

# Political participation of Luso-African youth in Portugal: some hypothesis for the study of gender

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## Abstract

Dealing with cultural action and associative intervention of Luso-African youth in Portugal, I will draw some hypothesis about young women participation within the associative movement. I first describe the social and political framework that set the emergence of the immigrants' associative movement in order to focus on the ethnic mobilisation of Luso-African youth, linking cultural identity to their strategies of political participation (a concept used in a broader sense).

**Key words:** Luso-African young generations, youth political participation, associative movement, cultural identity, gender relations, Portugal.

**Resumen.** *Participación política de los jóvenes luso-africanos en Portugal: algunas hipótesis para el estudio del género*

Partiendo de la acción cultural del asociacionismo de los jóvenes luso-africanos en Portugal, formularé algunas hipótesis sobre la participación de las jóvenes en el movimiento asociativo. Describiré primero el marco sociopolítico en el que se inserta la emergencia del movimiento asociativo de los inmigrantes, para pasar después a detenerme en la movilización étnica de los jóvenes luso-africanos, entrelazando la identidad cultural con sus estrategias de participación política (un concepto utilizado en un sentido amplio).

**Palabras clave:** generaciones de jóvenes luso-africanos, participación política juvenil, movimiento asociativo, identidad cultural, relaciones de género, Portugal.

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## Summary

## 1. Portugal as an immigration country and the emergence of the Luso-African youth

Until the mid eighties emigration flows were the most important trend in the Portuguese migratory experience, but since that period immigration has become more visible<sup>1</sup>.

Portugal was affected by the globalisation of international migrations after other traditional immigration countries such as Italy and Spain. After becoming a member of the EEC in 1986, Portugal also became a more attractive country, particularly for immigrants of Portuguese-speaking-African countries, for trying better living conditions<sup>2</sup>. The historical links between Portugal and its former colonies, the facilities of communication through the use of a common language and cultural similarities were appealing factors for African immigrants to come to Portugal. The attraction of Portugal was reinforced when it became «more European» and closer to rich European countries. The offer, at least in theory, of better opportunities of social mobility has determined a sudden growth of flows during the second half of the eighties. Immigration reached its peak at the very beginning of the nineties<sup>3</sup>.

The newcomers increased the size of African communities that had settled in Portugal since the independence of the colonies in 1975. In contrast to other southern European countries, the process of settlement of African communities started even during colonialism. In the sixties, the strong emigration of Portuguese to European countries and the youth mobilisation to the colonial war led to a lack of manpower in the Portuguese economy. Many Capeverdeans, who were at that time Portuguese citizens, were then recruited to work in the construction sector in Lisbon, the colonial metropolis. While the African inflows until the mid seventies referred to population movements under the colonial system, the flows that started ten years later obeyed the rules of typical labour migrations.

African citizens who arrived in Portugal in 1975 and had direct relatives who lived there for at least 5 years could choose to keep Portuguese nationality. That was a very common option among the Capeverdean communi-

1. The statistics of immigration were and still are very low compared with those of emigration: in 1997, 170,263 foreigners lived in Portugal (58,3% men and 41,7% women), while the Portuguese living abroad were 4,631,482. In 1996, the number of immigrants who arrived to Portugal was 7,767 while the total number of Portuguese who emigrated was 29,066 (Ministério da Administração Interna/ Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras 1997; Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros/ Direcção-Geral dos Assuntos Consulares e das Comunidades Portuguesas 1997).
2. Immigration from Portuguese speaking African countries —Cabo Verde, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé e Príncipe— has been the major trend and it is strongly connected with the colonial past and the relations established between the different countries since then.
3. In 1987, the growth rate of the foreign population was 3,2%; in 1990: 6,7%; in 1993: 10,7%; in 1994: 14,7%; and in 1997: 1,3%. The increase in 1993 and 1994 is also explained by the regularisation of irregular immigrants.

ty<sup>4</sup>. The generation of Portuguese nationals born in African countries produced a «first generation of Luso-Africans»<sup>5</sup>. At present, the nationality law allows African nationals of Portuguese-speaking countries who live in Portugal for 6 years to obtain Portuguese nationality. Also, the descendants born in Portugal of African nationals, who have kept their nationality of origin, can apply for Portuguese nationality at the age of eighteen years old. The descendants of African immigrants constitute what I call the young Luso-African generations. Young Luso-African generations created a major change in the picture of Portuguese society. On the contrary to their parents, they are not immigrants who came to a new country and had to adapt to a new culture. Their socialisation is the result of a convergence of different cultures within a social context dominated by «Luso» references and «whiteness». That will make the difference between their attitudes and those of the older generations.

