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Cultural placemaking in the black suburbs of the tourist city

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how non-institutional(ized) street art tours and DIY parties in two racialized, lower-class neighborhoods in the outskirts of Lisbon generate different results. In the neighborhood of Quinta do Mocho, these street art tours and DIY parties arise as playfulness and multicultural experiences of opening up the communities to local white middle-class visitors and tourists. In the neighborhood of Cova da Moura, these actions culminate in a cultural festival that celebrates African and Afro-diasporic cultures, promoting the visibility of the talented artists of the neighborhood. In both cases, positive representations about these territories are produced, linked to a strengthening of the sense of belonging to Quinta do Mocho's and Cova de Moura's communities. The article concludes by suggesting that non-institutional (ized) street art tours and DIY parties arise as pioneering actions toward challenging and decolonizing urban thinking on contemporary Lisbon.

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Introduction: what wonderful Lisbon hides

The arrival of thousands of migrants from Portugal's rural areas and its former Portuguese colonies in Africa (mainly Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe) since the 1960s onwards led to the proliferation of informal and self-built neighborhoods – some of which were shantytowns. The Portuguese capital was the main destination for these flows, which increased from the following decade with the advance of urbanization in the country and the independence of the former colonized territories. Slowly, new residential neighborhoods sprang up on the outskirts of Lisbon, which in many cases are the result of unplanned occupation on public or private land, built in precarious technical conditions by disadvantaged families in search of better life opportunities. It is precisely in the period between the end of fascism, after the 1974 revolution,¹ and the first years of democracy in Portugal that we find the basis of the current socio-spatial and ethnic-racial segregation of Lisbon's metropolitan area, which was consolidated in later decades (1980s, 1990s, 2000s).² This period was characterized by different migratory cycles in the country, whose intensity was influenced by economic instability and civil wars in the African countries of origin, and by Portugal's entry into the European Economic

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Community in January 1986. Precisely, this historical momentum meant the inflow of substantial financial resources to the State and the need to significantly increase the labor force for civil infrastructure modernization works. Simultaneously, urban and metropolitan planning in the 1980s and 1990s clearly favored new private-led urban segregationist development, to which public housing policies such as the Special Program for Rehousing (PER – Programa Especial de Realojamento) were strongly subjugated. PER was the main public housing policy in Portugal since the defeat of fascism in 1974, having as main goal to bringing an end to shantytowns of both Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas. Interestingly, many of the working-class suburban neighborhoods that were born under the 1990s' PER were built not only in the cities of Lisbon and Porto but especially in their metropolitan neighboring cities, due the relocation of many families from the central areas to the outskirts (Cachado 2013; Pato and Pereira 2013).

The socio-spatial segregation of the Lisbon metropolitan has not only “class” as its main variable but especially place of birth, ethnicity and race, and their multiple intersections with other main social and cultural factors, namely labor precariousness, job insecurity and unemployment, access to the labor market restricted to low value-added jobs, poor housing conditions, lower educations levels, higher school failure rate and family breakdown (e.g. Carvalho 2013; Carreiras 2018; Do Carmo, Cachado, and Ferreira 2015; Raposo 2023). While spatial segregation on an ethnic-racial basis initially led to the emergence of self-built, racial majority neighborhoods neighborhoods, PER led to a long period of demolitions and rehousing in social housing that meant a profound socio-spatial reconfiguration of Lisbon’s outskirts. Rather than a policy to solve the housing problems of disadvantaged populations, PER adopted a hygienist stance that displaced unwanted populations from urban centers, namely black immigrant and Roma populations (Alves 2022; Raposo et al. 2019). Accordingly, “white Lisbon” and “black Lisbon” have well-defined spatial delimitations: while the central city’s resident population is mostly white, most migrants from the Portuguese-speaking African countries and their descendants tend to be concentrated in the outskirts of Lisbon (Malheiros and Vala 2004; Raposo and Marcon 2021; Taviani 2019). Importantly, the structural lack of public funding for the urban improvement of these suburban lower-class neighborhoods is the main cause of the currently manifest physical deterioration of buildings, the poor connectivity with public transportation, and lack of educational and cultural infrastructure (Allegra et al. 2017; Do Carmo, Cachado, and Ferreira 2015; O. R. A. Fernandes 2009; Raposo 2019b). In this sense, the effects of PER in Lisbon’s metropolitan area have increased ethnic-racial segregation, the precariousness of the right to the city for black population and the stigmatization of certain racialized and peripheral neighborhoods.

With the aim of understanding the dynamics of socio-spatial segregation shortly mentioned in this introductory section, it is also important to consider the particularities of Portuguese colonialism, whose legacy still reverberates in the multiple ways that the citizens of Lisbon’s peripheries experience institutional and non-institutional racism and criminalizing punitivism. Interestingly, Goldberg (1993) states that the roots of the post-modern racialized city can be found at the end of the colonial era, whose policies implemented in the colonized territories followed a logic of oppression and racial hierarchy. The Indigenato Statute that prevailed in the Portuguese colonial space during the first half of the 20th century is an example of this, when a legal framework of

differentiation between “civilized” and “indigenous” legitimized the exploitation of the African workforce and their exclusion from citizenship rights (Henriques 2019).

In addition to “savagery” and “incivility,” imaginaries of impurity, disease and pollution were associated with Africans in the urban spaces of colonial domination, which implied racially defined sanitization policies. In the capitals of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, the creation of “indigenous neighborhoods” was imposed as a way of controlling and segregating African populations. Amid a strong period of urbanization expansion in the colonial territories, the increase in the black population was contained by eugenicist policies that divided society between the so-called “white city” (urbanized and central) and the “black city:” without infrastructure and peripheral (Lopes, Amado, and Muanamoha 2007; Maloa 2021). The hygienist arguments of the time were quick to defend this pattern of urban segregation of an ethnic-racial nature, serving to legitimize the ban on Africans living in the city center given the threat and degradation they would represent to white settlers according to the racist standards of the time (M. Fernandes and Mendes 2012; Maloa 2021).

