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## **The Black Beat of Lisbon: Sociabilities, Music and Resistances<sup>1</sup>**

*Otávio Raposo and Frank Marcon*

### **Abstract**

In this chapter we offer some reflections on the role of music in the construction of alternative forms of socialisation and political agency among the black youth of Lisbon's peripheral area, specifically in a neighbourhood called Quinta do Mocho. From an ethnographic standpoint, our observations are drawn from the experience of three artistic collectives with rap, kuduro and beat rhythms shaped by the phenomena of music digitalisation and by collaborative network processes. Through street sociabilities and expressions of creativity in music production, these young people embody innovative lifestyles, creating practices of resistance, playfulness and identifications that help them to question the status of subalternity in which they are immersed due to being poor, black and residents of an infamous neighbourhood. In a context marked by experiences of stigmatisation and racism, this "black beat" becomes a powerful means for these young people to gain visibility and imbue significance to their youthful condition.

**Keywords:** youth, creativity, artistic expressions, agency, African descent, ethnography

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## 1. Introduction

One of the largest surges of African migration into Europe established itself in Portugal from the 1960s onwards, above all coming from its former colonies. This flow, whose main destination was the Portuguese capital, was consolidated in the following decade with the intensification of the liberation struggles, and subsequent independence of these territories. Gradually, precarious and informally built neighbourhoods emerged in Lisbon's peripheries, markedly occupied by citizens originally of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé, with flourishing cultural expressions stemming from the musical repertoire of the African diaspora. The phenomenon of the digitalisation of music, initiated at the beginning of this century, contributed to permanent and instantaneous exchanges with what was played and heard in their countries of origin. New opportunities of crossings and reinterpretations of music genres became possible with the greater access to digital means (Aderaldo and Raposo, 2016; Marcon, et al. 2018), reinforced by local meanings conferred by young people born and/or raised in an "Afro-Lisbon" locus for innovative aesthetic expressions<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, various musical scenes emerged in the peripheries of the Portuguese capital whose protagonists were young black people, with their own production, circulation and consumption circuits, in which street sociabilities perform a fundamental role, such as rap, kuduro and beat. While rap emerged at the end of the 1980s in various racialized neighbourhoods as protest music linked to a black and peripheral youth connected to transnational rhythms (Ferreira and Contador, 1997; Fradique, 2003), kuduro was initially associated to the Angolan migratory networks,

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of Afro-Lisbon aims to draw attention both to the large black population of African origin living in the areas surrounding the Portuguese capital and to the importance of the artistic productions linked with African references, of which music is one of its key pillars. Responsible for the diversification and internationalisation of the city's cultural offer, these cultural attractions have progressively played a central role in the (re)branding of Lisbon: from an old metropole to a modern, multicultural and cosmopolitan city. For further details on this analysis, see Garrido and Raposo (2020).

responsible for bringing this rhythm to the country. Kuduro is a markedly entertaining dance music in which the components of resistance and awareness-raising are not really explicit in the lyrics. The beat, in turn, is also a style dominated by pure enjoyment, fun and the pleasure of having a good time, influenced by African soundscapes, namely the kuduro of Angola, the South African afro-house, in addition to other electronic music genres. The DJs, rappers, dancers and music producers were among those primarily responsible for instituting these styles on the streets of Lisbon, interacting between the different environments and giving these sounds a new centrality in the music consumption markets in Portugal and Europe. Quinta do Mocho is a quintessential neighbourhood for understanding these dynamics, where, coming from fairly precarious conditions, some young people seized the opportunities offered by digital devices to develop these rhythms, thus firing up local socialibilities and parties. As the home and meeting place of some of the rappers, kudurists and DJs of the country's beat scene, Quinta do Mocho became a space of intense music production, where home studios and street parties influenced new global fashions and trends.

While some of the neighbourhood artists created a career linked to music, the majority of them did not have the opportunity to develop it into a full profession. In this chapter, we propose an analysis of the experiences with music of some young people, correlating the transformations that occurred at Quinta do Mocho with the different music scenes embedded in the neighbourhood over the last few years, namely beat rhythm, which we consider to be, in many aspects, a combination of these various styles of music. We aim to analyse the relationship between street sociabilities and the forms of creativity in music production coupled with the forms of resistance created by these youths in reaction to racism, segregation and the configurations of social subalternation of their existence, space and of their know-how.

We present the findings of our reflections based on two ethnographic research projects, from two distinct opportunities. We visited Quinta do Mocho for the first time, in 2010, and then again in 2012, conducting field research on the relationship between young people and kuduro (Marcon, 2013). On this occasion we listened to various people engaged in this style discussing the formation of the neighbourhood, immigration, the consumption and production of music. And, more recently, since 2016, while conducting research on the topic of the urban art at Quinta do Mocho (Raposo, 2019), we also used this opportunity to extend our reflection to include the relationship of some of these young people with music production, activism in local associations and with the city in a broader sense. In both cases, social relations among youth were closely associated to music, whether this be in conversations and informal gatherings, intimate or large-scale meetings or parties, be it with or without the expression of dance. These situations were marked by the presence of rhythms such as rap, kuduro, kizomba, funaná and afrobeat<sup>3</sup>, among others, very often incorporated (and sampled) into what some young people have started to refer to as “beat”.

