

MIGRATIONS AND ANTI-RACISM IN SOCIETY: ARE THEY RELATED TO MUSIC?

Migrations are as natural as water is to the body; the problem is that we live in a racist society

The history of migrations goes back thousands of millions of years, ever since the first cell migrated to divide into more than one, through to the first person in the history of humanity, who turns out to be African (from the African continent), specifically Ethiopia. A history that has always been covered up and criminalized. Why do we associate migration by people from the Global South (also known disparagingly as the third world) with criminality, if there is no relation between them? The answer to this question is uncomfortable. We have the answer, but the vast majority of people prefer not to have to rethink and deconstruct something that is wrong and yet so deeply embedded.

Recognizing the racism perpetrated against racialized people is a lot to ask. It should be recalled that not all migrants are racialized, and that not all racialized peoples are migrants. Many have been here for countless generations, but are always considered foreign. They are never accepted as belonging in the territory where they grew up.

With regard to Spain, there is a law that perpetuates the myth that racialized people are not 'from here'. There is a law under which migrants have to face institutionalized oppression (one of many forms of institutionalized racial violence, such as discrimination in housing, policing, schools, and healthcare, to name but a few). This law states that to be truly Spanish, one must be 'Spanish in the blood'. Being born in the land that has been yours for generations is not enough: you have to be 'Spanish in the blood'. Nobody knows what being 'Spanish in the blood' actually means. Does it mean you like the monarchy? Does it mean being white? Does it mean you were born here? I don't think it is any of the above. Anyhow, this law is called *ius sanguinis*.

In addition to all this, there is also the critical situation of institutionalized racism that took place on the southern border on 24 June 2022. This event is known as one of the worst massacres in the history of the European Southern Border, to which the vast majority of the Spanish population are indifferent. On this day, the 'necropolicies' of the Spanish and European States – policies of premeditated death whereby African migrants are allowed to die or are directly killed at the physical borders – were once again enacted with all their force in Melilla. These policies of death killed at least 37 people (some organizations estimate the number at 100) who were trying to scale the border fence in Melilla. According to a statement by anti-racism movements, 'We have seen once again how the lives of black people, black bodies, have been brutalized, dehumanized, and denied all rights. Treated as waste while all of society looks on, complicit in their silence with a major massacre.'

All of this completely dehumanizes migrants. But it also dehumanizes those who were born in the territory, because they are forever classified as new arrivals. We black Africans have been here for generations, starting with Andalus. It was a black nation. The word 'moor' comes from the Latin *maurus* which means 'dark-coloured', which in turn comes from the Ancient Greek μαυρός (*mauros*). This term was originally used to describe the Amazigh and other peoples of Mauritania in northern Africa. Over time, it became increasingly used to describe North Africans with pale skin. However, the phrase 'there are no moors along the coast', which is older than Jordi Hurtado, referred to black, dark people from Africa.

If the story of humanity starts in Africa and today there are people all over the world, then the whole world must have migrated at some point. Therefore, one cannot look the other way and ignore the massacres, the institutional discrimination, and everything related to what has been criminalized.

These attitudes must disappear as soon as possible. The efforts of the anti-racism movement should not be in vain. We are going to do everything possible to eradicate the situations described above, the foreign-nationals legislation that makes the lives of migrants so difficult, forcing them into highly precarious situations (as has been reported by the *Regularización Ya* organization), the irregular administrative situation of many people that does not allow them to be part of society, the funny looks, the lack of respect, or the incredulity visible in the faces of white people when they see us in places where they never imagined we could be. To eradicate all this will not be easy, but it is a highly intentional task and a social problem, and as such the whole of society should be involved. The whole world must combat racism, given that it is a public health problem.

How is racism inter-related with music? Afrosesion as a tool for empowerment

Often when an African song goes viral, nobody knows it is African, or what it says, or anything else about it. When that great song *Jerusalema* by Nomcebo Zikode feat. Master KG became popular, I can remember how everyone danced to it. However, every time I asked someone if they knew what it meant or if they knew anything about Jerusalem, a territory closely linked to various spiritual religious traditions and to which the artist refers, the answer was always no. It was as if the song was only good because of its rhythm and not its spiritual content. Suddenly everyone forgot that Jerusalem is a Palestinian territory occupied by the State of Israel, which has perpetrated genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people for over 75 years. All of this happened, because the majority of African songs are characterized by their rhythm and their intimate connection with spirituality, the land, and dancing.

