

**CAPE VERDEAN KRIOLU  
AS AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF CONTACT**

**Derek Pardue**

Universidade de Washington  
St. Louis, E.U.A.

[dpardue@wustl.edu](mailto:dpardue@wustl.edu)

### **Cape Verdean Kriolu as an epistemology of contact**

*Kriolu as language and sentiment represents a “contact perspective”, an outlook on life and medium of identification historically structured by the encounter. Cape Verde was born out of an early creole formation and movement is an essential part of Cape Verdean practices of language and identity. Most recently, the Portuguese state and third-party real estate developers have provided another scenario in the long series of (dis) emplacement dramas for Cape Verdeans as Lisbon administrations have pushed to demolish “improvised” housing and regroup people into “social” neighborhoods. I argue that neighborhoods such as Casal da Boba are not simply “contact zones” where differences are made manifest and subaltern agency is potentially given a stage. In the case of Cape Verdean Kriolu in Lisbon, the concept of “contact” is an epistemological one. This essay connects the empirical realities of Lisbon neighborhoods to the historically structured experiences of contact vis-à-vis colonialism, migration and language.*

Keywords: Creole, Cape Verde, chronotope, Lisbon, space, rap

### **O crioulo cabo-verdiano como epistemologia de contato**

*O crioulo, como língua e sentimento, representa uma “perspetiva de contato”, uma visão sobre a vida e um meio de identificação que se estrutura historicamente através do encontro. Cabo Verde nasceu de uma formação crioula e o movimento é parte essencial das práticas linguísticas e identitárias cabo-verdianas. Recentemente, o Estado português e promotores imobiliários criaram um novo cenário na longa série de dramas de (des) localização dos cabo-verdianos, quando os municípios da Área Metropolitana de Lisboa aceleraram a demolição de casas “improvisadas” e o realojamento dos seus moradores em bairros “sociais”. Defendo que bairros como o Casal da Boba não são simplesmente “zonas de contato” onde as diferenças se manifestam e a agência subalterna adquire potencial visibilidade. No caso do crioulo cabo-verdiano em Lisboa, o conceito de “contato” é epistemológico. O presente ensaio liga as realidades concretas dos bairros de Lisboa às experiências de contato historicamente estruturadas face ao colonialismo, à migração e à língua.*

Palavras-chave: crioulo, Cabo Verde, cronótopo, Lisboa, espaço, rap

Saturday evening in Lisbon. Far from the *eletronica* clubs and fado tourist traps in the Bairro Alto neighborhood is Kova M, the largest improvised housing settlements in the metro area. The Kova M scene is as hip and nostalgic as electronic music and fado, respectively, and just as historically tied to “Europe” and “Portugal” as Bairro Alto. At the same time, Kova M is altogether different. Up and up I went, passing dozens of groups of kids and adults, shouting, laughing, calling after young men and women, restaurants and bars open with live bands playing *funaná* music, and the sounds of charcoal bits crackling, punctuating the steady, rhythmic dynamics of Kriolu speech from the chatter around a street barbeque. I found the familiar faces of LBC and Heidir, two local Kriolu rappers and asked, “hey, what’s all the fuss, what’s going on?” Heidir replied, “*Normal, é festa, é Kriolu, [together with LBC] é nos, Kova M.* No big deal, it’s a party, Kriolu, Kova M, [all this] is us”. As we walked, we passed murals of Tupac Shakur and Bob Marley accompanied by stenciled images of police interrogation scenes with Kriolu captions (see figures 1 and 2). Is this the juxtaposition of familiarity and difference that constitutes so many global cities? Heidir and LBC became more urgent and their Kriolu hailed me back to the real, the concrete, Kova M. “Did you see, those white/tuga kids, they also speak Kriolu. They live down there at the bottom of the hill. We all grew up here. Tuga and Kabuverdianu speaking Kriolu”. We stopped and took in the night for a moment as lights from the occasional street post and passing cars began to outline the base of the Kova M hill. Night had fallen and yet Lisbon’s complex array of spaces was becoming clearer.

Kova M or Cova da Moura is one example of a Kriolu space where music and everyday talk are tactics for youth of Cape Verdean descent to claim legitimacy in Lisbon’s peripheral landscapes. Kriolu, a language consisting of a mix of Portuguese vocabulary and syntactic structures of Mande languages and Atlantic languages (Niger-Congo group), is an unofficial language in Portugal and a national but unofficial language in its homeland of Cape Verde, an archipelago approximately four hundred miles west of Dakar, Senegal<sup>1</sup>. The goal of Kova M residents is recognition and rights, not vis-à-vis hopeful assimilation (becoming Portuguese and by extension European) or strict alterity (an ethnic enclave of nostalgic Cape Verdeans), but rather in terms of cultural investment in place. I argue that neighborhoods such as “Kova M” and Casal da Boba are not simply

<sup>1</sup> The debate about Kriolu’s “official” status in Cape Verde continues as legislators argue over the pragmatic and ideological ramifications of implementing ALUPEK (*Alfabetu Unifikadu pa Skrita di Kabuverdianu*, Unified Alphabet for Cape Verdean Writing) or any other standardized system of Kriolu. I witnessed a heated debate in the House of Representatives in November of 2009 around this issue that was clearly partisan with representatives from the PAICV (*Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo Verde*, African Party of Cape Verdean Independence) in support of making Kriolu official and the MpD (*Movimento para a Democracia*, Movement for Democracy) opposed.

