

**“LABANTA BRAÇO”: MUSIC AND THE
POLYPHONIC MEMORYSCAPE OF INDEPENDENCE
IN POSTCOLONIAL CABO VERDE**

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“Labanta Braço”: Music and the polyphonic memoryscape of Independence in postcolonial Cabo Verde

This article examines the 50th anniversary Independence celebrations in Mindelo, Cabo Verde, and explores the intersections of music, memoryscapes, and postcolonial politics. Focusing on performances by the Mindelense bands *Serenata* and *Kings*, it highlights tensions and frictions across generations, regional identities, and political contexts. The study shows how musical genres, repertoires, and embodied practices mediate and construct collective memory through often contested national narratives. Male-centered traditions, nostalgic recollections, and the negotiation between state-led and private celebrations reveal how the memory of independence is continuously reinterpreted. By analyzing these performances as both mnemonic forms and social acts, the article illuminates the dynamics and performance of Cabo Verdean memoryscapes.

Keywords: Cabo Verde, independence, music and memory, memoryscapes, nation, ethnomusicology

“Labanta braço”: Música e as paisagens da memória polifônica da Independência em Cabo Verde pós-colonial

Este artigo examina as comemorações do 50^º aniversário da Independência no Mindelo, Cabo Verde, e explora as intersecções entre música, paisagens da memória e política pós-colonial. Com foco nas atuações das bandas mindelenses *Serenata* e *Kings*, destaca tensões e fricções entre gerações, identidades regionais e contextos políticos. O estudo mostra como géneros musicais, repertórios e práticas corporais medeiam e constroem a memória coletiva através de narrativas nacionais frequentemente contestadas. Tradições centradas no masculino, recordações nostálgicas e a negociação entre celebrações estatais e privadas revelam como a memória da independência é continuamente reinterpretada. Ao analisar essas performances como formas mnemónicas e atos sociais, o artigo ilumina a dinâmica e a performance das paisagens da memória cabo-verdianas.

Palavras-chave: Cabo Verde, independência, música e memória, paisagens da memória, nação, etnomusicologia

On the evening of July 4th, fifty years after Cabo Verde declared its independence, Praça Dom Luís in Mindelo pulsed with anticipation. A large stage, framed by bright, shifting lights, stood at the north end of the square. Behind it loomed the now-iconic image of Cesária Évora, etched — larger than life — into the whitewashed wall of a city building. To the left, the Avenida Marginal traced the curve of the ocean. To the right, the city center opened up with its colonial-style houses, old cafés, and narrow streets still bearing the marks of colonial architecture.

As the night went on, the Praça became more crowded. Food stands ringed the square: women and men behind tables of sweets and drinks, others grilling chicken over open flames. The scent of smoke and sugar drifted through the warm air. Many had come dressed for the occasion — women in dresses patterned with the Cape Verdean flag, men in T-shirts bearing the face of Amílcar Cabral. One man stood at the back of the square, waving the old Pan-African-style Cabo Verdean flag in red, yellow, and green. There was some dancing in the streets surrounding the square, but most people stood watching the stage, listening to the music, or talking and drinking with friends.

Earlier, the legendary band *Kings* had played a full hour of *mornas*, *koladeras*, and protest songs from the 1970s. Then, five minutes before midnight, they struck the opening chords of “Labanta Braço,” the iconic liberation anthem, written by Alcides Spencer Brito and popularized by *Os Tubarões*. The seated rose to their feet. People lifted their arms and began to sing. At the stroke of midnight, fireworks lit up the sky. Still playing the anthem that memorialized the liberation of Cabo Verde from colonial rule and captured the emotion of a free people, the band continued while the crowd broke into cheers, echoing the lyrics: “*Labanta braço bu grita bo liberdade*” — raise your arm and shout out your freedom.

This moment — on the eve of Cabo Verde’s 50th anniversary of independence from Portugal — embodied what Émile Durkheim termed “collective effervescence” (1995[1912]): a heightened emotional intensity that produces a strong sense of community. For a brief time, Cabo Verdeans across generations stood together in shared attention, memory, and belonging. This article takes that moment as a starting point to examine how music — through specific songs and performances — shapes the cultural memory of independence, and how the repertoire evoked both early post-independence ideals and present political and regional tensions.

The performances that evening on Praça Dom Luís — and elsewhere in the archipelago — formed part of what Kelly Askew calls “performing the nation.” Writing on Tanzanian nationalism, Askew argues that artistic practices mirror

how state agents and cultural producers assemble elements of history, performance, and shared experience to create national identity (Askew, 2002, p. 25). In this sense, the evening staged particular visions of Cabo Verdean culture and nationhood.

These performances enacted postcolonial nationhood while drawing on a longer history of musical engagement with liberation ideals. As Rui Cidra (2018) notes, Cabo Verdean musicians helped mediate and transform Amílcar Cabral’s call for a cultural “return to the source” into musical expression.

Following Ann Rigney (2005), I approach cultural memory not as a static repository but as a process unfolding through performance, mediation, and selection. Memory is sustained not only through preservation and institutionalization alone but through social and aesthetic acts. This perspective aligns with Astrid Erll’s emphasis on the performative and mediated nature of cultural memory, which she sees as shaped by visual media, public ritual and other memory media (Erll, 2011).

Music operates at the intersection of memory and politics, serving as a site for the rearticulation of the past. As scholars such as Shelemay (1998), Bithell (2006), and Schoop (2023) have shown, musical practices provide spaces where earlier struggles resonate in the present and inform social imaginaries. Emblematic songs transmit collective memory while enabling reinterpretation in light of current concerns (e.g., Cidra, 2015, 2018; Hurley-Glowa, 2021). The performances at the 50th anniversary celebration in Mindelo — songs, speeches, and choreography — activated and reshaped cultural memory through collective experience rather than conveying a singular narrative.

This article draws on long-term ethnographic engagement with Cabo Verde dating back to 2015 (see Ringsmut, 2025), complemented by intensive fieldwork conducted during the 50th anniversary celebrations of independence in Mindelo, São Vicente. The latter took place over a two-week period and was carried out in the context of a supervised fieldwork training course with my colleague Julio Mendivil and students from the University of Vienna¹. The corpus comprises the musical performances staged during the official independence ceremony, treated as a historically specific set. The article analyzes how these performances mobilized cultural memory and narratives of independence. It examines how par-

¹ During this period, I conducted and supervised semi-structured interviews with musicians, organizers, and other actors, drawing both on long-standing research relationships and on contacts established in situ. The analysis presented here relies primarily on data gathered by myself, including participant observation, field notes, and audiovisual recordings. Supplementary sources include audiovisual concert recordings produced by students, who also contributed to the interview guide and assisted with recordings; analysis and interpretation remain my responsibility.

ticular songs evoked postcolonial identity, recalling early nation-building while reflecting contemporary political and regional dynamics.