The mixture of legal principles of *ius solis* and *ius sanguinis* in the nationality law has made possible the coexistence of Portuguese people with diverse ethnic ancestries. However, the equality given by law is taken away by inequality and disfavour faced in daily life. *A priori*, collective memory has forgotten that citizens from former colonies were all Portuguese and that history brings effects for the present. Luso-Africans, the old as well as the young generations, are still seen as immigrants. Their blackness is a distinction mark that assigns them the status of foreigners. These two characteristics underline the whole context of inter-ethnic social relations.

In Portugal, there are no statistics on the population according to ethnic origin or ancestry that could lead us to identify, in a quantitative way, the presence of young Luso-Africans. For this purpose we can only turn to the database of Secretariado Entreculturas that registers all the pupils of public schools by ethnic origin<sup>6</sup>. However, it draws a defective picture because it leaves out young people who do not study anymore and it does not characterise the students on the basis of gender. In the year 1997/1998 there were 36,404 pupils with African ancestry in all the schools, which represents only 2,8% of the total student body. The presence of Luso-African pupils becomes stronger in the district of Lisbon, whose schools host 59,4% of that population, due to the concentration of immigrant communities in this area.

4. A research about the Capeverdean community in Portugal stressed that 97% of Capeverdean immigrants have Portuguese nationality and 2% have double nationality, one of them being the Portuguese in most of the situations. We do not have, however, more updated data to see if this trend continues in present immigration (França, 1992: 111).
5. Machado (1994) introduced this concept.
6. Created in 1991 in the Ministry of Education, the Secretariado Entreculturas was the very first response of the government for the integration of ethnic minorities. Its main objectives are to promote and coordinate projects of intercultural education in schools. The data base comprises nine years of obligatory schooling (6 to 15 years old) plus three years of studies necessary to follow technical training or to apply to university (16 to 18 years old).

In spite of all the efforts carried out during this decade by the Ministry of Education and the associations of immigrants, the school is not flexible enough in order to promote equal opportunities for all the students and to encourage the educational success of those who come from underprivileged backgrounds<sup>7</sup>. As a consequence, they enter the labour market without the necessary skills to become a competitive labour force and to be able to ascend in the social hierarchy. That is a trend shared by pupils of lower social classes, either Portuguese or Luso-Africans as the roots of the problem are not merely ethnic but mainly social and economic. Young generations of Luso-Africans have so inherited from their parents the disadvantage of belonging to low social status communities. Worse than being African, black and male, is to be an African black woman or girl.

In Portugal, although girls have higher rates of school attendance, women earn in average only 71% of men's wages, face a higher unemployment rate and are more than a half of the unemployed looking for the first job<sup>8</sup>. Social and economic discrimination linked to ethnic belonging and gender constitute a triangle that pushes young Luso-African women to the most difficult position in the starting line of the race for equality.

## **2. Associative movement evolution and ethnic mobilisation of Luso-African youth**

Ethnic mobilisation of Luso-African youth is well related to governmental policies and the context of inter-ethnic relations, on the one hand, and to the emergence and evolution of an immigrants' associative movement, on the other hand.

As described before, the peak of immigration took place at the beginning of the nineties. Although immigration represented less than two% of the total population and emigration was still the major trend, the political discourse reserved for it a dominant place. Portugal had assumed political compromises in European immigration policies, so it started to produce legislation to control borders and restrict the entrance to non-member states' citizens<sup>9</sup>. Immigration became the central problem of the migration policy agenda in the nineties, a place that belonged to emigration during the sixties and the seventies. The phenomena of African inflows were interpreted with alarm by political authorities. It was argued that Portugal had no capacity to absorb so many immigrants due to its economic fragility. The real problem was not the dimension of the inflows but its sudden increase; the government was caught up with surprise and reacted negatively instead of developing policies for the integration of the newcomers.