## **2. African Immigration and Black Territories in Lisbon**

The different migratory cycles of the former territories colonised by Portugal in Africa, during the twentieth century, involved what is referred to as the Portuguese-Speaking African Countries (known in Portuguese as *PALOP*): Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé e Príncipe. Each, according to specific political and historical moments, contributed in a particular way to the intensity of these migration

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from rap (of North American origin) and afrobeat (created in the region of West Africa), the genres mentioned here are part of the expressions of music that emerged in the Portuguese-Speaking African Countries, also referred to as PALOP, throughout the twentieth century, and that were perpetuated as rhythms present in the immigration environment, the foremost being kuduro and kizomba coming from Angola, and funaná from Cabo Verde. These rhythms, among others, compose the soundscapes in the contexts of sociabilities in the African diaspora in Portugal.

flows, influenced by colonial wars, independence processes, civil wars and, at a later date, stimulated by Portugal's accession to what is now the European Union<sup>4</sup>, following which renewed economic expectations were generated based on the injection of financial resources and new employment opportunities.

Different generations of African migration have shaped Portuguese culture, influencing vocabulary and religion just as much as literature, cuisine and music. These dynamics gained strength and momentum from the 1960s onwards, with the progressive intensification of labour migrations into Portugal. The continuity of this migratory wave over more than a century gave rise to generations of descendants of African immigrants born and/or raised in Portugal, whose visions of the world and lifestyles were moulded by the Portuguese reality. Notwithstanding the importance of the cultural heritage conveyed by the older generations, these children of the African immigration contemporize the symbolic references of the countries of origin of their parents, adapting them to their daily life (Raposo, 2005). Therefore, these are not young people in limbo, adrift of a supposedly homogenous Portuguese culture; neither are they a poorly integrated "second generation", committed to an imbalanced and incompatible double culture. Instead, they are young black Portuguese socialized in a European urban context with strong intercultural influences (Antunes, 2003). The term "second generation immigrants", coined by political institutions and by the media is sharply illustrative of the *outsider* character in the way that Portuguese society perceives this youth, portraying it as immigrant (or African) even when born in Portugal and in possession of Portuguese nationality. Of a strong essentialist nature, this labelling

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<sup>4</sup> Portugal's entry into the European Union took place in 1986, at that time still the European Economic Community (EEC). It is important to highlight that the investment expectations were not necessarily reflected in economic and social regularity and stability, although an idealized imaginary about immigration to Portugal, and consequently to Europe, alongside the need for immigrants as labour for civil construction and services also fuelled immigration. On the other hand, the political instability and long periods of economic crisis in the different PALOP, primarily from the 1980s up to the early years of the twenty-first century, intensified and influenced the seasonality of these migrations.

emerged from the need to demarcate a series of social problems, using the cultural references of the parents of these young people to legitimate their supposed non-integration in Portuguese society (Marcon, 2012; Raposo, 2007). The result of this official framework was the amendment of the nationality law in 1981 with a view to restricting the citizenship rights of the children of immigrants, namely those of African origin. Founded on the prevalence of the principle of *jus sanguinis* over *jus soli*, this law excluded from immediate access to Portuguese nationality thousands of children and young people born in Portugal, converting them into foreigners in their own country<sup>5</sup>.

The social and ethnic-racial divides arising from a bigger black and immigrant presence in the city of Lisbon were progressively manifest in Portuguese society, giving rise to experiences of marginalisation, social exclusion and racism associated to the urban growth and to a structural inequality in access to decent living conditions. The multiplication of self-built neighbourhoods flourishing from the end of the 1970s, following the Carnation Revolution<sup>6</sup>, is an example of this, and expressed the severe housing crisis experienced at that time (Cachado, 2013; Raposo, et al. 2019), derived from the upsurge in migratory flows, the continuous steady flow of rural to urban migration and the arrival of the so-called returnees<sup>7</sup>.

Lisbon Metropolitan Area (AML), considering the conurbation of different municipalities, is a large urban sprawl, in which many neighbourhoods of its periphery were occupied by these populations. Among these shanty neighbourhoods, some are

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<sup>5</sup> A series of amendments to the Nationality Law between 2006 and 2020 aimed to make it less restrictive. Currently, the children of immigrants whose legal paperwork has been in order for at least two years can have Portuguese nationality at birth. This turnaround was greatly influenced by the creation of the “Campaign for Another Nationality Law” in 2016, fostered by more than 40 antiracist collectivities and cultural associations, whose main demand was the restoration of Portuguese law to principle of *jus soli* divulged through the motto: “Anyone born in Portugal is Portuguese, full stop”. For further information see: [http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei\\_mostra\\_articulado.php?nid=614&tabela=leis](http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?nid=614&tabela=leis)

<sup>6</sup> This revolution, also known as the “25<sup>th</sup> of April”, overthrew Europe’s longest fascist regime in 1974.

<sup>7</sup> In Portugal, the term “returnee” refers to thousands of people, primarily white, who came to Portugal after leaving the former colonies during the independence processes of 1975 and 1976. Notwithstanding the difficulties of counting them, a study on this topic pointed to 505,078 returnees living in Portugal in 1981, approximately 5% of the population living in the entire country (Pires, et al. 1984:38).

located in the bordering municipalities of Amadora, Odivelas, Oeiras and Loures, a portion accompanying the road named Estrada Militar, originally built for purposes of defence and connection between strategic sites<sup>8</sup>. Other neighbourhoods more distant from central Lisbon, located in the municipalities of Sintra, Cascais and Vila Franca de Xira, are crossed by Sintra railway line or are closer to the railway lines of Cascais or Azambuja, respectively; they may also be located in cities on other side of the River Tejo, in what is known as the Margem Sul (South Bank). The immigrant populations and those of African origin, together with the migrant Portuguese populations or “returnees”, progressively breathed new life into this porous peripheral circle around Lisbon. The great majority of the improvised self-built neighbourhoods that mushroomed up to the 1990s were transformed into “social housing districts” through the Special Rehousing Programme (Programa Especial de Realojamento – PER). Other neighbourhoods were gradually urbanised, as new private developments emerged in line with real estate interests. These dynamics were accelerated with the emergence of a series of large-scale public works and mega-events, such as Expo 98 and the 2004 UEFA European Football Championship, which cannot be dissociated from the effects of Portugal’s economic integration in the European Union.

