Popular Music in a colonial city: musicians' experiences and socio-racial issues in Lourenço Marques (1960-75)

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Abstract

Lourenço Marques, nowadays known as Maputo, was the main city in Mozambique, a territory which was under Portuguese colonial rule until 1975. As a result of the urban planning promoted by the Portuguese colonial administration, social inequalities of the colonial system were inscribed in the urban geography of Lourenço Marques. There was the city centre, known as the "city of cement", a place mainly occupied by European white population from the middle/upper classes; outside there was an extended area of neighbourhoods with poor living conditions, mainly inhabited by African population and by a smaller part of low-class Europeans and immigrants. This had an important impact on the social life of the city, reinforcing structural inequalities of the colonial system and promoting dynamics of spatial segregation, racial discrimination and creating more obstacles for those who had precarious positions in the city. In recent years, some studies have been focusing on the relation between cultural expressions and social processes in the urban context of Lourenço Marques – for example, the case of football (Domingos, 2012). Music was an activity with particular relevance in that context, since Lourenço Marques was a city with an intense nightlife activity, in which popular music had a notorious presence. There are already important accounts about music and the colonial context of Mozambique (Freitas, 2018; Lichuge, 2017; Filipe, 2012; Carvalho, 1997). However, the articulation between the activities of popular music groups from different areas of Lourenço Marques and the social dynamics in the city is a topic that still has a lot to explore. Its analysis can demonstrate the ambivalence felt by the individuals involved, but also the way they managed to overcome the constraints of the colonial system. With the main focus on the period between 1960 and 1975, marked by the historical processes of late colonialism (Castelo et al., 2012) this work approaches musical activities as a way to understand social and racial distinctions in a colonial city, based on ethnographic interviews.

Keywords: popular music; colonial city; Mozambique

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Assuring its position as a centre of colonial power, the geographical condition of Lourenço Marques, a point of connection between mainland Africa and the Indian Ocean, made it an important point of harbour activity (Mendes 1985). The city experienced an intense economic development and a process of modernization in the late 19th century (Domingos 2013, 63). The proximity to South Africa was a key factor for this. With the construction of the railway, Lourenço Marques became the point of connection between the sea and the mines of the Transvaal region, in South Africa. Socio-racial inequalities promoted by the colonial system were inscribed in the urban geography of Lourenço Marques. The white centre of the city - the “city of cement” - was the place of the middle and upper classes. The notion of the “city of cement” was used in opposition to the surrounding suburbs with poor living conditions, mainly inhabited by the African population.

The warm weather and the proximity to the sea created good conditions for nightlife business and leisure activities in Lourenço Marques. The city received tourists from South Africa, Rhodesia and other visitors who disembarked in the harbour. Music was something of great importance in this context. Hotels, clubs, restaurants, local associations and cabarets were always hiring musicians to play. This allowed the spread of popular music groups. These groups mostly played the songs heard on the radio, including repertoire from Brazilian artists, French, Italian and Anglophone music, especially with the beginning of the Beatlemania.

The activities of these groups tell us much about the issues raised by the colonial system and the consequent social inequalities, ambivalences and the dynamics of the city of Lourenço Marques. Following the notion of “struggle for the city”, proposed by Frederick Cooper, Phyllis Martin focuses on leisure activities as a way to regulate time and space in Brazzaville. Martin approaches colonialism “as an arena of negotiation in which all kinds of political, cultural and social transformations were worked out“, looking to go beyond “simple dichotomies of tradition and modernity, domination and resistance” (2002, 1), stressing the importance of activities such as sports, fashions, music, dance and associative membership as a way through which individuals dealt with colonial constraints in their everyday life. Her study offers a reflection about the division of African colonial cities into European centres and peripheral zones for the African population.