7. The average poor school performance rate for Luso-African students was around 21% while the average rate for the total student body was around 16% in the year 1996/97 (Entreculturas, 1997).
8. Instituto Nacional de Estatística, Inquérito ao Emprego (séries trimestrais), 1992-1997.
9. Portugal signed the Schengen agreements in 1991 and the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

The lack of institutional measures to favour the settlement of immigrants, on the one hand, and the gap between the communities' expectations and the hostility towards them, on the other hand, were crucial conditions for the development and progressive reinforcement of an immigrants' associative movement. At that time, there were already some associations with a rich experience in the promotion of social living conditions. The lack of integration policies led the associations to find out their own ways to facilitate the settlement of the newcomers and to overcome their first needs (for example, to resolve their legal status, to get a job and a house)<sup>10</sup>.

At this stage, associations did not have, however, the experience of political claiming due to the urgency of solving more basic needs and to the young life of the movement. For the same reason, there was not an intervention directed to tackle migrant women's problems. Actions were developed for the whole population to facilitate their integration in the host country. On the other hand, women who participated in associations were not yet conscious of the need to organise themselves around concrete problems felt only by them. Ethnic issues were above gender issues because racism and social discrimination of African communities needed a more urgent resolution. The irregular situation of many Africans in Portugal was the most important battle because, as in many other European countries, without documents they had no rights and were often and very easily victims of exploitation by the employers.

The first regularisation process of irregular immigrants took place in 1992 and it had direct effects in the political organisation of the associative movement as it compelled the associations to unit around a common and crucial claim. The most representative associations organised themselves in a *Secretariado Coordenador das Acções de Legalização* (Secretariat for the Coordination of the Activities of Legalisation). This organism was a meeting point of different organisations that were not used to working together, in spite of having similar purposes. Associations made out many criticisms of the law itself and to the way the government implemented the regularisation process and lobbied to make some bureaucratic procedures easier and to prolong the deadline for submissions.

The associative movement won the support of the Socialist Party and the Portuguese Communist Party (though the first one was more representative in the political scene), whose discourses were opposite to the dominant one. These political alliances, although informal, gave more power to the immigrant associations' claims, which became progressively stronger. The Secretariat, as well as other associations not represented there, confronted actively the gov-

10. The *Associação Caboverdiana* is the oldest in Portugal. It was created in 1981 but it existed since 1970 with the designation of *Casa de Cabo Verde* (House of Cabo Verde). It hosted many Capeverdian university students; its role was and it has been mainly political. There were also associations whose work was particularly directed to the promotion of basic conditions in the districts with a strong concentration of Africans, like *Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude*, created in 1984, and *Unidos de Cabo Verde*, in 1983.

ernment to change the immigration policy and to solve the problem of thousands of people who did not have the necessary conditions to get a permission of settlement. Those undocumented people would therefore continue to live in Portugal without any rights of social citizenship<sup>11</sup>. The importance of this question and the hostility of European policies towards non-member citizens have pushed forward the debate and political consciousness of immigrants themselves.

The «second generations» issues turned out to be the most complex. It was urgent to develop actions for their integration in school, the first institution that was forced to adapt to the diversity of Portuguese society. It became usual to hear stories about racism, physical and psychological violence against children of ethnic minorities by their own teachers (Paes, 1993). Besides, little crimes and violent acts by Luso-African youngsters occurred more frequently in districts with a high concentration of ethnic minorities.

The violence of youth of African ancestry was interpreted in an exaggerating way and generalised to all African youth. Government policies did not tackle the conditions that lead to violence in strong degraded urban areas of multi-ethnic peripheral districts and did not consider its connections to social exclusion and to the lack of youth future perspectives.