The link between the history of Portuguese colonialism and the pattern of socio-spatial segregation in contemporary Lisbon partly reproduces this dual city model, particularly since the 90s. It was during this period that the growth of the black population came to be understood as a threat that should be contained within its urban margins (Alves 2022; Raposo et al. 2019). In parallel, institutional, public, and media discourse started to label the working-class neighborhoods of the suburbs of Lisbon and its metropolitan area (including those with most of the African descent) as “Black ghettos,” “problematic neighborhoods,” “critical neighborhoods” or “sensitive urban zones” (Marôpo 2014; Guia and Pedroso 2016; Raposo 2010). This was reflected in the criminalizing, stigmatizing punitivism carried out by police, judicial corpus, some institutional(ized) organizations of community intervention and mainstream media against teenagers, young people and young adults from Greater Lisbon’ Black neighborhoods (Marôpo 2014; Raposo 2010). Precisely, this punitive institutional-civic front used to fuel its stigmatizing discourse on the existence of serious problems related to the chronification of social (racialized) problems such as high rates of family poverty, youth school dropout, drug dealing and crime (Carvalho 2013; de Melo and Salles 2019; Raposo 2022a; Sebastião 1998). Faced with this situation, several groups of young people from these racialized suburban neighborhoods have empowered themselves by creating a “community counter-narrative of place” (Elliott, Thomas, and Byrne 2020) through informal placemaking actions based on art creativity and music, vindicating the cultural richness of these stigmatized territories and claiming spatial and social justice.

Objectives and methods

Based on a dense ethnography conducted in two neighborhoods of Greater Lisbon (Quinta do Mocho and Cova da Moura) inhabited mostly by people of African descent, this article examines how non-institutional(ized) street art tours and do-it-yourself (DIY) parties, which are self-organized by young Afro-descendants, generate different local results (Figure 1). In Quinta do Mocho, these street art tours and DIY parties arise as playfulness and multicultural experiences of opening up the communities to local white middle-class visitors and tourists. However, in Cova da Moura, these actions culminate in



Figure 1. Location of Cova da Moura and Quinta do Mocho (left image), a detail of Quinta do Mocho (top right), and a detail of Cova da Moura (bottom right). Source: Image on the left: Google Earth map database modified by the authors. On the right, both photographs were taken by the first author.

a festival that celebrates African and Afro-diasporic cultures, promoting the visibility of the talented artists of the neighborhood. In both cases, positive representations about these territories are produced, linked to a strengthening of the feeling of belonging to Quinta do Mocho's and Cova de Moura's communities. In the discussion section, the article argues that the informal cultural and artistic practices analyzed challenge the discourse of the institutional actors of the central city that situate these black neighborhoods as areas to be avoided due to their (racialized) dangerousness. The article concludes by suggesting that non-institutional(ized) street art tours and DIY parties arise as pioneering actions toward challenging and decolonizing urban thinking on contemporary Lisbon.

The ethnography at Quinta do Mocho was conducted by the first author between 2016 and 2019. The ethnographic immersion entailed 64 field trips and 16 semi-structured interviews with young residents, community leaders, workers of non-governmental organizations, artists and representatives of Loures City Council (a Lisbon's metropolitan neighboring town). The main research focus of this period was the activity carried out by community guides, who arise as co-responsible for the symbolic metamorphosis that the neighborhood was experiencing through the promotion of street art tours for tourists. The ethnographic accompaniment of this informal placemaking action allowed the first author to access a very rich situational context. The interpretation of the pictorial works made by the young people allowed them (i) to attach new meanings to the neighborhood, (ii) to contradict the dominant discourses that labeled their neighborhoods as a dangerous location, (iii) and activate a positive sense of place about their territory. Participant observation and a long presence in the field were essential to gain the trust

(and friendship) of the guides. This enabled an in-depth understanding of the interests in dispute with Loures City Council about the set of local urban policies to which the street art tours were linked. In this process, the autonomization of the guides in relation to the institutional power was observed, when the tours were no longer linked to a top-down action of a governmental nature and were transformed into an informal initiative led by some of the neighborhood's youngsters.

The ethnography in Cova da Moura was developed between 2014 and 2015 within the scope of the project "The Work of Art and the Art of Work. Creative Circuits for the Training and Labor Integration of Immigrants in Portugal" (Ferro et al. 2016), of which the first author was one of the coordinators. In this neighborhood, a total of 42 field trips and 17 interviews were carried out with artists, residents, artists, local traders and community leaders. In this fieldwork, emphasis was given to "diving" into the Afro-Portuguese and African music circuit of the metropolitana neighboring town of Amadora (Varela, Raposo, and Ferro 2018). The first author's immersion into informal placemaking actions organized by residents – as is the case of Kola Son Jon, Kova M Studio and, mainly, the Kova M Festival – was decisive to better capture the range of narratives offered by the informants. In addition, attendance of various organizational meetings was crucial to gain an "insider" understanding (Burgess [1984]1997) about how the Kova M Festival was constructed by Cova da Moura's young people. With the aim of updating the reflection on the festival for this article, a new interview was conducted with an interlocutor from Cova da Moura. Finally, the use of a field diary was fundamental to record the observations in the two neighborhoods, to always keep in mind the dense informal conversations we had with the interlocutors and valuing their everyday world. Audiovisual collection such as photography and video also offered a valuable resource for our ethnography, allowing to support the construction of narratives that value the "native" point of view.

