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Cape Verdean Counter Cultural Hip-Hop(s) &
the Mobilization of the Culture of Radical Memory
Public Pedagogy for Liberation or Continued Colonial Enslavement

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Abstract

The paper traces the possibilities and limitations of transnational Cape Verdean Hip-Hop's mobilization of the culture of radical memory for the disruption of racialized transnational capitalism and neocolonialism. One of the most common reference points, both in the symbolic formations of popular culture and emerging scholarly texts² is the focus on CV Hip-Hop's embrace of the life and work of Amilcar Cabral. Undoubtedly, Cape Verdean Hip-Hop Culture(s) & Cape Verdean youth counter-culture(s), more broadly, continues to serve as the most vital space for the (re)mobilization and (re)invigoration of Cabral's thought, yet, much more is unfolding in these spaces. The paper argues that we must maintain a broader analysis on the intersection of the art form and the culture of memory. It also argues that our analysis must perpetually name regressive forces even as progressive projects unfold so as not to re-inscribe negative relations of power. Although the paper is primarily conceptual/theoretical, the tools of ethnography (rather than a full blown ethnography) are intersected to centralize artistic voices and for purposes of reflexivity. Observations of CV Hip-Hop music videos take centrality as it allows one to comprehend emerging elements of hip-hop beyond rap lyrics. Transcripts of interviews with hip-hop heads are integrated throughout.

The production of socially conscious Cape Verdean hip-hop(s), the counter memories it mobilizes and the political resistance it forges is nothing short of genius! The point is made not to romanticize the art form, but to register the fact that there exists an underground Cape Verdean rap and Cape Verdean hip-hop culture, that is informed by creative questioning of existing social, political and economic conditions. In some circles, it is considered the *real* hip-hop. The distinction between hip-hop and socially conscious

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² The author resists these categories since these are socially constructed cultural formations under constant change and certainly capable of being transformed.

hip-hop is somewhat of a distraction. As artist Chachi Carvalho puts it: “When rap is something you do, it’s easy to hide behind image and lies. When hip-hop is something you live, you can’t help but to tell the truth (Siclen, 2013).” Perhaps, the distinction should not be about hip-hop or socially conscious hip-hop, but rather good hip-hop and bad hip-hop. Since its very formation, the art form has been about documenting social, political and economic misery with an inclination towards social action. The paper concerns a hip-hop that comes out of a particular political context: the struggle to re-imagine racial and cultural identity in a post/neo-colonial environment; the catastrophes engineered by neoliberal capitalism’s reduction and destruction of the power of labor; reduction in state intervention when it comes to development and social welfare; deregulation and privatization; and the various social problems that have arisen out of those material conditions: addiction, teen pregnancy, police brutality and destitute poverty. It is a hip-hop that comes out of the history of militancy, community building and community based education efforts of the Black Panther Party in New Bedford, Massachusetts; the organizing against the lack of economic opportunity and the degradation of working conditions for Cape Verdean youth in Cova da Moura, Amadora, Portugal and Paris, France; and increasing disaffection on the part of, especially, the youth, given the collusion of the Cape Verdean elite in neoliberalizing the economy and the inability of a two-party political system to address pressing social needs (especially youth unemployment) and beat back the erasure of public space in Cape Verde. The movement is emergent and proving to be powerful given that it is a subculture in communication with a wider, global hip-hop nation often through digital networks and global music festivals. The Hip Hop Summer Fest in July of 2016 in Kebra Cabana, Praia, Cape Verde featured elements such as beat boxing, parkour, ciphars, dance battles, various urban wear clothing stands, workshops on social action and stand up comedy. Although the event and performances were certainly influenced by the U.S. hip hop movement, indeed the very event poster featured a collage of photos integrating Tupac, NAS, Run DMC, Ice Cube and various others (all male artists); “traditional” Cape Verdean themes, comedy, dance, and sound were also integrated. Consequentially, other Hip Hop Summer Fests (of the same name) were scheduled in roughly the same time frame in Puerto Rico and Chicago and were advertised within the events in Kebra Cabana. The art form is

suited for serving as a breeding ground where diverse global movements and demands coalesce.

Regressive elements exist and must always be named and resisted as more humane spaces are perpetually imagined, however. To dismiss the political potential of the art form because it is *art* or because it is also constituted by negative social and political energies is to engage in underdeveloped analysis and normally from a standpoint of privilege. bell hooks eloquently writes that “To have work that promotes one’s liberation is such a powerful gift that it does not matter so much that the gift is flawed. Think of the work as water that contains some dirt. Because you are thirsty you are not to proud to extract the dirt and be nourished by the water (hooks, 1994, p. 50).”³ Most of what constitutes CV hip-hop has been both consciously created for political resistance and it exists within a subculture that delineates the boundaries between dominant society and the cultural values and practices of the subculture. Although the boundary is never neat, it is, none-the-less present. One marker of its presence is that it is not thoroughly incorporated “into a society of spectacle” thereby making it politically futile (Ducombe, 2002). Indeed, the mainstream media and political authorities routinely sideline the art-form, marginalize it, and in some cases actively repress it. If the ruling elite undertakes such measures, chances are good that it is promoting the liberation of those who bear the most social cost.