“contact zones” (Pratt, 1987, 1991) where differences are made manifest and sub-altern agency are potentially given a stage. In the case of Cape Verdean Kriolu in Lisbon, the concept of “contact” is an ontological and epistemological one. In other words, Cape Verdean-ness, as it is with other creole cultural formations, only makes sense in terms of contact. Cape Verdean history, language, phenotypes began with contact. Moreover, contact complemented by the practice of migration has shaped the Cape Verdean worldview. This essay connects the empirical realities of Lisbon neighborhoods through the expressions of a particular youth cultural group to the historically structured experiences of contact vis-à-vis colonialism, migration and language.



Figure 1: Mural with “Kova M” calligraphy next to an image of Bob Marley (Photo by author, 2011)

The story of Cape Verdeans in Lisbon is one of “scenes”, a creative link between physical space and expressive culture that forges identity. The dynamics of scenes are results of socio-spatial encounters. Groups of youth residing in Lisbon of Cape Verdean descent use Kriolu to empower themselves psychologically, economically and politically by connecting their dynamic native tongue to space (local neighborhood, Lisbon periphery, Cape Verdean diaspora, Cape Verde itself, Africa, Europe, generalized migrant communities) and time (Portuguese co-

lonialism, 16<sup>th</sup> century West African migrations, 20<sup>th</sup> century decolonization, late 20<sup>th</sup> century personal narratives of family migration). Such space-time couplings are chronotopic, as Kriolu speakers generate new meanings out of these combinations. Moreover, such expressions of time-space demonstrate the linguistic process of creolization and recreolization as Cape Verdeans migrate, inhabit and develop new contact zones. These tactics help create distinction (“identity”) and are born from the intimacy of Portuguese colonialism (“creole”).

While there have been significant populations of Cape Verdeans and other “black” Africans in Lisbon since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is only since the 1960s that “Luso-Africans” have become a more expressive demographic in the European capital city. Furthermore, since the early 1990s the Lisbon housing authorities have targeted “improvised” neighborhoods for removal or renewal into what is referred to as “social”<sup>2</sup> neighborhoods, many of which contain majorities of Cape Verdean ethnic and Kriolu-speaking residents. This Portuguese version of state-sponsored project housing often represents an incursion into local residents’ lives and a challenge to collective and cultural investment in place. Such factors sparked a nascent sub-group of local rappers in Lisbon to be more forceful in not only rapping in Kriolu but using Kriolu to comment on migration with the hopes of changing opinions about their neighborhoods by persuading listeners to appreciate the value invested in these places.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it must be stated that similar to any identity politics project, Kriolu as articulated by local rappers involves a level of strategic essentialism. For example, not unlike the keyword of “nigga” in US rappers’ versions of locality as it relates to the “hood” (Perry, 2004; Forman, 2004), “*badiu*”, a polemic term of black laziness recuperated by contemporary Cape Verdean residents in Lisbon, indexes an assumed masculinity.

During my fieldwork, I spoke with thirty-five rappers, only three of whom were women. Of course, gender is not merely a demographic fact of representation but also a performance practice. For example, LBC, cited above, explained to me why occasionally he uses the word “bitch” (left untranslated) in his rhymes.

First of all, I got this idea from Tupac [Shakur] who turned people’s heads with his N.I.G.G.A. acronym [Never Ignorant About Getting Goals Accomplished]. So, I put in B.I.T.C.H. (translation from Kriolu: your insensitivity turned you corrupt and in-

<sup>2</sup> I maintain the diacritics of quotation marks around “social” and “improvised” throughout the text as a reminder that these terms contain particular ideological connotations under debate in the context of contemporary Lisbon.

corrigible)...The other thing is that ‘bitch’ is meant for other men, not women. I’m criticizing them, not young women (personal communication, 19 October, 2010)<sup>3</sup>.

LBC’s comments demonstrate the homosocial dimensions of Kriolu rap; it is a discourse overwhelmingly produced by and directed towards men as a series of judgments on masculinity. Moreover, LBC and other Kriolu rappers deploy “bitch” and “nigga” challenges as rhetorical qualifiers of “street” and “thug”. In other words, they imagine and propose public space as implicitly masculine and draw on empowering vocabulary etymologically rooted in English but pragmatically part of a Kriolu project, i.e., to make cultural claims to territory.

### **“A contact perspective”**

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In a speech delivered as part of a Modern Language Association conference, Mary Louise Pratt (1991) brought deserved attention to what had been a relatively simplified site of meaning – the encounter. Borrowing from linguistics studies of pidgin and creole, Pratt introduced her notion of the “contact zone” as more than just a place but rather as a process of subjectivity and identification. Pratt juxtaposed the language games of contemporary childhood pedagogy in the United States and the early colonial texts of a certain seventeenth century indigenous Andean named Guaman Poma as an entry point. Both parties were confronted with and readily engaged an intersectionality linking the triviality of baseball player names (Carl Yastremski and Manny Trillo) and everyday Spanish words (*indio, oro, plata*) with cultural histories, geographies, violence and humor, respectively.

