

An Enduring Paradigm of Resistance: The Resurgence of Negritude in Contemporary Black Portuguese Poetry

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Abstract: While Negritude is certainly the major ideological underpinning that inspired the poetry of Black intellectuals opposing racial subjugation in the twentieth century, its relevance in postcolonial times has been a subject of contention. The reasons for this include harsh criticisms of its essentialist character in the latter part of the twentieth century, and the presupposition of an improved reality for Blacks globally with the conclusion of colonialism. However, I argue in this article that considering the unfavorable racial experiences of Blacks in the white-dominated Portuguese society, Negritude-informed tropes have seen a resurgence in contemporary Black Portuguese poetry—even though its perspective has changed from strict focus on an essentialized Africa to an assertion of African identity within the space of the former metropole. Analyzing selected poems from *Djidiu: A herança do ouvido* (2017), I demonstrate the reappearance and overlap of themes of older-generation Negritude to confirm that the Negritude ethos continues to inspire contemporary Black Portuguese poetry.

Keywords: Negritude, Afro-Portuguese poetry, Black resistance, Portugal, *Djidiu*

In “Introdução a um colóquio sobre poesia angolana,” Agostinho Neto (1922–1979), an early proponent of Negritude in the space of the Portuguese language, states that “os poetas descobriram a negritude e a civilização negro-africana,”

highlighting how Negritude became the rallying point where Black poets began to appreciate the different forms of African civilizations (53). However, while Negritude maintains relevance as the ideological underpinning that inspired the poetry of Black intellectuals opposing racial subjugation in the mid-twentieth century, its relevance in postcolonial times has been a subject of contention. Due to harsh criticisms of its essentialist character, and the presupposition of an improved reality for Blacks globally at the conclusion of colonialism in Africa, its popularity has declined in the past decades.¹ Nevertheless, at a time when the public visibility of citizens of African descent in Portugal is on the rise, and their fight for civil rights and equality with their white counterparts in Portuguese society is the subject of heated debate, Negritude-informed tropes have seen a resurgence in contemporary Black Portuguese poetry. The unfavorable racial experience of Black minorities in the white-dominated Portuguese society has inspired them to take to poetry in what I consider a neo-Negritude gesture of Black poetic resistance. A recent anthology of poetry entitled *Djidiu: A herança do ouvido*, published in Portugal in 2017 and edited by Apolo de Carvalho and others, reflects the ethos of twentieth-century poetry of Negritude as it brings together Black poets to narrate their experiences of racism in Portugal. Focusing on the reappearance and intersection of themes from the twentieth-century poetry of Negritude present in contemporary Black Portuguese poetry, I argue that Negritude as a framework of Black critique through its politically aware and collective poetry has resurfaced as an enduring model of resistance and a historic form of Black agency that continues to inspire postcolonial Black resistance in Portugal. I demonstrate this through a critical analysis of seven poems from *Djidiu*. The poems are selected based on their alignment with themes of Black racial resistance in Portugal and beyond, such as Black racial affirmation, appreciation of African

¹ Prominent among these criticisms was that of French critic Jean-Paul Sartre in his famous *Black Orpheus* essay, which he wrote as a preface to Senghor's Negritude book *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*. Although Sartre acknowledged the importance of Negritude in restoring racial pride to the Black subject who had been debased by the colonial logic of Black inferiority, he also described Negritude as an "anti-racist racism" and went on to predict that after decolonization, the idea of race would be usurped by class and the proletarian struggle, which would lead to its eventual fall. Following Sartre, Soyinka's and Mphahlele's position on Negritude as a defensive romanticizing of Blackness that falsely homogenized diverse language groups and experiences, as well as the claim by Martinican intellectuals René Depestre, Jean Bernabé, and Patrick Chamoiseau that Negritude did not serve the heterogeneous racial composition of the Caribbean and that they would rather form their solidarity based on their material and historical circumstances, and not geography or race, were also influential.

cultural elements and aesthetics, as well as themes relating to the denouncement of racism, economic oppression, and police brutality.

The notion of Negritude's resurgence alludes to both historical patterns of Black racial oppression in Portugal and its African colonies and the legacy of radical poetic resistance in the demonstration of Black subjectivity in this space. I consider the convocation of Black poets to produce a collective poetry of resistance a neo-Negritude gesture considering that the first notable instance of a similar movement in Portugal was during the rise of Negritude in Europe, and its adoption by Lusophone African poets who studied in Portugal as assimilated subjects in the latter part of the 1930s and early 40s.² Despite an apparent change in times from the colonial to the postcolonial, the resurgence of Negritude was inevitable, as I argue, owing to persisting racial problems that continue to face Afro-descendants in Portugal. While Portuguese-speaking African poets of the twentieth century adopted the poetry of Negritude to denounce racial injustices present in their countries of origin while they lived and studied in Portugal as assimilated subjects in the colonial era, the rationale for its adoption by the contemporary generation is not so different. Their experiences of internal colonialism, as well as political and economic inequalities that relegate them to the margins of society—despite the fact that some of them are Portuguese citizens, unlike the older generation—have lingered. And the repercussion of this exploitation and its attendant racial prejudices, I argue, is what inspired their adoption of the Negritude ethos. Whereas an essentialist view of African culture and the quest for a physical return to Africa were controversial aspects of twentieth-century Black Portuguese poetry of Negritude, these elements are remarkably absent in the poems of the anthology. These new poets grapple with the challenges of being Black and Portuguese in the new cultural spaces of the former metropole.