Counter memories of political struggle leading to independence pervades the work of the likes of Cape Verde based Fidjus di Cabral, and France based La MC Malcriado. Tem Bless has launched profound critiques of corporate assaults, which has paved a path to ecological catastrophe. What we are witnessing are serious spaces of meaning making, politicization and education beyond the boundaries of the four walls of schooling. Furthermore, as Timothy Sieber has eloquently noted, “music indexes continuity and change, sustains and renegotiates connection across transnational space, and reshapes generational relations. Popular music across the global Cape Verdean diaspora – spanning the archipelago, Europe, North America, and Africa – offers a vital musical dialogue on issues of memory, identity, race, and post-coloniality (Sieber, 2005, p.123).” Spady et al. (2006) also powerfully observe that “Hip Hop communities worldwide interact with each

³ hooks’ reference was aimed at her feminist critique of aspects of Paulo Freire’s work, yet the reference applies cross contextually.

other (through media and cultural flow, as well as embodied international travel) in ways that organize their participation in a mass-mediated cultural movement (p.11).” Not only is there an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991), often referenced as the Global Hip Hop Nation, there is a global sub-community that we might call the CV Hip-Hop Nation. A global network of communication capable of opening new sets of possibilities through shared critiques of cultural and structural oppression across borders continues to unfold. There is an emergent, critical CV hip-hop (g)local social movement. It is no coincidence that in various interviews, when asked: “what is your relationship to hip-hop,” various artists responded, “I *am* hip-hop.”

Amilcar Cabral’s theoretical interventions and praxis paved a path towards a liberation struggle popularly referenced as “Portugal’s Vietnam.” When we weigh the struggle that Cabral and countless unnamed others led against the possibilities of the current Cape Verdean hip-hop movement, we may quickly conclude that the forms of resistance embedded in CV hip-hop are trivial. The strike by dockworkers in Bissau on August 3, 1959, the subsequent police massacre of roughly fifty people and the life and death adrenaline flows of guerillas in the bush make resistance through cultural forms like hip-hop seem like little league. Yet, we must always bear in mind that cultural manifestations of the masses such as *Tabanka*, *Funana*, and *Batuku* were repressed by the colonial regime and the anti-colonial struggle made extensive use of “traditional” music and other popular cultural forms to mobilize people against colonial rule. The irony is that these genres continue to be contained, if not in form than in content, by neoliberal, neocolonial transnational rule. Arguably, the genre most under state surveillance and control (both formal and informal) is hip-hop. The reasons are rather clear. CV hip-hop provides for a powerful medium through which youth are capable of inscribing, transmitting and circulating meaning transnationally. Although the linguistic repertoires through which this work is carried out vary, the symbolic formation of what has been called the “global hip-hop nation,” (Alim, 2009) to some extent, provides a common register and a spatio-temporal setting where youth may critically reflect, share, organize and perhaps even apply creative tensions across borders. In short, there is incredible possibility for the building of a transnational social movement capable of scaffolding resistance from the cultural to concrete “bodies on the ground” political action. Indeed, youth are already

dancing with disobedience, which explains why the state moves to surveil and shutdown counter discourses and symbols. The assault on these counterhegemonic practices means that new hegemonic forms are perpetually emerging. Amid the dissident MCs lurk the dissing MCs, whose objectives are to move the crowd into late capitalist consumerism, and others who are engaged aesthetically, but sleeping at the wheel politically. I will begin with a few disclosures and definitions then move to forms of CV hip-hop that radically read the world and ask several questions: How are radical memories mobilized through CV-hip hop and for what purposes? What are the possibilities for rupturing racialized transnational capitalism and colonialism through the art form? The sections that follow relate to the first question and the final section relates to the second.

Disclosures and Definitions

Clarification is required regarding “Cape Verdean Counter Cultural Hip-Hop” and “Cape Verdean Youth Counter Culture(s).” I have never been comfortable with identifying as an academic, but given my service as a professor, it would be disingenuous to not highlight my partial and always recalcitrant (to the point that I am conscious of it) role in the expansion of academic imperialism. The terms placed in quotations above are certainly not fixed. There are multiple spaces of Cape Verdeanness. I am also resistant to neatly categorize so as to “manage” hip-hop and youth counter culture(s). I resist efforts to domesticate these spaces, to make it static, and to institutionalize it in the academy; where it can be studied by students who (re)consume it academically or use scholarship as a way to distance themselves from the social pain that informs the production of the art form. Worse, such academic imperialism may lead us where Edward Said (1978), in his classic *Orientalism*, so long ago warned us to avoid, the dialectical re-inscription of the great texts of Europe and the West as more rational, flexible, and superior. There remains contradictions, and tensions in CV counter cultural hip-hop that eludes me. And, there are emergent spaces in CV youth counter cultural production that I have yet to understand because it is designed and circulated through subterranean channels – where the full force of its genius and power rests. It excites me when I come across it and feel its breath of life, its soul. Like Cabral, I am cautious of institutionalizing any counter cultural form. What follows, therefore, is only a partial interpretation informed by my own human limitation of