Various of these neighbourhoods are characterised by the predominance of populations of African origin, sometimes with higher concentrations of one or another nationality in particular. As a number of research projects on immigrant employment patterns have demonstrated, from the very beginning, a significant part of the adult men of these neighbourhoods work in civil construction, while the women are above all

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<sup>8</sup> The emergence of informally built neighbourhoods along Estrada Militar (a turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century military ring-road, flanking Lisbon to the west) was particularly significant due to the diffuse control of this area, where it was unclear whether those in charge were civil or military. These neighbourhoods included Fontainhas, 6 de Maio, Estrela D’África and Estrada Militar (in Amadora); Alto da Santa Catarina and Pedreira dos Húngaros (in Oeiras), Quinta da Vitória, Fetais and Talude Militar (in Loures), among others.



employed in cleaning services of private houses, hotels or restaurants (see Cerdeira et al. 2013; Machado, 2008; Rosales et al. 2009; Peixoto, 2008; among others). In these peripheral contexts, daily street forms of socialisation perform a central role for all generations. In the late afternoon, especially at the weekends, it is common to find both young people and adults, sometimes together, mingling and socialising in coffee shops or in the neighbourhood streets, in which mixing (of styles, influences, traditions) is a primary feature. This strong conviviality contributes to the reproduction of the language, accents, food and music originated in the PALOP. Due to the heavy immigration coming from Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé e Príncipe, the musicality of these countries marks the current soundscape of the peripheries of Lisbon, even in neighbourhoods where these populations are not the majority.

The music, the dances and the festivities that originated in the PALOP were embodied in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and associated to these forms of conviviality in the public space, as well as linked to racialized neighbourhoods of the periphery that emerged from the 1970s onwards. The so-called traditional musical expressions, generally associated with the older generations, such as morna, koladeira, semba or batuque<sup>9</sup>, are further enhanced by those of transnational or cosmopolitan nature in which the young people are the protagonists, as is the case of rap, kizomba, afro-house, beat or kuduro (Sieber, 2005). The case of Cova da Moura<sup>10</sup> is paradigmatic of the complex way that cultural exchange occurs between populations of different generations and lifestyles. This neighbourhood has everything from parties in bars with morna and

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<sup>9</sup> Morna, koladera and batuque are music genres that originated in Cape Verde, while semba originated in Angola. What they all have in common is the fact that they are associated to an older generation and to rural musical rhythms and urban acoustic beats that, by the middle of the past century, were already regularly played in dancing parties in the countries of origin.

<sup>10</sup> Cova da Moura is a neighbourhood of the municipality of Amadora, in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, with a strong presence of a black population of Cape Verdean origin.

koladera bands to studios of rappers who receive performers of traditional music; from the commemoration of *Kola Son Jon* led by the “elders” to *Kova M Festival*, organised by the young people, whose stage draws together black, African and diasporic references (Varela et al. 2018). Likewise, in the case of Quinta do Mocho, as discussed further on below, this mixture of influences was determinant for the emergence of new musical rhythms, such as beat. This genre is revealing of the creative manner in which the young people of these urban peripheries blend traditions from their ancestors’ places of origin with Portuguese and global influences, enabled by the ability of some actors to deal with different symbolic types and create hybrid products based on numerous possible combinations (Hannerz, 1998).

However, before this musical rhythm flooded onto Lisbon’s dance floors, other styles marked black youth in peripheries of the Portuguese capital, such as rap and kuduro. Ferreira and Contador (1997) and Otávio Raposo (2007) studied the emergence of rap in Portugal, focusing on Lisbon’s peripheries and the way that music became an important agent of socialisation, political engagement and reinvention of identity. This music style was a favourite instrument of projection for an up to then invisible black youth,<sup>11</sup> by endowing them with positive images in the face of the stereotyped discourses usually attributed to them (Raposo and Varela, [in press](#)). While the 1990s were crucial to the diffusion of rap countrywide, this decade also marked the unveiling of black youth by political and media agendas who generally associated them to the prototype of the new “dangerous classes” (Raposo and Aderaldo, 2019). Not by chance, rap produced by young black people reflects the experiences of marginalisation, social

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<sup>11</sup> Although rap music has always joined white and black youth with a variety of “cultural baggage”, the centrality of black youth in the dissemination of this style should not be underestimated, especially in Lisbon. It is not by chance that when the rap boom took place in Portugal, in the first half of the 1990s, when various albums were launched, among which the collection “Rapública”, the main leading figures were black rappers, such as *General D*, *Da Weasal*, *Boss AC*, *Black Company*, *Zona Dread*, among others.

**Commented [O1]:** É esta a denominação quando o artigo está no prelo?

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exclusion and racism endured by them in Lisbon's peripheries, similar to what also happens in the deprived neighbourhoods of New York and other cities of the world.