"Dance of the swans:" between formal and informal placemaking in Lisbon

Informal placemaking – or DIY placemaking, as coined by Finn (2014) – is often a central strategy of urban transformation in neighborhoods characterized by a high presence of lower-class populations (frequently racialized and stigmatized). For example, the most successful small-scale interventions aimed at encouraging greater equity and community engagement in growth and renewal in the United States during the Great Recession of 2008 were initiated by community activists, artists, and neighbors, and not by politicians, urban planners, or real estate developers (Carriere and Schalliol 2021). But despite the great scientific interest that informal placemaking can generate within the scientific community due to its implications in generating a radical contestation against urban planning designed from the central city, the number of papers up to the date of writing this article is far from the large volume of academic works published on formal placemaking.

Furthermore, it is worthwhile underlining how crucial informal placemaking is in asserting community claims to space, and in modifying, adapting and creating place identity, a sense of place and territoriality. In this sense, informal placemaking offers marginalized inhabitants the opportunity to overcome the constraints of normative, institutional(ized) planning and to creatively and cooperatively develop community-building actions that can satisfy their needs for better living conditions (Lilius and

Hewidy 2021). This is of special importance in racialized, low-class neighborhoods where the (self-)engagement and (self-)agency of their inhabitants favor the creation of autonomous spaces that “remain open-ended and multiple for activists interested in promoting different visions of social justice” (Buser et al. 2013, 606). In fact, and significantly, informal placemaking is often connected to activism (Sweeney et al. 2018) mainly linked to leisure and the right of the city (Knee 2022) and/or do-it-yourself urban design (Karunaratne 2023).

Accordingly, and crucially for the purposes of this article, Douglas (2022) argues that the participation of activists in informal placemaking actions contributes to make the struggle for legitimacy in place visible among a group of people often assumed to have none. This is of a fundamental importance, since (formal) placemaking not only subordinates the black urban poor, but also incorporates their street cultures (Montgomery 2016).

One of the cities that has recently become fashionable thanks to the boom of placemaking actions both in the central urban area and in its suburban neighborhoods is Lisbon, in Portugal, where the number of cultural placemaking initiatives have flourished since the late 2000s – see Jeong (2022) for a brilliant literature review on cultural placemaking. In the Portuguese capital, many institutionally-led community intervention projects are financially supported through the Lisbon City Council BIP/ZIP Program – Neighborhoods and Zones for Priority Intervention. This community intervention program aims to foster partnerships and small local interventions to improve urban habitats by supporting projects carried out by civil parish councils, local associations, communities, and non-governmental organizations, thus contributing to strengthen socio-spatial cohesion in the city of Lisbon. However, as Gomes (2020) argue, the fact that these formal placemaking initiatives are economically supported by Lisbon City Council adds an element of “political control” over the placemaking action itself. In other words, if the initiative goes beyond what is framed in Lisbon City Council’s urban development strategy, the local government activates a series of internal mechanisms to minimize any attempt to deviate from the objectives set in the institutional placemaking initiative while safeguarding the interests of the capitalist agents of urban change acting in the city (Campos, Barbio, and Sequeira 2022). As Medeiros (2022, 1144) rightly argues, “how far the common citizen influenced the development of the final version of the urban plan is, however, open to debate.”

However, the diversity of placemaking actions decreases significantly in the suburban cities of Lisbon Metropolitan Area. The fundamental reason is purely economic, since these suburban cities have much lower annual budgets than Lisbon, which benefits greatly from its powerful tourism industry. This means that urban art occupies a central role in the promotion of formal, institutionally-led placemaking in Lisbon Metropolitan area, as it is seen as an excellent (and cheap) resource against the stigma attached to these (racialized) municipalities (Campos and Barbio 2021; Raposo 2019b). Importantly, the use of urban art as placemaking strategy in the outskirts of Lisbon is not purely coincidental. As Gato et al. (2020) argue, creative tourism as useful tool to complement placemaking strategies in Lisbon’s peripheral areas, since “planned tourism placemaking often occurs as part of a deliberate approach to sustainable development and community resilience, driven by pressing needs for economic development, livelihood diversification, and control over future outcomes” (Gato et al. 2020, 14).

Interestingly, it is worthwhile mentioning here that the type of action carried out through formal placemaking differs radically from some informal placemaking actions. For example, Pozzi (2020) explores dwelling-related placemaking and its relationship with community-building, and sense of place and belonging in the neighborhood of Santa Filomena, which is one of the last shantytowns in Lisbon Metropolitan area that has recently been demolished. This comparison between creative tourism placemaking and dwelling-related placemaking in the outskirts of Lisbon is not at all meant to detract from the social, cultural, communitarian and potentially emancipatory value of urban art. In fact, cultural placemaking through street art – or, in Raposo (2023) words, streetartification – has developed a sense of belonging and social identity in some of Lisbon black suburban neighborhoods, recognizing the legitimacy of racialized, stigmatized, under-represented groups within Lisbon society, and, therefore, placing them “on the map of society.” In other words, this comparison intends to illustrate that, in the case of Lisbon and its metropolitan area, informal placemaking has a greater collective and individual emancipating force than the formal placemaking that is often (although not always) executed under the vigilant eye of power.

Quinta do Mocho and Cova da Moura: two parallel stories of informal placemaking with different outcomes

Quinta do Mocho and Cova da Moura are territories constrained by ghettoization processes (Chaddha and Wilson 2008), in which logics of confinement, stigmatization and social control operate (Agier 2015; Wacquant 2008), as well as specific governance practices marked by the condition of exception and social exclusion (Agamben 2011). Both neighborhoods are mainly inhabited by Afro-Portuguese and African populations and are known to the general public as “no-go areas” due to their constant media associations with juvenile delinquency and drug trafficking (Raposo 2005, 2019b). However, there are major differences between both Quinta do Mocho and Cova da Moura.

