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The Peripheral Subject in Welket Bungué's Films

Abstract:

Welket Bungué uses performance, poetry, and visual essay, among other resources, to ponder on the black peripheral subject in contemporary Portuguese society. In this paper, I analyze the conceptualization and representation of the peripheral subject in Bungué's short films, paying particular attention to *Peripheral Training*, *Bustagate* and *I am not Pilatus*. Bungué defines the peripheral subject as someone who agglutinates within himself diverse cultures and understandings of the surrounding world. The peripheral subject is a global citizen whose idea of home is dissolving. The films in question meditate on this condition in different manners. *Peripheral Training* is a film essay where two black characters, named Courage and Race, contemplate what it means to be a black body in the periphery of Lisbon. *Bustagate* is an experimental documentary short that departs from an episode of police violence against Cláudia Simões, using footage of the episode to reflect on issues of institutionalized racism in Portugal. *I am not Pilatus* is a manifesto against racism.

Welket Bungué is a transdisciplinary artist who was born in Guiné-Bissau in 1988. When he was 3 years old he moved to Lisbon, where he grew up. He graduated in Acting from Lisbon's Film and Theater School, and in Performance from UniRio in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is currently based in Berlin. In his book *Corpo Periférico (Peripheral Body, 2022)* Bungué identifies himself as an artist, Afroeuropean, Bissau-Guinean, black, Luso-African, Balanta, in continuous transit between Europe and Brazil. I begin this essay with these biographic details

about Bangué because he defines his cinema as a cinema of *self-representation*

(*autorrepresentação*), which departs from an afrocentric subjective emancipation, as he puts it:

Posso dizer que quando crio filmes, tenho um forte desejo de desconstruir narrativas estereotipadas, e que calcinam o entendimento deste momento de reafirmação que se faz sentir através do revivalismo das culturas de matriz africana. ... E é nessa *afrocentricidade* ou emancipação subjectiva que eu me baseio para criar o conceito de *autorrepresentação*. (*Corpo Periférico* 14)

I can say that when I create films, I have a strong desire to deconstruct stereotyped narratives that curtail the understanding of this moment of reaffirmation, felt through the revivalism of cultures of African origin. ... And it is in this *Afrocentric approach*, or subjective emancipation, that I depart to create the concept of *self-representation*. (my translation)

The right to narrate is a central claim to Bangué's concept of *self-representation*, and the subject who has the voice defines himself as a *peripheral body* (*Corpo Periférico* 16). Therefore, he who tells the story is not only narrating it, but he also owns this reality that he has subjectively experienced (*Corpo Periférico* 17). Bangué distinguishes being *peripheral* from being *peripheralized*: whereas the last concept is imposed upon the subject by external actors, the *peripheral subject* reclaims himself as such. Bangué notes that he first felt as peripheral when he travelled to Brazil and later on to Guiné-Bissau, distinguishing this feeling from that of being a foreigner, as that implies that you do not belong to a certain setting. Instead, being peripheral puts you in a place where you can observe, understand what you see, and from there act subjectively (Esteves et al. 300-301). He defines self-representation as a civic and artistic stand with regard to the world, and as a method to (de)construct stories, concepts, aesthetics and

prejudices in search of new artistic, political and cultural (re)interpretations of the world (Esteves et al. 295). His filmic work is therefore one of citizenship and of political compromise with the world he inhabits.

The *peripheral subject* is a symbolic conceptualization:

Ser periférico ... no senso da capacidade de um indivíduo poder aglutinar em si diversas culturas e entendimentos sobre assuntos de elevada complexidade ... quem passa para o lugar de periférico, e se assume como tal, é uma pessoa que passa a poder estar em qualquer lugar e quebra todas essas noções falsas e estigmatizantes que estão na raiz dessa construção de nacionalismo culturalista. (Esteves et al. 301)

Being peripheral ... in the sense that an individual can agglutinate different cultures and understandings about highly complex subjects... he who becomes peripheral, and assumes that position, is someone who from then on can be in any place, breaking those false and stigmatizing notions that are at the root of culturalist nationalism's construction. (my translation)

The peripheral subject is someone who is in the border between two places and circulates in both — and when someone is in the border between two places, they are actually in the center (Esteves et al. 302). The peripheral subject has multiple perspectives when telling a story, contrary to what Bangué defines as the *corpo centro impostor* (*impostor center body*). The *impostor center body* is a collective and spatial concept that can refer both to the State and to a collective of hyper normative people who strive to impose to themselves and to others their values and world views (*Corpo Periférico* 16).