vision and contextual experience. I take seriously Said's exilic form of analysis and consciousness. Ultimate finalities and closures are not possible, yet I do not subscribe to a form of infinite interpretation that is incapable of moving us to concrete social action informed through a wrestling with and analysis of the material condition of those who bear the most social cost. Of course, such analysis is not reserved solely for the lone academic, but in solidarity with those Frantz Fanon (1963) identified as the "wretched of the earth."

Commentary is also needed on the term "counter-cultural." The term may signal an anti-tradition sentiment in Cape Verdean youth, which is a notorious practice of framing CV youth. The common refrain is that youth have lost their connection to culture. They are unreflective and uncaring about their cultural past. Of course, the "culture" that is often insinuated is one that is problematically static and the tradition that is invoked is one that is un-problematically valuable. "Tradition" always encodes elements of altruism and cruelty that exists within a spectrum. In some circles, CV hip-hop is quickly exposed for its misogyny, yet it was not hip-hop that invented misogyny. Patriarchy has deeper cultural roots that is further compounded and complicated by colonialism, capitalism and different historical and cultural contexts. Artists such as Rapaz 100 Juiz have also produced tracks that can be characterized as critically feminist. The track *Kulpa é ka di bo* problematizes the traditional role that women are placed in as only care takers confined to the home and intervenes in the sport of blaming mothers for the faults of children and disintegration of the family. The track suggests that a solution is for youth to avoid negative influences embedded in music videos, but given the wider message of the group's music, the erasure of the welfare state becomes the most critical point of critique. Although there is an element of truth given the embracing of neoliberal capitalism's culture of narcissistic consumption by youth, what goes on in and through critical hip-hop is much more complex. Youth routinely sample "traditional" musical forms like Funana, Tabanka, Batuko and slide in and out of historic lyrics and symbolism, particularly those that were important to mobilizing revolutionary consciousness. In so doing, a profound intergenerational dialogue transpires and historical memory is animated so as to address present day oppressive reality. Such moves are made both linguistically and through visual rhetoric.

So, what else exactly is Cape Verdean counter cultural hip-hop performing at the moment? What role does it reserve or rekindle in the revolution? Perhaps we should begin

by how it activates memory, particularly how it recognizes, radiates and circulates Amilcar Cabral - the Guinea-Bissauan and Cape Verdean agricultural engineer, writer, nationalist thinker, and anti-colonial leader.

Track One: Dreams of Amilcar Cabral

Undeniably, the collective memory most often animated in critical CV hip-hop is the life and work of Amilcar Cabral. Several years ago, I attended a talk given by a Portuguese scholar at an annual conference on Amilcar Cabral and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The subject of his talk was his recently released book theorizing who, in fact, assassinated Cabral. He closed the talk by berating the people of Cape Verde for not establishing rituals and monuments to memorialize Cabral. He failed to consider that he was invoking a particular Eurocentric space outside of the cultural practice and experience of most Cape Verdeans. The number of statues, the names of structures, the encoding of holidays, and the like, were the only authentic practices, in his view, in experiencing the past. The transmission of knowledge and experience through the narration of the past in oral and popular culture, myths, legends, and anecdotes was dismissed. In order to scold the audience (of primarily Cape Verdeans), the scholar leaned on a form of Western rationality that marshaled an “objective knowledge,” which stated that there can only be one authoritative, official and “true” account of a nation’s past. The only way to “remember” is to do it the way that Europeans have been doing it. Speaking of how Europeans do it, one wonders where are the statues and celebrations of Cabral in Portugal. The liberation was certainly not only of Cape Verdeans, Guineans and other people of Africa.

One could, of course, also theorize such forms of remembrance as ways to bury the past or domesticate it so as to make it non-threatening to the ruling elite. Monuments that serve to record memories bear the burden of memory work and therefore often allow us to dismiss from public mind, the very person and work memorialized. Granted, we must also never allow an analysis of how the public interacts with such monuments, since the matter concerns both imposition and the various ways that people receive and experience. This is a matter for further investigation. For the moment and given the available evidence, such spaces are, for the most part, sutured to processes of political domestication. One way that

this gets accomplished is the appropriation of “Amilcar Cabral” as a charismatic hero. Here we have, as Sandy Grande (2004) has so powerfully written, the “subscription to ontological individualism. This assumption is most often linked to the Cartesian idea of the self-constituting individual whereby the self is viewed as the basic social unit (p. 69).”