The strength of Pratt’s argument is that she conceived of “contact” beyond the empirical spaces of lands and texts and elicited thought on scenes. For her, given the parameters of the talk, the “scenes” are pedagogic ones of classroom dynamics and the crossroads of students’ experiences as they and the instructor discuss “civilization” and “culture” within a milieu of multiculturalism politics and university curricula development. In her subsequent, widely acclaimed book on travel writing (1992) Pratt more effectively moves the discussion of “contact zone” to a “perspective” (p. 41ff.). This means that narratives about colonial encounters, for example, are not only about certain events; they also contribute to a manner of looking at the world and of recognition. As Antoinette Errante concluded from her work on the education system in late Portuguese colonialism

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<sup>3</sup> LBC provided the following Kriolu phrase to define the acronym: “bu insenbilidadi torna corruptu e horivel”.



Figure 2: Stencil art of police interrogation of Kova M youth.  
Kriolu caption reads: "We don't want anymore oppressive police" (Photo by author, 2011)

under the Salazar-Caetano regime, "colonialism was a *shared culture* that cultivated cultural pathologies across and within the colonial complex and was itself a maladaptive response to struggles of national identity within metropolitan societies" (Errante, 1998, p. 307, italics in original). In short, following Hegel, contact is

existential because it obliges certain kinds of recognition and forms subjectivity through ensuing value judgments.

What if the “contact perspective” were more than situational, more than just historical? Rather than a period mark of empowered modernity to be balanced by an “imagined” autochthonous tradition of ethnicity or cosmology, what if “contact” were plainly existential? Cape Verde as a dynamic socio-cultural place and heterogeneous identity was born from contact and serial migrations. To be Cape Verdean is to have a “contact perspective” that often results in a diasporic consciousness, the sense and sentiment of being in more than one place and cultivating expressions of belonging across geo-political borders. Given the aforementioned metaphysical and local political conditions of being Kriolu in Lisbon under urban renewal, the prospect of locality takes on particular challenges. A cadre of young, vocal Cape Verdeans have begun to articulate their contact perspective, i.e., Portugal-Cape Verde, Portugal-PALOP, Europe-Africa, White-Black, Portuguese-Kriolu, as a move to difference in the European milieu of identity politics and contested citizenship. How do Kriolu rappers link space to identity through contact experiences?

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## Identity as a spatial formation

In the scholarship on rap music and territoriality, Murray Forman has argued that rappers are experts in analyzing and popularizing the “spatial partitioning of race and the experiences of being young and black in America” (Forman, 2004, p. 202). Rappers bolster their claims to authority and legitimacy by transforming vague notions of ghetto into sharp identity tales of the “hood”. Yet, if we take the basic message of Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* (1993) to heart, we must agree that identity is always a translocal articulation (see also Pennycook, 2010). To this end, the following lyrical excerpt from rapper LBC, Kova M resident from the article’s introduction, demonstrates that the reckoning of Lisbon neighborhoods and socio-cultural identification involves other places and the curious, diasporic vehicle of Cape Verdean Kriolu. LBC raps:

What is that about “real thugs” and “real gangstas” in training who leave their kids and women hungry in the ghetto? / When I arrived from Eugénio Lima in Kova M, I learned a lot of things / a *badiu* soldier right here / MINAO soldier is here to defend / all those that the state oppresses / fuck a nigga who isn’t with my ideas / who doesn’t know about Carlos Veiga / he barely maintains his legitimacy / he was down with the guy who killed Renato Cardoso / enough nigga / I became the soldier here / we must have a new kind of spirit / *Refrain*: MINAO

/ Black Anti-Oppression Mental Intellect / It's all about preparing people for a world revolution...<sup>4</sup>.

In the above excerpt, LBC, an acronym meaning "Learning Black Connection", located his "learning" in the Cape Verdean diaspora. It is when he moved from the impoverished neighborhood of Eugénio Lima in the Cape Verdean capital city of Praia to the established yet "improvised" neighborhood of Cova da Moura ("Kova M") that LBC began to reflect on Kriolu. Rap is a form of education and this particular song marks an evolution of sorts for Flávio, aka LBC, as he identifies himself more as MINAO, a stable intellect constituted of race and revolution, and less as LBC, a relatively immature identity disengaged from the big picture of global oppression.

In other sections of the song, Flávio covers police brutality and racial profiling in the Lisbon periphery on his way back to references to Carlos Veiga and Renato Cardoso, two opposing political figures within the same party during Cape Verde's transition from a Marxist-style, one-party system to a multi-party, neoliberal system during the 1990s. When asked about the song's message, Flávio made it clear to me that "I identify my place as a contemporary colonized person, who hasn't realized the revolution. The spaces are linked. Kova M is like Palestine, is like Praia city, and so many other places. I am a soldier of the third world inside Europe doing outreach".

