

Chapter 11

Silence Does Not Protect Us from Racism and Violence: Telling Stories of Afro-Descendants' Collective Action in Portugal



Rosana Albuquerque 

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise. (...).
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.
(Still I Rise, Maya Angelou)

11.1 Introduction

This chapter traces a history of collective action by Afro-descendants¹ in Portugal, from the mid-1970s to the present, paying attention to the social and political contexts that frame agency and identifying claims, discourses, and practices. I seek to

¹The designation of Afro-descendant refers to people from the African diaspora in Portugal, who can be Black Portuguese or African immigrants and their descendants (born and/or socialized in

R. Albuquerque (✉)
Center for Migration Studies and Intercultural Relations, Universidade Aberta,
Lisboa, Portugal
e-mail: Rosana.Albuquerque@uab.pt

tell a collective story built on many stories that need to be uncovered and shared, as a way of confronting the silence and denial about racism in Portugal. This enables the recognition of the political agency of Afro-descendants, most importantly their contributions to human rights and democracy in Portugal.

The first African migrant associations were created in the beginning of the 1980s and pioneered in offering social services, creating shelters, and safe spaces in local neighborhoods, because of a lack in state policies providing these services. Throughout the 1990s, political mobilization was progressively strengthened with rights claiming and documents for all campaigns, due to the irregular situation of many migrants. Although these associations dealt with discrimination and racism daily, this was not an issue they explicitly addressed in their public interventions. This changed following the murder of Alcindo Monteiro in 1995, by nationalist skinheads. The racist attack on Alcindo's life became a driving force behind the establishment of an anti-racist agenda in Portugal. The Anti-Racist Network (RAR) was created and an effervescence of cultural and civic intervention of strong politicized, and openly anti-racist young Afro-descendants emerged. A relevant milestone in the trajectory of anti-racism in Portugal thus emerged in the mid-1990s and through the 2000s, when young generations and the lobby of the Network broke the silence about racism.

Since 2015, one can see a new boost of political intervention by Afro-descendants, which introduced new issues that can be considered as decolonial activism. Various collectives develop a debate on the legacy of colonialism and slavery and its impact in the structural racism within Portuguese society. In their interventions they argue too for the recognition of Black presence and of the Black Portuguese and demand historical reparations. The dynamics and diversity of this activism, its leaderships, and the decolonial agenda configures a relevant turn. Both stages can be understood by applying the wave metaphor as proposed by Essed (2014).²

Along this path, we must underline that Afro-descendants and African migrants have always played an active role as political actors to combat policy gaps and multiple discriminations.³ In a society where colonialism is “a thoughtless subject” (Lourenço, 2014), they have been breaking the silence about racism and the colonial

Portugal), not being related to nationality status. I chose this broad concept because it is used by African and Afro-descendant associations and not all associations represent themselves as Black, namely migrant associations of the 1990s, as presented throughout the chapter (for a deeper discussion on the concept and the designation of Afro-descendance linked to political demands that connect being Portuguese with African heritage and full citizenship in Portuguese society, see Évora and Mata, 2022).

²Wave terminology has been relevant to narrate the feminist movement (Chamberlain 2017). With a similar meaning to that of wave, one can also adopt the term ages to identify different generations and agendas in the history of associative participation and collective action, as used by De Wenden and Leveau (2001).

³E.g., Albuquerque et al. (2000), Albuquerque (2008), Carita and Rosendo (1993), Ramalho and Trovão (2010), Sardinha (2009). And we cannot forget the Black movement of the beginning of the twentieth century in Portugal, whose history is only now being uncovered (Roldão et al., 2023). For a brief presentation of migratory movements in Portugal see Oliveira and Peixoto (2022).

legacy in current social structure and minds (Almeida, 2000; Araújo, 2013; Maeso, 2021).

11.2 Pioneering Agency Within a Political Void

To understand the social context in which the first migrant associations were created, back in the 1980s, it is important to point out that before the Portuguese revolution of 1974, and the ensuing independence of Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa,⁴ part of the resident African population were already Portuguese citizens since their countries of origin belonged to the colonial empire. The advent of new legislation regarding nationality in 1975 changed this, resulting in a foreign community of African ancestry that would subsequently grow through family reunification and economic immigration from the 1980s onwards (Oliveira & Peixoto, 2022). The Afro-descendant community had few rights in a society transitioning into a post-dictatorship and post-colonial country. There were no state policies addressing the needs of this specific population or to welcome the incoming labor migrants from African countries. This omission persisted until the 1990s and can be considered as a “non-politics” regarding immigration (Baganha, 2005, p. 32).

