked simply by a line along the road, and even from infringing the taboo ever so slightly; he might also give a horrifying account of the penalty, which is collision with another vehicle... But we have no feelings of this kind; we respect the white line as part of our everyday routine without attributing any emotional value to it.

A fourth reason would be the dearth of police control along roads and in areas most worthy of the term “high risk”. In their everyday routine the police do not supervise drivers in any stringent manner, either on the roads or in the towns –except in major operations prompted by the celebration of festivals drawing people from different towns. A police officer tends to work where he lives, where he has his friends and family. And in small towns and villages almost everyone ends up being someone’s friend or family member, meaning that traffic rules are not enforced firmly enough. Senior police officers and ordinary traffic agents alike complain that they lack the sufficient technical and human means. Some drivers and passengers refer to a generalized practice by many policemen: the laxness of many agents with respect to traffic involving vehicles whose owners are themselves police officers or state officials. This has to do not only with keeping one’s license up-to-date but also passenger overload itself. However, certain van overload situations are experienced by many passengers as a show of solidarity by drivers. Passengers make special reference to vans that leave at night being the last possible vehicle available for reaching one’s destination. The absence of interurban collective public transport

makes dependence on the van absolute. In the end, the police take on the supervisory role which the population itself should play with regard to van drivers.

A fifth reason, central to road crashes, has to do with the previously mentioned fact that vans cut through countless villages, whose residents, above all boys, girls and animals –goats, dogs, chickens, pigs, even cows–, spend time on and walk along that same road which the vans cross, often at top speed. Roberto, an architect with the Câmara Municipal do Tarrafal (Municipal Chamber of Tarrafal), told us one morning in November, 2010 that he saw a car hit a cow. The residents occupy each village’s central streets, now transformed into thoroughfares, as extensions of their homes. Here one must stress the extent to which risk perception differs from one social and urban-planning context to another. As Ramos points out in reference to Addis Ababa (2010), the social evaluation of pedestrians’ rights is very low: the cognitive distance between drivers and pedestrians, in terms of spatial experience, interpretation and adaptation, is vast; and the negotiation or struggle for space, intense. See Fiori (2010) for Bamako; and Choplin (2010) and Alonso and Nucci (2011) for Nouakchott.

Bestard (1996: 11–16) highlights the crucial role played by Mary Douglas (1996 [1985]) in suggesting the inseparable link between risk perception and the social building of value judgments as a means for controlling social norms and, thus, as a category through which the ever-changing evaluations of a society are established with respect to its certainties and uncertainties. No human being is free of “cultural prejudices” and, in this regard, social representations are dynamically revealed through people’s social experiences –social situations, processes and structuralizations. Indeed such concepts come to mind as risk society, (Beck 1992) –owing to the technological changes in transport methods– and the surmounting of this very risk by their spatial, temporal and social limits (Beck 1995), exemplified in a situation as simple as the sale in Europe of a second-hand Hiace in poor condition, which would see its precarious driving life prolonged on the roads of Santiago.

Within this context, we see the curious paradox put forth by Moreira (2011: 87–97) in her analysis of the relationship between risk

perception and accident accumulation zones (AAZ) in Portugal. Smeed (1974) relates the increase in risk behavior by motor vehicles to improved infrastructure and technologies. Bellaby (1990), on the other hand, believes that discipline in vehicle driving behavior exists when drivers are accustomed to coexisting in an environment of motor traffic density. Even Adams (1995) refers to a reduction in road crashes as a response to increased risk perception. And Wilde (1994) postulates, from a homeostatic or self-regulating viewpoint, that collective risk management mechanisms work as a thermostat, tending towards an “optimum” tolerable risk based on the adjustment of driving behavior: reckless driving as opposed to careful driving.

Well and good. After tracing different ethnographical interrelations at black points on Lisbon’s streets and avenues, Moreira draws attention to new urban planning experiences in the Netherlands and Denmark, where immense uncertainty is being deliberately implemented in places where cars, trucks, cyclists and pedestrians converge, since artificial traffic regulation has been replaced by everyday standards of social interaction. This has brought greater awareness of existing dangers, which has in turn led to fewer serious accidents without affecting the traffic flow (Moreira 2011: 94). What is being advocated is, in some way, the social exercise of pedestrian self-organization –or self-management, both pedestrian (Lincoln and Schenkei 1974) and motorized, in all kinds of contexts worldwide, without the need for traffic signage or lights, as can be seen, say, in the urban contexts of India and so many cities in Asia, the Caribbean, America, Africa. Nonetheless, there will always be those who, conceiving social disorganization as “*the decrease of the influence of existing social rules of behavior upon individual members of the group*” –according to W.I. Thomas’s definition applied by Hannerz (1993 [1980]: 33)–, understand in such a particular way not so much the need to repress a pedestrian through the application of a reinvented highway code, as pedestrian self-organization as a danger that must be assuaged.

