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**Hip-hop urbanism, placemaking, and community-building among
Black LGBT youth in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

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**Hip-hop urbanism, placemaking, and community-building among
Black LGBT youth in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

by

Devin Antuan Oliver

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all fellow Black queer youth that are out there scratching, surviving, and thriving all over the Diaspora. In particular, I dedicate this project to those whom I call dear friends, who have graciously participated and contributed to this project's fruition. All the laughs, joy, tears, and pain shared—both in Rio and online—since 2014 not only made this project possible, but also taught me to truly love myself and other Black, queer, and truly inspirational young people.

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Abstract

Hip-hop urbanism, placemaking, and community-building among Black LGBT youth in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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The city of Rio de Janeiro has become a global gay tourist destination as well as political hub for the local and national LGBT movement. However, despite the city's gay-friendly, racially diverse reputation and pro-LGBT political gains, violence has increasingly endangered LGBT Brazilians amidst the rise of extreme conservatism in both government and society. This violence is not only gendered but also racialized, disproportionately impacting Black women and LGBT youth. Rio has become particularly renowned for a dual, paradoxical legacy: that of Black spectacle, celebration, and sexual freedom as well as that of great inequality, violence, and Black premature death. According to Smith (2016), this paradox is intentional—an “afro-paradise”—which simultaneously fetishizes and threatens Black lives. Numerous structural forces have transformed Rio into a hostile racial-sexual terrain in which Black LGBT youth must survive and build community. This critical ethnographic study examines: 1) how Rio's Black LGBT youth

negotiate violence and exclusion in everyday life; and 2) how they use physical and virtual sites as well as their own creative expression to claim their stake in the production of urban space. I ask, how do young Black LGBT people build political power when virtually locked out of state institutions and formal politics? I contend that Black LGBT young people are consistent placemakers across many spatial realms and scales, creating sites of self-making and political intervention through new media, art, events, and popular education. I highlight three particular spatial tactics: 1) occupying physical urban spaces and claiming territory; 2) Diasporic self-making through digital activism; and 3) leveraging cultural labor as young entrepreneurs and kinfolk. The key to youth's success has been the everyday strategic use of space, culture, and creative expression—a strategy of “infrapolitics”. Black LGBT youth enact a form of “hip hop urbanism”, in which they continuously make something out of nothing and quite literally put their creative expressions to work. Lastly, I argue that Black LGBT youth's placemaking practices demonstrate alternative ways of building power and innovating communal support systems, all in ways that do not entirely depend on state institutions, party politics, or even spatial proximity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Brazil's LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) movement has made unprecedented political gains as a "global leader in sexual rights" over the past decade, including a national anti-homophobia policy program and legalized same-sex marriage (de la Dehesa 2010, 2013). Rio de Janeiro in particular has become a global gay tourist destination and activist hub, hosting one of world's largest gay pride parades as well as the first openly gay parliament member, Jean Wyllys, elected in 2011. In recent years Rio's city government has also pursued economic development by branding itself as a gay tourist destination, in tandem with mega-event development. Historically, these touristic types of "gay-friendly" spaces and representations have served LGBT people as common sites for leisure, activism, and visibility. However, despite these recent political gains and affirmations of sexual rights by international human rights bodies (UN Human Rights Council 2011), violence continues to increasingly endanger LGBT Brazilians amidst the rise of extreme conservatism at all levels of Brazilian government. Brazil now has the highest reported LGBT homicide rate of the Americas, averaging one murder every 28 hours (Grupo Gay da Bahia 2014, 2017).



Figure 1: Compilation of “gay-friendly” touristic media. Sources: RIOTUR (Tourism Ministry of the City of Rio de Janeiro), TripOut Gay Travel

As in other countries in the Americas, homophobic and transphobic violence do not occur in a social vacuum; gendered violence, which includes misogyny, often works in tandem with racist (i.e. anti-Black) violence. Given that these systems of oppression manifest jointly, LGBT homicide victims are disproportionately poor and peripheral, transgender and gender-nonconforming, and Black across Brazil. Many LGBT people’s lived experiences are also colored by violent policing of majority-Black *favela* communities and sex work zones in which poor, Black transgender women, *travestis*, and gay men are disproportionately harassed and incarcerated by police forces. Considering that Black youth comprise 77% of all murdered youth in Brazil, black LGBT youth in particular navigate a precarious crossroads between homophobic and anti-Black violence (Amnesty International Brazil 2014). A geographical and conceptual chasm emerges in the lives of Black LGBT youth, between spaces of gay tourism and social life—largely located in affluent, white

neighborhoods and policed accordingly—and majority-Black peripheral neighborhoods, which can *both* be sites of gendered, anti-Black violence targeting Black LGBT youth.

Various societal institutions, practices, and discourses operate in tandem to transform Rio de Janeiro into a hostile racial-sexual terrain that directs violence toward Black, young, and non-heteronormative people. Black LGBT lives face even more precarious conditions following the 2016 impeachment of leftist President Dilma Rousseff and subsequent right-wing incumbency of President Michel Temer. Following impeachment, Temer’s administration has made swift, severe cuts to education, social services, and human rights institutions¹. The words of Rio de Janeiro’s politicians’ reflect and reinforce state actions, stating that Black women are thug-producing “factories” and that they would “rather have a dead child than a gay child”.²

Nothing exemplifies the very real dangers facing Black LGBT activists in Brazil as much as the assassination of Rio City Councilwoman Marielle Franco and her driver Anderson Pedro Gomes on the night of March 14, 2018. Elected in 2016, Franco was a radical Black lesbian and feminist activist-politician, mother, and advocate for the poor. In addition to her activism, Franco remained a fearless critic of police corruption of brutality against the city’s most marginalized residents. That is, until thirteen bullets pierced through both her and her driver. Three months after these slayings, state officials have failed to make progress on

¹ Following the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and subsequent takeover of Michel Temer, the Ministries of Culture and of Women, Racial Equality, and Youth, which long championed progressive social policy programs, were immediately terminated.

² Right-wing Congressman Jair Bolsonaro from São Paulo was recorded by journalists, originally and publicly stating (in Portuguese), “prefiro um filho morto do que homossexual!”. In a similar anti-Black and misogynistic vein, former Rio de Janeiro State Governor Sérgio Cabral stated that poor (assumedly Black) communities are “factories that produce marginal people”, and that “*do ventre da mulher negra nasce bandido* (thugs are born from Black women’s bellies).”

any investigations, despite nationwide and global protests demanding justice for Franco and honoring her legacy under the hashtag #MariellePresente.

Activists who, like Franco, navigate the intersections of Black, LGBT, and womanhood understand Franco's assassination as a symptom of global systems of oppression. From the perspective of Black feminist activists across and beyond Brazil, the gendered, anti-Black violence evidenced in Franco's killing are "part of a global phenomenon of anti-Blackness, manifested through routine violence against Black peoples, suppression of Black political voices, displacement from Black lands, exploitation of Black labor, erasure of Black cultures and histories, and gender and sexual violence against Black women, queer and transgender people" (AAG 2018).

Drawing conceptually from feminist political geographers and Black feminist theory, and critical race theory, I seek to empirically address the following research questions in this study:

- i. *How and where in the city do Black LGBT youth negotiate violence in their everyday lives? How do youth use space and cultural expression to engage in insurgent placemaking?*
- ii. *How do Black LGBT youth build power and effect social change without direct access to (or support from) formal political institutions?*
- iii. *How can youth's spatial practices challenge us to radically reconsider what counts as formal "politics" and community planning?*

Throughout this study I put forward several arguments regarding both the spatial nature of gendered, anti-Black racism in Rio de Janeiro as well as Black LGBT youth's responses to violence and inequality through space. First, I contend that the state, civil society, and the tourism industry have represented Rio de Janeiro as a global city renowned for two paradoxical legacies: that of Black spectacle, celebration, sexual freedom, and excess and,

on the other hand, that of great inequality, violence, and premature Black death. This racial-sexual spatial imaginary—what Smith (2016) calls an “afro-paradise”—has transformed the *carioca*³ urban landscape of Rio de Janeiro into a place of Black sexual fantasy and consumption as well as of Black death. Because of the city’s paradoxical realities as a ‘gay-friendly’ afro-paradise, Black LGBT youth must consistently create sites of self-making and political intervention through insurgent acts of placemaking. Black LGBT youth deploy a variety of such spatial tactics in order to create spaces of sociocultural support, entrepreneurship, and political power among themselves. These insurgent placemaking practices are simultaneously place-based, diasporic/transnational, and embodied, and even spiritual. Amidst a landscape of neoliberal urbanism and gendered racism, Black LGBT youth have invariably asserted their claim to urban space by making something out of nearly nothing and, quite literally, putting art and culture to work. The key to youth’s success in building political power has been the everyday but strategic use of culture and creative expression in a form of infrapolitics, using what’s within their physical and virtual reach in order to survive and even thrive. These practices constitute what Jeffries (2014) terms “hip-hop urbanism”, a political project in which marginalized urban youth deploy culture as a tool to protest violence and inequality, to retell their own stories, and to stake their claims to urban politics and culture. Youth demonstrate alternative ways of building power that do not depend fully on state institutions and party politics, breaking from more traditional notions of urban politics and social movement-building.

³ *Carioca* is a term that designates anything or anyone from the city of Rio de Janeiro.

In Chapter 2 I lay out the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that conceptualize the relationships between race, space, gender, and violence. I draw upon scholarship across the fields of queer and feminist political geography, Black feminist theory, and radical planning. I explore how race, gender, and violence inform Black queer youth's sense of place in the "afro-paradise" of Rio de Janeiro. I also interrogate the role of neoliberal urbanism in creating the precarious conditions of youth's livelihoods, informing a Black queer sense of place. I contend that amidst the hostile racial-sexual terrain of the postcolonial city, Black LGBT youth consistently create and carve out sites of self-making and political intervention through insurgent acts of placemaking drawing on cultural mediums such as social media, art, popular education, and celebration. These acts of placemaking illustrate how anti-Black racism and heteropatriarchy are central in ordering urban space, even when Black people are not visibly present and the city projects narratives of diversity and inclusion.

In Chapter 3 I flesh out the methodological and epistemological implications of this Black queer activist research project. As such, I argue that this project is a product of a *collaborative* research process that is grounded in similar standpoints and relationships to racial-gender hierarchies between the researcher and their research partners. As an activist researcher, it is my objective to help further decolonize social science research by centering the knowledge and agency of oppressed peoples through meaningful and accountable relationships. More broadly, I reflect on the Black Queer Diaspora as a political project which complicates common notions of "the field" as well as the methodologies and embodied experiences of ethnographic fieldwork. As a Black queer diasporic researcher and subject, my own lived experiences and shared positioning vis-à-vis racial-gender hierarchies force us to reconsider

not only the where and how of fieldwork but also issues of intimacy, performance, and violence, which are central yet rarely acknowledged facets of ethnographic research.

In Chapter 4 I provide political and historical context that elaborates more on the production of Rio de Janeiro as an afro-paradise. Numerous structural and spatial patterns transform Rio de Janeiro into an afro-paradise—a ‘gay-friendly’ afro-paradise more specifically—that consistently appropriates yet perpetuates violence against Black LGBT youth. In this chapter I trace examples of the oppressive hierarchies, structures, and spaces that work against Black LGBT youth in Rio de Janeiro. These dimensions of institutional violence include, but are not limited to, death and homicide, mass incarceration, compromised health, lack of access to education and formal political power.

In Chapter 5 I describe how Black LGBT youth respond to violence and exclusion and strategically build power because of and despite their disenfranchisement from formal politics. Drawing on my ethnographic research, I argue that *carioca* Black LGBT youth deploy an arsenal of spatial tactics in order to create spaces of sociocultural support, entrepreneurship, and political power among themselves. My findings highlight three key spatial tactics that characterize this emerging movement: 1) occupying physical urban spaces and claiming territory; 2) diasporic self-making through digital activism; and 3) leveraging cultural labor as young entrepreneurs, kin, and mentors. Amidst a landscape of neoliberal urbanism and gendered racism, Black youth have invariably asserted their claim to urban space by making something out of nearly nothing and putting art and culture to work. The key to youth’s success in building political power largely *outside* of formal politics has been the everyday but strategic use of culture and creative expression.

In Chapter 6 I conclude this study with reflections on the broader implications of Black LGBT youth's placemaking tactics for both social scientists and urban planning and policy. Black youth's history of placemaking and community-building remind us, as researchers and practitioners, to recognize and mitigate our own implicit biases when defining politics, stakeholders, and policy insights. Black LGBT youth can teach us that the source of critical knowledge needed to design socially equitable policies does not lie solely with state officials; it most often lies within the disenfranchised constituents most directly affected by the socioeconomic issue at hand. The infrapolitics of Black LGBT youth's placemaking also constitute what critical planning scholars call "insurgent planning". Everyday acts of resistance and survival—through pleasure, play, dance, fashion, performance, or popular education—create "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1985, 1992) outside the realm of formal politics that challenge us to rethink what counts as strategies of resistance, creative responses to spatial inequalities, and social movements overall.

Chapter 2: Race, space, and gender in “afro-paradise”

“Black matters are spatial matters”.

-Katherine McKittrick

“A geographical imperative lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice; if justice is embodied, it is then therefore always spatial, which is to say, part of a process of making a place”.

-Ruth Wilson Gilmore

In this study I seek to examine the role of urban planning in reproducing (post)colonial geographies of race, gender and violence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. More importantly, however, I reflect upon how Black LGBT folks respond to gendered, anti-Black violence and the potential of these spatial practices as an "insurgent planning" project in its own right. Much like geography, urban planning has long constituted a set of state-sanctioned spatial practices that exclude and limit Black people and knowledges as “oddities” and mere *objects* of study, rather than critical geographical *subjects* active in their own placemaking and planning practices (McKittrick 2006, 10). In many ways, urban planning has shaped the very foundations of the city’s physical and cultural landscapes and has thus enabled state violence that is both gendered and anti-Black in nature.

I hypothesize that, amidst the hostile (post)colonial cartographies that urbanism has made concrete, *carioca* Black LGBT young people consistently create sites of self-making and political intervention through social media, art, popular education, celebration, and placemaking. These acts illustrate how anti-Black racism, homo- and transphobia, and misogyny are central in ordering urban space, even when Black people are not visibly present and the city projects narratives of diversity and inclusion. These spaces serve as political sites

from which youth exchange experiential knowledge, share resources, and position themselves both within and against the state in order to address institutional forces that create precarious livelihoods.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINIST, QUEER AND BLACK GEOGRAPHIES

In my research, I analyze the spatial politics that create and rework the conditions of Black LGBT youth's everyday lives in order to center Black LGBT youth as geographical *actors* who also have a significant stake in the everyday production of space. Critical urban geographers understand urban space as much more than physical structures within the built urban environment. Space is also relational, meaning that the city is both a physical *and* political landscape produced through inequitable social relations and, thus, a site of conflict based on social differences (Lefebvre 1991[1974], Massey 1994). These politics of place, in turn, directly inform people's everyday actions, relationships and self-awareness. Feminist and queer geographers contend that space, identity and inequality are social processes shaped by gender, race, class and sexuality. These social relations across urban space are just as global as they are interpersonal in nature, emerging from the mundane experiences in people's everyday lives—the “global intimate” (Mountz and Hyndman 2006). Black feminist geographers contend that Black people's sense of place is informed by racism, sexism, and homophobia, through which we can “locate and speak back to the geographies of modernity, ...slavery, and colonialism” (McKittrick 2006, xiii). Even actions and spaces that suggest diversity can be complicit with the exclusion of others—in this case, Black LGBT people.

Amidst such a contradictory landscape, Black people must carve out spaces of everyday survival and political intervention.

FEMINIST AND QUEER APPROACHES TO VIOLENCE AND URBAN SPACE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Feminist political geographers argue that the scales of our studies must shift from the global and national to also include human bodies, the home, and community to discern how global political processes impact everyday practices and are, at once, grounded and produced by them. Through this lens—what Mountz and Hyndman (2006) call the ‘global intimate’—feminist geographers conceive of people’s everyday experiences of power and identity as material, symbolic, global and intimate (see Pratt and Rosner 2006, Browne 2007, Wright 2008, Massaro and Williams 2013). Global processes like capitalism and patriarchy do not simply penetrate or ‘touch down’ in local contexts; the global and ‘the intimate’—social relations, practices and modes of interaction that are embodied and rooted in everyday life—are mutually constitutive (Pain and Staeheli 2014). Mountz & Hyndman (2006) contend that people’s everyday practices “defy any fixed or given scale: they are at once connected to global and local processes, politics and people”. As such, “each site blurs the global and the intimate into the fold of quotidian life” (Ibid.).

Feminists reclaim the often feminized sites and scales of the intimate—the body, home, borders—as key sites of analysis as well as political intervention. As a result, feminist geographical analysis calls for analysis in the intimate, “everyday life of power, identity and place” by “interrogat[ing] the mundane experience of space, place and identity as people

navigate the tricky terrain of daily living and illustrate how this living does not fall neatly into either/or categories” (Wright 2008, see also Pratt 2004). This reframing of global political-economic processes is particularly relevant in discussions about violence and how exactly violence takes place in the lives of Black LGBT youth’s. Feminist geographers have taken the task of remapping violence and people’s strategic responses to violence in ways that cut across and “dissolv[e] boundaries between the customary boundaries of global/local, familial/state and personal/political as objects of study” (Cowen and Story 2013; Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Pain and Smith 2008; Pratt and Rosner 2012; Pratt 2012; Pain and Staeheli 2014, 344). In this vein, violence is a “multi-faceted and multi-sited force—interpersonal, and institutional, social, economic and political, physical, sexual, emotional and psychological” (Pain and Staeheli 2014, 345).

Although state violence shapes even the most intimate realms of people’s lives, the mundane, intimate relations are what enables broader geopolitical forces to persist across many sites, forming the foundation of geopolitics itself. Violence is multi-faceted because it is also always inflected by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression based on gender, race, class and sexuality (Crenshaw 1991; Nash 2008; Richie 2012). Remapping violence, then, is about shifting the scales, sites and means through which violence and agency take place away from global spectacles and toward what we face more intimately in our own lives (Pain 2014). What emerges from these alternative geographies are what Cindi Katz (2001) terms as “counter-topographies”, which span multiple scales and places and “ground, locate, map, and link empirical realities” (Mountz and Hyndman 2006). A transnational—or, in the case of my work, (Black) diasporic—feminist politics roots itself in everyday lives while also

“crossing boundaries” and “connecting [people’s realities] across [social and geographical] differences” (Ibid.).

Both feminist and queer engagements are inextricably tied to the study of human geographies due to their common objective to “approach sexuality as a nexus of the global and the intimate” and an increasing focus on the embodiment of space, with “the gendered and sex(ual)ised body as an important coordinate of subjectivity” (Wright 2010, Gordon-Murray et al. 2008). Thus, in both feminist and queer research sexuality is understood as a key site and frame of reference through which people build “meaning, power and politics in the most intimate and public of settings around the world” (Wright 2010). These bodies of literature thus approach space, identity and power as global-intimate processes and call attention to the critical theoretical value of the mundane experiences of space and power in people’s everyday lives.

