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Torino (Itália), 1971

*Omi i kus'é, um pedra?*  
(*What is a human being? A stone?*)

2018/2019



Anthropologist Raymond Firth visited for the first time Tikopia in 1928, choosing this tiny island as field for his ethnographic research. In one of the books based on this research, *We, the Tikopia*, published in 1936, Firth quoted a short conversation he had had with a man on the island. The man asked Firth to bring him to England with him. The anthropologist denied, alleging that the dire climate would probably kill the islander. The man replied: “What is man, a stone? If I go I die, if I stay here I die also” (Firth, R., 2004 (1936), *We, the Tikopia*. New York and London, Routledge, p. 20-21).

*Omi i kus'é, um pedra?* (Cape-Verdean kriol for *What is a human being? A stone?*) builds upon the opposition between stones and human beings, as respectively and supposedly immobile and mobile entities, and is a reflection on the strange nature and selective porosity of national borders. As a matter of fact, current global immigration policies seem to turn this opposition upside down. While material objects and goods are increasingly allowed to cross boundaries, human beings travelling across borders are strictly controlled, kept under surveillance and in many cases blocked or imprisoned for attempting to do so. The recent so-called migrants' crises in Schengen Europe and at the US/Mexico border are but recent examples of this turn of the screw on human mobility, especially when originating from the global South.

In the past months, I travelled several times back and forth between Lisbon and Praia. On each return travel, I 'illegally' smuggled Cape-Verdean rocks into the Schengen space. Before embarking to Portugal, each rock was photographed in the hands of a Cape-Verdean citizen. These portraits are now displayed, together with the entire collection of geological material smuggled to Portugal. While the rocks are materially present, these women and men stare at the visitors in their absence.

I would like to thank Edson Moreira, Nísia Neves, Ravilton Mendes, Ider da Lomba, Fernando Jorge Martins and Zelito Fernandes for collaborating in this project and allowing me to publicly show their photos.

Em exposição na FCSH, sala 0.08