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Abstract Proposal for Individual Communication

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African batuko threatens European waltz:
Music, dance and social tension in colonial Atlantic Cape Verde

Introduction

The fabulous final of the first act of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* depicts the wedding of Zerlina and Masetto, a couple of peasants. D. Giovanni, a noble man, and his servant Leporello are there, since the patron, an incorrigible seducer has lubricious intentions about the bride. The exciting music presents us a blend of a *Minuetto* for the nobles to dance with a *Quadrille* (or country dance) for the peasants and then a german *Waltz* or *Ländler* for the comic moment in which Leporello tries to distract Masetto dancing with him.

This clear social and psychological distinction is emphasized by Mozart certainly inspired by the practice of his own time and society. It is a very strong device that we know from many social contexts, based on associations that music allows and consequently helps to mark social distinctions.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* – analysing the social context of 20th century French bourgeoisie - had

showed how the aesthetic choices people make are all distinctions - that is, choices made in opposition to those made by other classes. He argues that the social world functions simultaneously as a system of power relations and as a symbolic system in which distinctions of taste become the basis for social judgement. Thinking about music as a social marker many ethnomusicologists would add to the aesthetic choices, the uses of it.

Although the kinds of music of Mozart and Cape Verde are very different I firstly thought about Mozart's opera because it partially coincides with the epoch from which we got the first documents about Cape Verde that refers to European musical and dance practices (besides religious music) and to forbidden musical and dance practices based on African traditions. It is the second half of the 18th century although they occurs in a very different contexts. The context of Cape Verde islands is that during the Portuguese colonial rule in the apex of African slavery trade through the Atlantic routes to the Americas and the Caribbean. It provides also a complex and strongly stratified society inspired on the Portuguese and European monarchic models of the time. It was a highly hierarchical society with complicities and oppositions between social groups that characterized other colonial scenarios.

After its discovery by the Portuguese navigators, the archipelago of Cape Verde was occupied mainly for slave trade and agriculture production. For more than a century slaves were brought across the Atlantic routes from different regions of mainland Africa, Christianized and then sold to the Americas and Caribbean. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries a Creole culture took shape locally and a singular social segmentation mixed races but clearly defined social positions and powers: Portuguese colonial authorities, urban merchants and land owners, Portuguese convicts deported, free rural workers descent from escaped slaves (*vadios* = "loafers") and slaves.

By the time of its independence (1975) Cape Verde was still largely a predominantly peasant society structured during the 19th century. The historical dynamics that lead to this frame included factors of social change as ecological crisis, slave escape and political tension. The repeated famine that struck slaves and their coalition with land owners against the colonial rule was a mechanism of disruption of the social order.

The relationship between different social groups was clearly reflected on the expressive behaviours adopted by each one. The local elites identified with European musical genres (waltz) while the *vadios* performed forbidden African inspired music and dances (*batuko*).

The historical accounts throughout two centuries – or its absence – shows particularly well the tension and nervous balance between escaped slaves, land owners and colonial authorities.

My goal is to discuss some aspects of music association with social groups in Cape Verde between the 18th century and the present. This issue offers an opportunity to look at the social distinctions, tensions and oppositions from the music choices and its use by social groups. In special I look at the processes by which some musical genres and dance practices of African descent survived two centuries despite its repeated prohibitions. The postcolonial appropriation and popularity of these practices – as the *batuko*, for instance – show how they changed their social signification and how they still have the power of representing a contemporary cape-verdian identity among Diaspora communities all over the Atlantic continents.

Social tensions and batuko in historical accounts

As it happened in Brazil and other places the performance practices associated with the marginal strata of cape-verdian society diverged in order to maintain features linked to African cultures that the slaves brought with themselves. The particularity is that in Cape Verde due to small dimensions of slave groups, the main cultural traits – as local languages or religions – couldn't ever be reconstructed as it happened in several cases in the Caribbean or the Americas. However general musical and dance features had persisted throughout the times in local cape-verdian practices, like batuko, finassom or tabanka mutual fraternities. By the other side the European salon dances were cultivated among the local elite and bourgeoisie.

The historical accounts shows us a permanent persecution from the authorities against African practices, for example, in documents produced between 1762 and 1772, and published by Pereira (2005)

One is a letter from the governor to the Portuguese King explaining and condemning the “esteira” a funeral ritual that involved music, dance, food, beverage and unlicensed relations between men and women whether single or married. Another document is an official announcement that prohibits noisy processions for collecting alms, know as “Reinados”. Other documents disapprove the gentile habits of some people in holy days

against catholic prescriptions. There are also convictions of practices performed by members of mutual fraternities that included songs, music and dances.

