

**Trans Tessituras**  
*Confounding, Unbearable, and Black Transgender Voices in  
Luso-Afro-Brazilian Popular Music*

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation shows how gay, trans and queer performers in Brazil, Portugal, and Angola, working in traditionally misogynistic, homo- and transphobic popular music genres, have successfully claimed and refigured those genres and repertoires through iterations of transgender voices and bodies. I show how Pablio Vittar, Fado Bicha and Titica refigure normative gendered conventions of sex and song through trans formations of popular music genres. I locate them within a genealogy of queer Luso-Afro-Brazilian popular music practices and performances that deploy trans formations of voice, body, and repertoire. I trace a genealogy of transgender voice in Brazilian popular music to Ney Matogrosso's 1975 debut release, through which I reveal a cacophony of queer, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian intersections; and in Portuguese popular music to António Variações 1982 debut, through whom I trace a fado genealogy of Afro-diasporic cultural practices, gender transgression and sexual deviance. Finally, I locate Titica's music in practices of the black queer diaspora as a refiguring of Angolan postcolonial aesthetics. Together, these artists and their music offer a queer Luso-Afro-Brazilian diaspora in spectacular popular music formations that transit beside and beyond the Portuguese-speaking world, unbound by it, and refiguring hegemonic Luso-Afro-Brazilian discourses of gender, sexuality, race and nation.

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*Para os meus pais*

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation shows how gay, trans and queer performers in Brazil, Portugal, and Angola, working in traditionally misogynistic, homo- and transphobic popular music genres, successfully claim and remake those repertoires as queer cultural practices. These artists and their music are instances of queer thriving in popular culture that proliferate in all three nations and as an archive of material and embodied performances, collaborations, citations, and resonances. I locate them within a genealogy of popular music performances that deploy transgender formations of voice and body in Luso-Afro-Brazilian song and dance. Brazilian drag and music artist Pabllo Vittar, performing since 2014, is an international, Grammy-nominated superstar. Vittar headlined the 2018 LGBTQ+ pride festivities in Portugal alongside Portuguese queer fado group Fado Bicha, who debuted in 2017 and have quickly gained attention for their performances. Vittar has also recently collaborated with Titica, an Angolan trans woman and performer of Angolan electronic music genre kuduro, whose 2011 debut release was an immediate success. Titica is a sought-after performer in Brazil and Portugal, and in other parts of Europe, Africa and the Americas. In their music, videos and performances, I show how Pabllo Vittar, Fado Bicha and Titica voice and embody nonnormative gender and sexuality through affective cultural practices. I trace a genealogy of transgender voices and trans formations in Brazilian popular music to Ney Matogrosso's debut release in the 1970s, through which I reveal indigenous and Afro-Brazilian intersections; and in Portuguese fado to António Variações's debut in 1980s, through which I trace a longer fado genealogy of gender and sexual transgressions. Finally, I locate Titica's music in practices of black queer diaspora. Through trans formations of voice, body and repertoire, I show how this archive reveals spectacular queer diasporas of popular music and performance that refigure gender, race and nation.

These artists are part of LGBTQ+ visibility in Portuguese-speaking nations that is not limited to music. In the last decade, Angola aired its first gay kiss on a TV drama,<sup>1</sup> a Brazilian telenovela featured a transgender actor and subplot,<sup>2</sup> and both shows also aired on Portuguese TV, which also had a number of gay TV romances. Along a more political axis, there has been an expansion of LGBTQ+ rights and activism that includes Angola's decriminalization of homosexual acts in October of 2018,<sup>3</sup> and a record number of LGBTQ+ people in politics in Brazil.<sup>4</sup> A longer history of Luso-Afro-Brazilian LGBTQ+ organized activist movements can be traced to 1950s-60s social upheaval and post-Stonewall reverberations in Brazil and Portugal, a response to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and more recently in Sub-Saharan Africa, and to processes of globalization. A politicized Brazilian LGBTQ+ movement coalesced in the late 1970s,<sup>5</sup> while Portuguese politicization gained momentum in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Notably, Associação Iris Angola, the first Angolan LGBTQ+ organization formed in Luanda in 2013, as part of a national effort to combat HIV/AIDS, was legally recognized by the government only in 2018.<sup>7</sup> While this recent politicization has in ways been the product of global cultural changes somewhat stalled by authoritarian regimes, war and revolutions, they obscure a long history of Luso-Afro-Brazilian same-sex sexual activity and gender transgressions documented in colonial encounters and prosecutions, present in Luso-Brazilian androgyny in the modernist era, cross-dressing carnival practices, and as aspects of Afro-Brazilian culture and spirituality, to name a few instances.