Flávio/LBC/MINAO identifies the problem of postcolonial emplacement as not only a challenge of physical diaspora but also of language. The latter is signaled in the term "*badiu*", a Kriolu word, which literally means *vadio* in Portuguese or vagabond or scoundrel in English. Unlike the Cape Verdeans in past generations of migration, most young Cape Verdeans in Lisbon are *badiu*, meaning poor, working-class individuals from the island of Santiago, home of roughly half of the archipelago's population. Most were initially young men from the rural towns and later the national capital city of Praia on Santiago, which is considered to be the most "African" island by Cape Verdeans and foreigners alike. "*Badiu*" is a discursive term in that it contains a number of connotations that discipline thought about a group of people. The term has a direct geographical reference, the island of Santiago. During his 1952 visit to Santiago, sponsored by the Portuguese state, Brazilian scholar Gilberto Freyre called the island "so negroid: a sign that, unlike what has successfully been happening in Brazil, this place has maintained the African elements of origin" (Freyre, 1953, p. 290). Beyond race and place, "*badiu*" historically has meant backwardness, "traditional" religiosity and a proclivity to

<sup>4</sup> In Kriolu MINAO stands for "Menti Intelekt Negro Anti-Opreson".

violence thereby constituting a stigma that many Cape Verdeans in Lisbon must negotiate<sup>5</sup>. Just as Bourgois (2003) describes the impact of the *jíbaro*, a symbol of Puerto Rican rural masculinity, on the East Harlem landscape in New York City, the Cape Verdean *badiu* has influenced significantly the milieu of masculinity and youth in the “improvised” and “social” housing in contemporary Lisbon.

As an expression of diaspora, postcoloniality, gender, class, language and race, *badiu* is a keyword in the “social imaginary” of certain peripheral spaces in Lisbon. LBC most directly relates “*badiu*” to his personal identity, “a *badiu* soldier”, an identity marker that requires space to be meaningful. In his lyrics LBC qualifies “*badiu*” with two deictic expressions: “right here” and “arriving from Eugénio Lima”. While the former refers to his current presence in “Kova M”, the latter refers to migration from the Cape Verdean island of Santiago and an “improvised” neighborhood in the capital city of Praia. Moreover, LBC articulates “*badiu*” as a spatial project of “outreach” through Europe for those who engage oppressive state regimes in a spirit of resistance.

As this brief example of “*badiu*” demonstrates, the production of locality through the process of emplacement involves a range of spatial references. Such heterogeneity complicates the straightforward notion of place as an easily demarcated locale rooted in autochthonous or even unidirectional diasporic practices. In popular culture, the term used by practitioners and more recently employed by scholars that best characterizes the creative and competitive dimensions of locality is the “scene” (Connell & Gibson, 2003; Krims, 2007; Straw, 1991). Kriolu rap as a scene distinct from “Portuguese” rap (*rap tuga*) or Cape Verdean rap (*rap kabuverdianu*) depends on participants’ belief and assertion of their identities as essentially linked to inhabited space. It is the popular, in this case rap music, which draws attention through the aesthetics of rhetoric and facilitates circulation in public presentations and information technology. Similar to the “music scene” in Austin, Texas during the 1990s (Shank, 1994) or the hip-hop scene in Newcastle, England (Bennett, 2000), the Kriolu rap scene and by extension Kriolu emplacement in Lisbon relies on landmarks of consumption or participation, broadly defined.

For Kriolu the efficacy of the scene depends less on commercial spaces of clubs and stores and more on the relative penetration into neighborhood community centers and the social ubiquity of streets. Kriolu as a linguistic practice is not only spatial but also shot through with a set of temporal relationships between Kriolu

<sup>5</sup> One can locate a racialized stigma among the “Luso-African” community more generally. For example, see the recent article in the Lisbon-based newspaper *Público*, <http://www.publico.pt/Sociedade/onu-traca-retrato-de-discriminacao-e-racismo-subtil-em-portugal-1564647?p=1> (accessed on October 1, 2012).

and Portuguese, Cape Verde and Portugal, Portugal and Europe, all of which have shaped the value of Kriolu as well as contributed to the meaning of Lisbon as a “contact zone” embedded in urbanization processes such as the transformation of “improvised” into “social” neighborhoods.

## Kriolu temporalities

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Kriolu identification in Lisbon is an expression of time-space links or chronotopes because it requires particular combinations of migration experiences and certain histories for speakers to make meaning and ultimately place themselves in the here and now. Histories range from a sense of the emergence of Cape Verde as a place in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, to the reinvestment of Portugal in colonial Africa during the “scramble for Africa” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the post-WWII reconfigurations of European sovereignty and identity, to the current milieu of citizenship and rights in Portugal as part of a precarious European Union.

The spatial politics of Kriolu in Lisbon cannot be reduced to simply a presentist chronotope organized around African difference located in the “social” neighborhood. Due to its strategic geographic position for both Iberian and West African traders, militias, refugees and other migrants, Cape Verde was a central point of creolization and a key intermediary point in the formation of what is now referred to as the “Black Atlantic” (Heywood & Thornton, 2007). For example, historian Matthias Perl argued that, more generally, Portuguese creole by the sixteenth century became a recognized trade language in West Africa, practiced by even the Dutch and English, and was disseminated to various parts of Africa and the Americas. Kriolu contracted after the seventeenth century but it was once a transcontinental primary language of trade and power (Perl, 1982, p. 12).