Interpreting African rhythms in this way tends to denature these genres as a result of capitalism. This is something that seems to be commonplace with regard to musical genres or dance routines from the Global South. Often they are seen merely as 'folklore', as entertainment with no true value or meaning, and which simply serve to move your body on a purely superficial level, without taking into account the different artists involved in the artistic creation, normally linked to contextualized lived experiences, fused with resistance to colonialism, joy, survival, communal happiness, anger, love, and joviality.

Paradoxically, this does not happen with musical dance routines linked to white people, despite the fact that they reproduce biases based on stereotypes that are dangerous for certain vulnerable social groups. Another peculiar phenomenon occurring with musical genres originating from the Global South is that they are always described pejoratively or in negative terms. They are typically categorized as being chauvinist or discriminatory, when everyone knows that they reflect musical contexts. Songs are expressions that respond to a particular context, and as such it is impossible for all songs that a set of people come up with within a particular genre to be discriminatory. It is more honest and sensible to reflect on what discrimination exists within all musical genres where you find people, because they reproduce those stereotypes in the music they make.

However, when one points out this kind of discrimination, people are only able to identify a few limited examples: the emphasis is always on how genres from the Global South, such as reggaeton, are so chauvinist, or on how the Afrobeats genre is so chauvinist and classist. Everyone ignores what is going on with genres associated with white people such as Rock & Roll. Rock & Roll was not created by a white person, it was created by Sister Rosetta Tharpe, a black African American woman at the end of the 1930s, who was totally marginalised following the capitalization of Rock & Roll into the figure of the famous Elvis Presley. There are many bands made up of white people that are considered benchmarks for the genre, such as AC/DC, Guns and Roses, etc. that have misogynist lyrics. According to the newspaper *The Guardian*, Guns N' Roses has deleted the

song *One in a Million* from a forthcoming re-issue of their successful album *Appetite for Destruction* of which they sold over 5 million copies. The 1980s titans of rock have not commented on the decision, but it appears to have been motivated by the song lyrics, which include racist and homophobic language. The lyrics include: "Police and niggers, that's right / Get outta my way / Don't need to buy none of your gold chains today".

Other lyrics include:

"Immigrants and faggots
They make no sense to me
They come to our country
And think they'll do as they please
Like start some mini-Iran
Or spread some fucking disease
And they talk so many goddamn ways
It's all Greek to me"

Paradoxically, this will never become a stereotype. People will never say that rock 'n roll is racist, homophobic, or misogynist. This is mainly because of the racist dynamics that exist in the music industry, which allow one part of the world to be portrayed in monolithic terms and for them to be categorized pejoratively as "underdeveloped", and linking it to their intellectual or analytical capacity.

As I said before, dance is a cultural element with historical roots, with an emphasis that should not be separated out from the dance itself. Dance constitutes a communal way of sharing culture, where the historical backgrounds from which all cultures in which dance is adopted needs to be understood. They all have a history, which must be respected. I strongly emphasize how African dance routines constitute and derive from historical resistance, following the attempts to wipe them out and eliminate them for good by oppressing those who performed them. And this is what I like best: for people to learn contemporary African dances, but with knowledge and critical awareness.

This is the main reason I set up the AFROSESIÓN project in 2020, a project that teaches African dance routines together with their historical and cultural background. More specifically, it teaches afrobeats, a popular musical genre from western Africa and the diaspora, which was initially developed in Nigeria, Ghana, and the United Kingdom in the 2000s and 2010s. It also shows us fascinating things about the African continent. We have taken AFROSESIÓN to many places around the world, bringing about a cultural revolution that is respectful of its nature. Our slogan is: "Dancing is always better with knowledge!"



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QUINNDY AKEJU



Quindy Akeju (Ella/ella) (@quinndy) is an Afrobeats dancer and choreographer. She is Nigerian, born and based in Spain; she has also written two books, is a researcher, media communicator, and care nurse. She is co-founder of the AFROCOLECTIVA communications medium, and she has also worked with numerous state media and institutions, from local authorities to universities. She works on various initiatives of the Spanish State to promote the rights of migrants, racialized people, Africans and the descendants of Africans. She has been widely recognized for her work, including the 'Political Woman' day by the Bilbao City Council. Her Afrosesión project teaches African dance routines together with their histories and cultures.