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BATIDA AND THE POLITICS OF SONIC AGENCY IN AFRO-LISBOA

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Abstract: This article examines the politics of sonic agency in batida, the most successful recent electronic musical style emerging from Lisbon's outskirts in Portugal. The genealogies of batida are closely linked to the emergence of a young generation of *Djs do Gueto* [Ghetto Djs] who unabashedly claim their right of belonging as major players within the Portuguese acoustic and cultural fields. We analyse batida as a space for agency and affirmative mobilisation of Afro-Portuguese populations. Two elements are of special interest: the digital recombination to celebrate the irreducibility of Afro-Portuguese experience, and the way in which racial exclusion, urban segregation, and racism are problematised through the act of inscribing the neighbouring sounds of peripheral neighbourhoods as part of a transnational Afro-Portuguese sonic aesthetic. Through the examination of these two elements, we aim to position sonic agency as a central space in the configuration of racial politics and processes of nation building in the Portuguese case, highlighting the concept's suitability within an expanded postcolonial European framework.

Keywords: Afro-Portuguese youth; Ghetto; Electronic Music; Portugal; Racism; Agency.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the politics of Afro-Portuguese sonic agency as a central part of a process of radical inclusion and participation in the public domain within the contemporary landscape of Lisbon. Understanding Afro-Portuguese as a complex, diverse and open-ended strategy for self-identification widely used in the Portuguese context, we will explore the use popular music as a central platform for civic agency.¹ Although Portuguese colonialism in Africa officially ended after more than four centuries in 1974, the same year that saw the end to the Estado Novo dictatorship, coloniality still conditions the ways in which Afro-Portuguese communities are incorporated within the national public and cultural spheres. The first decades of the 21st century have also been decisive for unsettling the continuities of colonial power and violence at play in contemporary Portugal through the articulation of cultural and political activist movements led by Afro-

¹ Our use of the concept Afro-Portuguese throughout this essay is intentional, and attempts to acknowledge the importance of collective identification and the socio-political agency of a complex and diverse community that embraces blackness and that strategically uses the idea of *Afroportugalidade* [Afro-Portugueseness] as a symbol of identification and belonging. This community includes racialised citizens of African origin based in Portugal (Portuguese, Angolans, Cape Verdeans, Sao Tomeans, Mozambicans and Guineans, but also racialised Brazilians, individuals of other African backgrounds, multinational and stateless individuals). Our preference for the term Afro-Portuguese does not imply homogeneity. It does not attempt to characterise a uniform, conflict-free group; rather, it acknowledges and celebrates an active process of civic and political participation that transcends clear-cut national and cultural divisions and puts Africa at the centre of collective identification and subject formation. The "Afro" in Afro-Portuguese does not refer to any essentialist value; on the contrary, it makes emphasis on positive identification and the ways in which racialised individuals of diverse nationality are challenging the idea of whiteness the constitutive element of Portugueseness. The "Portuguese" in Afro-Portuguese does not just refer to a country, a nation-state or a language; rather, it points at the existence of correlations and fractures within the pluri-continental territories that were colonised by Portugal. The use of the term Afro-Portuguese in the Portuguese context (in academia, but also in public life) highlights the importance of coming to terms with the coloniality of the contemporary Portuguese society.

Portuguese engaging with racial justice and the legacy of colonialism in the country. Against the official view that colonialism is something from the past and that racism does not apply because of the exceptional, unique nature of Portuguese colonialism, cultural and socio-political manifestations developed by Afro-Portuguese communities have been crucial to generate public awareness on issues of systemic exclusion, infrastructural marginalisation and national amnesia.

An example of this has been the multiplication of anti-racist collectives in the country during the last decade. Most of these collectives are led by young Afro-Portuguese born in Portugal, such as Femafro, Consciência Negra, Djass - Associação de Afrodescendentes, Afrolis and Imune - Instituto da Mulher Negra. This new movement has mobilized protests and public debate on structural racism in an unprecedented way, as with the case of the Campaign for Another Nationality Law, which brought together more than 40 anti-racist collectives, cultural and migrant associations between 2017-19.² It is also worth mentioning the numerous protests in the public space against racist violence, such as the historic demonstration triggered by the murder of African-American George Floyd, which gathered around 10 thousand people in Lisbon on June 6, 2020, or the gathering in front of one of the most important theatres in the city in repudiation of the murder of actor Bruno Candé on July 31 of the same year. These collective actions against the structural racism have reached beyond the confines of academia and parliamentary politics, taking to the streets and involving a much wider range of interlocutors. Such public mobilisations has proved decisive in countering the systemic invisibility of communities of African origin in Portugal, which cannot be reduced to a uniform, homogeneous process despite going back to at least the 15th century, (see Castro Henriques 2019, 2022).