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<sup>1</sup> The Angolan drama *Jikulumessu: Obre o Olho* aired from 2014-2015.

<sup>2</sup> Trans man and actor Tereza Brant starred in the popular soap drama *A Força do Querer* (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Other Portuguese-speaking African nations have also decriminalized homosexual acts in the recent past, such as Mozambique (2015), São Tomé and Príncipe (2012), and Cape Verde (2004).

<sup>4</sup> A "record-breaking... 45 LGBT candidates running for office in 2018," in Brazil. See Angela Brodini and Gustavo Uribe, *Folha de São Paulo*, September 25, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> James Green offers a history of homosexuality in Brazil that details this process, *Beyond Carnival* (1999)

<sup>6</sup> As noted by Ana Luisa Amaral and Gabriela Moita in "Como se Faz (E Se Desfaz?) o Armário" (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Associação Iris Angola give their founding date as 2013, while other dates have been reported elsewhere, as in this announcement of their legalization in *Novo Jornal*: <http://www.novojornal.co.ao/sociedade/interior/governo-valida-primeira-associacao-lgbt-do-pais-55744.html>

Though cultural practices and histories of the lusophone world may offer a visible and affective archive of sexual and gender transgression imbricated in processes of colonization and in postcolonial nation-formation, this visibility has occurred concurrently with marginalization, persecution, and homo- and transphobic violence with racial intersections and racist counterparts. Brazil gives us an immediate and visceral example of this paradox, where Pablo Vittar is a successful artist, among many other queer performers, while it leads in the murder of transgender people and particularly of trans women of color, among nations where such violence is tracked.<sup>8</sup> Underscoring racist counterparts to this violence, lesbian, Afro-Brazilian activist and Rio de Janeiro city councilwoman Marielle Franco and her driver were murdered in a targeted assassination in March 2018, a visceral intersection of black and queer precariousness in Brazil that drew global attention. Meanwhile, as LGBTQ+ life is increasingly legalized and protected under Portuguese law, other tensions have recently flared up in the Portuguese capital. In January of 2019, Portuguese police brutally beat an Angolan family living in the Jamaica neighborhood of the city of Amadora, one of Lisbon's urban peripheries, for which Angolan officials claim the Portuguese government has since apologized.<sup>9</sup> This incident of violence-gone-viral is part of a pattern of anti-black police violence in Portugal that plagues peripheral places and people, even as Lisbon repackages colonial histories and racial strife as tourist-friendly multiculturalism.

While it is beyond the scope of this work to account for the various causes that keep queer bodies and sexualities in oscillation between popular and precarious states, this dissertation seeks to analyze what those bodies and voices materialize in their moments of public

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<sup>8</sup> As reported by Trans Murder Monitoring, tracking from 2009-2016. See: <https://transrespect.org/en/map/trans-murder-monitoring/>

<sup>9</sup> Portuguese news agency Lusa writes, "Angola diz que Governo português pediu desculpa pelo 'caso Jamaica' *Diário de Notícias*, May 4, 2019. See: <https://www.dn.pt/pais/interior/prangola-chefe-da-diplomacia-angolana-diz-que-caso-jamaica-esta-ultrapassado--10643152.html>

performance and queer thriving. Through popular music and performance by queer, gay and trans artists, I analyze the conflation of peripheral, popular, queer, normative, lusophone and Afro-diasporic people and practices that resonate through trans voice and body particular to Luso-Afro-Brazilian worlds of song and dance. Listening to transgender voices in popular music formations, I reveal the tensions between trans voice and cis and trans bodies that materialize in genre codifications, reception, and repertoire, and chart out the queer diasporas that emerge when these resonances are recognized. Analyzing queer artists and performances in Luso-Afro-Brazilian popular music from the 1970s and 80s as well as the present-day, I uncover a genealogy of queer embodiments that expose and transgress longstanding gendered and racialized conventions of genre and nation formative to all three nations in this work. I show how the artists in this work transgress these conventions in body, voice, and repertoire. In doing so, they reveal and refigure these discourses along queer, transgender and Afro-diasporic contours. These artists and their music speak to continuing homo- and transphobic violence and enduring paradigms of gender and race in Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultures. I show how repertoires of heritage mediate and codify these paradigms, and are transgressed, refigured and re-materialized through trans formations of voice and body in performance.