I situate this case within ethnomusicological scholarship on music, cultural memory, and national identity in postcolonial Cabo Verde (e.g., Cidra, 2018; Hurley-Glowa, 2021; Rodrigues, 2017) and in broader African contexts (e.g., Dave, 2019; Moorman, 2008; Turino, 2000). After a brief contextualization of memoryscapes of the liberation struggle (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2023), I present an ethnographic account of the 50th anniversary celebrations in Mindelo, São Vicente, and analyze the songs performed as emblems of the postcolonial nation. I argue that these performances constitute a key site where national memory is negotiated, shaped by generational, gendered, and political frictions.

Music and Cabo Verdean memoryscapes of liberation

Cabo Verde gained independence in 1975 amid the wider decolonization of African territories. Along with Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé e Príncipe, it was among the last Portuguese colonies to do so, closely tied to revolutionary struggles in Lusophone Africa. The process was led by the PAIGC (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde), founded in 1956 under Amílcar Cabral. Although no military confrontation took place in the archipelago, independence was secured through the liberation war in Guinea-Bissau. After Cabral's assassination in January 1973, Guinea-Bissau declared independence later that year. The Carnation Revolution of April 25, 1974, overthrew Portugal's Estado Novo and accelerated decolonization: Portugal formally recognized Guinea-Bissau's independence on September 24, 1974, and Cabo Verde declared its own on July 5, 1975 (cf. Davidson, 2017; Lobban, 1995; Lopes, 1996).

The archipelago's post-independence political order reflected this shared trajectory. Under a one-party system, the PAIGC jointly governed Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde until the 1980 military coup in Guinea-Bissau prompted a formal split. Cabo Verde's branch reconstituted itself as the PAICV (Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo Verde) in 1981 and assumed sole authority. Single-party rule continued until 1990, when the PAICV introduced multiparty democracy. In the 1991 elections, power shifted to the MpD (Movimento para a Democracia), marking a turn from socialism toward neoliberal reform (cf. Cardina & Rodrigues, 2021; Keese, 2017; Furtado, 2016).

While the independence struggle has been extensively documented (e.g., Davidson, 2017; Fonseca, 2025; Furtado, 2016; Keese, 2017; Lobban, 1995; Lopes,

1996; Lopes & Barros, 2020), its afterlives in cultural memory and national identity have received less attention. Miguel Cardina and Inês Nascimento Rodrigues (2021, 2022, 2023) argue that political transformations in Cabo Verde were accompanied by shifts in the mnemonic landscape. During the First Republic, official memory cast the liberation struggle as the nation’s foundation, structured around three elements: condemnation of colonialism and famine; proximity to Africa; and a heroic grammar of sacrifice that elevated former combatants — now political leaders — to the status of “super-citizens” (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2023, p. 96; Furtado, 2016).

The political transition of the 1990s brought what they term a “mnemonic transition” (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2021), as the anticolonial, Africa-oriented narrative gave way to a memoryscape foregrounding figures and events from Cabo Verde’s pre-independence past.

Cardina and Rodrigues note that although the PAICV initially nationalized Cabral through media, political discourse, song, and public ceremony, the mnemonic shift of the 1990s triggered a process of “de-Cabralisation” (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2023, p. 100). His image disappeared from currency, his birthday lost its status as a national holiday, and the anthem based on his words was replaced. Symbols of the armed struggle were displaced as an “anti-anticolonial memoryscape” (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2023, p. 103) became hegemonic.

Over the past two decades, elements of the immediate post-independence memoryscape have resurfaced, producing what Cardina and Rodrigues call “mnemonic pluralization” (2023, p. 104): the recombination of post-independence and anticolonial narratives into a composite formation.

This memoryscape brings together the colonial past, the liberation struggle, and the postcolonial state. Its coherence depends as much on silences as on evocations, generating a narrative in which “everything has its place” (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2023, p. 105), even if that order remains fragile.

While they initially conceptualize memoryscapes in relation to material sites, Cardina and Rodrigues extend the term to encompass the materiality, politics, and imaginaries shaping memory (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2021, p. 381). They focus on the state’s production of memorial complexes — monuments, symbols, and discourse — and their interaction with civil society. This approach resonates with Erll’s notion of memory media, highlighting how media materiality shapes traveling memories (Erll, 2011, p. 12).

They also address music’s role in revolutionary politics and the post-independence memoryscape. Cabral (1978) framed culture as central to liberation, and the PAIGC mobilized it accordingly: establishing *Rádio Libertação*, circulating

protest literature and oral poetry (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2022, p. 29), and commissioning revolutionary songs — particularly in the diaspora — that circulated widely in Cabo Verde and beyond (Hurley-Glowa, 2021, p. 93). Cultural expression thus became a means of reclaiming Africanness marginalized under colonial rule.

Within Cabral's call for a "return to the source," music was pivotal. Alongside efforts to valorize forms of Africanness associated with Santiago, the PAIGC/PAICV promoted the reworking and modernization of popular music. These initiatives sought to develop local genres with political and cultural force, a process further shaped by the diaspora, which reinforced music as a key site where liberation ideals and cultural memory converged (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2022, p. 31).

Writing before Cardina and Rodrigues, Rui Cidra (2018) analyzed Cabo Verdean music as an ongoing act of cultural emancipation rooted in Cabral's vision. Focusing on *badiu*² culture and the modernization of Santiaguense genres such as *batuku* and *funaná*³, both associated with African heritage and contrasted with elite European orientations (Cidra, 2018, p. 445) — he contrasts the electronic styles of the immediate post-independence years, celebrated as a Cabralian "return to the source," with a later turn toward the acoustic qualities of Santiago's expressive practices (see also Hurley-Glowa, 2021). Through the mimesis of instrumental textures, especially rhythmic structures, and the creative use of Santiago Creole, musicians crafted a distinctive aesthetic articulating a poetics of the postcolonial nation — centered on the "*badiu* peasant" as emblem of a "primordial African diasporic past" and values such as "authenticity, resilience, generosity, and simplicity" (Cidra, 2018, p. 446). While stylized and fused forms of *badiu* genres resonate with elites and middle classes across the archipelago, *batuku* and *funaná* remain rooted in Santiago's participatory sociabilities and express a racialized condition within postcolonial society (Cidra, 2018, p. 446). By framing these practices as ongoing cultural and political expression, Cidra extends the notion of a composite memoryscape, showing how music contributes to shaping Cabo Verde's memory of independence.