In a country that has reinvented itself as a multicultural nation since the 1980s, when it began to receive diverse migratory flows, Lusotropicalist rhetoric has served to support political racelessness (Goldberg 2006). These policies render invisible the African presence in Portugal - in the past and present - as well as the effects of racism in the reproduction of racial inequalities.³ In the context of Lisbon, the creation of a set of afro-diasporic rhythms (including creole rap, kuduro and afrobeat) by young, racialised (understood as a critical, bottom-up strategy of self-identification) musicians is exemplary of the way in which social media and digital tools are appropriated by racialised European citizens to challenge Lusotropical reconfigurations of the Portuguese cultural field. In the case of Creole rap, recent scholarship highlights the importance of Afro-Portuguese rappers for the visibility of racism in the Portuguese public debate, where the use of digital devices plays a decisive role in denouncing unequal power relations structured around contemporary forms of coloniality (Raposo *et al.* 2021). In this way, musical practices such as Creole rap unsettle the national politics of social representation, challenging Lusotropicalist rhetoric and racial stereotypes.

In this article, we focus on batida, a sort of electronic kuduro that mixes elements from Angolan tarraxinha and Cape Verdean funaná alongside afro-house, dancehall, zouk and techno, and that is often considered as the “ghetto sound of Lisbon” (Kelling 2014). Batida is quintessentially local, but also diasporic and pluricontinental. It is simultaneously contextual and uncontainable, “biographical” and from outer worlds (Elliott 2022: 4). Rhythms such as batida enact an inexhaustible pulsing that paves the way for a radical reconfiguration of postcolonial Portugal. Batida is part a movement of sonic affirmation that uses of creative and digital strategies to

² Under the slogan “Quem nasce em Portugal é português, ponto final” (Who is born in Portugal is Portuguese, full stop), this campaign fostering public debate within Portuguese society about the historic injustice that many citizens face of being considered immigrants in the very country they were born in. Even if it did not manage to change the nationality law from the principle of jus sanguinis to jus soli, this campaign was successful in pressuring parliament to reduce from 5 years to 1 year the minimum period of residency which one parent must have in order for their children to be granted Portuguese nationality at time of birth. See: https://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?nid=614&tabela=leis

³ This is how one understands the continued denial of the collection of ethno-racial data in official censuses in Portugal, as well as the perpetuation of an “imperial imagination” in schoolbooks (Araújo and Maeso 2010:259).

(re)inscribe the diverse collective experiences of Afro-Portuguese communities into the body of the Portuguese nation. From rhythmic recombinations, this fusion music denies racial essentialisms, strengthening an Afrodiasporic consciousness among its protagonists. It builds a community of affections that counteracts informal racializations and hierarchies among young Afro-Portuguese of different nationalities and ethnic origins (Grau-Rebollo *et al.* 2024), as they would all share common experiences of urban segregation and racial exclusion. In this sense, the batida unsettles mainstream narratives that still marginalise young Afro-Portuguese who are often seen as foreigners or individuals “out of place” (Hancock *et al.* 2018), while also producing connections and solidarities between different racialized groups.

Despite the richness and complexity of this music style, batida remains undertheorized and under-examined, especially if we compare it to more “lyric-driven” Afro-Portuguese musical manifestations such as rap, kizomba or kuduro. Whilst the importance of these three styles for the configuration of transnational processes of identity affirmation has been widely explored – a notable exception to this rule is Richard Elliott’s recent book on *Djs do Guetto* (2022); it is significant that Vítor Belanciano’s systematic mapping of Afro-Portuguese rhythms (2020) does not delve in detail into the recent, fast-paced, electronic recombination of sonic and cultural elements that is batida. Batida remains marginal when it comes to cultural analysis within the Portuguese-Speaking world. There are several reasons that explain this: batida is the most recent music style emerging within the Afro-Portuguese sonic landscape; it is less mainstream and, for many, it is still confined to specific “peripheral” neighbourhoods of Lisbon; finally, batida is often seen as lacking content, as “noise”. As we hope to demonstrate, despite (or because) of these elements, batida offers a strong potential to explore the ways in which sound, music and noise are mobilised as part of processes of socio-political participation. With Jacques Attali (1985), we argue that noise is always concerned with potentiality, with the possibility of creative and social composition. This becomes evident through a closer look at the cultural politics of batida.

Vítor Belanciano (2020) has recently highlighted the importance of music for a twofold process, one which includes both the cultural rebranding of Lisbon as a multicultural city and the emergence of a vibrant affirmative movement driven by younger generations of Afro-Portuguese citizens claiming visibility, recognition and racial justice. For Belanciano (2020: 9), music is the vehicle through which these two processes unfold. Music, he argues, “was never just music. It is also a social experience. A place of debate and confrontation of ideas”. And yet, he adds, music is still seen with paternalism, as something that “does not deserve to be taken seriously.”