Queer geographers, in particular, conceive space as embodied, gendered and (hetero)sexualized, and contend that people’s appropriations of space, in turn, can reinforce or disrupt gender sexual norms in particular sites (Binnie 1997). As such, the social production of space implies that space is constantly reworked: the heteronormative disempowerment of space and place can be reshaped by queer folk themselves through appropriation. However, such queer appropriations of space can be co-opted by city elites, as in the case of Rio de Janeiro, through tourism narratives justified by ideologies that view assimilation as social and economic progress (Rushbrook 2002, Waitt et al. 2008, Oswin 2015). Despite these contributions to our understanding of sexuality and space, other scholars have critiqued queer geographers for their privileging of sexuality in the Global North while

failing to “position sexuality within multifaceted constellations of power” that are informed at once by sexual, racialized, classed and gendered processes (Oswin 2008, Hanhardt 2013, Giesecking 2014, Valentine 2007). As a result, nonnormative queer people of color in both the Global North and South are rendered invisible in such studies, with little due diligence given to their relationships to space and power (Cohen 1997, Puar 2002a, 2002b, Livermon 2014).

BLACK FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS IN LGBT/QUEER STUDIES

Brazilianist scholars have made attempts to decenter queer and sexuality studies from urban centers of the Global North through ethnographic accounts of sexualities. Specifically in the context of Brazil, Richard Parker (1999) and Don Kulick (1998) contextualize in historical and cultural terms their analyses of nonnormative genders and sexualities across several Brazilian cities. Both offer readings of such lived experiences largely without assuming a queer politics as it takes place in North America. However, works like these are often problematic for failing to consider the authors’ own positionalities as white, cisgender gay men, initially drawn to Brazil as titillated tourists, as well as the effects of anti-Black racism on the lives of the majority-Black LGBT people that they study. These shortcomings result in a typical white masculinist ethnographic gaze that seems ‘colorblind’, leaving the authors unmarked and accountable and rendering LGBT people as ‘incomplete’ subjects only identifiable by sexual and gender identities (see Stout 2014).

A main reason for the centering of white queer experiences—or elision of those of Black queer folks—in the aforementioned literature resembles what Cathy Cohen (1997: 438) calls an “uncomplicated understanding of power” and identity categories in mainstream queer politics. What we should problematize is the tendency of queer theorists and activists to isolate and prioritize sexuality as the “primary frame through which they pursue their politics” (440). What is created as a result of “activating only one characteristic their identity” (ibid.) is a simplistic dichotomy between everything that is queer, assumed to be radical and just, and everything that is heterosexual and thus inherently oppressive and despised (see Oswin 2008). Left to grapple with this divide while caught in the middle of it are Black and other non-white, non-normative people.

Black feminist and queer scholars have long problematized simplistic understandings of power and identity categories and the tendency of queer theorists and activists to isolate and prioritize sexuality as the “primary frame through which they pursue their politics” (Cohen 1997, 440). This has resulted in a simplistic dichotomy between everything that is queer—assumed to be radical and just—and everything that is heterosexual and thus inherently oppressive and to be despised (see Oswin 2008). Left to grapple with this divide while caught in the middle of it are Black and other non-white, non-normative people.

Thus, Black feminists across disciplines and fields—including Geography—have advanced forceful critiques that build a broadened, intersectional understanding of queerness, violence, power, and identities. Furthermore, Black feminists have called for ‘standpoint epistemologies’, which call for critical knowledge production situated and grounded in everyday lived experience. This knowledge must be centered in the experiential knowledge

of nonnormative folks in an “attempt to locate authority or expertise with those who experience a circumstance” (Richie 2012, 129-30; see Miller-Young 2014).

RADICAL BLACK STUDIES AND BLACK FEMINIST GEOGRAPHIES: INTERVENTIONS ON SPACE, RACE, GENDER AND VIOLENCE

Grounding Black feminist thought in more geographic terms, urban space itself becomes both material and imagined, with racialized, gendered, classed *and* sexualized dimensions, creating a hostile landscape through which Black people must constantly navigate and struggle to make more livable. Black feminist geographers thus understand racism, sexism and homophobia as determinants of people’s sense of place. As Katherine McKittrick states, “Black matters are spatial matters”, in that space and place factor centrally in Black lives and, in turn, render us geographic actors whose negotiations can result in reformulations of their own subjectivities and space itself (McKittrick 2006, xii). In other words, Black geographies *necessarily* center Black agency in geographies of both domination and resistance. As spatial subjects, Black people engage in building sites of consciousness, survival, and resistance in the face of trauma and violence.

The geographical imaginations and practices of Black LGBT youth should be understood as “social processes that make [space and place] a racial-sexual terrain” (McKittrick 2006, xiv). In this vein, both domination and resistance can be understood as spatial acts through which Black people assert their own place in the world. My research brings to the fore the spatial agency and imaginations of Black LGBT youth, which in turn provide insurgent, reimagined geographies of violence, struggle and pleasure all at once. Black feminist and queer scholarship across the Americas has made productive interventions that view the

conditions of Black people's lives as always already ambiguous, embedded in epistemological tensions. In such ambiguity where trauma, pleasure, exploitation, and survival coexist in daily life, Black people exercise their agency by appropriating and refashioning negative representations in hopes of building socio-spatial alternatives on their own terms—a 'remix', in a way, of the violence that centrally defines our existence (Bailey & Shabazz 2014, Walcott 2007).

Black feminist activist-scholars like Keisha-Khan Perry (2013), Erica Williams (2013), and Christen Smith (2016) already offer insights on how Black Brazilian subjects—Black women in particular—must make strategic choices to fashion themselves, cope, and intervene to secure daily survival and livability. Working with Black sex workers, neighborhood activists, and activist performers, all three see Blackness and Black spatial consciousness not as a mere effect of exclusion, but rather as central to the constructions of the spaces, places and society that one takes for granted daily—like tourist landscapes, plazas, and even celebratory “gay spaces”. Smith (2016) sees this as a dangerous paradox which she calls “afro-paradise”. Afro-paradise is a “gendered, sexualized and racialized imaginary” through which Salvador becomes a place of Black fantasy and consumption as well as Black death (3). Black people in highly exoticized sites like Rio de Janeiro simultaneously become hyper-sexualized, romanticized, consumed, and exterminated objects. However, this paradox is intentional: it is precisely this Black fantasy that serves as a smokescreen that facilitates the state's extermination of Black bodies. Brazilian society, media, and the state actively choreograph these celebratory performances and routine killings. It is in the midst of this erotic, genocidal landscape that Black people—especially Black women and youth—must

carve out spaces of everyday survival, consciousness, and political intervention. Similarly, Katherine McKittrick (2013) understands this contradiction as indicative of a “plantation future”. According to McKittrick, the plantation becomes a material and symbolic site of violence and resistance, where the built environment, urban social processes, and Blackness become inseparable. Because of and despite the violence that the plantation symbolizes, “painful racial histories hold in them the possibility to organize our collective futures” (Ibid.).

URBAN PLANNING AS MEANS OF STATE VIOLENCE: FEMINIST, ANTI-RACIST AND DECOLONIAL APPROACHES TO URBANISM

So, then, what does this theoretical intervention mean for planning theory? My critique of the impacts and ideological foundations of urban planning stem from the Black feminist stance that urban space itself is both material and discursive, with racialized, gendered, classed *and* sexualized dimensions, creating a hostile landscape through which Black people must constantly navigate and struggle to make more livable. Driving the profession across the Americas and beyond has been the imperative to maximize laws, policies, and regulations in the quest to serve public purposes such as efficient uses of natural and political resources, historic preservation, and state regulation over the built, natural, and social environments. Urban planning is thus a field of practice and inquiry invested in spatially reshaping the relationships between human subjects and their environments across multiple scales. Furthermore, colonial logics of race, class, and gender have permeated planning theory and practice since the field’s inception, operating as a project that seeks to transform individuals and discipline society through the city, protect private wealth, and advance nation building and eugenics (Outtes 2003, see Shabazz 2015).

Urban planning has long constituted a set of state-sponsored spatial practices that have excluded and limited Black people and knowledges as “oddities” and mere objects of study rather than critical subjects active in their own placemaking and planning practices (McKittrick 2006, 10). In this vein, urban planning concretizes a white patriarchal and Eurocentric sense of place concealed by “rational spatial colonization and domination”—a process based on the “profitable erasure and objectification of subaltern subjectivities, stories, and lands” (Ibid.). Planners present urbanism as a scientifically objective field, which contends that space and place are mere transparent containers for human activity. This conceptualization of space serves a seductive veil of objectivity, which occludes and normalizes the unequal power relations that sustain space itself. This “transparent space”—space that “just is”—that many planning practitioners exalt creates an “illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation, and that what we see is true”, in effect eschewing Black imagined geographies and replacing them with a Eurocentric, patriarchal vantage point accepted as scientific truth (Lefebvre 1991[1974], 127-29; McKittrick 2006, xv). Relatedly, Richie (2012) understands urban policy and planning as key mechanisms of what she calls “America’s prison nation”—a convergence of “conservative rhetoric, punishment ideology, and crime policies” (21) that works to increase social inequality and to create a hostile social environment that positions poor Black women and youth in precarious situations for which they are seen as personally culpable. Most accounts of crime and Black women’s experiences with violence in policy contexts do not account for structural racism or economic exploitation and, when met with conservative, anti-Black, misogynistic forces, work to further criminalize Black non-normative subjects for the

violence that they must negotiate. Black women and youth—especially if poor, queer, and non-normative—in a Black diasporic city (Chicago, in Richie’s study) thus become “criminal defendants” or “perpetrators” instead of victims and survivors of the violence that urbanism and colonial ideologies has established in the first place. Consequently, urban planning has shaped the very foundations of the city’s physical and cultural landscapes and, in many ways, has enabled state violence that is both gendered and anti-Black by nature. In other words, planning becomes a driving spatial force in reproducing colonial legacies of state violence in the postcolonial, Black diasporic city (see Fanon 1966, Cowen and Lewis 2016).

However, as non-normative, queer subjects, Black LGBT youth must produce redemptive places and imagine alternative worlds within such landscapes of domination produced, in part, through the mechanisms of urban planning. Caught up in the veil of “transparent” space while, Black queer geographies “do not make sense in a world that validates spatial processes and progress through domination and social disavowal” (9), Black people consistently create places and negotiate space and its meanings. In addition, Black queer geographies—both imagined and real—work alongside, across and against traditional geographies produced by urban planning. Following McKittrick (2013), the diasporic, postcolonial city—like Rio de Janeiro—is a site of constant struggle that holds within it “plantation futures”. Put another way, the city becomes the plantation—a material and symbolic site of violence and resistance, where the built environment, urban social processes, and blackness become inseparable. Because of and despite the violence that the plantation symbolizes, “painful racial histories hold in them the possibility to organize our collective futures” reworked through everyday, intimate acts (Ibid.).

INSURGENT PLANNING AND PLACEMAKING VIS-À-VIS BLACK QUEER YOUTH

Black queer youth's responses to exclusion and violence are insurgent spatial practices that are at once intimate, structural, rooted in trauma, and oppositional (Bailey 2013, 2014). Through these performative practices of placemaking, hustling, and community-building, Black LGBT youth have developed what Jeffries (2014) calls "hip hop urbanism", in which urban youth try to make something out of nearly nothing and quite literally put art and play to work. As with early hip-hop among Black and Latinx youth in U.S. cities, the diverse cultural expressions of Black LGBT youth in Rio constitute "a direct response to economic violence and neglect" of segregation and isolation (Jeffries 2014, 707). Through their own cultural labor and spatial tactics, Black LGBT youth retell their own stories of urban life, all while challenging anti-Black, misogynistic, and homophobic narratives, create safer spaces, and economically sustain themselves. Such redemptive spaces, such as Casa Nem that I describe in Chapter 5, represent material political sites through which youth build "plantation futures" in the exoticized, genocidal "afro-paradise" of Rio de Janeiro. More importantly, I understand Black queer youth's practices as an insurgent planning project that, in effect, unsettles planning as "the voice of reason in modern society", diversifies planning history and planning actors, and advances new planning innovations from the grassroots (Sandercock 1998, Roberts 2016). As Sandercock notes, insurgent planning evokes "alternative traditions of planning" that have "always existed outside the state and sometimes in opposition to it", challenging our basic notion of what constitutes planning (2).

Miraftab (2009) advances the notion of insurgent planning and planning histories in ways that not only seeks to imagine new planning futures, but also decolonize planning as a

political project. In this sense, one can understand insurgent planning as a series of radical spatial practices among subaltern subjects that respond to the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism through alternative forms of inclusive governance. As in the work of McKittrick (2006, 2007, 2013) and Smith (2016), Miraftab disrupts planning as a mechanism for colonial domination in order to advance an “‘upside-down’ look” at urbanism that understands subaltern cities “by their own rules of the game and values rather than by the planning prescriptions and fantasies of the West” (45).

Miraftab thus defines insurgent planning as that which is transgressive, counter-hegemonic, and imaginative. Insurgent planning practices are “transgressive” in time, place and action “by locating historical memory and transnational consciousness at the heart of their practices” (2009, 46). Insurgent planning is “counter-hegemonic” in that such a project destabilizes the ‘normal’ orders of things and space itself, promotes a “historicized consciousness” and insurgent historiographies (see Sandercock 1998) that “stimulates collective memories and historicizes the problems” created by the contradictions of neoliberal governance (Miraftab 2009, 45). Lastly, insurgent planning is “imaginative”, made real through subaltern imaginaries of what the world could be, with “symbolic value” that “offer[s] hope from which to work towards alternatives” (46). In sum, Miraftab provides a conceptual framework through which one can begin to decolonize planners’ imaginations of subaltern cities and subjects that represent the Western city “as an object of desire” and ultimate goal of modernity. Through insurgent planning, one can envision and enact a project toward liberation and re-imaginings of the world which decolonize the mind, our environments, and space itself (see Fanon 1966, 1967).

However, missing from the vast majority of the existing literature on insurgent planning is a thorough consideration of planning as a colonial instrument that has highly gendered and racialized dimensions and impacts on subaltern subjects. In other words, much of the insurgent planning does not put forth an intersectional feminist lens, which accounts for the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, and citizenship inform our sense of place and subjective experiences. Sweet (2016) advances a more intersectional lens to this discussion through the concept of “kitchen table planning”, which conceptualize insurgent planning as gendered, racialized, informal, transgressive and spiritual practice of placemaking, which aims to save communities by responding quickly to inequalities and state violence. I draw upon Sweet’s metaphor of the “kitchen table” as a site for insurgent planning: a literal and political site from which Latinas (in Sweet’s work) exchange experiential knowledge in order to collectively address institutional structures and forces that adversely affect everyday life. “Kitchen table planning” presents planning as a white, Eurocentric, masculinist field that can be countered by those most negatively impacted by its outcomes. As I will detail in Chapter 5, sites like Casa Nem represent a queer sort of “kitchen table”, so to speak, from which Black queer and trans youth create “redemptive places” amidst a hostile landscape in ways that acknowledge a wide array of lived experiences, and which try to enact more livable futures for young people of all races, genders, sexualities, backgrounds, and social positions.

How do race, gender, and violence inform Black queer youth’s sense of place in the postcolonial, Black diasporic city? How does urban planning become implicated in creating the precarious conditions of many youth’s livelihoods? How do youth’s spatial practices and

imagined geographies unsettle planning and geography as we know it? Drawing upon feminist political and queer geographies, Black feminist thought, and radical planning scholarship, I contend that amidst the hostile racial-sexual terrain of the postcolonial city, made concrete through urbanism and urban planning, Black queer youth consistently create sites of self-making and political intervention through insurgent acts of placemaking. These spatial practices are transgressive, counter-hegemonic, and imaginative in ways that disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about the roles of planning in shaping urban space. Black queer insurgent planning and placemaking illustrate how anti-Black racism, homophobia, and misogyny are central in ordering urban space—in effect, acting to decolonize the mind, the built environment, and urbanism itself. These redemptive spaces serve as political sites from which youth can exchange knowledge, imagine and enact alternative worlds, and position themselves both within and against the state in order to address the institutional forces that create precarious livelihoods.

Chapter 3: The methodological and epistemological challenges of Black queer activist research

As a Black queer activist research project, this thesis documents and theorizes upon three years of fieldwork. My work is grounded by a shared commitment to principles of intersectional social justice and aligned with Black LGBT youth's struggles to confront and eliminate inequalities (see Hale 2008). In addition, as I will explain in this chapter, my personal trajectory and lived experiences "in the field" are inextricably linked to my research process and this research product. As activist researchers, our desires to utilize academic skills in the service of collectives in struggle necessitate a clear connection between our progressive politics and theories and our research methodologies. As a Black queer activist research process and critical ethnographic project, this chapter demonstrates why and how every methodological choice of mine has been a conscious political decision. First, however, I must engage three basic yet critical epistemological questions:

- *What do we count as valid knowledge production?*
- *For whom and for what do we conduct research?*
- *What is activist research, and what makes it unique as an epistemological and methodological approach?*

ACTIVIST RESEARCH AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

As I have suggested, this project is not merely one of cultural critique; it is a Black queer activist research project, both methodologically and epistemological. Furthermore, this thesis is a product of a collaborative research process that is grounded in the similar standpoints and relationships to racial-gender hierarchies that activists and I, the activist-researcher, share. As such, this project necessitates a corresponding transformation of conventional

social science methodologies. As an activist researcher, I seek to further decolonize social science research by centering the knowledge and agency of oppressed peoples through meaningful and accountable relationships, all while challenging the taken-for-granted methodologies and power relations in conventional knowledge production within academia.

Like other forms of knowledge production that count as cultural critique, activist research is politically engaged in explicit ways and therefore “challenges power structures, acknowledges authority, and deconstructs oppressive ideas” that persist in social science research and broader civil society (Hale 2006, 98; Smith 2016, 27). However, as activist researchers like Charles Hale and Christen Smith note, cultural critique is often only assessed for the critical content of knowledge produced, taking little or no account of the institutions and power dynamics through which that knowledge is produced. In other words, cultural critique shares common intentions with activist research insofar as it seeks to “champion the subaltern peoples and deconstruct the powerful”, but it ultimately fails to produce knowledge in ways that establish meaningful, accountable relationships with organized groups in struggle—the cornerstone of activist research (Hale 2006, 98). Cultural critique and activist research thus often greatly differ methodologically due to the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the political processes they study (Hale 2008, 16). Therefore, activist research requires that I, a Black queer cisgender man, explicitly align myself with the Black LGBTQ youth with whom I work in Brazil, whose lived experiences and political demands ground the knowledge that I have produced through this very thesis.

