COSMOPOLITAN, RACIALIZED, OR BOTH: CONFLICTING IMAGINARIES IN MOURARIA

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Urban studies scholars have long questioned the tension between urban cosmopolitanism and racialization. This is especially the case in recent times, as branding has become increasingly central to entrepreneurial urban politics, and more and more cities have made efforts to represent themselves as open and diverse – that is, cosmopolitan – hubs. Critical urban studies scholars have often replied by placing cosmopolitan discourses in dichotomic opposition to racial exclusion and injustices: "purportedly" cosmopolitan cities are in fact often racialized ones, with the latter explicitly or implicitly excluding the possibility that the former may be true.[1]

Lisbon has long been considered a cosmopolitan city,[2] and this perception has circulated increasingly amid its recent urban change – in large part because of explicit efforts by the municipality and national government to place the city and the country within global flows of tourism, cultural investment and technological development. As brilliantly discussed in Elena Taviani's PhD thesis, the long history of Portuguese colonialism and its post-colonial urban development problematize the smooth image of an open, diverse Lisbon.[3] But while this and similar accounts[4] implicitly suggest that racialized Lisbon can hardly be considered cosmopolitan, I want to suggest that cosmopolitanism and racialization – at least in Lisbon – are not two sides of a dichotomy: Lisbon is *both* racialized and cosmopolitan.

More than that, the dialectical relation between racialization and cosmopolitanism is crucial in the making of the imaginaries that frame Lisbon's present urban change. This is particularly evident in and around the Mouraria neighborhood, the southernmost, most central edge of Lisbon's "East Side", which I have dubbed the "Eastern districts of Lisbon",[5] a banana shape that, from Mouraria, goes north following Avenida Almirante Reis, including the areas of Anjos and Arroios, and then turns east to encompass Penha de França, the southern edge of Olaias, Chelas and Marvila, to end up, on the river, in Braço de Prata, an area whose trajectory of urban change has been very different to those of the areas north and west of the historical center. Mouraria is paradigmatic of the role of imaginaries in this urban change.[6]

Mouraria's cosmopolitan/racialized nature is present in its name, which comes from Mouros, a term used to refer to the Arab populations that historically settled in the area. During the twentieth century, Mouraria has been a "backdoor" to the city for a variety of migrant groups from rural Iberian regions, former Portuguese colonies in Africa (since the 1970s), and East Asia (since the 1990s), who started their residential careers in this very central, and yet marginal – and cheap – neighborhood.[7] The social diversity of Mouraria, together with narratives articulated around Fado music, bohemian life and *malandragem* (roguery), as well as the visible presence of drug dealing

and prostitution in some of its public spaces, has long been associated with ideas about marginality and danger, which were the dominant representations of the neighborhood up until urban change hit in the late 2000s.

When Lisbon decided to center its anti-crisis policies on urban regeneration, the attraction of tourism and the creative economy, the municipality made a flagship of Mouraria, in terms of both material and symbolic investment. Then Mayor António Costa moved his office to Largo Intendente, one of the main public spaces of the area and one of the most stigmatized squares in the city. The imaginary of cosmopolitan Lisbon emerged at the center of this endeavor: the most emblematic example is Mercado de Fusão (Fusion Market), a dozen "ethnic" kiosks installed in Martim Moniz square in explicit homage to the "multi-culturality" of the place – which, for example, has long been used by Indian and Bengali men for playing cricket or for the celebration of the Chinese New Year. Incidentally, the square is named after Martim Moniz, a legendary soldier who sacrificed himself when Lisbon was "reconquered" and the Mouros expelled from the city.[8]

While, in a first stage (roughly 2008–2014), the cosmopolitan branding was accompanied by a broader process of involving local groups (including foreign nationals and racialized people), things dramatically changed since roughly 2015, when Lisbon started to become a "global city." Indeed, at the same time as investing in regeneration, the City of Lisbon has been relentlessly working to position itself in global touristic flows and brand it as a creative, green and safe city. And, while Portugal was emerging from economic crisis, Lisbon was being hyped by international magazines: tourists first, then international students and wealthy pensioners attracted by tax rebates, and finally digital nomads, startuppers, tech workers and (post-)pandemic remote workers started to flock in. Much has been said and written on the processes of gentrification, touristification and financialization that have been prompted by Lisbon's global positioning and which are particularly evident in Mouraria and Lisbon's East Side at large, and on the racialized fractures these have deepened. Less has been said, however, about how this emerging imaginary simultaneously articulated, clashed with, and partially wiped out the cosmopolitan imaginary of Mouraria.