Batida is a clear example of a ubiquitous sound that is often “not taken seriously”. It emerged by the middle 2000s as an artisanal digital music developed in personal rooms by self-styled “*Djs do guetto* [ghetto Djs]” living in Lisbon’s outskirts. The epicentre of batida is Quinta do Mocho, an area located in the north-east of Lisbon within the Loures municipality area, and mostly inhabited by Afro-Portuguese communities of Angolan, Guinean, Sao Tomean and Cape Verdean origin. Quinta do Mocho is still commonly pictured in public media as a “no-go zone, proscribed as an area of transgression and crime” (Raposo 2023:164). Despite this reputation, however, the area has been gradually and rightfully recognised as a “*caldeirão cultural* [a cultural melting pot]” playing an important role in the reconfiguration and expansion of Afro-Portuguese cultural influences. Since its inception, batida soon generated a vibrant cultural scene that is now enjoyed way beyond Portugal, valorised by mainstream platforms such as Rolling Stone magazine and the global music festival circuit. This success, however, has not omitted the spatial identification of the main protagonists of this story.

The origins of batida stem from the creative collaboration of a group of Djs (including Dj Marfox, Dj Nervoso, Dj Firmeza, Jesse, Fofuxo, o Pausas and N.K.), all inhabitants of different peripheral neighbourhoods of Lisbon, such as Queluz Massamá, Barcarena, Quinta do Mocho, Quinta da Vitória and Baixa da Banheira. Their artisanal digital music was first put together in the compilation *Djs do Guetto Vol. 1*, an album launched online in 2006. Made available for free download online, the tunes included in *Djs do Guetto* circulated widely through the online

grapevine. The launching of this compilation was timed to match the start of school term, a strategy which resulted in a peak of sociality. *Djs do Guetto* popularised batida to the extent that the musicians responsible for the album were invited to perform in France, Switzerland and other European countries (Raposo and Marcon 2021). Although the group formally stopped working together a few years later, the atmosphere of collaboration continued, proving influential for younger generations such as the “*Piquenos Djs do Guetto*” (“The little ghetto Djs” a group organised around Quinta do Mocho that included Firmeza, Liofox, Maboku, Dadifox and Liocox.) Through an analysis of printed and digital media, participant observation, informal interviews and a long-term period of fieldwork research in Quinta do Mocho,⁴ our main aim is to explore Afro-Portuguese sonic agency as a central—yet commonly unknown—part of the history of Afro-Iberian memories, understanding that these memories are a contested and far from uniform field.⁵ We argue that sonic agency stands at the centre of the genealogies of anticolonial and antiracist affirmation in the Portuguese context. Following Labelle (2018) among other voices, we consider that sonic agency is a vibrant form of emancipatory politics and alliances resulting from moving oneself, while moving others, rhythmically. Sound, then, emerges as a central tool for mapping and historicising the “empowerment strategies” of African and Afro-Europeans communities in the Iberian Context (Aixelà Cabré 2024). More specifically, Afro-Portuguese rhythms such as batida have the potential to inscribe silenced histories and systemically excluded bodies into the national body and the public sphere, countering century-old dynamics of cultural and economic marginalisation, socio-spatial segregation and racism. Despite its relevance, Afro-Portuguese music made in Portugal remains an unexplored, yet particularly vibrant, field of cultural production (see Belanciano 2020, Pardue 2015). Afro-Portuguese music made in Portugal has been demeaned as something exotic and foreign at worst, tolerated as part of the myth of Portuguese conviviality and natural predisposition for cultural and racial tolerance at best. Such appreciation, therefore, restages an imaginary of harmony and problem-free miscegenation with deep roots in the Luso-tropicalist policies adopted in the Estado Novo.⁶

The examination of batida as a site of sonic agency offered in this article is driven by two main objectives: to examine batida as a process of creative digital recombination, a process that challenges and counters the still common identification of Afro-Portuguese as “foreigners” and “migrants”. This process also involves a democratisation of the spaces of cultural production in Portugal, where post/decolonial creative manifestations are often appreciated only when they are presented in more institutional and sanitised cultural spaces, such as museums and film, literary and music festivals. Secondly, we aim to identify in the “background noise” of neighbouring sounds of *bairros periféricos* [peripheral neighbourhoods] registered in batida an interest in bringing together racial affirmation and atmospheric justice. Through both objectives, we aim at positioning batida as an original and fertile sonic archive allowing practitioners (and not just researchers and those “in the know”) to uncover a hidden part of Afro-Iberian recent history.