Kuduro is another musical expression that arrived in force, being greatly acclaimed in Portugal in the mid-1990s. As described by Marcon (2012), kuduro had emerged previously in Angola as a music and dance style with rapid electronic beats and intense body language of the hips, legs and arms, and was then shared with friends and family members who migrated. Originally derived from the streets of Luanda and produced digitally by home computers, young Angolans or descendants in the diaspora were quickly taken with the style, bringing it into their festive and leisure gatherings. Thus, this soundscape, markedly generational and ethnic-racial, also appeared in the daily social exchanges between black adolescents and youth in the peripheral neighbourhoods of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, being consumed among friends in public places, and subsequently being produced by them, as we shall discuss below. In sum, rap and kuduro, but also kizomba and other more traditional genres, such as semba and funaná, all heard in backyards, parties and discotheques, by having crossed oceans, neighbourhoods and genealogies, created an intense flow and powerful musical synergy in these territories, facilitated by the phenomenon of music digitalisation<sup>12</sup>. These dynamics intensified the connection with other global rhythms, as the contact with different styles of electronic music were shared with young Portuguese of other origins and social classes through the media platforms and socialisation at schools, parties and leisure areas. This atmosphere of conviviality and mobility enabled access to numerous forms of artistic expression and to new music experiences that circulated in the major European centres, in particular *techno*, *house* and their variants.

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<sup>12</sup> Here, we are referring both to the phenomenon of the audience and circulation of music contents produced and reproduced digitally, and to the appropriation, creation, diffusion, production, circulation and consumption of digital musical by the younger generations.

During the first decade of the present century, a black youth presence consolidated itself on the Portuguese public scene, agile and resourceful in its use of the new digital devices that were emerging. These new digital technologies became made it easier to (immediately) access a variety of global rhythms, and at the same time enabled greater possibilities of production, audio file compacting and use of mobile means of reproduction, communication and sharing, giving rise to new relational habits with music (Marcon, 2015). In Lisbon's peripheral neighbourhoods, cultural collectivities multiplied rapidly, structured by friendship networks, in which the primary social activity was music, namely rap and kuduro. Improvised studios cropped up in the bedrooms of these young people, embodying new artistic projects that progressively gained visibility, as much in their neighbourhood streets and at the schools they attended, as in the parties they organised and in other places of entertainment and youth conviviality (Marcon, 2012; Aderaldo and Raposo, 2016). In not being restricted to youth of African origin of Lisbon's peripheral belt, these dynamics also influenced young white Portuguese and immigrants of other diverse origins, many of whom were resident in those same neighbourhoods and shared feelings of the same economic deprivation.

### **3. Quinta do Mocho: from Stigmatisation to Resistance**

Quinta do Mocho is an emblematic case for the analysis of the relationship between African cultural influence, marginalisation and artistic-cultural productions that emerged in Lisbon's peripheral landscape. This is a neighbourhood in which street sociability, cultural diversity and access to personal computers and mobile digital devices, such as mobile phones, coupled with internet access, even if sporadic in some

cases, has enabled creative insights, generating new urban rhythms like the beat music genre.

Located in the municipality of Loures, Quinta do Mocho is inhabited by more than three thousand people, almost all black and of African origin. Known by the media as one of the main “problematic neighbourhoods” of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Quinta do Mocho was associated to an imaginary of criminality, a decrepit and morally “polluted” area, with its young residents considered potential delinquents (Raposo, 2019). Owned by the City Council, this is a “social housing district” built in the late 1990s to reaccommodate the immigrant population who were inhabiting four unfinished blocks of flats surrounded by shacks, the majority of whom had originally come from Angola, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe and Cape Verde<sup>13</sup>. One of the first neighbourhoods to be covered by the Special Rehousing Programme (PER), Quinta do Mocho was erected on a plot of land bordering the formerly occupied blocks of flats. Nevertheless, this social housing district repeated some of the mistakes of the then PER “formula” to deal with the housing problems of the deprived and undesired populations: shove them into desolate urban spaces lacking in transport networks or access to services (Raposo *et. al* 2019). The isolation of the first years of existence of Quinta do Mocho was summarised as follows by Kedy, a young rapper who arrived there in 2002, having come from São Tomé e Príncipe:

*When I arrived, the first thing I said was: “Hey, I left one island just to go to another island”. Unfortunately, Quinta do Mocho was an island, there was nothing around it, there was no health centre, supermarket, the bus didn’t come in, it was really sad. There started to be a lot of juvenile delinquency problems, family breakdown and there were lots of conflicts. And for us, who had never experienced problems of this kind, in coming here, we were a bit shocked with it. [Kedy, 30 years old, February 2016]*

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<sup>13</sup> Like in other Lisbon peripheral neighbourhoods, the Mozambican immigrants at Quinta do Mocho are not very numerous due to the particularities of the migratory networks of this country that prioritise South Africa rather than Portugal.

Although the rehousing meant an improvement in the housing conditions for many families, it did not represent a change in the way that these populations and their spaces were treated (EUMC, 2003; Raposo, 2018). Nor did it mean more attention from the political powers. The families felt forsaken during the rehousing, as participatory mechanisms were not created to foster the rekindling of former community and neighbourhood ties. Not by chance, many residents associated the first years in the new neighbourhood with “juvenile delinquency” and “family breakdown”, a social problem that was rapidly exploited by the sensationalist media accustomed to generalising deviant conduct of a tiny part of young people to the entire population.

