

Popular music groups in Lourenço Marques: what can music tell about the history of a colonial city?

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Lourenço Marques, nowadays known as Maputo, was the main city in Mozambique, a territory which was under Portuguese colonial rule until 1975. As a result of the urban planning promoted by the Portuguese colonial administration, social inequalities of the colonial system were inscribed in the urban geography of Lourenço Marques. There was the city center, known as the 'cement city', a place mainly occupied by European population from the middle/upper classes; outside of this cement city there was an extended area of neighbourhoods with poor living conditions, mainly inhabited by African population and by a smaller part of low-class Europeans and immigrants. This had an important impact in the social life of the city, reinforcing structural inequalities of the colonial system and promoting dynamics of spatial segregation, racial discrimination and creating more obstacles for those who had precarious positions in the city. In recent years, some studies have been focusing the relation between cultural expressions and social processes in the urban context of Lourenço Marques - for example, the case of football (Domingos 2012). Music was an activity with particular relevance in that context, since Lourenço Marques was a city with an intense nightlife activity, in which popular music had a notorious presence. There are already important accounts about music and the colonial context of Mozambique (Freitas 2019; Lichuge 2017; Filipe 2012; Carvalho 1997). However, the articulation between the activities of popular music groups from different areas of Lourenço Marques and the social dynamics in the city is a topic which still has a lot to explore. Its analysis can demonstrate the ambivalence felt by the individuals involved, but also the way they managed to overcome the constraints of the colonial system. With the main focus on the period between 1960 and 1975, marked by the historical processes of late colonialism (Castelo et al. 2012) this work approaches musical activities as a way to understand the daily life in a colonial city, based on ethnographic interviews, archival research and mapping techniques.

Keywords: popular music; Lourenço Marques; colonialism; Mozambique.

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