African migrant associations emerged as a response to a lack of state policies. They focused on problems caused by the loss of Portuguese nationality or irregular migration, job opportunities restricted to precarious sectors and risks of exploitation (e.g., in fields such as construction and cleaning), and limited access to health care and housing. Very often these organizations started out as residents’ associations that were active in the slum neighborhoods of Greater Lisbon,⁵ such as Associação Unidos de Cabo Verde (1983) and Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude (1983), with African and Portuguese founders. The Associação Cabo-Verdiana (1981) and Associação Guineense de Solidariedade Social (1987) are also examples of pioneering associations that were born at this time, but with nationwide intervention aimed at Cape Verdean and Guinea-Bissau nationals and not focused on local contexts nor specific neighborhoods.

The priorities of these pioneering associations were thus the demand for rights and documents because such rights would be the first step towards preventing and combating labor exploitation, discrimination, and racism. Those claims were the distinctive mark of this phase of collective action, without a public agenda on anti-racism. But I argue that, although invisible in the public space, tackling discrimination was underlying daily intervention with communities. A relevant example is *Nô*

⁴Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe.

⁵Given the absence of integration policies, particularly in the field of housing, migrants and Afro-descendants occupied empty lands on the outskirts of Greater Lisbon to build their own houses. Over the last few decades, relocation and social housing programs have been implemented, but these areas became racialized and marginalized places under constant police surveillance and control until today (Alves, 2016; Raposo et al., 2019).

Djunta Mõn project (join hands). After Cape Verde's independence (1975), Cape Verdean democratic action groups in Portugal undertook literacy campaigns with migrants. The project ran between 1980 and 1989 in Damaia, Fontainhas and Pedreira dos Húngaros (slums on the outskirts of Greater Lisbon), offering adult education courses. Coordinated by Cape Verdean Association, it designed specific materials for the adult learner, aligned with Paulo Freire's pedagogy, focusing issues based on real situations that facilitated awareness of discrimination and rights.

The work of these associations and activists was fundamental in the intervention throughout the 1990s, with a transmission of experience to the following generations which maintained the continuity of the fight for rights and was also felt in the strengthening of political mobilization. We will find these pioneering activists at the forefront of the struggles for rights and against racism in the following years, in alliance with other actors and various Portuguese organizations, as presented in the following section. Therefore, I argue that even if invisible in the media and public arena, African migrants and Afro-descendants' civic intervention has been an "everyday struggle against racism and xenophobia" (Rodrigues, 2021, p. 329).

11.3 Getting Up, Standing Up for Rights⁶

In the 1990s, Portugal implemented several legislative measures concerning immigration to comply with European Union commitments, such as the Schengen Agreement and the Maastricht Treaty. These were the result of immigration policy standardization at a European level, based on controlling the flows of foreigners from countries outside the European Union. The implementation of these regulations coincided with a hostile political discourse fueling public anxieties towards immigration, which were further exacerbated by media coverage of "fortress Europe" (Baganha, 2005).⁷ These new immigration policies were centralized within the Immigration and Borders Service and were not accompanied by a coordinated integration policy to address the problems that associations were denouncing and trying to solve since previous decades (Santos, 2004).⁸

⁶Inspired by Bob Marley's song "Get Up, Stand up" to highlight the impulse of collective mobilization that marked this period.

⁷The Information Network on Migration from Third Countries General Report indicated that the year 1994 had seen growing hostility towards immigrants in Portugal, with calls for greater legislative control of foreigners entering and residing in the country, pointing to the adoption of restrictive measures in the Schengen area as contributing to this hostility (RIMET, 1997).

⁸This focus on borders, with *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* (Immigration and Borders Service) being the unique state body in charge of immigration issues, stresses the dimension of police surveillance that shaped migrants' lives until mid-1990s.

This was the context where Portuguese human rights associations emerged, such as SOS Racismo (1990), Frente Anti-Racista (1994) and Solidariedade Imigrante (2001). Founded by Portuguese and African activists, they joined forces with the earlier-on established African associations, mentioned before, and introduced an agenda which unveils racism and its connection with the restrictive border control policies, as presented below.

11.3.1 “Documents for All”⁹

The best illustration of a growing politicization in the first half of the 1990s can be seen in the first extraordinary immigrant legalization, which took place in 1992/1993. The Portuguese state funded information campaigns on this regularization process as part of the border control legislation and combating irregular immigration policy. In response, the associations joined the Coordinating Secretariat of Associations for Legalisation, a platform that not only included African and other migrant associations, but also Portuguese Catholic Work for Migrations, the Portuguese Council for Refugees, the two large national trade unions, and human rights organizations working with migrants.

The main claims were migrant legalization and the struggle for rights as key to combating discrimination and having a decent life.¹⁰ To this end, there were numerous “information drives” throughout the country, mostly focusing their attention on the outskirts of the Greater Lisbon, which was where most migrant and/or African populations lived. The different teams provided information virtually “door to door”, to regularize as many people as possible. Those campaigns allowed the Secretariat to become a space to discuss and coordinate positions, kickstarting a political dialogue between associations.