A longer view of history affords us the perspective of Kriolu as a complex encounter, an intimacy related to a set of intended transitions, including race (becoming “white”), nation (becoming “Portuguese”), and language (speaking Portuguese). Cape Verde appeared to be a perfect model for managing encounters given its demographic admixture of Europeans and Africans since its inception and the accompanying racial difference attributed to the archipelago in contrast to other African colonies of Portugal (Lobban & Halter, 1988). The lightening of Kriolu as a transitional racial mark was generally true in the *Barlavento* or Windward group of islands, as opposed to *Sotavento* or Leeward, with the former including São Vicente and the relatively cosmopolitan city of Mindelo<sup>6</sup>. Such

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<sup>6</sup> This distinction between the island groups is a general one. Residents of the islands of Fogo and Brava, part of the Leeward group, are significantly lighter than *badiu* or Santiago island residents.

positive “culture” of miscegenation and colonial stewardship was what Gilberto Freyre was expecting when he visited Santiago. His surprise was, as cited above, a remark on the determination of race and place; Santiago was woefully “too negroid”.

Kriolu rappers convey an ambiguous sense of racial identity embedded in the long history of Cape Verde as an intermediary and transitional place in Portuguese colonialism and later British imperialism. Cape Verdean politicians pride themselves on their close relationship with European heads of state and boast a leading rank among African countries with regard to indices of “human development” and “economic growth”. Yet, Cape Verde is seemingly always locked into a sign of African blackness in the experiences of immigrant labor and poverty in the European context. Kriolu rappers express such complex sentiments through the charge of “nigga” thereby racializing Kriolu as a language of class and place predicaments.

That Cape Verde and Kriolu were transitional spaces and practices within the luso-tropical paradigm of Portuguese identity would become more significant in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The state apparatus under dictator António de Oliveira Salazar codified laws defining who were “indigenous” and by extension too black and uneducated to qualify for Portuguese citizenship and who were “assimilated” and potential Portuguese citizens. One part of the evaluation, according to the 1953 “indigenous law code”, specifically related to speaking Portuguese “correctly”. Citing linguistic research, Portuguese officials didn’t recognize Kriolu as another language but rather as a diligent effort to speak the mother European tongue. In part because of this, the Portuguese state categorized Cape Verde as not “indigenous” but “assimilated” despite the troublesome blackness of its population. In sum, the combination of Kriolu as transition, infrastructure investment of schools on the archipelago, and a belief among Portuguese colonial officials in the work ethic of Cape Verdeans afforded a disproportionate number of Cape Verdeans access to Lisbon as well as employment as colonial intermediaries in plantation societies such as Guinea-Bissau (Léonard, 1999).

This seemingly straightforward assimilationist story of the Cape Verdean creole-turned-Portuguese urban citizen begins to fray because, in simple terms, Cape Verdeans are proud of their linguistic heritage and have not stopped speaking Kriolu in public spaces (Carter & Aulette, 2009). Unlike other Lusophone African émigrés, Cape Verdeans did not linguistically adjust to continental Portuguese over time but rather have insisted on Kriolu as an essential element in socialization and basic identification (Horta, 2008; Duarte, 2003; Märzhäuser, 2010). With a sense of foundational and colonial temporalities related to Kriolu and Cape

Verdean identity, more generally, we can turn to the historical formation of the “social” neighborhood, a particular kind of “contact zone” within the current landscape in Lisbon’s periphery.

The “social” neighborhood is a standardized design, featuring clustered apartment buildings around a central plaza with accessible streets of commerce, which provide basic services of groceries, baked goods, café, popular restaurants, clothing, hardware and household items. After the 1881 “Industrial Study” (*Inquérito Industrial*), a state evaluative report on national industries, city administrations began to consider more seriously the geography of labor. The challenge was, of course, how to manage urban space to maximize labor efficiency. State urbanization agencies responded in two ways: “pátios” and “vilas”. The former refers to annexes and ad hoc construction for laborers behind the houses of elite urban property owners. Subsequently, real estate developers proposed to standardize the “pátio” phenomenon and codify it as the “vila” thereby creating more spatial segmentation and differentiation (Pereira, 1994).

“Social neighborhoods”, first established in 1918, essentially are vilas on a larger scale. After World War II, migrants from the Portuguese countryside met significant groups of Cape Verdeans, and to a lesser extent Angolans and Mozambicans, and remade the Lisbon peripheral areas of Loures, Seixal, and Amadora into large residential municipalities with significant pockets of “improvised” settlements. In the 1950s Salazar began to address housing through a reinvestment in “social” neighborhoods to combat the surge of “clandestine neighborhoods” and informality outside of the municipality proper (Eaton, 1993; Cardoso & Perista, 1994). The implementation of subsequent laws around residential property contributed to a stigma levied against those in the auto-constructed communities. The stigma of informality intensified after the implosion of the fascist regime and the concurrent independence movements in Lusophone Africa in 1974 (Horta, 2001).

Since 1993, the Lisbon landscape for the underemployed, working classes has gradually changed from a mixture of the social and auto-constructed to almost exclusively “social” neighborhoods. With this said, it is important to underscore that the relationship between “social” and “improvised” housing in Lisbon is not Manichean with the former as a cold rigid drone village and the latter as an innovative cultural hub. For example, some Cape Verdean rappers such as Chullage have used the official recognition of his “social” neighborhood Arrentela by the Lisbon city administration to gain funding and other resources so that he and others in the area could transform the bottom floor of one of the housing project

buildings into a hip-hop cultural center and internet café called Khapaz, a purposeful misspelling of the Portuguese word *capaz* or “capable”.

By the same token, some residents such as Gil, born in São Tomé e Príncipe of Cape Verdean parents and living in the “improvised” housing area of Santa Filomena, have felt lost, defeated and often not a part of any scene in Lisbon.