Applied to the sphere of motor vehicles, we find the singular political challenge by the Catalan anarcho-syndical organization *Confederació Nacional del Treball* (National Labor Confederation) (CNT), which in the revolutionary Barcelona of 1936, proposed abolishing traffic lights in favor of collective self-management of traffic on city streets. What is significant about the enormous self-organizational capacity of

pedestrians as opposed to the overall battle by automobile drivers for space, subjected to strict traffic regulations? What is lost on the path that leads from pedestrian to driver? What hinders the perpetuation of that everyday behavioral self-management? Why do cars collide when pedestrians do not? In a different context, insomuch as vehicle traffic density was negligible in 1936 compared to the present, the Catalan anarchists sought to galvanize that tremendous capacity for self-organization of people in the streets to the dimension of relationships among automobile drivers. The idea was once again to abolish, the mediation figures: in this case, traffic lights.

Returning to our account, it might be worthwhile to add a sixth and eminently technical reason, which relates different fields: passenger and/or goods overload. The first public complaint recorded on this issue was voiced 30 years ago by Mário G. Fernandes in an in-depth report (*La Voz di Povo* 1985). The text is accompanied by the photograph of the rear of a Hilux packed with passengers, with three men precariously seated on the rear door, legs dangling from the vehicle. Even at this early stage, mention was made that the Datsun and Peugeot 404 pickup trucks for transporting passengers and goods were designed to hold a maximum load of 900 kg. This limit, Fernandes argued, was exceeded on countless occasions, since regular passenger overload can mean cramming 18 people –with an average weight of 75 kg per head, reaching 1,350 kg. This affects both the vehicle’s technical structure, reducing its capacity, and the shift in its center of gravity, which, say in curves, can bring about fatal consequences. In view of such a situation, Fernandes advocated setting a load limit of 13 passengers, although this proved insufficient, as we will soon discover.

Since 1967, the Hiace model has been designed to take more and more passengers: first 12, then 15, and later 18 for the new models. More than once we have witnessed 25 to 30 people –including children or babies–, and often these people will add their own load –as is the case of fishmongers or other types of vendors–, which tends to accumulate in the second and back rows. Such a phenomenal and unquestionably disproportionate load change in a Hiace produces a substantial shift in the vehicle’s center of gravity, contrasting sharply to the initial determination of a center of gravity intended for a much smaller load. Many younger drivers are unaware of this and the results are disastrous: any sudden slamming of the brakes or U-turns will cause

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the load being transported to shift –and/or the same alteration in the center of gravity which the vehicle experiences under these circumstances– can have potentially fatal consequences.

A seventh reason, just as technical and closely related to the previous ones, has to do with the fact that, given the lukewarm police supervision and precarious presence of traffic lights and manual signaling, speed bumps are the only devices on the roads of Santiago and throughout Cape Verde able to calm vehicle speed. A speed bump may be described as the abrupt change in the pavement's longitudinal profile with the concave part facing upwards, called in Portuguese *quebramolas* (literally, “suspension breakers”). These curved elevations in the pavement extend right across the width of certain points in the road. Also made of cobblestones, Cape Verde speed bumps are unlike some of those found in Europe, at least the better built ones, which are manufactured with softer materials and form winding elevations yet not as violently pronounced, and graphically distinguished with bright colors with respect to the chromatic continuum of the pavement, which is gray at all times.

Despite the fact that drivers usually know where the speed bumps lurk, a simple distraction caused by fatigue or speeding, combined with, say, reduced vision at night –due to the non-existence of public lighting at the towns' entrances and exits or at junctions where the speed bumps are installed – are enough to create a context apt to lead to an accident.