The first extraordinary regularization of migrants could be said to constitute the “ground zero of ethnicity politicization” in Portugal (Machado, 1992), because migrant associations and other civil society organizations were visible in public arena and started to build a joint political discourse to confront the state regarding the restrictive policies of a “fortress Europe” (Vianna, 2010). Their experience made it possible to strengthen debates and alliances to pursuit denouncing and combating racial violence and structural racism in the following stage.

⁹“Documents for all” was the most frequent slogan of campaigns and demonstrations at this time.

¹⁰A focus similar to Spain, as both countries shared some common features of migration flows and policy framework (Gómez-Reino, 2013).

11.3.2 *Networking an Anti-Racist Agenda*

In 1995, on the night of June 10th, Alcindo Monteiro was murdered by nationalist skinheads who organized an attack on Black people in a traditional nightlife area of Lisbon.¹¹ This tragic event provoked coordinated action among associations, who demanded justice and a more proactive response from the state in relation to combating ethnic and racial discrimination. Multiple civil society organizations, such as human rights organizations, trade unions and anti-racist associations like SOS Racismo and Frente Anti-Racista¹² organized, that year, the first public demonstration against racial and ethnic based violence and discrimination in Lisbon. For the first time in Portugal, Africans and Afro-descendants took to the streets to demand justice and break the silence to openly denounce racism.

The seriousness of Alcindo's murder led some associations to study ways of monitoring and representing the interests of the victims of these kinds of crimes. In 1996, this led to the creation of the law that allowed immigrant communities and other associations to become private prosecutors in criminal proceedings in the case of a racist or xenophobic crime (Albuquerque et al., 2000). In the same year, through the initiative of SOS Racismo and the Portuguese Citizens' Rights Association a petition was made for a law against racial discrimination and presented to the Portuguese Parliament.

The first law against racial discrimination was approved in 1999, due to the persistence of SOS Racismo, several parliamentary debates, and reconciliation of the bills presented by the Portuguese Communist Party and the Socialist Party. The creation of a Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination was also approved within the scope of this law (Ba, 2021; Falcão, 2016).

The path to the approval of the law triggered a discussion about racism among migrant and human rights associations and led to the creation of Rede Anti-Racista [Anti-Racist Network, or RAR]. RAR attracted a wide range of associations, including those representing migrants, Afro-descendants, African university students, human rights, and anti-racist associations like SOS Racismo. With 27 founding associations its mission was to converge individual efforts into a collective structure

¹¹ Alcindo Monteiro was a Portuguese citizen of Cape Verdean origin. The attack was premeditated to celebrate Portugal Day, the tenth of June, by a group of nationalist skinheads, as this day was designated Race Day during the dictatorship period (since 1933 until 1974 revolution). There were 11 victims, one of them fatal. The trial took place in 1997, with 17 individuals accused of crimes of bodily harm and one crime of qualified homicide, proving racist and xenophobic motivations.

¹² SOS Racismo (1990) and Frente Anti-Racista (1994) are the first two anti-racist associations in Portugal, having been driven by citizens of Portuguese nationality, some with a migrant background, and also African migrants. Since its creation, they have developed a network with migrant associations, which strengthened throughout the decade and is still active today. It should be noted that SOS Racismo is an autonomous Portuguese association with no connection to its French counterpart, and was created after the murder of radical left activist José Carvalho by a group of skinheads, in 1989.

that was aware of the challenges of its mission, as stated in the introductory text of RAR first congress (20th and 21st March 1999):

A broad perspective regarding the anti-racist struggle will always be key. As racism and xenophobia are complex, wide-ranging problems found in different spheres of society, this fight will inevitably take place at different levels and areas of intervention. As such, great solidarity between the different associations will always be necessary. Solidarity, understanding, sharing problems, resources and solutions will be key (...). (RAR, 1999b)

The debates launched in the first congress of RAR revealed the structural nature of the problems that already guided the associations we mentioned in previous section, and the intervention since the 1980s, as exposed in the congress minutes: “immigrants and their rights; security forces and their relationship with minorities; education, information and training; cultural diversity and the issue of the Roma” (RAR, 1999a). RAR took a political approach,¹³ having organized that same year the “Documents for all campaign”, criticizing the immigration laws that neither resolved the problems of countless undocumented people, nor protected migrants from exploitation in the workplace and other areas. These proposals accompanied the “undocumented movement” in countries like Spain and France and were associated with the work of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and UNITED for Intercultural Action.

RAR lost strength in mobilizing associations and pursuing public campaigns along the years and stopped its activities in 2008. However, RAR was a landmark of the Portuguese anti-racist movement and managed to link the lobbying for rights and documents and the fight against structural violence and racism, to bring together different generations of leaders, and to interconnect the work of migrant and Afro-descendants associations and Portuguese human rights organizations.

11.4 Young, Anti-Racist and Black¹⁴

Along with the mobilization by associations presented in previous sections, the 1990s also saw the formation in Greater Lisbon of the first associations of young Afro-descendants, a generation born in Portugal with migrant family paths.¹⁵ Their

¹³The slogans had a clear critical political position, such as: “Government prepares to legalize slavery” (Press release, ninth May 2000, SOS Racismo archive); or “Immigrant demonstration about the amendment of the ‘Expulsion of foreigners’ law” (Press release, 25th June 2000, SOS Racismo archive).