While Quinta do Mocho is formed by social housing resulting from PER implementation, Cova da Moura is one of the few self-built neighborhoods that has not yet been demolished. Because land regularization remains unresolved in Cova de Moura, families have become a sort of “informal owners.” On the other hand, Cova da Moura is one of the best-known racialized neighbourhoods in the country. Cape Verdeans are the majority of Cova de Moura’s population, although there is also a significant presence of white Portuguese and Africans of other nationalities. A walk through its streets allows to confirm the strong influence of Cape Verdean culture in the neighborhood (streets names, neighborhood toponymy, (hairdressers, cafés, small-sized supermarkets, etc.). In fact, Cape Verdean Creole is the dominant language. However, Quinta do Mocho neighborhood is very heterogeneous in terms of nationalities. Families from Angola and Guinea-Bissau standing out, while the number of white Portuguese is residual. This strong cultural and Afro-diasporic mix has important effects in terms of youth sociabilities and artistic practices, producing creative insights such as the rhythm “batida.”³

The persistent defamation of these neighborhoods through political and media discourses shed light on the modus operandi of the racialization of violence, the effects of which range from the stronger police repression in these territories to the dissolution of

the residents' sense of place. However, this has been changing over the past few years. Quinta do Mocho and Cova da Moura have begun to be increasingly perceived as prominent places of art and culture as consequence of the emerging potency of the artistic-cultural practices carried out by the youngsters of these territories. These (mostly racialized) young people construct alternative representation policies to the dominant stereotypes, mobilizing positive identities and participative actions to combat social marginalization (Raposo, Sedano, and Lima 2020). New meanings about themselves and the neighborhoods in which they live are expressed through rap, *kuduro* and *batida* music styles (Raposo and Marcon 2021; Raposo et al. 2021), which are primarily celebrated in community festivities (Castellano and Raposo 2020; Varela, Raposo, and Ferro 2018) or narrated by local guides in street art festivals and multicultural tours (dos Santos 2017; Raposo 2023). Many of these actions can be defined as "informal cultural placemaking," as they are developed in a non-hierarchical manner by the community of both Quinta do Mocho and Cova da Moura with the aim of generating new uses of the public urban space, stimulating the residents' sense of place, and symbolically regenerating these wounded territories⁴ by structural and discursive violence. In the second part of this article, we will immerse more deeply into some of these experiences, in which the visual and musical creativity works emerge as a trigger to mobilize bottom-up processes of urban regeneration, cultural and symbolic revival that (i) decolonize the perception about these ghettoized neighborhoods; (ii) make visible the claims of those who are considered the "outsiders" of the city; and (iii) transform these "penalized spaces" (Pétonnet 1982) into a new socially accepted (multi)cultural destination.

Quinta do Mocho: a public art neighborhood

Quinta do Mocho is a rehousing neighbourhood located in the metropolitan neighboring city of Loures, in northern Great Lisbon, that was built in the late 1990s under the Special Program for Rehousing (PER). The new residential units aimed at accommodating families that lived in an unfinished block of high-rise buildings surrounded by shacks due to the bankruptcy of a former construction company. The great majority of its 3,000 inhabitants are black, including immigrants from African countries (namely Angola, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe and Cape Verde) and their descendants. Although the rehousing provided Quinta do Mocho's dwellers with better housing conditions, the neighborhood continued to be associated to an imagery of criminality, a "polluted" area operating "outside the law" (Raposo 2019b, 2023). In an attempted makeover to deal with this negative public image, the local municipal authorities changed the neighborhood's name to *Urbanização Terraços da Ponte* [Bridge Terraces Urbanization] in 2008. However, this strategy proved ineffective, as not only did the depreciative news persist, but the residents held on firmly to the former name, rejecting the State's interference in the neighborhood's memory.

Quinta do Mocho's territorial stigma would continue to disturb the successive municipal governments, which saw it as a "blemish" of incivility threatening the residents of the suburban city of Loures. The opportunity to symbolically regenerate the neighborhood and "integrate" its population came in the guise of the "*O bairro i o mundo*" [The neighborhood and the world] festival, in 2014, whose leitmotif was to "display the neighborhood to the world and bring the world to the neighborhood" through urban

art and “appealing to the social responsibility” of its residents. This project was transformed into the Public Art Gallery (GAP), when street art was called upon “to address prejudice and stigma, increase pride and the sense of belonging toward public space” (Loures City Council, UIC and AIPC 2015). GAP’s success led the municipal authorities to create the Loures Public Art Festival, in which renowned Portuguese (Odeith, Bordalo II and Vhils) and foreign (Hopare, Utopia and Vinie) artists began to be invited annually to create street art all over the municipality. Currently, more than 110 large-scale murals adorn the façades of Quinta do Mocho’s 91 buildings, in a placemaking action spearheaded by Loures City Council which transformed it into “Europe’s largest outdoor urban art gallery” as evidenced by a prestigious newspaper (Silva 2015). One of the municipal councilors stated the following about GAP’s early days:

We understood that the paintings which were made at that time [O Bairro i o Mundo], six or seven, could be a pathway to help “clean up” the neighborhood’s image. Because at the meetings we progressively held, we knew that the residents were proud to live there but were also ashamed. They were proud because it was their history, their culture. But they were also embarrassed because the media only associated it with issues of criminality. And in fact, that neighborhood did experience a very complicated period. [Maria Eugénia Coelho. Interview – 2016]