Against this backdrop, I turn to the 50th anniversary celebrations in Mindelo, São Vicente. Whereas Cidra foregrounds Santiaguense genres in affirming Cabo Verde's Africanness, I shift attention to São Vicente's regional particularities. I

² *Badiu* is a historically layered term in Cabo Verde. From the nineteenth century onward, it became associated with the predominantly rural population of Santiago, carrying racialized connotations linked to slavery and post-slavery labor regimes. The complementary term *sampadjudu* is commonly used to denote Cape Verdeans from the other islands, particularly the northern islands (see Cidra, 2018, p. 436).

³ *Batuku* is a percussive musical and dance tradition, historically performed by women, characterized by call-and-response singing and polyrhythmic patterns. *Funaná* is a dance music genre centered on *gaita* (accordion) melodies and *ferrinho* (scraped iron bar) rhythms.

show how the event staged a specific configuration of the national mnemonic landscape, in which liberation memory was remembered, contested, and re-worked in the present.

Staging independence: performing the nation

Three days before Independence Day, the *Câmara Municipal* of Mindelo declared that Friday, July 4, would be a public holiday for non-essential workers, “to take part in the festivities.” What festivities, exactly, remained unclear. No official program had been released, and the municipality offered no further explanation. On social media, speculation circulated — some wondered if anything would happen at all. Even the taxi drivers, often the first to know what’s happening in Mindelo, had no information to share. Conversations with people in the cultural sector confirmed what many had already assumed: the central events were planned for Praia, not here. Indeed, 2025 had been declared a year of national commemoration, with events scheduled across the archipelago. The official inauguration had taken place on April 25 at the *Centro de Artesanato e Design* in Mindelo, marking the anniversary of Portugal’s Carnation Revolution and publicly outlining the government’s plans: the main Independence Day celebration would be held on July 5 in the capital, with a closing ceremony set for December on the island of Sal. Social media, state television, and public radio were filled with retrospectives on the independence era — even if the city itself gave no indication that the occasion was near.

Historically, the municipality has been a central actor in the organization of public events, even as private organizations and associations have long played an important role in staging large-scale festivals such as *Baía das Gatas*, *Kavala Fresk*, or the *Mindel Summer Jazz Festival*. In this sense, the involvement of private actors in organizing public celebrations is not in itself unusual in Cabo Verde. Nevertheless, in the days leading up to the independence celebrations, many people in Mindelo appeared to be waiting for a visible signal from the municipality. As one cultural activist at *Quintal das Artes*, an artist and crafts collective located in the city center, put it: “We are basically waiting for the *Câmara* to say something — we are ready” (personal communication, July 2, 2025). And yet, people felt certain that something would happen. And something did.

On the morning of July 3 — just two days before the anniversary — the municipal government finally announced a public celebration to take place on the eve of Independence Day at Praça Dom Luís. According to the program (fig. 1), there would be musical performances by seven singers accompanied by the band

Serenata, a show by the legendary Mindelense band *Kings*, as well as performances by school children and a sports demonstration, beginning at 7 p.m.



Figure 1: Program announcement for the celebration in Mindelo

The official program began on July 4 at around 7:30 p.m., when a moderator welcomed the gradually assembling audience. Many arrived only once the bands started playing and likely missed the announcement that the event was organized by the online sports portal *Sports Mídia* in partnership with the municipality — an arrangement few people I spoke with seemed to notice.

Our team documented the event in shifts. While I remained at the *Praça* throughout, the students rotated and explored the wider city center, where cafés, restaurants, and bars offered their own musical programs, not necessarily tied to independence. The event at *Praça Dom Luís* nevertheless stood out as the island's central public celebration.

A cordoned-off seating area near the sound engineer, guarded by security, was reserved for invited guests and families of the performing children. Most attendees gathered around the sides and back of the square. Attempts to enter the seated area — by people and the occasional stray dog — were promptly blocked, prompting visible frustration, especially later in the evening. The clear spatial division between invited guests and the public did not produce a sense of unity but rather enforced boundaries.

The first act featured a middle school choir performing the national hymn. Dressed in white shirts and dark jeans — a contemporary variation on the white-and-black attire typical of rural performances such as *Kolá San Jon* and *Batuku* —

the students sang with their right hands over their hearts, accompanied by keyboard and cavaquinho. Two additional songs, framed as tributes to Cabo Verde, followed and were met with polite applause.

Next, a dance school of adolescents took the stage, performing modern choreography set to mostly remixes of k-pop and MPB (*música popular brasileira*) tracks. They wore shimmering silver outfits that caught the light as they moved, shifting their formations fluidly, while the throbbing dance rhythms from the loudspeakers reverberated throughout the city center. Following this, a second dance school presented more traditional performances. Four adolescent performers — both male and female — wore white clothing, with the girls accentuating their costumes using a *pano di terra*⁴ tied around the waist. Their performance was set to two well-known songs: “Cinco de Julho” and “Labanta Braço”, pieces that would recur throughout the evening, reinforcing their emblematic status.

After the dance schools concluded and many of the children rejoined their families, the first of the main musical acts, the band *Serenata*, took the stage. Founded in Mindelo in 1995, *Serenata* has seen a rotating line-up of seasoned São Vicentian musicians. The band is well-known for performing at important local events and has frequently been invited by the municipality to represent Cabo Verde abroad (Nogueira, 2016, p. 473). This evening’s line-up included keyboard, bass, drums, percussion, guitar, and cavaquinho, delivering a sound rooted in local musical traditions while engaging a broad audience.

After opening their set with an instrumental version of Jorge Monteiro’s (Jotamonte) well-known *morna* “Cabo Verde Terra Estimada”, the band accompanied different singers, who would perform two songs each before leaving the stage for the next performer. The exclusively male instrumentalists wore individual outfits that mirrored the motley crew character of the band. They maintained a restrained air throughout the performance; even during the occasional guitar solo, the focus remained squarely on the singers, who always occupied center stage. During the band’s performance, more and more people arrived at the Praça. In between songs, the buzz of conversation swelled, people moved in and out of the seating area to get snacks and drinks, though most remained attentive to the music. At the end of their set, *Serenata* had accompanied a total of seven singers before relinquishing the stage to the final act of the evening: *Kings*.

