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FORRO IN THE EUROPEAN DIASPORA:
WHEN THE NEED OF A SECRET CODE FAVORS THE MAINTENANCE OF A LANGUAGE

For many years, urban Santomeans and education officials denigrated Forro (as well as the other creoles of São Tomé and Príncipe) as the language of the poor uneducated people and did not allow their children to speak it. They were afraid that Forro would hinder the acquisition of Portuguese and limit their social mobility (Bouchard 2017). Transmission across generations was disrupted (starting around 1950s), which contributed to a rapid language shift, mainly in the capital and its surrounding, from Forro to a Santomean variety of Portuguese. Today, Forro is an endangered language (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig 2019). However, there is a growing awareness of the importance of this creole to Santomean identity, culture, and history, especially among educated Santomeans and the ones living in the European diaspora. In fact, many Santomeans learn and use Forro once in Europe. Hence, this presentation will discuss on how a shift in ideologies among Santomeans in the diaspora impacts the use and vitality of Forro.

To investigate ideologies and the use of Forro as an identity marker, field research and ethnographic interviews with 58 Santomeans were conducted in the Netherlands and Portugal (Winter 2018-2019). These two countries were chosen because in the Netherlands, Santomean Portuguese is *not* (or very little) in contact with European Portuguese (the standard variety), while in Portugal, Santomean Portuguese is in close contact with European Portuguese. However, in both countries, there is a high level of contact with other creole-speaking communities from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa (especially with the Cape Verdean community).

Results show that Santomeans in these diasporic communities embrace Forro as the spoken embodiment of their Santomean identity. They view Forro as a unifying force, one that they use to set themselves apart from Portuguese-speaking Africans.

This research contributes to research on possible outcomes of language and cultural contact, the social dimensions of language shift and/or maintenance, and the impact of language ideologies on the vitality of a language.

References:

- Bouchard, Marie-Eve. 2017. *Linguistic Variation and Change in the Portuguese of São Tomé*. PhD dissertation, New York University.
- Eberhard, David, Gary Simons, and Charles Fennig (eds.). 2019. *Sãotomense. Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Retrieved from <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/CRI>