In order to deal with this negative public image, the former city council changed the neighbourhood’s name to Urbanização Terraços da Ponte in 2008. However, this strategy proved ineffective, as the disparaging news flowed unceasingly and the residents continued to call it Quinta do Mocho, affirming a feeling of belonging intimately associated to the memories of the neighbourhood. Its official name of Quinta do Mocho was restored in 2014, when a new city council acknowledged urban art as a particularly useful instrument to combat territorial stigma. This was the primary goal of the Public Art Gallery of Quinta do Mocho<sup>14</sup>, which currently has more than 100 large-scale works decorating the fronts of its social housing buildings. “Reconverted symbolically into a territory of art and culture” (Raposo, 2018:136), Quinta do Mocho transformed itself into a touristic attraction, enticing thousands of street art enthusiast and others seeking alternative experiences in multicultural spaces (Loukaitou-Sideris and Soureli 2012; Freire-Medeiros, 2007). The “discursive redevelopment” (Raposo,

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<sup>14</sup> The first *street art* interventions at Quinta do Mocho occurred in September 2014 under the Festival “O bairro i o Mundo” (The neighbourhood and the World spelt in a phonetic way), organised by the Ibisco Theatre Association and Loures City Council, whose motto was “showing the neighbourhood to the world and bringing the world to the neighbourhood”. The following year, this project was transformed into the Public Art Gallery (GAP), when the number of artistic works multiplied and guided tours became regular. For further details, see Raposo (2019).

2018: 127) stamped on numerous journalist reports about its visual landscape changed the way that Quinta do Mocho was henceforth represented in the media, as the neighbourhood had become a reference of urban art in Portugal and in the world, no longer being exclusively linked to topics of violence.

However, before Quinta do Mocho became a prominent site of street art, a group of young people had already appropriated music both as a form of entertaining, spontaneous and daily sociability, and as counter-stigmatisation fostering positive identities. If for some, this relationship with music was becoming rather more serious in terms of occupation, work and rent, for others, the convivial and leisure components of that relationship continued to be the most important elements. In either case, these practices contributed to position Quinta do Mocho in the Portuguese music scenario, symbolically enhancing its value. It is this process that we shall now address in detail.

#### **4. The Black Beat and the Struggle for Visibility and Agency**

Since our very first incursions into Quinta do Mocho, we were able to observe the centrality exerted by music in the life of its residents. One of the most evident particularities in this context is the age cohort aspect, which in one way reflects the generational behaviour of young people, to some extent connected to mobile digital media platforms and the internet. Another particularity is the intermingling of family migratory experiences that originated in the PALOP, sometimes implied by national affinities, but moved by the same taste in music shared in the public space. In this regard, streets are the spaces, digital media platforms are the means, and music is the visceral language through which these social exchanges take place. At family parties, meet-ups in the street or in the home studios of Quinta do Mocho, rap, kuduro and beat, but also kizomba and funaná, have become part of young people's expression of

identity. On the other hand, as an extension of these experiences, in school grounds, at discos and via the internet (Marcon, 2012), music operates as a means by which these young people seek expression beyond the neighbourhood, attracting visibility, enlarging friendship networks and fighting against the lack of decent opportunities of social and economic existence, added to daily confrontations against racism in the different places in which they circulate.

The importance of artistic practices for the youth of Quinta do Mocho, and of music in particular, can be better understood through three artistic collectives which we encountered in our different ethnographic incursions into the neighbourhood: Império Suburbano, Kebrada 55 and DJ's do Guetto. Created in the first decade of the twenty-first century, after their rehousing in the new Quinta do Mocho, these three collectives are linked, respectively, to the music styles of rap, kuduro and beat. Despite the importance that ethnic origins continue to represent in the socialisation of young people, this does not *a priori* define the participants in each of these collectivities. It is the musical tastes, the lifestyles and the friendship networks that determine the belonging of young people to each of these collectivities, whose ethnic and cultural heterogeneity is their dominant marker. Thus, the intermingling of origins and nationalities is one of the most interesting elements of the conviviality occurring at Quinta do Mocho, primarily among the younger generations. So, socialising in the neighbourhood's streets are young people of African origin of diverse countries (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe, and others), all together, dressed in a similar way, using the same accessories (earrings, necklaces and caps) and following the same codes of conduct (language, gestures and preferences).

Império Suburbano (Suburban Empire) is one of the oldest rap groups of Quinta do Mocho. Formed in 2003-2004 by about twenty young people, this group marked the



neighbourhood's musical panorama by being one of the first artistic collectivities to launch their own CD, giving concerts at prestigious venues in central Lisbon and participating in television programmes. Their internal diversity was perceived by their members as one of the group's strengths, an expression of the actual heterogeneity of the neighbourhood, as they were of various religions (Catholic, Muslim, Evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses) and origins: São Tomé e Príncipe, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. From the very beginning, Império Suburbano was supported by the Hope Project – associated to a government crime prevention programme named Choices<sup>15</sup> under the wing of the High Commission for Migrations (ACM) – which gave them a space for group rehearsals. The experiences offered by their participation in an artistic production circuit linked to hip-hop culture<sup>16</sup> were crucial for this collective's members to develop a critical perspective on forms of injustice, social inequalities and the mechanisms of subalternation embedded in their environment. The dynamics of agreement and debate on topics that marked their lives was recounted as follows by Kedy, a group member:

*We were a huge group, we would meet up, talk, people who were studying or not, we would talk about hip-hop, issues of society, we sought reflection. Of course, everyone had their own point of view. That was in 2003-04, when we started this project. (...) We made some music, we started to gain some visibility, largely with the help of the Choices [Programme], we started singing outside of Lisbon, or even in Lisbon, more distinguished concerts at Teatro Camões, Teatro Dona Maria, Gulbenkian. (...) We've performed at several places where we never imagined entering. It's really something... And when we said we were from Quinta Mocho that made it even worse: "How come these guys from Mocho do this, say this, sing this, are like this?". And that really helped, it helped a lot. [Kedy, 30 years old. Interview – February 2016]*

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<sup>15</sup> The Choices Programme was created in 2001 primarily aimed at the "prevention of juvenile criminality" and the "insertion of young people of the most problematic neighbourhoods", as stressed in Council of Ministers Resolution 4/2001. Years later, the premises of this programme were redirected to the promotion of "social inclusion" and would become the most important public policy in Portugal directed at the youth of deprived social layers. For a more in-depth review of this programme, see Raposo and Aderaldo (2019).

