



FILHOS DE IMPÉRIO E PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS
CHILDREN OF EMPIRES AND EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES
ENFANTS D'EMPIRES ET POSTMÉMOIRES EUROPÉENNES

Saturday, 19 October 2019



Ticket for Djamal and GNR's concert | 1997 | Coliseu do Porto

THE ORIGINS OF *RAP* IN PORTUGAL: MARGINS AND CENTRE, ACCOMMODATION AND EMANCIPATION

Miguel Cardina

A recent controversy revolving around the musician Valete has launched a debate about the place of women in rap and hip-hop culture, and the persistence of deep-rooted misogyny among its protagonists. In one of his recent works, the rapper tells the story of a man who finds his wife with his best friend and unleashes a chauvinistic rage laced with insults, imagining shoving a shotgun down his partner's throat (1). Valete saw



it as a piece of art fictionalizing violence. Various critical voices have pointed to how the video reiterates stereotypes about women and glorified chauvinist violence in a country that has faced many cases of domestic violence and murder of women. Beyond the old question of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, the controversy encourages us to ask how rap – understood as a site for the denunciation of racism and the visibilization of the daily life of racialized, subordinated groups – has, itself, been complicit with other kinds of invisibilities and oppressions.

The recently published *Fixar o (In)Visível. Os primeiros passos do RAP em Portugal (1986-1998)* [*Fixing the (In)Visible. Rap's first steps in Portugal (1986-1998)*] by Soraia Simões de Andrade, gives us important tools to think with in this debate. It analyses the emergence of rap and hip-hop culture in Portugal and the intersection between this emerging artistic practice, its lead actors and the culture industries in Portugal at the end of the 20th century. Based on academic research, the book describes the origins of rap between 1986 and 1998. The opening date marks the beginning of the *Mercado Negro* [*Black Market*] programme on *Correio da Manhã Rádio*, a key moment in the mediatization of hip-hop culture. The endpoint corresponds to Expo98 when, the author argues, prominent hip-hop groups achieved unprecedented social visibility and commercial success.

The first chapter analyses the emergence of rap in North America and the key moments and spaces of its reception in Portugal. It argues that the emergence of rap “has allowed us to reinforce how mechanisms of identity came to give a deeper meaning to the biographical journeys of the pioneers” (2), establishing a connection between their daily lives and where they came from. At the same time this emergence was followed by a movement towards the mainstream of the music industry and access to influential media and independent television channels. This had a significant impact in the years of *cavaquismo* (3). This is illustrated by the case of the first rap compilation, *Rapública*. Released in 1994, it featured Boss AC, who shortly afterwards wrote Cavaco Silva’s campaign anthem, and the single “*Nadar*”, by the Black Company. There, and in the releases that immediately followed, the author shows an increasing articulation between rap and what she calls a “culture of the centre”, in a period in which dependence on recording studios was naturally greater than in the Internet era. This landscape leads Soraia Simões de Andrade to define rap as being, “of the urban musical forms, ironically the one that was most directly a product of what it criticized: the *modus operandi* of the culture industries and their social and economic context” (4).



Simultaneously, rap worked as a powerful challenge to modes of identity and exclusion, frequently taking the urban margins as a site for the observation and criticism of racism, social exclusion, poverty, xenophobia and police violence. At the same time that “*Nadar*”, by the Black Company, became a big hit on radio and television music and artists also emerged who used Cape Verdean language and wrote lyrics with a strong political character. General D is the clearest example. Chapters 2 and 3 underline rap’s drift towards the consumer society in the 1990s, while at the same time consolidating discourses associated with “racial coexistence” and the struggle against social injustice. New modes of performance and new spaces of socialization allowed it, also, to define itself as a territory of resistance.

In chapter 4, Soraia Simões de Andrade goes on to identify the major observable trends in this musical field. Among these “routes of invisibility” she emphasizes the groups Divine and Djamal, the only female rap groups to record in the 1990s, who explicitly dealt with sexist violence. In a context in which women were either objectified, or appeared as members of a choir or singing a refrain, these pioneering artists were a counterpoint to a world with overwhelmingly masculine protagonists, practices and values. One of the most obvious merits of this book is precisely that it reveals this alternative history of rap to give visibility and recognition to rappers who challenged chauvinism and violence. They were, in many ways, the precursors of a more recent generation of artists: of Capicua and Mynda Guevara.

Due to a lack of written resources, the book draws on a wide range of audiovisual material, a good part of which the author has made available on the site [Mural Sonoro](#). She has gathered testimonies that allow her to portray the first phase of Portuguese rap through key moments and personal experiences. Through oral history, Soraia Simões de Andrade therefore brings us a critical analysis of the emergence of this musical field and of the socio-political dynamics which determined it. She challenges the masculinist primacy of existing histories of rap, emphasizing its dependence on the music industry and analysing the repertoires and trajectories of its central protagonists. She highlights, too, the role of hip-hop culture in the socialization of youth in Portugal, initially of black and Afrodescendent youth in particular. It is a book, therefore, that deals with the visibilities and invisibilities inherent to a particular musical field. But it is also about the construction of youth in the eighties and nineties. It is about both cavaquismo itself and the anticavaquismo of the right. The book shows, for instance, the newspaper *O Independente*’s unexpected and long-denied ties to that world. Those decades were a crucial period for the definition of a liberal, cosmopolitan and European Portugal. Rap was used by that project as a multicultural symbol of a country in search of modernity, but was nonetheless criticized by the same voices for its use of music as a field of political expression against racism and inequality.



THE ORIGINS OF *RAP* IN PORTUGAL:
MARGINS AND CENTRE, ACCOMMODATION
AND EMANCIPATION

-
- (1) B.F.F.: “Forreta, that’s what I heard your say / when it was me who went to buy your jewellery, your clothes / Bitch, wide pussy, pure insane / soaked with morals always loaded with puritanism (Bitch) / Now you’re going to feel the sequel / With the shotgun shoved down your throught / the bullet piercing your windpipe / And your body an audience while death speaks”. For a picture of the debate, see: Fernanda Cândia, “Valete. O rapper, a adúltera, a caçadeira e a “pide feminista”” [Valete, the rapper, the adulteress the shotgun and the feminist PIDE], [Diário de Notícias](#), 18th September 2019. Mário Lopes, “B.F.F., o novo vídeo de Valete, glorifica a violência machista?” [Does B.F.F., the new video from Valete, glorify chauvinist violence?] [Público](#), 21st September 2019. The stakes rose recently when Valete made a video in which he criticized “bourgeois feminism” and called out Fernanda Cândia.
- (2) Soraia Simões de Andrade (2019), *Fixar o (In)Visível. Os primeiros passos do Rap em Portugal (1986-1998)*. Casal de Cambra: Caleidoscópio, p.25.
- (3) A term that refers to the period 1985-95, dominated by the liberal reforms of Aníbal Cavaco Silva.
- (4) *Ibidem*, p. 34.
-

Translated by Archie Davies

Miguel Cardina is a researcher at the Centre for Social Studies. He is an associate researcher with the MEMOIRS project and coordinator of the project CROME. He is author and co-author of various books, chapters and articles about colonialism, anti-colonialism and the colonial war, the history of political ideologies in the 1960s and 1970s and the dynamics between history and memory. This text is published under the auspices of the CROME project (ERC-2016-StG-715593).

4

ISSN 2184-2566

MEMOIRS is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (no. 648624) and is hosted at the Centre for Social Studies (CES), University of Coimbra.