Bangué's concept of *peripheral body* is in dialogue with the notion of double consciousness advanced by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, and later on by Paul

Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. When Bangué situates himself as someone in transit between Europe and Brazil, and born in Guiné-Bissau, he evokes the Atlantic as the border — and therefore, as the center — between these spaces. The physicality of double consciousness is emphasized in his concept of *peripheral body*, which puts the body at the forefront of his subjectivity: the exploitation of black bodies always came in hand with the denial of black subjectivities. Welket Bangué questions the western division between body and soul when he centers the body as the site where black subjectivity begins, following other cultural traditions where body and soul are not two separate entities. He is then deconstructing this duality in order to create new artistic, political and cultural (re)interpretations of the world (Esteves et al. 295). The first film analyzed here, *Peripheral Workout (Treino Periférico, 20', 2020, Portugal)*, deals precisely with the concept of *peripheral body* departing from its physicality, as the two main characters, Courage (She) and Race (He), exercise in an empty field while they have a philosophical discussion about race in Portugal¹.

Peripheral Workout is set in Bairro de Angola, a neighborhood in Camarate, a peripheral municipality north of the Lisbon airport. The film opens with the following sentence in a black screen: “Two living bodies, present and peripheral. Courage (She) and Race (He), they workout. In a peripheral place, you need antibodies to gain invulnerability.” This sentence reminds us of the difficulties of living in the peripheral areas of big cities; the need for immunizers points to the challenges of living in the peripheries as a type of disease that affects the human body. It is also important to point out that working out is a way of strengthening the immune system.

¹ Other films directed by Welket Bangué also use physical exercise as a starting point. For instance, *Intervenção Jah (Intervention Jah, 15', 2019, Brazil)* films a performance that departs from warming exercises before a boxing combat, rope skipping and being shot (Esteves et al. 300).

The first images of the film are of the two characters facing each other, followed by a close up of Courage, while in voice over Race asks her: “Courage look around you. Tell me what you see.”² The shot shows Courage in a close-up with a slight low-angle, making the character look respectful and powerful. The black gaze is an important political site of black resistance. As bell hooks reminds us in her book *From Reel to Real*, “white slave owners (men, women, and children) punished enslaved black people for looking.” (253) However, she notes that this power was never absolute and that enslaved people found ways not only to look, but to change reality with their gaze: “Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The ‘gaze ’has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally” (255). When Race asks Courage to look around and describe what she sees, he is exhorting her to narrate reality from her perspective, and therefore to intervene in it, in the tradition of what hooks defined as the black oppositional gaze, a site of resistance for black people, especially black women, around the world (254, 255).

As an answer to Race’s request, Courage states:

I chose to be an artist precisely in order to propose a reflection on our ways of being... when we circulate through these territories of obsolete truths and resolute experiences. But I can’t express myself assertively. I have the impression that people don’t want to hear us. They are not prepared, or this or that.

² Later in the film Race asks this same question again, to what Courage replies “Race, I see the universe behind every window. I see the shining glow of our skin when in contact with the sun. I feel the vibration of the drums, I feel my heartbeat when it fills with adrenaline. I smell the ruins of my ancestral memories... At every lunch prepared by my neighbors and sisters over the weekend.”