In this respect, I would like to pick an example, pointing out the news coverage of a weekly newspaper in 1993. The news referred to a report of the Home Office about violent gangs in Portugal that identified youth subcultures, like the rap and the rastafarianism, as criminal gangs (Albuquerque, 1993). The front page of the newspaper was particularly shocking because it represented black young boys dressed as monkeys in sport clothes and wearing basketball caps (like the rap style). That caused a great discussion within anti-racist NGOs and the immigrant associative movement and, of course, among the African communities, particularly among young people who felt that the news was directly addressed to them. The Home Office, which was the institution responsible for immigration policy, had revealed its ignorance of the context of social interaction that produced subcultures and its indifference in understanding the roots of violence in urban areas where people lived in inhuman conditions.

In fact, in the multi-ethnic districts of Lisbon's outskirts there are ghettos —«African islands» (CEPAC, 1995)— where youth criminality is strongly connected to small scale smuggling —smuggling offers a way of getting cash, which would be otherwise impossible with the other jobs they are offered. Not

11. The number of estimated undocumented immigrants varied a lot depending on the source. Yet, the government had defined, *a priori*, to regularise the situation of about 30 thousand immigrants while some organisations estimated the existence of around 200 thousand. The most important criticism addressed to the government was the definition of a quota before the development of the process, being indifferent the number of requests and the future of those people who would get negative answers. At the end, nearly 40 thousand immigrants saw their submissions approved.

only does a part of black youth choose a strategy of marginality but so does the white youth who shares with them the same disadvantaged social and economic conditions.

In this context, the visibility of violence has led to the construction of a political discourse about urban insecurity, which has legitimated repressive measures and the reinforcement of police control in those areas. Situations of human rights abuse against blacks in police stations have become notorious and the search for drug dealers in African ghettos by the police has been conducted with hard violence and also by disturbing children and residents who were under no suspicion. It was then obvious that institutional violence had been used in an excessive manner and police violence became a stronger cause of insecurity than urban criminality itself<sup>12</sup>.

However, in the very same multi-ethnic districts that police identified as criminal areas, there were emerging new cultural expressions as a result of the mixture and recreation of different cultures that coexist in those suburban areas. The rappers, protagonists of the informal cultural events that have influenced the lives of young people and a growing number of hip-hop fans, were the leaders of the protests and disappointment of Luso-African young generations. Many youth associations were created and the rap movement moved from the ghettos and expanded to the inner city.

Between 1994 and 1995 the first rap editions came to light, expressing clear messages against racism, denouncing injustice and exclusion and claiming respect for their cultural identity. The events that arrive to the public are but a small sample of the social dynamics of those districts and do not reveal the profuse emotions that young people were experiencing through artistic and cultural innovation.

Similar to other European cities, the area of Great Lisbon became acquainted of syncretic youth styles, cultural forms and identities. The cultural elements inherited through a socialisation strongly marked by African roots were mixed with other cultural elements that the global village made at their disposal. Luso-African youth was also questioning their identity and the place where they belonged as they felt society was rejecting them. The lyrics of rap songs are very illustrative of young people claiming and dilemmas, having some examples below:

I see degraded districts with hungry people / People who do not eat / Who do not work and who do not sleep / Democracy is a bread for me and two for

12. Abuse by police forces became also visible, as the blackness of the immigrants did. In a 1994 research about citizen rights, people stressed the right of not being harassed by police abuse. Either in Lisbon as in Oporto, people signed this right as the most important one and also as the one that they did not believe to be recognised in Portuguese society (Benavente et al., 1997: 85-87). Also, a report of the Réseau d'Information sur les Migrations des États Tiers describes the year 1994 as one marked by the increase of hostility towards immigrants and the reinforcement of the control of entrance and settlement of foreigners in Portugal (RIMET, 1997).

you / But this is not the way that I have learned to / Equality between races,  
that would be good / Respect difference is something you maybe cannot do  
(Boss AC, 1994).

I was born in Angola, my mum is Cape Verdian / I have always lived in “lusó”  
land / Three cultures I will not break / Each one has something to teach me /  
I rather make a fusion / Because strength comes out from the union (Da  
Weasel, 1995).