When I was a kid, BSF [Santa Filomena neighborhood] was more alive. There were more people here, more community vibe. The thing is they don’t just demolish our places in a day or so. No, it takes years. So, our BSF breaks up. Some people leave, some stay. You know, like divide and conquer. It’s hard to live here now. Random people move in and out. There’s no collective spirit anymore... It’s a struggle but, as a rapper, I try to bring a little BSF reality to the overall Kriolu thing going on in Amadora (personal communication, 22 October, 2009).

The “they” in Gil’s story is often a coordinated team of state and commercial employees, whose goal is to appropriate the public land and develop it in a strategic manner in accordance with the dynamics of the market. The temporality of the intra-urban migration, expressed by Gil as “it takes years”, fragments the “improvised” neighborhoods and exposes the social and physical infrastructure to alternative and stigmatized socio-economic activities such as illegal drug trafficking and prostitution. Both of these result in violence and add greater stigma to the residential area. Gil contrasted this temporality of gradual, sometimes painful transition, with a nostalgia of the early years of BSF. The bygone “community vibe” itself followed a much faster yet more distant inter-urban migration, predominantly from Praia or Tarrafal, Cape Verde to Lisbon. As temporalities of experience collide for BSF residents in their identification with place, youth like Gil find a potential vehicle in Kriolu and the socio-linguistic practice of rap. He tried to articulate his local knowledge to a wider scene, the “overall Kriolu thing going on in Amadora”, the municipality adjacent to Lisbon that includes BSF as well as the residential focus of this article, Boba.

### **Kriolu attempts at neighborhood formation: Boba**

The neighborhoods of Cova da Moura, from the essays’ introduction, and Casal da Boba demonstrate a contrast in terms of the relationships between language, space, identity and urban policy. I have visited Cova twelve times and Boba six times since 2007. Visits ranged from an hour to eight hours, depending on the day of the week and the time of day of the visit. While Cova da Moura is (in)famous as Lisbon’s largest “improvised” neighborhood of predominantly

residents of Cape Verdean descent, Boba is a much smaller and much more recent state project of the “social neighborhood”. Interestingly, many of the most well-known and respected Kriolu rappers have emerged from the milieu of a multi-layered transition – from Cape Verde to Lisbon to “improvised” to “social” neighborhood. This is the case of Ghoya, a Kriolu rapper, who along with his rapping partner Boss, represent the problems of current relocation projects and the significance of Kriolu as a coping mechanism that they hope to popularize and impose as a neighborhood signature.

Ghoya moved to the “social” neighborhood of Casal da Boba in the municipality of Amadora in 2001 when he was fifteen years old. He had lived previously in Benfica municipality in the “improvised” neighborhood of Fontainhas<sup>7</sup>. The demolition of Fontainhas was part of PER (Special Program of Relocation), a project initiated in 1993 sponsored by the Portuguese state and European Union agencies to eradicate the “tin can hoods” (*bairros de lata*) from Portugal’s main cities of Lisbon and Oporto by the year 2000. Many of the residents from the Fontainhas demolition ended up in Boba (note the reference to “Fontainhas” in figure 3). The main goal of PER was/is to relocate approximately 130 thousand people, who were living in unregulated, non-standard, poorly serviced communities to places with infrastructure in the most efficient manner possible.

In October of 2009 during our conversation in Boba, Ghoya described the relocation process after the demolition of Fontainhas in the following manner.

The experience here has been shit. You see these buildings? They’re less than ten years old and you can see how they’re crumbling. I mean, they didn’t invest much in this. That’s obvious. I’m old enough to remember Fontainha and that was tough, but we made that. People put that on the map... The housing officials think that now it’s all solved just because they made these white, cement boxes and call it new and then publish in the media that we are ‘new’ – meaning included folks. It’s not true; there’s no recognition. That’s why you find young folks like me, Boss and dozens of others out here yelling and screaming. We’re not interested in just asking for some help at the door; we’re going to bust down the door so we can get some rights to make this place into our own (personal communication, 5 October, 2009).

According to Ghoya, the problem with Boba and the “social” neighborhood more generally is the assumed connection between spatial management, i.e., urbanization, and a collective sentiment about the city, i.e., urbanism. The idea that standardized housing of poor material quality represents inclusion into modern

<sup>7</sup> The official spelling is “Fontainhas”, but on multiple occasions residents referred to it as “Fontainha”. I simply maintained the difference as per the speaker’s choice.

Portuguese society appears to Ghoya as a farce. Perhaps what is most distasteful, as Ghoya interjected “it’s not true”, is that such investment by the state and real estate contractors has changed the migrant community, approximately sixty percent Cape Verdean in 2007, into “new” residents. Rather, in his claim that Boba fails to represent any substantive recognition by the state, Ghoya maintains that the “social” neighborhood has not addressed “spatial segmentation” or the “landscapes of inequality” (Suárez-Navaz, 2004) embedded in neoliberal urbanization projects such as PER. The demolition of Fontainhas and demographic transition of several hundred to Boba is a fact of imposition. However, language both at the stylistic level of rap lyrics and the ubiquitous level of public chatter remains a social practice from which residents like Ghoya work to reconfigure Boba and thus “make this place into our own”.