When Courage claims that she wants to be an artist, she is reclaiming her right to narrate, to create, to intervene in the world and change it. Bangué equates his artistic work with exercising citizenship, as he wants his films to have a political impact in the current state of affairs of what are racial relations in contemporary Portugal, the country that he considers his own (Esteves 306). He wants to produce what hooks referred to as resisting images (88), images that oppose white supremacy and create other possible worlds for black subjects. Filming is itself a way of looking to the world and of building new worlds. Films are empathy generators through the power of storytelling; the gaze is political protagonism (Soloway, no page). When Courage reclaims her position as artist, she is reclaiming her agency over the world that surrounds her, and the opportunity to change it. She is however aware of the obstacles ahead of her, in a society that does not want to listen to her, to see through her eyes. This is also why the only two characters that appear in the film are Race and Courage, so that they have a space for dialogue among each other and can be heard, not only by each other but by their audience. As hooks notes, audiences tend to be complicit with the status quo (93), but they also have immense power in changing film culture by supporting or boycotting a certain film (94-95). One of the purposes of *Peripheral Training* and the other two films I analyze here is precisely to transform its audiences, since film is an empathy machine, as Soloway noted. Changing the way audiences think is a way to change the world around us.

Throughout the entire short, the dialogues we hear never match with what the characters do. This can point to the disconnection between body and mind, as we always have two parallel narratives: the dialogue between the characters, and the images of the landscape and of them exercising. Even though these two narratives complete each other, they are not the same. While we listen to Courage explain why she chose to be an artist, we have a couple of establishing

shots where we see the characters running in an empty field, with apartment buildings in the back, the Tagus River behind the buildings, and further away the South bank of Lisbon and the Vasco da Gama bridge that connects both banks of the river. This last establishing shot presents important references to the viewer: the characters are in an apparently abandoned field of the peripheral neighborhood of Camarate, alone. The space reinforces the idea of peripheral space, as the field is a periphery of the periphery. We never see any other person in the film, and it is as if they are in a no man's land. The apartment buildings define the neighborhood as a dormitory city — as the name indicates, these neighborhoods were built to house working people away from the city center, and they usually lack leisure spaces, as they were built with the sole purpose of offering workers apartments where to sleep.

The bridge in the back of the shot was inaugurated in 1998 and its name celebrates the 500 years of the arrival of Vasco da Gama to India. This points to the difficult relationship that Portugal has with its colonial past: the country still celebrates it and refuses to acknowledge the negative impact of colonialism to those it colonized. During the building of this bridge, 11 workers died, and it is important to note that many construction workers in Portugal are of African descent. Besides these 11 workers, two other girls of Bissau-Guinean descent died in the construction site, where they went to play³. As I pointed out in the previous paragraph, these dormitory neighborhoods usually lack leisure spaces, and young children end up playing in the streets for lack of proper parks and similar spaces, exposed to accidents such as the one that killed the two young girls from Guiné-Bissau.

³ Nine engineers were convicted of violating security rules in the construction site, as a direct cause to the death of the two girls, Grigória and Sãozinha. <https://www.publico.pt/2005/06/09/sociedade/noticia/ponte-vasco-da-gama-tribunal-le-sentenca-do-caso-da-morte-de-duas-criancas-1225375> (consulted on June 10, 2022)

The short represents an urban landscape of the periphery during the day. The scenery is empty, reminding us that most people are away in the city, working. Housing is one of the guiding topics of the short. Race notes that he does not believe that these peripheral neighborhoods were built to bring quality of life to those living there, and Courage advances that these spaces never had the purpose of including them “in a relationship with the city center”. Race then asks, “And leisure, where is it?” In *Rebel Cities* David Harvey asks whether the city is just a passive site where political struggle is expressed, or if certain spaces are conducive to rebellious protests, and reminds us that “[p]olitical power therefore often seeks to reorganize urban infrastructures and urban life with an eye to the control of restive populations.” (117). Urban planning in Lisbon’s metropolitan area has followed a similar strategy, forcing racial minorities and the working class to live in the peripheries, usually the only areas where these segments of the population can afford housing. The scarcity of leisure spaces in peripheral neighborhoods is another strategy to control restive populations, reducing the opportunities of conviviality and the exchange of ideas.