¹⁴Inspired by Nina Simone’s song “Young, Gifted and Black” to highlight the politicized consciousness of this new generation of activists.

¹⁵E.g., Associação de Jovens Promotores de uma Amadora Saudável (1993); Associação Luso-Africana de Jovens, in the Pedreira dos Húngaros neighbourhood (1994); Associação Luso-Africana Morna, from the 6 de maio neighborhood - Damaia (1994); Associação CaboJovem, which was not located in a particular neighborhood and consisted primarily of university students and young people who had taken cultural activities courses (1995).

collective action can be seen as a “strategy of conservation and subversion—a defense and intervention mechanism to solve the everyday problems faced by children and young minorities” (Resende, 1996, p. 157). And, at the same time, it indicates a rejection of the “too conformist resignation” they attribute to adult generations, while adopting a “more active, less silent posture (...) aiming to change their own social condition, as well as that of their socio-cultural peers” (Resende, 1996, pp. 82–83).

This new generation got involved in the struggles for rights waged in the 1990s, but their discourse was more insurgent. It revealed the awareness of belonging to a Black community, a distinguishing factor compared to previous leaders. Anti-racism was strengthened by these young Black activists who openly denounced racism and its connection to unemployment, poor living conditions, police violence and the hypersurveillance of racialized neighbourhoods, linked to the valorization of Black belonging.

The CaboJovem association is an example of this nonconformist posture. In 1995 it organized the conference “Different among equals?”, as a response to the “All different, all equal” campaign launched that year by the Council of Europe to commemorate 50 years since the end of World War II and designed to combat racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and intolerance. The question in the title of the conference revealed a critical stance regarding the slogan and the campaign’s assumption of equality. In another perspective, they draw the attention to the persistence of inequalities felt by Black youth, such as school failure, unemployment, discrimination and racism, conditions that denied the effectiveness of intercultural policies that did not confront the roots of structural problems.¹⁶

Another distinctive aspect of Black youth anti-racism of this stage was the role of cultural action, in particular rappers who addressed issues rooted in the experiences of a Black diaspora. Within this context, the rapper General D became one of the precursors and a leading activist with the 1994 single “Portukkkal é um erro” [Portukkkal is a mistake]. It is also worth mentioning his explicit anti-racist intervention along with other rappers, such as the female group Djamaal, who worked with SOS Racismo linking up at concerts and other events denouncing and combating racism (Raposo et al., 2020, p. 277).

In fact, in the same Lisbon neighbourhoods that the police identified as areas of crime and where young Black people are associated with dangerous youth cultures, cultural creativity connected to hip hop buzzes, with rappers leading a movement that remixed lifestyles, urban cultures and politicized discourse expressing frustration and discontent. Since the early 1990s, “Black rappers from Lisbon’s outskirts have denounced the country’s structural racism, encouraging an anti-racist vision in the media, in the associative movement itself, and in everyday life. These artists

¹⁶Confirming this concern for political reflection, and because their founders were women, CaboJovem undertook research on the situations of young women from ethnic minorities – “As true as our lives”, which is part of the Young Women from Minorities network (WFM, 2003). This focus on women’s issues was unique at that time, and deserves to be highlighted, but many women’s collectives will flourish after 2000, as can be seen later in this chapter.

were primarily responsible for making the issue of racism part of public debate in Portugal, rhyming personal experiences of injustice, such as police violence, residential stigma, racial discrimination and poverty” (Raposo et al., 2020, p. 276).¹⁷

The intervention of this young generation will continue throughout the 2000s, with innovative cultural and civic projects, mostly outside the formal spaces of existing associations and networks led by migrants or older activists, like those members of the RAR network. In addition to the explicit anti-racist attitude, a new feature also stands out: the valorization of Black consciousness and the visibility of Black Portuguese populations.

This emphasis on Black consciousness as a philosophy that guides activism is a hallmark of Khapaz—Associação Cultural de Jovens Afrodescendentes [Young Afro-descendants Cultural Association], which has been operating since the beginning of 2000 in an area of Greater Lisbon’s south bank that faces police abuse and violence. Khapaz’s work focusses on hip-hop culture, confronting the “stigmatising visions that blamed young Black people from the city outskirts for a supposed increase in urban violence” and “contributing to the redesign of an anti-racist agenda” (Raposo et al., 2020, p. 278).