Additionally, activist research decenters the academy within the process of knowledge production. Instead, activist researchers acknowledge that social movements and the very

concrete political struggles that they wage are the sources of new ideas, new knowledge, and new goals (Kelley 2002, 8). As a result, activist researchers must continue their commitment to carefully listen to the social movements they support, “assign special importance to their agency and standpoint ... work in dialogue [and] collaboration, alliance with people who are struggling to better their lives”, and produce results that their research partners see fit (Hale 2008, 4). Activist researchers thus straddle and negotiate “two disparate intellectual worlds”—that of the academy and that of social movements and their organic intellectual traditions (Hale 2006, 115). According to Hale, we must be ready to “name and confront” the contradictions that emerge from the uneven power dynamics between researcher and organized political group with which they work (see Hale 2008).

As a Black queer youth myself, I have followed the tradition of other activist researchers of color by grounding my work in the “experience-based connections” that I share with my research partners—a sense of “positioned objectivity” (Hale 2008, 3). In other words, I have experienced—albeit differently—many of the same political processes and broader forms of oppression that my research partners grapple with daily, such as racism, homophobia, assault, and the structural anti-Black, anti-poor violence of neoliberal urban development. Thus, guiding my methodological choices and overall approach is a commitment to epistemologies grounded in a Black feminist standpoint that center ideas and practices of subjects that navigate the margins of society. As Beth Richie (2012) notes, there is a significant difference between “simply describing racial difference”—a project simply about Black youth—and situating racial difference within a complex system of domination centered around marginalized perspectives (58). In this vein, Richie’s work serves as a methodological model

for the development of my own Black queer activist research project, which insists on self-reflexivity and resists potential co-optation by researchers and policymakers. In particular, I seek to demonstrate that non-normative Black people (such as Black LGBT youth) are “closer to the experience that they are analyzing”—particularly gendered, anti-Black violence—and are thus “in the best position to evaluate and make claims about the meaning of it” (Richie 2012, 129).

As a Black queer activist-researcher, my intention is to create a more democratic process of knowledge production and a heightened sense of accountability to the collectives of Black LGBT youth with which I work. Academia and conventional scholarship alone do not and cannot guarantee “relevancy and accountability to collectives resisting domination” (Gordon and James 2008, 371). In doing so, I seek to bring about both material and discursive change in the collective’s work and in broader civil society in ways that center their stories, visions, and freedom dreams (Hale 2006, 98; see Kelley 2002). I believe that this sense of accountability to activist collectives is more important than the prestige granted to scholars who produce knowledge about oppressed people but only use it for scholarly consumption and career advancement. As a consequence, I resist the allure of such careerist “narcissism” that constrains and entraps many of us well-intentioned academics and cultural critics. My rejection of “narcissistic conformity” means that I reject the academy as “the final destination point for activist politics for social justice” (Gordon and James 2008, 368). I recognize that the publication of an article in an esteemed academic journal—a reward and high accomplishment for all scholars—is not inherently radical and will not directly bring visibility or material change for the Black queer youth with whom I work.

If I am to be considered a radical subject engaging in activist research, then the communities of “those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable” must replace the academy as the final destination point for my activist politics and intellectual endeavors (Lorde 1984, 112). For radical subjects engaging in activist research, the academy often represents Lorde’s notion of the “master’s house”. The master’s house, although often oppressive for most of us, can also be contested and appropriated by those of us outside society’s white supremacist and heteropatriarchal standards. Sometimes the very conditions of oppression provide us certain tools and opportunities that enable us to slowly chip away at the house’s foundation in order to one day build a decolonized edifice that leverages our differences in the struggle for social justice. However, Lorde also recognizes that “survival is not an academic skill, and truly centers the knowledges and needs of oppressed communities. This commitment of “leaving the academy and embedding ourselves in collectives” in struggle is the “true hallmark” of a radical subject, which distinguishes them from an activist scholar (Gordon and James 2008, 370). In doing so, we honor Lorde’s lesson:

For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support (Lorde 1984, 112).

In other words, bringing about genuine, material change in the lives of our aligned communities does not come about through academic means alone. Furthermore, bringing about radical transformation of society requires us to know both what we fight against and what we fight for, a new society that we can literally only dream of—the world of our

“freedom dreams” (see Kelley 2002). At best, those of us dependent upon the university as the only harbor and incubator for new knowledge will be able to offer powerful critiques of oppression that shift paradigms of thinking that may or may not “trickle down” to the masses. However, many scholars of this tradition do not acknowledge how their theories are often appropriated by elites for antiradical purposes and thus contribute to elite power, leaving intact all of the house’s foundation, pipes, and furniture within. This reflection forces us to ask ourselves: do these more conventional modes of critical scholarship bring about the “genuine change” that Lorde envisions? If not, then for whom are we conducting research?

CONTEXTUALIZING ACTIVIST RESEARCH CONTEXTUALIZED WITHIN THE BLACK (QUEER) DIASPORA

All at once, this research project is an activist research project, a Black Studies project, and more specifically a Black queer intervention in urban geography and radical planning scholarship. As such, I have engaged in dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge production that are necessarily diasporic and self-reflexive. In order to reflect upon the methodological and epistemological implications of the Black (Queer) Diaspora, I turn to the Austin School approach to Black Studies and the Black/African Diaspora. As an interdisciplinary Black Studies project, my research must go beyond discourse, into the feminist realm of praxis, and must revolve around “Black collectivity, Black positioning in relation to power and social hierarchies, and Black agency regardless of national or other boundaries imposed upon us” (Gordon 2007, 93). Put more simply, I situate both my research and myself within the Black Diaspora, which I view as a transnational political and cultural project oriented toward the liberation of all African-descended peoples. Like Gordon and

other scholars of the Austin School tradition, I understand Black Diaspora as a transnational spatial framing of activism and research as well as a collective struggle for liberation. As Gordon (2007) notes:

“[O]ur idea of Diaspora focuses on Black agency and the processes of self-making, the Black/African Diaspora as a transnational cultural, intellectual, and, above all, political project that seeks to name, represent, and participate in Black people’s historic efforts to construct our collective identities and constitute them through cultural-political practices dedicated to expressing our full humanity and seeking for liberation” (p. 94).

Central to the completion of this project has been this sense of diasporic solidarity and political kinship, which I see as a transnational relationship shaped by trust and shared political convictions and commitments to social justice (see Smith 2016). In practice and in the context of this project, my research partners required a few actions on my behalf to ‘prove’ my solidarity and political kinship. For many of my research partners, they could only trust that my intentions were good once I had engaged in many conversations in which I shared as much as I actively listened and offered both my intellectual and artistic skills as well as resources. For example, I needed to demonstrate solidarity beyond words as concrete actions, a key trademark of activist research, which included the following:

- I offered my camera and skills as a photographer to photodocument two events for the *Bixas Pretas*, a collective of Black gay men that meet monthly in Rio. After their usual photographer had warned that he wouldn’t be present, I took turns between participating in the workshop and taking photos of other participants. I have donated all of the photos to the collective, which the collective leader thanked me, stating that “it’s more documentation for our collective” (“*é mais registro nosso!*”).

- I also offered my photography skills by means of free, *pro bono* photo shoots for other research partners that needed visual tools to help them ‘brand’ themselves and elevate their personal websites, social media profiles, and entrepreneurial endeavors.
- Given the “research fatigue” of many poor, Black folks in Rio de Janeiro, a city teeming with *gringo* researchers, many research partners hesitated or refused to participate in written or oral interviews until I would show that they themselves would benefit from their participation. People’s faith and trust in me as an activist researcher dramatically increased once I (successfully) pitched an article highlighting the work of Black LGBT activists in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. I have promised a written article (and Portuguese translation) for the U.S. Black queer magazine *The Tenth Zine* this fall.
- I offered contacts and advice for friends and research partners who showed interest in pursuing doctoral studies in the United States, since the application process is one that is intimidating and confusing to many.
- During my last summer of fieldwork I worked as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for the binational Black Diaspora in the Americas study abroad program, led by Dr. João Vargas. My job involved hundreds of hours dedicated for interpretation, collaboration, solidarity, and exchange of resources among Brazilian course participants who themselves identified as Black and LGBT. My role as a TA showed some that I was politically “engaged” in concrete ways that linked research with political action. My role with the course served as a literal and metaphorical diasporic bridge that required significantly more than conventional ethnographic fieldwork.

In *Lose your mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route* (2006), Saidiya Hartman conceptualizes the great potential of diaspora, as both a concept and embodied experience, to forge the political kinship that Smith relies upon in her own work. For Hartman, the common ‘thread’ that links our pasts, presents, and futures as Black subjects is not one that we have only suffered as descendants of slaves, but also a story about our ability to “reconstruct shattered communities” as scattered peoples. As such, these processes of self-making are what most directly connects us, guided by “aspirations that fueled flight and the yearning for freedom”—what Hartman calls shared “fugitive dreams” (234). It is this “fugitive’s legacy” that often articulates Black lives even if we are rendered as socially dead, and we ourselves construct this legacy through “the ongoing struggle to escape, stand down, and defeat slavery in all of its myriad forms” (ibid.). I believe that this idea of fugitivity enabled my research partners and me to recognize ourselves (to an extent) in the other’s struggle, articulating common experiences and strategies between Black LGBT activists in both Brazil and the U.S. I personally found it generative to dig beneath the more superficial differences between our contexts—like different languages, slang, and inside jokes—in order to connect our struggles around common desires to reconstruct, flee and resist violence, challenge or re-appropriate stereotypes, and to ultimately remake ourselves in the midst of trauma and the afterlife of slavery.

By now, it should be clear that this project is situated politically and spatially within the Black Diaspora. But what exactly makes this diasporic project *queer*, besides the fact that my research partners (i.e. research participants) and I identify as non-heteronormative? In order to more deeply conceptualize the Black Diaspora, its queer dimensions, and the

implications for this project, I turn to the works of Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2008) and Jafari Allen (2011, 2012).

Tinsley provides a reading of the Black queer diaspora that pays overdue attention to the Atlantic as not only a site of cultural crossing and hybridity for Black subjects (see also Gilroy 1993), but also a haunting “site of diasporic trauma” through a common history of colonialism and slavery as well as re-making, “collaboration and resistance”—what she calls a “site of painful fluidities” (p. 192). Tinsley call for a reimagination of the Atlantic, the Diaspora, and space itself as metaphorical, concrete, and embodied all at once. In effect, Tinsley respatializes blackness and queerness through the concepts of the “queer Black Atlantic”, a “transoceanic current” and “borderland” that brings together “historical, conceptual, and embodied maritime experience [that] transform racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized selves” and the juxtapositions of “enslaved and African, brutality and desire, genocide and resistance” (192). The Black Queer Diaspora is about “the possibility of *putting the world together* and *putting the senses back together* at the same time” (211, emphasis in original). Although the spatial focus of this research is not the Atlantic Ocean per se, Tinsley’s analysis helps me to decenter my attention away from both the United States and the African continent in order to better consider the political, erotic, and spiritual connections and “currents” between Black queer subjects while in the field across different diasporic sites. Such a conceptualization of the Black Queer Diaspora enables me to more fully explore the erotic *and* spiritual as equally significant dimensions of Black queer experiences in Chapter 5.

Similarly, Jafari Allen (2012) explores the meanings of the Black Queer Diaspora as an “organic” political-intellectual project that is at once about desire, global exchanges, trauma, love, intimacies, and rearticulations of Black queer sexualities through “conjunctural moments”. The Black Queer Diaspora, in this sense, “is at once about particular locations (actual and imagined); roots/uprootings...and routes that bodies, ideas, and texts travel”, interwoven through histories of capitalism, slavery, and colonialism (216). For Allen, “Black/queer/diaspora” as a set of conjunctural moments and a “project of multivalent and multiscale reclamation, revisioning, and futurity (yes, all at once) (214)”. For me, to express a commitment to the political-intellectual traditions of the Black Queer Diaspora, I aim to link Black struggles, desires, and self-making across places, scales, and borders, recognizing the Diaspora as something concrete, contested, and embodied. It is not just knowledge and capital that flow through space and political borders; histories, trauma, bodies, desires, and pleasure also flow and conjoin through diasporic spaces, now in both material and virtual ways. It was a queer process in the sense that sexuality, gender, desire, the power of the erotic (see Lorde 1984) were all valid.

As an ethnographic example of Black queer activist research as a process of “conjunctural moments”, friends (also research partners) and I spent countless moments hearing and sharing each other’s painful stories of discrimination, violence, and appropriation of Black LGBT folks happening in both countries in similar yet different ways. The topics of our discussions ranged from the sexual abuse that we’ve each survived, to the taboo of interracial and intergenerational dating, to white gay men’s appropriation of Black culture, to the erased histories of Black gay culture in both countries, such as ‘voguing’, the

HIV/AIDS epidemic (threatening U.S. Black communities to this day), to the whitewashed history of the Stonewall Rebellion and U.S. LGBTQ movement. The list of topics can and does go on much further. On the other hand, knowing that the other shared a “similar relationship to racialized power hierarchies” reminded each of us that we were not alone in our struggles and to “recognize each other as connected and potentially collective” (Gordon 2007, 94). Such a recognition of solidarity was both powerful and empowering, often spurring hours of meaningful conversations and exchanges of ideas and strategies for resistances, sprinkled with laughter, tears, rage, sadness, and humor. I contend that central to the completion of this project has been this sense of diasporic solidarity and political kinship, which I see as a transnational relationship shaped by intimate trust and shared political convictions and commitments to social justice (see Smith 2016).

REDEFINING “THE FIELD” AND THE SPATIALITY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH’S DIGITAL ACTIVISM

‘The field’ is the central site for ethnographic knowledge production. The field “is a physical place as much as it is an epistemological space of investigation shaped by histories of European and United States imperialism and colonialism” (Berry et al. 2016). Thus, fieldwork is most often recognized as the “basic constituting experience, not only for anthropological knowledge but of anthropologists themselves” (Moser 2007, 243). But where exactly is the field? When the activist researcher and their research partners both identify as diasporic subjects, is the field ‘over there’ or ‘back home’? Or is the field present everywhere the diasporic researcher goes? The concept and intellectual project of the Black Queer Diaspora complicates such core definitions of the field and the spatiality of fieldwork,

radically challenging masculinist, Eurocentric notions of the field as a space that is fixed, foreign, static, and geographically bounded, which the researcher can easily leave and (re)penetrate every summer. However, I have come to understand the field as a space that is not only concrete and epistemological, but also fluid in temporal, spatial, and erotic ways. As a diasporic subject, I am unable to demarcate the field as a detached place ‘over there’, given my shared roots, routes, and positioning in relation to racialized and gendered power hierarchies.

Thus, ‘home’ and ‘the field’ are two sides of the same coin, dialectically and more. This observation became even more evident through the realm of social media, mainly through the platforms of Instagram and Facebook. In summer 2016, with funding that barely enabled three weeks of fieldwork, I could not manage to make *face-to-face* personal connections with Black LGBT activists. I had very few leads and I’d only met two activists who identified as both Black and non-heteronormative over my two years of fieldwork. These individuals, while sympathetic, showed little interest in my work (which I did not frame as activist research at the time). It seemed as if many Black LGBT youth—or those who I at least read as Black and LGBTQ—were either a part of the LGBTQ movement and only acted politically around their non-heteronormativity, or they were part of the Brazilian Black Movement and understood themselves first and foremost as Black subjects that ‘happened to be gay’. It turns out that I had been naively looking for a cohesive movement that saw itself as both Black and queer, as both activists and Black queer studies scholars—a political movement of which I am a part in the United States.

Not only was I imposing North American subjectivities onto a Brazilian context, but I had also assumed that fieldwork could only happen through face-to-face contact ‘in the field’. Frustrated, I was about to bring my research back to the States to work with Black queer youth’s experience to urban space until I stumbled upon Black LGBTQ activists in Brazil through social media. Until then I had only followed the Black gay Tumblr blog *Bicha Nagô*, well known for its sharp critiques of both racism among gay men and homophobia within peripheral, Black communities throughout São Paulo. Months later, I found myself scrolling through the Instagram profile of the blog’s creator, Ézio Rosas. Soon after I started following Rosas and a few key Black LGBT figures that the application’s algorithms ‘suggested’ for me, I quickly became connected to a network of dozens of activists, artists, DJs, and academics who understood and presented themselves as Black, non-heteronormative, and diasporic.

From July 2016 through May 2017, I slowly built my own network of Black LGBT activists through Instagram alone. I achieved this while studying and working in Austin, Texas, not in my field site of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. By the time I returned to Rio de Janeiro in late May 2017 to complete final fieldwork and to work as a Teaching Assistant, many Black LGBT activists in Rio and São Paulo had already learned a great deal about my intimate life without having met me in person. Just as I had done with them, they had followed my Instagram profile, which represented a type of visual diary, witnessing my travels, the small joys of everyday life, love and heartbreak, selfies, jokes, and my political statements. This visual diary, I believe, provided my research partners with a sense of transparency about my daily life, positionality, and political commitments. Activists and I

introduced ourselves via direct messages (colloquially known as “DMs”, or “*inbox*” in Portuguese) through Instagram as well as Facebook. I explained my research project, my plans to work as a TA during the summer, and why I was fluent in Portuguese—a fact that surprised many. Once we exchanged numbers, we communicated through voice and text messages on the application WhatsApp in order to set up in-person meetings.

As a graduate student methodologically trained largely by way of social science literature by professors who were themselves trained before the ‘golden age’ of social media, “the field” appeared to be a bounded, disparate place that could only be visited by the researcher with travel scholarships. This conventional notion of the field-site and ethnographic fieldwork did not—or could not—account for the possibility of digital activism or virtual communities, delaying any serious engagement with email and social media platforms as *valid empirical field-sites* for this project. Fortunately, a late introduction to the works of Katz (1994), Lee and Gregory (2008), and Bjork-James (2015) affirmed my methodological relationship with new media and virtual spaces. These authors and other postmodern ethnographers have effectively questioned the idea of the field-site as *only* a bounded “found object” and “a discrete spatial or human entity”, advocating for more multiscalar and multisited analyses (Candea 2007, 179). This literature has taught me—and challenged me—to treat “the field” as place-based yet also multiscalar, inextricably virtual and material at once. I learned that I could actively engage in fieldwork both in Rio de Janeiro as well as on my computer or iPhone, wherever and whenever necessary.