Through this dissertation, I maintain as a productive site of tension both trans voice and body, though voice emanates from a body. Yet, as I show in the chapters ahead, trans voices and bodies are often in tension with one another, and with the mediated archetypes of gendered voice that make up repertoires of popular music. In their confounding, I hear productive sites of intersection and intervention. This work is a concerted effort to register the material resonances that these artists share, cite, and perform across genres of Luso-Afro-Brazilian popular music. Together, I show them as formations of queer thriving in counterpoint to the grim statistics and

histories of violence that profoundly shape their histories. Enmeshed and promiscuously entangled in popular and precarious formations, these voices emerge as spectacular, as “mass-mediated representations [that] create spaces of possibility and distinction” (Ochoa 10), and beside being queer, resonate as repertoires of resistance and of care. I analyze how these artists mobilize such spaces of possibility and what distinctions they take up and refigure in the normative repertoires and cultural significations within which they are imbricated, from Brazilian popular music to Portuguese fado and Angolan kuduro. Finally, I offer a queer diasporic formation of Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultures that contends with the scale of mass-mediated formations of vocal and embodied material traces, resonances and references, a scale which unsettles genre, gender, and nation through a projection out onto spectacular and queer diaspora.

### **Shades of Sexual Transgressions**

In studying cultures in different genres at different times and across three continents as a Luso-Afro-Brazilian archive of nonnormative gender and sexuality, I am in ways following the impetus of the pioneering work *Lusosex: Gender and Sexuality in the Portuguese-speaking world* (2002), edited by Fernando Arenas and Susan Canty Quinlan. The title of that work conjoins the prefix luso, which the editors describe as designating “‘things’ Portuguese or related to the Portuguese language or to Portuguese-speaking cultures (e.g., Luso-Brazilian, Lusophone)” (Arenas xxi), to sex. Luso operates here as shorthand for lusophone and incorporates “former colonizing and colonized [Portuguese-speaking] nations,” in a “succinct [way to] designate the multiplicity of [lusophone] cultures” (Arenas xxi), and suggests there is a particular way that sex is shaped, narrated, felt, and shared through these cultures. While I use

the prefix luso and the descriptor lusophone judiciously in this dissertation, I favor the more cumbersome and sutured Luso-Afro-Brazilian configuration to mark how these cultures have come together in violent and sutured ways. This configuration keeps important differences in tension with shared cultural repertoires, languages, and lexicons. Through it, I underscore cultural rather than linguistic ties, implicitly attentive to sites in the Portuguese-speaking world where Portuguese is less spoken. Luso-Afro-Brazilian as a designation marks Portuguese, lusophone African, and Brazilian cultures and communities. This designation does not account for all Portuguese-language communities, or nations that have Portuguese as one of their official languages. However, it does center the transatlantic cultures and practices I have studied for this work, even as the archive I analyze exceeds this definition with references and resonances of cultural practices from outside the Portuguese-speaking community altogether. These transgressions of socio-spatial boundaries pull Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultural practices into formations of queer diasporas that refigure paradigms of Luso-Afro-Brazilian gender, sexuality, race and nation.

The anthology's conjoining of sex to the study of lusophone cultures suggests that the cultures of Brazil, Portugal and Angola share, to an extent, archetypes of gender and sexuality that are imbricated into national cultures. It is a productive starting point from which to analyze how queer performances of popular culture in a Luso-Afro-Brazilian configuration are similarly engaged in refiguring historical and contemporary transatlantic resonances even as they are locally differentiated. Joseph Roach considers the cultures that emerged around the Atlantic, bound up by Europe, Africa and [North and South] America in a circuitous relationship of remembering, forgetting, and invention. He argues for a "circum-Atlantic world [which] insists on the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and

South, in the creation of the culture of modernity;” in “a vortex in which commodities and cultural practices changed hands many times” (4). To study Luso-Afro-Brazilian popular cultures as repertoires through which nonnormative gender and sexuality may emerge, as intervention in normative paradigms and in moments of thriving, is to keep the tension of their violent encounter present in the hearing, seeing, and feeling of voices and bodies. These cultural practices may yet remember when bodies were commodities of the transatlantic slave trade, while also having invented new cultural practices that transit as commodity in popular music scenes.