1-BATIDA AND THE SPATIAL POLITICS OF LISBON’S SOUNDSCAPE

⁴ Despite the fact that the first author of this article has developed ethnographic work in Quinta do Mocho since 2016, it is only after 2020 that he started focusing on batida from an ethnography research perspective and regularly interviewing Djs.

⁵ In the same way that Afro-Portuguese is both a critical concept and a strategic site of cultural and political mobilisation, the use of Afro-Iberia throughout this article refers to a critical interest in mapping and making visible African memories produced within the Iberian Space (see Aixelà Cabré and Rizo 2023) Far from homogeneous, these memories should be seen as a complex and diverse kaleidoscope. We argue that Afro-Portuguese cultural manifestations (such as batida) occupy a special and distinctive place within the Afro-Iberian constellation. At the same time, the concept Afro-Portuguese refers to the mobile nature of these memories (and Afrodiasporic), which cannot be confined within the Portuguese or Iberian space.

⁶ Almost half a century after the end of the Portuguese colonial empire in 1974, Lusotropicalism continues to be a powerful ideological apparatus for spreading ideas of Portugal as a tolerant, inclusive and non-racist nation (Castelo 1998, Vale de Almeida 2000).

It is commonplace to establish a link between nation-building and sonic agency in the context of Portuguese-speaking postcolonial African and European territories. Looking at the cornerstone figure of Cesária Evora, Fernando Arenas (2011: 45) identifies in popular music “a centrepiece for the interpretation of Cape Verdean postcolonial reality both as a diasporic nation and as a nation-state.” Something similar could be affirmed of the centrality of semba and marrabenta in the Angolan and Mozambican context respectively. If these “traditional” musical styles played a decisive role in the cultural resistance to Portuguese colonialism, “cosmopolitan” rhythms coming from the musical repertoire of the African Diaspora have been precursors in giving visibility to the young people of African descent in Portugal, either denouncing structural racism, in the case of creole rap⁷, or staging in a more playful way a sociability that challenges the urban marginalization, such as kuduro, afrobeat, and batida (Raposo and Marcon 2021).

Produced by young Afro-Portuguese families coming from territories formerly colonised by Portugal, the Lisbon soundscape generated by these rhythms fused and updated “more traditional” influences from previous generations – including morna, coladeira, funaná, batuke, tabanka and semba. As part of this diasporic culture, sonic hybridisation became a common praxis within the last decade, producing a unique intergenerational interaction that triggered productive informal processes of knowledge production and apprenticeship (Varela *et al.* 2018). They are, then, a central part of Portuguese recent history as a consequence of the migratory fluxes in the post-dictatorship, post-independence and postcolonial period.⁸ Despite the fact that Afro-Portuguese music has been produced, circulated and danced to in Lisbon for decades, this body of work is still considered a foreign influence, something accepted (but rarely incorporated) as part of the evolution of Portuguese society.

If digital do-it-yourself creativity and circulation were crucial for the popularisation of batida, something similar can be said about self-organisation. The creation of Editora Príncipe [Príncipe Records] was indispensable for the internationalisation of batida, as it succeeded in anticipating a transnational taste for the kind of handmade electronic music produced in Lisbon around that time, a musical genre that was largely unknown even by Lisbon audiences⁹ (Belanciano 2012). Marfox acted as a mediator between Príncipe and the musicians operating in Lisbon’s outskirts, “recruiting” the most talented Djs to record and make visible what was being made and heard “in the ghettos of Lisbon.” The creation of Editora Príncipe played a decisive role in the positive valorisation of batida at a transnational level, and by the mid-2010s batida Djs were performing at Sonar, Roskilde and MoMA, their tunes moving the masses in Asia, South America, Africa, Europe and the US. The international success of batida made the style more known and acceptable in Portugal, challenging the assumption that it only represented “noise”.

Despite this positive appreciation, batida Djs were, and still are, eager to contextualise their work as “*música do guetto*” [ghetto music]. This spatial ascription is important, as it highlights the coloniality of the Portuguese society, which still ascribes negative value to, and project “fear” on, areas where the majority of inhabitants are racialised. The contextual emphasis on “the guetto” operates in two different ways: first, it lays bare the dynamics of marginalisation and stigmatisation still haunting Afro-Portuguese populations, which are often associated with so-called “problematic neighbourhoods” on the outskirts of the country’s largest cities, have their work reduced to “popular creativity”, and their voices excluded from debates on public and housing policies, as well as urban planning.