The poems I have selected are “Basta” by Carla Fernandes, “Minha pele” by Carlos Graça, “Preto/Polícia” by LuzGomes, “África positiva” by Carla

² The group formally labeled as *assimilados* within the Portuguese colonial framework were individuals from Portuguese African colonies who, according to colonial statutes, attained a level of civilization that qualified them to enjoy the privileges of Portuguese citizenship. To qualify for this status, the individuals had to adopt a “Portuguese” lifestyle and renounce their African identity, among other requirements such as becoming a baptized Catholic, being able to speak and write Portuguese, and paying a fee. However, less than one percent of the population of the colonies qualified for the status, and even those few never enjoyed the full privileges of Portuguese citizenship due to structural racism. A critical work on the subject is José Moreira's *Os assimilados, João Albasini e as eleições, 1900–1922*.

Fernandes, “Eu sei que sou negra” by Cristina Carlos, “Coisa preta” by LuzGomes, and “África, une-te” by Dário Sambo. Through a stylistic and thematic analysis of these seven poems, I point out the persistence of the thematic preoccupations of Negritude in the poetry of Black Portuguese authors; establish connections between themes of contemporary poems and their antecedent appearance in twentieth-century Negritude poems; and discuss the contributions of the selected poems within the context of race relations in Portugal and beyond. By recognizing Negritude’s presence in contemporary Black Portuguese poetry, I demonstrate how this tradition of ideological poetry serves as a form of Black agency through its critique of the multilayered and embedded racial injustices prevalent in this society. I also demonstrate the consciousness of this group regarding their right to justice and equal dividends of citizenship with their white counterparts, even as they assert pride in their African identity.

Cheikh Thiam and Reiland Rabaka, among other scholars, have argued in favor of the relevance of Negritude in the twenty-first century. In his book *Return to the Kingdom of Childhood: Re-Envisioning the Legacy and Philosophical Relevance of Negritude*, Thiam discusses Léopold Sédar Senghor’s philosophy and its universal applicability. In the same vein, Rabaka, in the conclusion of his book *The Negritude Movement: W.E.B. Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aime Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea*, weighs in on what he calls the mutation of classical colonialism into neocolonialism and writes:

For those of us who understand that racialization always and everywhere accompanies colonization in continental and diasporan Africa, and for those of us who . . . continue to wrestle with issues of assimilation, alienation, hybridization, creolization . . . the Negritude movement, and specifically the respective theories and praxes of Damas, Césaire and Senghor remain relevant. (332)

My article complements the work of these scholars through its critical focus on contemporary Black Portuguese poetry. This group usually receives marginal attention in studies of manifestations of Black subjectivities in the African diaspora, a reality partly owing to the supposed veiled nature of anti-Black racism in Portugal maintained through the discourse of Lusotropicalism that has been

fostered by official discourse since the 1950s.³ Recent works published on this population have focused on the representation and presence of Blacks in Portugal through film and music.⁴ My focus on poetry is in recognition of the growing Black poetic movement in Portugal;⁵ I seek to further bring visibility to this group and their struggles by highlighting the critical role of contemporary Black poetic manifestation in Portugal.

Contextualizing Negritude and Its Presence in Black Portuguese Poetry

The coining of the term *Negritude* traces back to the 1935 publication of the student magazine *L'étudiant noir* (*The Black Student*) by the trio Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Léon Damas from French Guyana, and Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal. These three Black intellectuals at the time were students from French colonies studying in Paris, and they utilized the term to express diverse aspects of their Blackness, as well as to resist Black racial subjugation, particularly in written poetry. One of the term's earliest appearances in poetry is in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, 1939), where he uses it to represent the feelings of a Black subject from the French Caribbean colony who finds himself in France. As illustrated in this excerpt—"My negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day / My negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's dead eye / My negritude is neither tower nor cathedral in 1935" (41)—it conveys the human sensibility of the Black individual. Metaphorically, the term also serves the ideological role of resignifying Blackness given the derogatory connotations of *nègre*, the French word for *black*, which is used to refer to people of African descent.

³ *Lusotropicalism* refers to the concept coined by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre based on the idea that Portuguese colonialists were much fairer than other European colonialists because of their greater social plasticity as evident in the widespread miscegenation in their colonies. This idea was mainly developed in his book *Casa-grande e senzala*. The rhetoric was adopted by the Portuguese Estado Novo regime in the mid-twentieth century as the then dictator, António Salazar, sponsored Freyre on a tour of former Portuguese colonies.

⁴ A few notable works include Fernando Arenas's articles on cinematic representations of Afro-Portuguese people (2012, 2017), Derek Pardue's book *Cape Verde, Let's Go: Creole Rappers and Citizenship in Portugal*, and Pedro Schacht Pereira's article entitled "'Dance Is a Disguise': Batida and the Infrapolitics of Dance Music in Postcolonial Portugal."

⁵ Apart from *Djidiu*, other prominent recently published anthologies focusing on themes of Black racial experience in Portugal include *Volta para tua terra: Uma antologia antirracista/antifascista de poetas estrangeiros em Portugal*, edited by Manuella Bezerra de Melo and Wladimir Vaz, and *Ingenuidade inocência ignorância* by Raquel Lima.

In a broader reconceptualization of the Negritude ideology, Léopold Senghor, who later became the representative figure of the movement, describes it as the totality of the Black individual's demonstration of subjectivity: "Negritude means the entire values of the civilization of the black world as they are expressed in the life and the works of blacks" (qtd. in Mabana 4). Consequently, Senghor, Césaire, and Damas—all three proponents of Negritude—would inspire through their works a wider acceptance of its ideological spirit in the twentieth century, as it spread to other geographical spaces.