Certainly, Cabral was an individual of distinguished courage, ability, and morality. The process of heroification (Lowen, 1995), however, is counter-productive. It subjects critical subjects to dangerous processes of objectification and co-optation. It allows ample space for the ruling class to re-write history so as to make him, his ideas and the ideas of others more "safe." Czech writer and cultural critic Milan Kundera (1979) reminds us that, “The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory...the struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” In the end, what is most significant is the spirit that inspired the praxis and the tracing of the genealogy of that spirit from past to present and present to past, so that it inspires new encounters with power. Processes of idolatry prevent us from reaching a more nuanced historical readings and realities about how human beings move in the world. The process abstracts the power of cooperation and collective struggle.

Human beings do not live in neat categories such as good and evil. We live in tension. We live in complex in-betweens and often reproduce what we are against unconsciously by the very act of living in a world where total escape and resistance from complicity in systems of domination is a fiction. We would be better off understanding Cabral’s complicated choices, choices that arose out of his particular context. Such analysis and interpretations are not only consistent with how human beings encounter the world and themselves, it also further fuels positive political projects by intervening in the inclination that one must be morally flawless and intellectually superhuman to participate in struggles for a more socially just world (Lowen, 1995). Selectively appropriating Cabral also erases countless unknown people who labored, resisted, and gave their lives in acts of intransigence. Women such as Paula Fortes, Carmen Pereira, Teodora Gomes, Titina Ernestina Silá (Guinean soldier killed on the way to Cabral’s funeral) and Arlinda Santos, among countless others, remain abstracted figures in the history of the revolutionary movement. Not only were women critical in the armed resistance, they were also critical in the political and social transformation of the state and civil society leading to revolution

and beyond. Revolution would have been impossible if it were not for women's involvement in the agricultural and domestic workforce.

CV hip-hop is not immune to this form of adoration of Cabral. The art form is not monolithic. Yet, there is a significant dialogue that disturbs mainstream celebrations of Cabral. Amid La MC Malcriado's *Viva Amilcar Cabral*, a track that is marred in the celebration of ontological individualism, lies Rapaz Sem Juiz's *CV Di Hoje en Dia*, a track that intervenes in efforts to mobilize the memory of Cabral outside of the current material conditions that the most vulnerable of Cape Verde experience. The focal point in summoning Cabral is to transform current day social, political and economic conditions.

<p>Antis nos era skravu di Portugues Gosi nos e skravu di Chines... Keli e CV di hoje em dia Terinha xeiú di thuggy E povu fala so na dougie, dougie Es skeci di kes thuggy xintadu na parlamentu Ta da nos tudo kasu bodi Ke li e CV di hoje en dia Hospital ku igreja sta sima dos impresa Duce si bu teni dinheiro I paga ba bu reza... Sal sta bendedu I maio sta a venda... Pasa, pasa mo guerero Nu podi mudo tudo si nu uni ku kumpanhero Nu podi korigi tudo lado mal si nu pensa ma kada un di nos e un Cabral... Nu arma nos voz</p>	<p>Before we were slaves of the Portuguese Now we are slaves of the Chinese... This is CV today A small country full of "thuggy" And the people only speak of "dougie, dougie" They forget about the "thuggy" sitting in Parliament Assaulting us all This is CV today The hospital and the church are like two corporations Get ill if you have money And pay to pray... Sal island is being sold and Maio island is up for sale Move ahead, move ahead like a warrior We can change everything if we unite We can change all that is wrong if we think That each one of us is a Cabral... Let's arm our voices</p>
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This way of invoking Cabral is not accidental. The text seeks to counter dominant cultural memory by securing its own parameters for a cultural counter-memory. The memory of Cabral is imperative, but only relevant to generate a sense of collective memory that instigates new cultures of contestation and fashions new collective activist identities. Unlike the dominant narrative that imprisons the memory of Cabral in the past, here, the past is summoned to concretely address the present and by implication, the future. It is no coincidence that Rapaz Sem Juiz, the authors of the text, are furiously policed by those in power.

As outlined above, the most explicit counter-cultural reference point in CV hip-hop is the life and work of Cabral. It is not the most common however. There are other points that must be spotlighted, so that they may be expanded and deepened in praxis. One of the most significant entry points of analysis is the role of language as a repository of counter memories given its subordinate role. Language is both a key determinant of content and is *the* medium in need of analysis. Linguistic analysis is highly under-developed in work analyzing the role of politicized hip-hop broadly and CV hip-hop more specifically.

Track two: The role of language and radical memory

Frantz Fanon insightfully observed that “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (Fanon, 1986, p.5). There is no way to theorize collective memory without theorizing its relationship to language. Timothy Sieber (2005) in partly citing Deidre Meintel (1984) writes: “As Deidre Meintel wrote two decades ago [now three], Kriolu has long been a “clear marker of Cape Verdean cultural distinctiveness [...] shared by all Cape Verdeans,” a tool of resistance to colonial rule, and “a symbol of Cape Verdeans’ identity as a people... (Meintel, 1984, 148).” Language is, of course, neutral. It is what is done with language that marks it as a space of oppression or liberation or both in complex ways. Just as a language that is positioned as dominant often subjects its users to unearned privileges and encodes unexamined oppressive dynamics, language that is marked as inferior often carries memories of resistance and agency. Take, for example, a common aphorism in Cape Verdean when one faces hardship: *É mi ki mata Cabral?* [Was it I who killed Cabral?].