In this work, the study of queer performances of popular music necessitates an understanding of the circum-Atlantic paradigms of gender and sexuality imbricated in bodies and practices as history, as remembrance and invention, through cultural repertoires. Arenas and Quinlan note, “Portugal, Brazil and Lusophone Africa do share, in differing degrees, a Western Judeo-Christian cultural matrix that historically informed attitudes and beliefs about practices of sex and sexuality” even as they suggest there are “key influences stemming from Amerindian, Bantu, and Sudanese cultures in the case of Brazil... and a wide spectrum of Central and Southern African ethnicities in the case of Angola” (Arenas xiv). They argue that “minimal attention” had been “devoted to the study of sexuality in the realm of Lusophone cultures, with the exception of Brazil,” and that “insights of queer theory seldom have been incorporated into academic research in the various Lusophone fields, and when they have, it has taken place mainly in the North American academic milieu” (Arenas xiv-xv). Nevertheless, the aim of the anthology is to open “new spaces of articulation, challenging or subverting traditionally dominant cultural paradigms, and expanding the meaning of citizenship or the definition of the nation-family” by taking shared histories, languages, and cultural resonances into account (Arenas xv).



Notably, while this dissertation will show emergent Luso-Afro-Brazilian queer cultural practices that play out mostly in Portuguese, there is no clear translation of queer to Portuguese. Mário Cesar Lugarinho argues that an exploration of “the meanings and possible uses of the term *queer* for Portuguese-speaking cultures,” must account for “the specific cultural field in which discourses about difference circulate” (280-281, emphasis in original), and notes three key twentieth-century concepts through which to think queerness in Portuguese. Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre’s narrative of Brazilian society as a racial democracy or “cultural hybrid resulting from three main influences: Portuguese, African, and Amerindian” in which the Portuguese influences “left the biggest imprint,” is a foundational discourse of Brazilian, and Portuguese society as normative cultural underpinning. To Freyre, Lugarinho adds the Brazilian Modernist aesthetic innovation of *antropofagia*, a cultural cannibalism through which the “relative nature of the relationship between peripheral and core cultures” is decentered, cannibalized and carnivalized (282). This creates “a type of ‘non-sense’ in the relationship between elites and working classes... without clear centers... mediated through [devouring] the culture of the other,” and Lugarinho argues this “certain ‘chaos’” suggests “a permanent carnival... [where] citizenship and marginality [are] fluctuating concepts that vary according to social and cultural circumstances” (283). After conjoining anthropologic and aesthetic theories of Luso-Brazilian culture and nation, or miscegenation with *antropofagia*, Lugarinho adds Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santo’s pinpointing of peripheries of Portuguese-speaking peoples through Portugal’s “peripheral position in the context of European capitalism, at the same time as it was the center of a colonial empire” (281). This triangulation is a confounding and shifting ground of fluctuating centers and peripheries.

Freyre’s *The Masters and the Slaves (Casa Grande e Senzala)* lays the foundation of

Luso-Brazilian society at the threshold of the plantation house and in the desires of a promiscuous colonizer (27), exemplified by the master's intimate relations with enslaved and coerced indigenous, African and Afro-Brazilian women. Freyre weaves a tale where the Portuguese were adaptable to and adept at colonizing the tropics and, moreover, were benevolent colonizers prone to miscegenation with women of color. Freyre's work argues that miscegenation in Brazil mitigated the distance between master and slave, which was not only pivotal in formative notions of Brazilian society in the twentieth century, but which the Portuguese Estado Novo regime, in power from 1933-1974, used to justify colonial holdings in Africa. Freyre develops this in subsequent works as lusotropicalism, which defines this promiscuous colonization of the tropics as engendering a mixed-race Luso-Brazilian civilization free of the drastic racism of North America exemplified through segregation. Though lusotropicalism has been rightly criticized and debunked, its narrative differentiated the colonization of Brazil, and the Portuguese colonizer, as unique and apart from other European colonizers, and has held strong sway in the normative conceptions of Luso-Brazilian culture. Importantly, is a poignant underscoring of sex as a tool of empire. Freyre locates Luso-Brazilian elite men at the patriarchal pinnacle of a triangle that directs sexual, social and political violence downward. He refigures the Portuguese as non-white through an Iberian history of Moorish occupation, and points to Portuguese colonial incursions in Africa and Asia as evidence of their tropical preferences in both place and women. Freyre's narration fetishizes the violence of empire as BDSM-like trysts, through which the Luso-Brazilian man takes on a fungibility with blackness and sexual deviance.