In the same vein, on the north bank of Greater Lisbon, a group of young women created Encontros in 2004, which published the “Cadernos Consciência e Resistência Negra” [Black Consciousness and Resistance Notebooks] from 2007 to 2010. This fanzine was photocopied and distributed at the association’s events (cinema, debates, concerts, exhibitions) or in neighborhoods with Afro-descendant communities. The objective of these notebooks is spelled out in the first edition: “to disseminate the History of Black African Consciousness and Resistance in the World”; “to appreciate and promote the knowledge and contribution that Black African history and culture has given to the world”; “to offer young Africans and Afro-descendants the chance to present their work, express their culture, thoughts and opinions”; “to promote the development of a consciousness and organized resistance of young Black Africans” (Encontros – Associação Juvenil, 2007, p. 2).

Having a similar posture, “Jornal Gueto: Olhos, Ouvidos e Vozes” [Ghetto Newspaper: Eyes, Ears and Voices] also stands out as a key to the anti-racist struggle of youth. The launch issue editorial made its mission quite plain:

Racism, unemployment, few opportunities or police violence are part of daily life for thousands of young people in Lisbon’s suburbs. It’s no different for us. Our voice is not heard, our problems forgotten, and our experiences caricatured or stigmatized. So, we urgently need to create associations, informal collectives and newspapers that express our ideas and opinions, so our wishes and demands are publicly heard (...) Time is up on the media and political institutions that produce generally misleading information about the ghetto. Young people from the ghetto want to speak with their own voice to demand rights and a better quality of life. We demand Portuguese nationality for all those born in the country!

¹⁷Like the following lyrics included in the first compilation of Portuguese rap: “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 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, The Truth, Rapública, 1994)

Legalisation for all immigrants! We want African history to be taught in schools with large numbers of Afro-descendants! No more police violence! Equal opportunities! (Editorial, *Jornal Gueto*, n. 0, 2007, cit. in Raposo et al., 2020, p. 278–279)

Jornal Gueto would later lead to the foundation of *Plataforma Gueto*, a collective built upon the experience of rappers from the racialized suburbs. Using Facebook and the *Jornal Gueto* blog, *Plataforma Gueto* is recognized as an anti-racist association that filled the “void that characterized the representativeness of anti-racist organizations, in particular Black communities” (SOS Racismo activist interviewed by Santos & Vasconcelos, 2019, p. 88), because of its strategy marked by Black visibility.

Finally, I must mention *Grupo de Teatro do Oprimido de Lisboa* [GTOLX, or Lisbon’s Oppressed Theatre Group], that was founded in 2005 and involved Afro-descendants from the very beginning, as seen in the creation and organization of the plays, the target audiences, and the themes chosen. GTOLX had the clear intention to represent the “pretogueses¹⁸ born, raised and living in Portugal” (Rodrigues, 2021, p. 330), and is also an example of how artistic and cultural intervention mirrors political intervention that prioritizes the fight against discrimination alongside a “Black consciousness” by “[rejecting] any system of values that, in any way, makes the Black man or woman a foreigner in their own country and undermines their human dignity” (Rodrigues, 2021, p. 332).

I highlight these various projects that emerged in the mid-1990s and mid-2000s to illustrate the critical stance of a young, anti-racist, Black activism that claims that “the young Black Portuguese are also Portuguese” (Borges, 2010, p. 34) and rejects a status as “citizen outsiders” (Beaman, 2017). Their discourses mark a shift compared to the intervention of African and migrant associations, as well as RAR agenda, as Blackness was not visible in those anti-racist strategies. These young generations shape an anti-racism that call upon the legacy of Black diasporas and history to affirm a full belonging to Portuguese society. However, despite the dynamics of these collectives and their recognition among young population of racialized neighborhoods, this activism was not visible in the media, nor did it play a lobbying role towards State policies, as previous activism of RAR and campaigns for documents sought to do. In my view, these experiences were very important to strengthen activism and catalyze a decolonial turn in the following decade, which will result in a clear anti-racist turn, as presented below.

¹⁸This is an expression that combines the adjective “preto” (black) with the noun “português” (Portuguese). It is used in informal speech to strengthen the Black presence in Portugal, regardless of nationality or citizenship.

11.5 Towards a Decolonial Anti-Racist Agenda

Since 2015, which marked the beginning of the International Decade for People of African Descent (hereafter, Decade) decreed by the United Nations, there has been a noticeable increase in associative projects and struggles led by Afro-descendants in Portugal.

We can look at the Decade as a favorable factor for mobilization. But it is also important to highlight the violence experienced systematically in neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Greater Lisbon. The case of the Alfragide police station (2015) is a paradigmatic case of police violence that falls on young black and Afro-descendant people, and led to a significant and unprecedented concentration in front of the Assembly of the Republic against racist police violence by dozens of residents of Cova da Moura and local associations and solidarity activists (Raposo et al., 2019).¹⁹ It is also important to highlight the emergence of Chega political party in this social and political context that frames anti-racist mobilization. With populist, radical right, nationalist, conservative ideology, and anti-immigration and xenophobic speeches, ran for the first time in the legislative elections in 2019 with the election of a single deputy, and registering a steady increase (12 deputies elected in 2022 and 50 in 2024 March elections).

