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## O Lenço Da Minha Mãe...A Reflection

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## *O Lenço Da Minha Mãe... A Reflection*

For over sixty-one years it has been with my Mother, sheltering and guiding my Mother. In Cape Verde, Africa, in my early childhood, I would look up, see it, and feel a gracious warmth in my heart. I would feel safe to know that our family would make it through in life. Yeah, I remember it, my Mother's special head-cloak. I remember the way it was wrapped around my Mother's head; a cut piece of cloth, square in shape, white in color, and quite durable. It had some strings, dangling and cottony, undoing their way through the skillful ball-shaped knot, tight and pressed by my Mother's neck. The two knotted flaps followed and formed another knot, a little one, that would meet at the top of my Mother's head.

I can still picture that unique cloth and how it surrounded my Mother's head. Along its sides, the interconnected fibers were much looser, flannel-like and delicate. The top, which is the circular portion of my Mother's head-scarf is most important. The strains of work have taken a toll on it. It is worn and beaten, yet, it endures. This top part helps my Mother to carry out the necessities, the hard and difficult work of daily life in Fajá de Baixo, in São Nicolau, one of the islands of Cape Verde. For certain this top part of the bandanna most represents the labor my Mother would undertake to survive. It is shaped to fit, cover, and protect my Mother.

The head-dress is *always* there, by my Mother's side, especially during her great tasks of carrying steadily and humbly, upon her head, heavy, and large bundles of things: big buckets of water, bundles of wood for cooking, baskets and *bandejas* stocked with food and various merchandise to be bought and sold,...to meet the living conditions of Cape Verde-country-side life. In this life of struggle, my

Mother performs these tasks with a controlled and placid sense of vigor! Her tasks at hand are second-nature. For she is alert of all that is around her and deeply in touch with herself. My Mother, my dear love, is my world. The bandanna speaks of *Deia's* integrity, *Deia's* might, and *Deia's* kind love of all of life. It is my Mother. It has been with my Mother all of her life; there in *Cabo Verde* being an orphaned young child; scrubbing people's houses; seeing other little girls go to school; doing the labor of adults; sustaining her circumstances with a smile.

*O Lenço Da Minha Mãe*, reminds and helps me recognize the later years, the strenuous years, when it helped my Mother to do it all, for example, instill in me and my siblings good and moral standards of living. It provided her with care and courage—carrying her on her bare and strong feet, over the rugged roads, towards her long, long journeys to the market affairs. It protected my Mother and seeped her perspiration, from being out in the sweltering heat, under the great hovering sun. The head-scarf guided her while she worked during the day, cultivating the dry, steep red land. Also, in the evenings it relieved my Mother by giving her the strength to see the meaning of her struggle. It made it possible for her to gather with her children and bind, tell stories, learn life-lessons, and see us healthy—healthy of a joyous heart and full of dignity. Yes, I remember that wonderful head-cloak of my Mother; her managing to do it all then, now, and always. From my first days, I saw the head-scarf of my Mother.

Here, in America, in this land of opportunity, freedom, and abundance, I still see *O Lenço*. After a severe separation, our hanging unto life and our swinging in life incomplete, here, in America, we find

each other. Our culture is still with us; my Mother's head-dress has a special warmth and is filled with aromas of *cachupa*, *cuscus*, and *modje*. It is full of memories and it reminds me of oral stories, like *Nho Lobo*. Upon my Mother's head, the head-scarf's presence is monumental. It is the constant power that keeps her able to care for her children and her children's children. It does all this and many more, such as giving her the strength to supply us all with a hearty meal from scratch, keep our culture and our profound love for our dear homeland, our life source, so alive and close. She helps us stay focused on what matters — the good and the way. Lastly, it is her ability to go out for seventeen years, here in America, unfailingly, to labor and provide clean rest-rooms, parks, and restaurants, for the rest of our human family.

*O Lenço*, my Mother's beautiful head-scarf! In our most dear moments, I see it coming off and I see my Mother combing her long, thick and wavy, black hair. She takes off the cloak when she makes appearances outside of the home, visiting friends, going to church, or welcoming friends. That head-cloak, that significant token of familiarity, of custom and culture, represents my Mother. It sits on the highest and most sacred part of my Mother. It is proud! It is my mother! That head-dress on my Mother's head, in whatever material, form, design, and color, it may be, is as humble, welcoming, simple, hardworking, caring, and loving as my darling Mother. I see it *always*! It helps me to meet and appreciate life. It allows me to help and encourage all the people I meet to feel and share life. I won't let it go. I am grateful! I have my Mother and I learn from her. I too am full of life, full of knowledge, full of friendship, ready to join the world and let ultimate love be. I am serenely happy. I am me, *Alicia da Fátima Duarte*

*Veiga, because of my Mother and The One! I know my Mother forever  
and I owe the world to my her. I love my Mother.*

*Alicia Veiga*