I am a son without a nation / I am second generation / [...] / Big mess / I feel  
my roots do not belong to this land (General D, 1995).

The shows, hip-hop parties and other cultural events organised by informal youth groups serve not only to amuse but also to make a discussion about their own lives possible. Cultural action allowed the construction of a political discourse. At the same time, cultural action was a way to revalue African cultures and to represent positive images of Africa and of Africans instead of the negative ideas and prejudices society ascribed to them.

Youth involved in those events were not aware of the consequences that these cultural and political happenings would have in the process of the reinforcement of ethnic identity among young Luso-Africans. Although many of them never walked on African land, there emerged a symbolic ethnicity strongly rooted in the African inheritance. The feelings of being African were stronger than those of being Portuguese and that was a strategy of resistance to oppose to a cold society. Africa was too far geographically but very close emotionally.

The Associação Cultural de Novos Artistas Africanos/Tchon Di Nôs (Cultural Association of Young African Artists) is an example of the dynamic symbols that Luso-Africans introduced in the artistic and cultural scene. Looking for their African roots, these young artists reinterpreted them while creating syncretic cultural products. This formal cultural invention also legitimised and underlined the importance of the informal cultural events that were developed.

All these cultural dynamics were a «men’s world». The rap culture is a male culture and rap groups discriminated (and still do) against the girls who dared to compose rap. Also the other cultural components of hip-hop culture, such as *grafitti* and break-dance, are created mainly by boys. It does not mean that girls do not participate in those cultural events or that they have chosen to keep a passive role. They are always there but at the «back stage», being a silent and invisible presence. Even nowadays, although there has been an emancipation, women’s roles are still more linked to the private sphere of social life.

Cultural action of Luso-African youth was supported by the positive evolution of the associative movement. Associations were strengthening their strategies and gaining the respect and recognition of their own communities and of political institutions. Along with leaders from the older generations (some of them had been anti-colonial militants), a younger generation of associative militants was arising. There were the conditions for the emergence of youth



associations, which would take upon themselves the fight for equality, side by side with the youth groups that already claimed respect through cultural action.

The first youth associations were local associations, settled in districts with high concentration of ethnic minorities<sup>13</sup>, or national ones, mainly composed of university students<sup>14</sup>. Luso-African youth associations are usually multicultural, contrary to the majority of immigrant associations that are organised around a specific ethnic origin. There is a geographical concentration in the area of Great Lisbon but some have been created more recently in other cities of Portugal, like Oporto and Coimbra. The significant presence of African university students, whose countries have special agreements with Portugal, has led to the constitution of Associations of African Students at the universities. As the people involved have the status of foreign students, their scope of intervention is centred on social services in order to host the new students and support them during their stay.

The newborn youth associations had no special orientation about women issues. NGOs of Portuguese women that already existed centred their action around the questions on sexual education, family planning, violence against women, and did not develop activities related to the specific situation of migrant women. The Associação Mulher Migrante ('Migrant Woman', created in 1993) gave priority to the problems of Portuguese migrant women abroad. Only recently it has included in its list of activities the problems that directly affect ethnic minority women living in Portugal. Among immigrant associations, the Associação dos Amigos da Mulher Angolana ('Association of Friends of Women from Angola') is the unique immigrant association that we know created especially to tackle the needs of migrant women<sup>15</sup>. Yet, opposed to the lack of NGOs that work on migrant women issues, there has been a strong participation of African women in the associative movement, which can be explained as a way to conquer more freedom. The family control is still tighter for females and black women who have not only to face ethnic discrimination but also sexism. If there is one aspect where black and white men are not on opposite sides, it is on their discrimination against women. Sudbury (1998) uses the concepts of «gendered racism» and «racialised sexism» in the analysis of the situation lived by black women. We cannot divide ethnic issues from gender ones as both determine the status that black girls and women have in the social hierarchy, as well as the opportunities and roles they are expected to assume in society and within their own communities.

