

Morabeza

THE COHERENCE OF CABO VERDE

JENNA A. MONIZ

I remember as a little girl, the exact smell of my grandparents' home. A sweet little house on Leonard Avenue, right around the corner from the Cape Verdean Progressive Center, or as we've always known it, "The CV Club." It was the aroma of something delicious baking in my Nana's oven mixed with a magical potpourri of cedar, cloves, mint candies, and my Grampa's majestic cologne. Over three decades later, I can close my eyes now and still remember the smell. It takes me right back. To the place and the feeling. I'm pretty sure that it is Bau's guitarra that I hear in the background of my memory. It is a soothing nostalgia.

A morabeza of sorts.

And before even visiting the Cape Verde islands, "The Old Country" as our family lovingly called it, the rhythm of our music lived deep in our veins. The chords, the melodies, the movements, seemed to just come naturally -almost like a memory. Sometimes a song could make you sway to a place that seemed to transcend space and time. Almost as if floating back to a memory of Cabo Verde that one could not have known if they'd never been. Or could they?



My description of coherence will begin there, nestled in the recesses of my own childhood memories that include that special corner of East Providence where so many of my most precious memories live. In the place where we collected, convened, and celebrated our family and culture. Nearly every family occasion of ours to this day is celebrated, mourned, or commemorated at our cherished CV Club.

My name is Jenna Moniz, proud daughter of Julie Coelho and Joey Moniz. I am an educator and children's advocate who studies cognitive science (the science of thinking) as well as the science of the heart. I work with the [HeartMath Institute](#), who, for three decades, has pioneered the research of heart patterns or heart rate variability (hrv) and how we are all interconnected and connected to and through nature. Doctors, first responders, top athletes and performers use HeartMath tools to improve self-regulation, performance, and intuition. They are able to measure these patterns using our biofeedback technology. The goal and bottom line here is that the better we get at regulating our autonomic nervous system (ANS), the better we get at everything. We think more clearly. We communicate and connect better with others. We perform more optimally, and we have greater access to what HeartMath calls our "intuition."

This brings me back to where we started . . . with us as kids dancing to CV music and sensing what could only be described as a familiar yet elusive essence -sort of like a memory carried through the rhythm of our music. It was a feeling we wanted to last forever. And one that we would chase for years that followed. We, of course, were not alone. In fact, just about every Cape Verdean I know who grew up outside of the Old Country also knows this same feeling within their beings even if it lies within their unconscious minds and memories. They seek to reconnect with it too -almost drawn into its mystical pull.

The Essence of Morabeza



So what is it? What actually is Morabeza? And where does the science of this coherence come into play?

This essence, so unnamable, and yet so prevalent, has come to be called **MORABEZA**.

And rightfully so, this concept that lives beyond our conscious awareness does not have a direct translation into English. We do not have a word that can accurately or fully describe the experience of morabeza. It is a frequency that transcends the 5 senses and has been described by some as a feeling or nostalgia similar to bliss.

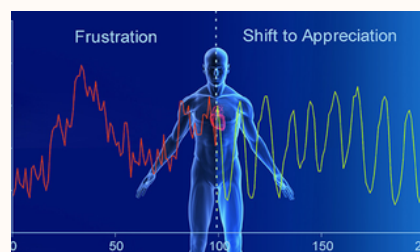
For some, that draw to resonate with IT is so strong that it inspires us to pick up everything and relocate to its Afro-Atlantic source. For our oldest sister, Joli, it did just that. A bit over ten years ago, she packed up her fast-paced, high-profile New York life and moved to Cabo Verde. She didn't even speak Krioulo then.

Now that's a powerful pull!

A decade and change later, she now has a thriving travel and relocation business for others seeking to make that morabeza a part of their ongoing lives.

To answer that, we need to have a working understanding of what heart rate variability is and why it matters. HRV, not to be confused with heart rate (how many times the heart beats per minute) measures the pattern of the heart including the spaces between the heart's beats and the rhythms that it produces.

Even more impressive than being able to measure our emotional states is to understand their impact on the health and wellbeing of an individual as well as a collective group of people. Let's focus on one person first. Here is what hrv can look like in a person.