The two characters train in an empty field. Due to lack of other leisure infrastructure, football courts and training fields like the one in the film tend to be the main spaces for entertainment in these neighborhoods, where people meet and hang out. Sports therefore play an important role in these communities, as they are usually one of the few leisure opportunities for its inhabitants. Traditionally, sports have been seen as apolitical but, as Ben Carrington argues in “Raced Bodies and Black Cultural Politics,” “because black subjects have historically been denied access to the public sphere of Western liberal democracies — due to both formal and informal acts of exclusion — an alternative black public sphere was created by New World Blacks that has broadened orthodox understandings of what constitutes ‘politics’” (131). The

political role of sports is emphasized in *Peripheral Training*, beginning with the title: the word workout is juxtaposed with a reference to the urban peripheries, traditionally associated with political and economic exclusion in Lusophone spaces. As demonstrated earlier, “periférico” is a central concept for Bangué’s art and for his thinking. The characters work out in the field while we listen to their dialogues in voice over. One of the movements that they repeat is rolling a boulder over and over again, much like Sisyphus; however, they are not rolling it up a hill, but in plain ground, pointing that their task is arduous, but not futile.

Carrington notes the political potential in centering performative and creative expressions that go beyond texts, which traditionally rely on the word:

In this context, the assumed apolitical nature of sports may be a useful and instructive starting point for producing an account of black politics that goes beyond texts (too often narrowly defined as speeches, literatures, manifestos and laws) as the primary modality for understanding politics. Instead, I make an argument for centering performative and creative forms of embodiment as expressive of and a site for politics. (131)

He also reminds us that Franz Fanon was already aware of the revolutionary potential of physicality for the colonized subject:

The first thing which the colonial subjects learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running and climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonization the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning. (Fanon quoted in Carrington 132)

The characters in *Peripheral Training* do precisely this as part of their philosophical thinking: they claim this tradition of physical resistance without foregoing the power of words. They reclaim the right to speak, but they resist the western tradition that opposes body and mind: even though their words and their workout are disconnected in the film, they are not separated, as they co-exist and complement each other, dialogue with each other. Bangué classifies this film as an experimental narrative (*Corpo Periférico* 126-127), and here he experiments with the possibilities of connecting mind and body, physicality and thought, so that new ways of representing black experience come into place.

It is in this context that leisure occupies a central position in the short. As I noted earlier, peripheral neighborhoods are usually devoid of recreation spaces, and they also tend to exclude its inhabitants from the entertainment places in the center of cities. This exclusion is usually done through public policies such as the distribution of public transportation, which tends to serve peripheral communities only during business hours, with low to inexistent service during evenings, weekends and holidays. Peripheral neighborhoods are also usually located away from city centers, and distance increases the separation between these two urban spheres. As Courage notes, “We are driven to excessive work for nine hours a day, six days a week. Without considering the morbid time we spend on public transport.”

Leisure is one of the main subjects discussed in *Treino Periférico*, occupying the final sequence of the short. Amílcar Cabral (and other African intellectuals like Fanon) notes that the first steps of a colonizing nation is to repress the colonized culture, and that the first step to national liberation struggles is the revival of national cultures (45). Peripheral neighborhoods in Portugal are mostly inhabited by citizens of the African territories previously colonized by Portugal, or their descents. *Treino Periférico* often refers to this past: Race declares that “Our

bodies were colonized. They were colonized to internalize and accept this way of life.” When governments plan these urban spaces, it is not by chance that they do not build leisure spaces; their planned absence is a way to negate the exercise of culture to its inhabitants as a strategy of domination. Therefore, enjoying moments of leisure is an act of resistance against this colonization of the bodies: “It’s in those leisure moments that we can really exercise this physical musculature that able us to act and react.” It is important to note that we do see a small playground for children in the background of the empty field, but it is quite small and it is surrounded by a fence, like the rest of the empty field, pointing to the imprisonment of peripheral communities in their neighborhoods. The last five minutes of the film show us both characters dancing in the small football field of the neighborhood: first Courage dances to “Courage” by Bartolomeu, and then Race joins her to the sound of “Glossolália” by Alexandre Francisco Diaphra. This is a moment of joy and assertion, when body and mind come together through dance. After the dance, the film closes with an image of the blue sky and the following statement that closes with a message of hope in the future: “In honor of the days to come. As tomorrow never dies, we celebrate life so that today remains alive.”