One of the topics approached by the author is the process of "beautification" of those European centres, promoting ways of segregated leisure and using space as an instrument for "social and psychobiological distancing" (2002: 6). In the case of Mozambique, there are already studies focusing on very similar processes. The work of Nuno Domingos (2012) is a good example, concerning football in Lourenço Marques as an activity through which representations of social groups and spaces were created.

In the context of my research and considering other contributions about music in Mozambique (Lichuge 2017; Sopa 2014; Filipe 2012; Carvalho 1997), I'm asking: what was the role of music in creating or challenging social barriers in the city? How did the geographical organization of the city condition the activities of the groups? In this text, I'll draw an introductory perspective on this subject, supported by examples of individual experiences of musicians and concerning spaces such as Polana Hotel and Araújo street, to illustrate how socio-racial inequalities were expressed in musical activities. I'm working the years between the 1960s and the independence of Mozambique in 1975, a period characterized by the political and social transformations of late colonialism (Castelo et al. 2012). Based on my interviews with musicians who were active in those years, I'll explore some perspectives from individuals with different backgrounds to exemplify how socio-racial issues interfered with musical experience in the city and shaped perceptions and representations of urban space. I'm writing as a Portuguese who was born in the post-colonial context, searching for the different perspectives of individuals who experienced the everyday life of colonialism, and seeking to understand how social inequalities and distinctions were normalized or contested through musical practices. The interviews presented in this text were made in Maputo, in August 2018, and in Portugal with musicians who left Mozambique after its independence.

In the musical scene of Lourenço Marques, there were groups from different parts of the city: groups from the peripheral neighbourhoods, groups from the wealthier neighbourhoods of the "city of cement" and groups from the transition zones. The background of a particular group was a determinant variable in the development of its activity. Musicians often stress that, in those years, social and racial backgrounds were conditioning factors in their activities. As an example, drummer Carlos Alberto Silva, a white Portuguese who went to Mozambique during childhood, recognizes that "for a black musician, playing at the Polana [Hotel] was something out of question" (Silva 2018). Polana was a luxury hotel in Lourenço Marques, administered by a South African company (Zamparoni 1998, 329, 352). Groups were coming from Europe to play there, such as Cinque di Roma (Italy) or the group of Shegundo Galarza (Portugal). Carlos Alberto Silva was one of the musicians playing at the Polana with his group AEC-68. He

played in several groups of Lourenço Marques since the beginning of the 1960s until the end of colonialism. He remembers that only near to the end of colonialism he saw the first black musician playing at the Polana, who was invited by Carlos Alberto himself to make a replacement of one element of the resident group in New Year's Eve (Silva 2018).

The statement of Carlos Alberto Silva is an example of how musicians' discourses encompass, in more or less explicit ways according to who the speaker is, issues of racial stratification as part of their history in Lourenço Marques. The way they recall venues in the city is often associated with the kind of groups that would play there and with the local audiences, as shown in the case of Polana Hotel. Narratives about musical experience also bring representations and perspectives about urban space. Black musicians from the peripheral neighbourhoods of the city usually refer to the difficulties felt to integrate themselves in the musical milieu and the venues of the "city of cement". For example, Domingos Fu, a drummer from Mafalala, a suburban neighbourhood of Lourenço Marques says that "there were two different realms: the city of cement and the suburbs; I'm from the suburbs, so I had to break into the cement part" (Fu and Silva 2018). Inácio Magaia, a guitar player from the suburban neighbourhood of Chamanculo, gives a similar perspective: "for the groups of the suburbs, it wasn't easy to break into the city. There was almost a selection" (Magaia 2018). Some of those musicians even describe the privilege of white musicians from the wealthier neighbourhoods of the city of cement, referring that "groups from neighborhoods of Polana and Sommerschield didn't need equipment [to play and rehearsal]. They were from rich families who could afford it" (Le Bon 2018). In these stories, racial differentiation, strongly connected with the organization of urban space, is presented as an important part of the black musicians' experiences.

