Working Paper

From the Outskirts to the Beats: The Sonic Revolution of DJ Marfox and DJs Di Guetto

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The Sonic Revolution of DJ Marfox and DJs Di Guetto

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ABSTRACT

On September 18, 2006, a group of young DJs and producers from the outskirts of Lisbon released *DJ's do Guetto Vol. 1*, a compilation of 37 tracks blending the musical legacies of kuduro, tarraxo, and funaná with global Black and Afrodiasporic sounds, primarily from house and techno. Created by DJs Marfox, Pausas, N.K., Jesse, Fofuxo, and Firmeza, the album synchronized a set of historical, cultural, and urban coordinates, synthesizing the desire to create a sound that reflected their own experiences, imaginaries, and social worlds. This text argues that, by embracing the idea that *anyone can produce music*, these producers subverted the prevailing rules of the music field, which had been based on a professional monopoly legitimized by virtuosity. It further contends that this gesture expanded music's role as a space of cultural and political affirmation for young Afro-descendant and Black Portuguese generations, opening horizons of expectation that had been systemically constrained. Such an opening generated a musical repertoire that disrupted lusotropicalist narratives embedded in contemporary Portuguese culture, asserting music as a powerful medium of self-representation for the Black community in Portugal. This is a revised version of a presentation delivered at the "Second IN2PAST Field Trip" on December 12, 2024 — a listening session dedicated to music as an object of research. On that occasion, I proposed a collective listening of "Drift Furioso" by DJ Marfox, one of the tracks featured on *DJ's do Guetto Vol. 1*, which served as the starting point for this reflection.

Keywords: Music, Beat, Identity, Sonic Agency, Afrodescendants

RESUMO

A 18 de setembro de 2006, um grupo de jovens DJs e produtores da periferia de Lisboa lançou *Dj's do Guetto Vol. 1*, uma compilação de 37 faixas que fundiam as heranças musicais do kuduro, do tarraxo ou do funaná, com sonoridades negras e afrodiaspórica globais, sobretudo oriundas da música house e do techno. Criado pelos Djs Marfox, Pausas, N.K., Jesse, Fofuxo e Firmeza, o álbum sincronizava um conjunto de coordenadas históricas, estéticas, culturais e urbanas, sintetizando a vontade de construção de um som que refletisse as suas próprias vivências, imaginários e mundos sociais. Este texto argumenta que, ao assumirem que *toda a gente pode fazer música*, estes produtores subverteram as regras do campo musical, assentes num monopólio de profissionais legitimados pelo virtuosismo. Sugere-se que esse gesto ampliou o espaço da música como lugar de afirmação cultural e política para diversas gerações de afrodescendentes e portugueses negros, abrindo horizontes de expectativa sistemicamente negados. Essa abertura gerou um repertório musical que rompeu com as narrativas lusotropicalistas enraizadas na cultura portuguesa contemporânea, afirmando a música como instrumento de autorrepresentação da comunidade negra em Portugal. O texto é a versão revista de uma apresentação realizada na "2ª Saída de Campo do IN2PAST", a 12 de dezembro de 2024 — um encontro de escuta comentada dedicado à música enquanto objeto de investigação. Nesse encontro propus a escuta coletiva de "Drift Furioso", de Dj Marfox, uma das músicas das faixas de *Dj's di Guetto Vol. 1*, a partir da qual se desenvolveu esta reflexão.

Palavras-chave: Música, Batida, Identidade, Agencialidade sónica, Afrodescendentes

Figure 1: Album cover of "Dj's do Guetto Vol. 1" (2006)

Source: Príncipe Discos

DJS DI GUETTO AND THE COORDINATES OF A SONIC REVOLUTION

September 18, 2006. It was the first day back at school, a moment filled with excitement for younger generations — a time for reuniting with friends, meeting new classmates, exchanging stories, and sharing experiences. It was also the day chosen by a group of young DJs and producers from various neighborhoods on the outskirts of Lisbon to release *DJ's do Guetto Vol. 1*, an unprecedented compilation of beats that would become a milestone in Portuguese music and a pivotal moment in the cultural and political self-representation of the Black community in Portugal.