GAP’s primary drive was to diffuse a sense of place and sense of belonging to counteract the negative perceptions about Quinta do Mocho, and embodied a public policy of social inclusion and urban regeneration. Although this experience of creative placemaking (Mateo-Babiano and Lee 2020; Wyckoff 2014) emerged from a governmentally engendered top-down perspective, some young people were encouraged to engage in the project as community guides. Their role was crucial in making this former “no-go neighborhood” accessible to tourists, in view of their legitimacy and cultural capital to offer captivating (and safe) visits and unblock the resistance of some of the residents who did not want to see their community transformed into a multicultural zoo. By providing positive experiences to those who were interested in getting to know marginalized territories within a controlled and safe space (Klein 2018), the neighborhood became a tourist attraction, widely publicized by the mass media as a street art hotspot in Portugal. Based on an “informal curatorship” (Andron 2018; Raposo 2019a), the community guides symbolically regenerated Quinta do Mocho, telling stories about the street art murals interwoven with the neighborhood’s daily life under the bias of dignity. This is case of the portrait of DJ Nervoso and various female characters, among whom is a black woman allegorically removing a white mask. Created by the artist Nomen, the guides associated this artwork with the territorial stigma to which they were exposed on a daily basis:

That graffiti actually represents just that: it’s a mask. Here in the neighborhood, we are what we are, but when we leave the neighborhood in search of work, we had to say that we were from somewhere else. (. . .) That was the only way we could pass onto the next stage of the application; it was the only way to get the job because we could never say that we were from here. [Guide 1. “Audio”recording – 2016]

The street artworks depicting icons of a black and African identity became privileged moments on the street art tours, when the community guides linked positive representations of the neighborhood to an audience of tourists, denouncing a “coloniality of power”

that normalized racist stereotypes and relations of domination (Quijano 2005; Mignolo 2007). The Bob Marley mural was read as a way of legitimizing the use of dreadlocks by young people who felt discriminated against because of the black aesthetic they adopted. The image painting of African leader Amílcar Cabral, the African struggle for independence, unearthing memories so often made invisible by Portuguese society.⁵ In this case, the political revolution sought by Amílcar Cabral served as a pretext for one of the guides to discuss the profound “transformation” of the neighborhood brought about by this urban policy.

This work by Amílcar Cabral makes perfect sense because today the Independence Day of Guinea-Bissau is being celebrated in the neighborhood, a festival organized by the uGinean community. Amílcar Cabral is a transversal figure who fought for the independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. (...) I usually talk about this graffiti because it has a very strong symbolism, talking about revolution. (...) There were many young people with potential, but they couldn't express it or didn't have the opportunity to show it. From then on there was a combination of two negative things: how minus and minus in mathematics gives plus. In the meantime, they combined and turned it into an urban art gallery, which is a fantastic thing, showing a problematic neighborhood that has undergone a positive transformation, also in personal terms. [Guide 2. Audio recording – 2016]

The formal placemaking actions that characterized the initial phase of the street art tours reaffirmed the idea of Quinta do Mocho as a “problematic neighborhood” undergoing a process of “positive transformation.” From this perspective, GAP would be “revolutionizing” the neighborhood through regeneration that went beyond its urban infrastructure, also impacting the set of young people subjectivities.

The guides, who showed to be proud to be contributing to the transformation of their neighbourhood's image, gradually lost their enthusiasm with GAP with the growing contradictions arising from the lack of organicity of this urban policy. The reason for this loss of enthusiasm was the fact of residents being excluded from decision-making about the murals that would embellish their homes, as well as the fact that the myriad artworks were unaccompanied by structured actions of social inclusion and public investment.⁶ The unease of contributing to an urban policy with a strong art-washing component (Schacter 2014; Raposo, 2023) by masking the precarious condition of its inhabitants was noticeable in informal conversations with the community guides.

People have started to understand that the graffiti and the tours are not wielding any benefit to the community. Many residents are losing their patience and we have already been pressured to stop doing the tours. [Field diary – 2017]

The lack of financial compensation of the guides by the local authorities, amidst a growing number of tourists, also generated discontent. Based on discourses of voluntary action and entrepreneurship,⁷ they were encouraged to take on responsibilities in a top-down formal placemaking action that trivialized the economic hardships they faced. The guides were encouraged to support themselves by selling merchandise to tourists such as magnets, pins and mugs adorned with the works of the neighborhood, which was a strategy that proved to be ineffective for their economic survival.

It's been two years now of working for free for Loures City Council. At the beginning that was fine, as it –as a project that would bring good things to the neighborhood. But after two years

in this situation I'm not stupid, mate! We end up being in a really insecure situation, spending our days counting our pennies. Not them [local authority civil servants], no, they go home at the end of the month with a wage in their pocket. [Field diary – 2017]

After three years of voluntary work for Loures City Council in regularly hosting street art tours, which actually attracted over three thousand people a year (Raposo 2023), the guides broke away from that model of collaboration with the public authorities.