Up until this point, the evening had unfolded more or less as expected, centered around live music and typical street food. What surprised us, however, were the intermittent sports performances that followed every second singer.

⁴ *Pano di terra*: a traditional cloth often worn in *batuku* performances, symbolizing a connection to cultural heritage.

A group of gymnasts staged a five-minute routine that included synchronized stunts and striking group formations. They were followed by a local boxing school performing a choreographed sparring session and showcased other forms of martial arts. Then, just before the last act of the evening was to be announced, a representative of *Sports Mídia* took the stage. He introduced a wheelchair gymnast as one of the top three performers in the world in his category. Set to the global hit song "Gangnam Style", he performed handstands and other stunts that drew enthusiastic cheers from the audience.

The band *Kings* was formed in the early 1970s and quickly developed into one of the most influential groups from Mindelo. Alongside *Voz de Cabo Verde* and *Os Alegres*, they frequently played at the city's largest festivities, such as Carnival and New Year's Eve (Nogueira, 2016, p. 301). They began their career performing music inspired by bands like The Beatles and Otis Redding, while also incorporating styles such as reggae and disco. As Gonçalves writes, the band took on an active musical role during the period of anticolonial mobilization in 1974/75 (Gonçalves, 2022, p. 363). Over their twelve years of activity, *Kings* became a talent factory, with many renowned musicians passing through the group. After 1982, they were revived occasionally to perform at major events, with varying line-ups. On this evening, they played a mix of original songs and cover versions, including "Labanta Braço," which I will discuss in more detail in the upcoming section.

Before *Kings* took the stage at around 10:45 p.m., the moderator returned to announce that the entire event was being streamed live across multiple channels, allowing audiences in the diaspora — particularly in the United States and Europe — to follow along. This moment underscored Cabo Verde's frequently discussed status as a "transnation" (e.g., Batalha & Carling, 2008; Cidra, 2008; Sieber, 2005) and illustrated how such performances serve as symbolic bridges to the diaspora.

The line-up consisted of drums, two percussions, bass, two keyboards, guitar, saxophone and a singer. They wore matching outfits: dark trousers and white shirts with *pano di terra* patterns printed on the chest. Although their stage presence, too, was relaxed and focused on musical performance rather than audience animation, they filled the role of the main act perfectly. *Kings* played without interruption until midnight, when the fireworks began, and the scene described in the introduction ensued. For a brief moment, the structure of the evening gave way to something more spontaneous, as the carefully staged celebration loosened and the barrier between seated and standing area was no longer upheld by the security personnel.

After the fireworks, the band performed three additional songs and closed their set with “*Parabéns A Você*” (“Happy Birthday”) to the nation. By half past midnight, the official celebration had ended, and the crowd dispersed quickly, many heading elsewhere to continue the night.

Especially the final moments in the set performed by *Kings* can be understood as collective effervescence between musicians and audience, as well as of the nation through music. In this sense, the closing performance staged the nation itself as an audible and embodied community, echoing the ways music has long served as a medium for collective effervescence (see Dave, 2019, pp. 20-26) and “experience of simultaneity” in imagined communities (Turino, 2000, pp. 173-177). Elaborating on Benedict Anderson’s (1991) seminal publication, Kelly Askew argues that rather than focusing on nations as fixed “imagined communities,” it is more useful to think in terms of “national imaginaries”: the shifting, layered, and often contradictory sets of ideas and ideologies through which people conceive of the nation at different times (Askew, 2002, p. 273). Apart from the musical performances, the varied sports and dance acts, together with the relatively young age of most performers and singers, underscored the ways in which the celebration showcased Cabo Verde’s younger generations.

In the following section, I argue that the interplay of these “national imaginaries” with the Cabo Verdean “composite memoryscape” is articulated and negotiated through music. It is precisely through this musical repertoire that the ongoing processes of remembering, contesting, and performing the nation are enacted.

The mnemonic repertoire: singing the postcolonial nation

As ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman contends: “Music is a particularly malleable means for shaping a nation’s many images” (Bohlman, 2004, p. 81). The musical repertoire performed on the eve of Cabo Verde’s 50 years of independence shaped audience’s experiences of the event and served as expression of postcolonial, national identity. Ethnomusicologists have long since researched music’s role in fostering and mediating but also challenging and resisting such identities (e.g., Dave, 2019; Rodrigues, 2017; Stokes, 2003; Turino, 2000). Especially when engaging with the multifarious relationship between music and the state (see, for instance, Askew, 2002, pp. 271-285), we see that postcolonies as “a specific system of signs” (Mbembe, 1992, p. 3) have made use of music in their nation-building process. Yet, as Turino and others emphasize, the enactment of national identity is not imposed solely from above; it is realized and negotiated

at the grassroots level (Bohlman, 2004, p. 81; Moorman, 2008, pp. 140-164; Turino, 2000, pp. 215-219).

Building on this perspective, I examine the songs performed at Praça Dom Luís as expressions of national imaginaries and cultural memory. Through close readings of both lyrics and musical performance, I demonstrate how the repertoire reflects the “mnemonic pluralization” of the nation and highlights the continuing significance of the liberation struggle in national memory, as outlined in the previous discussion of Cardina and Rodrigues’s work. I begin my analysis by focusing on the repertoire presented by the band *Serenata*. Figure 2 provides an overview of the songs performed by each singer over the course of the evening. The fifteen pieces can be classified into three thematic categories, determined by their lyrical content.

	Song	Singer
1	Cabo Verde Terra Estimada	Instrumental
2	Cabral Ca Morri	Derrick
3	Nos Raça	Derrick
4	Neto	Zizi Vaz
5	Titina Silá	Zizi Vaz
6	Voz d'Amor	Naná
7	Terra Scalabrode	Naná
8	Fomi 47	Duda Teixeira
9	Manú	Duda Teixeira
10	Distino d'um Crioula	Constantino Cardoso
11	Nha Terra Aonte E Aoje	Constantino Cardoso
12	Patrice Lumumba	Edson Oliveira
13	Terra Bo Sabe	Edson Oliveira

Figure 2: Setlist of the band *Serenata*

The first category includes songs that make direct references to the Independence Struggle. Within this category, a further distinction can be made between pieces that honor specific figures — most prominently Amílcar Cabral, but also other anticolonial icons such as Titina Silá, Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Agostinho Neto, as well as Che Guevara (songs 2, 4, 12) — and those that commemorate pivotal events associated with the liberation, such as the declaration of independence itself (song 14).