This fungibility is replicated in the implicit references to the desiring, devouring and abstraction of indigenous and Afro-diasporic cultures present in *antropofagia*, marking an

aesthetic movement of Brazilian Modernism that takes up cannibalism attributed to indigenous peoples in Brazilian history as the defining gesture in Brazilian cultural expression. Carnival is used as evidence of such anthropophagy in the 1928 *Manifesto Antropofago* (Andrade), and is often underscored as a site of queer practices and potential. Considering carnival is a cultural festivity that takes a particular form in Brazil because of African and Afro-Brazilian influences, *antropofagia* also marks sites where indigenous and Afro-Brazilian bodies are abstracted out. *Antropofagia*, as a cultural devouring, turns the cannibalistic gesture on the very referents of the act. Indigenous groups still very much a part of Brazil, and are unable to ask whether they are “Tupy or not Tupy?,” the question that launches the cannibalistic manifesto (Andrade), since “Native Brazilians have rarely, if ever, had a say in official or dominant renderings of indigeneity” as historian Tracy Devine Gúzman notes (3). The devouring gesture is made visceral in the continuing struggles for land and life indigenous peoples face daily under the modernity that *antropofagia* frames. Carnival, consequently, is wholly absorbed as a Brazilian cultural phenomenon, with Afro-Brazilian and Afro-diasporic contributions subsumed into Brazilian heritage, understood as a hybrid made whole.

These appropriations of bodies and cultural practices amplify, through their absence, the ways in which black and indigenous bodies are relegated into peripheries, made subordinate and devoured by elite, Luso-Brazilian male desire, and abstracted into cultural configurations of sex and gender. Meanwhile, the directionality of Boaventura de Sousa Santo’s important theory on the Portuguese condition as both center (empire) and periphery is a salient underscoring of Portuguese postcoloniality, even as it makes an unsettling analysis of diverse racial perceptions of the Portuguese *in the world*. This conceptualization of a modern Portuguese condition is vital for understanding Portuguese nationalist discourses and their underlying cultural anxieties. It is

also a poignant indicator of the global South condition of Portuguese-language cultures, and indicates the twice-removed peripheries within those cultures from global centers of power and knowledge production. In this, it casts a long shadow down and out onto peripheral worlds, of peripheral *worlds within* the peripheral Portuguese-speaking world. The move muddles colonizer and colonized as fungible parts, in tension with a long history of enslaving, colonizing and marginalizing people of color based on racist paradigms.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, however, also offers a necessary correction to lusotropicalist renderings of miscegenation as precursor to a racial democracy, and marks sexuality as key to understanding Portuguese colonial and postcolonial society and culture.

Miscegenation is not the consequence of the absence of racism, as argued by Luso-colonialist or Luso-tropicalist reasoning, but it certainly is the cause of a different kind of racism. The existence of ambivalence or hybridity is, therefore, trivial, as far as Portuguese postcolonialism is concerned. What is important is to understand the sexist rules of sexuality that usually allow the white man to sleep with the black woman, but not the white woman with the black man. In other words, Portuguese postcolonialism calls for a strong articulation with the question of sexual discrimination and feminism. (17)

As Boaventura de Sousa Santos implicitly points out, this is a society strongly marked by intersections of race, gender and sexuality, where misogyny, gendered violence, and racialized sexuality are potent modifiers. Here, racism does not preclude penetration. Rather, racism it is the driving force behind penetration, sexual and otherwise, so that race is imbricated into an elaboration of sex and sexual partners in differing iterations of female, effeminate, queer, and perverse, at the disposal of a normalized elite, patriarchal, lustful, masculinist archetype.

In an important first effort at queer theory in, for and about Portuguese-speaking cultures, Lugarinho underscores these foundational narratives of Luso-Brazilian society as a necessary ground upon which to think gender and sexual transgression in a lusophone context, and traces a history of gender and sexual deviance that underpin their formations. Yet, in their miscegenating, devouring, and peripheral moves, only some may gather while others are inevitably buried or exposed in shifting piles of dirt. These shifts, of gender and sexual deviance, and of social and cultural peripheries, mark a site of Luso-Brazilian sexuality made upon racialized and gendered nonnormative bodies and desires rendered and fetishized as feminine, deviant, and perverse. Through histories of “ambivalent and fluid relations between Portuguese society and homosexuality,” evident in the many histories that show same-sex practices in colonial and contemporary times (Parker; Green; Trevisan), Lugarinho marks an “eccentricity” which includes “transvestism, the use of cosmetics, and other ‘peculiar’ habits” (284), that at times “occupy center stage in Luso-Brazilian cultures” (285). He offers as more recent evidence “drag queens who impersonated Portuguese *fado* diva Amália Rodrigues [that] were famous [in Portugal] during the Salazar regime, and transsexual Roberta Close [who] became a mass-media phenomenon during the 1980s and 1990s in Brazil” (285). Here, he concludes, is a “shady zone that extends between what is designated by the binary ‘straight’ and ‘queer’ within its Anglophone matrix,” with “less intense homophobia and greater tolerance for difference experienced in the practices of everyday life in Portuguese-speaking societies” (285). Though, he offers, “Anglophone queer theory” may be useful in “its inclusions of other registers of sexuality, class, gender, race, nationality and political ideologies” as a “more exhaustive framework for the analysis of peripheral societies,” that links them to “transnational concerns uniting sexual and gender minorities” (286-287).