CV hip-hop does not have to necessarily be produced in Kriolu to be politically charged. Its beauty is that it allows for the circulation of multiple registers and linguistic repertoires, although mostly subordinate. These linguistic border crossings speak to “the ways in which cultural forms move, change and are reused to fashion new identities (Pennycook, 2007, p. 6). It is, in short, a process of “borrowing, blending, remaking and returning, to the processes of alternative cultural production (Pennycook, 2007 p.6-8).” The track *Energy*, released in 2011, featured seven east coast U.S. based CV hip-hop artists joining forces to explicitly observe the power of their own transnational identities, hip-hop

culture, and critical consciousness. The track is complex and contradictory given its simultaneous and subtle indexing of misogyny and conspicuous consumption however. Nevertheless, the transformative elements should not be dismissed. The most transformative aspect of the track is what is likely to be missed because it centers on the vehicle/medium through which the message is disseminated – language. In one track, one witnesses the following dialect transitions:

Original	Translation
No bai. Turn the music high, hands up in the sky This beat is sick, I got the remedy <i>Chorus:</i> Energy World wide celebrity I'm International, bi-coastal (Santiago variant) N'ka speraba ma nunca ta serba si Matchikadus di djunto na track di D Prokura manera di fazi kaminhu pa nu lebal diston Matchikadu, e panha moral, karegal I lombal na tchon (St. Vincent variant) dizem cant vez kin ten k' dze I'm the best (switch to Spanish) Numero uno, (switch to French) numere un, <i>translate French</i> Fala kriol, fala fransez, fala chinez... I speak unity Building my community You ain't foolin me, see through it like nudity Hip-hop is my culture and I speak it fluently... The courage of a student in front of moving tanks The movement will advance...	Let's go I never thought it would be like this Powerful [voices] together on D's track Find a way to make a path to bring it far Tell me how many time I have to say Speak Krioulo, speak French, speak Chinese

Alim et. al. (2009) eloquently claim that

The multiplicity of indexicalities brought forth by such multilayered uses of language demands a sociolinguistics of globalization that gives a more central role to linguistic agency on the part of youth, as their appropriations and remixes of Hip Hop indicate that these heteroglot languages practices are important technologies in the fashioning of their local/global identities. (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook, 2009, p.7)

CV hip-hop is built on subversive language ideologies and instantiates a powerful public pedagogical function by circulating the power of Cape Verdean and subordinate varieties of language while contributing to a living counter-memory of the politics of language. It

functions as both an important site of language pedagogy, and a challenge to dominant ideologies of language. It is critically important to consider the context within which much of this art flourishes. Language planning in Cape Verde is marked by language policies and policy cultures that often refuses the promotion of the vitality of Cape Verdean as the official language of commanding institutions, including schools (Rosa, 2010). Youth who are linguistically profiled (Rosa, 2010) and oppressed are creating creative linguistic identities in and through hip-hop. Language planning in the diaspora is often premised on policies that are linguistically subtractive rather than additive. The dominant ideology of language in the U.S., for example, can be collapsed in the expression, “English-Only.” Increasingly, repressive language regimes are normalized in European states due to anxieties over racialized transitions. It is within this terrain that CV hip-hop is marked as a powerful linguistic resource that focuses our gaze on the vitality and versatility of Cape Verdean. H. Samy Alim (2009) powerfully suggests that: “this knowledge can be used to develop pedagogies that create high levels of metalinguistic awareness through reflexive ethnographic and sociolinguistic analysis of speech (p.227).” More importantly, spaces need to be created where educators become more reflective about their own language ideologies and experiences with youth cultural production. Most educators, whether in the diaspora or in Cape Verde, “are enacting Whiteness and subscribing to an ideology of linguistic supremacy within a system of daily cultural combat (Alim, 2009, p. 218).” Of course, educators are not the only group participating in negative relations of linguistic and cultural power, although they clearly have a deeper responsibility for intervening in such spaces. “They hold the same deeply entrenched set of folk linguistic mythologies and ideologies of language as most citizens, yet they are required to enforce “rules” which reproduce the current sociolinguistic order in a very direct way through language teaching, thus placing them in a tremendous position of power (Alim, 2009, p. 216).”