There was a specific place in Lourenço Marques which is also particularly interesting to analyze these questions: Araújo street. Araújo street gives us much to think about the historical and social aspects of the city while reflecting the ambiguities of its everyday life. This street had a long story with hotels, casinos, theatres and cabarets. Araújo street was located beside the harbour and it was known as the local Red-Light District. It was a place with an intense nightlife activity, with the neon lights of the cabarets spreading along the streets. In my interviews with musicians, it is commonly described as a place of bohemians, closely associated with alcohol and prostitution, which attracted many foreign visitors. Music was also part of that scenario. Usually, cabarets such as Pinguim, Luso, Aquário or Tamila had resident musical groups, hired to play every night, with one rest per week.

Sometimes, there were musicians and artists from abroad performing in those cabarets. There were also several musicians from Lourenço Marques playing in that street. But there were some issues concerning who would play in the cabarets of Araújo street and in what conditions. Social and racial factors were an important part of that process as we will see.

In the first place, there was a preference for the cabaret's owners when hiring musicians: they should be licensed by the local union. Someone without the license of professional musician could be hired, but this created payment distinctions. According to musicians, the requirements to get the license were a certificate of formal music training (for example, conservatory) or proving the capacity to read western musical notation. Inácio Magaia, an example of a black musician who played in Araujo street, regards these requirements as a factor of racial inequality. He stresses that "we [black musicians] won 4000 or 5000 *escudos* [Portuguese currency at the time] per month, while they [white musicians] won 10000 or 12000. We could be even better than them, but they had a license saying «professional»" (Magaia 2018). To be familiar with musical notation was something hardly accessible for many musicians. For black musicians, church activities were one of the few contexts where they could acquire the practice of reading musical notation. In addition, there was no conservatory in Lourenço Marques. For musicians coming from outside of Mozambique, with other musical background and material conditions, it would be easier to achieve a better position in the cabarets.

Another example: Domingos Fu, a drummer playing in the group Storm, remembers that he had a salary of 4000 *escudos*. When he went to the military service, he was replaced by a white drummer that was receiving 6000 *escudos* as a substitute musician. Fu expressed his indignation to me and argued that "I was replaced by a bad musician who was earning more than me because of the skin color" (Fu and Silva 2018). According to Fu, the Portuguese authorities discouraged the increasing of the payments for black people to avoid a generalized revindication. He remembers that the owner of a cabaret told him that "it's not by our will that we don't pay you more, it's because we are forced to do that"(idem). In the same encounter I had with Fu, Carlos Alberto Silva was also present. As mentioned above, Carlos Alberto was a white musician and he also spent some months playing in Araújo street. When he listened to the story of Fu, he said: "I was receiving 18000 *escudos*" (idem).

Besides, there were other reasons why some musicians didn't play in Araujo street. Those who were playing at the cabarets in Araújo street had to be full-time musicians since they were playing every night. Musicians still recall that being a professional was something associated with a wandering life:

> Domingos Fu: Being a musician was like being a loafer. No father wanted his son to be a musician.
>
> Carlos Alberto Silva: It was an heartbreak to the parents. They wanted their child to be a doctor or an engineer (Fu and Silva 2018)

In the context of the white urban elites or middle-class milieu, it wouldn't be the worthiest thing to present oneself as a full-time musician. In fact, groups playing in venues such as hotels or clubs were mainly constituted by white middle-class musicians from the "city of cement". Generally, those were not full-time musicians. They usually played only at weekends while, during the week, they kept their jobs or studies. Besides, according to the musicians, Araújo street had a specific connotation, as Fu recalls: "It was a forbidden zone [laughs]. It was a place for us, bohemians" (Fu and Silva 2018). Another example: José Muge was the leader of Conjunto Oliveira Muge, a group of white musicians which became one of the most famous in Mozambique during the 1960s, and one of the few with published records. In spite of their success, none of them was a full-time musician. The social distinctions about the places and musical groups are explicit in one of his statements: "those groups [referring groups such as his own] played in more sophisticated contexts. They didn't play at Araújo street. […] Music at Araújo street didn't have quality. It was music to entertain, for drinks. If we were invited to play there, we would say no. It wasn't our environment" (Muge 2017).