Bustagate (Portugal, 13’, 2020) is an experimental short documentary that focuses on recent events of racial violence in Portugal. Welket Bungué also considers it an intervention film: “Bustagate é um filme híbrido, que mistura textualidade e três narrativas visuais para contar e asfixiar o público, fingindo colocá-los no mesmo lugar que a nossa defraudada Sociedade, personificada pela heroína Cláudia Simões” (“Bustagate is a hybrid film, combining textuality and three visual narratives to tell a story and asphyxiate the audience, pretending to put it in the same place of our deceived Society, personified by the hero Cláudia Simões” my translation) (*Corpo Periférico* 103). The film opens with an epigraph on a black screen that notes: “(1998 -

2019) Aqui jaz Pretugal. For most people in the world, this means ‘Pretugal died.’” The dates refer to the life and death of Luís Giovanni Rodrigues, a Cabo Verdean citizen studying in Lisbon at the time, here personified as Pretugal. On the night of December 20, 2019, he and three other friends, also Cabo Verdean, were attacked by a group of white men in Bragança after leaving a bar. Giovanni died a few days later of the injuries resulting from that attack.⁴

In *Bustagate*’s epigraph, the word Pretugal conflates the name of the country and the Portuguese word for black (“preto”)⁵. This epigraph is followed by three more shots with a text, first in Portuguese and then in English. The translation does not necessarily coincide with the text in Portuguese, as there are clearly two messages, one for the Portuguese audience, and one for the international one. However, there is a clear awareness that Portuguese audiences will most likely read English and understand that there are two messages: therefore, the message in English is also intended for the Portuguese audiences, reminding them that their traditional discourse regarding colonialism does not stand as universal, but is rather situated in Portugal’s racist history, which still insists that racism is not a relevant issue in Portuguese contemporary society. In the second shot, we read:

Temos que entender quais são as questões sociais fraturantes da nossa sociedade. Somos brandos, e por isso acreditamos que a colonização de África, da América do Sul (...) foi uma missão importante que uniu a humanidade. Hoje grande parte da nossa riqueza deriva dos ganhos do nosso passado de violência, portanto devemos muito a esses povos agora ex-colonizados. LIVRES.

⁴ <https://expressodasilhas.cv/dossiers/in-memorium-luis-giovani-rodrigues-1998-2019>

⁵ “Preto” is often considered a racial slur similar to the n** word; however many black people reclaim the use of the word with pride, in order to reverse its negative meaning.

We still try to understand what are the civil rights problems in our society. We still believe that our domination over four centuries in Africa, South America and everywhere else was an important mission that bridged the humanity, although we don't know why they still come to our country Pr*tugal.

When the text in Portuguese declares “somos brandos”, it is ironically referring to the maxim, popularized during Salazar's fascist regime, that advances that Portugal is a country of mild manners (“brandos costumes”). This maxim goes in hand with the concept of lusotropicalism, developed by Gilberto Freyre, which defended that Portuguese colonialism was less violent and more inclusive than other European colonialisms. This was obviously a way to obscure the violent nature of Portuguese colonialism and defend the country's presence in Africa when the other nations of the continent had already become independent. The idea that Portugal is a country of mild manners, accompanied by a strong denial of racism, is still firmly operating in Portuguese society⁶. As an example, the judge did not consider Giovanni's murder a hate crime, and it is rare that similar crimes are judged as hate crimes in Portugal.

The second half of the sentence from the previous quote reminds in Portuguese that its citizens highly benefitted from colonialism and that they are indebted to the ex-colonized peoples, emphasizing that they are now FREE, whereas the translation in English repeats a racist trope often heard in Portugal: why do those who wanted independence for their countries now immigrate to Portugal.