Of course, conducting research through online spaces (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, WhatsApp) present their own unique set of ethical risks and concerns around the

issues of informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality (see Hayley et al. 2016, De Jong 2015). Moving forward, both online and offline, I had to take extra care in keeping research partners confidential and anonymous when possible and explaining outright that I am a researcher, even labeling myself as such in my social media profile biographies. In online spaces, the political, emotional, and affective ties between researcher and research subjects (i.e. research partners) are possible both in person and online, and that this relationship is at once virtual and material as all parties communicate through various media (see Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst 2017). This is not to say that face-to-face contact and time that I physically spent in Rio de Janeiro was unnecessary for my research; the fact that I would be in Rio de Janeiro made many activists feel that our exchanges were worthwhile and would turn into lively discussions over food and drinks upon my return to Rio. Upon returning to Rio after having virtually met through Instagram, both research subjects and I were often equally surprised upon realizing that our online personas did not quite match our everyday selves in person. Several subjects/partners were shocked that I was fluent in Brazilian Portuguese and able to culturally adapt, with neither an American accent nor the American propensity to party, be loud, sexualize other Black Brazilian men, or wander “*sem noção*” (cluelessly). Inversely, I was surprised (and relieved) when my research subjects/partners quickly transitioned from friendly flirtation when online to platonic trust and solidarity upon sharing our experiences of racism and homophobia in our respective contexts.

Given the political and ethical imperatives of activist research, I am also committed to the key principles of critical ethnography. Critical ethnography can be understood as both a dialogic and reflexive process, which entails both empirical observation and self-reflexive

praxis, all while centering the insurgent knowledge of Black LGBT youth. Critical ethnography is guided by “an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain”, a process in which researchers “acknowledge their own power, privilege, and biases”, even as we scrutinize power structures in our participants’ lives (Madison 2012, 5-8).

Critical ethnography is thus an active engagement with others toward goals of human freedom and well-being, inflected by uneven power relations for which we as researchers are fully accountable (Madison 2012, 10). As John Langston Gwaltney (1980) similarly demonstrates in *Drylongso: A self-portrait of Black America*, critical ethnography of Black people is not merely an account about Black folks; it is rather an account of Black life co-produced by Black folks through their reflections of the everyday—“drylongso”—as the primary source of critical theorizing. Like Gwaltney, who structures each chapter of the “self-portrait of Black America” around a working-class Black person’s personal history, I too seek to co-produce insurgent knowledge with other Black folks who are “eminently capable of self-expression” to “speak for themselves” (xxii). Thus, the grounded theories that emerge (as “case histories” in Richie’s work) are the crucial starting point for more critical, responsible, and relevant research in the social sciences.

For this research project I spent three short stints in Rio de Janeiro throughout the summers of 2015, 2016, 2017. Furthermore, this thesis builds upon my undergraduate thesis research, which interrogated the racial and gendered representations generated through the gay tourism industry in Rio de Janeiro.

The time I spent (physically) in the field during summer 2015 was a turning point for me. During this time, I participated as a student in the Black Diaspora in the Americas program, also in Rio de Janeiro, led by Dr. João Vargas (formerly with the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies, UT Austin). Throughout this experience I was exposed to and connected with Black activists from nearly all corners of Brazil who challenged many assumptions I had about Black life and activism, which was a humbling experience that taught me to commit to critical thought *and* action in tandem (i.e. praxis). During this time I also feared that my research would be, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, harmful to the people I wanted to help and work with. As a LLILAS student, I was challenged to incorporate the ethos of “activist research”, which was the main reason for committing to my dual-degree program as well at The University of Texas at Austin and this study abroad program. My experience as a participant of this binational activist research program instilled in me two principles that guide this thesis: the concept of diaspora as a frame for both scholarship and activism as well as the realization that I had academic skills that could be put to use for a collective in struggle.

I later returned to Rio de Janeiro in summer 2016 in order to conduct more participant observation and interviews. I found little success in scheduling formal ‘sit-down’ interviews with activists for various reasons: some worked numerous jobs and studied at the same time, many lived in peripheral areas and it proved to be an inconvenience to meet me downtown, and some simply did not want to participate. Among those who did not want me to interview them, a few even challenged me and my justifications for an interview, frustrated that yet another *gringo* had come to interview them. It became clear that conventional ethnographic

methods were not working, which I believe can be explained in part by activists' research fatigue, tired of sharing personal histories with foreigners and academics but not receiving any useful support or resources in return. Furthermore, my framing of our interaction as a formal interview and desire to record the interview rubbed people the wrong way.

It was during the summer of 2017 when I decided to radically shift my methodological choices, but in ways that followed the lead of my research partners. First and foremost, I decided to not record my discussions with activists who wanted to share their ideas and knowledge with me. Instead, I made the effort to take additional ethnographic jottings and fieldnotes shortly after our encounters. All of the ethnographic accounts and snapshots I detail in this thesis are from fieldnotes and memory. Of course, one could say that I have compromised the empirical validity of this research project, especially if I am to publish this work in peer-reviewed academic journals. However, as I have explained in this chapter, scholarly publications and additional lines on my curriculum vitae are not the main intention of this project.

Given these methodological choices, interviews were, according to research partners, "*trocas de ideias*" (exchanges of ideas), or simply dialogue and conversation in highly informal settings. In the vein of critical ethnography, these exchanges were reciprocal so that together we conjoined our insights and produced new knowledge. People were much more comfortable sharing stories and opinions once I framed interviews as exchanges of ideas while still acknowledging that our conversations also counted as ethnographic data for my thesis. People showed even more interest and ease once I assured that them that their insights

would be highlighted through the publication of a non-academic piece that would reach larger audiences than most scholarly journal articles.

My fieldwork over the past three summers in Rio de Janeiro not only entailed “*trocas de ideias*” and participant observation, but also *performance* on my behalf in spaces created by Black LGBT youth. As D. Soyini Madison elucidates the main distinction between participant observation and performance ethnography, “participant-observation does not capture the active, risky, and intimate engagement with Others that is the expectation of performance” (Madison 2007, 826). Thus, it is important to briefly highlight the importance of performance—more specifically, the practice of performance ethnography. Performance ethnography has become a central methodological and analytical tool in Black feminist and Black queer theory (see Smith 2016; Bailey 2009, 2013, 2014). Although I am not Brazilian, my lived experiences and thus positionality as a Black queer man in a racially stratified society granted me access to many black queer spaces and made me a part of the collective experiences within these spaces. In other words, I actively coproduced the same Black queer spaces that I aimed to study (see Livermon 2014, 511). Thus, as Xavier Livermon argues, “performance ethnography reveals the fieldwork as the collaborative and co-performative practice that it is” (Livermon 2014, 511; Congquergood 1991; Denzin 2003).

My access to certain Black queer spaces was contingent upon my own performances and coproduction of Black queer spaces. This was particularly the case for a day-long ‘voguing’ dance workshop, screening of the American documentary *Paris Is Burning*, and post-screening group discussion in which I participated. Observation alone was inadequate and, quite frankly, inappropriate. Thus, my participation in the space required both

observation and the risk to perform and embrace my femininity in the presence of other Black queer men who formed part of the *Bixas Pretas* collective. Expressions of solidarity with the men present literally required me to ‘walk the walk’ instead of talking the talk, as I duckwalked, catwalked, switched my hips, and blew kisses across the *terreiro*⁴ floor to the beat of “Big Big Beat”, a song by American Black queer rapper Azealia Banks. In a very concrete but also symbolic way, I was actively coproducing the same Black queer space that I sought to analyze. From a Black queer diasporic perspective, then, my research process has been “part of the experience of working together to prepare the space for the communal performance ritual and of the larger work of building and sustaining this community” (Bailey 2014, 490). In addition to this example, I also deployed artistic and technical skills as a photographer, thus performing as an artist and group historian at events, which helped build trust, friendship and partnership throughout the research process.

As D. Soyini Madison (2007) suggests, performance ethnography is not just active but also highly intimate and thus potentially risky. This leads to a taboo subject among scholars engaged in ethnographic research: that of intimacy and desires between researcher and those being researched. Although queer spaces are often queer because of their embrace of intimacy and non-normative sexual practices, the issue remains controversial and thus delicate. It is important that I recognize that several of my research partners made initial contact with me because they found me to be sexually appealing and desirable, and this sexual tension remained even after their informed consent of my research project. For example, a research

⁴ *Terreiro* is the term used to describe sacred worship spaces for followers of Afro-Brazilian religions such as *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*.

partner stated his appreciation for my research project but also admitted that the fact of me being “smart and sexy” was what truly convinced him to work with me. Thus, I cannot contend that my own positionality and erotic subjectivity did not influence their consent to contribute to the research project. For some of my research partners, the boundaries between research partner, friend, and lover were necessarily fluid. I do not find the presence of sexual tension and desires to be problematic *per se*. On several occasions, however, these desires along with the unequal power dynamic between us prompted me to place friendly boundaries, reminding my research partner(s) that my ethical obligations as a researcher required that I maintain this distance (see Lancaster 1994).

THE ANALYZED (AND ERASED) VIOLENCE OF FIELDWORK IN ACTIVIST RESEARCH

Despite privileges of navigating society being read as a cisgender man, it is important to restate that central to my solidarity and political kinship with other Black LGBT people was my similar relationship to gendered, anti-Black violence. Fieldwork itself is an embodied experience that, by no means, leaves me immune to the same forms of violence that I analyze. Unfortunately, the majority of activist research scholarship fails to account for and thus erases the ways in which Black, Brown, queer, and women researchers are subject to the same violence as their researcher subjects/partners. What brought my research partners and I closer in solidarity were our shared experiences of racism (e.g. extra security guards following us on the subway, being heckled by white gay men, and vendors assuming us to be *favela* residents)—and homophobia (e.g. snickers from others as we chatted). Furthermore, a great deal of our conversations revolved around the different accounts of discrimination and violence that each had separately faced in our respective homelands. In

fact, a central event ‘in the field’ that initially turned my eye toward the topic of violence was my experience surviving sexual assault and rape by a taxi driver that read me for a “*boy de programa*” (call boy), as I hailed the cab near the street corner. The married man refused to believe the possibility (and reality) that I was not what he had stereotyped me to be.

In this chapter, I have argued that this research project must be understood as a Black queer activist research project which necessitates a variety of methodological and epistemological reflections. Furthermore, this research project is a product of a collaborative research process that is grounded in similar standpoints and relationships to racial-gender hierarchies between the researcher and their research partners. As an activist researcher, it is my objective to help further decolonize social science research by centering the knowledge and agency of oppressed peoples through meaningful and accountable relationships. As a Black queer activist-researcher, more specifically, my intention is to create a more democratic process of knowledge production and a heightened sense of accountability to the collectives of Black LGBT youth with which I work. This is a process involving dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge production that are necessarily diasporic and self-reflexive. As an analytical lens and intellectual project, the Black Queer Diaspora complicates many traditional notions of ‘the field’ as well as the methodologies and embodied experience of ethnographic fieldwork. Ultimately, as a Black queer diasporic researcher and subject, my own lived experiences and shared positioning vis-à-vis racial-gender hierarchies forced me to reconsider not only the where and how fieldwork takes place, but also issues of intimacy, performance, and violence as central yet under-acknowledged facets of ethnographic research.

Chapter 4: Trouble in paradise...racial formation in Rio de Janeiro

“A good criminal is a dead criminal.”

-Brazilian proverb (translation my own)

“I went from being a sexual object to being a threat to society”.

-Leonardo Peçanha, Black transgender man and activist

“We [as Black LGBT people] have to survive in order to actually get married.”

-Joilson Santana Marques, Black gay social worker and doctoral student (translation my own)

Rio de Janeiro is an iconic city, whose history, people, and landscapes have long aroused outsiders' curiosity and spatial imaginary. Rio has risen internationally as an 'exotic' global city as host to several mega-events over the past decade, the cradle of *samba* and *funk* music and Carnival, as well as a gay tourist destination. Nationally, the city, once the capital of both the Portuguese empire and the New Republic, continues to be a central political hub and tumultuous hotbed of political struggles, particularly as it relates to social movements around racial justice, human rights, and sexual diversity. As mentioned in previous chapters, Rio's history of social movements, tourism, and cultural production has positioned it as a utopic, vibrant, and diverse place, home to one of the world's largest gay Pride parades, gyrating hips and voluminous, bronzed *bundas* (butts) on any given day, the nation's first openly gay politician, unprecedented anti-homophobia public policy programs, urban rainforest and beaches (even a gay beach!), and city-sponsored gay tourism campaigns.

Rio de Janeiro is a place associated with racial, cultural, and sexual diversity, a spectacle in which Black people and LGBT people are hypervisible and even celebrated. However, Rio de Janeiro is also world-renowned for another legacy, which is that of great

inequality, violence, and Black premature death. As Christen Smith (2016) notes, this paradoxical existence is intentional—an “afro-paradise” that threatens Black livelihoods. Afro-paradise is a “gendered, sexualized and racialized imaginary” through which Rio de Janeiro has become a place of Black sexual fantasy and consumption as well as Black death (p. 3). Black people in sites like Rio de Janeiro simultaneously become hyper-sexualized, romanticized, consumed, and expendable bodies—representations that are rooted in colonialism and slavery. It is precisely this appropriative Black fantasy, produced and consumed by tourists, the Brazilian state, and civil society, that also facilitates the criminalization and extermination of Black bodies. Numerous structural and spatial patterns transform Rio de Janeiro into an afro-paradise—a ‘gay-friendly’ afro-paradise more specifically—that consistently appropriates yet excludes and perpetuates violence against Black LGBT youth. As a relational phenomenon, the gendered, anti- Black violence that sustains Rio as an afro-paradise *take place*—both discursively and materially—as it manifests in people’s daily lives. As Lipsitz (2011) argues, these unequal social relations “take on their full force and meaning when they are enacted physically in actual places”.

As an afro-paradise, institutions, practices, and discourses operate in tandem to transform Rio de Janeiro into a hostile racial-sexual terrain that directs violence toward Black, young, and non-heteronormative people. It is in this simultaneously celebratory yet genocidal context that Black LGBT youth must survive and build community. Black queer lives face even more precarious conditions following the impeachment of leftist President Dilma Rousseff in June 2016. Following impeachment, the right-wing President Michel Temer’s administration has made swift, severe cuts to education, social services, and human

rights institutions⁵. The words of these politicians reflect and reinforce state actions, stating that Black women are thug-producing “factories” and that they would “rather have a dead child than a gay child”.⁶

In this chapter I seek to describe the oppressive hierarchies, structures, and spaces that work against Black LGBT youth in Rio de Janeiro. Racism in gay social spaces as well as LGBT-phobia in Black communities and activist spaces in a hypersegregated city creates the spatial context that Black LGBT youth must navigate. As I more fully detail in Chapter 5, Black LGBT youth deploy various spatial strategies for survival and sociocultural support with this violence and exclusion in mind.

RACE, RACIALIZATION AND RACIAL FORMATION

Race—and the consequent processes of racial formation—have been central “in the organization of political life” throughout the Americas (Omi and Winant 2014, 3). Race and gender emerged as scientific fictions, but they continue to result in very concrete ways as social facts that determine distributions of power, resources, and inequalities (see Winant 2001). In other words, race has operated for centuries as a “fundamental category of (dis)empowerment”, inequality, difference, identity, and agency (pp. 2-3). Race, however, is also more than just a master category of analysis; it is a relational, historically and geographically contingent process. Moreover, race is a dynamic system of differentiation and

⁵ Within two weeks of President Michel Temer taking office, his administration swiftly extinguished the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality, and Youth—two federal agencies that have championed civil rights in the country.

⁶ Conservative (and homophobic) Federal Deputy Jair Bolsonaro stated in a 2011 interview that “*prefiro um filho morto que um filho gay*”. Similarly, former Rio de Janeiro state governor Sérgio Cabral expressed anti-Black, misogynistic sentiments, stating that poor (Black), marginal communities are “factories that produce marginal people” (“*do ventre da mulher negra nasce bandido*”).

classification of human bodies along highly unequal hierarchies, which works strategically over time to then rationalize these oppressive hierarchies. Put another way, race is a social construct “with definite social consequences” that “does ideological and political work” to mark bodies differentially and attribute symbolic meanings to embodied difference (p. 111). This creation of racial subjectivities through the marking, representation, and exploitation of human bodies is called racialization. More specifically, “bodies are read visually read and narrative in ways that draw upon an ensemble of symbolic meanings and associations” rooted in the racial projects of slavery and racial capitalism, genocide, and settler colonialism (ibid.; see Smith 2012).

Hegemonic understandings (i.e. what we think as “commonsense”) about race itself are determined by what Omi and Winant (2015[1986]) call the “racial state”. The racial state, such as Brazil, is constantly at work to determine and shift racial hegemony so that it protects whiteness and its corresponding racial hierarchy, creating a “pattern of conflict and accommodation which takes place over time between racially based social movements and the policies and programs of the state” (78). Anti-racist social movements have long challenged racial hegemony and have made significant political gains for civil rights and racial equality. For Black people in Brazil, these movements have mobilized in various ways over the centuries, ranging from the *quilombo* (maroon community) movement in colonial times, to *samba* schools and Black social clubs since the early 1900s, to the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (Unified Black Movement) since the 1970s under the military dictatorship, to the Black women’s movement since the 1990s. These social movements have resulted in several political victories such as the criminalization of racism as a hate crime in the 1988

Constitution as well as the approval of affirmative action in all federal universities in the early 2000s.

This legacy of activism has generated several victories that have been compromised by the hegemonic notion of “racial democracy” in Brazil. This hegemonic notion of race encourages (without revealing) the whitening of the population through miscegenation and immigration of non- Black peoples in order to ‘absorb’ and blend racialized ethnicities across the population. In other words, although the notion of ‘democracy’ implies an equal status among races, this hegemonic racial frame is predicated on the assumption that “Blacks can and should aim for the erasure of their Blackness in favor of increasing degrees of Whiteness” (Vargas 2008, 105). The notion of racial democracy emerged in the 1930s as a “rearticulation” of racial hegemony evoked upon in order to globally showcase Brazil as an exemplar case of harmonious race relations, obscuring the political reality of Blacks in order to prove that racism is no longer a problem (see Omi and Winant 2015[1986]). To this day, racial democracy stands as a discourse that anticipates Black resistance and operates to not only demobilize Black movements, but to also rearticulate and justify the existing racial order.

RIO DE JANEIRO AS A HOSTILE RACIAL, GENDERED TERRAIN

Racial formation and violence are not only structural but also inherently spatial phenomena that work in tandem with hierarchies of gender, sexuality, and class. Gendered, anti- Black violence is at once something concrete, discursive, and structural, and it is the principal means through which racialization shape the city’s built and social environments. Together, racism and heteropatriarchy manifest spatially—and most visibly—in Rio de

Janeiro as hyper-segregation and violent policing of the built environment. Like the Black ghetto of the United States, *favelas* become “spaces of colonial administration” in which the relationship between the racial state and civil society reproduce inequalities rooted in colonialism and slavery—a process of “internal colonialism” through “spaces of colonial administration” (Cowen and Lewis 2016; see Fanon 1966, Bush 2008, Gutiérrez 2004). As during colonial rule, the police, the law, and public policies become the main instruments of colonial violence and administration of social relations (ibid.)

Racism and heteropatriarchy also operate institutionally by restricting access to adequate education and health care. In the following sections I discuss the ways in which gendered racism differentially subjects Black people to conditions of violence and premature death (see Gilmore 2007).