<sup>16</sup> Hip-hop is an urban cultural movement based on street culture, especially juvenile and composed of four artistic expressions: rap, DJing, graffiti and break dance.

Following their involvement with rap music, many of these young people felt motivated to organise themselves locally, whether to better drive their music projects or to influence the configurations of the unequal societies in which they lived. While some were invited to work for the Choices Programme, which was the case of Saline, who eventually became coordinator of the Hope Project, others founded youth associations, like Kedy who was chair of the Young Stars of the Neighbourhood Association (Associação Jovens Estrelas do Bairro – AJEB), in 2012, in addition to having worked for three years in the Hope Project. Império Suburbano is currently dismembered, as its main leaders emigrated, moved to another neighbourhood or are engaged in other personal projects related to family or employment. The aging of its members reduced their available time for artistic projects linked to the group, whose music production never offered them professional career prospects, despite having widened their artistic, identity and life horizons. If there is a new generation of rappers in the neighbourhood today, it's greatly due to the dedication of these “pioneers” in music and local activism, respected as cultural and community mediators by the residents as a whole.

Kebrada 55 (K55) is a collectivity of friends formed right after the rehousing and was based on the dynamics of sociability played out at the entrance of a building in Quinta do Mocho, more specifically at number 55. The group's name is a reference to this meeting place, where over a dozen young people met regularly to chat and share their leisure time, always with music brought by one or another. In an interview held in 2010, DK, one of these members, told us how the group's name came into being<sup>17</sup>:

*At the time we were the Chocolate Gang, a group of kids, so called vandals, problem youth (laughter). Then we started seeing things differently, let's stop messing about, we're growing up, so, we changed, right, to Kebrada 55,*

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<sup>17</sup> See research video produced in 2010, with sections of interviews with the K55 (including the presence of Kimo, DK, Ticho, Mauro Djavan and Xeué): Frank Marcon, *Kuduro: diáspora e estilo na tuga*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUMgd6fFNyU> (last accessed on 13/08/2020).

*it's the building where we stop by, right, where we hang out. [Kuduro: diáspora e estilo na tuga, 2010]*

With the group's change of name and behaviour, music began to gain more space as a form of expression.

Mostly of Angolan origin, this collectivity could be considered a crew, as it gathers young people who identify with the same aesthetics (language, musical taste, clothing, body ornamentation), developing group rituals and shared cultural practices. Strongly territorialised, like the other crews in Lisbon and in other parts of the world, its members share experiences, imaginaries and the same lifestyle, which, in this case, can only be understood if related to their status of subalternity due to being black youth, poor and resident in an infamous neighbourhood. Differently from Império Suburbano, which sought to transform the neighbourhood and the precarious living conditions of its youth through a special relationship with public power, we can view Kebrada 55 as having a "dissident identity" (Pais, 2004:25), in fostering a divergent *praxis* in relation to the State and its formal institutions, whether concerning the adversities confronted or their desired feeling of personal dignity. Kebrada 55 is, for this reason, a collective identification that by reinventing an "us" with symbolic materials that retrieve their self-esteem, gives rise to intense feelings of belonging among them and in relation to the neighbourhood, and also becomes of creative way to make themselves known and differentiate themselves from the "others" in the neighbourhood and outside of it.

In interviews with various K55 members, in 2010, they shared the idea that the group's relationship with music, namely kuduro, started to intensify around 2006, when their first compositions emerged and, in the following years, with their first recordings. Various lyrics of their music reveal the neighbourhood's daily life, mentioning names of the group's friends who died or are imprisoned (in a kind of tribute) and talk about parties, using young peoples' slang, especially of Angolan origin. When the music and

videos began to be posted and viewed on YouTube, the neighbourhood started to gain a certain visibility, and the Kebrada 55 became an important reference of self-esteem for the young residents, even though, paradoxically, their members were stigmatised as dangerous thugs by part of Portuguese society. This visibility occurred at the same time as the neighbourhood's residents rejected its renaming as Terraços da Ponte. It is not by chance that the group's members used the slang "Urbanização Mochaile" or the abbreviation QdM in their first videos, as a form of affirmation and being known as coming from Quinta do Mocho.

The production and circulation of the K55's musical work was initially through rather precarious means. However, as some of the neighbourhood's youth began to acquire and learn to make music on personal computers, this musical production became increasingly sophisticated and started to be broadcast via videos on the internet. The music production duo Nova Geração<sup>18</sup> and the producer Nigga Ssom (of Império Suburbano), neighbourhood residents, also collaborated on some important pieces, with some productions circulating through audio or videoclips released on the internet or, initially, through mobile phone storage.<sup>19</sup> To begin with, the recordings circulated between them, later spreading to school friends and other neighbourhoods and cities around Lisbon, like Sacavém, Odivelas and the urban sprawl of the South Bank and the Sintra railway line, in some cases traveling further beyond the Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

Nowadays, some of K55's founding members no longer live in the neighbourhood, although the collective is still active as an important musical reference

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<sup>18</sup> Nova Geração was formed of the brothers, Paulo and William, who at that time had a home studio set up in their shared bedroom, and performed numerous roles such as DJs, producers and dancers. They continue to work with music, sound and video production, now as Paulo A. Proad and William A Proad.