Lugarinho's pinpointing of shifting centers and peripheries begins to account for the irruption in popular culture scenes of queer gender and sexuality, and the inclusion of transgressive embodiments in repertoires that may still be constitutive of normative cultural heritage. Yet, it is the demarcation of a shady zone of permissiveness and less intense homophobia that makes for a precarious foundation, too much so for the rooting of this current analysis, without further elaboration. Queer seems strangely positioned as the binary opposite of straight in teasing out a difference between Anglo-American and Luso-Brazilian queerness, eliding the more direct opposite of straight – gay. Yet this move inadvertently highlights that all things nonnormatively gendered and sexual are diametrically opposed to straight in the Luso-Brazilian matrix. Moreover, rather than a place of “greater tolerance,” statistics show Brazil as a place of heightened violence particularly against queer and trans people of color. Though the Trans Murder Monitoring project only started tracking these murders in 2013, already in 1996, Luiz Mott's *Epidemic of Hate: Violations of the Human Rights of Gay Men, Lesbians, and Transvestites in Brazil* revealed that a “homosexual is brutally murdered every four days, a victim of homophobia that pervades Brazilian society,” as James Green recounts, noting, “Many of those killed are sex workers, transvestites, or gay men” (4). I do not mark Brazil as exceptional in a global context of violence against the LGBTQ+, however. I argue that if Luso-Brazilian culture contains a certain permissiveness for same-sex practices, it is heavily tilted toward acts between cisgender males of a certain race and class, and leaves many others exposed to violence. Permissiveness emerges in circles of homosexual elites, writers, artists, urbanites, in moments of carnival or as parts of a performance, through a comingling of the elites with the working classes, a traipsing down into deeper shades of gender and sexual deviance protected by race, class, and status.

It is in these shades of permissiveness that the trans voices and bodies I amplify in this work have been ensconced. In a Luso-Brazilian formation of queer theory, we have yet to get the Afro connective in Luso-Afro-Brazilian, and there are gender and sexual hierarchies within the shade that require mapping out. Shade gave coverage to the nonnormative sexual and cross-dressing pleasures of certain eccentric, peculiar and shifty men, while exposing others to violence and marginalization. Argentinian poet and anthropologist Nestor Perlongher plotted out urban zones of sexual shade in his study of male prostitution in São Paulo in the 1970s (*O Negócio do Michê*, 1986). Ignacio López-Vizcuña shows how Perlongher's map had "shaded areas [to] indicate the diverse cruising sites (*pontos*): corners, plazas, theaters, and streets, marked according to the varying degrees of socioeconomic status of the clients and the *michês*" (161). *Michê* refers to both the male prostitute and the act of engaging one. López-Vizcuña details how Perlongher catalogued "the diverse slang terms *michês* and their clients use to describe various homosexual identifications, ranging (for the hustlers) from the hypermasculine *miche-macho* or *oko* [*macho* of color], to the more neutral taxi-boy or *miche-gay*, and (for the clients) from the more masculine gay *macho* to the neutral *professor* (which described Perlongher) to the effeminate *tia* or *bicha*" (161). In this cartography of gender and sexual difference, race was also noted – masculine men of color were *okos*; *bicha*, a derisive term for overly-effeminate gay men, became *mona* for overly-effeminate men of color (162, n7). For López-Vizcuña, these categories of identity betray "the changing parameters for representing sexual desire and sexual identity," which moved along axes of age, class, and gender-mannerisms," and where the "axis of 'gender' (more masculine/more effeminate) is the most subjective and variable" (162).