⁷ During the 1990s, for example, Portuguese hip-hop brought these issues to the fore at a time when cultural and sociopolitical discussions on postcolonial Portugal rarely addressed systemic and economic marginalisation (Contador and Ferreira 1997, Raposo *et al.* 2021)

⁸ Since the 1980s, the migratory fluxes from African territories colonised by Portugal into the former metropolitan space experienced a significant increase. A second stage took place in the following decades, when these fluxes became more diverse and several communities, such as Brazilians, became more numerous.

⁹ Batida Djs also benefited from the work of cultural ambassadors developed by bands such as Buraka Som Sistema, the most well-known and successful music project in contemporary Portugal and the group responsible for popularising the mixture of electronic and Afro-Portuguese music globally.

Secondly, it contextualises Afro-Portuguese music as a central part of Lisbon's sociocultural history. If black music has been essential to challenge and counter the invisibilisation of racial exclusion, then exploring the main characteristics of batida allow us to understand overarching processes of belonging, imaginaries, and racial affirmation questioning a coloniality of power (Quijano 2000). The pulsing that lies at the centre of batida denounces the irreducibility of Afro-Portuguese cultural creativity in Portugal, its stubbornness against the polyphony of practices of commodification that masks mechanisms of subalternisation, urban segregation and racism. We are not talking here metaphorically, as batida acts for many as a tangible tool for cultural democratisation and radical socialisation capable of challenging and unifying racial categories affecting youth communities that are seen as "strange bodies" in Portugal. The pulsing of batida emerges, thus, as a subversive frequency inscribing Afro-Portuguese experiences within the Portuguese national cultural panorama.

2-BATIDA AND DIGITAL SONIC RECOMBI/NATION

The democratisation of personal computers and sonic equipment, as well as the intensification of social media use through young populations living in Lisbon's outskirts, were essential for the development of batida. The Djs operating in Quinta do Mocho in the middle of 2000s were self-taught practitioners who learnt the practicalities of musical production on a do-it-yourself basis. This is the case of Nervoso, for many Djs the forerunner of the batida music genre, who learnt how to make music at home by using free software distributed by internet companies:

I started installing several programmes that were available through the CDs that Clix company distributed for free. One of these included FL Studio [...] Nobody taught me how to make music. I tried, I tried by myself, alone. Finally, I managed to do something useful. I recorded my first tunes using a Walkman that allowed to record cassettes (I didn't have a CD recorder at home back then.) I recorded the cassette and went to the street to share it with colleagues. They laughed, asking me what that was. For them, it looked like reggae and taraxinha together, the biggest confusion they had heard...And I replied, "so, what's wrong, what matters is what I did, it doesn't matter the style, what matters is what I did..." [Nervoso 2020]

Son of an Angolan mother and a São Toméan father, Nervoso epitomises the fusion of influences present in batida. Nervoso started testing and improving his set at birthdays and parties organised by friends. However, it would be, between 2003 and 2007 when Nervoso moved forward and displayed his abilities as a Djs. By then, he started organising clandestine raves in abandoned shops of Quinta do Mocho, parties in which kuduro was the main soundtrack. Nervoso's music was singular for not having a vocal accompaniment that is typical of kuduro. As a result, the tunes were more rhythmic and easier to dance. Nervoso then started introducing his own tunes amidst more well-known kuduro tracks. The new songs were eminently danceable and were welcomed by the Quinta do Mocho community with general positive appreciation. The taste for batida developed quickly. The parties soon generated a collective effervescence that attracted young groups from other neighbourhoods. As a result, in a few years batida took over the entire peripheral area of Lisbon. Nervoso best defines batida as a recombination of transnational elements filtered through the life experience of Afro-Portuguese communities in Lisbon: "This is different, it is not really afro-house, it's batida. It's like kuduro, but European...". Nervoso's words are revealing, as they touch on the creative and subversive potential of recombination done in the segregated neighbourhoods of European cities.

Whereas the transnational influences of batida are undeniable, the sonic agency of its Djs is inextricably linked to the "quadros de interação local [local frameworks of interaction]" (Costa, 1999). Basic elements such as rhythmic composition, frequency and editing are deeply embedded within a shared community life where "music is breathed". More than this, the inhabitants of *bairros periféricos* are exposed to a wide variety of music influences, becoming particularly skilled at "dealing with different kind of symbolic types" creatively (Hannerz 1998: 37). *Festas de bairro*

[neighbour parties] occupy a central role within this process. They offer essential moments where Djs consolidate and celebrate their apprenticeship as they deal with the most demanding audience they will find: one composed by the heterogeneous population of the *bairro*, from Angolans to Cape Verdeans and São Toméans, from old Afro-Portuguese families who migrated to Portugal after the Independence period to the younger generations already born on Portuguese soil. Besides coping with the varied expectations of these groups, the parties are important for reinforcing the aesthetic and social bond with the community, which often provides the most useful barometer to see if the music “está ou não a bater” [is or isn’t flowing]. Thus, Marfox explains the following focusing on the party atmosphere in Quinta do Mocho:

You call a kid from the neighbourhood and ask them if this music is any good. If the answer is “well no, it’s not flowing”, then that’s the way to go, he/she knows best! The neighbourhood is who rules, who knows. When I appear on TV they used to say “you look strange, your music looks strange.” Because this happens in [the centre of] Lisbon, what I do is often accepted. But when it comes to the *bairro*, the intensity and the effort has to be higher! (Albuquerque 2018).