Maybe the most emblematic example of the articulation is one of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of minimarkets, often owned or run by Indian and Bengali immigrants, that pinpoint Lisbon's center. One day around 2018, one of those shops, in the heart of Mouraria, became Bomercado, at the time probably the only biologic, vegan and gluten-free food shop in the entire historical center of Lisbon. As of September 2022, the Google Maps profile of the shop has almost 200 reviews, the vast majority of which are signed by persons with Anglophone or Central European names – a telling indication of the changing social composition of the place. In the emerging aesthetic of the new Mouraria, the global imaginary is progressively accompanying, and increasingly replacing, the cosmopolitan one.

What we've got here is the intermingling and conflict of two imaginaries – one about social and racial diversity, one about tourism and investment flows – that, after all, may both be problematic. The cosmopolitan imaginary is not only problematic because of the deeply racialized nature of ongoing changes, but also because, a posteriori, it is

easy to see how the imaginary of diversity was soon co-opted to create the conditions for (re-)investment – thence favoring the progressive displacement of that very diversity. The global imaginary, on its side, seems to be above all the aesthetic of profoundly extractive urban capitalism.

But imaginaries, one should always remember, are never just about ideology. Their productive nature goes well beyond masking deeper interests and contradictions. The cosmopolitan imaginary of Mouraria is also made of a number of experiments with local democracy that have been strengthened, if not made possible, by the arrival in Lisbon of "immigrants" – mostly European and Latin American – that have brought with them their traditions of struggle. Take, for instance, Sirigaita, a social space right at the border of Mouraria, whose political and cultural agenda is characterized by truly global and cosmopolitan sounds, imaginaries, cultures and politics. The struggle for the hegemony of urban imaginaries is always ongoing; and maybe the problem is not so much *whether* the imaginaries are cosmopolitan or global, but *how* to be so.

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[1] For a reference to a "purportedly" cosmopolitan city, see Fatimah W. Castro, "Afro-Colombians and the Cosmopolitan City: New Negotiations of Race and Space in Bogotá Colombia", *Latin American Perspectives* 40, no. 2 (2013): 105–117.

[2] See, for example, Matilde V. Caldas, "A praça do Martim Moniz e o Mercado de Fusão. Contributos para a análise dos conceitos de cosmpolitismo e cidadania cultural em políticas urbanas," *Diffractions* 5 (2015): 1–27, and Maria J. Mortagua, and Madalena R. Mira, "Lisboa cosmopolita," in *A Internacionalização de Lisboa*, ed. Luís Moita (Lisboa: Universidade Autonoma de Lisboa, 2017), 257–273.

[3] Elena Taviani, "The line of colour. Intersections of race and space in Lisbon." PhD Diss., Gran Sasso Science Institute, 2022.

[4] I would point the interested reader to the important works of the likes of Ana Rita Alves on housing, and Elsa Peralta and Nuno Domingos on (post-)colonial urban history.

[5] See the introduction to this Round Table by Lavínia Pereira and João Felipe Brito.

[6] The following is loosely based on empirical research carried out for: Simone Tulumello, "Reconsidering neoliberal urban planning in times of crisis: Urban regeneration policy in a 'dense' space in Lisbon", *Urban Geography* 37, no. 1 (2016): 117–140; Simone Tulumello, and Giovanni Allegretti, "Articulating Urban Change in Southern Europe. Gentrification, Touristification and Financialisation in Mouraria, Lisbon", *European Urban and Regional Studies* 28, no. 2 (2021): 111–132.

[7] Jorge Malheiros, "Comunidades Indias en Lisboa. ¿Creatividad Aplicada a las Estrategias Empresariales y Sociales?", *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals* 92 (2010): 119–137.
[8] I owe this telling detail to Marco Allegra.