To illustrate this category, consider the example of *Cabral Ka Mori*⁵ (song 2), which explicitly evokes Cabral’s legacy and situates the listener within the historical and symbolic framework of the struggle.

Example 1: *Cabral Ca Mori*

Oi, Kabuverdi, bu óra dja txiga
Sima bus irmons d’Áfrika grita
Indipendénsia, fidjus, dja no ten
Pa no ser livri, livri di tudu algen (2x)

Chorus:

Cabral ka mori, Cabral é gritu ki duiguigi mundu
Cabral ka mori, Cabral é gritu na nha peitu
Cabral ka mori, Cabral é liberdadi
Onra memória di erói di povu (2x)

Di PAIGC, partidu di luta
Na finason no ka pode skese-l
Di tudu irmon, erói ki da se sangi
Pa liberdadi, justisa di nos povu (2x)

Chorus (4x)

Translation⁶: **Cabral Did Not Die**

Oh, Cabo Verde, your time has come
 Like your brothers of Africa cry out:
 We already have independence, children
 Because we are free, free from everyone else (x2)

Chorus:

Cabral did not die, Cabral is a cry that shakes the world
 Cabral did not die, Cabral is a cry within my chest
 Cabral did not die, Cabral is freedom
 Honor the memory of the people’s hero (x2)

From the PAIGC, the party of struggle,
 In song we will not forget him/them.
 Everybody’s brother, hero who gave his blood
 For the freedom, justice of our people. (x2)

⁵ The original title, taken from the LP *Sema Lopi* by *Os Tubarões*, is spelled *Cabral Ca Mori*. The title has been adjusted here for consistency with ALUPEC conventions for Cape Verdean Creole. All lyrics are taken from <https://www.letras.com/>

⁶ All translations made by the author.

This example shows the construction of Cabral as an idol, equating his figure directly with the notion of liberty (see also Barros & Lima, 2012). However, this form of musical memorialization was also seen critically by some of our interview partners. A musician who was already active during the pre-independence era told us:

Now, what's happening is this: we shouldn't create a cult of personality. A cult of personality is not a good thing. We need to study history. We cannot erase history. We have to speak the truth about history. It's not about saying we respect Cabral and then doing this or that. We're not actually doing what he said should be done — or what he stood for. (Anonymous I, Mindelo, July 2, 2025, my translation)

In a similar vein, “Patrice Lumumba” (song 12) situates Cabral within a broader lineage of African revolutionary leaders, including Patrice Lumumba and Kwame Nkrumah, who spearheaded independence movements in the Republic of Congo and Ghana, respectively. The lyrics further reference the PAIGC as the party of the struggle and extend solidarity to other African nations, thereby situating Cabo Verde's struggle within the wider framework of African decolonization. This Pan-African orientation is also apparent in the songs honoring Titina Silá and Agostinho Neto, which express both solidarity with and gratitude toward the liberation struggles in Guinea-Bissau and Angola. Collectively, though, these compositions establish a direct link between Cabral, the PAIGC, and the ideals of Pan-African solidarity. It is also noteworthy that these songs originate from the immediate post-independence era and were largely popularized by the band *Os Tubarões* during the mid-1970s and early 1980s, serving both as cultural repository and as vehicles for negotiating collective memory.

A second category of songs references Cabo Verdean experiences under colonialism and neo-colonialism, sometimes explicitly, sometimes metaphorically (nr. 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15). The dominant themes of these songs include loss and emigration, as in the *mornas* “Manú” (nr. 9) and “Distino d'um Crioula” (nr. 10). “Fomi 47” (nr. 8) is particularly striking for its explicit treatment of the severe droughts that afflicted the islands during the 1940s, causing famines and mass emigration.⁷ Another notable example in this category is “Nos Raça” (nr. 3), which stands out for its direct critique of colonialism and racial oppression.

⁷ For a more in-depth analysis of this specific song, see Cidra (2015, pp. 314-317) and Martin (2016, pp. 55-56).

Example 2: *Nos Raça*

*Papa bêm flam qui raça qui nós é o pai
Nós raça ê prêto ma branco burnido na tempo
Burnido na temporal d’escravatura ô fidjo
Un geração di tuga cu africano*

*Es bêm di Europa fareja riqueza
Es vendê fidjo di Africa na escravatura
Carregod na fund d’porão di sês galera
D’box d’chicote ma juga colonial*

*Alguns que fca prâ li gatchod na rotcha ô fidjo
Trança ma tuga ês cria ess povo caboverdiano
Ess povo que sofrê quinhentos anos de tortura
Ess povo qu’ês revultia tabanca intere*

*Pa tma sês liberdade que ta compatês na mundo
Pa caba cu exploraçon duns gente racista e mau
Que pa tma sês terra que pas governa
Pa cria progresso dess povo africano*

*Agora ja sês reinod tchga na fim nha fidjo
Nós Africa intere t’fca livre de sês maldade
Pa mostra mundo intere sês dignidade di povo
Cu sês direito humano universal*

*Pa nós bem participa na construção dum mundo
Um mundo novo di paz pâ tudo gente vive
Historia que ja passa nós pôl num cont a parte
Nós tra vingança e odia d’nos coraçon*

Translation: *Our Race*

Father, come tell me what our race is, my father
Our race is black and white, blended over time
Blended through slavery, my child
A generation of Portuguese and Africans

They came from Europe searching for wealth
They sold the sons of Africa as slaves
Packed in the bottoms of their galleys
Under the whip of the colonial yoke

Some stayed here, hidden in the rocks, my child
 Mixed with the Portuguese, they created this Cabo Verdean people
 This people who suffered five hundred years of torture
 This people who revolted, village by village

To reclaim their freedom that was theirs
 To put an end to exploitation by racist and cruel people
 To take back their land, to govern it
 To build progress for this African people

Now that their reign has ended, my child,
 All of Africa is freed from their evil
 To show the whole world the dignity of its people
 And their universal human rights

So that we may take part in the building of a world
 A new world of peace for all
 Let us set aside the history of the past
 Remove revenge and hatred from our hearts

“*Nos Raça*” is notable, among other things, for how it situates Cabo Verde as a cultural and historical mixture of Portuguese and African influences, reflecting a lived *creolidade* that emerged as a consequence of centuries of colonialism.⁸ The song addresses the history of slavery, exploitation, and five centuries of suffering under colonial rule in an unusually direct manner for the genre. Its closing lines, which speak of carrying vengeance and hatred in one’s heart, mark an atypical departure from the melancholic but generally reconciliatory tone of the *morna*, underlining both the emotional intensity of historical memory and the lingering traces of injustice in postcolonial Cabo Verde.