In this fragment we see how the taste and critical appreciation for batida is situated, therefore challenging the placelessness resulting from the uncritical and celebratory incorporation of Afro-Portuguese music as part of the cultural rebranding of Lisbon as a multicultural and cosmopolitan capital (Garrido Castellano and Raposo 2020).

Therefore, the history of Afro-Portuguese music can be seen as the history of an Afrodiasporic recombination, a global alliance whose increasingly digital radar spans from the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 2001) to the neighbourhoods where they live. Kuduro, the main “ingredient” sampled in batida, already epitomises this fertile recombination. Developed in the *musseques* [shanty towns] of Luanda in the 1990s, kuduro arrived in Lisbon soon afterwards through the flow of Angolan immigrants to the Portuguese capital (Marcon 2012). This musical genre implied a conscious and active act of sampling and breaking the boundaries between electronic music, Angolan rhythms and a wide array of transnational sonic influences.

Batida undertakes a similar exploration of the creative potential derived from the irreducibility and complexity of Afro-Portuguese experience and the subversive underside of sonic digital recombination. The fact that the human voice is mostly absent from batida might seem to suggest that the rhythm has often led to downplaying its sonic agency. Under this logic, batida would just be dance music, a sound that lacks the politically charged and racial affirmation character of rap or “more traditional” Afro-Portuguese styles such as semba and funaná (Cidra 2021). This interpretation, however, seems to us inaccurate. If the city’s official image uses the soundscape of so-called ethnic (sub)cultures to rebrand the city image as cosmopolitan, add value and attract a creative class (Florida 2002, Landry 2000, Garrido Castellano and Paulo 2019, Garrido Castellano and Raposo, 2020), batida finds in digital recombination a way out, and a strategy against, the normalisation of difference and its insertion into neoliberal and neo-colonial paradigms (Garrido Castellano and Lança 2019). Take, for example, the pioneer album *Eu sei quem sou* that Dj Marfox released in 2011. In the album’s first track of the same name, a voice attempts to repeat the tune’s main and only sentence “*Eu sei quem sou*” [I know who I am]”. Driven by a digitally edited kuduro tune, the lyric is reduced to the word “eu” [I]. Yet this “I” blurs with the bass, becoming part of the instrumental composition. *Eu sei quem sou* therefore fulfils two functions simultaneously: it is the visiting card of a young musician who experienced the drawback of a weakened Portuguese music industry that does not value racialised young composers from Lisbon’s outskirts, accepting *misturas culturais* [cultural mixes] only when these are filtered through, and sanitised by, more official channels. At the same time, through the recombination of the self (the “I” that fades into the danceable kuduro bass), the song is also a clear expression of the capacity for identity recombination of Afro-Portuguese youth in Portugal who do not see themselves exclusively as Portuguese and/or African. *Eu sei quem sou* can therefore be understood as a way of producing sonic destabilisations that transcend the bias of whiteness in the way of imagining Portugal (and the

Portuguese), bringing to light the experiences of spatial ghettoization and racial exclusion of part of the Afro-Iberian population. In the artist's words:

Back then and still now, "I know who I am". But there are many youngsters who, like me, were born in Lisbon and can't be fully accepted as Cape Verdeans nor as Portuguese. You still hear the commentary "he/she is black, therefore he/she is not Portuguese." Then you live in Lisbon, you are disoriented. My music brings identity and certainty to a group of young people who don't fully identify with anything. This group identified with this *batida* because it was something new, not fully African nor European. (Albuquerque 2018)

Marfox's music, from the early *Eu sei quem sou* to the most recent *Chapa Quente*, expands and mutates electronically, refusing to identify itself as Angolan or African, or worry about essentialist views of kuduro and Afro-Portuguese rhythms, but also rejecting easy adscriptions within afro-house music. The "eu" of *Eu sei quem sou* escapes from what is perceived as "acceptable blackness", from the imposed and normalised definitions promoted and accepted by, and in, Afro-Lisboa. This "eu" is made through the act of digitally sampling and filtering sonic influences through the specific lens of the everyday reality of Quinta do Mocho. The emphasis on the multi-layered experience of everyday life in Lisbon's outskirts permeates the album and conditions the affirmative process mobilised by *Eu sei quem sou*, thus inscribing a zone that is often erased in the conflict-free celebration of Afro-Portuguese rhythms as a global music influence.