In an attempt to dodge the speed bumps, many drivers swerve in such a way as to cross them diagonally so that the wheels need not pass over the elevation in a pavement which, let's not forget, is built with cobblestones, always on the shoulder of the part of the road where the vehicle is traveling, which is to say on the right. Or, in the case of asphalt pavements, the speed bumps occupy only one's own lane, so that the driver invades the opposite lane, veering diagonally to the left so that at least one wheel is spared the “exertion”. The most frequent damage occurs to the wheels, suspension and steering, as both drivers and mechanics attest. In fact, Barley (1983) refers – in his fieldwork in the Dowayo country, in Cameroon– to a primary precedent of speed bumps located at both ends of a bridge as the mainspring of countless accidents.



The eighth cause is undoubtedly the high volume of the music that accompanies the itinerary, since it drowns out sound signals by other vehicles or alerts by passengers who wish to get off at the most unsuspected spots. Is it a question of scale? Buxó (2010: 337) relates automatisms such as music –and the imaginative induction of speed–with movement. This facilitates the loss of the causal connection, appearance and reality blend, and an extremely sensory identification with the environment takes place. Driving along the road resembles a cinematic displacement: sequences, scenes and plans follow each other while the person tense connections and disconnections between things and acts:

Control over one's attention is deactivated while automatisms invade the stimuli and this much needed control ceases to be exerted. As long as road contingencies produce lines, tie-ups and other annoyances, we see transgressions from the norms and imprudence such as running traffic lights, passing and failure to maintain the safety distance. And if the conditions are repeated on a daily basis, the driver uses the distraction as a compensatory mechanism, since, because one cannot advance and nothing else can be done, the alternative is to seek distractions in order to surmount situations of desperation and irritation. These include radio talk shows, music, note-taking, talking on the cell phone or dictating into a tape recorder, activities that expand the car's usefulness in terms of entertainment and getting the most out of space-time. As always, the dose is fundamental. In the form of a homeopathic medicine, minimum doses of distraction are reflex reactivators, as are road signs, which call attention to drowsiness and fatigue, although certainly give secondary importance to the necessary tension between attention and lack of attention.

When seeking verisimilitude in comparing the states of the souls of humans and animals, Lévi-Strauss (1990: 683–84) reflected with precision on the implications of motorized driving as being both fascinating in that it opens doors to new social universes and fatal because it leads to the cemetery or to suffering:

A man accustomed to driving a car controls this supplementary power by means of a nervous system adapted to the more modest function of controlling his body. We see here, the, the same disproportion as in the animal between a symbolic faculty whose capacity for synthesis is

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remarkably limited in relationship to the problems that it may have to solve, and the enormous physical resources available for the solution of the problems.

A man is driving at speed along an open road; there is nothing special to attract his attention; he falls into a state blissful, dreamy absentmindedness and trusts to his automatic reactions as an experienced driver for the carrying out of slight and precise movements that he no longer need control consciously, since they have become second nature to him. But if suddenly, some object that he has carelessly thrown on to the seat and forgotten about, falls out of place, producing an unexpected noise that cannot be confused with the hum of the engine or the familiar vibrations of the car body, his attention is immediately alerted, his muscles begin to tense, his whole being is seized with feverish anxiety through fear of some incomprehensible mishap that could in a fraction of a second, lead to disaster. In no less short a time, his mind reels off the list of possible explanations, his defense mechanisms spring into action and his memory is called upon to function: the effects is then linked with its cause, and the occurrence is understood as the insignificant matter it is. It was nothing of any importance, and yet, for a moment, the nervous system of an ordinary human body has had to cope with the risks inherent in the enormous surplus of power bestowed on it by the engine. One sometimes reads in the newspapers that drivers, at the wheel, behave like animals; as can be seen, there is another sense too, an intellectual not a moral one, in which the use of a machine produced by human inventiveness, paradoxically takes man back to the animal condition: his symbolic capacity, although incomparably greater than that of an animal, is, as it were, minimized by his being in charge of an artificial body whose physical power is far in excess of that of his natural body. It is in such a situation, which has nothing to do with ritual, that the messages become impoverished, schematic and discontinuous, and call for an all-or-nothing answer.