After the opening text, we see excerpts of “Não, Somos Daqui,” a video installation of a performance intervention by Welket Bungué with actresses Izabél Zuua and Cleo Tavares, where the actresses face each other, with the palms of their hands put together, moving around as if

⁶ <https://www.publico.pt/2018/02/27/sociedade/noticia/conselho-da-europa-diz-que-portugal-e-dos-paises-europeus-com-mais-violencia-policia-1804518>

they are looking into a mirror. The comma in the title “Não, Somos Daqui” changes the meaning of the sentence: without comma, the sentence would mean “we are not from here”, and with the comma it means, “no, we are from here”. Two black women therefore reclaim their belonging to Portugal, against the prevalent idea in Portuguese society that to be Portuguese is to be white. Their mirror-like performance evokes the idea of double consciousness mentioned above — but this time, it is two black subjects who look at each other, symbolically freeing themselves from the white gaze (or the *impostor center body*).

The performance is followed by another still introducing the third and main narrative of the film (the other two are in fact a prologue to this one):

Amadora, 19th January 2020

Toda a comunidade sofre com a mãe de Pretugal. [All the community suffers with Pretugal’s mother.]

A mãe, ainda sente a dor pela perda do filho.

The mother of the deceased still suffers from his loss.

(I cannot really translate this.)

Here Pretugal’s mother is personified by Cláudia Simões, an Angolan Portuguese woman who was beaten by the police in Amadora⁷, another peripheral city of Lisbon, with one of the largest African and African descent populations. These two separate stories conflate into one, pointing to the collective suffering of the Portuguese black community. The still refers to the community’s suffering, as it is the community who mourns the loss of this son. Cláudia Simões is herself a mother, and she was arrested because she forgot at home her daughter’s bus pass,

⁷ <https://www.publico.pt/2020/01/21/sociedade/noticia/mulher-acusa-policia-agressao-racismo-psp-chamou-bombeiros-queda-1901168>

who was aged 8 years old,⁸ and who watched the police beat her mother. Here again, just like in *Peripheral Training*, the issue of public transportation and access to the city center is at the forefront of the discussion. The author notes that he is not quite able to translate the sentence he already translated, pointing to the suffering of the author regarding the death of Giovanni and his mother, personified by Cláudia Simões. This is also another instance of *self-representation* in Bungué's films, where the filmmaker addresses the audience in first person, reminding them that he is the one speaking.

The credits of the film follow this still: "A film by Welket Bungué, uma criação made in PT (it means "made by a Pretu + guese")." The film then shows a sequence filmed in Cabo Verde, in Praia's Eugénio de Lima neighborhood. However, since the previous still identified Amadora, these two neighborhoods are conflated as two sides of the same space, as Amadora has one of the largest population of African origin and African descent. In an interview with Michelles Sales and Ana Cristina Pereira, Bungué points to the ties between Portugal and its ex-colonies, how they are still at work despite a desire from Portugal to erase this connection (*Corpo Periférico* 197), and how Bungué himself belongs to this triangulation of Brazil, Portugal and Africa (211). This again refers back to the author's concept of peripheral subject.

The images of Eugénio de Lima show the daily life of the neighborhood, with people walking in the streets, etc. At a certain point, we see a group of children playing foosball, and the sound of the aggression slowly enters the film. The innocence of the children is juxtaposed with the police violence against a black mother. We then see the images of Cláudia Simões' aggression, filmed on a cellphone, its violence contrasting with the calm images of the previous scenes. The film then proceeds to more images of Engénio de Lima during nightfall. We then see

⁸ Children under 12 do not have to pay bus fares, though they do have to carry their bus pass with them.

a photo of Cláudia with her face swollen and sentences with the police version of the aggression, while in voice over we listen to Cláudia describing the aggression. The film continues interspersing images of the Cabo Verdean neighborhood at dusk and at night with images of the police attacking Cláudia and images of the “Não, Somos Daqui” performance. There are also two images of violence against Cláudia Simões covered with words in English and Portuguese, put together (Fig.1). *Bustagate* often uses the text as image. In these films, text occupies an important position, as we saw in *Treino Periférico*, and in *Bustagate* it acquires a new dimension, that of image.

For the film *I am not Pilatus (Eu Não Sou Pilatus, Portugal, 11', 2019)* Welket Bungué departs from two Facebook videos, using dialectical editing to denounce not only the prevalent racism in Portuguese society, but also the constant denial of its existence. According to Bungué (interview 2019), the short's title wants to instigate its audiences to a process of self-reflection, digging into the Judeo-Christian roots of Portuguese society, in an attempt that another viral video of police violence becomes more than that and leads its audience to reflect — and act — upon the racist roots of Portuguese society.