Anti-racist mobilization throughout this period is led by Black activists and various collectives that join forces and network their intervention to openly question the legacy of the colonial past in the structural inequalities of contemporary Portuguese society and deconstruct the myth of whiteness of Portuguese identity.²⁰ Altogether these organizations play an important role in the visibility of Black Portuguese and Afro-descendant lives and shape an anti-racism without shyness or fear of speaking about colonial wounds, actively confronting the silence, denial, and concealment of the colonial legacy in today's Portuguese society. These features shape a decolonial turn and we present some projects that exemplify this shift below.

AfroLis association (2016) followed the experience of AfroLis Radio, an audio blog created in 2014 by a young journalist. Its aim was telling stories of “people from the Black community or interested in African themes living in Lisbon” to “[unveil] facets of Black consciousness in Portugal” (AfroLis, n.d.). Today, AfroLis Podcast (2023) highlights the interconnections between race and gender issues. In fact, women activists became more visible and new associations explicitly linked Black and gender identity when calling out discrimination and presenting intersectional emancipatory proposals, such as: Associação de Mulheres Negras, Africanas e Afrodescendentes em Portugal—FEMAFRO [Association of Black, African and

¹⁹The Alfragide case was a criminal process that took place between 2015 and 2020, where 8 police officers were convicted of kidnapping and assaulting 6 young Black men from the Cova da Moura neighborhood, one of the oldest self-built neighbourhoods in the Greater Lisbon and the Moinho da Juventude Association's field of action (pioneer association from the 1980s).

²⁰As Almeida well summarizes in the title of his text when characterizing the distinctive feature of the identity imaginary that denies the long black presence in the history of the Portuguese nation: “no one really imagines a Black Portuguese”, 2022.

Afro-descendant Women in Portugal; founded in 2016], Instituto da Mulher Negra em Portugal—INMUNE [Institute of Black Women in Portugal, in 2018] and the collective *Mulheres Negras Escurecidas* [Darkened Black Women, in 2020], among other more informal collectives (Roldão, 2020, p. 175).

Consolidating this position, the founder of the *Mulheres Negras Escurecidas* collective [Darkened Black Women] states that the project is a place of “exterior healing as a result of interior healing”, i.e., “creating a safe space for Black women to share their experiences, empower themselves and do things that increase knowledge about the history of the Black population and, essentially, of Black women in Portugal” (Vânia Andrade interviewed by Bossuet, n.d.).

The *O Lado Negro da Força* collective [The Black Side of the Force] also prioritized sharing stories as a form of emancipation and civic intervention, creating a YouTube channel as “a listening place for rarely heard voices” (*O Lado Negro da Força*, 2019).²¹ *Afrolink* defines itself as an “‘embassy’ of the Afro workforce in Portugal [that] promotes greater Black representativeness in the workplace, encouraging greater understanding of the ethno-racial diversity that composes it” (*Afrolink*, 2020). Both use their digital channels to take public positions regarding policies and get involved in open letters and other collective initiatives that we mention ahead.

All these collectives, notwithstanding their diversity, reveal the commitment to “make a difference, promoting equity, racial and gender justice” (*AfroLis*, n.d.). This commitment also stems from the growing awareness of how discriminations intersect, and is a result of the experience acquired in debate and reflection among the collectives and between different generations of activists.²² So we can see these projects as heirs of the “Sisters of the yam” groups proposed by bell hooks (2015), allowing strategies for civic and political action nurtured by mutual help and a safe sharing community. Activism is then a mix between internal and public empowerment rooted in Black alliances and solidarities and political resistance and intervention, that feed each other.

The legacy of the previous decades of mobilization to make a Black presence visible, recognized and respected persists in this new stage of collective action. The visibility strategy is reinforced by a confrontation with colonial myths, which were not explicit earlier. It is also worth emphasizing that this strategy of recognizing the Black presence in Portugal is accompanied by demonstrations, monitoring of policies (or their absence) and political proposals (as given by the examples of open letters, presented ahead).

²¹ *O Lado Negro da Força* (2019) <https://www.youtube.com/c/oladonegrodaforca>

²² Here, one should remember Plataforma Gueto’s pioneering translations of bell hooks’ “Ain’t I a woman”, and Angela Davis’s, “Women, Race and Class” (2013 and 2014), which was a key of Black consciousness and resistance work among young people. The readings of Black authors or the study of History (as in the *Cadernos de Consciência e Resistência*, as seen previously) are awareness-raising activities that boost self-esteem, and prepare activists for a politicized intervention, grounded in the thinking of anti-colonial authors, such as Amílcar Cabral, leader of the liberation movements of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau.