This "Eu", revealingly the only word included in the entire album, integrates a partially ignored genealogy of Afro-Portuguese voices resourcing to music as a vehicle for active self-definition and place-making. The history of Afro-Portuguese music in Lisbon, from Bonga and Cesária Évora to Buraka Som Sistema, Mayra Andrade and Dino D'Santiago, is exemplary of the placelessness that Afro-Portuguese music occupies within the official and canonical soundscape of the Portuguese capital. This remains true despite the transformations that the city's cultural landscape has experienced within the last twenty years, which can be seen as an expression of a coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) that insists on seeing people of African descent as "others" par excellence (Raposo *et al.* 2019, Mata 2006).

What this process reveals, is precisely how colonial categorisations are endlessly (re)modelled through the dynamics of racial exclusion, urban segregation and racism of Afro-Portuguese cultural practitioners. In contrast, recombination in *batida* operates as an affirmative sonic strategy against this colonial refashioning.

3-BATIDA AND/AS ATMOSPHERIC RACIAL AFFIRMATION

We have seen how recombination operates within the acoustic register of a song and an album, shaping the cooperative and nurturing strategies of young Afro-Portuguese musicians from Lisbon's outskirts. Batida also expresses an interest in inscribing the socioeconomic conditions and diasporic atmosphere where this rhythm is produced. Such inscription entails a strategy of embedding the "background noise" as a layer of sonic information into the tunes to counter territorial stigmatisation and everyday racism (Essed 1991). Moreover, through recombination, a process is put into practice of self-knowledge and collective identification that clings to a silenced part of the history of Afropeans (Pitts 2019). These strategies make visible a new generation of racialised young Europeans, whose voices (and "noise") claim a space of legitimacy into the body of the Portuguese nation and the European continent, deconstructing the discourses of colour-blindness (El-Tayeb 2006).

A major feature of batida has to do with the attention given to "raw" atmospheric acoustics. Car horns, fire alarms, percussive sounds and indistinguishable chat in Portuguese, Cape Verdean creole and Angolan slang are a common presence in batida tunes. The digital recombination that lies behind the composition of batida is actively produced by keeping an attentive ear to "what goes on in the neighbourhood", to the voices and public presence of these groups, elements that are often systemically excluded from the official face of a so-called multicultural and "African" Lisbon. Likewise, crucial for understanding the atmospheric sounds of *bairros periféricos* registered in Batida is the interest of their Djs in making visible the daily life of Afro-Portuguese communities, from the festive occasions to the racial side of the politics of urban degradation. Of course, Batida is hardly the only Afro-Portuguese rhythm developed in Lisbon that proudly shows its "ghetto urban condition." Yet what makes this sonic body distinguishable is the emphasis on the pivotal role of background noise contamination, the idea that only by "letting the neighbourhood in/to the mixtape" can batida operate as a valid source of affirmative and generative identification.

"Noise" here matters because it represents the main sonic strategy through which the structural racism targeting Afro-Portuguese citizens is registered and inscribed. Whereas the internationalisation of Afro-Portuguese styles has implied a certain standardisation, by which musicians and Djs have favoured a "cleaner" soundscape, batida performers and producers are productively entrenched into the "polluted" sonics made through the inscription of neighbouring sounds. At the same time, the historical evolution of the *bairros periféricos* of Lisbon and other major Portuguese cities provides an acoustic atmosphere that is a central part of batida. That is, the "noises" inscribed in batida can only be understood from the historical process (and project) of *realojamento* [re-housing] that particularly targeted inhabitants of large areas of informal construction. The PER [Plano Especial de Realojamento; Special Re-housing Plan] was initiated in 1993 seeking to improve the living conditions of thousands occupying self-built housing units by transferring this population from *barracas* [shacks, a derogatory term referring to informal neighbourhoods where self-construction was the norm] to *bairros de realojamento* [re-housing neighbourhoods]. One of these *bairros* was Quinta do Mocho. Whereas the PER regularised the situation of many, providing relocated citizens with basic public services and a "formal" housing, it did not put an end to the stigmatisation experienced by the relocated population (Raposo 2018). On the contrary, the plan can be seen as part of a regime of governmentality based on containment, overfull spaces and surveillance that particularly affects racialised individuals (Hood Washington 2005, Umukoro 2005, Raposo 2022). Paradoxically, this regime has proven to be compatible with the celebration of diversity and the idea of Lisbon as an *espaço de mistura e encontro* [place of miscegenation and encounter] (Raposo 2023). Moreover, the normalisation and agglutination of inhabitants from these settlements quickly patterned the *bairros* as "space of exception" continuously exposed to forced displacement, police raids and exacerbated negative media attention (Raposo *et al.* 2019).