A ninth and fundamental cause of road crashes lies in the very guidelines of social road conduct prevalent among certain Hiace van drivers, or what could be called “bad driving” by excellent drivers. These drivers literally stop wherever they like, even just beyond an extremely rare traffic sign prohibiting just that: stopping. The widespread disorder results in tie-ups in the midst of a road trip,

usually produced by a pedestrian flagging down the vehicle in the hopes of boarding or because a passenger informs the driver, with next to no warning, of the spot where he or she wishes to get off. As a passenger I have witnessed both situations on dozens of occasions. With respect to the prevailing driving styles, it is eye-opening indeed that the driver should halt just after a very tight curve, placing his occupants very much in harm's way, regardless of his good intentions of picking up or dropping off a passenger. On a 110-minute trip –Praia-Tarrafal–, I have observed stops right in the middle of the road, twice with considerable backing up included. Another example is the overall failure to use seat belts, even though the driver, passengers under 12 years of age and those in the front row are obliged by law to do so.

As the tenth cause, in certain cases this “bad driving” can be related to daily alcohol consumption by young salaried drivers, which, like the fish that bites its own tail, takes us back to our starting point: the tremendous labor pressure that salaried drivers are under sometimes leads to drinking on the job. This does not in any way facilitate reasonable van driving, and without a doubt must be contextualized in the cultural role played by consumption of *grogue* –distilled sugar cane within reach of the popular social majority – in Cape Verde. It is there where the property system, more specifically that which is encountered for the most part in Praia and Somada, is recognized as a core element in triggering generalized high-risk situations.

The eleventh and final reason is that a considerable number of the vehicles are second-hand ones purchased in the Netherlands or the Canary Islands. The vehicle's wear and tear during its ownership brings with it a series of deficiencies made more severe with the passing of time, which on occasion become another reason for accidents to occur. Bear in mind that the technical maintenance of the vehicle and official Hiace van inspections are rather slapdash.

Returning to Fernandes's text (1985), where does he believe attention should focus as regards methods for as regards proposing methods for reducing road crash intensity? In seven points: 1) more exacting standards when testing future drivers; 2) limiting the right to drive automobiles with more than four passengers to drivers with at least one year of proven experience; 3) in addition to the preceding point, truck and Hiace van drivers must pass a complementary exam; 4)

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the maximum number of passengers to be transported by truck and Hiace van must be in line with the transportation capacity and box size of each vehicle; 5) specialized technical teams, with appropriate equipment must see to the inspection of all vehicles running on Cape Verde roads, with the aim of pinpointing mainly problems with the brakes, transmission, steering, power supply, regulation and focalization of lighting..., and just as ordinary vehicles should undergo a yearly inspection, those employed for passenger transport should have to pass the tests twice yearly; 6) the visible placing of traffic signs and signals on roads and urban streets, at a height of at least 1.5 m and made from adequate material –in a display of admirable propositional astuteness, and in view of the empirical basis of his recommendations, he proposed replacing the galvanized pipes used to make signs and signals with reinforced concrete as a deterrent to the then widespread practice of theft and 7) speed limit on roads with the help of the police and proper traffic signage.

The fact that almost 30 years ago a mechanical automobile engineer like Fernandes would be alerting the public to issues such aspects as passenger overload, technical inspection of Hiluxes and Hiaces, the regulatory role of the police and the lack of traffic signage confirms how stubbornly real life takes over government plans that are agonizingly slow in their application, if applied at all. What is paradoxical about the case is that Fernandes himself became director of the DGTR in the 1990s and nothing changed with respect to what he himself had protested so strongly about in 1985.

On Sunday, November 28, 2010, a Hiace van rammed into another car near Somada killing a female passenger, people got out of their vehicles, some weeping... The road crash data for Cape Verde for the year 2009 set the figure as 3,500 accidents, with 900 persons injured and 60 dead –79 in 2010. Parallel to road crashes is the endemic lack of health care. Takota, a former military officer now retired (11/14/2010), looks back on an accident that took place near Tchon Bon in 2006: a truck literally crushed a Hiace with nine people aboard, four from a single family. All were killed. At that time there were no civil defense teams, such as firefighters to cut through the wreckage and rescue the victims, or mobile units to tend to the injured onsite.

Takota also recalls a festive Sunday in Tarrafal, when the Praça da Igreja was the setting for a car crash rescue simulation: eleven civil defense and firefighting vehicles took part, and one ambulance, in addition to 30 members of the police, firefighters and civil defense employees. The operation was supervised by three Portuguese police officers. The simulation of the accident in a certain way reenacted the accident that had taken place in 2006, when different cooperation agencies began to acquire fire engines for the island. The day of the exhibition the local firefighters did not convey a great sense of self-assurance, or perhaps they were simply very nervous on account of the supervision and the presence of the congregated public. They gripped the vehicle's roof and proceeded to open it like a can. Next a fireman played the role of the injured party so that he could be evacuated from inside in accordance with the protocols. The vehicle was then set on fire and rapidly extinguished with foam, to showcase the firefighters' prowess. The onlookers grimaced at the ineptitude of Cape Verde's finest.