A noteworthy example is the intervention of Djass—Associação de Afrodescendentes [Association of Afro-descendants] (2016). Djass was responsible for the proposal for a Tribute to Enslaved People Memorial, whose budget was approved by Lisbon city council in 2017. Among the aims of the Memorial, one finds a mix of celebration and historical recognition, such as “to pay tribute to the millions of African people who were enslaved by Portugal”, and to “highlight the historical continuities that link slavery to subsequent forms of oppression and discrimination” (Djass, 2019). The Memorial can be interpreted as a strategy to deconstruct the colonial legacy and the mental and structural decolonization of Portuguese society, analyzing the interconnections of current oppressions with the historical roots of the pro-slavery, colonial empire. This explicit decolonization project can also be found in the “Descolonizando” Facebook group, which organized a demonstration against the statue of Father António Vieira that was inaugurated by the Lisbon municipality.²³

This decolonial thought also seeks to construct a narrative of Portugal history that highlights the role of liberation struggles in overthrowing the dictatorship and building democracy and can be seen as a demand for historical reparation.²⁴ Being encouraged by Afro-descendant activists, it is also driven by historical research into colonialism in Portuguese universities, which also impacts activism.

Aligned with decolonial, recognition and reparation approaches, the recent manifesto “We are Kilombo—Together against Racism”, presented by the Kilombo Anti-Racist Intervention Platform (created in 2023), proposes a “racial democracy”:

With this manifesto, we invite everyone who identifies with the declaration presented here to work together to unite those interested in striving for a hitherto utopian, but achievable, racial democracy. (...) We do not allow any form of discrimination or denial of rights. The rule of law and democracy are untouchable (...). (Kilombo, 2023)

Also, there is a persistent mobilization of Afro-descendants in monitoring state policies through positions taken in the media, revealing a collaborative network between associations and activists without formal associative membership, as well as transnational links to other movements. Of note are initiatives such as: the “Open Letter from 22 Afro-descendant and Anti-racist Collectives to the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination” (2016); the campaign “For Another Nationality Law” so that the principle of “jus sanguinis” was changed to the principle of “jus soli”, which would give immediate access to Portuguese nationality for the children of immigrants born in Portugal (2017/2018); the proposals on the collection of ethnic-racial data in Censuses, as a way of revealing inequalities and allow the design of public policies that tackle it (2018 and 2019). Moreover, there was the “Collective Declaration: A Critical Perspective on the Creation of the

²³ António Vieira was a philosopher and missionary of the Jesuit Order, involved in the conversion to the Catholic religion of the Indigenous peoples of Brazil, in the seventeenth century. In 2020, the statue was daubed in red with the word “Decolonize”.

²⁴ On demonstration posters you can see “April 25th began in Africa”.

Racism and Xenophobia Observatory and the Exclusive Nomination of White Individuals”, also signed by Black Excellence Global (2023).

Finally, in telling stories of collective action of Afro-descendants in Portugal, we must point out demonstrations of protest and solidarity with victims of violence. As episodes worth noting as they urge and reinforce agency, we name the previous mentioned case of the Alfragide police station, the police violence in Bairro da Jamaica,²⁵ the police aggression against Cláudia Simões,²⁶ the murder of actor Bruno Candé,²⁷ and the attack on the headquarters of SOS Racismo.²⁸ And we cannot forget the strong Black Lives Matter demonstration after George Floyd’s murder in 2020.

These demonstrations and public stances highlight the continuities between current violence and colonialism and slavery, uncovering how the colonial dehumanization project perpetuates itself in structural inequalities and discrimination in Portuguese society. At this point, it is important to consider the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on Afro-descendants protest, because all the victims of the violent acts here mentioned were also a mirror of Floyd’s murder, as well as all the bodies attacked throughout colonial history and slavery until today. Furthermore, the struggles for historical reparations that have emerged at a global level support the decolonial approach of current activism. The articulation of these themes in the anti-racist debate has been deepened over the last few years, and we can see a consensus in Afro-descendant collectives’ public positions, which allows us to glimpse a Black political decolonial thought (Hanchard, 2010).

The practice of concerted mobilization between anti-racist collectives, with voiceful and visible Black leaderships in the public space, persists in recent actions, such as the solidarity campaigns with Mamadou Ba²⁹ and Cláudia Simões (2023/2024), or the Vote Against Racism Demonstration (February 24, 2024),

²⁵ Bairro da Jamaica is a racialized neighbourhood in the Greater Lisbon, subject to frequent police control. In January 2019, it was the scene of incidents between residents and the police, a case that led to protests by associations and the opening of an investigation by the Public Security Police.

²⁶ Cláudia Simões, a Black Portuguese citizen, in January 2020, was attacked by a political agent, who was not at work at the time, at a bus stop because she did not have a transport ticket for her daughter. She filed a complaint and is on trial but is also accused of assaulting the police officer.

²⁷ Bruno Candé, a Black Portuguese citizen, was victim of homicide in July 2020, after an argument on the public road in the locality where he lived. The court sentenced the killer to 22 years, demonstrating that the crime was intentionally perpetrated out of racial hatred.