From this perspective, the productive overlapping of “sound” and “noise” we find in batida can be clearly interpreted as part of a colonial genealogy of exclusion and othering, one that regulates the dynamics of visibility and acoustic acceptance, but also the regimes of degradation and exposure to “slow” violence (Nixon 2011) and ruination (Stoler 2013). The poetics of inscription of neighbouring sounds that characterises the acoustic register of batida operate, therefore, as a pulsing and active force challenging the kind of inscription resulting from the politics of containment and planned neglect imposed from top to bottom by the State. The atmospheric acoustics of batida voice out the fault lines of visibility and respectability determining what and who is seen and heard, how, and by whom.

CONCLUSIONS. FREQUENCIES OF RACIAL JUSTICE

Afro-Portuguese music has been an essential tool for the materialisation of a new understanding of the Portuguese nation, one based on the bonds generated among a racialised youth born and/or socialised in Portugal. Through music, young communities build and put into practice innovative ways of conceiving existence and affirming identities as well as creative ways of reconfiguring the territories they inhabit. The recorded video clips associated with batida emerge as a conscious creative strategy seeking to embrace “the ghetto” as a place of culture and sonic emancipation.¹⁰ Batida Djs have been keen on appearing on interviews that are recorded in Quinta do Mocho, thus bringing the sources of dissemination and valorisation “back home” so the vibrant reality of Afro-Iberian sonic creativity can be appreciated and the image of Quinta do Mocho repurposed as a “Quinta dos Talentos” [House of Talent]. Music, therefore, paves the way for a performative defiance that mobilises a shared sense of marginalisation to rearticulate experiences, affinities and imaginaries at a collective level, thus countering the stigma of nonbelonging as well as the hegemonic vision of Portugueseness defined by the paradigm of whiteness.

The recombination taking place within batida has been crucial for the creation of a sense of belonging that goes beyond the usual essentialism that refers to the imagined borders of the nation-state. Batida encourages cultural exchanges between heterogeneous young racialised communities that despite their difference are equally exposed to marginalisation. Batida engages with spatial containment and racial exclusion as part of a single process, sounding a careful mixture of traditional Afro-Portuguese and digital rhythms that vibrate with a sense of “transnational peripheral” imagination (Aderaldo and Raposo 2016: 282), from samba to funk, from zouk to tarraxinha. The apparent disorder of this sonic combination ends up inscribing Afro-Portuguese young generations spatially, thus expanding and challenging the idea of these generations as groups that suffer “identity loss” and that “have to choose between two cultures” (Raposo and Marcon 2021, El-Tayeb 2011). Facing a context of historical amnesia concerning the centuries-old African presence in Portugal, which has been strategically forgotten to the configuration of the nation, batida Djs pulsate a sonic agency that inscribes the endless variations of sonic and racialised experiences into the Portuguese national body.

STATEMENT OF ETHICS

This essay draws on two semi-structured interviews recorded in 2016 and 2020. Both interviews were conducted in ethical terms. Following the procedures of the main author of this article’s research unit, an informal agreement was made that stipulated that the recorded material could only be used with explicit consent by the interviewees. The writing of this article would have been impossible without the thoughtful insights of the Batida Djs, especially Dj Nervoso and Dj Marfox. Both interviewees are aware of and have approved orally and via texting the use of these

¹⁰ A good example is the videoclip *Lendário* by Studio Bros, whose imagery values Quinta do Mocho as a cool neighbourhood.

conversations in the context of this article. A first draft of this text was sent to and discussed with both artists, and the feedback provided was incorporated, becoming essential in the preparation of the current version of the essay. The interviewees have approved the use of their interviews and reflections for the writing of this article and its publication in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, having been assured in this work in ethical terms that their rights have been fully respected.

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INTERVIEWS

Dj Nervoso is a 39-year-old man from São Tomé and Príncipe. He lives in Lisbon, although he does not have Portuguese citizenship. He moved to Portugal alongside his sister at the age of twelve, when both joined their family home in Quinta do Mocho. He still lives in the neighbourhood, where he works as a metalworker and Dj Nervoso was interviewed by Otávio Raposo in Quinta do Mocho on the 1st of November 2020.

Dj Marfox is a 35-year-old man born in Portugal from a São Tomean family. Originally based at the Quinta da Vitória neighbourhood, Marfox moved to Quinta do Mocho about eight years ago. He was interviewed by Otávio Raposo in Quinta do Mocho on the 9th of September 2016.

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