The third category comprises songs in the *morna* tradition that function as homages to Cabo Verde (songs 1, 6, 7). These pieces highlight the archipelago’s natural beauty and its rich cultural heritage, frequently referencing musical genres such as *morna*⁹, *koladera*, *funaná*, and *batuku* (song 7). Here, too, themes of emigration, *sodade*, and loss recur throughout these songs, reflecting established motifs in Cabo Verdean musical expression (see Dias, 2004, pp. 35-48; Rodrigues & Lobo, 1996, pp. 31-45). Although these compositions do not explicitly reference

⁸ I discuss the notion and Cabo Verdean reality of *creolidade* in more detail in Ringsmut, 2025.

⁹ *Morna* is a slow and minor key dominated genre often dealing with themes such as loss, longing and love. It is often paired with *koladera*, which is faster, more dance oriented and often employs lyrics ranging from light-hearted to satire.

the liberation struggle or nationalist ideology, they participate in the ongoing nation-building process by articulating shared cultural and historical experience. In our interview with Antero Santos, a renowned Mindelense musician, he explained the significance of the genre during colonialism as follows:

For example, there’s a *morna* by Jorge Monteiro, Jotamonte, called “Fidjo Maguado.” But that *morna* couldn’t be played at that time. If you played it back then, there would be trouble. It was a critique of the situation. There was control over many song lyrics. [...] I can’t say there was outright censorship, but there was control over what you did. Still, *morna* managed to intervene in society. It conveyed its message. *Morna* is a way of lamenting, but also of, how can I put it, sustaining the soul. (Antero Santos, Mindelo, July 3, 2025, my translation)

Morna occupies a complex position within Cabo Verdean musical and national imaginaries. In the literature, it has often been described as music of the salons, aligned with European aesthetics and associated with elite culture, in contrast to the more “African” genres such as *funaná* and *batuku* (see Cidra, 2018; Palmberg, 2002). Yet, other scholars have emphasized that *morna*, despite its elite associations, has also long been an expression of the “common people” and has functioned as a unifying national symbol across social strata (see Dias, 2004; Rodrigues, 2017). Moreover, Rodrigues highlights the subversive potential of *morna* during the colonial period: through elaborate metaphors and poetic conventions, seemingly innocuous *morna* lyrics could encode social critique and articulate a distinctly Cabo Verdean national consciousness (Rodrigues, 2017, pp. 260-275).

In contrast, the set performed by *Kings* began with a sequence of songs that fell outside the three categories outlined above (see fig. 3; songs 1-9). These opening numbers consisted largely of popular party songs that animated the audience to dance and celebrate. *Koladeras* and *funanás* such as “*Rambóia*” (1), “*Minino na Tchora*” (4), “*Sangue de Berona*” (5), “*Dança ma mi Crioula*” (6), and “*Ana Mata Tchuck*” (8) were well-known staples of Cabo Verdean music in Mindelo, instantly recognizable to local audiences. *Kings* further expanded the festive atmosphere by including widely popular Kizomba/Cabo-Zouk hits such as “*Gata Morena*” (2) and “*Mulata Coca Cola*” (3).

The first part of the set was punctuated by two slower, more sentimental songs — “*Ambiente*” (7) and “*Recordações d’Infancia*” (9) — which offered a contrasting nostalgic tone to the otherwise upbeat, dance-oriented repertoire. Another song of a more reflective character, though still framed through metaphor, was “*Poema do Serviçal*” (10), a classic from *Kings*’ second album *Na Estrada D’Europa*

(1980), which critiqued the lived experiences of Cabo Verdean forced laborers in São Tomé. An additional female vocalist, who unfortunately had not been introduced by the moderator, joined *Kings* during a couple of songs (5, 6, 12) whose solemn stage presence contrasted with the animated and energetic singing of *Kings'* vocalist.

1	Rambóia
2	Gata Morena
3	Mulata Coca Cola
4	Minino na Tchora
5	Sangue de Berona
6	Dança ma mi Kriola
7	Ambiente
8	Anna Mata Tchuk / Catarina
9	Recordações d'Infancia
10	Poema do Serviçal
11	Labanta Braço
12	Cinco di Julho
13	Jona Poss
14	Sô Foia De Traboí
15	Felicidades

Figure 3: Setlist of the band *Serenata*

Following this more ambivalent interlude, the band transitioned into two songs directly tied to the Independence period: “*Labanta Braço*” (11) and “*Cinco de Julho*” (12). Both pieces belonged to the same repertoire invoked earlier by the singers of *Banda Serenata* and were originally popularized by *Os Tubarões* in the immediate post-independence years. In performing these songs, *Kings* explicitly connected their otherwise celebratory set to the liberation struggle and the collective memory of Independence. Example 4, “*Labanta Braço*,” illustrates this connection.

Example 4: *Labanta Braço*

Labanta brasu bu grita bo liberdadi (4x)

Grita povu independenti, grita povu libertadu (2x)

Sinku di Julhu é sinónimu di liberdadi

Sinku di Julhu kaminhu abértu pa flisidadi (2x)

Grita: Viva Cabral

Onra konbatenti di nos térra (2x)

(repeat)

Translation: *Raise Your Arm*

Raise your arm, shout out your freedom (4x)

Shout, independent people, shout, free people (2x)

July 5 is a synonym of freedom

July 5, an open path to happiness (2x)

Shout: Long live Cabral

Honor the fighters of our land (2x)

Shout: Long live Cabral

Honor the fighters of our land

“*Labanta Braço*” is striking for the simplicity and insistence of its lyrics. The song repeatedly affirms the central elements of Independence: the Cabo Verdean people celebrating their freedom, the significance of July 5 as the day of Independence, and the role of Amílcar Cabral in fighting for it. This straightforward use of words functions as a prime example of what Astrid Erll has described as “mnemonic forms” (Erll, 2011, p. 13), such as symbols or icons that condense cultural memory contents. By reducing complexity, these forms facilitate repetition and ensure the circulation of key mnemonic content. At the same time, the song links mnemonic condensation with embodiment, calling on listeners to raise their arms and cry out “*liberdadi*.” Witnessing this moment, even as outsiders, we felt a palpable charge in the air, an almost physical sense of shared joy.