The tours started being charged and became independent of the local authorities, while at the same time the friendliness and relationship with the public space were strengthened. The intention was to draw the tourists closer to the neighborhood's daily life, so that they could experience the "soul" of Quinta do Mocho, whether in lunches at restaurants with African gastronomy or through participation in local social events: religious festivities, street sociabilities and DIY parties. The creation of a specific Facebook page called "Guias do Mocho – Bairro de Arte Pública" [Mocho Guides – Public Art Neighborhood] was very important in this process of autonomization and informalization of placemaking actions. On this Facebook account, the guides started to publicize the tours as well as to contact those interested and publicly dialogue with tourists interested in these guided tours about Quinta do Mocho and the visits that the guides offered (Castellano and Raposo 2023). Without pressure from the municipality eye to convey an idealized image of this urban policy, the guides' speeches became more critical about the institutionally-led, culture-driven regeneration process. In addition to the aesthetics of the street art murals and the (multi)cultural richness of the neighborhood, some of the ambivalences and shortcomings of this urban policy were presented to tourists during the guided tours: from the crumbling playground to the holes and cracks that remain in the walls of the buildings. The guides also started to use social networks to give visibility to the creative practices of Quinta do Mocho's youngsters, with this territory affirming itself as an "universe of talents" due to its large number of rappers, djs, *kuduristas* and dancers. Before the emergence of institutionalized urban regeneration policies such as GAP, these young artists were already producing a "sense of place" and "sense of belonging" through their music, performances and parties, critically questioning the caricature representations of their territory. The acknowledgement of the importance of these bottom-up cultural productions to the neighborhood's image is extremely present in the (online and offline) discourse of the guides, who do not miss the opportunity to introduce the tourists to the neighborhood's "notable figures" during the visits, from musicians and community leaders to the "aunts" (more elderly ladies) who sell savory pastries in the stores or on the street (Raposo and Marcon 2021). The guides' capacity to articulate strategies of positive visibility based on Quinta do Mocho's numerous creative agencies, make them authentic cultural mediators of a network of informal placemaking actions portraying the neighborhood as a "vibrant community" (Guinard and Margier 2018) which refuses to be considered "problematic." These community-led tactical urbanism are very similar to others, as we will see in the following case in Cova da Moura.

Pride of being a child from Cova da Moura

Although Cova da Moura is known as an ethnic neighborhood with strong links to Cape Verde, its first residents were white Portuguese who had migrated from rural areas as well

as from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa. These first Cova da Moura's first inhabitants started to occupy the lower part of the neighborhood in the mid-1970s, which was a period characterized by a demographic boom in the Lisbon metropolitan area. This is one of the main reasons of the initial spreading of informal urbanization across the surrounding areas of the city of Lisbon. In turn, African families occupied the upper part of Cova de Moura in the following years, where the use of *djunta môn* ("joining hands," in Cape Verdean Creole) was decisive in mobilizing family and community networks to support the construction of housing. At the beginning of the 1980s, Cova da Moura became a black-majority neighborhood, where the differences in occupation between the lower and upper parts revealed significant architectural, toponymic and cultural contrast (Raposo 2005).

Because of public authorities promptly classified Cova da Moura as a "clandestine" and/or "illegal"⁸ neighborhood, the history of this racialized neighborhood is impregnated with the struggle of entitlement to the right to housing, due to the constant threat of it being demolished and its populations dislodged. This was also the case of other self-built neighborhoods (with a heavy presence of Cape Verdean immigrants like Cova da Moura) that were found in suburban locations in Great Lisboa, namely Seis de Maio, Estrela D'África, Fontainhas, Santa Filomena –, in the metropolitan neighboring city of Amadora, with which Cova da Moura shared the creole language,⁹ in addition to strong cultural affinities. The fight against stereotypes that has longly criminalized Cova da Moura's residents, particularly its young population, is another facet of the neighborhood's history which cannot be dissociated from the police violence, institutional racism and greater economic vulnerability of its population. In fact, Cova da Moura is probably one of the neighborhoods in which the perception of insecurity is most intense, due to the political and media hypervisibility that use to label the neighborhood as a "geography of chaos" (Ferrándiz 2002, 6) that contaminates the so-called "civilized city" (i.e. central, white, middle-class Lisbon). In this "non-city," the surveillance and violence of the public security forces have become legitimate practices of regulation and disciplining in the eyes of society (Das and Poole 2004), exacerbating the logics of exception, confinement and urban segregation.

Despite such a considerable territorial stigma, Cova da Moura is an important stronghold of sociabilities and artistic-cultural practices of the Cape Verdean diaspora in Portugal, attracting people from neighboring municipalities. The existence of numerous restaurants and bars, some with live music, illustrates the neighborhood's strong dynamism, which transforms it into "Cova da Música" every weekend (Ferro et al. 2016). The centrality that this neighborhood plays in the Cape Verdean cultural dynamics of Lisbon metropolitan area is also related to the increased opportunities for residents to develop entrepreneurial initiatives, considering the ownership status of the properties. By transforming a part of their homes into small commercial ventures, they secure economic independence, often supported by the cultural expressions of their countries of origin. This is the case with the numerous hairdressers, bars and restaurants in Cova da Moura, which promote Cape Verdean aesthetics, cuisine and musical genres (Varela, Raposo, and Ferro 2018).

Challenging the idea that Cova da Moura is a chaotic and dangerous "no-go area," some informal placemaking actions took place in the neighborhood, strengthened by an internationally recognized associativism. Created in 1984 in the context of a struggle for

better working and housing conditions, the Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude [Youth Mill Cultural Association] (ACMJ hereinafter) also performs a significant role in formulating strategies for the economic development and enhancing Cape Verdean and Afro-Portuguese culture in the neighborhood. For more than a decade, the “Sabura: Come and discover Africa so close by” project has promoted tours that connect the rich cultural diversity of Cova da Moura with its residents’ desire to break with the stereotypes associated with the neighborhood. A forerunner of ethnic tourism in Portugal, ACMJ sought to promote entrepreneurship among residents through a strategy of commodifying African cultural references. This resulted in the creation of a gastronomic and traditional services route, identified by signs that served as a business card for tourists. This association was also strongly implicated in the creation of the group of *batukaderas* Finka Pé, and in the popular manifestation Kola Son Jon, both festive practices that draw deeply on Cape Verde’s musical and celebration traditions. The latter became Portuguese intangible heritage in 2013, with festivities in honor of Saint John taking place in Cova da Moura’s streets every June with dancing, flags, drums and whistles, reinforcing a community of belonging that withstands all attempts to demolish the neighborhood.