The film juxtaposes two videos from Facebook: the first documents an episode of police violence in Bairro da Jamaica, an informal housing neighborhood located in the South Bank of the Tagus River, part of Lisbon's metropolitan area. The police arrived on an early January morning of 2019 to intervene in a fight, and ended up battering several members of an Angolan family.⁹ The video, filmed by someone from their family from the window of an apartment, shows the police beating a few people while they lie on the ground without reacting. The video became viral, rekindling discussions of police abuse and racism in Portugal, and led to the first

⁹ <https://www.publico.pt/2019/01/20/sociedade/noticia/familia-denuncia-violencia-policial-bairro-jamaica-1858659>

large protest against racism in Avenida da Liberdade (January 22, 2019), a main Avenue in Lisbon with a tradition of protests and political marches. This was the first time in Portuguese history that one of these protests was led by a majority of black citizens, and the police acted again with excessive violence, even firing rubber bullets, a resource seldom used in Portugal¹⁰.

The second video used in *I am not Pilatus* was filmed during this march by a passerby, Júlia, who sees the police action against the protesters and decides to record a Facebook live defending the Portuguese police, despite admitting that she does not know what originated the protest: “I don’t know what happened. I don’t know if it’s a gang or not. But as always, this kind of situations, these situations. They are not very common in Lisbon. The fact is that these ethnic groups continue to leave a lot to be desired for our country.” Bungué uses dialectical editing, loops, and voice manipulation to deconstruct Júlia’s racist discourse, juxtaposing it with the images of police violence in Bairro da Jamaica. At a given moment, a group of young protesters approaches Júlia and confronts her. A young black woman asks: “You’re white? And I’m less human than you? Am I?”

Júlia’s video sequences play in loop to emphasize parts of her racist discourse, and her voice is manipulated to speak either slower or faster, making her sound ridiculous, almost like a cartoon, as a strategy to delegitimize her discourse. Bungué also uses dialectical editing for the same purpose: for instance, at 4’48” we see footage of the police aggression in Bairro da Jamaica, followed by images of Júlia while she again defends the police, saying “They are the pride of Portugal. Yes, they are our pride. Portugal is for the Portuguese. And they are indeed our police.” The sound is then accelerated, with her announcing in a high pitch, cartoonish voice: “And I’m with them forever. Because Portugal belongs to Portugal. So I say to you leave it to the

¹⁰ <https://www.dn.pt/pais/uma-manifestacao-muitos-tiros-varios-detidos-e-duas-versoes--10469494.html>

Portuguese, hail Portugal and hail our police,” emphasizing Júlia’s ridiculous and even infantile discourse. In an interview, Bangué notes that his use of voice manipulation and loops had the purpose of lending the film a synthetic side, suggesting a kind of abstractionism or even surrealism, so that the audience does not exclusively focus on Júlia’s individual speech, but rather understands that what this woman is saying concerns the voice of an entire society, our society (interview 2019). Júlia represents the *impostor center body* described in the book *Corpo Periférico*.

In *I am not Pilatus*, as well as in the other two shorts, Bangué’s editing is intrusive, reminding us that the director is manipulating these images to pass a message. Therefore, even though he never appears on camera, the director makes himself present through visible editing. The film is a film of *self-representation*, where instead of simply appearing in the short, the director uses other filmic strategies to represent himself on screen. According to Bangué,

Autorrepresentação é a ideia de uma atitude ou método, que nos orientam para a criação audiovisual ou performativas, que tenham como propósito essencial impulsionar intervenções autoconscientes. Este método serve para desconstruir paradigmas estereotipados que nos aprisionam de várias formas. (Corpo Periférico 16)

[*Self-representation* is the idea of an attitude or method that guide us towards the audiovisual or performative creation, which have as their main purpose to push for self-conscious interventions. This method serves to deconstruct stereotyped paradigms that imprison us in various ways.]