GENDERED RACISM IN FORMS OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND POVERTY

Rio de Janeiro, and by extension Brazil, has long grappled with staggering rates of economic equality. This unequal distribution of material resources is simultaneously influenced by race and gender. According to the World Bank, Brazil has the 13th most unequal income distribution (of 154 total) as calculated through the GINI index. In other words, the richest 10% of the nation’s population received 41.8% of the national total income in 2016, while the poorest 10% received only 1% (Telles 2017). More specifically, Black women, 18% of whom work with few guaranteed workers’ rights as domestic workers, earned on average less than 40% of the average salary of white men from 2004 to 2014. The unemployment rate of Black women was over 10% during this period, while that of white men were 4.5% (Pinheiro et al. 2016). Although Black people now make up 17% of the

richest 10% of the national population, they also make up 75% of the national population living in poverty (Vieira 2016).

Not only do Black people—whether LGBT or not—have to work within a racial and gender division of labor, they also must navigate daily through a highly segregated urban landscape. In the specific context of Rio de Janeiro, socioeconomic inequality has particular spatial dimensions that locate the city’s richest and poorest both within arm’s reach and miles apart. The most visible spatial forms of racial-economic inequality are present within the Rio’s Southern Zone (*Zona Sul*), where many *favela* communities often brush up against the backs of wealthy, gated neighborhoods—part of the *asfalto* (asphalt, the ‘formal’ city). Although the city is notorious for its sprawling *favelas* that overlook wealthy condominiums on hilltops in the Southern Zone, most of the city’s poor (and Black population) live in the expansive Northern and Western Zones and neighboring cities that form the northern lowlands (*Baixada Fluminense*). Although *pretos* and *pardos* (Black and mixed Afrodescendant) people made up nearly 50% of Rio’s overall population in the 2010 Brazilian census, they only constituted 17% of the population in the Zona Sul (southern zone) of the city, home to the beaches and affluent neighborhoods of Copacabana and Ipanema, which also host many esteemed spaces of gay social life. Lagoa, one of the most affluent neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil, boasts a population that is 91% white. Meanwhile, the population in the *favela* of Cantagalo, which sits on hills overlooking the upper-class neighborhoods of Ipanema and Copacabana, is 68% black, but then plummets to 17% as you descend in the public elevator onto the asphalt streets (Desigualdades Espaciais 2015; Brazil 2010 Census).

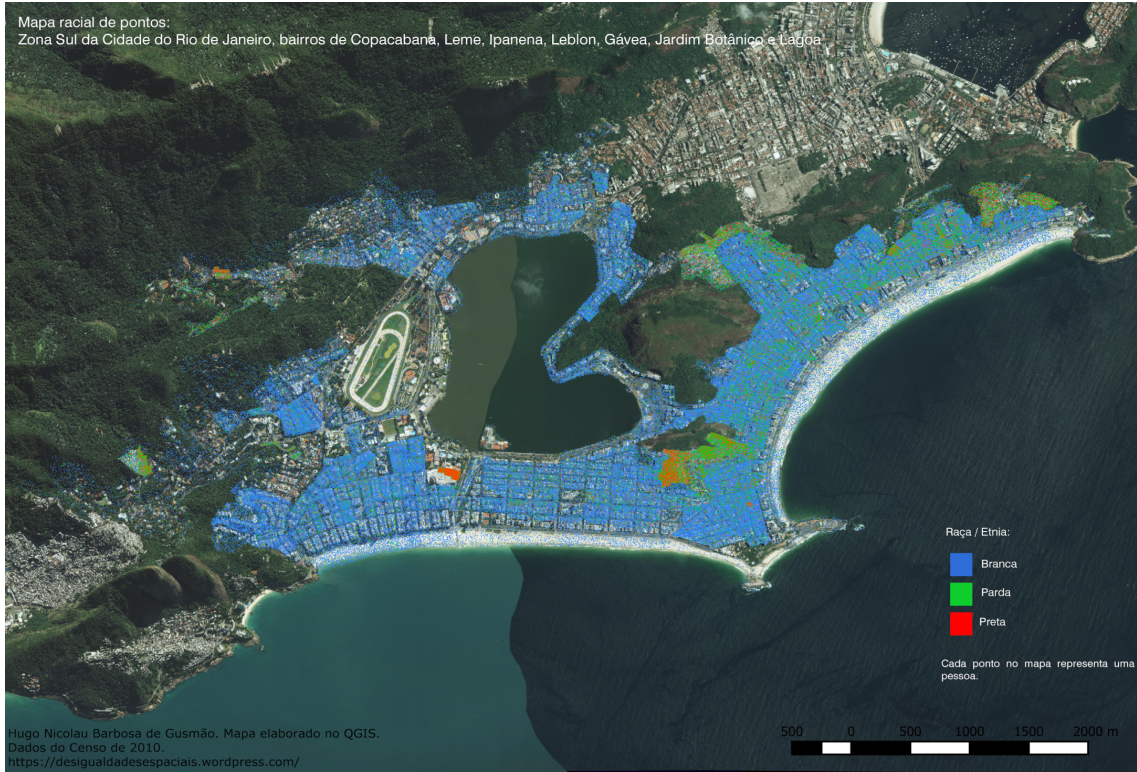


Figure 2: Racial dot density map of Rio’s Zona Sul (Southern Zone), displaying spatial concentrations of Blacks (Green—clustered in favela communities), Whites (Blue), and mixed “Pardos” (Red). Source: Hugo Nicolau Barbosa de Gusmão.

The fact that the elite Southern Zone is inhabited by a majority white and upper-class population does not mean that is not racialized. In fact, the relative racial and economic homogeneity of this enclave, home to the city’s prized beaches, can be seen as a product of racial formation and a particular “white spatial imaginary” that creates a moral geography. Although the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema play a central role in appropriating Black life and culture in the state’s performance of afro-paradise, these neighborhoods were created under the auspices of a white spatial imaginary that correlates and co-locates whiteness and

superior morality. The “white spatial imaginary” in (post)colonial cities such as Rio de Janeiro shares political objectives with the spatial imaginary of afro-paradise insofar as it “relies on misdirection, on creating spectacles that attract attention—yet detract our gaze from the links that connect urban place and race” (Lipsitz 2011, p. 13). The borders of these moral territories are policed through “practices of surveillance, regulation, and incarceration become justified as forms of frontier defense against demonized people of color” (ibid.).

When Black people are in fact present in the city’s “white”, elite spaces, they are often performing—or read as performing—specific societal roles that are associated with service as domestic and construction workers, poverty as *favela* residents, and crime as drug dealers (*traficantes; bandidos*). Black people are put in place under the spatial logics of the white spatial imaginary as they navigate the wealthy areas of the Southern Zone, and are often seen out of place once performing societal roles not ascribed to them. Black Brazilian feminist scholar and activist Beatriz Nascimento gives an ethnographic account that still describes the “place” of Black people in white spaces today:

Around me there were nannies, doormen, domestic servants, porters, men on garbage trucks, shoe shiners, and street children dancing in their work in this large neighborhood. What a show, what a spectacle! All of them were Black (or almost all of them), happy, since even when working the Black person seems to be dancing, sprightly, smiling, especially that nanny of there, in a white uniform, with a boy almost the same color as her uniform—a 1974 version of a Black mammy. I kept walking, thinking... (Nascimento 1982, translation my own).

GENDERED RACISM AS LETHAL VIOLENCE AND MURDER

The white spatial imaginary and afro-paradise, which both work to protect whiteness, have very material, very lethal consequences for Black people. Racism, after all, can be more

specifically understood as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (Gilmore 2007, p. 21). In Brazil, it is Black youth that face the greatest risk of lethal violence. In 2012, 56,000 people were murdered around the nation, of whom about 30,000 were between the ages of 15 and 29. Of these 56,000 assassinated persons, 77% were Black (Anistia International Brasil n.d.). The fact that 53% of Brazilians self-identify as Black implies a clear overrepresentation of Black people among those lost to violence (IBGE 2010). In 2016, of all homicides in Brazil, 54% of these homicides took the lives of youth between 15-24 years old, and 73% of those killed were Black (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017). Black women have been murdered at increasing rates that are alarming. Between 2003 and 2013, the amount of Black women murdered in Brazil increased by 54%, even though the number of White women murdered decreased by 9.8% during the same period (Waiselfisz 2015). According to the Institute of Public Security, on average, Civil and Military Police forces killed someone every 8 hours in the state of Rio de Janeiro in 2016 (Bianchi 2017). A total of 920 murders in 2016 represents an 85% increase compared to the 2015 total of 645. This spike may be related to the increase in policing and mass incarceration before and during the 2016 Olympics (discussed below). In 2015, 1 in every 5 homicides in the city of Rio de Janeiro was committed by police (Bianchi 2016). Impunity is also widespread in Brazil: less than 8% of these cases resulted in sentences of police officers (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017). Most cases of police brutality and lethal force occur far from the tourist eye, within peripheral *favelas* communities, home to the majority Black youth live that remain highly contested territories between the racial state and extralegal forces such as gangs, militias.

State violence is most intense when the Military Police “pacify” these communities in order to clear out drug traffic and restore order, but also spray the entire community with bullets in the process. The pressure of mega-event committees, tourists, and politicians has increased pacification within *favelas* throughout the city in order for the city to govern territories it previously neglected.

These statistics suggest that Black youth—particularly young Black men—are criminalized from an early age, if not by birth, and their racialization as criminals and *bandidos* (thugs) quite disproportionately subjects them to premature death. We see discursive justifications for this anti-Black violence, ranging from the proverb “a good thug is a dead thug” (*bandido bom é bandido morto*) to ex-governor of Rio de Janeiro Sérgio Cabral publicly referring to Black women and mothers as thug-making factories. In fact, 57% of the population believe that “a good thug is a dead thug”, according to a national survey in 2016. In other words, the state finds discursive and concrete ways to justify the deaths of poor Black youth by racializing and criminalizing them (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017).

GENDERED RACISM AS MASS INCARCERATION

Young Black people, if not murdered by agents of the Brazilian racial state, are disproportionately locked up in Rio de Janeiro’s overcrowded prisons. As the following statistics suggest, incarceration has become a more predominant means to punish and contain the poorest segment of the population. Nationally, of the 622,000 incarcerated across the nation, 96.3% are men, and 67% are black—14 percentage points higher than the national population (Almeida and Mariani 2017). Forty-four percent of the 50,000 currently

incarcerated by the state of Rio de Janeiro are simply awaiting trial—a process that can often take years—a proportion that is 3% higher than the national average. In Rio de Janeiro, over 70% of the prison population is Black and 50% are youth under the age of 29 (Ibid.). Although only 3.7% of the national prison population, the absolute numbers and rate at which Black women are incarcerated has soared within the past year in Rio de Janeiro. The incarceration rate has increased more than 1000% within the course of one year, from 1% to 10% of the total prison population, which itself also increased. The number of incarcerated women in Rio de Janeiro increased from 64 in 2013 to over 4,000 in 2016—a number 3 times higher than the national average. The majority of these women are poor and black. This spike reflects a general increase in incarceration that has coincided with the city's hosting of megaevents, such as the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. From 2011 to 2014, the incarcerated population increased by 32.8%, exacerbating the already existent crisis of overcrowding, lack of sanitation, starvation, and torture in state prisons. By July 2016, one month before the Olympics, the state prison population (50,000) was almost two times greater than the amount of beds available (27,242). In December 2015, just seven months earlier, the prison population had been recorded as 44,600. This represents an 11% increase in the state prison population within this short time (Vieira 2016; Justiça Global 2016).

GENDERED RACISM AS RESTRICTED ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Similarly, Black Brazilian youth experience a disproportionate burden in completing high school studies and entering university. Black communities' struggles for the right to quality public education addresses a legacy of inequality rooted in colonialism and slavery. In the words of 19th-century Brazilian abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco, "slavery, by instinct,

proceeded by expelling school and public instruction and by keeping the country in ignorance and darkness, which is the means by which it can prosper. The slave's quarters and the school are both poles that repel one another".⁷ Unlike the case of the United States, "racial segregation in universities was never legally imposed in Brazil, but its concrete practice has been the reality of our academic world", according to Professor of Anthropology José Jorge de Carvalho of the University of Brasília (Coletivo Nuvem Negra 2017). Thus, many Black youth activists advocate for education—in particular higher education—as a main pathway for Black people to gain access to state institutions and improve their quality of life.

Despite decreases across all races over time, the illiteracy rate among Black Brazilians above 15 years of age was 26.2% in 2008--10 percentage points higher than that of white Brazilians of the same age range (Paixão et al. 2011). Although affirmative action for black, indigenous, and poor students has been in effect since 2003 across all federal universities—generally the country's most prestigious—the majority of Black youth continue to struggle to enter and graduate from these universities. Affirmative action helped increase the amount of Black youth enrolled in both public and private universities. In 2015, 12.8% of Black youth ages 18-24 were enrolled in university, an increase of 5.5% since 2005. Despite this increase, this proportion pales in comparison to that of white youth of the same age range, which increased from 17.8% in 2005 to 26.5% in 2015 (Vieira 2016). Furthermore, Black university students, on average, took longer to graduate from university. In terms of graduate studies, the enrollment of Black students has increased twenty-fold between 1988

⁷ Joaquim Nabuco, "O abolicionismo" (1883, translation my own) original quote in Portuguese: "...a escravidão por instinto procedeu repelindo a escola, a instrução pública, e mantendo o país na ignorância e escuridão, que é o meio em que ela pode prosperar. A senzala e a escola são pólos que se repelem."

and 2008, but still exhibits the starkest racial inequalities. In 2008, however, Black people constituted less than 20% of all graduate students in Brazil. In that same year, the quantity of white graduate students was almost triple (297.8%) of that of Black graduate students (Paixão et al. 2011, 242; IBGE; PNAD). Unsurprisingly, the presence of Black people as university faculty is even smaller, constituting merely 1.34% (5,154) of all 363,683 university faculty members in Brazil. At, Black professors account for 0.2% of faculty at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), the city's most prestigious university, and 4.3% of faculty at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), the city's top private university (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais—Inep 2017; Coletivo Nuvem Negra 2017). At PUC-Rio in particular, white men outnumber Black women as professors at a ratio of 40 to 1. The university's Black student collective Coletivo Nuvem Negra, led by many Black non-heteronormative youth, projected that it would take 119 years to reach an equal number of Black and white professors at PUC-Rio based on the rate of progress made in the last 10 years (Coletivo Nuvem Negra 2017). Reasons for this educational 'achievement gap' between white and Black Brazilians are plentiful and intersect with other dimensions of institutional racism and heteropatriarchy. Among them are: underfunded and poorly resourced public schools; anti-poor, Eurocentric biases in university entrance exams that favors elite private education; poverty among Black communities; familial responsibilities and burdens placed especially on poor young women; and violence and drug trafficking in poor communities that interrupt many poor youth's studies.

GENDERED RACISM AS LACK OF FORMAL POLITICAL POWER AND REPRESENTATION

With only a few notable exceptions (e.g. Benedita da Silva and Tia Eron), Black people—in particular Black women, LGBT people, and youth—have been unable to occupy positions of formal state power on all levels of government. Among the Chamber of Deputies' 513 elected positions (one of the federal Parliament's two legislative bodies), Black folks occupy only 43 seats—8% of all federal deputies. On a similar level, only two of 81 senators self-identify as Black (Agência Brasil 2016). More specifically, Black women are even further locked out of the formal political arena at a national level; Black women account for 0.39% of federal deputies. In other words, only 3 Black women occupy positions of power in the Chamber of Deputies, of which one, Benedita da Silva, the pioneering Black woman politician, is on medical leave (Londres 2016).

It is important to also note that marginalized Black communities—especially those who identify as women, LGBT, and youth—have long struggled to occupy position of formal political power before, during, and after the military dictatorship, which ended in 1985. As the movement's key legal-political arsenal, the 1988 Constitution reserves—at least in theory—vital political, social, and economic rights for marginalized groups. One notable electoral victory that suggests potential progress is that of City Councilmember (*vereadora*) Marielle Franco in 2016. Franco, the councilmember with the 5th most votes in the city's history, hails from and still resides in the expansive *favela* community of Maré in Rio's Northern Zone. Franco has described her own processes of racialization despite her political victory, noting that as “a Black woman, *favela* resident, teen mother and married ... the stigma was that I was going to be a thug or drug dealer's wife and commit crimes” (Pimentel 2016). As a politician, activist, sociologist, and beneficiary of affirmative action scholarships,

Franco used her position to advocate for the well-being of women, Black communities, and disenfranchised *favela* residents. In Franco's words, her electoral victory was a telling moment and "the city's answer in the ballot box for what they want from us [politicians], which is the debate concerning women, Blackness and *favela* communities" (ibid.). Although quite unprecedented in its own right, I must raise the important caveat that Franco's electoral victory case is rare, as one can infer from previous statistics. Although clearly an advancement for Rio's marginalized Black people within the formal political arena, I do not want to overgeneralize her trajectory as the ideal political strategy through which Black youth, women, and LGBT people build power and effect social change. Indeed, Franco's hyper-violent assassination in March 2018 represents a symptom of the broader structures of misogyny, homophobia, and anti-Black racism at work.

GENDERED RACISM AS HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC VIOLENCE

As I have detailed, the aforementioned dimensions of gendered racism intersect and affect Black people differentially in relation to gender, class, and sexual identities as well as age. These gendered forms of racial formation can transform the city into a battleground for survival in everyday life, which affects young Black LGBT people's lives in profound, inherent spatial ways. Gendered, anti-Black violence influences where and with whom Black LGBT youth go to find resources, support, community, and affirmation.

Black women and Black LGBT people remain a key target of gendered, anti-Black racism, which Gilmore (2007) defines as state-sanctioned or extralegal subjection of Black people to conditions that lead to their premature death. In 2016, 347 LGBT people—an unprecedented *recorded* number—were murdered in Brazil 347 people. This annual total has

more than doubled since 2000 and has steadily increased since then (Grupo Gay da Bahia 2017). Of the 347 reported homicides, 50% were of gay men, and 36% transgender people and *travestis*. Higher proportions of transgender people and *travestis* were murdered and are thus the most victimized. Many of those murdered were both poor and Black. The data provided by Grupo Gay da Bahia suggest that transgender woman is 14 times more likely to be killed than a gay man in Brazil. Homicide rates aside, 90% of Brazilian transgender women are illiterate due to discrimination and social isolation, and 68% of transgender Brazilians are living with HIV, according to Global Rights Partners for Justice and the Black LGBT Network of Brazil in their report to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. The report denounces the lack of federal legal protections for Black transgender women's rights in Brazil, and states that "discrimination and acts of violence based on homophobia and transphobia [i.e. sexuality and gender identity], which affects people's rights to gender expression as well as effective access to jobs, education, and health services" (Pomykata 2013; see Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2015). Compared to the US, Brazilian trans women have 9 times more chance of being killed (Grupo Gay da Bahia 2017). According to the international agency Transgender Europe (2017), Brazil has witnessed more transphobic murders (in terms of relative numbers) than any other country between 2008 and 2016: 802. Mexico and the US followed Brazil with 229 and 132 trans murders, respectively. Of the homicides of LGBT Brazilians last year, 32% were between ages 19-30 at the time of their death, and 21% were minors. In other words, LGBT youth, by far, constituted the largest share of homicides. Similar to the cases of racist hate crimes, many of these crimes are permitted due to police and judges' dismissal of these cases as potential hate crimes.