While Kola Son Jon is associated with the older generations born in Cape Verde, the Kova M Festival is an event emerging from the experiences and aesthetics of the youth that was born and/or grew up in Portugal. The hip-hop parties conceived by Cova da Moura’s youngsters, in the mid-1990s, laid the groundwork creating a desire to organize a broader festival that would amalgamate the so-called cosmopolitan musical genres (rap, *quizomba*, *kuduro*, afro-house) with the traditional (*koladera*, *funaná*, *batuke*), in addition to a variety of artistic attractions: dance workshops, exhibitions of films, debates, photography, literature, fashion shows. The Kova M Festival, which is organized by the neighborhood’s youngsters in collaboration with the ACMJ, is now moving toward its tenth edition and culminates in a weekend in which youngsters are the key agents. They are the ones that set up the stage in the multi-sports court, select the artists, design the publicity posters and ensure the festival’s security. Although there are musical attractions emerging from other neighborhoods, one of the main aims of the Kova M Festival is to give visibility to the artists of Cova da Moura, as explained by the rapper Strike, one of its idealizers:

We wanted to create a festival that would return every year, this was an idea that was already circulating among us because it emerged from the very first [rap] concert that we produced in 1996. (...). As we already had the studio, it was necessary to create an event for the neighborhood’s artists to present their work. Because sometimes the neighborhood has groups of artists but doesn’t have events. So, we decided to create the Kova M Festival to be a reference festival and grow gradually, to offer opportunities to the neighborhood’s artists. [Strike. Interview – 2023]

The creation of the Kova M Estúdio in the ACMJ was crucial in strengthening the sonorities of Cova da Moura’s youth, making it indispensable for the artists’ daily musical rehearsal and recording experiences to be materialized in a renowned local event. The Kova M Festiva is considered to be Portugal’s most important neighborhood festival. Its stage welcomes more than 30 artists every year, the vast majority of whom are Afro-Portuguese and African. In this festive atmosphere which gathers about four thousand people, a significant part of the audience come from other areas of the city, including (white) middle-class visitors attracted by the excellence of the cultural program. However,

this is a DIY party celebrating “the blackness,” the Afro-diasporic and African identity, in which the belonging to Cova da Moura is claimed with pride through the enthusiastic cheer for Kova M. More than just naming the festival, this insignia reveals a ritualization that decolonizes perceptions of space and identity about Cova da Moura and its residents (Quijano, 2005; Mignolo 2007). It is a youth ritualization that reflects the desire to “represent” the neighborhood in the public sphere due to its qualities through “contesting” the status of subalternity attached to a specific (black) skin and (infamous) place.

It is not by mere chance that the symbol of Kova M is expressed on t-shirts, in graffiti, rap lyrics, tattoos and even in the youngster’s name in social networks. Precisely, graffiti is another important tool used to promote informal placemaking actions in Cova da Moura, either as part of the Kova M Festival attractions or in independent projects. One of the last to be carried out took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and was called “Fluxo,” by Virus (an artist living in Cova da Moura). The aim of Virus was to paint a street in the neighborhood from one end to the other aiming for its “artistic, visual and cultural rehabilitation.” With the support of local residents and artists, Vírus made dozens of graffiti murals, without any institutional support, motivated by the desire to requalify the neighborhood in both aesthetic and discursive terms. With murals that invoke symbols of Cape Verdean culture (from the national flag to the image of women in typical costumes), this open-air art gallery was also intended to be a point of union and sociability in the neighborhood. As Vírus explains:

The intention [of the project] has always been to unite, to create a place for us to meet: artists, creators, people who also feel stimulated by things like this: art, music. (...) So it’s about bringing down this curtain [of stereotypes], and giving a dignified identity to those who have lived here for a long time (...). People helped a lot, they participated with materials. There were even people who donated leftover paint. I’d like to thank all these people, because they came forward of their own free will, without me even having to reach out to them. [Video recording 2021]

Although Vírus didn’t manage to paint the whole street as initially planned – a crowdfunding campaign didn’t reach its target – there was significant community participation that generated an artistic *djunta môn* that also promoted the sense of belonging and attractiveness of the place.

With greater or lesser structuring, the informal placemaking actions present in the neighborhood are powerful instruments to combat territorial stigma, everyday racism, and promoting a positive representation of people of African descent. These efforts aim to foster a sense of place and community irradiating a dignified perception of Cova da Moura. The Kova M Festival condenses many of these non-hierarchical actions carried out by the neighborhood’s youngsters, a form of “making the neighborhood known everywhere, worldwide” on account of its virtues, attracting visitors and fostering the pride of being Fidjo Di Kova M [Child of Kova M].¹⁰ The rapper Strike sums up this point of view: The idea of the festival was not just to create a music festival, but a festival that would empower the neighborhood’s people: the store owners, the artists and so on. (...) So, we thought that a festival in Cova da Moura could also make the neighborhood known everywhere, worldwide, and be a festival that everyone would want to attend. (...) Then the festival began to engender that thing of wanting to belong to the neighborhood. If you go to Facebook and write “Kova M,” a whole load of people from the neighborhood will appear, others who no longer live in the neighborhood and live abroad, but go there and enter “so and so Kova M.” They always

use the codename Kova M to indicate that they belong to the neighborhood. That issue of place of belonging, you see. [Strike. Interview – 2023]

Discussion and final remarks

The case studies of Quinta do Mocho and Cova da Moura constitute paradigmatic examples of a collective emancipatory journey by Africans and Afro-Portuguese populations, particularly young people, who have decided to de-stigmatize their neighborhood while vindicating their ethnic-racial background through informal, non-institutional(ized) cultural events and actions of creative art and music. Both case studies place their racialized ghettoization at a spatial, social, economic and cultural level as a common starting point of their particular journey. But importantly, both case studies share the use of informal placemaking led by their young racialized inhabitants as the main strategy toward spatial and social justice (McDonogh 2021). In fact, the cases of Quinta de Mocho and Cova de Moura can be inscribed in a transnational movement of counter-racialization that is very widespread in the ghettoized suburbs of the cities of southern Europe (e.g. Carrel 2022; Frisina and Kyeremeh 2022; Nofre 2021). By reconfiguring representations of their neighborhoods in the field of virtues, they promote the positive visibility of populations historically excluded from spaces of power, deconstructing the Europe's colorblind narratives that keeps Black populations in the shadows (El-Tayeb 2011).