Given the Hiace van's prominent role in road accidents, there is a series of concomitant factors depending on different experiences that must be kept in mind. First off, demands by the drivers, including driver-bosses, are futile. Nor is there a Hiace passengers association, meaning that any type of action taken regarding the organization of Hiace van transport is up to the public administrations. Something as simple as the lack of reliable transit scheduling leaves passengers utterly dependent on circumstance, obliged all too often to turn up at the departure spots well ahead of time, and more so when the trip is a long one, since it is impossible to predict with any degree of accuracy how long the trip will take. We have to remember that passenger-driver agreements are what ensure a certain trust in punctual departures and arrivals. In fact, the places pre-established as departure and arrival points for Hiace vans are not even properly set up, meaning that passengers often have to endure a long wait under the blazing Central African sun or withstand the sand-bearing easterly wind from the continent, without so much as a shelter or a bench. This is why the passengers' own experience can seem paradoxical, since at times it is they themselves who urge the driver to go faster. So what parameters is social risk control based on?

And yet, we should not lose sight of the fact that the working and wage conditions of salaried Hiace van drivers are higher than those of

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most of the working population; and too that being a Hiace driver is a source prestige, given its prominent social relevance. Regardless of the types of relationships this phenomenon may give rise to between the driver and female passengers – romantic and sexual, consented or negotiated –, the experience of certain young drivers as little road gods heightens the frequency of risk situations –greater commitments, faster speed– or simply situations of abysmal service: stopping to drink *grogu*, or else halting to comply with requests for a tryst by a girlfriend who lives somewhere along the route (the latter perhaps now unusual, common enough if we look back in time, and which entails a broad spectrum of possibilities in terms of the empirical connotations of the encounter).

Most of our sources –drivers and residents of different small towns and villages – are quick to point out that 2008 marked the beginning of a slump in passenger volume. This palpable crisis is due to the fact that many cannot nor need not travel, owing to unemployment. The effects of this process directly affect the length of working days and the conditions under which the trips are carried out. The drivers are trapped between the need to make the trip cost-effective –which depends on the number of passengers transported– and the increased amount of time recruiting passengers –and the waiting time for those already aboard the vehicle, which in the case of departure from Praia, at midday or in the afternoon, can be up to two hours, or one hour from Tarrafal to Praia in the morning. This decrease would explain the intensified competition between Hiace van and taxi drivers in Praia and at its international airport. Moreover, the increase in vans on the road in recent years has only exacerbated the gravity of the situation.

## Conclusion

The causes of road crashes involving Hiace vans in Santiago must be placed in the context of the urban transformation processes that have been taking place in the island during the last 20 years. We are in front of a wide set of interrelated situations and frameworks for interpretation and action. All of which is cast in the vehicle traffic on the roads of Santiago and, to a greater or lesser degree, on the whole of Cape Verde.

In this context, several social dimensions must be examined. To begin with, the public normativisation of vehicle traffic does not mechanically match neither the uses and daily appropriations by drivers of all types of vehicles, nor the uses and appropriations of space by pedestrians on the roads. On the other hand, there is an explicit relationship between the accident rate and the Hiace ownership system, particularly concerning the labor conditions of van drivers, and, in some cases, the consumption of alcohol or drugs. In the area from Praia to Somada, the fierce competition for passengers among Hiace van drivers does not favour good driving. In front of this, the absence of a true public organisation of collective transport that acts within the many domains affecting Hiace vans' operation is apparent.

Finally, two spheres must be added: firstly, a wide range of technical issues (the types of road pavement; the lack of road signage and good lighting; the ambiguous role of police on the road; the role of speed bumps –the technical design of which has been improved in the years 2013 and 2014; the change of the center of mass in vehicles overloaded with passengers or commodities; etc.). Secondly, the social construction of the perception of risk in relation to “good” and “bad” driving must be taken into account, since in many occasions it is the passengers' collective dynamics what motivates the driver to drive faster and assume certain risks. In short, these are different aspects which cannot be analyzed individually, but must be approached through the global interrelation between them.

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