I am not Pilatus, which Bangué includes in the category “Intervention Films” (*Corpo Periférico* 98), is an exercise to deconstruct racist paradigms at work in Portuguese society. The filmmaker sees his audience as active, with a participatory role in society. The title of the film

again points to that: instead of washing their hands like Pilatus did, the viewers of the film must act and intervene in society to change the status quo. This is also true for *Peripheral Training* and *Bustagate*, which use similar techniques to remind the viewer of the existence and intervention of the filmmaker in the message of the film, either using discontinuous sound, loops, and text over image to remind its audience that there is a filmmaker manipulating images to pass a message, and that these are *self-representation* films.

Much in line with Soloway's notion of film as an empathy generator that grants political protagonism, Bangué advances:

O direito de narrar, é o direito de ser protagonista consciente e ativo sobre a história que se conta. ... O cinema de autorrepresentação não apenas conta, ele implica um sentimento de propriedade sob quem vivenciou a realidade que, por sua vez, é ficcionada, através da arte do fazer fílmico. Porque nós não vivemos a História, mas sim fazêmo-la, inscrevendo-nos no mundo. (*Corpo Periférico* 17)

The right to narrate is the right to be an active and self-conscious protagonist of the story you are telling. ... *Self-representation cinema* not only tells, but also implies a sentiment of property to he who lived that reality, which is itself fictionalized through the art of filmmaking. Because we do not live History, we make History, inscribing ourselves in the world. (my translation)

Bangué's *self-representation cinema* is directly connected with his concept of peripheral subject, as Raquel Schefer notes:

Bangué's self-reflexive and self-referential performing and filmic work operates relocation in space as it outlines a cartography of decentered sites connecting the former colonial and metropolitan zones. The artist's work is inseparable from a reflection on

space, the spatiality — landscape and urban spatiality — is historically charged and politically constructed. (pp. XXX)

The three shorts analyzed here outline this cartography of decentered spaces that connect these two zones, the former colony and the metropolitan city. The three films depict peripheral areas of Lisbon — Camarate, Bairro da Jamaica, Amadora —, which have a considerable number of African descent populations, who because of their race and socio-economic status cannot afford to live in the center of the capital city, and are therefore subject to lack of infrastructures, precarious housing, and police violence. Whereas in *Peripheral Training* the characters reflect upon life in the periphery and how urban spaces are organized to exclude them from the center, in *I am not Pilatus* a group of black citizens reclaim the city center by marching in one of the main Avenues of Lisbon, not by chance named Freedom Avenue (Avenida da Liberdade), which is also one of the most expensive avenues in Europe, with high end stores and five star hotels. Bungué chooses Júlia's live video to illustrate how Portuguese society looks at its black citizens, as foreigners who do not belong in the city center, and who are met with disproportional police violence when they decide to occupy these white spaces and reclaim their rights. *Bustagate* includes images of Cabo Verde, juxtaposing them with images of violence against a black mother in Amadora. If it were not by the subtitles identifying the location as Bairro Eugénio Lima in Praia, Cabo Verde, the audience could easily assume these were images of another periphery of Lisbon. The juxtaposition of these two spaces in the film contributes to what Shefer referred to as “a cartography of decentered sites connecting the former colonial and metropolitan zones,” reinforcing the connection between the two geographical spaces, as Amadora has a considerable number of inhabitants from Cabo Verde and of Cabo Verdean descent. In these short films, Bungué's peripheral body transits between these spaces — previous

colonial zones and metropole, urban center and periphery — imploding the *impostor center body* and advancing new possibilities to narrate and interpret the world. The peripheral body of his films narrates Black Portuguese experiences, making them visible and thus empowering them to act subjectively in the world.

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Filmography

Bustagate. Directed by Welket Bangué, performances by Izabél Zuua and Cleo Tavares, Kussa Productions, 2020.

I am not Pilatus. Directed by Welket Bangué, Kussa Productions, 2019.

Peripheral Training. Directed by Welket Bangué, performances by Isabél Zuua and Bruno Huca, Kussa Productions, 2020.



Fig. 1 - *Bustagate*