Though the map is presented as a horizontal terrain, it is a topography of desires with

dangerous precipices, arranged according to racialized and gendered tropes formulated against the normative, masculine white male – who had every option open to him, as he searched for sex in the shade. Importantly, Perlongher noted in 1970 the commodification and politicization of queer gender and sexuality as particularly compounding for the *travesti*, which he saw at the bottom of his hierarchy of sexual and gender deviance (102-103). *Travesti* are usually characterized as cross-dressing gay men, as does López-Vizcuña who conflates them with drag queens (162). The conflation of *travesti* with drag queen, however, is another important indicator of the paradox of gender and sexual variances that exist within shades – though they are mapped out and visible, they are in many ways unintelligible, and any differences and distinctions are only ever marketable attributes for the pleasure of paying men. The Brazilian *travesti* has a complex history of shifting identities, both claimed and put upon. Several ethnographic studies of the *travesti* in Brazil describe mostly individuals assigned the male sex who may or may not identify as men, but who feminize their bodies, through many different means, including hormones and injections, but notably normally reject gender reassignment surgery, and usually prefer female names and pronouns (Kulick; Benedetti). They are visible fixtures of urban life in Brazil from the 1970s on, are strongly associated with prostitution (Green 251; Kulick 8), began to organize more politically in the 1990s, and do not have to be attached to theatrical performance, as drag queens are. Perlongher argued that the *travesti* was glaringly exposed to police violence and to discriminatory marginalization within the coalescing gay community (102-103). López-Vizcuña notes how these divisions mirrored social views of homosexual men as more legitimate members of society compared to “criminal” *travestis* (163). Moreover, where early *travesti* identity seemed framed within gay male subjectivity (Kulick 6), the effects of globalized markets and activism on gender and sexual identities have since led to an elaboration



of *travesti* as an iteration of gender variance aligned and in tensions with globalized discourses of transgender subjectivities.

For some gay men, shades of permissiveness offered protection for sexual deviance, while recent global attitudes, markets and activism around homosexuality has been geared toward assimilation and social acceptance. However, for those who cannot put on or take off deviance, the shade has always been limited, leaving queer and trans people, desires, and cultures glaringly exposed. Carnival comes to an end, class disparities continue, racist hierarchies remain in place, sexism is pervasive, and homo and transphobia create peripheries of peripheries in shades of all sorts. The artists I study require a spectrum of analysis and insight that moves beyond cisgender homosexual histories, to elaborate on forms of gender, desire, kinship, and thriving hidden in view. While African and Afro-diasporic gender and sexuality have been subsumed under normative paradigms of Luso-Brazilian gender and sexuality, this work redirects the focus toward transgender, African and African diaspora elaborations of gender and sexual subjectivities perceived in repertoires of performance.

### **Diaspora Desires and Transgender Apprehensions**

In this work I shift the ground of queer scholarship and critical theory on the lusophone world away from the sexual practices of cisgender gay men, and toward cultural formations of transgender body and voice, sexual deviance, and peripheries of race and class in the repertoires of queer, Luso-Afro-Brazilian and Afro-diasporic performances. Interestingly, the exception of Brazil as an outlier in an otherwise lacking field of research on lusophone gender and sexuality offers a move toward a more Luso-Afro-Brazilian configuration that takes race and class into account, a necessary redirection to understand the proliferation of queer and transgender

lusophone subjectivities that transit through peripheries within popular culture with Afro-diasporic resonances. Brazilian historian Luiz Mott includes the lower classes and the enslaved in his histories of homosexuality (*Escravidão*), and João Trevisan notes in *Perverts in Paradise* (1986), a diffuse sexual environment in colonial Brazil, with men taking indigenous women, male prostitutes, and many incidents where “colonists took Indian men as wives,” considered a common custom (23). Perlongher also noted the contemporary and urban axes of gender, race and class onto which sexual deviance in Brazil was mapped. The implicit charge in Boaventura de Sousa Santo’s corrective on Freyrean lusotropicalism in which I locate an intersection of race, gender and sexuality is here explicitly revealed. Trevisan and Perlongher show how shades of sexual permissiveness are not immune from gendered hierarchies of power when male colonizers can make wives out of indigenous men. This is a Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultural matrix that assigned racialized gender roles in cultural operations of sex.