Before closing their set with a “Happy Birthday” version dedicated to the nation, *Kings* performed two more songs from their early career: “*Jona Poss*” (13) and “*Sô Foia De Traboi*” (14). These pieces struck a balance between celebratory, dance-oriented music (“*Jona Poss*”) and socially critical themes (“*Sô Foia De Traboi*”), effectively bringing the performance full circle. It is notable that *Kings*

drew on several songs from their formative and most productive period, during which they produced three albums and an additional double-sided single. For instance, “*Ana Mata Tchuk*” (6) and “*Minino na Tchora*” (4) had already appeared on their first LP *Faroeste*, in 1979.

The musical repertoire of the evening can thus be categorized according to its lyrical and mnemonic content. Most songs performed by *Serenata* and the accompanying singers emphasized explicit connections to the liberation struggle, highlighting key figures of the African independence movement, foremost among them Amílcar Cabral. A second group of songs focused on the specific Cabo Verdean experiences of colonialism and its enduring legacies. In both of these groups, *Morna* emerged as the predominant genre through which these themes were articulated. A third category, which comprised a substantial portion of *Kings’* setlist, consisted of songs without overt mnemonic references to the liberation struggle or colonial history. These were primarily dance-oriented pieces and popular hits designed for celebration and enjoyment. Yet, as noted by several ethnomusicologists, such expressions of pleasure are themselves political, particularly in postcolonial contexts (e.g., Alisch, 2017, pp. 187-195; Dave, 2019, pp. 25-33).

Rather than dismissing these songs as evidence of social forgetting, particularly in relation to modern dance-oriented genres like Kizomba and Cabo-Zouk, it is important to recognize their contribution to what Marissa Moorman has termed experiences of “cultural sovereignty” (Moorman, 2008, p. 7). Writing on popular music in Angola during the immediate pre- and post-independence era, Moorman observed that much of the music played in urban cultural centers and on national radio did not carry overt political messages, both because of the constant surveillance and censorship by the PIDE and because the music produced and disseminated in urban clubs prefigured and expressed an independent nation in its own terms (Moorman, 2008, pp. 140-164). Similarly, as JoAnne Hoffman notes, Cabo-Zouk — a genre that emerged in the Cabo Verdean diaspora in Europe — can be understood as a musical expression by a generation of young Cabo Verdeans with little or no personal memory of colonial rule: Hoffman emphasizes that Cabo-Zouk was created by the first generation to have little or no memory of a Cape Verde that was not free from Portuguese colonialism. This does not imply that the country had fully overcome the effects of five centuries of colonial domination, but rather highlights that music assumes a different role in an independent nation than under occupation (Hoffman, 2008, p. 211). The inclusion of Kizomba hits and other dance-oriented songs in the 50th anniversary celebrations therefore served a crucial function: it engaged younger

generations and allowed their experiences to be represented within the national commemoration.¹⁰

This intergenerational and integrative function can also be extended to the sportive and dance performances that frequently interrupted the more serious, solemn, and openly revolutionary material performed by *Serenata*. In the final section, I examine these moments of friction and fragmentation more closely, exploring how they articulate tensions within the performance of the nation and the shaping of the memoryscape.

Frictions and fragments: music, memory, and postcolonial politics

In this final section, I return to the tensions that surfaced during the 50th anniversary celebrations in Mindelo, examining how music, memory, and postcolonial politics intersect in practice. A central tension concerns gender in the performance of the national memoryscape. Sylvia Palatschek and Sylvia Schraut (2008) argue that women’s perspectives are often marginalized in national memory and call for attention to the gendered implications of such narratives (Paletscheck & Schraut, 2008, pp. 267-287). Similar concerns have been raised regarding Cabo Verdean cultural production and the legacies of resistance and revolution (Lima-Neves & Pilgrim, 2021).

Music reflects this structural divide. Women are frequently confined to roles as singers or dancers, while instrumental performance is dominated by men (Doubleday, 2008; Koskoff, 1995). In Cabo Verde, with few exceptions, women perform as vocalists, whereas men predominate as instrumentalists and composers (cf. Gonçalves, 2022; Nogueira, 2016). The anniversary celebrations made this imbalance visible: among seven singers accompanied by the all-male band *Serenata*, only three were women; with *Kings*, a single female guest vocalist appeared for three songs. This contrasted with the more gender-balanced audience.

The divide also operates at the level of representation, particularly in the construction of a national canon (Grever & Ribbens, 2008). Songs addressing the liberation struggle overwhelmingly center on male figures, with Amílcar Cabral occupying a central position (2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 14). Against this backdrop, “Titina Silá” (5), performed by Zizi Vaz, stands out. The song commemorates women’s contributions to the struggle and gestures toward Pan-African solidarity with

¹⁰ On the other hand, a significant and growing body of Cabo Verdean rap music produced in the diaspora specifically engages with the ideals of Cabralism and his legacy to address contemporary issues and diaspora experiences (see Barros & Lima, 2012).

Guinea-Bissau. Its inclusion underscores both the belated and still marginal recognition of women within Cabo Verde's independence narrative.

This belated acknowledgment reflects broader political dynamics. Cardina and Rodrigues (2022) show that official recognition of women's participation in the independence struggle emerged unevenly, often visible only at specific political moments. Under President Pedro Pires, for instance, the state emphasized liberation symbols and narratives, awarding distinctions to women whose contributions had previously gone unrecognized. In 2004, on the 29th anniversary of independence, Pires awarded eight women the Order of Amílcar Cabral, explicitly correcting the 1990 ceremony, which had honored combatants without including a single woman (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2022, p. 100). Despite subsequent recognition in national media (Cardina & Rodrigues, 2022, pp. 99-105), the performance at Praça Dom Luís remained limited, leaving women at the margins of the musical memoryscape.



Figure 4: Celebration at Praça Dom Luis, Mindelo, 2025

The only other female figure represented — though not directly linked to the liberation struggle — was cultural icon Cesária Évora, whose image was prominently displayed on the stage façade (Fig. 4). The male singer Naná highlighted

her presence by performing “Voz d’amor” (6), referencing Évora’s success and her Grammy-winning album of the same name.¹¹

Lastly, it is worth noting the gendered dimension of the genres most prominently performed by the band *Serenata: morna* and *koladera*. As Juliana Braz Dias has convincingly shown, *morna* in particular articulates distinctly male perspectives, with performative aesthetics closely tied to male values (Dias, 2004, pp. 183-187). In turn, women, as Lindinalva Lima demonstrates, are typically represented in restricted roles — as the beloved (*kretxeu*), the mother, or the dangerous temptress (Lima, 2011). The dominance of these genres not only projected a São Vicentian perspective of the nation (Rodrigues, 2017) but also reinforced a male-centered memoryscape of Cabo Verde’s independence.