<sup>19</sup> One of the K55's first videoclips, *Língua da Mbata*, illustrates the sociability referred to in this chapter. Released in 2009, it has actually received more than 55 mil views, when last accessed on 19/07/2020: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwCbfqD\\_VV8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwCbfqD_VV8)

for the youth of Quinta do Mocho. The creation of a bar named K55 is evocative of how this crew remains a source of pride for many of them, who continue to use this name as an identity and musical production reference. Despite all the economic and social difficulties that continue to afflict the inhabitants of Quinta do Mocho, some K55 members pursue their attempt to make music as an alternative career even if separately from the crew, as is the case of Mamborro, now known as MeninYnho<sup>20</sup>.

Very significant for the development of kuduro at Quinta do Mocho were the clandestine parties held inside some of the neighbourhood's buildings. Taking place between 2003 and 2007, these parties invaded the ground floors that had been designed for shops and were subsequently abandoned by the public authorities. Memorable for an entire generation of the neighbourhood, during these parties, countless young people "put themselves to the test" as DJs, presenting their music to a wider audience. This was the case of Nervoso, a member of the DJ's do Guetto, also considered the "inventor" of beat rhythm in Portugal. At that time, kuduro dominated the music production of Nervoso and other DJs. However, the music they created revealed the particularity of not having the voice component that characterised kuduro, enhancing the prominence of the beats. Reminiscing on this time, Nervoso commented:

*We started to perform here at the neighbourhood parties. And here people really went for kuduro. At that time, what was most heard was kuduro. I started making music and, hey, there was a time I was DJing and I slipped in my own music in the middle and people came up to me asking «who's music was that?». I said: «it's mine» [and they answered] «hey man, that's good music». (...) And whenever I DJed at parties, I would always play two, three mixes and I would always do them the evening before I played them. (...) I only do instruments. No voice. Voice is that situation. I'm at home, if he wants to sing, when he wants to sing, we make music and play around. It's not at all serious. We played around and performed, but just for the neighbourhood. [Nervoso, 32 years old. Interview – September 2016]*

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<sup>20</sup> MeninYnho's official channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnwldblJVW1uFwXosMrTnSg>, last accessed on 19/07/2020.

The collective effervescence caused by the innovative beat of their “resident DJ” attracted people from various neighbourhoods, contributing to the proliferation of this embryonic music style in Lisbon’s peripheries. The son of an Angolan mother, Cape Verdean father and born in São Tomé, Nervoso mirrors the fusion of rhythms embedded in the beat he helped to create. From Angolan semba and tarrachinha to Cape Verdean funaná, everything is fair game to incorporate in a beat that varies from 138 to 150 beats per minute (BPM), in a rhythm summed up as follows by Nervoso: “this is different, it’s not really afro-house, it’s beat style. It’s a more European kuduro”. At that time, the youths’ sharing of music gained new wings, both via the internet and new digital devices: mobile phones, MP3 players, etc. Consequently, the music of Nervoso and other DJs circulated, albeit outside the hegemonic mass media, which led to an initial circuit of musical producers of the periphery, among whom the DJ’s do Guetto were the most expeditious expression.

Marfox is a fundamental performer to understand the formation of this group. Originating from São Tomé, he was one of the many youths who followed in the “footsteps” of DJ Nervoso, learning the secrets of music production alongside him. A former resident of the shanty neighbourhood called Quinta da Vitória, Marfox also presented his music at Quinta do Mocho parties when he was still a beginner DJ, moving there with his family years later (Garrido and Raposo, 2020). He was the one that invited Nervoso to join the group, at a time when its members were Fofuxo, Pausas, N.K., Jesse, in addition to Marfox himself. These youths lived in different regions of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area: from the neighbourhoods of Queluz, Massamá and Barcarena (on the Sintra railway line) to Oeiras (Cascais railway line), as well as Quinta do Mocho (Azambuja railway line) and Baixa da Banheira (Lisbon’s South Bank). The

motives for inviting Nervoso to join the group are implicit in the following statement by Marfox, who always admired him:

*He's the person who created this on his own. Get it?! He didn't go to Angola to steal beats, no. He created his own stuff all on his own. Hey, and when you arrive at a place like Loures, I am also from Loures. And you know that you have a DJ that no one in Loures will ever beat, do you see. No one will ever beat Nervoso in Loures. A thousand years could come and go, but DJ Nervoso is eternal here. (...) The great DJs who currently perform at African discos at the weekend were yesterday or are today inspired by Nervoso, not just those who create this music. Beyond him creating this music, which is beat, he also had a nervous way of performing. That's why they named him Nervoso. [Marfox, 28 years old. Interview – September 2016]*

The group's first compilation was *DJ's do Guetto Vol. 1*, launched on purpose at the very beginning of the school year of 2006. Available on the internet for free downloading, this music circulated in the digital networks and from "hand to hand" with increased vigour due to the return to school, enhancing the group's visibility, including beyond Portugal's borders. Indeed, following this compilation, they were invited to perform in France, Switzerland and other European countries.