13. E.g. Associação Luso-Africana de Jovens of Pedreira dos Húngaros, a multiethnic ghetto, famous for the worst reasons due to the strong occurrences of drug traffic and related violence.
14. E.g. Associação CaboJovem, Associação Luso-Africana Morna, União da Juventude Angolana em Portugal.
15. It is possible that there are other immigrant associations whose aims cover women issues but I have not found yet in my research any which has women as the only privileged target group.

The peak of ethnic mobilisation initiated by the associative movement was reached in 1995. In that year, a Portuguese young man with Capeverdean ancestry was murdered by a group of skinheads in Lisbon. This death was a last drop of water that led to the organisation of the first demonstration against racism with the overpowering participation of Africans and particularly of the new generations. For the first time in Portugal, Africans went to the streets to claim justice. This has been the most important collective and public protest in Portuguese antiracist and immigrant associative movement, until now. All together, associations were claiming for justice as a whole, demanding the condemnation of the murderers and keeping a vigilant eye on the way the process developed in the courts. The power of the associations was also due to the emergence and convergence of actions by the hands of the new generations, which created conditions for strengthening political positions and confront government policies. An example of Luso-African youth mobilisation is given by Associação CaboJovem, which organised a conference under the title: «Different between equals?» (1995) as a symbol of the dominant state of mind of young Luso-Africans. Later in time, many voices criticised the slogan of the European Year Against Racism «All different, all equal» because it hid the inequalities and differences of their real lives. Another example is the publication of the book *Preto no Branco* ('Black in White') (N'Ganga, 1995) by an university student and association activist from Angola. This book had the effect of a rock thrown in a lake because it brought to discussion the colonial relations and its connections with interethnic relations in Portuguese society of the nineties. N'Ganga wrote: «The real purpose of the process of miscegenation [...] was [...] to build an obstacle that would not allow the awakening of a black consciousness» (N'Ganga, 1995: 86). The book assumes the role of a critical force that represents the political attitudes of Luso-African young generations. They do not want to become white, as colonialism forced their parents. They assume their blackness as a right and as a crucial element of their identity of citizens.

In the mid nineties, we find a strong associative movement with a wider scope of intervention<sup>16</sup>. The hostility of Portuguese and European policies had been creating space for the expression of tougher protests. However, the increase of protests and claims weakened after the election of a Socialist government in late 1995. The newly-elected government developed a second process of regularisation of irregular immigrants, which was partly due to the continuous claims of the associations since 1992. While in opposition to the former government, the Socialist Party had claimed for laws and measures that now was forced to promote. In this way, it created in 1996 the institution of the High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities, depending directly on the Council of Ministers. It was supposed to be the intermediary between the

16. While in 1986 there were only two immigrant associations registered, in 1990 there were ten and in 1996 the number had increased to 78, plus ten associations of African university students (Correia, 1997).

government and the civil society, being the dialogue a key strategy in the relations with the civil society. Its scope of intervention is centred in the proposal of actions and measures to favour the integration of ethnic minorities. Through the High Commissioner, associations could apply for some funding to develop information activities within the regularisation process going on. The official financial support and the expectation for financial help for future projects arose the competitiveness and rivalries between associations. The majority of the associations chose not to criticise institutional policies in order to benefit from expected support, and given the needs and continuous lack of support that associations faced to prosecute their aims this could be interpreted as a natural reaction.

At the end of the nineties, the African associative movement, be it the elder or the younger generations, has already noticed that the new policy was not so different from the previous one regarding the restrictions to immigration and asylum. After three years of giving the benefit of the doubt to the government and waiting, quietly, for changes, the associative movement is living a stage of frustration as immigrants keep facing social inequality, discrimination, labour exploitation and situations of irregularity. The dialogue on which the present government is so keen is not enough for solving the problems. In fact, this strategy and the financial support to the most uncritical associations resulted in weakening and dividing a movement that had been strengthening political positions over the years. Besides, associations revealed their weakness in keeping the unity and in defending the rights of the communities they represented.