The album opens with a powerful symbol: the sound of a school bell, much like the ones that call students to their classrooms. However, the summons here is of a different nature - a call to an unexpected blend, a fusion and synchronization of multiple African musical heritages, particularly Angolan kuduro, but also tarraxo and funaná, interwoven with various strands of Black and Afrodiasporic electronic music, especially techno and house. Circulating through schools, neighborhoods, mobile phones, and computers, the album spread like a virus, inaugurating an aesthetic, cultural, and political moment that continues to resonate today.

At the time, the collective was composed of five names unknown in Portugal's mainstream cultural landscape: DJs Nervoso, N.K., Jesse, Fofuxo (now F Flava), Pausas, and Marfox — the latter being the creator of *Drift Furioso*, one of the tracks from the album that sparked this very reflection.

Marfox, or Marlon Silva, was born in Portugal in 1988 to a family from São Tomé and Príncipe. He grew up in Bairro da Quinta da Vitória, in Portela — a self-built

neighborhood later demolished as part of the Special Rehousing Program (PER) (Cachado, 2011). The communal nature of the neighborhood played a key role in shaping his artistic identity. It was on a brick from his own home that he inscribed, using white correction fluid, what would become his stage name: *Marfox*, a combination of his first name, *Marlon*, and the suffix *Fox*, inspired by the Nintendo 64 game *Star Fox*.

We were in the early 2000s when this self-taught musician began sharing the edits he was digitally producing, inspired both by the Angolan *kuduro* that echoed through the neighborhoods on the outskirts of Lisbon and by the electronic music that was starting to circulate. This blending of worlds was particularly influenced by Nervoso, who was already building DJ sets that mixed *kuduro* with techno - an electronic genre that worked well in DJ sets due to the relative similarity in Beats Per Minute (BPM). Marfox learned by closely watching DJ Nervoso, especially at the parties he hosted in Quinta do Mocho, in the municipality of Loures. This was also the time when Fruity Loops (renamed FL Studio in 2003) was gaining traction - a now-legendary music production software that, alongside new digital distribution tools, played a crucial role in democratizing music production itself.

While Nervoso and Marfox were shaping their sonic language on the eastern side of Lisbon Metropolitan Area, on the opposite end of the metropolitan area - specifically in Bairro do Pombal, in Oeiras - Pedro Cardoso was also taking his first steps, under the name N.K. The son of a Portuguese father and an Angolan mother, N.K. was primarily influenced by Angolan *kuduristas* until he came across tracks produced by Marfox and Nervoso, played at neighborhood parties, even though he immediately recognized their origins. When they eventually met, the three discovered a world of shared sonic and cultural affinities that would prove essential to the future collective they would form.

Let’s move, finally, to the Sintra train line — the third cultural coordinate in this story. Marfox was on a train, wearing a T-shirt with his name on it, when someone approached him: “Are you Marfox? We love your sound.” This was the beginning of his connection with Pausas, from Queluz, Fofuxo, from Barcarena, and later with Jesse, from Massamá. From this group of six emerged a process of personal, cultural, and artistic exchange, around which a distinct and differentiated sound would take shape - one that quickly spread across Greater Lisbon.

So how does this process of cultural intimacy emerge — one that gives rise to a sound that is at once individual and collective, rooted in biographical journeys and resonating with shared cultural experience? Despite their unique life stories, family backgrounds, and the differences in the metropolitan spaces where they grew up, all these producers were young Afro-descendants from the outskirts of Lisbon, sharing musical and cultural references and a desire to create a sound that reflected their own histories and imaginaries.

To tell and intertwine their stories, they didn't immediately start producing original tracks. Instead, they began with *edits* — taking pre-existing music and constructing loops, synchronizing and mixing them in a process of collage, reinvention, and re-signification, all geared toward movement and dance. Dancers, such as the *Máquinas de Kuduro*, soon joined in, helping spread this music and dance through schools and across the Lisbon metropolitan area.

Their musical learning unfolded organically, collectively, and through shared experiences. The inventiveness of the sound that emerged from this encounter was also a result of necessity - the need to build a new sonic language without tutorials, formal music training, professional role models, and, in some cases, against the reluctance of families who never imagined that music could become a viable career path. Yet, their repertoire kept growing, circulating throughout the city, culminating in the release of a 37-track album. It was the beginning of a Sonic Revolution.