In the picture above, the heart rhythm on the left shows a pattern or hrv described as incoherent. And here is why: just like a cell phone or radio signal, the communication between the heart and the brain is not clear. You can think of it as a staticky signal. The brain can't hear the heart clearly.

It's important to know, according to HMI Director of Research, Rollin McCraty, that in the communication between the heart and the brain, which comprises our autonomic nervous system, the heart is doing over 85% of the talking.

Since the heart is doing almost all of the talking, it makes sense then that what the heart is "saying" is important. The brain's ability to function depends upon the harmony of the information coming from the heart.

The heart, you see, works like a springboard, entraining the brain and the rest of our organs to follow its pattern. Like a drumbeat sending messages by way of a rhythm, the heart works like the orchestra conductor telling the rest of the choir what notes to play.

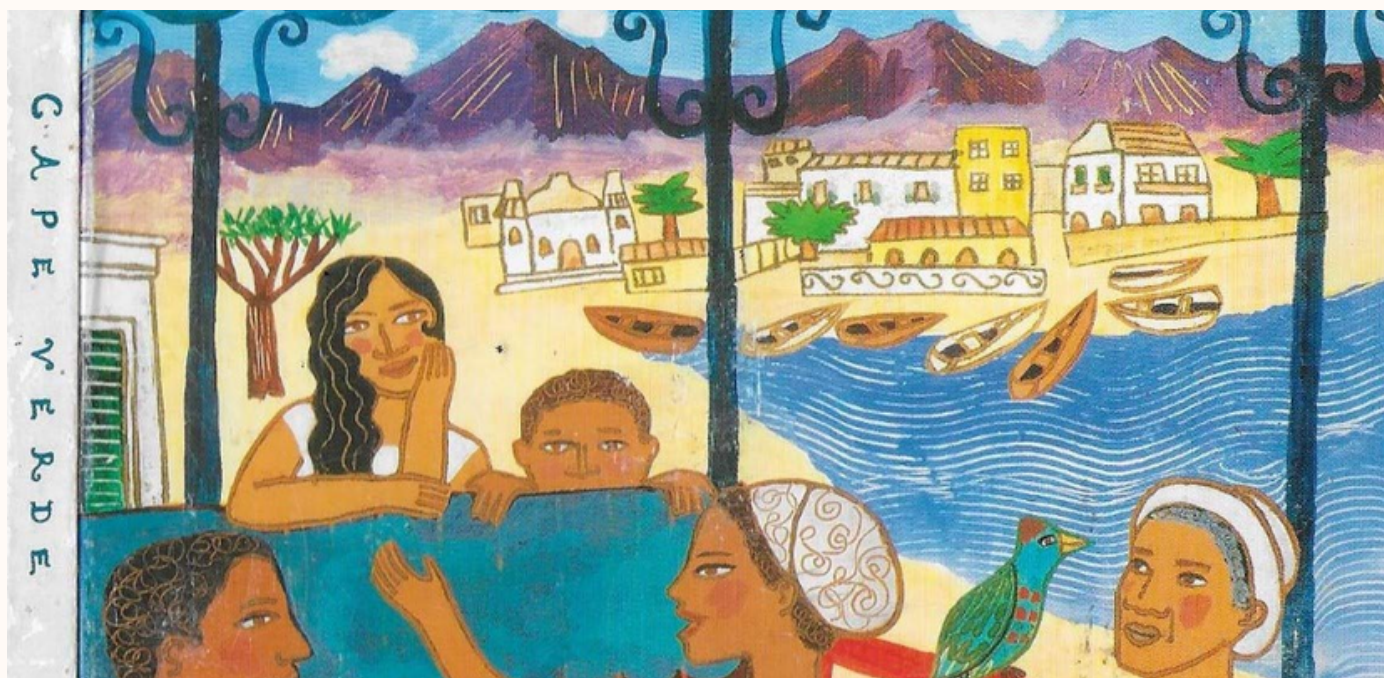
And as we know from medical consensus and likely from our own personal and collective experiences, chronic emotions of stress ultimately lead to breakdown of the body aka disease. The reverse is true too.