Given the similarity of the colonial experiences of Blacks from the French and Portuguese colonies, Negritude was adopted by Portuguese-speaking African intellectuals who at the time were studying in the Portuguese metropole. Pires Laranjeira indicates that "desde 1953 (quando os poetas já conheciam Césaire, Senghor, Guillén, Hughes e Depestre), a Negritude é descrita, por Mário de Andrade, como o movimento cultural destinado a sancionar a reivindicação da inclusão do 'novo negro,' o negro-africano ocidentalizado, no contexto económico, social e políticos dos espaços onde vive" (124). In his collection of essays, *Negritude africana de língua portuguesa: Textos de apoio (1947–1963)*, he similarly contends that texts by Portuguese-speaking African authors at that time show an assimilation of the Francophone Negritude to create its Lusophone equivalent (vii). Along the same line, Ebenezer Omoteso affirms that Lusophone African poets demonstrated a commitment to the freedom of Blacks against colonialism similar to that exemplified by Francophone poets of Negritude ("Negritude" 272), further revealing the impact of this framework of Black literary resistance.

In *A negritude e as lutas pelas independências na África portuguesa*, Eduardo dos Santos states that the famous Casa dos Estudantes do Império⁶ was instrumental to establishing the prominence of Negritude in the space of the Portuguese language as it became the cradle of Negritude poets (51). John Haggstrom contends in his doctoral dissertation, *Negritude and Afro-Portuguese Poetry*, that the "Negritude movement also provided Lusophone students, writers, and intellectuals with inspiration and helped them return to their African roots" (220).

⁶ The Casa dos Estudantes do Império was a house established in 1944 by the Portuguese government to support students from the Portuguese African colonies who were in Lisbon for their higher studies. It became the birthplace of the nationalist movements in the colonies.

Djidiu: A herança do ouvido builds on the various volumes of the *Antologia da poesia negra de expressão portuguesa* published by Angolan intellectual Mário Pinto de Andrade (1928–1990) in the 1950s. While the latter is focused on the experiences of being Black during the peak of nationalist movements and struggles against colonialism across Africa, the former demonstrates how Blacks in contemporary Portugal grapple and respond to forces of neocolonialism, racism, and marginalization. Portuguese sociologist Cristina Roldão, in her preface to the anthology, describes *Djidiu: A herança do ouvido* as inscribed in a heritage of Black racial resistance—“este livro inscreve-se numa herança de resistência cultural e política negra através da produção literária coletiva”—situating it within the collective nature of literary productions by Black poets since the twentieth century (11). The idea of collective poetry within this space was what gave rise to the *Antologia da poesia negra de expressão portuguesa*, an initiative that first brought visibility to the poetic productions of Lusophone African poets in the mid-1950s.

Djidiu: A herança do ouvido presents various themes of Black racial experience in Portugal and comprises poems presented by members of the Lisbon-based Afrolis—Associação cultural in their monthly meetings between March 2016 and March 2017. It is significant as the first major Black Portuguese poetry anthology of the twenty-first century. The group Afrolis started off as a radio blog known as *Rádio Afrolis* in April 2014 with the goal of having Black racial experiences in Portugal heard through radio interviews. In 2015, the name of the group was changed to Afrolis—Associação cultural, with a view to extending its operations beyond radio by becoming involved in community development initiatives. Its monthly poetry recitation culminated in the anthology. Although divided into twelve sections based on the distinct monthly thematic focuses, the poems maintain an interrelated entanglement of a racially centered ideological resistance. The leader of Afrolis is Carla Fernandes, a Portuguese journalist of Angolan origin, who studied at the University of Lisbon, earning a degree in English and German translation. Other poets featured in the anthology include Apolo de Carvalho, Carla Lima, Carlos Graça, Cristina Carlos, Danilson Pires, Dário Sambo, the Brazilian poet LuzGomes, and Té Abipiquerst Té.

Analysis of Negritude in Djidui: A herança do ouvido

The word *Djidui* has its root in the Mandé linguistic family of the Mandinka, an ethnic group spread across West African countries such as Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal. It carries the meaning of “storyteller,” a custodian of a collective ancestral memory who also bears the responsibility of transmitting this memory between generations. The *djidui* is considered a spokesperson for the voiceless, a role like that of a griot. Here, the title refers to the pivotal role of these published poets as spokespeople for fellow Blacks.

My analysis of the appearance of tropes of Negritude in this anthology begins with the poem “Basta” by Carla Fernandes. The title means “enough” in English, and in this poem, the poetic voice denounces the oppressive realities of Blacks in the workplace. Structured as a one-way conversation, the poetic voice issues an ultimatum for an end to the paternalistic and racially motivated economic exploitation of Blacks by their employers:

Basta
Quero mudar de casta
Quero sair desta vida que se arrasta
Posso?
Posso agora dizer-te algo patrão, posso?
Quero dizer-te que tenho vontade própria!
Quero dizer-te que tenho sonhos próprios. (*Djidui* 20)

The verses depict a scenario of confrontation where Fernandes’s poetic voice directs her frustration to her presumably white boss. Her assertion “Quero mudar de casta” clearly refers to the caste system of social stratification where characteristics such as racial purity among other attributes constitute the basis for societal privileges. While this system is mostly practiced in India, and in parts of Latin America during the colonial era, its reference here alludes to the legacy of Eurocentric dialectical concepts of race that put whites above Blacks in society. Isabel Wilkerson, in her book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, writes of European colonizers in Latin America and the United States: “And thus, a hierarchy evolved in the New World they created, one that set those with the lightest skin above those with the darkest. Those who were darkest, and those who

descended from those who were darkest, would be assigned to the subordinate caste of America for centuries” (103). Wilkerson goes on to even accuse of a hardened caste structure in the United States since the end of slavery in 1865. In a similar manner, the poetic voice in “Basta” accuses a continuation of the caste system in Portugal, and asserts that as a human being, she has her own desires and dreams and thus wants to change her caste position. In a critique of racial stereotypes, she proceeds to inform her boss about her family:

Posso agora dizer-te algo patrão, posso?
Quero dizer-te que a minha mãe não é uma prostituta
O meu pai não é um ladrão
O meu irmão não é um delinquente
Somos gente! (*Djidiu* 20)

The need for her to assert that her mother is not a prostitute, her father is not a thief, and her brother is not a delinquent denounces the presence of racial stereotypes in Portuguese society.⁷ Her affirmation “Somos gente!” becomes a claim of humanity in a racist society where Blacks are seen as deviants. In a continued assertion of her humanity, she affirms the hardworking character of her kin, as she further criticizes the paternalistic exploitation of Black people through false hopes of betterment without the necessary institutional restructuring. In her words:

Gente que sente o tempo a passar
E as mentalidades a estagnar
Gente que trabalha e dá no duro
Só para ouvir a sociedade inteira dizer: “Não vos aturo!”
“A vida vai melhorar” dizes tu.
Palmadinha nas costas, sorrisinho nos lábios,
Paternalismo incorporado de quem sabe
que o sistema de casta essa mudança não permite.