A second tension evident during the celebrations involved generational frictions over how Cabo Verde’s past should be remembered and enacted in the present. Especially in our interviews with musicians who had been active during the struggle for independence, a prevailing sense of nostalgia characterized their personal memories of the Independence era. Consider these recollections from the Mindelense musician José Luis “Pinúria” Ramos who had played with the band *Kuelah Tabanka* on Independence Day in Mindelo:

We had the opportunity to, on the 5th of July 1975, to play at Praça Nova, on the bandstand. I played there, I was 20 or 19 or something, and it was Independence Day. We played there; it was crowded. Everybody was happy because we got independent [...] As I told you before, we had ideals. We were very idealistic. And at the time we had dreams. And when I look back, I can say that all those dreams came true [...] So, it was at that time a moment of happiness. All the people were happy. It was a moment of joy, right? I get goosebumps just talking about that. It was a moment of joy. It was a moment of happiness. We had the world ahead of us and the world was nice. (José Luís Ramos, personal communication, Mindelo, July 3, 2025, original in English)

These recollections are laced with nostalgia and a visceral sense of independence felt by people at the time. Some musicians of that era saw this as a sign of relative loss of memory and political urgency, especially among youth, often portraying them as less political and more concerned with entertainment. As Jovino dos Santos, a Mindelense singer and composer active since the 1970s, put it:

The problem here in Cape Verde is this: Freedom was gained in the 70s, but we are still dependent on the Portuguese. The bank is Portuguese, the telecom com-

¹¹ Much has been written about Cesária Évora’s central position in Cabo Verdean culture. For further elaborations see, e.g., Arenas, 2011; Cambanco, 2015; Kavoori, 2009; Lang, 2007; Martin, 2010; Teixeira, 2012.

pany is Portuguese. Whereas the Cape Verdean government has the possibility to move forward and abandon all of this. Because this new generation, which is the future of the country, I think they should have a better understanding of this [...] Who was Amílcar? What did Amílcar do? But nobody is interested in that. They don't want to know. They'll sing "*labanta braço, grita bo liberdadi*", a song they made for the liberation of Cape Verde. "*Labanta Braço*" is the only song you hear on July 5th. [...] They have little interest. (Jovino dos Santos, personal communication, Mindelo, July 4, 2025, my translation)

This viewpoint, of course, is not unique to Cabo Verde or the independence context, but resonates with generational critiques observed in many societies worldwide (e.g., Mendivil, 2016) and echoes the "scarcity" approach to cultural memory as framed by Ann Rigney (2005).

Compared to their vivid memories of Independence from different musicians of that time, the event we witnessed did appear more subdued, formal, and carefully staged. Yet, as Cardina and Rodrigues (2022) argue, this shift is better understood not as cultural decline but as part of mnemonic transitions and the deliberate de-Cabralisation of national memory. It also reflects the proliferation of multiple memories, rather than the scarcity of a single, monolithic narrative (Rigney, 2005, p. 26).

A third tension, historically linked to generational divides, concerns the friction between post-socialist and neo-liberal orientations, evident in the organization of the celebration. As noted in the introduction, the local administration made no public statement, frustrating residents who expected the *Câmara* to assume its customary role. Instead, the event was largely organized by a private sports media platform. Whereas the *Câmara* had long coordinated public concerts — reflecting the state-centered orientation of the post-independence period — recent years have seen more festivals organized and financed by private actors. Several interlocutors interpreted this shift through broader political differences between the PAICV and the MpD (Movimento para a Democracia). One musician described the contrast in the following terms: "It was a left-wing party. People said it was communist, but it wasn't. It was a party of the left. It was more social, more cultural, more traditional, more oriented toward home, much more connected to its roots. The other is more open, more liberal" (Anonymous I, personal communication, Mindelo, July 2, 2025). He went on to recall that in earlier years cultural workers were formally supported by the state: "When I needed to travel to Guinea to perform, I was officially released from work — it was as if I was still on duty. I liked working in the name of the country. Now that's no longer possible. You ask for leave, and either your salary is deducted, or you

use your own time” (Anonymous I, personal communication, Mindelo, July 2, 2025). In a similar vein, another interlocutor suggested that the comparatively restrained tone of the 50th anniversary reflected political priorities, arguing: “The current government has nothing to do with independence. Their important date is January 13¹²: Democracy. Not Independence” (Anonymous II, Mindelo, July 8, 2025, my translation).

These findings underscore Cardina and Rodrigues’s analyses of the mnemonic shifts in Cabo Verde and resonate with broader patterns observed in other African postcolonial contexts, where the transition from socialism to neoliberalism has reshaped cultural memory and public performance. In this light, the Independence celebrations in Mindelo appear not as isolated developments but as part of a wider trajectory of post-socialist reconfiguration (cf. Askew & Pitcher, 2006).

Conclusion: polyphonic memoryscapes

The 50th anniversary Independence celebrations in Mindelo show how music, memory, and postcolonial politics intersect in complex, often contradictory ways. Rather than presenting a singular national narrative, the performances reveal frictions shaping the Cabo Verdean memoryscape. Male performers and male-coded genres dominated the stage, while women were largely underrepresented. Generational differences surfaced: older musicians lamented a perceived loss of tradition, whereas younger performers demonstrated engagement with Cabo Verdean musical heritage. Regional dynamics also influenced the festivities, as historical colonial legacies and centralization in Praia highlighted inequities between islands. The growing role of private actors alongside the *Câmara* raises questions about who shapes national imaginaries and how the memory of the liberation struggle is framed across different political visions.

The repertoire at Praça Dom Luís reflected multiple modes of memorialization. Some songs explicitly evoked historical and political narratives, referencing independence, the liberation struggle, and figures such as Amílcar Cabral, functioning as media of traveling memory (Erl, 2011). Others expressed emigration, loss, and *sodade*, often through *morna* and *koladera*, while danceable pieces fostered intergenerational connection. Musicians thus performed memory in overlapping, layered ways, revealing the polyphonic character of Cabo Verdean liberation memory.

¹² January 13 marks the first multiparty democratic elections in Cabo Verde (1991), won by the Movimento para a Democracia (MpD).

The 50th anniversary celebrations in Mindelo thus exemplify polyphonic memoryscapes, where the past, present, and envisioned futures of the nation are actively negotiated, revealing the enduring complexity of postcolonial nationhood.

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