Today, the support given by the High Commissioner to the associative movement is mainly a «moral support» but associations are officially recognised as playing an useful role in the issues of social integration of immigrant communities and their descendants. This trend is also due to the valorisation of NGOs as partners in the European programs, such as Integra, the ELAINE Network and so on. The change of the political scenery was yet important in the sense that the capacity and power of the associative movement is determined by an institutional recognition which legitimises its value and role in the society. However, the general disappointment felt by the association activists, opens conditions for a future counter-attack with the redefinition of the strategies, political positions and claims<sup>17</sup>.

17. The very recent creation of a Consultant Institution within the High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities, composed by several associations can be used by the associative movement as an instrument to play a more decisive role in the policy making that directly affects the communities they represent. The election of a new Socialist government in October 1999 can also introduce changes in the next years of migration policies and integration of ethnic minorities' programs.

### 3. Expressions of cultural identity and youth political participation strategies

Youth associations are places where young people can exercise their participation in a broader social context; they are free places to strengthen claims, to share emotions and doubts about themselves, that is, about their identity. Luso-African associations (as well as African associations) are «African and black habitats». The dominant culture of the society is not dominant there, so there is more freedom to try to build a territory of their own without feeling directly the pressures of the majority.

For young black women, to participate in public life through the association, to make decisions, to express their needs, to be responsible for organising cultural and other events are ways of female emancipation, as well as their social promotion as citizens. For Luso-African young people, either girls or boys, associations have a role of making citizenship possible. It is a place that allows them to rehearse their citizenship and to have some control on their lives. Along with the refuge that African identity gives them, the association offers protection from the aggressions towards Africans and blacks; both bring to these boys and girls a sense of security and well being.

Since the constitution of associations represents the recognition of difference, we find again that associations are used as resources to express and maintain an African emotional and cultural identity by Luso-African young generations. The social activities and all the cultural action they take in their hands are ways to assert the specificity of their cultural identity to the others.

Empirical research conducted in 1996 on the cultural identity of Luso-African youngsters (Albuquerque, 1996) revealed that these youngsters give much importance to their African roots. They express the desire to pass on to Portuguese society some of those cultural elements which make up their inheritance, without ghettoising their culture. This trend was noticed regardless of their gender. A message that came out of the research can be summed up by a declaration of an eighteen years old boy: «I am not here to bow myself, I am here to conquer».

Although we cannot generalise the results of the research because it was developed at a micro level, we can observe some similarities with the political discourse of the associative movement and of the younger generations in particular. If we return to the book *Preto no Branco* (N'Ganga, 1995), we observe a very clear message of claiming for citizenship without renouncing the right of being different, that is, of being African and black. Blackness is used by youth associative leaders as an inclusive organising symbol, appealing to Luso-African youth to unite around the common battle for an effective citizenship. More than creating a distance between black and white, it is the symbol of a strategy to motivate the political mobilisation of Luso-African youth. The symbol relates blackness to the present exclusion and to the history of colonialism and the resistance of African countries.

In this context, the constitution of associations to promote African culture appears as a natural option. Cultural action is a way of social and political participation because all the activities have underlined the claim for equality and respect towards difference. African cultural identity is the expression of a culture of resistance against assimilation (seen as a cultural colonisation similar to the one that their parents were forced to accept).

Among the many scholars who have been researching on the issues of cultural identity, I turn to Carmel Camilleri's definition of a «social visibility strategy» (Camilleri et al., 1990) to argue that young generations of Luso-Africans assert and give value to their cultural differences as a way to participate in society and conquer its respect. Young leaders are building a discourse that links a syncretic identity to their desire of being full citizens and that allows them to introduce their added value, through cultural action, associations and identity expressions, in the society where they live.

In respect to women participation, the connection between racism and sexism determines the degree and the quality of participation of Luso-African young women in the associative movement. In general, associations share a common characteristic: regardless of the number of women who participate in the activities, the public representation of the associations is done by men. The reason behind this fact is strongly linked to the heritage of social relations that ascribe women the roles stronger connected to the private sphere of life, like the education and nurturing of the children. Then we can wonder why so many young black women keep involving themselves so actively in community activism.