⁷ Evidence of manifestation of racial stereotypes in Portugal has been extensively documented by Portuguese author and social commentator Joana Gorjão Henriques. See her series “Racismo à portuguesa” in the Portuguese newspaper *Público*: <https://acervo.publico.pt/racismo-a-portuguesa>. Some of her other publications about race in Portugal include the books *Racismo em português: O lado esquecido do colonialismo* and *Racismo no país dos brancos costumes*.

Patrão, és um hipócrita, admite! Aí está, já disse!
Basta! (*Djidiu* 21)

The penultimate verse in the above quotation accuses her employer of hypocrisy, in a critique of the oppressive power structure that undermines the complete liberation of Black people. Fernandes in this poem essentially demonstrates Negritude's ethos through her critique of the unjust dynamics of race relations that are manifested in the forms of economic exploitation, racial paternalism, negative racial stereotyping, and racism against Blacks in Portugal. The multiple references to *patrão* (boss) in this poem are reminiscent of the Portuguese policy of *contratado*, where Blacks in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa were also exploited as cheap sources of labor.⁸ Similar to "Basta," mid-twentieth-century Negritude poems such as "Monangamba" (1958) by António Jacinto and "Grito negro" (1964) by José Craveirinha also criticize the economic exploitation of Black subjects within the Portuguese colonial framework. For example, in "Grito negro," Craveirinha's invocation of the metaphor of "carvão" and "patrão" represents an even more fiery affirmation of resistance than in Fernandes. The African subject in this poem tells his boss:

Eu sou carvão
Tenho que arder
Queimar tudo com o fogo da minha combustão.
Sim!
Eu sou o teu carvão, patrão! (*Djidiu* 27)

This poetic subject threatens to someday be the fuel that burns down the whole machinery of exploitation, unlike Fernandes, whose outcry for an end to the exploitation in "Basta" is without violent connotations. The undertone of the verses from "Grito negro" quoted above demonstrates the anger of the poetic subject regarding the abuse of Black laborers, reflecting the revolutionary spirit of Craveirinha, who wrote in the context of colonial Mozambique in the '60s, which

⁸ *Contratado* refers to the Portuguese policy of contract labor, where subjects from Portuguese colonies in Africa were taken to work in mines in South Africa and São Tomé. However, critics have contended that the term was a euphemism for forced labor, since the workers were forcefully recruited and toiled under severe exploitative circumstances. For more discussion on this, see Omoteso's article "Contratado: Forced Relations in Lusophone African Literature."

was marked by the Guerra de Libertação (1961–1974) across Portuguese colonies in Africa. From the intertextuality between Craveirinha’s and Fernandes’s poems, it is evident how the experiences of racial paternalism by contemporary Blacks in Portugal are a carryover of the Portuguese Lusotropical sentiment. And this fact makes Fernandes’s poem both a continuation of the same tradition of poetic resistance and a tribute to twentieth-century Portuguese-speaking poets of Negritude.

In addition to addressing economic exploitation, the anthology also considers other forms of racial prejudice. Carlos Graça’s poem “Minha pele,” for example, focuses on the physical appearance of the poetic subject to reveal and criticize presuppositions of Black people as potential criminals. This provocative poem is written in a personal tone and could be read as a lamentation:

Esta é sobre a pele . . .
Sobre a minha cor que faz com que, numa rua pouco iluminada,
Seja apontado como um possível ladrão ou agressor. (*Djidiu 24*)

In the verses cited above, the poetic voice addresses a recurrent concern regarding the negative racial stereotyping of Blacks as criminally inclined. He goes on to debunk the myth that seeks to reduce racism to a mere social class problem when he writes:

Apesar de ser o único que sofre das suas consequências,
devido às aparências físicas:
Nariz largo, lábios grandes, tez escura . . .
Mas há quem diga que o racismo apenas tem a ver com a estatura
social
E que o mesmo não é de todo estrutural. (*Djidiu 24*)

Further, he refutes the accusation of victimhood by a section of the society who would rather deemphasize racism and name class difference as the problem. To drive home his point on this negation of racism, he declares: “Seja a nível laboral, judicial, que NÓS / SIM, NÓS é que vemos mal em tudo!” (*Djidiu 24*). The two verses present a double sense: the poetic voice establishes the victimhood rhetoric held on to by some sections of the Portuguese society that claim that Blacks

deliberately choose to see negatives in all things; however, his choice to capitalize the words “NÓS SIM, NÓS” constitutes an ironic acceptance of the accusation, in what represents in itself a form of resistance. The irony here is obvious if we consider how conversations about racial issues continue to be a taboo at the governmental level in Portugal owing to the claim of color blindness.⁹ As of 2023, the Portuguese Constitution, despite the protests of the country’s minority Black population, still prevents direct and indirect registration of data on race and ethnicity of its inhabitants under the presumption that it reinforces racial stereotypes.¹⁰ Perhaps it is owing to this reluctance to constitutionally admit possibilities of racially motivated prejudices and the consequent denial of racism that Graça accuses Portuguese society of a culture of silent complicity. In his words: “percebe que racista não é só quem oprime, / Mas também quem se faz de cego, surdo e mudo” (*Djidiu* 24). Clearly, the apparent fear of the collection of information on race and ethnicity has to do with the social readjustments that will need to be made once the race-based social inequality of the country is documented. In a journalistic piece in *The Guardian*, Portuguese author and social critic Joana Gorjão Henriques describes this lack of data collection on race and ethnicity as deriving from a notion of “racial blindness,” an ideological attitude and form of hypocrisy that aims to foster the notion of Portugal as a uniformly white country:

There are ideological reasons behind this attitude too. Some argue that identifying people by their race is discriminatory. There seems to be a similar logic behind the fact that Portuguese authorities keep no data on ethnicity or race. . . . Ignoring race completely means burying your head in the sand and accepting Portugal as a country that is uniformly white. We are race blind, but not for the right reasons. (“Portugal”)

Furthermore, Graça’s poetic subject calls out the systemic racial prejudice regarding the unequal value accorded to the lives of Black people in relation to whites. He states, “Continuaremos a ser considerados 1/5 de um ser humano,” and

⁹ Color blindness in racial terms refers to the notion that implementing racial classification implies a form of racial separation and distinction, which is a form of racism.

¹⁰ These protests are both physical and literary. This anthology and many similar are fruits of these protests.

in backing his accusation, he criticizes the hypocrisy of the West in giving more attention and solidarity to the death of six people in Paris than to the two thousand lives lost in Nigeria: “Daí que 2000 vidas na Nigéria / Tenham menos peso que 6 em Paris” (*Djidiu* 25). Graça’s critique in this poem becomes relevant in light of the biased media campaigns that have over the years normalized a state of crisis within the African continent, ideologically portraying it as retrograde and reducing its people to stereotypes of barbaric and war-loving in order to normalize their deaths, despite their occurrence under abnormal circumstances. In the verses that follow—“Que África continue a ser falada e tratada / Como se tratasse de um país; / Que a sua história seja contada apenas a partir de um momento infeliz”—Graça furthers his criticism of the Western world’s belittling posture toward the African continent, which is often referred to as a country, its history continually portrayed in a negative manner (*Djidiu* 25). Clearly, these criticisms are directed at agencies of the West such as its institutions of learning and media, which for political reasons show bias in the way they propagate knowledge about Africa. Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina famously formulated this criticism in his widely read satire “How to Write about Africa,” in which he analyzed a variety of common negative clichés about the African continent, mocking Western preconceptions about Africa and its peoples.

To end the poem, Graça, in a form typical of colonial Negritude poems, issues a call to resistance: “Homens e mulheres pretas resistem”; and follows up with a political resignification of words commonly used to refer pejoratively to Black subjects:

Mas apesar do preto estar conotado como morte e azar,
Os nossos dias serão cada vez mais NEEGROS, como a noite mais
escura.
As nossas mentes serão tão denegridas com conhecimento,
Que nos libertaremos desta escravatura linguística
Que fique bem escuro,
E lembrem-se que como Assata Shakur, disse:
“Um muro é apenas só um muro . . . Ele pode ser quebrado.”
(*Djidiu* 25)

Graça attempts to resignify the connotations of the words “NEEGROS,” “denegridas,” and “escuro” through his joint usage of negative and positive signifiers. Having started with a negative signifier in “apesar do preto estar conotado como morte e azar,” the words “NEEGROS,” “denegridas,” and “escuro” in the verses that follow now become elements of affirmation, taking on positive meanings. Explaining his action in subsequent verses, he affirms, “Que nos libertaremos desta escravatura linguística / Que fique bem escuro” to demonstrate his awareness of the politicization of language. And with his substitution of *escuro* for *claro* in the popular expression “que fique bem claro” (let it be clear) blackness now becomes a positive signifier in the context. To further capture his hope of victory in the struggle against racial injustice, Graça references famous African American political activist and former member of the Black Liberation Army Assata Shakur, employing her phrase of hope in the verses “Um muro é apenas só um muro. . . . Ele pode ser quebrado” to affirm his confidence in an eventual victory in the struggle for Black racial equality.¹¹

The denouncement of racism and the call for racial solidarity through an awareness of shared humiliation as Black subjects across geographical spaces are some of the apparent themes in Carlos Graça’s “Minha pele,” thus situating the poet within the conceptual purview of Preto-Rodas’s definition of the first level of Negritude. According to Preto-Rodas, “The first level of Negritude, an awareness of shared humiliation, is basic to the work of any poet who subscribes to its tenets” (3). Clearly, without this awareness, Negritude would not have had as much resonance as it did and continues to, even among contemporary generations of Blacks.

The poem “Preto/Polícia,” by the Brazilian poet who writes under the pseudonym LuzGomes, focuses on the presuppositions of Blacks as criminally inclined and considers how institutions of the state partake in their repression. In this vein, she examines the relationship between the police institution and Black people. Structured like a protest chant, this poem represents a poetic denouncement of police brutality. We see repeated the encounters between the two subjects of the poem, *preto* (Black subject) and *polícia* (police), and the various negative outcomes that proceed from such encounters:

¹¹ The original quote from Shakur is “And, If I know anything at all / It’s that a wall is just a wall / And nothing more at all / It can be broken down” (1). It is from her poem “Affirmation.” See *Assata: An Autobiography*.