I reflect on my own autobiography and relationship to hip-hop. I immigrated to the U.S. at the age of six in 1980 the “golden age of hip-hop.” Throughout my childhood, Run-D.M.C., KRS-One, Eric B. & Rakim, Slick Rick, Big Daddy Kane and, especially, Public Enemy heavily influenced me. Indeed, I was immersed in hip-hop culture, looking for the latest word on b-boy battles in Nilson St. and staying well beyond to test my own skills. We looked for the latest shell toe Adidas and windbreakers and amassed a large collection

of vinyl records in crates and desperately waited for the call to DJ house parties. Strawberry Records was the weekend destination and often we would be bold and take the bus and train to Tower Records in Boston. Later, Ice-T and N.W.A. entered the field of influence. It wouldn't last. Hard core rap indexed a reality that I wanted to drown out. I wasn't naïve enough to think that the music totally produced the identities, but felt that it was part of a culture that included negative elements that also happened to intersect with the life trajectory of friends who were killed. In hindsight, their predicament was more closely tied to the lack of structural opportunity and a criminal justice system bent on our destruction than cultural influences. By late adolescence, my interaction with newly arrived Cape Verdean immigrants re-directed me towards Cape Verdean musical and cultural production. I was especially immersed in *Funana* and *Batuko* facilitated by an uncle who was living with the family at the time and heavily involved in the Cape Verdean music scene as a producer and sound engineer. At sixteen, I would follow the musical group *Finaçon* while on tour in the U.S. and be granted entry into all of their performance venues. I was fixated by all that was Cape Verdean and reclaimed the language, first immersing myself in the Fogo variant that circulated in Brockton, MA, and then the Santiago variant from where I was born. Shortly thereafter, Jose Fernandes or DjéDjé, one of the first Cape Verdean hip-hop artists entered the scene. The circulation of the Cape Verdean language in the rap fascinated me. The merging of cultures while emphasizing cabo-verdianidade, especially of the variant that touched on my existence between borders, deeply resonated.

Whether choosing to circulate a language that is marked by a connection to place, exercising specific speech styles and stylization, or code switching and language mixing, CV hip-hop ruptures “normative” and dominant language. It disturbs efforts to standardize through the introduction of a tremendous amount of lexical innovations (Alim et al.) and reminds us that language is a living dynamic used to name processes that are both present and unfolding. More importantly, it reminds us of the importance between the politics of naming and the enacting of processes of social transformation. No space marked by negative relations of power can ever be changed if it cannot be named and named in a language that speaks to public comprehension and connection. Keeping alive memories of linguistic resistance is a key function of CV hip-hop.

Track Three: Convergence, sampling, and radical memory

One of the monumental flaws of scholarship on the global hip hop nation is lack of attention to the relationship between hip hop's political formation in relationship to more indigenous musical forms that have already marked transgressive political spaces. The tendency that hip scholars, particularly those based in the U.S., have in positioning the art form as the premier political musical form as it travels across geographic boundaries, is not only misguided, but an imperialist performance. Aesthetic ingenuity born out of social misery is not exclusive to the 1970's Bronx. The documenting of urban infernos, critiques of state oppression, police brutality, and racialized capitalism are not limited to hip-hop. Centuries of melancholy of Cape Verdean *morna* has been about chronicling recurring famine due to drought brought about by both natural and politically imposed conditions under colonialism. Between 1773 and 1776 forty four percent of the population was eliminated due to famine. Between 1854 and 1856 twenty five percent were annihilated and forty percent succumbed to the famine of 1863-67. Throughout these epochs, music was mobilized as testimonio to document and cope with mass trauma. Slave spirituals in the Americas severed similar functions. Moreover, there have been explicitly political musical forms banned for their transgressive lyrics and aesthetics by the Portuguese colonial government. Funaná, a variable tempo genre associated with the diatonic accordion and batuko, a polyrhythmic call and response performed by groups of women are two important examples. The recent history of revolutionary struggle on the islands was characterized by a strong revival of these genres coupled by the politicization of other genres such as the Coladeira and Morna. This history and these dynamics are important to our purposes, since CV hip-hop is often in dialogic exchange with indigenous art forms through the sampling of politically significant and more indigenous music, sounds, and images or through the remixing of those sounds and images. Cape Verdean music producer and Harmonia label owner Jose Da Silva suggests that

What's interesting is that the urban music of Cape Verde is interesting because it utilizes a great deal of traditional music. This is our strength. Many other countries utilize foreign beats and American beats in urban music. Cape Verdeans utilize a great deal of traditional sounds, which is great. Cape Verdean music has always suffered influences. We have influences from everywhere. This is our strength. We know how to integrate

all that comes from abroad and make it ours. We can't be afraid of these influences.

Artists such as Tem Blessed and Bachart are clear that they are not only influenced by more indigenous beats, but that their very political sensibilities have been shaped by the political content of Cape Verdean music of the past. Batchart states

One of the contributing founders of Coladera, a Morna with a fast tempo, was my great grandfather. He was considered to be one of the first to write a protest song in Cape Verde. It was a song called Abyssinia that spoke of the importance of Africa and the position of Ethiopia in the face of the Italian invasion. This music came into my house and was sometimes sung, so it was of great influence. In Cape Verde you have had many artists who do it [explicitly touch on controversial and political themes]. Protest music in Cape Verde follows the history of Cape Verde. You have Morna's that took an Explicit political position. You have Coladera that touched on extremely Sensitive themes. Manuel De Novas is a great example. He criticized Cape Verdean society under the radar, through jokes, through satire. (Personal Interview with Joao Rosa, April 17, 2016).