First, I would dare to advance the hypothesis that the active social participation of young black women is, in a way, the result of a traditional education that states that women have the duty to help, care and to be responsible for the others. This is true for black and for white women. Besides, African women are traditionally seen as the guardians of the home because the men are absent very often (for example, due to emigration) and women have to take alone the responsibility to feed and educate the children. Secondly, it is more frequent to find women developing roles linked to motherhood, for example, working in the kindergartens which have been created by most associations or by attending a professional training seminar for nannies. Also, in the cultural events that play an important part of the life of associations, women are always responsible for cooking the traditional cuisine from their own countries. In sum, the participation that takes place in the sphere of the association reproduces the gender discrimination present in society itself. Although immigrant and Luso-African youth associations have, as a priority, the fight against discrimination, they are still surrounded by many prejudices that have been separating women's and men's lives.

This context determines that Luso-African young women who dare to actively participate in the social and cultural life of society must be seen as real superwomen who keep facing resistance against their autonomy. This scenery leads me to advance the hypothesis that participation of Luso-African young

women is a strategy of a double emancipation: a female emancipation opposed to the discrimination reproduced outside and within their ethnic communities; and an emancipation as a black African against the inequalities and prejudices that the society addresses to African communities. Above all, their activism is vital as a way to reinforce the consciousness of gender and ethnic discrimination and it allows them to politicise their strategies of intervention. While they gain experience, they also become more critical about their life chances and able to assume stronger political attitudes.

During the last years, the participation in associations allowed young leaders to be recognised and respected, not only by their communities but also by political institutions. They have been building a political discourse about racism and difference and denouncing the abuses and discrimination they suffer. Politicians and, in particular the local authorities and the High Commissioner, are sensitive to their claims and we can see as a consequence of that recognition the development of new political actions. Some local authorities created within the «Youth departments» cultural centres in order to open more opportunities to young people express and produce new urban cultural languages. The High Commissioner signed an agreement with the Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional (Institute of Employment and Professional Training) in order to improve the training activities for young people of ethnic minorities as well as an agreement with the Secretaria de Estado do Desporto (National Secretariat of Sports) to facilitate sports activities developed by numerous immigrant associations. So, even in an informal way, and many times unconsciously, while ethnic minorities are denouncing discrimination and participating in social life, they are also influencing opinion making, contributing to the construction of ethnic consciousness and forcing political institutions to promote policies towards equality and integration. Although there is neither a coordination between the several youth associations and between these ones and immigrants associations, nor a coordination of their activities with those of informal groups, which gives some weakness to their collective action, all together —youth associative movement, cultural activities such as arts and music, informal events, etc.— are conquering a political space of intervention that no one has offered them.

#### 4. Conclusion

In Portugal, the institutional racism, the xenophobic political discourse and the inequalities in daily life were decisive factors for the construction of a collective consciousness by African communities and set the framework for the evolution of the African associative movement. After the boom of the youth associative movement in the mid nineties, associations walked through a crisis in the last years determined by the gap between their expectations and the political responses to their problems. The present time offers new opportunities for political claiming; young leaders have been acquiring more experience and they do not give the benefit of the doubt to the political institutions anymore.

The process of identity construction around African heritage is a strategy of long term survival for Luso-African youth. Young people are particularly bombed by cultural elements brought by an immense global village. So, if they want to keep the particular characteristics and avoid the dilution of their identity they must resist against the pressure of homogeneity. The option for asserting a Black and African identity is also a way to assume the power of their own bodies; they do not allow anybody to rob their colour nor their culture because those are the visible symbols of deeper African roots they want so strongly to maintain.

For young people who do not have the experience of anticolonial resistance and do not accept passively the humiliation endured by the first generations (as earlier the slaves were forced to do to their masters), political and cultural action appears to be a new way of resistance to the still existing cultural colonisation. For young women especially, social participation is also a way of resistance against sexism and of reinforcing a gender consciousness.

Luso-African young generations are building a social body that is visible because of their acts and not only because the others assign them a difference. Their political participation is a collective action that moved from the periphery of the cities and of the rights to conquer a real and effective citizenship. For its purposes and dynamics, Luso-African young adults are actively exercising the right of being citizens and, in so doing, contributing to the achievement of equality and the reinforcement of democracy in a Portuguese multicultural society.

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