RIO DE JANEIRO AS A 'GAY-FRIENDLY' AFRO-PARADISE

Rio de Janeiro is not only a place of carnivalesque Black fantasy and Black death, but also one associated with sexual freedom and deviance. As I explain in this section, these spatial representations and performances are not coincidental, but rather processes that represent Rio de Janeiro into a sort of 'gay-friendly' afro-paradise. The gay tourism industry and the mainstream LGBT movement often appropriate Black bodies and culture in demonstrating sexual diversity and tolerance. In effect, these actors merely rearticulate racial-sexual hierarchies that are rooted in colonial violence, casting Rio as a 'gay-friendly' afro-paradise.

Carioca LGBT activists have increasingly appropriated key tourist landscapes for political action and visibility, such as *Posto 8.5*—the “gay beach”—on Ipanema Beach as well as Avenida Atlântica that runs parallel to Copacabana beach, developing key partnerships with city agencies to spearhead gay tourism and anti-homophobia campaigns. Rainbow flags, muscular, bronzed bodies, the boardwalk, and palm trees are prominent features on city-sponsored gay tourism brochures. The spatial imaginary of gay tourism materials, gay nightlife sites and maps, and word of mouth locate most “gay spaces” within the affluent neighborhoods of the Southern Zone: Ipanema, Leblon, Botafogo, and Copacabana, with the “gayest street in Rio” being Farme de Amoedo Street in Ipanema.

However, one must remember that these allegedly ‘queer’ spaces of tolerance and racial-sexual diversity are embedded within an urban terrain starkly segregated by race, class, and gender. Simplistic binary notions of “queer” space and “straight” space, which are present in most of this literature, fail to recognize that queer spaces are also contested along lines of race and class (see Oswin 2008). Often gayness in the city becomes mapped or demarcated

within the Southern Zone far from where most Black *cariocas*—including Black LGBT youth—live. As a result, even when Black LGBT people are present in these gay spaces, they are also ‘out of place’ unless they are working as mobile vendors, service employees in bars and restaurants, domestic workers, sex workers, or criminals from nearby *favelas*—the racial-sexual “spectacle” that Beatriz Nascimento (1982) witnesses in Copacabana.

The Brazilian state, city government, and tourism industry all strategically appropriate and resignify Rio’s racialized landscape as a “site of desire” (Manderson and Jolly 1997) and of “erotic possibilities” (Binnie 2001), where blackness is central, being simultaneously celebrated, commodified, and concealed from touristic sites and narratives (see Williams 2014). We see this simultaneous desire and disgust for blackness in Rio’s city-sponsored gay tourism campaigns, with an all-white white cast, set in Ipanema, with rainbow flags waving below palm trees, with Afro-Brazilian *samba*⁸ music playing in the background to entice the prospective tourist. However, what is concealed is the gratuitous violence with which police “pacify” neighboring *favelas* as well as the communities from which many low-wage employees commute daily. This performative production of touristic and gay leisure spaces relies upon the concealment of blackness on the one hand, but also on an eroticized hypervisibility of Black *cariocas*’ bodies and cultural labor (see Kelley 1994).

⁸ *Samba* is a musical and cultural tradition with roots deeply grounded within the cultures and religious practices of poor, Black Brazilians. *Samba*, along with *capoeira*, *jongo* and the Afro-Brazilian religions of *candomblé* and *umbanda*, was once banned by the federal government as criminal activity and a moral hazard, until the “nationalization” of *samba* by then President Getúlio Vargas. In 1935, President Vargas identified (or appropriated) *samba* as a central symbol of popular culture and national identity for Brazilians, legitimizing *samba*, catalyzing its transformation into what we witness annually as the world-renowned *samba* school parades in the Samba Dome, a key tourist attraction for Rio de Janeiro during Carnaval.

SPATIAL EXCLUSION VIS-À-VIS BLACK LGBT YOUTH IN RIO DE JANEIRO

Even though recent political gains suggest somewhat higher levels of racial and gender justice, violence continues to mark Black LGBT youth's lives and sense of place in Rio de Janeiro. These gendered forms of racial formation can transform the city into a battleground for survival in everyday life, which affects young Black LGBT people's lives in profound, inherent spatial ways. As a spatial and structural phenomenon, gendered, anti-Black violence influences where and with whom Black LGBT youth go to find resources, support, community, and affirmation.

According to my research partners, Rio's LGBT movement is largely dominated by white, middle-class gay men who fail to challenge the ways in which the state, civil society, and the tourism industry criminalize and hypersexualize black youth. Many spaces of gay social life, activism, and tourism—through which narratives of diversity and tolerance emerge—rely on institutions and ideologies that are invested in the marginalization and systemic killing of black people. Pro-LGBT policy programs and legal protections focus more on individual cases of discrimination and violence and do not fully address structural, institutionalized forms of violence. Peripheral black youth have been racially profiled as *bandidos*, or thugs, verbally and physically assaulted, and/or arrested on public transit and in public spaces, including beaches. Black transgender and gender-nonconforming (GNC) people must also face misgendering and harassment by police and civil society in order to access basic social services, despite being legally able to use their own “social name” and gender identity.

On the other hand, majority-black neighborhoods or spaces of anti-racist, pro-black consciousness are also not necessarily safe harbors for black LGBT youth. State forces, like

the Military Police, carry out routine killings of black residents in *favela* communities, where conservative evangelism has often encouraged homophobic and transphobic violence. Black LGBT people are highly aware of the dichotomy between what is LGBT—predominantly made up of white, cisgender gay men—and what is black and *marginal*—still predominantly heteronormative. Furthermore, black LGBT people also understand this simplistic binary as *spatial*, with serious, even deadly consequences for them.

As Gilmara Cunha, a transgender woman, renowned activist, and leader of *favela*-based LGBT group Conexão G, contemplates this spatial binary and resultant inequality between those living in the affluent Zona Sul and those living in the predominantly black periphery, she holds both the LGBT movement and peripheral communities accountable:

[i]n the *favela* we can neither give each other a kiss nor walk holding hands. Whoever is gay, lesbian or transexual [sic]from favela territory doesn't benefit from the advancement that the country's LGBT people are experiencing... There [in the Zona Sul and general 'formal' city] they can denounce prejudice, aggression, and there's even a chance of punishment [for the hate crime]. Here we have no way to do that. We're in a lawless land. The reality is different, the risks are different... We're not fighting to adopt a child. We're still struggling to survive (Puff 2015).

Ézio Rosa is founder and writer of Bicha Nagô, a prominent Brazilian black LGBT Tumblr blog, as well as a friend and research partner of mine. Rosa is from the Eastern periphery of São Paulo and comments on the social and physical distance between spaces of gay social life and peripheral neighborhoods (*quebradas*) where many black LGBT people live, and the role that blogging and online activism in enabling black LGBT people to organize across space and scales:

The tumblr emerged from the need to discuss sexuality through the angle of race and class, and to also bring up the issue of appropriation of public space for black LGBTTT people. When we come out as LGBTTT, the idea is that we go hang out with similar LGBTTT people. So, where do we find, these similar people? Downtown ... why can't I exercise my affectivity in the neighborhood where I live? Why do I have to go so far to be able to exercise this affection? Through the tumblr I could get in contact with other poor neighborhoods and also other people who are also trying to bring up this issue in their own neighborhoods. There's a really interesting movement going on when it comes to representation in the periphery—the “non-place” [*não-lugar*].

The “*não-lugar*” is a transient “non-space” that characterizes a black queer sense of place that invisibilizes and displaces youth like Rosas.

When we think about the dilemmas that a black LGBTTT person carries, you directly think of this non-space, because when you go and try to bring up the subject of racism in the LGBTTT movement, you'll face a lot of difficulties. And then when you try to discuss homophobia in the black movement, the same thing happens. It's really hard to find black and gay representation.

At a public roundtable discussion (*roda de conversa*) in summer 2015, I asked social worker Joilson Santana, who identifies as a peripheral black gay man, what he thought of the LGBT movement's public policy strategies and how black LGBT people deal with a fragmentation of their identities. Joilson denounced the movement's focus on marriage as political progress and the fact that social services are “being developed only for the gay man”; instead he stressed that Black LGBT people need policies that “make our survival possible”, which necessarily involves a challenge to anti-black genocide. Joilson declared, “*temos que estar vivos para casar*”—we have to be *alive* in order to marry (Santana 2015, emphasis my own).

In this chapter I sought to trace just a few examples of the oppressive hierarchies, structures, and spaces that work against black LGBT youth in Rio de Janeiro. These dimensions of institutional gendered racism include, but are not limited to, death and

homicide, mass incarceration, compromised health, lack of access to education and formal political power, intersecting with various forms of homo- and transphobic violence. Rio de Janeiro is global city renowned for two interrelated legacies: that of Black spectacle, celebration, sexual freedom and excess as well as that of great inequality, violence, and Black premature death. Institutions such as the Brazilian state, media, the gay tourism industry, and even the mainstream LGBT movement often appropriate black bodies, art and culture in demonstrating Rio's cultural-sexual diversity and tolerance. However, these actors merely rearticulate (and thus justify) racial-sexual hierarchies that are rooted in colonial violence, casting Rio as a 'gay-friendly' afro-paradise. Together these spatial narratives create a racial, gendered, and sexual spatial imaginary called "afro-paradise", transforming the urban landscape of Rio de Janeiro into a place of black sexual fantasy and consumption as well as black death.

Chapter 5

Hip hop urbanism: Youth culture and play as political work

As an active witness I've learned that much of Black LGBT youth's political activity takes place outside of the 'formal' realm of politics naturalized by most social scientists and policymakers. When we restrict the scope of "politics" to only include courts, elections, laws, and policymaking, we only see a small fraction of the lives of the politically disenfranchised, such as Black LGBT youth. Lost to our analyses are the actions and productions that we too often separate and relegate to the realm of "culture", such as performances, demonstrations, workshops, parties, and other embodied expressions of joy, grief, and pleasure. Broadening our notion of politics and community helps to defend the humanity and agency of Black LGBT youth in Rio and to "see culture and community as more than responses to, or products of, oppression" (Kelley 1997, 4). Through this lens, aesthetics and pleasure are political, and various forms of cultural production can have as much political significance as an election campaign.

As I have observed in Rio, Black LGBT youth deploy a variety of spatial tactics in order to create spaces of sociocultural support, entrepreneurship, and political power. My field observations discerned three particularly salient tactics: 1) occupying physical urban spaces and claiming territory; 2) Diasporic self-making through digital activism; and 3) leveraging cultural labor as young entrepreneurs and kin. Through these performative practices of placemaking, hustling, and community-building, Black LGBT youth have enacted a variant of "hip hop urbanism", in which urban youth try to make something out of

nearly nothing and quite literally put art and play to work. As with early hip-hop among Black and Latinx youth in U.S. cities, the diverse cultural expressions of Black LGBT youth in Rio constitute “a direct response to economic violence and neglect” of segregation and isolation (Jeffries 2014, 707). Across the city, “physical space takes on human form and social import” as disenfranchised youth use their own cultural labor and creative expression in making room for an emerging movement (Ibid.). Through their own cultural labor and spatial tactics, Black LGBT youth retell their own stories, all while challenging anti-Black, misogynistic, and homophobic narratives, create safer spaces, and economically sustain themselves. These spatial tactics for survival and political organizing include physical occupation, performance, aesthetics, and celebration. More broadly, I argue that Black LGBT youth’s experiences and practices in the city demonstrate alternative ways of building power and clout that do *not* depend fully on state institutions, party politics, or physical spatial proximity, which break from conventional notions of community planning and organizing and of social movements overall.

MAKING SENSE OF THE GERAÇÃO TOMBAMENTO

Within the last few years, Black LGBT youth have gained unprecedented visibility and clout through their own cultural production both on and offline. As a response to racism, discrimination, and violence, many black LGBT youth have begun creating their own spaces that center Black non-heteronormative people and experiences. These spaces extol the principle of *representatividade*--spaces for Black LGBT youth, by Black LGBT youth--where the organizers, attendees, DJs, vendors, performers, and promoters, are all black, LGBT, and fully represented. In particular, Black women and gender non-conforming folks

have spearheaded what some call a cultural and political movement of young people through social events, independent publications, blogs and websites, visual arts, blogs, hair, and fashion. Through these various modes of intervention, young Black LGBT activists have “taken White people from the center” in order to “control their own narrative and no longer allow themselves to be interpellated as a minority subject” (Bueno 2016). This movement of Black youth self-making has been dubbed the *geração tombamento* by contemporary Brazilian journalists and media outlets.

This youth movement has even entered more mainstream strata of Brazilian society through the ascension of musical artists such as Karol Conká, Liniker, and Linn da Quebrada as well as cultural influencer Magá Moura. Multinational corporations Nike and Avon have increasingly highlighted key figures of the so-called “geração tombamento” in their promotional materials for retro sneakers and cosmetic products. Although some members of this generation of young Black activists may aim to reach mainstream visibility and corporate sponsorships, many more members view their everyday existence as inherently political acts that challenge white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.

MAKING ROOM FOR THE MOVEMENT: OCCUPYING AND CLAIMING URBAN TERRITORY

As documented among many queer, trans, and non-heteronormative groups throughout the Americas, Rio’s Black LGBT youth have gone to great lengths to affirm themselves by reclaiming and occupying urban spaces. Black LGBT youth in both Brazil and the U.S. have repeatedly demonstrated that “occupying space has [been] an important queer tactic” (Valentine 2003, 417)—a process known “reterritorialization of heterosexual space” (Oswin 2008, 90)—and, as I argue, a reterritorialization of anti-black landscapes. The social

nature of these places can vary widely, including liminal spaces like highway underpasses, highly public spaces like central plazas and neighborhood streets, or conventionally private spaces such as residences and art studios. The social nature of places that youth occupy often neither confine nor prescribe the events and activities performed within. A small house (the case of *Casa Nem*), a highway underpass (the case of *Batekoo*), or even an alleyway can all become sites of celebration, performance, entrepreneurship, or political activism, often spilling over into adjacent streets and sidewalks. As Wesley, a São Paulo-based DJ and artist said, “we can make something out of nothing, anywhere—what matters is that we find each other and create something together for ourselves.”

1.1: CASA NEM

The potential of Rio’s Black LGBT youth to ‘carve out’ and reclaim urban spaces becomes apparent through the case of Casa Nem. With a name that itself presents a critique of the gender binary—*nem* meaning “neither/nor”—gender-nonconforming youth and elders have occupied and transformed a small house into a multipurpose site. Where the house’s name alludes to diversity and inclusion, its slogan demands it, declaring that “there are faggots, dykes, trans men, and there will also be trans women and *travestis*, too!” (Casa Nem, n.d.). According to Leonardo, a frequent guest of the house and Black transgender activist, the house had originally been rented and managed by middle-class white gay men who used the house as a residence and arts space. After experiencing a series of transphobic attacks by other house guests (and complicity of the gay men running the space), the survivors—all transgender women and *travesties*—occupied the house and refused to leave until the tenants agreed to apologize and do right by them in the future. Instead of reconciling and creating a

more inclusive space, the former occupants vacated the property, leaving the house to the new occupants.

Since then, transgender women (including *travestis*) have become the primary occupants, akin to house “mothers” and elders, and continue to run the house as a repurposed shelter for transient youth needing shelter from the violence of discriminatory police, clients, and bystanders. The house has now become a base for community-building and political organizing as well as a refuge for transgender women and *travestis*, many of whom identify as Black and are (in)voluntarily engaged in sex work due to extreme barriers to education and formal employment opportunities. The house’s location in Lapa gives many sex workers, whether trans-feminine or as young cisgender men, direct access to shelter, food, and communal support in times of need. The house has been increasingly useful to sex workers as the demand for sex work and consequent violent policing of sex work have both drastically increased especially in the midst of recent mega-events and growing tourism.



Figure 3: Front entrance of Casa Nem, with a message stating, “Respect the girls, queens, trannies, and whores!”. Source: Author.

While Casa Nem began primarily as a reclaimed refuge for homeless trans youth, the house has quickly evolved to serve multiple collective needs of Rio’s marginalized trans community—all under the leadership of trans and gender-nonconforming people of various ages, races, and walks of life. House programming has used the arts, education, and celebration to equitably fundraise and train its LGBTQ (and largely Black) constituency. A salient example of such programming is PreparaNem. With young, low-income transgender

people as its pupils, PreparaNem is free, intensive prep course for the ENEM⁹, the universal entrance exam to all of Brazil's superior federal universities. Many of the students in the course have either lived in or frequented Casa Nem at some point. The course's LGBT instructors, all volunteers, have either attended elite public universities and/or have multiple degrees, equipping the students with the knowledge and strategy needed to overcome the barrier of the ENEM—all free of charge. Despite its main objective, PreparaNem has accomplished more than superior test outcomes and more transgender youth entering university. In 2016, the course organizers and first class of students collaborated with local photographers and graphic designs to create and sell calendars featuring the students, dressed in attire attributed to their dream profession. Using their aspirations, networks, and creativity, house youth have actively participated and have helped 'pay it forward' by fundraising for the coming classes.

Another way that the house collective leverages reclaimed spaces in the service of community needs is through celebrations, what many Black Americans would call "rent parties". At monthly rent parties house residents and members fully staff the function, deploying their crafts as bartenders, event planners, entertainers, security, DJs or visual artists in order to create a fun, discrimination-free atmosphere for attendees. This intersectional

⁹ ENEM stands for the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio*, or the National High School Exam, which tests students' knowledge in all subjects taught in the national standard high school curriculum. The exam is both a test of students' retained knowledge and critical thinking as well as the principal barrier to a solid university education. Similar to the LSAT in the U.S., scores are ranked and heavily weighted and applicants compete for a limited number of seats in their chosen major at the university/ies of their choice. By far, one's ENEM score determines one's admission. Although a standardized test for all Brazilian high school students, the vast majority of public high school students do not achieve competitive scores to enter Brazil's prestigious public universities, largely due to disinvestment from public education and lack of school resources. Historically, only those with the financial means to afford private high school education and private ENEM prep courses have earned coveted class seats in Brazil's best universities. In effect, the ENEM has impeded the vast majority of poor, Black, and transgender youth from public universities and thus socioeconomic mobility.

feminist ethos is literally etched into the physical structure of the house, with both interior and exterior walls marked heavily with art and phrases against racism, homo- and transphobia, ableism, the criminalization of sex work and HIV, and all forms of violence and discrimination. At the same time, the house fulfills a second objective: to create a mechanism that provides equitable monetary support for house beneficiaries and programming. Rent parties help pay the bulk of the pricey R\$5000 monthly rent as well as food and living supplies for house residents; these parties are fully staffed by house members. Cisgender attendees pay a cover of R\$10, while transgender and *travesti* attendees can enjoy the parties free of charge. However, as my research partner Leonardo explained, many of the trans and gender-nonconforming attendees help run the party in some way, taking shifts selling beers, *catuaba* and *caipirinhas* as a means to raise additional house funds.