We know that this performance practices were mainly performed by the lower members of the society – the slaves or its descendents - and despite the prohibition of African musical instruments these people invented ways of maintaining and reproduce complex percussion rhythms, vocal styles and other musical and dance devices linked to an ancestral African memory. One of most distinguishable and inventive features is the use of the body for percussion whether it is clapping hands or beating folded tissues tight between thighs. This kind of instrument – called “tchabeta” – still is a hallmark of contemporary batuko.

A German traveller – Chelmiki - that visited Cape Verde in 1840 during slavery times described the different social groups clarifying their musical and dance practices. He accounts of the “vadios” - the “free black people living in the interior villages of Santiago island” and their batuko practices. He considers that it is in these that “the true African character is present. It is performed during baptism and marriage feasts where all men and women gather from many miles around to dance and sing the batuko”.

He also accounts of the Creole and white people that live in the urban context of Praia, telling us of the feasts and parties where “white and Creole ladies appear, very elegant with pleasant modes. These gatherings are European in character and people dance the French and English Quadrilles (or country dances) and the waltz” (Chelmiki 1840)

In 1866 an official announcement forbids the “batuques for they are opposite to the civilization, highly inconvenient, annoying and offensive to good moral and public order.” It tells also the batuko is performed by “slaves, freed slaves and alike ones.”

In 1890, after the slave abolition another visitant to the islands, Doelter y Cisterich, that was raised in the Caribbean and educated in Germany, noted similarities of batuko practices with African continental practices of the Mandingas: he describes it in detail as performed in a circle with dances and loud singing with lascivious movements. He is lucid about the role of the church and he admires himself how the African praxis are still alive despite the Christian strong influence.

During the next decades there is a relative social peace due to the indifference of the Portuguese politics about the archipelago. In fact that’s a period with severe famines due to ecological crises that increments emigration.

In 1910 a revolution overthrows the monarchy and establishes a Republican regime in Portugal. In 1928 a dictatorship regime emerges and the Portuguese politics towards Cape

Verde tends to ignore the African traits of its culture and to emphasize the European traits using the arguments of the luso-tropicalist theory of Gilberto Freyre. This is an interdisciplinary theory of sociologic base about the originality and historical individuality of the adaptation of portuguese culture in tropical environments. The accounts of the presidential visits to the colony of Cape Verde always omit the batuko despite its great popularity among rural populations in Santiago. Besides that, the batuko was absent in the big Exhibitions during the decades of 1930 and 1940 promoted by the Portuguese regime that staged the Portuguese Empire and its role in the World History.

In 1975, when Cape Verde reach its independence, batuko was a practice among rural populations in Santiago. Despite several famous singers in the island, batuko was only present in local festivities. It had no public expression in official events that involved music or dance or even appeared in the official discourses about culture. However after the independence it gained socially and politically a space due to the commitment of the new authorities to gave visibility to the African features of capeverdian culture. This politics were developed in order to create a distinction against the old Portuguese colonial mode. So batuko found a space within political rallies and the activities of the Cape Verdian Women Organization. At the same time batuko maintain its continuity among the rural populations in the context of family and community feasts and celebrations.

Finally batuko gained a new impulse after 2000 when commercial recordings started to appear and the tourism industry began to demand performances from several groups.

In the diaspora the batuko had already find place within the activities of immigrants, as is the case of the cape-verdian community immigrated in Portugal. It played a crucial role in the negotiation of identity of the cape-verdians with the general portuguese society, besides the important role of maintaining the emotional links to Cape Verde. It was a new mode of poscolonial relation and affirmation of the cape-verdians with the rest of the world.

Conclusion

Like other musical popular practices the batuko history porposes uncertainties and interrogations about the social mechanisms that made its trajectory. The historical sources show that the atlantic was a space of circulation of languages, practices, music and dances.

The memories, tragedies and glories associated to batuko practices established a multifaceted and multiracial imaginary over which several conflicts have taken place,

namely social exaltation, racial exploitation and affirmation of human dignity. The colonial mode had been affronted by many expressive behaviours of African descent such as loud nocturne gatherings with singing, percussion and dances, strange funeral rituals, clandestine ceremonies.

By the end of the 18th century the slave descendents – vadios - although integrated in the society continued to be affirm their social otherness, which made of them marginal.

During the process of impoverishment of local slave and land owners they did nothing to avoid this difference affirmation even because many of them distant of the colonial ethos, started to be a part of it... In the beginning of the 20th century they were all sons of the islands, unlinked to the Portuguese colonial mode.

The vadios, through their ludic and religious practices of cultural differentiation, become impossible to control. They were insensibly constructing a memory and a historicity that would reveal crucial for the identity construction of modern and poscolonial Cape Verde.