In my conversations with musicians, I tried to understand musical differences between groups playing in Araújo street and groups which used to play in other venues such as hotels. Here is an excerpt about it:

> Me: I'll give an example to understand the kind of group playing in Araújo street: Shegundo Galarza, was it the kind of group playing there?
> Carlos Alberto Silva: No!
> Domingos Fu: No. The music was the same…
> Carlos Alberto Silva: But the status of the group was different.
> Domingos Fu: The context was different.
> Eu: Do you mean they had a higher status?
> Carlos Alberto Silva: Yes! They were a group to play at Polana Hotel.
> Eu: But was the music similar to that played in Araújo street?
> Domingos Fu: The music was the same. (Fu and Silva 2018)

Araújo street had a different connotation than places such as hotels. For some musicians, as shown by the example of José Muge and Shegundo Galarza, playing at Araújo street could be seen as something less sophisticated. The venues where a group played were important in terms of social status, which was also related to racial issues. But trying to see things from the perspective of a black musician coming from a peripheral neighbourhood, being a professional musician in cabarets could be a way to achieve a place inside the "city of cement", to earn a better wage and to overcome the pejorative

colonial stereotypes about African people and their practices. As Inácio Magaia recalls: “I had the privilege to play in a multiracial group [Psicobanda] with two blacks and four whites. That was when I had an opening to play in the city. It wasn’t easy at that time” (Magaia 2018). The activities in Araújo street also contributed to the questioning of social barriers. It was a place where racial categories and divisions could lose strength while different people were socializing, dancing or flirting. Musicians from different social backgrounds, while feeling the contrasts and inequalities of the colonial context, were also working together, doing the same job with the same skills.

Popular music groups in Lourenço Marques had several and very distinct places to play. The status of each group was in great part related to the kind of venues they played. However, things would change drastically after the independence of Mozambique. In 1975, Mozambique became an independent country and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) assumed the government. There were huge transformations in Lourenço Marques with a big impact on musical activities. A great part of the venues where musical groups played started to close doors. The kind of music these groups played and the contexts of their performances didn’t fit the cultural policy of the FRELIMO government. Popular music was seen as some kind of western imperialist propaganda and a bad moral influence for the Mozambican people. Araujo street was recognized by the political positions of FRELIMO, disseminated through radio and newspapers, as a place of moral degeneration, associated with the bourgeois ethos, and a misrepresentation of the Mozambican cultural values (Freitas 2018, 346). The cabarets in the streets started to close, the spaces became more and more abandoned and the neon lights gave place to degradation. With these changes, the dynamic scene of popular music groups that existed in Lourenço Marques faced a drastic process of decline, practically disappearing in a short period of time. That decline is described by the musicians in all of my interviews. Joel Libombo, a black drummer who played in Araújo street, remembers that “things started to be forbidden. Araújo street was closed and [musicians] lost their jobs. There were critics against Pink Floyd, Bob Marley […]. Musicians started to face unemployment. It was when much of them started to look for work in Portugal and South Africa” (Libombo 2018).

As we can see with the examples in this text, the activities of popular music groups in Lourenço Marques were deeply conditioned by socio-racial issues raised by colonial context. The way musicians from different backgrounds recall that period also reveal different experiences and perceptions according to their position in the colonial society. The relation between musical experience and the representation of urban space is also tied with matters of social position and racial categorization. This text, which only

presents a preliminary approach about the importance of musical activities in the social processes of the urban colonial context, clearly indicates, by the examples exposed, that the history of popular music groups is particularly relevant to think about social inequalities, racial categorization, spatial segregation and also how the independence of the country was conceived. In this case, popular music assumes itself as an important element to reconstruct what was the everyday life in a colonial city.

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