Figure 3: Neighborhood of Casal da Boba in background.  
Traffic barrier with “Fontainha” graffiti tag in the foreground referring to the demolished neighborhood of Fontainhas (Photo by author, 2009)

Kriolu is a linguistic practice that creates locality through social participation, i.e., a “speech community”, and a more literal connection of the discursive to the material of the city. It is more often than not the performance of speech that communicates than the substantive words per se. While this is true to some extent in all languages, i.e. the *parole* is critically distinctive from the *langue* using

Saussurian terminology, local speakers value phonetic and oratory style relatively more given the fact that Kriolu, as well as other creole and pidgin languages, contain simpler syntax and grammatical structures.

In the case of moving from Fontainhas to Boba, what was once done in the *becos* or the labyrinth of alleyways within the shantytown is carried out around the cement soccer court and in the nondescript cement courtyards between the residential buildings. Ghoya explains, “we start from the street. This is where we make ourselves. Ok, it looks different here in Boba than in Fontainha or wherever, but we make it work. That’s one of the powers of Kriolu. We link Kriolu with rap to speak”.

The question is how does Kriolu reconstitute “street”, if at all. In our conversations Ghoya repeatedly employed “drama” in response to such queries, but it wasn’t until I heard several of his recordings and discussed these songs with Kriolu rappers around Lisbon that I was able to grasp a deeper sense of the operative imaginary. The Kriolu words for “street” and “drama” do not depart from those of Portuguese, “rua” and “drama”, respectively. Rather, it is in the narrative where Kriolu distinguishes itself as an emphatic and aesthetic practice. For example, in Ghoya’s songs “Life is like that: today it’s you, tomorrow it’ll be me” and “The other side of the law”, there is a frequent use of the first person objective case (“me”) connected to the verb. This is a typical Kriolu verb-object construction foregrounded particularly in Kriolu phonetics. Ghoya places himself immediately in the songs as under stress or under an imposition: *es kritikam* or “they criticized me”. Other examples include: “*es dam*” (“they gave me”) and “*es mandam*” (“they told me or demanded from me”). The phoneme of “m” when connected to the verb changes the rhetorical stress from the conventional penultimate syllable “kritika” to the last syllable in “kritikam” thereby creating the highlighted morpheme of “me”. Moreover, Ghoya and others often create emphasis, authority and rhythmic tempo by using regularly “*djam bai*”, a phrase ranging in meaning from “I’m outta here” or “I’m off” to “I’m going to do” something depending on subsequent text. The significance here beyond the “m” is the urgency and accentuation of “dja”, the idea being that my actions will take place right now. The aesthetic features of “kritikam” and “djam bai” are part of a Kriolu sound, and due to the success of rappers such as Ghoya, LBC, Chullage, and others, such sonorous qualities serve to reconstitute the “Lisbon sound” within popular music scenes (Connell & Gibson, 2003, pp. 90-116; see also Märzhäuser [2010] regarding the adoption of some Kriolu vocabulary from Kriolu rap by non-Kriolu speakers in Lisbon). These rhetorical stress points give a punchy quality to the sound of Kriolu rap and enable the rapper to achieve the

narrative goal of authority by way of a crisis in the form of, “something is happening to me”.

Ghoya’s unraveling of imposition is a drama often accompanied by sound mixes featuring synthesizers with sequences of high-pitched string instruments articulated in high reverberation. For Ghoya it is the “false nigga” and the “system” that work against him and by extension all his “people” of Boba and the “real” Kriolu rap scene. How is “reality” reconstituted? For Ghoya, sometimes it is not possible and his “feelings of rage and pain [related to police brutality, unemployment, jealousy] go to prison, to the casket”, but if it is to happen, it is through the “sentiments of place”. Ghoya raps “what we niggas have in common is suffering and solitude / recover that nigga in this place right now / the other side is a movement that hasn’t fallen / these are our suburbs and streets / disillusion is enemy number one”. While certainly vague in his attempt to address suffering, Ghoya does locate it in a way that is both specific to the urban margins of Lisbon and also general enough to include anyone with sentiments of marginality. Based on fieldwork conversations with local rappers in Praia, Cape Verde, Ghoya’s stories have reached audiences not only back “home” in Cape Verde but also in other diasporic locales of Rotterdam and Paris, thereby suggesting a transnational dimension to Ghoya’s descriptions of his struggles in Boba and Lisbon more generally.

A remaining question is: why rap in Kriolu and not in Portuguese? Rapping in Portuguese or what is codified as part of “hip-hop tuga” is heterogeneous in its politics and includes a number of rappers critical of Portuguese society and various “systems” of marginalization. When asked questions about the utility of Kriolu versus Portuguese, rappers consistently cited “sentiment”. Boss, Ghoya’s rapping partner and fellow Boba resident, began his explanation in a common fashion: “*Ami é Kriolu. É o sentimentu di movimentu kabuverdianu. É kel li. É a gerason di gosi*”. These four short phrases are “stock”, part of a Kriolu script among Cape Verdean youth in Lisbon that sets the tone of Kriolu distinction. “I am Kriolu” followed by “It’s a sentiment of Cape Verdean movement” are not simply elements of a nostalgic identity claim such as “I am a British ex-pat”, since it implies an identity-language isomorphism but, more importantly, as a practice. Namely, “to be Kriolu” involves working through a series of contact zones and making sense of various “contact perspectives”. The phrase refers to a series of indexical chronotopic affirmations regarding migration, diaspora, abandonment, labor, family, youth, and/or, in this case, general hip-hop nationhood. Furthermore, the phrases “It’s like that here” and “It’s the now generation” draw their power from the keywords of *li* (“here”) and *gosi*, a typical creole construction combining the Portuguese words of *agora* (“now”) and *assim* (“like that” or “right away”).