THE PROCESS OF AN ONGOING SONIC REVOLUTION

The release of the album took place on September 18, 2006, and ended up symbolizing the formalization of a new aesthetic that expanded across various urban territories, broadening the audience for this music. Its distinctive feature lay first in the fact that this sound was no longer merely a reflection or a transposition of *kuduro* or other electronic sounds from Angola. Here, the beat was generally more frantic and accelerated, heavy and aggressive, with multiple rhythmic layers overlapping in a polyrhythm that blended African music with Western electronic black music, particularly techno, whose origins are inseparable from the Black experience and imagination (Brown, 2022).

Furthermore, the aesthetic and temporal juxtaposition foundational to their music implied that their artistic gesture focused almost exclusively on sound and its expressive potential,

working with rhythmic and melodic textures that did not rely on the role of the MC or reliance on lyrical.

Finally, despite using edits, samples, and vocalizations, the album's sound sought to merge signs that both related to their personal experiences and references and embraced an idea of revolution they wished to build in the present, a revolution that this sound sought to express and amplify.

When the album hit the streets, its impact was tremendous. Its historical, cultural, and urban coordinates translated a very particular syncretic identity, one that seemed to resonate in processes of (re)discovery of identity and politics. As DJ Marfox put it: "When you are born in Portugal and you are African, or you are African European, the people from Africa tell you that you weren't born in Africa, so you're not African. And the people from Europe tell you that you're not European because of your color. So what are you? What do you represent to those people? This music is like my passport. It says, 'He is this, he is the product of these two worlds, he is this music.' This music gave me my identity."[1]

This music represented a search for identity rooted in the social and familial origins of its creators, those who listened to them, and those who danced to its rhythms. But it also symbolized the emergence of a new cultural circulation reality. Far removed from record labels, artistic curatorial centers, journalists, and gatekeepers, these musicians built a self-produced album, made available online, which spread in those years through pirated downloads, ripped CDs, Bluetooth sharing, MP3 Devices, or infrared rays between mobile phones.

In 2006, YouTube had only just been launched and was not yet a central platform for music distribution. Nor did the diversity of social media that artists use today to promote their work exist at the time. Internet access was also far less widespread, particularly among lower-income populations in the city's peripheries. Yet, the digital availability of the album — combined with the producers' connections to various territorial networks across Greater Lisbon — enabled the music to circulate between computers, mobile phones, and sound systems. It travelled through schools, neighborhoods, and communities, reaching new audiences and dancers who resonated with its sonic textures

[1] "*Exploring Lisbon Ghetto Sound: A Journey with DJ Marfox | Electronic Beats TV*" (7:17). Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHNvhd2sc2Q&t=1s.

and rhythms. This diversity echoed the lived experiences and the social and cultural backgrounds of the areas where each producer had grown up, lived, and moved.

The album eventually disseminated throughout the periphery and, before long, began reaching different parts of the world. From 2007 and 2008 onwards, the six producers began receiving invitations to perform abroad. This moment marked the onset of a process of *sonic agency* (LaBelle, 2020; Raposo & Garrido Castellano, 2024) through which Lisbon Batida began to transcend its geographical and urban boundaries. Crucially, these musicians were no longer invited merely to play others' music, but to perform their own. Operating far from the centers of symbolic and cultural representation, music emerged as a vital space for narrating their own stories.

Despite growing international attention, the live circulation of this music within Portugal remained limited and complex. The album was listened to in Lisbon's outskirts, where it found audiences and built community. Yet, invitations to perform in nightclubs, concert halls, live music venues, or cultural institutions were rare. The journey was marked by obstacles and struggles, especially for a group of young artists operating on the margins of the music industry — artists who were seldom recognized as part of 'Portuguese music.' For the cultural establishment, all of this appeared foreign.

At the time, none of the producers were making a living from the music they created. The sound they embodied did not fit within the established canon of Portuguese music, nor did it find a place in the African music club scene, which also struggled to fully grasp their aesthetic. What is certain is that, by asserting in their daily practices that *anyone can make music*, these producers subverted both the rules and conventions of the musical field — a field historically shaped by the monopoly of professionals legitimized through virtuosity and the symbolic separation between performers and listeners. In breaking with this structure, they aligned themselves with the tradition of Black music which, as Amiri Baraka (2010) argues, must be understood as an expression of an attitude — or a set of attitudes — toward the world, one that cannot be reduced to its purely formal and musicological aspects.