²⁸ In June 2020, SOS Racismo association’s headquarters building was painted with the message “War on the enemies of my land”. In August of the same year, there was a concentration of nationalists, with their faces covered with white masks, imitating the clothing of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States.

²⁹ Black activist accused of defamation by Mário Machado, a skinhead involved in racial persecution on the night of June 10, 1995. Mamadou Ba, a leader of SOS Racismo and a renowned Black activist, has been participating in the political debate since the mid-1990s, building a link between anti-racist struggle and democracy, proposing a critical thinking about the systemic inequalities and violence linked to the colonial past, and rooted in anti-colonial authors. In 2021, Mamadou Ba won the Front Line Defenders award that distinguishes human rights activists, see <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/mamadou-ba>

before the elections for the Portuguese Parliament, as well as the Joint Action Group against Racism and Xenophobia, which celebrated the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination with a tribute to the victims of racial and xenophobic violence in Portugal, in the place where the Memorial to Enslaved People should be installed, in Lisbon (March 21, 2024).

The articulation between the various collectives, proclaimed in the Kilombo manifesto that we mentioned before, feeds the visibility of anti-racism and the agency of Black activists in the public and media sphere. All the demonstrations and campaigns are also energized by opportunities offered by digital social networks, as they allow a more organic, do-it-yourself participation, reaching more people beyond formal associations, and fueling a reciprocal net between online and street activism.³⁰ One example is the collective *Consciência Negra* [Black Consciousness] which uses Facebook as a key instrument in mobilizing various campaigns and demonstrations (e.g. the campaign “For Another Nationality Law” already mentioned).

The reciprocal influence and solidarities that arise from all these anti-racist collectives and actions feed, step by step, a public debate regarding colonial legacy and an interpretation of Portuguese history from the perspective of those categorized as “Others”. Those “Others” who refute the perpetuation of a place of “not being” created by colonial dehumanization (Fanon, 2021) and who challenge “universal subordination” (Mbembe, 2014), in search of “the right to have rights” to build an “us” as a political community (Arendt, 2014).

Afro-descendant activists’ voices do not yield to the erasure of memory, or any silencing about the past, or the present’s legacy of discrimination, and assert that “our time has come” (Picot, 2019). They mobilize with the awareness that “silence does not protect” and that visibility can make one vulnerable, but that it also boosts consciousness and resistance regarding collective struggles (Lorde 2019). Current-day Afro-descendant Portuguese activists aim to create a public space that nobody provides them with, they demand the right to “be present” (Mamadou Ba interviewed by Fernandes, 2014). This is the distinctive mark of this generation of anti-racist activism that clearly distinguishes itself from the previous stages, similar to developments in other European countries (Beaman, 2021; Fadiel & Martiniello, 2020).

11.6 Conclusion

The main features of the social and political context of the 1990s that boosted activism by African migrants and Afro-descendants still persist in Portuguese society today.³¹ However, while the structural conditions of violence and racism persist, the

³⁰As seen in the so-called fourth wave of feminism (Zimmerman, 2017).

³¹Such as: barriers in access to education, health, housing, and employment; racial profiling, abuse of authority, and police brutality; valorisation of the colonial past along with systemic racism in ways that violate both human rights and public policy (UN – HRC, 2022).

character of the anti-racist movement in recent years is, as we have seen, is quite different.

I identify a first significant wave in the trajectory of anti-racist activism in the mid-1990s until mid-2000s. After the murder of Alcindo Monteiro, there was an impulse of collective mobilization that led to the approval of the law against racial discrimination and the creation of the Anti-Racist Network (RAR). RAR was able to bring together very different associations on a common agenda and broke the political and media silence about racism in Portugal.

A new and visible anti-racist turn arrived after 2015, feeding on activists' experience over decades and the emergence of projects rooted in Black consciousness and resistance. While keeping the agenda of denunciation and protest of former associations, one can observe some distinctive features: the questioning of racism's structural character in connection with colonial history, and the Black leadership of the movement. Very different from the 70 s or 80 s, stronger than the 90 s and 2000s, activists make their voice heard without tolerating the official silence about racism, and their intervention in the public sphere can thus be seen as acts of "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2009).

Current anti-racism is not separated from previous activism. There is a continuum in this trajectory with today's struggles and protagonists building their path on the legacy and learning from past struggles. Afro-descendants and Black Portuguese activists force us to think about colonial legacies to combat structural inequalities and hierarchical powers, by proposing a democracy project that articulates policies of redistribution and recognition (Fraser, 1998). This proposal is linked to the ongoing discussion on historical repairs and results from the conviction that oppressions need to be called out and made visible so life-changing solutions can be found (Ribeiro, 2019), and the struggle for rights must be an anti-racist struggle, as "seeing race is essential to changing the system" (Eddo-Lodge, 2021, p. 104).

Anti-racism is, therefore, an heir of political struggles against colonial dehumanization. It is a struggle for "the birth of a human world, that is, a world of reciprocal recognitions" (Fanon, 2022, p. 215).

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