The late Cape Verdean singer, songwriter and activist Norberto Tavares produced some music for Tem Blessed, Djédjé and the group Strela Negra. At times, the relationship is not explicitly political. U.S. based hip-hop artist Chachi Carvalho's sampling of Grace Evora's *El e Sabim* is a case in point. At first analysis, it is a simple artistic appropriation and celebration of homeland. Deeper analysis reveals that the connection, however impartial, also concerns an invoking of an affiliation to community that runs counter to the investment in possessive individualism and the modes of consumption and escapism characteristic of music that glamorizes capital. The very power of CV hip-hop lies in its incorporation of more indigenous cultural forms in some way. Not only does it open up a space for the voice of hybrid identities, it connects those identities to movements bigger than any one individual and therefore serves as a tonic that resists the rugged individualism that forms the basis of the poison of neoliberal capitalism. CV hip-hop does more than sample beats. It samples political memory as a vehicle to counter the gimmicks of mass distraction.

Track Four: Rousing Radical Visual Rhetoric

The use of visual materials in CV hip-hop can best be understood within a framework that allows analysis to proceed from "three sites: the site of production, which

is where the image is made; the site of the image itself, which is its visual content; and the site where the image encounters its spectators or users (Rose, 2012).” Images, however, can never be disarticulated from lyrical content, literary techniques, flow and delivery. Moreover, they cannot be separated from the technologies that largely determine its effect. Lastly, the social, political and economic context cannot be divided from the site of the images production, the image itself and, obviously, the dynamics of audience reception. All of these elements function in the creation of an ecosystem of meaning. Less time is spent engaging the meaning that artists themselves ascribe to particular images or the assemblage of visual rhetoric behind any video. The wider visual context is what is most important to this analysis; that is, the visual forms that are pieced across the current production of CV hip-hop videos. Several images and techniques resonate across music videos.

The organization of visual rhetoric is central to CV hip-hop. The representational layers of music videos structure how able-bodied viewers experience the text globally. A common theme that marks the visual culture of the art form is the embedding of the Black Star and the colors yellow, green and red associated with the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, the revolutionary socialist party that also governed Cape Verde from 1975 to 1980. In short, a scopic regime (Metz, 1975) of the revolutionary period dominates CV hip-hop and functions “to increase the surface area of experience (Marks, 2002: x).” This regime, in turn, indexes and takes a position regarding a key current tension, the state’s dismantling of the former image and the institutionalization of the current image, which invokes a solidarity with Europe and the West more broadly. The encoding of revolutionary imagery suggests that a particular type of social work is moving through the art form; a particular type of *seeing* is invited. The image’s social valence coupled with other forms of political representation (including lyrics) invites self-reflection on our own ideological standpoints. As John Berger (1972), in the seminal text *Ways of Seeing*, had put it, “we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves (Berger, 1972, p.9). The point becomes all the more important when we observe the spaces where hip-hop heads interact, more will be said later in the essay.

Detroit Kabuverdianu's constant camera shift between the Black Star's image and the revolutionary colors painted on a wall in the video 265 is significant given that it seems to be embedded into the visual vernacular of a number of videos that make up the genre. The yellow, red and green flag and/or the Black Star is embedded into the videos seamlessly by capturing that which is already encoded organically on a wall or in embedded visual texts of the past. These representations are powerful in the sense that the site of production is often the community or communities and the video becomes a technology for its display and dissemination. The hip-hop artist and art becomes a conduit delivering the image and the voices and creativity of its creators and the circumstances of their production. Indigenous representation triangulates the trustworthiness of the lyricism and kinesics of CV hip-hop and the incorporation and circulation of the image through hip-hop lends continued legitimacy and relevance to the representations. In the video 265, the image of the flag and star is effectuated by the image of a t-shirt that reads *Amor Antis di Tudo (Love Before All)* transacted by lyrics such as "*undi kin bai n'ka ta skeci di undi kin ben (wherever I go, I will not forget from where I've come)* or *regressos di prophetas ta prophitiza un regresso (the return of prophets prophesizing a return)*. The arrangement effectively pushes back against the narcotizing dysfunction (Lazarfeld & Merton, 1948; in Lyman, 1948) of mass media. It is designed to politically awaken and socially energize the masses against the self-obsession and self-interest that forms the center of neoliberal capitalism. Of course, the image(s) must never be isolated in analysis, but rather be conceptualized as texts embedded within a particular cultural, political, social and economic context. In this case, what we are witnessing in the assemblage of texts is a powerful counter-hegemonic symbol against the prevailing winds of neoliberalism irrespective of political party in Cape Verde. Although largely powerful, it is also important to note that it is never totally harmonious in political subversion. A great deal of the elements of this particular video, and/or other videos in CV hip-hop, is about *pleasure* – a space that we must also respect. At times, the text also participates in and invites negative political elements, which must be forcefully critiqued. The negative and the pleasureable should not dissuade a reading of the positive project and possibilities. Again, we are reminded about the cautionary words of bell hooks introduced earlier.