Figure 4: Interior of Casa Nem during July 2016 rent party. Source: Author.



Figure 5: Rent party inside first-floor communal space of Casa Nem. Source: Author.

Casa Nem has also evolved into a haven for political organizing around issues of racism, heteropatriarchy, and human rights as well as an electoral campaigns base for socialist PSOL-endorsed candidates Marielle Franco, Marcelo Freixo (runner-up in Rio’s mayoral election) and Indianara Siqueira (house mother at Casa Nem and Rio city councilmember candidate). As a political organizing base, Casa Nem has grounded several protests, celebrations, and broader organizing networks. Through Casa Nem’s community organizing work, Rodrigo Luther King, a 28-year-old trans man from the nearby *favela* of São Carlos, connected with other Black LGBT activists—in particular with assassinated councilwoman Marielle Franco. Rodrigo describes Casa Nem as,

“a space where I felt like I belonged. It is a shelter for people in vulnerable situations and living on the street. I lived there for a month, I learned, I grew, because inside the favela we do not get as much information. There I learned to stand up for myself and to fight for my rights, and now I ... can pass this on in a clear way to my brothers, in a way that means people from my surroundings in São Carlos can understand me, embark forward from these ideas, and learn to stand up for themselves as well, seeing what their rights are and fighting for them.” (Maxx 2018)

In times of increased state violence and rollbacks of civil and human rights, youth’s experiences at Casa Nem have reaffirmed their existence and have equipped them with the conceptual tools needed to articulate their reasons for resistance. The April 2018 assassination of Marielle Franco demonstrated the benefits of such a support system. As Rodrigo further explains, “what happened to my sister Marielle can happen to any of us, even more because we are black... So it is very important for us to have a representative like Marielle was. She was not only having an impact by being a city councilmember, but by representing exactly this excluded minority” (Maxx 2018).

1.2: CASE OF CONEXÃO G AND MARÉ PRIDE

Black, poor, and young LGBT activists have also effectively reclaimed spaces that are literally in their backyard, within several *favela* communities. Unlike the case of Casa Nem, the streetscapes that youth reappropriate are not a part of the *asfalto* (the “formal” city) but are nevertheless spaces that historically have been hostile sites of gendered, anti-black violence. Through annual LGBT Pride parades in communities like Rocinha, Complexo da Maré, and Cidade de Deus, LGBT favela residents reclaim the same streets in which military police have abducted and murdered their kin in the name of “pacification”, gang factions have slaughtered one another over territory, and both cisgender and transgender women have

been sexually assaulted. Alternative pride parades have increasingly emerged across Rio's *favela* communities, largely due to LGBT *favela* residents' common desire to serve their immediate communities' needs and address the overrepresentation of upper-class White cisgender gay men in Brazil's mainstream LGBT movement.

The main protagonist in reclaiming territory and making room for the LGBT movement is Grupo Conexão G based in Maré, a complex of several *favela* communities in Rio's Northern Zone that was violently "pacified" and policed by military police in 2014. Conexão G is a non-governmental organization whose main objective is to advocate exclusively for the human rights and well-being of LGBT *favela* residents. According to Gilmara Cunha, the organization's co-founder and current director, Conexão G continues to be the nation's only organization dedicated exclusively to LGBT people in *favela* communities (Cunha 2015). Gilmara—a Black transgender woman, Maré resident, and renowned activist—has long struggled with racial-spatial segregation and its reverberations within Rio's LGBT movement and *carioca* society overall. Conexão G conducts its outreach and programming in a highly polarized landscape, marked by stark inequality between those living in the affluent Zona Sul and those living in the predominantly Black periphery. When it comes to gendered, anti-Black violence against her constituency Gilmara holds the mainstream LGBT movement, the state, and *favela* community institutions accountable, stating that,

"[i]n the *favela* we can neither give each other a kiss or walk holding hands. Whoever is gay, lesbian or transexual [sic] from *favela* territory does not reap the benefits of the advances that [other] LGBT people in this country are experiencing... There [in the Zona Sul] they can denounce prejudice, aggression, and there's even a chance of punishment [for the hate crime]. Here we have no way to do that. We're in a lawless land. The reality is another one, the risks are different... We're not fighting to adopt a child. We're still struggling to survive" (Puff 2015).

Much of Conexão G's success in educating and empowering LGBT youth amidst violence can be attributed not only to their spatial tactics but also to their discursive strategies, which integrate public health, human rights, and gender justice. Such a strategic framing maintains a focus on issues that directly impact their constituency of LGBT *favela* residents but nevertheless enables the organization to create partnerships across difference to address the systemic nature of these issues that affect all residents, albeit differentially. In particular, Conexão G's annual LGBT Pride Parade in Maré has consistently centered its programming and public space interventions around the issue of public health. While discursively anchored around public health, Conexão G staff and volunteers manage to educate their direct constituency on matters of sexual health, such as HIV/STI prevention and, by extension, their rights to accessible and gender-appropriate healthcare. The issue of public health enables Conexão G to expand their programming to the broader community, regardless of gender, sexuality, or religion. For example, Gilmara, once a catholic friar herself, has established partnerships with local NGOs, schools, and even more conservative community churches in order to provide education around pregnancy and maternal health, Dengue Fever, vaccinations, and SUS¹⁰ administrative tips—information that is needed by all community residents. Leveraging the multifaceted discourse of public health has rapidly established buy-in and relative tolerance from unexpected community institutions and stakeholders, such as the Pacifying Police Units that patrol Maré as well as the area's more conservative

¹⁰ SUS, short for *Sistema Único de Saúde* (Single Health System), is Brazil's universal healthcare system, which is free and open to all, including foreigners. SUS was created in 1989 after the fall of the military dictatorship and subsequent creation of the 1988 Constitution.

Evangelical and Catholic churches. In my 2015 interview with Gilmara, she asserts that, “it’s through public health fairs that we’ve been most successful in reaching our target audience and educating them about their human rights—reminding them that they are worthy and deserving of equality and justice. Although each person has different needs and experiences, everyone wants to be in good health, and that is how more conservative sectors [of the community] accept and respect our programming.”¹¹

1.3: CASE OF BATEKOO

Likely the most visible and publicized example of Rio’s Black LGBT youth occupying physical spaces and reclaiming urban territory is that of Batekoo. Featured in American and European outlets such as Afropunk and Vice, Batekoo represents a cultural pinnacle of Brazil’s nascent Black LGBT movement. Simultaneously a party, Black queer space, artistic venue, and the platform for a movement, Batekoo demonstrates the political potential of Black queer performance and cultural production in the era of digital activism in Brazil and the Diaspora overall. Among these intentional spaces, Batekoo represents the most visible and popular of them, with monthly parties and celebrations convening thousands of Black LGBT youth across Brazil’s metropolises, including Rio, São Paulo, and Salvador. Amidst the right-wing takeover of federal government, Batekoo represents the epitome of a party with a purpose. As Black feminist activist and writer Winnie Bueno notes, “putting up a Black aesthetic in a world where Black bodies are always in the place of subordination is an extremely potent transgression” (Bueno 2016).

¹¹ Personal interview, June 2015.

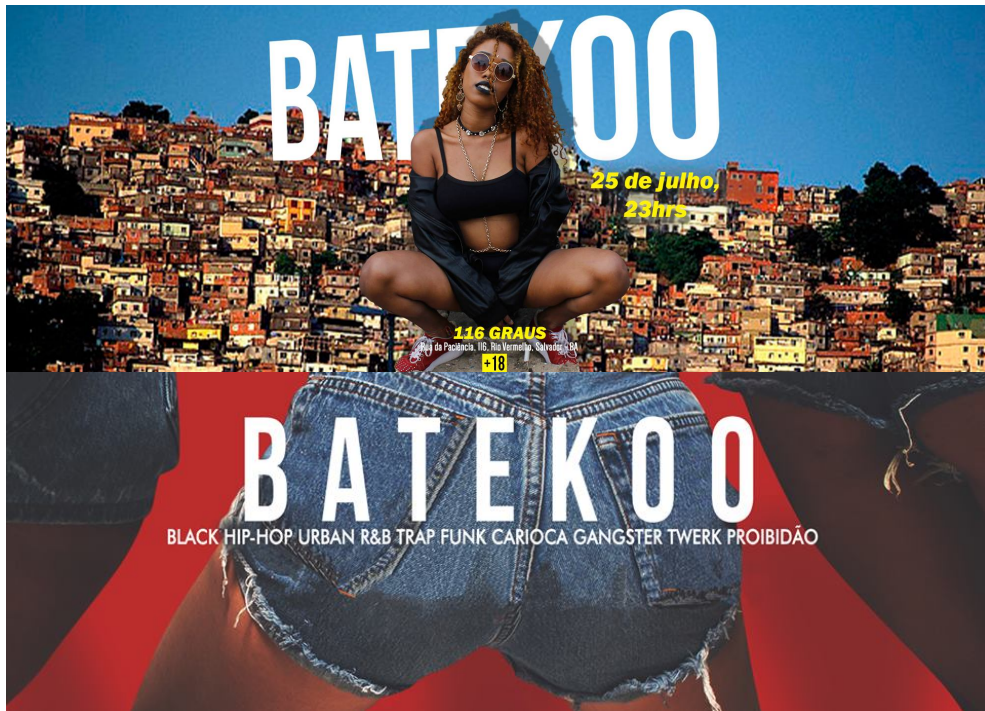


Figure 6: Advertisements for 2016 Batekoo events in Rio de Janeiro. Source: Batekoo

Although Batekoo appears to be a rather novel cultural phenomenon, Black Brazilian activists have situated Batekoo in a much richer history of Black performance as political resistance. Most connections have been made between Batekoo gatherings and the Black cultural traditions of *bailes charme*. *Bailes charme*, or “charm dances”, have occurred since the mid-20th century and have always been intentional, multipurpose spaces where Black youth not only convened to celebrate and experiment with Black music and dance across the Diaspora, but also organized themselves against the tyranny and racism of multiple dictatorships.

Youth have organized Batekoo-related events across a wide array of venues, occupying various public spaces—like the alleyway directly in front of Casa Nem—and even

liminal spaces such as the Viaduto de Madureira, a highway underpass that has been reutilized as a hub for the cultural production in Madureira, Rio's "Blackest neighborhood"¹², according to several friends during our visits. Having witnessed Batekoo gatherings in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, various powerful scenes appear to the rhythm of the strobe lights: sweaty bodies writhing and grinding; neon braids flying in all directions; young folks twerking; loving on themselves and each other; dancing sensually with people of all genders; bright and tight clothing; and vibrant makeup on most attendees. The sensorial experience is enhanced by sounds and sets carefully curated by young self-trained DJs, who effortlessly sample and mix all types of Black Diasporic Mix. As friend and regular Batekoo DJ Mirands told me, "we play *Black* music—that's all we require. The music can come from any place, but it must be Black music" (Miranda 2017). Brazilian rappers and *funkeiros* wrap to the beats of American hip-hop and R&B hits. Soca and Jamaican Dancehall songs inspire dances that fuse Brazilian, Caribbean, and American street dances—one may twerk, wine, and practice their best *samba* and *passinho* steps all in one mix. Through dance and performance, youth's bodies become vehicles for radical self-love, desire, and politics. As such, Batekoo becomes a site not only for celebration and self-love, but also a site for Diasporic cultural and political exchange. Batekoo is, by far, a carefully crafted queer, feminist, and anti-racist space that reaffirms the humanity of young people who repeatedly fight for their dignity.

¹² Madureira is a suburban neighborhood in Rio's Northern Zone that is known as a cradle of Black *carioca* culture. Settled by many formerly enslaved families by the early 20th century, Madureira is home to one of the city's most elite *samba* schools and other Black cultural institutions, such as the *bailes charmes* that were founded by neighborhood DJs and have occurred monthly in the reclaimed Madureira Viaduct since the early 90s. The Viaduct, a previously liminal, underutilized space, has been repurposed by Black residents of all ages for a wide array of activities, such as *passinho* classes for the *bailes charme*, hip-hop freestyle events, skateboarding, and general leisure. In this way, Black LGBT youth Batekoo weave themselves and Batekoo into the historical-cultural fabric and traditions of the neighborhood.

However, like many other social movement- and justice-oriented spaces, Batekoo is not immune from the aggressions of broader Brazilian society—a society which, like that of the U.S., has relied on White supremacy and the subjugation of Black people. As a Batekoo attendee myself in June 2017, I was reminded of this when a group of cisgender White gay men, who had been occupying the center of the dancefloor, spilled my drink and then proceeded to laugh and not apologize. A friend in attendance with me, Watu, witnessed this occurrence, exhibited frustration, and explained that “even in a space *for* us, we can’t always escape whiteness. But look, we outnumber them and can still resist!” This encounter alludes to a growing concern among party organizers and attendees: the “gentrification” or “whitening” of Batekoo, as a result of curious yet clueless (“*sem noção*”) White middle-class youth re-appropriating a space that was not meant for them in the first place. As Mirands said, “this is the only space that we have exclusively for ourselves. It’s frustrating because they have the rest of society to enjoy and enjoy their privilege.” As in the rent parties at Casa Nem, I witnessed artists and DJs mitigating co-optation by repeatedly announcing to the crowd that while allies are welcome, Batekoo represents a space for Black people, by Black people, where Black people of all kinds are to be respected and centered.

2.1: DIASPORIC SELF-MAKING THROUGH DIGITAL ACTIVISM

Batekoo has been both the result and guiding force of an unprecedented emergence of Black LGBT youth in Brazil’s sociocultural institutions, particularly through newspapers, talk shows, and magazines. Despite its rapid popularity, Batekoo does not owe much of its recent fame as a pillar of Black youth culture to mainstream media; its success is largely

attributed to Black LGBT youth who have gone digital with their activism and ‘artivism’¹³ through social media networks (e.g. Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) and online publications. Youth’s persistent and adept use of social media has done more than effectively disseminate information; social media has become a crucial means that informs youth’s own senses of self and self-making in the face of dehumanizing discourses. As such, Batekoo itself simultaneously serves as an exemplary culmination and *ponto de partida* for Black LGBT digital activism. Social media platforms Instagram and Facebook made possible my very entrance into the networks needed for this research project. The power and utility of social media networks is so great that the vast majority of my “fieldwork” technically occurred out of the field and through my phone. I met nearly all of my research partners through social media, having one or more connections in common and striking up friendly conversation. Just like theirs, my profile served as a curated form of creative expression that mirrored their politics in many ways, vetting me in effect—and vice versa. I have witnessed on countless occasions *carioca* Black LGBT youth using social media as a platform for “jumping scale” (Smith 1993; Moore 2008) and bridging diasporic connections with other Black LGBT youth across Brazil and the world in order to engage, dialogue, and build solidarity.

The case of Ézio Rosa clearly demonstrates the ability of Black LGBT youth to “jump scale” in their own processes of self-making and creative expression (Smith 1993; Moore

¹³ According to Nigerian feminist artist Amina Doherty, the term “artivism”—a portmanteau combining art and activism—can be defined as the use of any form of creative expression to “fight and struggle against injustice and oppression—by any means necessary”. Doherty draws her definition from M.K. Asante, Jr.’s 2008 book *It’s bigger than Hip-Hop: The rise of the post-hip-hop generation* (St. Martin’s Press). See <https://justassociates.org/en/womens-stories/when-art-meets-activism-being-young-feminist-artist>.

2008). Ézio—whom I met virtually via Instagram and then later in person—is the founder and one of the main contributors of Bicha Nagô, a prominent Brazilian Black LGBT Tumblr blog. Like many other youth, Ézio is well aware on the spatial mismatch between mainstream spaces of gay social life and peripheral neighborhoods (*quebradas*) where many Black LGBT people go to connect with people like them, as well as how blogging and online activism enables Black LGBT youth to organize across multiple sites and scales. Through the internet and blogging, Ézio has been able to educate himself on key Black feminist theories (e.g. intersectionality) and draw Diasporic connections that link the struggles of Black queer life in the United States and the lives of Black LGBT youth in Brazil. Whether connecting with readers down the street or across continents, Tumblr has enabled Ézio and other Black LGBT activists to jump scale with their activism, greatly broadening their audiences and social impact. Ézio also notes the following:

“The Tumblr [blog] emerged from the need to discuss sexuality through the angle of race and class, and to also bring up the issue of appropriation of public space for Black LGBTTT people. When we come out as LGBTTT, the idea is that we go hang out with similar LGBTTT people. So, where do we find them, these similar people? ... Why do I have to go so far to be able to exercise this affectivity or affection? Through the tumblr I could get in contact with other poor neighborhoods and other people who are also trying to bring up this issue in their own neighborhoods” (Viegas 2015, my own translation).

Rosa also explains the “*não-lugar*”, a transient “non-space/place” that characterizes Black LGBT youth’s fragmented sense of self and place within the LGBT and anti-racist movements and spaces. Rosa’s spatial imaginary alludes to a broader racial-sexual geography that other Black LGBT youth must navigate. Though in different ways in different neighborhoods, Brazilian cities are highly racialized, gendered, and classed landscapes where hostility and violence is directed toward at least one dimension of a Black LGBT person’s

subjectivity. In one moment a Black gay man may be criminalized and policed as a *bandido* (thug) or sexually fetishized as a “mandingo” in affluent white gay spaces and on hookup apps. That same man may then be verbally or physically assaulted by neighbors or family for his non-normative sexuality and labeled *bicha* (faggot) back in his neighborhood. Or, if he lives in a poor neighborhood rattled by police and gang violence, he may find himself endangered for his non-normative Black masculinity. As social worker Joilson Santana, a Black gay man from the Northern periphery, shared with me, “Black LGBT people need resources that make our survival possible” and thus confront the various mechanisms of gendered, anti-Black violence, in various spatial contexts (Santana 2015).

3.1: LEVERAGING CULTURAL LABOR FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Black LGBT youth have leveraged the success of Batekoo and the wide reach and influence of social media to spur their own entrepreneurial activities. In other words, as Kelley (1997) notes, youth have put popular street culture ‘to work’ in the pursuit of economic survival and self-sufficiency. Whether by DJ-ing, hosting parties, braiding hair, designing jewelry, publishing independent newspapers and zines or conducting fashion photography shoots, Black LGBT youth have transformed unique cultural expressions into means of economic survival. As Kelley (1994, 1997) has documented in the case of the United States, Black youth understand that life is oftentimes a hustle, and the hustle oftentimes dictates life. If that is so, then why not make your art work for you and others and make the hustle as creative and self-fulfilling as possible? Most youth like Ézio Rosas or Wesley Miranda acknowledge such cultural production rarely yields enough to substitute a

steady, middle-class salary. However, many see their production as a service to a Black LGBT community and an example of a do-it-yourself work ethic where young people like them are both the main producers and consumers of culture, as well as the main authors and protagonists of their narratives.

