

## Wanderings

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*The 1980s. The Alto da Cova da Moura neighborhood. The day before a christening celebration. Huge cooking pots in improvised fireplaces. Women are arriving from their work. They are helping each other out. Smells are in the air. The pots only need some watchfulness. The dishcloths are wrapped, and formatted to serve as 'tchabeta'. The women turn into batucadeiras. The batuque takes care of the party during the rest of the night. There is life in the neighbourhood.*

The Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude, located in the neighbourhood of Alto da Cova da Moura, founded in 1987, plays a key role in the struggle for social and economic rights of residents and of the community. Cultural activities are probably the most visible face of an action that has been long and transformatory. In this text, two Cape Verdean performative practices will be highlighted: batuque and kola San Jon.

The batuque group Finka-Pé emerged in 1988 in the Alto da Cova da Moura neighbourhood, in the Amadora municipality, within the activities of the Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude.<sup>1</sup> Formed by Cape Verdean women, of the island of Santiago, that live/lived in the neighbourhood, this group devotes itself to the practice of batuque as a means of dissemination and maintenance of Cape Verdean culture (Ribeiro, 2010), but above all because of the power/energy that it gives them as a group, as immigrants, as people.

Batuque is an integration of body, of feelings. Together with a psychotherapist, the batucadeiras have identified the therapeutic aspects of their batuque: women sitting in a circle, support each other, singing about their sorrows and joys, concerns and about what gives them power. A phrase sung by one of the batucadeiras is repeated in chorus, like a mantra; they are exorcising what suffocates them. They sing verses from their great-grandmothers and invent new ones like a song about people without documents, about their children that cannot find a job and about some that get into unlawful acts. The fact that they are together in a circle; the alternation left/right, valued by EMDR;<sup>2</sup> a dance that can lead into trance; all of these are therapeutic elements.

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**Figure 1 - Finka Pé in the Jerónimos Monastery, 27 September 2009.**



Photo of Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude.

Everyday life is embedded in their art, that is, the art of the body as an absolute experience of their emotions, thoughts, feelings and problems. They are aware of their cultural identity, an identity that is not constructed negatively, against or in favor of a European reference but positively, for what it is, through what they represent.

The recognition of their art by Domingos Morais, ACARTE<sup>3</sup> programmer, had a major impact on children of batucadeiras and on young immigrants in general. He invited Finka Pé to perform in Gulbenkian in 1992. The official (and financial) recognition of the Cape Verdean culture by the official Portuguese instances provided an *aha-erlebnis*<sup>4</sup> to youngsters, children of immigrants, that witnessed the valorisation of their parents' culture.

In 2008, Finka Pé spent a week in Zaragoza, in the framework of the EXPO. It performed seven times a day for 20 minutes in front of the African Pavilion. On the last day, the producer said: *"should many professionals, had only half of your professionalism"*.

In November 2009, Paris, Blanc-Mesnil. Finka Pé presented a show about batuque with the support of teachers and pupils of the Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema de Lisboa. In Paris, they met with a group of women from the Comoros called 'Les Femmes de la Lune' and with a group of women from Algeria. A meeting of women from the suburbs. They did not understand the languages of one another, but through music, in workshops, they dialogued intensively; a dialogue of cultures, of human values between people of very different cultures, of different religions. We are far from the time of the Edict of 31/03/1866 prohibiting batuque in Cape Verde (Santiago): *"... such entertainment of less civilized people should not be seen by honest people of good manners ..."*

Kola San Jon, a cultural expression of the islands of São Vicente and Santo Antão, was similarly banned during the colonial period. In Cova da Moura, the group started its

activities on the initiative of a direction member of the Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude, originally from Santo Antão.

We quote Ana Flávia Miguel (2010): *“The group Kola San Jon (...) plays an important role in the social, cultural and economic life of Cape Verdeans and their descendants. The festivities, for which all prepare themselves months in advance, take place in June, during Popular Saints days, though other performances happen throughout the year. The dynamics surrounding this Cape Verdean genre reveals a multiplicity of meanings, rhetoric, narratives, memories and expressive behaviours that transform the genre into a performative practice of a polysemic nature, that incorporates music, dance, voice and artifacts. Here, the sound of drums, whistles and voices summons everybody to the dance in which the umbigada coup [a choreographic movement stretching out the belly bottom] repeats itself in a continuous motion that is colored with rosaries, ships and other artifacts. The religious component, in various ways associated with a set of beliefs that are ritualized in the devotion to St. John the Baptist, such as through the use of images of the saint, in the conduct of masses and pilgrimages, (...). Finally, merely considering Kola San Jon held in the community residing in Lisbon and the symbolic representation of memories and rhetoric that get mixed in social relations, and that, in representing the space of origin, build bridges that are actually lusophone because the music works as a symbol of something bigger and allows for sharing”.*

In this context, the participation in January 2007 of 60 members of the group Kola San Jon of the Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude in Madrid in the filming for the documentary ‘Fados’ of Carlos Saura is very significant. Half of the group did not have their documents in order. We managed to get support from SEF.<sup>5</sup> The regularisation of the documentation later made it possible to find a job!

**Figure 2 - Kola San Jon in Cova da Moura, 27 June 2009.**



Photo of Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude.

Since the 1990's, in the sphere of action of Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude, other musical groups of youngsters, descendants of migrants, have developed themselves: hip hop groups that explore the Studio 'Kova M', organise 'residences', produce CD's, and make connections with youngsters from the suburbs of other countries: this is material for another article. Fact is that examples such as the batuque group Finka Pé and the group Kola San Jon enrich European culture. Migrants and descendants of migrants demonstrate the importance of linking cultural, social and economic aspects; they are actors within an intercultural dialogue; that achieve the dialogue between / the integration of body and soul.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This information is available at <http://www.moinhodajuventude.pt> [date consulted 05.02.2010]; Rodrigues, C. (1997), *Mulheres do Batuque* [available at: <http://www.vimeo.com/4436108>, date consulted 05.02.2010]; Finka Pé at Universidade de Aveiro (2006). Available at: <http://www.vimeo.com/4897895>, date consulted 05.02.2010]; General rehearsal ESTC of Batuque Finka Pé (2009) [available at: <http://www.vimeo.com/8570123>, date consulted 05.02.2010].

<sup>2</sup> Psychotherapy EMDR (*Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing*)

<sup>3</sup> [Then the Department of Entertainment, Artistic Creation and Education through Art of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Note of the publishers]

<sup>4</sup> Aha-erlebnis: an experience that provides an understanding, a solution or an answer to a problem that has been a concern for someone for a while.

<sup>5</sup> Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras [Note of the publishers]

## References

- Ribeiro, J.C. (2010), "Batuque", in Castelo-Branco, S., *Enciclopédia da Música em Portugal no Século XX*, Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores/Temas e Debates, pp.133-35.
- Miguel, A.F. (2010), "Eu vou mas volto, diferente! – (Re)visualização e legitimação da cabo-verdianidade numa viagem a Cabo Verde", in *Actas do Post-ip: 1º Congresso internacional de estudos de pós-graduação em música e dança*, Aveiro: DeCA.