Rooted in a particular historical experience and driven by a desire to transcend it, this music began to dissolve social and cultural boundaries through community circulation, attracting the attention of broader audiences and cultural agents. It was in this context that, in 2007, DJ Marfox encountered the promoter collective Filho Único, initiating a

dialogue that would, a few years later — in 2011 — lead to the creation of the Príncipe Discos label. This structure became central to the gradual professionalization of some of these musicians and the consolidation of Lisbon's Batida scene (Elliott, 2022). It opened an opportunity structure that enabled many young DJs and producers to begin releasing, exchanging, and commercializing their music. With this sound, a new phase in the democratization of music began — one in which these DJs would increasingly occupy central spaces in Lisbon's nightlife and draw media attention, particularly from the international press. In 2014, for instance, Marfox was named by Rolling Stone magazine as one of ten world artists to know.

Marfox's trajectory became emblematic of a broader story of cultural affirmation, leaving a legacy that resonated not only sonically but also symbolically. Dozens of emerging DJs and producers began adopting stage names ending in "fox", consciously or tacitly acknowledging the influence of the Quinta da Vitória producer. Marfox and the DJs Di Guetto became a source of inspiration for a generation, as new projects blossomed across various neighborhoods of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area — and beyond — where music increasingly assumed a role of cultural and political affirmation, opening horizons that had long been systemically denied.

Following the pioneering DJs Di Guetto, a broad cultural lineage emerged, forming what can be defined as a *sonic constellation* that unites artists such as Tristany, Afrokillers, Studio Bros, Nídia, Nigga Fox, or RS Produções. This lineage also includes the very Piquenos DJs di Guetto, a collective that openly claims its heritage from this first group, consisting of Firmeza (from Quinta do Mocho), Moboku (from Queluz), and LiloVox (from Casal de Cambra). Many of these artists began producing music in their bedrooms, using software like FL Studio — often installed on computers provided by the "e-escolas" program, the first computer in many households. Ironically, these computers were not used to learn or reproduce the colonial history still conveyed in school textbooks (Araújo & Maeso, 2012), but to create sounds, images, and narratives that challenged its very continuities.

From music created at home to the creation of public dancefloors, this entire story gained momentum with the inception of 'Noite Príncipe' in 2012, a monthly ritual at the Musicbox club in Lisbon. Here, many of these young artists saw the music they created on their computers transform into vibrant dancefloors filled with Black, Afro-Portuguese, and Afrodiasporic sounds, breaking away from the *generic Lusotropicalism* (Almeida,

2004) that still define contemporary Portuguese culture. Often incorporating words and images, but always rooted in sound and its empowering potential, these musical expressions gradually spilled over into the night circuit, and, though exceptionally, into cultural production centers like the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. This shift was particularly evident in the 'Jardim de Verão' event, which has been held since 2022. Here, Black music is no longer merely played for white audiences; there is, however temporarily and sometimes contradictorily, a shift in both the audience and its relationship with the institutional space. In 2025, the 'Casa Príncipe' space will be inaugurated — a venue dedicated to the publisher's activities and its artists, furthering the narrative and legacy of this cultural movement

DRIFT FURIOSO, BACK TO THE FUTURE

Going back to 2006, this entire story begins with that first compilation from DJs Di Guetto, which features 'Drift Furioso' — a raw, powerful, and fast-paced creation. In this track, DJ Marfox appropriates 'Tokyo Drifts' by the Teriyaki Boyz, particularly the iconic bell riff produced by the Neptunes. However, in Marfox's hands, the rhythm accelerates frenetically, and the riff becomes a 'hot potato', bouncing from hand to hand. With BPMs that connect directly to the body, it transforms into pure movement. In this music, there is little space for embellishments. It returns to rhythmic essence, stripping away the original synthesizers, ad-libs, and voices.

This minimalist creation is crafted with — and for — dancing, on any dancefloor, built whenever and wherever body's start moving. In a certain sense, nothing could be further from the nature of an academic meeting. But here it is, one of the gateways to the history of self-representation of the Black Portuguese community, which did not find expression in political and cultural institutions, but here expresses itself on its own terms.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBgQirExowo

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