As previously noted in this article, the poverty-blackness-violence-suburban neighborhood equation, which has been and is still reproduced by Portugal's institutional-civic-media front, has involved the creation of a collective imaginary that situates racialized suburbs of Lisbon and its metropolitan area as synonyms of "no-go areas," or, in other words, deviant territories (Eaves et al. 2022). The fact of speaking of "problematic neighborhood," in analogy to the problematic (or deviant) behaviors widely studied in sociology, aims to highlight the divergent tension existing at present between (i) a strongly touristified central city, which is a source of great profits for the dominant groups of – among other sectors – the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industries of the central city; and (ii) lower-class suburbs with a high presence of people of African descent that are an unwanted burden in the configuration of a new metropolitan economy aimed at constituting central Lisbon and its first metropolitan belt as a large leisure resort for hundreds of thousands of tourists, digital nomads, and international undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The fact of participating (even indirectly) in this new configuration of the metropolitan territory of Lisbon may make it possible to break the symbolic and spatial barrier between the central city and the racialized suburbs of the Portuguese capital that is fiercely evoked by the media. But at the same time, strong social and cultural resistance arises in some of the lower-class suburbs of Lisbon and its metropolitan area, where especially young people have begun to vindicate a cross-generational, cross-gender "community counter-narrative of place" (Elliott, Thomas, and Byrne 2020). Undoubtedly, this vindication gives visibility to an extraordinary cultural wealth of the neighborhood, which has been systematically belittled, silenced and even oppressed by the institutional-civic-media front of the central city. In doing so, non-institutional(ized) creative art and music serve as a trigger to mobilize bottom-up processes of community revitalization and re-affirmation that enable decolonizing and subverting the gaze of the Tourist city, situating its periphery as a center

of cultural creativity and social dynamism in contrast to an extremely commercialized, culturally standardized city center. In this sense, the Kova M Festival in Cova da Moura, and Mocho Guides – Public Art Neighborhood are two examples of how young people from these racialized, stigmatized “political creatures of the State” (Wacquant 2008, 80) have positioned themselves in an autonomous and self-organized way in order to confront the set of policies, discourses and practices of reproducing the condition of their neighborhoods as “penalized spaces” (Pétonnet 1982). From this perspective, the reconfiguration of the image of its neighborhoods can be interpreted as a way to challenging the othering process imposed by colonial genealogy, placing certain territories (peripheral) and populations (racialized) on the map of the Portuguese cityscape. In sum, non-institutionalized street arts tours in Quinta do Mocho and DIY parties and graffiti in Cova da Moura, in Greater Lisbon, can be seen as pioneering actions in the enormous task of challenging and decolonizing the (white-dominant) urban thinking on contemporary Lisbon.

Notes

1. This revolution in 1974, also known as the “25th of April,” overthrew Europe’s longest fascist regime.
2. There are officially 107,598 Africans living in Portugal out of a total of almost 700,000 immigrants. 82% of the Africans are concentrated in the Lisbon metropolitan area, according to the most recent data (SEF 2021). This number is underestimated, as a significant part of the population of African origin acquired Portuguese nationality due to their long time in Portugal, disappearing from official statistics as immigrants.
3. “Batida” is the “ghetto sound of Lisbon” (Kelling 2014), and was created by Afro-Portuguese DJs from this neighborhood, who used Angolan *kuduro* to produce new electronic music that combines soundtrack influences ranging from *funaná* to Cape Verdean *tarraxinha*, from Afro-house to techno (Raposo and Castellano, 2023).
4. This concept is inspired by the term “wounded space,” which Blanchot (1986) addresses in a restricted sense, but whose capacity for questioning has been used by other authors to address from the horrors of the Holocaust (Langer 1991), to territories with high levels of daily violence (Ferrándiz 2002).
5. This invisibilization is reproduced in the teaching of history in Portugal, whose textbooks, while omitting the long African presence in the country, praise the “discoveries,” trivializing the crimes of slavery and colonization (Araújo and Maeso 2010; Raposo et al. 2019).
6. During this period, around 500,000 Portuguese returned to Portugal fleeing the former colonies following their independence processes in 1974 and 1975 (Pires et al. 1984), which aggravated the housing shortage in the country’s capital.
7. While the lower part is characterized by the precise alignment of the streets and the larger, completed houses, often with gardens, the upper part of Cova da Moura is distinguished by the greater density and precariousness of the housing, as well as a greater urban misalignment.
8. This project ended after several criticisms from its residents, especially due to the reproduction of an exoticized vision of Cova da Moura, as if it were a small Africa to be discovered by white tourists (Almada 2020).
9. Please, see: <https://ppl.pt/fluxokm?fbclid=IwAR0XpMZWA9fX2wXI7THAXbr-TrTmLvNpdTulgj3SF7dwXI>.
10. This is the name of a Creole rap song by Nico OG. See the clip at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhH7lywnySk>.

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