Taken together, as in the case of Boss, utilized as transitional fillers, e.g., *kel li*, or emphatic introductions, e.g., *gerason di gosi* or *ami é Kriolu*, in rap songs and everyday conversations, Kriolu makes manifest a sentiment of not simply longing for Cape Verde but more often than not, a sentiment of critique based in a pride of collective linguistic practices within a process of emplacement experienced through waves of serial and intra-urban migrations. Certainly, Kriolu is about being Cape Verdean, as for the past five hundred years residents have spoken Kriolu in public and private spaces without any official recognition by the Portuguese colonial administration or, later, the independent Cape Verdean state. Yet, in the case of Ghoya, Boss and others, Kriolu is not necessarily about the place of Cape Verde. Kriolu, as a symbolic system, affords a structured way of routinizing imagination, a “fantasy” (Weiss, 2002) of community inside a society that historically has recognized Cape Verdeans and the Kriolu language as productive intermediaries on the way to become Portuguese in the late stages of empire as well as in the current milieu of citizenship in the “New Europe”.

Kriolu rappers like Ghoya are not only part of a social network of “nigga” and migrant dramas but also they are members of everyday, neighborhood chitchat. As I sat together with Ghoya and Boss on a cracked wall, Kriolu salutations of *tud dretu* from older speakers and *modi* and *kal é* from the youth ricocheted about bouncing off the concrete façades. The literal translations of youth greetings are often about “manner” or the “way” to do things. As an acutely oral language, Kriolu signifies most forcefully in the way one speaks; it is the flow and enunciation that communicates. Kids yammered about rules of a game, an elderly man complained about the price of bread, and girls shouted out commands for young males to go do this or that chore.

If Kriolu is a kind of “social imaginary”, a routinized medium of “worlding” or reality shaping, have Boba residents translated the spoken language into an identifying landmark? In Boba, Kriolu and the more general experience of migration have yet to grow beyond a daily tenor of difference in relation to the concrete boxes of apartment residence.

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## Conclusion

Local rappers’ spectacular and ubiquitous use of Kriolu in Lisbon exemplifies what Nicholas de Genova (2010) has described as the conflict between an “autonomy of migration” and state sovereignty. The language and identity of Kriolu represents a “contact perspective”, an outlook on life and medium of identification historically structured by the encounter. Cape Verde was born out of an ear-

ly creole formation involving Portuguese sailors, West African traders, and displaced Muslims and Jews migrating out of Iberia. Movement as part of an overall spatial recognition is an essential part of Cape Verdean practices of language and identity. Most recently, the Portuguese state and third-party real estate developers have provided another scenario in the long series of (dis)emplacement dramas for Cape Verdeans as Lisbon administrations have pushed to demolish “improvised” housing and regroup people into “social” neighborhoods. While in the U.S. public opinion continues to reckon the “project” as a vertical slum, a negative residue of modern architecture, and an obsolete form of urbanization, in Lisbon, as is the case in many other parts of the world, the project or “social” neighborhood is a primary response to postcoloniality made manifest in migration demographics and the reorganization of labor. The case of Lisbon housing fits within the spectrum of reactions and policies based on a set of expectations by European states regarding migrants, labor and city space after the Second World War (Huttman, Saltman & Blauw, 1991; Karakayali & Rigo, 2010).

It is not the case that social housing is necessarily bad and “improvised” housing is pure positivity, but rather that the gradual shift of the working poor to the exclusively “social” neighborhoods in the Lisbon metro area has provoked many local youth to make more explicit their claims to place, not only because they try to combat stigma related to displacement but also, because they strive to transform standardized urban planning into cultural identity. Moreover, the move to social housing has fortified the spirit of a cadre of activists to maintain “improvised” neighborhoods such as Cova da Moura as distinct spaces. Cape Verdean Kriolu has emerged as one idiom with which youth work to reclaim control over their identification with space.

The relationship between urbanization policies and urban experiences is a problem of agency, that life path of connecting self to recognized social structures. The Kriolu distinction within the milieu of immigration and housing in the “New Europe” is embedded in the chronotopes of a relatively inclusive Portuguese colonialism with regard to Cape Verdeans and the differentiated linguistic practices of Cape Verdean creole. The ethnographic cases of Boba, Kova M and BSF demonstrate that language and space are essential elements in identity formation because they mediate social history and citizenship politics, in this case, around the processes of migration, labor and race.

The presence of Kriolu still does not resonate with the Portuguese state in any sustained systematic way and thus reveals part of the discontent between migrants and the state in postcolonial Portugal. Such case studies as this one provide insight into the relationship between African experiences in Portugal and

state policies regarding urbanization. In sum, Kriolu rappers in their lyrics and comments on everyday life teach us that contact is not only chronotopic in nature but also an operative epistemology. Furthermore, the evidence on Kriolu in Lisbon contributes to our understanding of a global phenomenon – the interdependent and constitutive relationship between space and discourse in the milieu of postcolonial identity formation.

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