We might also dismiss the positive political sensibilities by stating that it was not the intent at the point of production. Perhaps artists are merely mixing and borrowing without too great a presence of mind. Yet, when we analyze the lyrics, images, and styles intertextually, the argument often falls apart. My interviews with hip-hop artist Tem Blessed suggests that there is a great amount of thought regarding not only lyrics, but imagery. I utilize his voice here because it is indicative of nuance, organic creative flows and growing transnational consciousness.

I started with Djedje [a U.S. based CV hip-hop artist often credited with releasing the first cd in the genre] and we came up with the name “Strela Negra” [Black Star] for the group. At that time I wanted to break into the American market. “Strela Negra” initially came out of the work of Marcus Garvey, but I soon saw its application to the Guinean and Cape Verdean revolution. We wanted to identify with our African roots and the socially responsible mindset of the revolutionary struggle. I read *Return to the Source* and was moved by the work of Amílcar Cabral. (Personal Interview with Tem Blessed, August 2, 2016).

Strela Negra was not only circulated through lyrics, but also served as the focal logo of the group. Aside from explicit introductions into the visual field, *imagery* is a keystone of hip-hop. Hélio Batalha, a conscious hip-hop artist from Cape Verde, is very explicit about the inspiration for his work. “African leaders like Thomas Sankara and Amílcar Cabral also have a big impact on the music I make (Team True, 2016).” The imagery he invokes through his lyrics in the track *Sacrifício Eterno* (Batalha, 2013) is a testament to his political genealogy. Consider the chorus and parts of the verse:

<p>(chorus) Nha rap e di son, nha rap e razon Nha rap e Cabral ku makina na mon N’sta fazi pa dal nha kontinuason Kultra soldado pa revoluson... (verse) N’sta fazi pa re-Africanismo Pa keda di Kapitalismo</p>	<p>(chorus) My rap is of sound, my rap is reason My rap is Cabral with a machine in his hand I’m making it for continuation Cultivating the soldier for revolution I’m making it to re-Africanize For the downfall of Capitalism</p>
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The image and imagery is often assembled as a vehicle to, not only return to the source and for cultural pride, but as a way to wrest control of the co-option of those images and their conversion into state-sponsored forms of propaganda.

At times, the image is subjected to a comparative and contrastive analysis that moves through a wider visual context that seems to be explicitly built to mobilize social and/or political identities. The video *Alô Alô Cabo Verde* by Rapaz 100 Juiz serves as an example of this technique. The video begins with an original image of the period of independence. A group of militants are raising the revolutionary flag and at the end of the video, it is the current flag (red, white and blue with ten gold stars-often understood as an effort to more closely affiliate with the West) that is being burned while the image of the CD (two black men with mouths covered by a headless figure wearing a suit and tie) is superimposed on the flag.

Conclusion

The power of socially conscious CV hip-hop is rather clear. In an era when school systems are being increasingly standardized through uniform policies, curricula, language planning and managed institutional culture; critical hip-hop provides youth with a political vocabulary that helps name their social condition and, at its best, also provide them with opportunities to imagine and act to create a different world. As the art form crosses borders, it refracts and articulates diverse social, political and economic anxieties that also cross borders. We are already witnessing a space where diverse concerns are coalescing: the Black Lives Matter movement, the pain of migration and the exclusion of immigrants, and global environmental ecocide. We must also take exception to the reality that women and the LGBTQ community (at least not openly) do not seem to be equal participants in the hip-hop community. Although there are certainly less MCs who are female and they tend to inhabit a commercialized hip-hop characteristic of the Cape Verde based Nissah, there are women involved in hip-hop culture more broadly. Perhaps it is also time to historicize CV hip-hop more deeply and open up the “canon” to women such as Nacia Gomi, who upon close reflection was not only seminal to Batuko and Finaçon, but to the very foundation of rap’s chanting, rhythmic and rhyming speech. At the same time we must take heed of aspects of CV hip-hop (including the socially conscious hip hop) that circulates

symbols and discourses that indoctrinates us into slavery to capital and neo-colonialism. The art form is not immune to breathing what is already in the air. As the popularity of socially conscious hip-hop continues to grow, the ruling elite of Cape Verde and in the diaspora will find new ways to assert control. We must struggle to not allow this art form to be subjected to capitalist ideologies and neo-colonial impulses, but rather be attuned to the social pain that informs the creativity. More importantly, we must labor to address that social pain through, both, cultural action and concrete social action.

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