Preto . . . polícia . . . polícia . . . preto . . . medo . . .
Preto . . . polícia . . . polícia . . . preto . . . desespero . . .
Preto . . . polícia . . . polícia . . . preto . . . dismantelo . . .
Preto . . . polícia . . . polícia . . . preto . . . berreiro . . .
Preto . . . polícia . . . polícia . . . preto . . . desassossego . . .
Preto . . . polícia . . . polícia . . . preto . . . decesso . . . (*Djidiu* 26)

Through beautifully composed and succinct verses, this poem demonstrates not only the negative impacts of encounters between the police and Black subjects, but also how these escalate, from a traumatic psychological experience of fear, hopelessness, and restlessness to eventual death. LuzGomes employs the poetic technique of anaphora, repeating “Preto . . . polícia . . . polícia . . . preto . . .” for emphasis and deeper effect. While the police should protect all lives, police presence terrorizes and takes away Black lives. Joana Gorjão Henriques emphasizes the severity of police brutality in Portugal in her book *Racismo no país dos brancos costumes*, asserting that the police institution has become a machine of anti-Black racial oppression, brutalizing Black people today in a manner comparable to what was once meted out by officers of the Portuguese colonial regime. According to her, “Se no tempo colonial os senhores chicoteavam os negros de sol a sol em regime forçado, hoje a polícia entra nos bairros desfavorecidos à queima-roupa e brutaliza jovens negros, homens ou mulheres” (17).

Similar denouncement of police brutality was also manifested in several mid-twentieth-century poems of Negritude by African poets writing in Portuguese, specifically in response to Salazar’s New State regime (1933–1974). Abílio Duarte’s “Não chorem, Pai e Mãe” (1979), “Salazar espantado” (1979), and “Outrora sofriram os angolanos” (1979) are examples of poems written to criticize the Estado Novo, as well as lament the treatment of Blacks by the Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado during the colonial period.¹² LuzGomes’s criticism in “Preto/Polícia” is the same echoed by the Black Lives Matter

¹² PIDE was a Portuguese security agency created in 1945 during the Estado Novo regime. Its formal roles included securing the country’s borders, immigration control, and internal and external State security. However, it became the machinery with which the Portuguese government terrorized African natives in their quest for independence.

movement in its various protests across the United States of America, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

It is important to point out that LuzGomes's experience as a Brazilian must have contributed to her critical perception of the reality of police brutality in Portugal. Having lived within an arguably harsher reality of Black racial genocide and extreme police brutality in Brazil,¹³ she possesses a critical lens that allows her to see these forms of abuses perhaps even more than her Black Portuguese counterparts are able to do. Additionally, the poem demonstrates how the resurgence of Negritude in contemporary Portugal benefits from the presence of Black Brazilians, who through their experiences of an arguably longer history of racial resistance offer critical perspectives regarding the situation of Blacks in Portugal.

A series of poems that pay homage to Blackness and African origin further demonstrate how Afro-descendant Portuguese-speaking poets affirm their Negritude in contemporary Portuguese society. In Carla Fernandes's "África positiva," the speaker cogitates on the African continent, describing it as motherland: "o continente mãe de todos nós" (*Djidiu* 45). Through her use of personification, she attributes a voice and personality to Africa, and asserts that this voice comes alive in the color black—"cuja voz se ouve na cor negra"—alluding to Black people as representative of Africa. And in the verse "um calor que se sente no bater do coração silencioso" she invokes the metaphor of hot weather—a distinctive characteristic of the African continent—to describe the yearnings of motherland Africa for her children in the face of a harsh reality of transformation within the continent. Fernandes writes:

África
O continente mãe de todos nós
Cuja voz se ouve na cor negra
África
Um calor que se sente no bater do coração silencioso
perante as dificuldades gritantes de um devir,

¹³ See Abdias Nascimento's *O genocídio do negro brasileiro: Processo de um racismo mascarado*, which analyzes the insidious anti-Black racism in Brazil, and how it disproportionately takes away Black lives.

Que se adivinha pelo sentir da sua pulsação estridente, ardente,
sorridente
do apelo dos seus filhos
Premiados pelo seu amor
Pelo amor do seu calor. (*Djidiu* 45)

The last four verses of the poem spell out the passion with which mother Africa longs for her children, owing to forced dislocation caused by the slave trade and postcolonial economic migration that took them beyond the continent's shores.

The personification of Africa as mother was common in twentieth-century poems of Negritude. Pires Laranjeira comments:

A África mitifica-se como o grande continente de esplendorosas civilizações, de onde irradiaram para a *diáspora* de todo o mundo . . . e cuja terra se constitui na grande *mater* da *raça* negra (é comum na poesia africana surgirem os temas e expressões da “Mãe-Terra”, “Mãe-África” e “Mãe Negra”, etc.). (394)

Costa Andrade's “Mãe terra” (1949) and Armando Guebuza's “Mãe Africa” (1979) are two examples; Noémia de Sousa's invocation of the metaphor of mother in the first stanza of her poem “Sangue negro” (1949)—“Ó minha África misteriosa, natural! Minha virgem violentada! Minha Mãe!” (151)—denounces the rape of Africa through the invasion of European colonizers. Evidently, Fernandes's “África positiva” is a Negritude poem in the order of Senghor's “Black Woman” (1949), given the way both poets eulogize the strength and resilience of the African continent despite her rape through slave trade and colonization. In “A Defence of Negritude: A Propos of *Black Orpheus* by Jean Paul Sartre,” Abiola Irele writes:

The poets of negritude construct a dream image of the African past, of a negro “golden age.” This is a natural enough phenomenon; in times of sorrow, one dreams of happier times. But in the case of the negro poet, his aspiration also takes the form of a vindication of his myth through a revalorization of African values. (40)

There is a memory trope in the way poets represented in *Djidiu: A herança do ouvido* refer to Africa. Even though they are not physically on the continent, they retain pride in their African origin through their remembrance and imaginations of it.