Years later, the *DJ's do Guetto* disbanded. However, by this time beat rhythm had already made its mark on Lisbon's peripheries, rousing new generations to follow in this pioneering group's footsteps. From 2011 onwards, Editora Príncipe played a decisive role in the internationalisation of this music style, taking the rhythms created by these young musicians<sup>21</sup> both to central Lisbon and discos worldwide. Nowadays, Marfox is the principal representative of the beat style, having been included by the United States *Rolling Stone* magazine in their list of "10 Artists You Need to Know" in 2014, and responsible for its dissemination to a global audience. Key to the shift of these marginal cultural productions onto the mainstream stage was the international

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<sup>21</sup> The majority of whom are the children of African immigrants, these *DJs* and *beat* producers hang out at this small publishing structure that promoted the "Noite Príncipe" parties at the *MusicBox* disco, in central Lisbon for more than six years. At the same time, this publishing house placed these *DJs* in an international circuit of electronic music, organising tours that took them to perform at MoMa (New York), the Institute of Contemporary Arts (London) and even Chinese and South Korean discos.

success of the Buraka Som Sistema group, whose fusion of electronic music with the rhythms of the PALOP (primarily kuduro), were listened to and recreated in Lisbon's peripheries, and many consider that it made it into Portugal's most successful dance music project<sup>22</sup>.

The use of digital platforms – social networks, website pages, YouTube – for the dissemination and sale of their music projects gained a professional status, and the circuits of parties they participated in reached transnational dimensions. Quinta do Mocho is the “heart” of this phenomenon, grounded on new technologies and processes of network collaborations which opened the door to new talents (Garrido and Raposo, 2020). Inspired by the DJ's do Guetto, then came the Piquenos DJ's do Guetto, led by Firmeza, and groups like the Studio Bros, both of Quinta do Mocho. This neighbourhood thus emerges as a core junction of a “glocal” network which also nourishes artists of other peripheral neighbourhoods of Lisbon, followers of DJs Nervoso and Marfox: Nigga Fox, Lilocox, Dadifox, among others. In this scenario, where imagination and creativity gain traction, populations historically alienated from the hegemonic spaces of cultural consumption foster symbolic shifts and exchanges able to deconstruct stereotypes and reposition borders, decisively influencing the current configurations of Portuguese society.

## **5. Final Considerations**

For many years, music has been the bedrock for social engagement and part of the actual performance of the socialisation of Quinta do Mocho's youth, whether on the

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<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere (Marcon, 2013), we discuss that, although some of these musicians were to become stars or highly regarded in the mainstream scenario of commercial music in Portugal and internationally, paradoxically the great majority was never recognised as such and continue at the fringes of these possibilities, being repeatedly stigmatised. Even among the more renowned artists, like Buraka Som Sistema or DJ Marfox, very few are able to make a living professionally and exclusively from music.



doorsteps of the buildings in which they live or inside them, where casual conversation about daily life is mediated by the soundscape of electronic rhythms and by the African, diasporic and peripheral dance and accents. A crossing point of memories arising from their countries of origin, of different individual and family experiences, intermingled with information about job opportunities, artistic practices and cases of violence. The creativity for the compositions very often emerges in a collective form, in the midst of the noise of conversations, by way of verses or in an instrumental form. Frequently, the actual recordings are improvised and some ideas hardly evolve to the point of being recorded. For the majority, music is an act that is part of their individual and collective subjectivities, performed in moments of leisure and social exchanges in the neighbourhood as a platform of social visibility, acknowledgement, citizenship and rent.

Some continue to insist on using music for a potential musical or artistic career, in which the ladder out of poverty is climbed through creative practices with which they identify. The possibility of verbalising their experiences through an artform that is enjoyed, laying claim to societal recognition of their socially marginalised black bodies, is undoubtedly transformational for the life of these young people. As stated elsewhere, “it is through musical and dance expressions that the ‘subaltern speak’ to the world (Spivak 1988), sending their message in a language encoding and conveying know-how and experiences (see Daniel, 2005; Grau, 1998; Jiménez, 2019), even when delegitimised by the colonial power (see Quijano, 2000). This message is easily spread and becomes even more powerful via the new digital communication technologies and their accessibility.” (Marcon, et al. 2018: 7).

The interesting point about the experiences recounted above is that they express alternative sociabilities and political agencies connected to innovative lifestyles that generate collective action, some of which potentially able to deconstruct hegemonic

representations of themselves and their places of origin. From the Império Suburbano's activist lyrics to the casual clips by Kebrada 55, they all reflect a self-portrayal of themselves and their neighbourhood inquiring into the urban segregation, racism, poverty and violence in which they are immersed, sometimes co-starring with some of these dynamics in a position of power. Among those who benefit from some public recognition, like Marfox, there is an attempt to give new meaning to the neighbourhood as a place of art and culture, whether by means of their public statements or by demanding from journalists that their interviews, addressing the musical world of beat, be conducted at Quinta do Mocho:

An interview in the neighbourhood is always an opportunity to open doors to the world. (...) Of what interest could I possibly be if I were sitting in Bica or in Chiado or in Rossio or in Martim Moniz [Lisbon tourist zones]? I'm not from there, it wasn't there that this happened. This happened in this neighbourhood, in Portela and in other neighbourhoods. Having the Rolling Stone or Rimas e Batidas [music magazines] sitting in my house is a way of demonstrating that there's life here too, that the people are cool, that the identity of this music comes from here. And I don't mean to say that there are no direct influences from the city of Lisbon, of course there are. We weren't born and learnt only to make kuduro, we had a Portuguese style of education [**Rimas e Batidas, 2016**].

In sum, what is most striking in all the examples given herein is the singularity of the music as a form of fundamental expression in the social life of the black population neighbourhoods in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, as is the case of Quinta do Mocho. And, primarily, that in a scenario of multiple forms of deprivation, lack of social recognition and expectations as to the future, namely among the youth, music (rap, kuduro, beat, among others styles) is an essential part of their subjectivities, creating forms of identification, entertainment, leisure, creativity, conviviality, opportunities, in sum, living experiences of the condition of being young.

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