Consistent patterns of elevated (or positive) emotions signal the brain and body with messages (that then make biochemicals) of vitality and wellbeing. Stress makes us sick. Positive or renewing emotions improve our health and longevity. Nothing new here. What is new is that the rhythms created from the emotions of the heart can be made visible and measurable -and more importantly, that they impact our resilience, our overall health, and our ability to connect and create when we use our intuition.

So what does all of this have to do with Cape Verdean culture, music, and memories therein? This is where my own conclusions come into play - combining the science that I live and the culture that I love.

Here's what we know: the patterns of the heart that we can now measure are literally rhythms. We can think of them as the music of the heart. And the more flexible or varied the patterns, the more resilient and healthy the person, and the more access they have to the wisdom of their heart. A coherent heart is a heart that is open to FEEL with the flexibility to resonate in the highs and the lows of its emotional vibrations -the peaks and the valleys of our feelings. This is the resilience of the heart. Coherence also allows us more access to our intuitive and mystical wisdom. This is a connection to information that exists beyond the five senses and connects us to something greater.

Love. Compassion. Generosity. Sodade. Joy. Miséria. Romance. Celebration. Felicidade. Joy. Amor. Connection . . . all huge emotions that demonstrate an amplitude in range of highs and lows.



Cape Verdeans are a feeling people. You can sense it in our music. In fact, if you close your eyes for a moment and think about a favorite Cape Verdean tune of yours, you may find that some things are consistent no matter the song or musician(s):

- 1) There is a large range of pitch and tones -highs and lows.
- 2) There is a variety of rhythms or patterns within the song. Patterns overlaying patterns. TV
- 3) You are moved emotionally in a profound way that is unique and perhaps takes you to “another place.”

This is part of the Cape Verdean mystique. Our unique morabeza.

Music enthusiasts from outside of the culture appreciate this musical coherence as well. Cabo Verde has been described as, “Home to one of the world’s greatest musical treasure troves.” (cite). Storper goes on to say that there is “something mysterious and evocative that can only be traced to the romance of these remote and exotic islands.” Unique indeed.

Jacob Edgar of Putumayo World Music has this to say about Cape Verdean music:

It would not be an exaggeration to call Cape Verdeans some of the most musical people on the planet, and the depth of their creativity given the paucity of their population is astounding. Music pulses through the daily life of Cape Verdeans like blood, binding disparate communities and uniting distant cousins in celebration of a unique and bountiful culture. Separation has not weakened Cape Verdean culture, if anything it has given it strength, as immigrants use music to reflect their love of their homeland.

Cape Verdeans are no doubt artistically inclined, especially when it comes to music. No matter the genre, from morna, funana, coladeira, batuku, and more, CV rhythms tend to be varied with complex and harmonious patterns that are a unique dichotomous blend. A mixture of influences, no doubt, but powerful emotional amplitude as a common thread.

So, while incoherence can be summed up as disconnection and coherence as connection, it gives me pause to consider the fortitude of the Cape Verdean heart that has remained powerfully connected (over the centuries) with -and for- a country, culture, and global community that originates from our tiny islands that were isolated from one another and from the rest of the world. That dogged resilience takes massive energy, coordination, and invincible communication. That kind of connection in a world full of separation takes what I would consider an almost superhuman level of coherence within our hearts.

And if the heart acts like a springboard (which it does) that connects our intergenerational wisdom to our individual selves as well as to others and the larger world, one could view our music as the harmony that traverses the globe through space and time. And since energy never dies, it just changes form, I would argue that the energy of coherence is a grand part of who Caboverdianos are inherently.

Resilience is in our blood as is creativity, compassion, elation, and connection. Our history and collective personality to persist, survive, and thrive through some of the most uninhabitable conditions (drought, famine, separation, devastation, and the like) demonstrate what some would consider a super-human power that is unique to us and a curiosity to the world.

It is the vibrations of our hearts -the peaks and troughs, demonstrated by our emotional disposition and expressed through our music and coherent connection, that would give any keen observer pause and draw in the curiosity to want to know more. For many others who simply want to enjoy basking in its essence, the pull is powerful just the same.

What we KNOW in our hearts, despite any circumstances or isolating perceptions, is that to BE Cape Verdean is to embody a unique and magical essence that defies any edges of separation. It continues to seek the expansion of connection from one generation to the next.

Our MORABEZA Caboverdiana lives on strong and sure. It always has and always will.