In the poem “Eu sei que sou negra” by Cristina Carlos, we repeatedly witness the affirmation of self by the female subject. The first two verses—“Eu sei que sou negra, / É impossível esquecer, mesmo que queira” (*Djidiu* 101)— present a discourse of identity and self-acceptance, which is developed in subsequent verses:

Não me consigo esconder de todos os espelhos
Tapei os que estavam pendurados na minha casa
Alisei os cabelos, afinei o português e cantei o fado dos heróis do
mar
Mas outros espelhos me perseguem
Espelhos que brilham nos olhos dos outros. (*Djidiu* 101)

Carlos uses the metaphor of mirror (*espelho*) to refer to society’s judgmental eyes and constructed ideals of European feminine beauty, and how these persecute her because of her position as the Other—in other words, for being Black in a white-dominated society. She further explains how these eyes interrogate her existence in order to point out her differences or demonstrate her otherness: “Que procuram na raiz do meu cabelo, no gingar do meu andar / O som distinto do meu fado” (*Djidiu* 101). Carlos uses the metaphor of fado, a popular Portuguese musical genre, to reflect on the state of racial hierarchies in the access to cultural patrimonies. Her Blackness invalidates her performance of this musical genre since the white society perceives her as foreign, or not Portuguese enough. Nevertheless, through her response—“Eu sei que eu sou negra”—she resists by claiming her self-acceptance and self-pride as a Black woman. In the verses that follow, she further relates how these sad experiences, shared by other Black women, deeply affect their humanity:

E nem é que eu o queira esconder
Mas por vezes a cor fere, como em carne
Deixando marcas que não sendo minhas
São carregadas por mim e por toda a mulher negra

E sigo evitando o olhar a marca
Cobrindo-me num fato que de tão apertado
Por vezes sufoco-me num pranto silencioso
Que ecoa num fado, numa morna ou num *blues*. (*Djidiu* 103)

We see in these verses the negative emotional impacts of anti-Black racism on Black women. Carlos compares this experience to a physical injury that hurts to tears. She acknowledges the struggles and conquests of Black racial visibility by many before her through the verses “E, como eu, muitas antes de mim / Lutaram, marcharam e triunfaram / para que eu pudesse estar aqui” (*Djidiu* 103). The poem ends:

Consciente de ser negra
Num tempo de estranhas contradições
Onde ser negra ainda é uma sentença
E mesmo assim encontrar forças para simplesmente ser negra.
(*Djidiu* 103)

In other words, Carlos acknowledges how assuming Blackness in a racist society where being Black is seen as an inferior category in itself represents a form of courage and empowerment.

In summary, the poem “Eu sei que sou negra” describes the negative experiences of Black women in societies dominated by Eurocentric standards of beauty, and how women such as Carlos claim their subjectivity by questioning the Eurocentric conditioning of womanhood in Portuguese society while taking pride in their Blackness. This important act echoes Aimé Césaire’s definition of Negritude, as quoted by Irele: “Negritude is the simple recognition of the fact of being black, and the acceptance of this fact, of our destiny as black people, of our history and our culture” (*African Experience* 67–68). The poem’s focus on the figure of the Black woman is characteristic of Negritude and its objective of dignifying Black people and their cultural aesthetics.¹⁴

¹⁴ A similar Negritude poem that talks about the condition of the Black woman is Noémia de Sousa’s classic “Negra” (“Black Woman”), in which she praises the resilience of the Black woman and uses this figure as a metaphor to illustrate the strength of the African continent in the face of colonial invasion and exploitation. “Negra” is part of de Sousa’s anthology entitled *Sangue negro*. Although the anthology was published in 2000, the poems were written between 1948 and 1951.

In a similar thematic preoccupation to “Eu sei que sou negra” regarding racial pride, LuzGomes in “Coisa preta” makes an even more critical assertion about being Black. The poet’s specific choice of the word “negritude” to describe her Blackness in this poem makes it pertinent to this analysis:

Quero celebrar a minha negritude todos os dias . . . Não quero ter
consciência negra . . .
Quero viver a minha pele preta . . . E nesse novembro negro . . .
Quero um novembro negro de amor . . . Quero um novembro
negro
sem dor . . . Quero um novembro negro de calor . . .
Quero um novembro negro de abraços sem pudor . . .
Para que as coisas fiquem negramente pretas . . . (*Djidiu* 104)

We see in these verses an affirmation of racial pride by a subject who would rather celebrate her Blackness daily than anticipate its periodic celebration in the name of a designated Black-consciousness event (in Brazil, November is the Black Consciousness Month). It is important to recall here that LuzGomes is a Black Brazilian scholar who lived in Lisbon at the time of the publication of the anthology and was active within the city’s Black intellectual circles. The poetic voice’s rejection of the notion of a periodic Black-consciousness celebratory event is seen in the assertion “Não quero ter consciência negra.” It is possible to consider this rejection in the light of the constant allusions such events make to the history of slavery and the unimproved overwhelming reality of racial prejudice. Consequently, through the anaphoric repetition of “quero” in the verses quoted below, the subject’s assertion of her desires for the month of November becomes a motif of racial affirmation that questions the notion of a designated periodic celebration of Black consciousness:

Quero viver a minha pele . . .
E nesse novembro negro . . .
Quero um novembro negro de amor . . .
Quero um novembro negro sem dor . . .
Quero um novembro negro de calor . . .
Quero um novembro negro de abraços sem pudor . . .

Para que as coisas fiquem negramente pretas. (*Djidiu* 104)

The last verse spells out the poetic voice's desire: a timeless normalization of Blackness rather than a periodic celebration, in what can be described as an existential approach to Negritude—to affirm its universality. The idea is reminiscent of Abiola Irele's statement that "Negritude is . . . a great human ideal, a reinsertion of the original vitality of a race into the great collective power of the human race" ("Defence" 41). In her poem, LuzGomes exhibits a radical consciousness of Negritude that not only seeks to affirm Blackness but makes a case for its revalorization through a universal normalization rather than occasional celebration.