Ézio, like most Black LGBT youth who I met during the project, has learned to master many trades. He is not only a cultural influencer as a writer but also a cultural producer as a DJ and frequent organizer of Batekoo events in São Paulo. Ézio is also an up-and-coming hairbraider, weaving in the bundles of (often fluorescent) synthetic hair that have so often represented the corporeal-spatial aesthetic of Batekoo and, by extension, the *geração tombamento* as a whole. Born and raised in the poor and violent peripheral *quebradas* of São Paulo, Ézio is no stranger to the hustle. He quickly realized as an impoverished student with no financial support at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro that his art and economic survival as Black, queer, and young did not—and could not—exist in separate realms. By transforming his art and creative expressions into daily *tramos* (gigs), Ézio quickly deployed his cultural labor in the form of entrepreneurship, which would not only sustain him financially but also serve community needs. As Ézio recalls, “there were days when I didn’t have money to eat and I thought I would starve. I had to find a way to make money and continue doing the things that I loved and mattered to people like me. Thanks to [friend and social media] networks, I began to do both of those things through DJing and at parties, writing [on the *Bicha Nagô* blog], and other things like modeling and hair braiding” (Rosa 2017). By transforming his art and creative expressions into daily *tramos* (gigs), Ézio quickly deployed his cultural labor in the form of entrepreneurship. As a cultural

entrepreneur, Ézio has not only sustained himself financially but has also served community needs and created other educational and entrepreneurial opportunities for others like him. Like many others, Ézio has also used his emerging expertise as a mentor for other aspiring DJs and writers, who often use Batekoo and Bicha Nagô as points of departure for their creative careers.

“HIP-HOP URBANISM” AND THE ROLE OF INFRAPOLITICS IN BLACK LGBT YOUTH’S PLACEMAKING PRACTICES

In this chapter I have attempted to weave together experiences and moments that demonstrate a Black queer sense of place in Rio de Janeiro. In the vein of Black feminist geographies, Black LGBT youth understand racism, sexism and homophobia as major formative forces in their senses of self and senses of place. However, violence and inequality never fully define one’s identity. Instead, Black LGBT youth exercise their agency in myriad ways, whether fighting against forms of gendered, anti-Black violence or fighting for a more fulfilling and supportive community. The youth, like Black folks across the Diaspora, are always spatial subjects that actively engage in placemaking in ways that ensure critical consciousness, survival, and resistance in the face of trauma and violence.

Although youth are agentic spatial subjects that build power through a variety of spatial tactics, this does not quite address one of the original questions of this project: how do marginalized youth change the society around them without direct access to or support from formal political institutions? In order to begin answering this question, I rely upon Robin D. Kelley’s take on the notion of infrapolitics, originally a concept of anthropologist James Scott (1985, 1992). Black people—especially those of us who are women, youth, and LGBT-

identifying—have largely been locked out from positions of formal political power. Many Black LGBT activists, whether younger or older, have learned that a strategy that relies solely on institutions like the Supreme Court and Congress will never be adaptive, proactive, or effective in fostering racial and gender justice. In this vein, Black young people realize that too often “the question of what is political hinges on whether or not groups are involved in elections, political parties, or grass-roots social movements” (Kelley 1994, 9). It is through the struggles, persistence, pleasures, and creative expression of the everyday that Black LGBT youth build their own alternative spaces, kinship structures, and institutions that center Black agency and “freedom dreams”. Thus, this “politics of the everyday” breaks away from traditional notions of formal politics with a capital “P”—in essence, the Brazilian racial state.

The contours of infrapolitics are often perceived by those in power as simply play, apolitical culture, myths, and legends. Contrary to popular belief, everyday culture and creative expression are inherently political. In other words, politics is not separate from the everyday *trampas*, hustles, art, and play of Black LGBT youth; politics is about these things and is central to why these cultural practices occur in the first place. These practices of what Kelley calls “cultural labor” are central to the histories of oppressed peoples. As Kelley (1994) notes, “the political history of oppressed people cannot be understood without reference to infrapolitics, for these daily acts have a cumulative effect on power relations” (Ibid.). My task in this chapter has been to follow Kelley’s methodology of “writing history from below” in order to redefine conventional notions of politics, community planning, and culture itself.

In the daily lives of many Black LGBT people, trauma, pleasure, play, and struggle all tensely coexist. Amidst such a contradictory landscape, folks must carve out spaces of everyday survival and political intervention. Like other Black folks across the Diaspora, *carioca* Black LGBT youth literally make room for their community by appropriating urban spaces, leveraging new realms for activism, and refashioning stereotypes in hopes of building socio-spatial alternatives on their own terms—a ‘remix’, in a way, on the violence that centrally defines our existence (Bailey & Shabazz 2014, Walcott 2007). It is not by accident that I draw on hip-hop cultural references to analyze the youth’s spatial practices and tactics. Drawing from Michael Michael Jeffries (2014) and Craig Wilkins’ (2017) notion of “hip-hop architecture”, Black LGBT youth enact a type of hip-hop urbanism as agentive subjects that do what they can, “given the little that they’re given” in the city, in order to provide and (re)create for themselves and each other. The *carioca* youth whom I have met evoke a “collective entrepreneurial spirit” that has driven hip-hop cultures across the decades and the Diaspora (Wilkins 2017).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, space is relational, meaning that the city is both a physical and political landscape (re)produced through inequitable social relations and, thus, often a site of conflict and contestation (Lefebvre 1991[1974]); Massey 1994). Black LGBT youth are, like anyone else, geographical actors who also have a significant stake in the everyday production of space. Akin to American Black youth’s repurposing of everyday spaces and items (e.g. parks, community centers, old turntables) to create hip-hop music and culture, Rio’s Black LGBT youth evoke a similarly scrappy and innovative spirit of “hip hop urbanism” in times of neoliberal urbanism. In Wilkins’ words, “hip hop culture has taken

things considered garbage, has rescued them and taken things that have been considered dispensable and made them indispensable” (Wilkins 2007).

COUNTERPOINTS AND LIMITATIONS OF BLACK LGBT YOUTH ACTIVISM

Of course, there are significant caveats and limitations to the arguments that I’ve posited regarding Black LGBT youth’s spatial agency and placemaking practices. This younger generation of Black LGBT activist has been the object of several critiques. Most notably, critics have contested the fact that youth activists’ cultural labor and expressions are not, in fact, political activism at all. Instead, this “movement” is one that is largely based on superficial aesthetics and neoliberal individualism, largely devoid of structural critique of the racial state. Others, including Black LGBT youth who even contributed to this project critique the Black LGBT activists and the *geração tombamento* movement for imposing aesthetics and political norms that prioritize individual expression over collective needs as well as a reliance on expensive clothing, hair, makeup and parties that exclude many of the people that the movement claims to represent. Critics fear a hasty, naïve embrace of neoliberal individualism instead of collective struggle and grassroots organizing. As such, an ideological bias leaves them vulnerable to co-optation by government, celebrities, and multinational corporations. Two large (and controversial) corporations, Budweiser and Nike, have partnered with a small subset of Batekoo party organizers, highlighting them in fashion shoots and advertising campaigns. These engagements with corporate money has caused internal points of contention between many youth activists.

Similarly, one could argue that such a focus on culture, the everyday, and small interventions loses sight of how ubiquitous the state and its mechanisms really are in youth’s

everyday lives. Such arguments criticize youth's activism and self-positioning against the state and party politics; not trying to effect political change from within formal political institution is politically naïve and shortsighted. Lastly, some critics paint most Black LGBT youth activists as entitled, disgruntled university students unaware of their class privileges—a classic stereotype of the leftist student activist.

Any one of these counterpoints may be valid to varying extents, especially regarding the delicate yet contradictory relationship between Black youth and neoliberal capitalism. As Kelley (1997) observes in the U.S. context, neoliberal capitalism has been both “the greatest friend and foe” of Black youth and hip-hop culture (p. 21).

Furthermore, as in many youth movements, there seems to be an overrepresentation of middle-class youth leading the *geração tombamento* and Black LGBT activist circles. For centuries, the university has been a site of lively knowledge exchange and critique of societal norms and of exposure to critical theory and peer networks. With barely a decade of federal affirmative action, many more Black Brazilian youth have become academic “trailblazers” and dissidents. Furthermore, Black LGBT student activists have avidly leveraged their privileged affiliations in order to extend access to information and carving out supportive spaces within academia. For example, Black students at the elite Pontifícia Universidade Católica (PUC-Rio) have launched their own independent newspaper called Coletivo Nuvem Negra (Black Cloud Collective), where they produce their own transgressive scholarly works, write about their discrimination as affirmative action students, and highlight work about Black LGBT activists, for Black LGBT activists, by Black LGBT activists.

Overall, I urge that critics of youth movements (akin to that of Black LGBT youth activists in Rio) not disregard the agency and initiative that youth constantly wield *as spatial actors*. The reasons for exerting one's agency to claim a stake in the production of urban space can and do vary widely, ranging from self-expression to desire to trauma to love to mere survival. We should not doubt the capacity of young people to take the little that is given them, with little to no state support, and to remake and remix it in the process of resisting, collective planning, and making space for a movement.

In this chapter, I explored *how*—not simply *why*—Black LGBT youth respond to violence and exclusion and strategically build power because and despite their disenfranchisement from formal politics. I presented ethnographic findings in order to argue that *carioca* Black LGBT youth deploy an arsenal of spatial tactics in order to create spaces of sociocultural support, entrepreneurship, and political power among themselves. My findings demonstrated three key spatial tactics that, often literally, work to make space for an emerging movement: 1) occupying physical urban spaces and claiming territory; 2) Diasporic self-making through digital activism; and 3) leveraging cultural labor as young entrepreneurs, kin, and mentors. Amidst a landscape of neoliberal urbanism and gendered racism, Black youth have invariably asserted their claim to urban space by making something out of nearly nothing and (quite literally) putting art and culture to work. The key to youth's success in building political power has been the everyday but strategic use of culture and creative expression. When your communities have been virtually locked out of formal political institutions—and assassinated after entering them—infrapolitics becomes a mode of action youth to use what's within their reach—culture and knowledge—to survive, thrive,

and live their best lives. More broadly, I have contended that Black LGBT youth's spatial practices represent alternative ways of building power and clout that do not, and cannot, depend fully on state institutions, party politics, or physical spatial proximity. Such a spatial strategy breaks from conventional notions of community planning and organizing and of social movements overall. In the conclusion, I delve deeper into this last implication of Black LGBT placemaking, in hopes that we can begin to reimagine our notions of politics and community planning.

Chapter 6:

Envisioning Black queer and feminist models of community planning

Through this ethnographic study I have sought to contextualize and explain two overarching issues: 1) how Rio's Black LGBT youth negotiate violence and exclusions in their everyday lives; and 2) how youth use physical and virtual spaces as well as cultural production to carve out spaces for themselves and a broader emerging movement. Following the rise of extreme conservatism and gendered, anti-Black violence across Brazil, I explore a recurring dilemma for *carioca* Black LGBT youth: how does one build political power when virtually locked out of state institutions and formal politics? In order to explore these questions, I draw primarily upon scholarship across feminist political geography, Black feminist theory, and radical planning to substantiate these claims. *Carioca* Black LGBT young people are consistent placemakers across spatial realms and scales, creating sites of self-making and political intervention through social media, art, popular education, celebrations. These placemaking practices are critical responses to the systemic gendered anti-Black racism that is central in ordering urban space, even when the city of Rio de Janeiro brands itself as a inclusive haven for racial-sexual diversity

As a place branded by the state and tourism industry as a diverse global city, Rio de Janeiro has become a spectacle in which both Black and LGBT *cariocas* have become hypervisible and even celebrated during peak tourist seasons (e.g. Carnival, Gay Pride). Rio has thus been renowned for a legacy of racial-cultural hybridity and sexual freedom. However, Rio has become increasingly renowned for a different but related legacy: that of

Black spectacle, celebration, sexual freedom and excess as well as that of great inequality, violence, and Black premature death.

Although paradoxical upon first impression, this dual legacy of the city is intentional—an “afro-paradise” that fetishizes and threatens Black livelihoods all at once. Afro-paradise is a discursive construction and a “gendered, sexualized and racialized imaginary” through which Rio de Janeiro has become a place of Black sexual fantasy and consumption as well as Black death (Smith 2016, 3). The Brazilian and local state, media, the gay tourism industry, even the mainstream LGBT movement often appropriate Black bodies, art and culture in demonstrating Rio’s cultural-sexual diversity and tolerance. However, these actors merely rearticulate (and thus justify) racial-sexual hierarchies that are rooted in colonial violence, casting Rio as a ‘gay-friendly’ afro-paradise. Black *cariocas* simultaneously become hypersexualized, romanticized, consumed, and expendable bodies—representations that are rooted in colonialism and slavery.

It is precisely this appropriative Black fantasy, produced and consumed by tourists, the Brazilian state, and civil society, that also facilitates the criminalization and extermination of Black bodies. Numerous structural and spatial patterns transform Rio de Janeiro into an afro-paradise—a ‘gay-friendly’ afro-paradise more specifically—that consistently appropriates yet excludes and perpetuates violence against Black LGBT youth. As an afro-paradise, institutions, practices, and discourses operate in tandem to transform Rio de Janeiro into a hostile racial-sexual terrain that directs violence toward black, young, and non-heteronormative people. It is this simultaneously celebratory yet genocidal landscape through which Black LGBT youth must survive and build community.

I have observed that Black LGBT youth deploy a variety of spatial tactics in order to create spaces of sociocultural support, entrepreneurship, and political power among themselves. My field observations discerned three particularly salient tactics: 1) occupying physical urban spaces and claiming territory; 2) Diasporic self-making through digital activism; and 3) leveraging cultural labor as young entrepreneurs and kin. Amidst a landscape of neoliberal urbanism and gendered racism, Black youth have invariably asserted their claim to urban space, by making something out of nearly nothing and (quite literally) putting art and culture to work. The key to youth's success in making room for themselves has been the everyday but strategic use of space, culture, and creative expression—a strategy of infrapolitics. Through these everyday, creative placemaking practices, Black LGBT enact what I call hip hop urbanism, where Black youth continuously “make something out of nothing” and quite literally put art and play to work. I argue that Black LGBT youth's experiences and practices in the city demonstrate alternative ways of building power and clout that do not fully depend on state institutions, party politics, or physical spatial proximity.

I conclude this study by reflecting on the broader implications of Black LGBT youth's placemaking tactics for both social scientists and urban policy practitioners. In particular, this concluding section responds to the question posited earlier in this study: how do youth's spatial practices challenge us to reconsider what counts as legitimate “politics”, “community planning” and policy best practices? As researchers and practitioners, we must recognize our own implicit biases when defining politics, stakeholders, and policy insights. What we may

write off as child's play or feminized social work may be the key to restorative, transformative community development.

Black LGBT youth can teach us to seriously question conventional power relations between local governments and their constituencies. In Black feminist tradition, the source of critical knowledge needed to design socially equitable policies is not with state officials, but rather with the disenfranchised constituents most directly affected by the socioeconomic issue at hand. What this implies for practitioners is that constituents are not mere tokens to provide passive “buy-in” for policy programs predesigned for them; the problem, solutions, and budgets must be directly informed by the everyday realities of the most disenfranchised. In essence, the task is the operationalization of what Black feminist scholars call “standpoint epistemology”: critical knowledge production situated and grounded in everyday lived experience. This knowledge must be centered around the experiential knowledge of nonnormative folks “in attempt to locate authority or expertise with those who experience a circumstance” (Richie 2012, 129-30).

The infrapolitics of Black LGBT youth's placemaking also constitute what critical planning scholars call “insurgent planning”. Insurgent planning can be understood as a broader political project rooted in the everyday practices of subaltern subjects that respond to the crises of neoliberal capitalism—crises that set up the constructions of Rio de Janeiro as a touristic “afro-paradise.” Everyday acts of resistance and survival through pleasure, play, dance, fashion, performance, or popular education create “hidden transcripts” outside the realm of formal politics that challenge us to rethink what counts as strategies of resistance, creative responses to spatial inequalities, and social movements overall. MirafTab (2009)

provides a conceptual framework through which we can begin to decolonize planners' imaginations that idolize the spatially "ordered" and "legible" Western city as the ultimate object of desire. With more decolonized constructions of the city, we can begin envisioning and enacting collective "liberation" that decolonizes the mind and our surrounding environments. Whether through rent parties, shelter provision, parades, or outright occupation, what youth are doing in the city is often transgressive, counter-hegemonic, and imaginative in ways that disrupt common assumptions about the roles of planning in shaping urban space. Black queer insurgent planning and placemaking constitute spatial critiques through everyday subaltern life, which illustrate how gendered anti-Black racism and homophobia are central in ordering urban space—in effect, acting to decolonize the mind, the built environment, and urbanism itself. The redemptive spaces that youth produce serve as political sites from which youth can exchange knowledge, imagine and enact alternative worlds, and position themselves both within and against the state in order to address the institutional forces that create precarious livelihoods.

The communal work of Black transgender women at Casa Nem, for example, can easily be feminized and thus considered labor more akin to social work than community planning. Unfortunately, such a perspective is masculinist and misogynistic and thus misses the value of such cultural and economic labor as an intersectional critique of the politics of urban space and Brazilian society. As an intersectional spatial critique, the members of Casa Nem engage in insurgent "kitchen table" planning (Sweet 2015), which represents a specifically intersectional critique of planning history, theory, and practice. The "kitchen table" is an intentional metaphor, representing the literal and political site from which women

of color—Black young transgender women in this case—exchange experiential knowledge in order to collectively address institutional structures and forces that impact everyday life, on both individual and communal levels. As such, “kitchen table planning” offers an alternative to planning as a white, Eurocentric, masculinist field (Ibid.) The cases of Casa Nem, Conexão G, Bicha Nagô, and Batekoo represent variants of a Black queer “kitchen table”, so to speak, from which Black LGBT youth can plan for themselves and their futures. Time and time again, youth use everything within their reach to create redemptive places amidst a hostile landscape, in ways that acknowledge diverse lived experiences and seek to enact more livable futures for LGBT people of all races, genders, and backgrounds.

As we move forward in critical planning and feminist geographic scholarship, it is our obligation as researchers to not merely paint our subjects as helpless victims in endless turmoil. The struggle is certainly real, and it is our duty to analyze how the world is often a violent, unforgiving place for our Black queer brethren. However, it is also just as much our duty to support collective struggle and resistance and to uplift the human spirit and infrastructure that get people by, get them moving, and get them organized. Black queer and Black feminist models of kinship and community planning have existed since our ancestors were first brought to the shores of the Americas. Four hundred years later, it is time for others to finally adjust their ideological lenses and learn to actively see and honor them.

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