Finally, in another Negritude-influenced poem entitled "África, une-te," by Dário Sambo, the poetic voice urges Africans to unite, and to mentally recuperate and valorize their sense of origin. The poem opens: "Une-te porque temos que africana – mente abandonar essa babilónia / Une-te porque temos que voltar" (132). His choice of the term "babilónia" to describe the estranged land Africans must abandon signals his contempt for this space—the word is imbued with the pejorative meaning of an oppressive or degenerate society and signifies exile in its historical usage as seen in Luís Vaz de Camões's "Sôbolos rios que vão." Another important keyword in the poem is *mente*, referring to the mindset or mentality of the Afro-descendants:

Está na hora de voltar urgente – mente para casa da nossa mãe
Lembras-te de como era bom?
De como eram bons os tempos antes do mundele
Antes dele vir e dizer que tudo era dele
Lembras-te que a união faz a força mas que a força fez a nossa
desunião?
Portanto, África, Une-te
Une-te porque seus filhos precisam de voltar para casa,
Trilhar o caminho antigo há muito perdido
Voltar a raiz da mulembeira em que nós sentávamos para receber
a herança do ouvido.
África, Une-te! (*Djidiu* 132)

We see in the lines above the urgency with which the return to Africa must happen, and by describing the destination as “a casa da nossa mãe,” the poet represents the African continent as a maternal figure, similar to Fernandes’s “Africa positiva” (*Djidiu* 132). However, the return here is symbolic, as the poet’s wordplay (“africana – mente,” “urgente – mente”) reveals his emphasis on the mindset (*mente*) of the Black individual. Thus, the poet advocates for a decolonization of the Black mind through the appreciation of African heritage and a consequent desertion of Eurocentric values imposed through colonization and assimilation. He seeks to evoke the memory of Blacks regarding their history before the arrival of the European colonizer when he asks: “Lembras-te de como era bom? / De como eram bons os tempos antes do mundele¹⁵ / Antes dele vir e dizer que tudo era dele” (*Djidiu* 132). Sambo goes on to use the image of the mulembeira tree¹⁶ to emphasize the need to return to African roots: “Voltar a raiz da mulembeira em que nós sentávamos para receber a herança do ouvido” (*Djidiu* 132). He finishes with the final call for Africans to unite, here blending the people with the continent in his direct address: “África, Une-te!” (*Djidiu* 132).

Sambo’s poem is directed to diasporic Afro-descendants, those whose ancestors were forcefully taken as slaves to the New World and others whose parents migrated owing to political and economic instabilities created in part by past colonial exploitation and wars, among other forces. The principal theme here is the unity of Black people—specifically, in the case of Portugal, the unity of Blacks of different ancestry and linguistic-cultural backgrounds (Cape Verdean, Guinean, Angolan, Mozambican, etc.) and their need to embark on the symbolic return to appreciate their African identity. Bernd Reiter describes how Afro-descendants in contemporary Portuguese society are being socially forced to undermine their African origin and values and embrace a Portuguese identity in order to fit into society. He writes of his interview experience during his sociological study on ethnicization and Black citizenship in Portugal:

It also became evident during my interviews that the pressure on young blacks to assimilate Portuguese culture was extremely

¹⁵ A term used to refer to a white or a European person in Lingala, a Bantu language spoken in the northwestern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and different parts of Central Africa, particularly Northern Angola, which shares borders with Congo.

¹⁶ A tree found across western and southern regions of Africa. It is famous for its large shield and typically people would gather underneath it.

pervasive and even violent. Some of the young black Portuguese I interviewed seemed to have adhered to an extreme conformism and developed something like “hyperportuguese” manners. They behaved “more Portuguese” than any white citizen I met, downplaying their African cultural heritage, and denying that they had ever personally experienced any racial prejudice, which is very unlikely, even more as all of them declared that white Portuguese were racist towards blacks. (409)

Certainly, experiences such as Reiter describes are justifiable reasons for the urgent return Dário Sambo clamors for in “África, Une-te!” The poem demonstrates the decolonial character of Negritude-influenced poetry in the way it educates diasporic Afro-descendants to desert Eurocentric ideals for African values and cultural aesthetics.

Conclusion

The poems analyzed in this article contain various themes characteristic of a Negritude-inspired poetry: the denouncement of racism and racially motivated economic exploitation, the importance of racial solidarity, racial awareness, racial revalorization, affirmation of Black pride, universalization of Blackness, and Black racial unity. Clearly, the unfavorable racial experience of Blacks in Portugal is what warranted their revivification of Negritude-inspired ethos in this poetry, in a manner similar to twentieth-century Lusophone African intellectuals who adopted the same inspiration while they lived and studied in the Portuguese metropole. While one might suppose that the sentiments of racism that characterized race relations under slavery and colonialism would have evaporated over the years, contemporary issues raised in the different poems analyzed here reveal that Black subjects still face diverse, racially motivated prejudices comparable to those of colonial times—hence their embrace of Negritude.

Although “Coisa preta” is the only poem in which Negritude is explicitly mentioned, one cannot but observe that the ethos of Negritude radiates in all the analyzed poems as the paradigm of resistance that inspires contemporary Black Portuguese poetry. Through references to the continuous domination of Black people’s bodies by the colonizers and their institutions, as evidenced in “Basta”

and “Minha pele,” the poets criticize the idea of the Black as Other and the dialectic of European superiority. Also, we see that beyond denouncing the agonies of the continuous reality of racial domination, as in “Preto/Polícia,” poems such as “África positiva,” “Eu sei que sou negra,” and “África, Une-te!” demonstrate forms of Black subjectivity and racial pride. The poets’ engagement with the cause of the Black race, in the context of Portugal and beyond, reveals the borderless character that motivated the ideology of Negritude. Finally, the adoption of Negritude-inspired ethos in this poetry puts the new generation of diasporic Africans in conversation with the older generation, particularly on the need for Blacks to embrace their identity as Africans in the world and unite in remembrance of their shared oppression as they challenge global forces of Eurocentrism and white hegemony.

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