In an upending of perspective, however, James Sweet’s “Male Homosexuality and Spiritism in the African Diaspora: The Legacies of a Link” (1996), takes up Luso-Afro-Brazilian sexuality within a diasporic analysis of desire, gender and sexuality. Sweet shifts the perspective from sexual practices as seen from normative vantage points, toward the social, and constitutive bonds of homosexuality in Afro-diaspora cultural practices. Zeb Tortorici argues that “James Sweet “reframes questions of same-sex sexuality among African slaves in Brazil in terms of gender imbalances, kinship practices, African spirituality, and intimate relationships” (163-4). Yet, Sweet describes his work as a “comparative analysis of African transvested homosexuals from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century in Angola, Brazil, Portugal, and Zimbabwe” that demonstrates “the traditional, spiritual significance of homosexual transvestism in Africa and the African diaspora” (186). More than a reframing of questions on same-sex sexuality

among African slaves in Brazil, Sweet offers his analysis of a Luso-Afro-Brazilian conjuncture of gender and sexuality as a way to elaborate on African homosexualities in a diasporic context, in a timeline that stretches from the sixteenth century to the twentieth. In doing so, he unsettles the nation as culturally delimited and defined, and points to transhistorical and transnational reverberations of the lusophone cultural matrix within which large segments of African diaspora are situated to reveal their imbrication in cultural and social practice. Sweet argues, “African core beliefs across time and space [have led] to a residual survival in almost all of these societies” of forms of nonnormative gender and sexuality, such as “a powerful respect for the man/woman, the *jin bandaa*, the *bicha*” (201). Magnifying transatlantic formations, pointing to gender transgressions through his focus on “transvestism,” Sweet reveals an occluded history of queer Luso-Afro-Brazilian bodies and sexualities, locating the Brazilian *bicha* in a genealogy of Afro-diasporic nonnormative gender and sexuality.

Sweet offers a redirection toward African and queer diaspora important for my analysis of popular music and performances that move through and outside of peripheries of gender, sexuality, race and popular music genres. He anticipates a more coordinated North American turn toward black queer cultures and subjectivities in diaspora contexts that came almost a decade later.<sup>10</sup> For the North American context, Rinaldo Walcott argues that a “diaspora reading practice... can disrupt the centrality of nationalist discourses within the black studies project and thereby also allow for an elaboration of a black queer diaspora project” (90). He proposes a diaspora reading practice to “render complex and shifting notions of community” against notions of “community as homogenous,” (91). This is a necessary shift of perspective for the study of

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<sup>10</sup> The publication of the *Black Queer Studies* anthology, edited by E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (2005), was a pioneering effort to think black and queer together, and in a global Afro-diasporic capacity, followed by a second volume, *No Tea, No Shade*, edited by E. Patrick Johnson, Duke UP, 2016.

lusophone cultures as well. While Lusophone African literatures are well represented in the diverse field of lusophone cultural studies, there is an admitted lack of African or Afro-diasporic representation in the *Lusosex* anthology. Moreover, while the sutured Luso-Afro-Brazilian configuration begins to disrupt perceptions of homogenous lusophone cultures, this work tilts more decisively toward dislodging the anchors of Luso and Brazilian from their national moorings altogether and throwing them into diaspora formation.

Reading Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultures through diaspora allows for a dislodging of normative cultural identities from secure anchors points such as Luso and Brazilian. Yet, in many ways, lusophone cultures have subsumed diasporic differences already into nationalist discourse. The beginning grounds of queer theory in Portuguese show how miscegenation, cannibalism, and peripheries, formative for normative lusophone cultural paradigms, are also instantiated within hierarchies of nonnormative gender and sexuality as well. This effect – of diaspora taken up into nation – is noted by Gayatri Gopinath, who argues, “While the diaspora within nationalist discourse is often positioned as the abjected and disavowed Other to the nation, the nation also simultaneously recruits the diaspora into its absolutist logic” (*Impossible* 7). Gopinath is also critical of how “globalization provides the unacknowledged terrain upon which the diasporic cultural productions... take shape,” (*Impossible* 9). Nevertheless, Gopinath argues, “the impact of globalization on particular diasporic locations produces various forms of oppositional diasporic cultural practices that may both reinscribe and disrupt the gender and sexual ideologies on which globalization depends” (*Impossible* 10). Though I deploy diaspora reading practices in this work, I am attentive to how they work in and through globalization as performances of popular culture widely shared. Moreover, the concept of diaspora applied to Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultures is already decentered in peripheral logics, as Boaventura de Sousa

Santos shows. The queer performances I analyze in this work unsettle a criticism that disavows globalization altogether. While queer diaspora frameworks, as Gopinath argues, “may begin to unsettle the ways in which the diaspora shores up the gender and sexual ideologies of dominant nationalism on the one hand, and processes of globalization on the other” (*Impossible* 10), my analysis requires a further shifting of scale that can contend with queer lives and desires as they are mediated and imbricated in diaspora formations that have gathered on local and globalized terrains, many times necessarily so, finding modes of thriving unavailable to them in local settings.

Lusophone queer history offers a telling formation of transitive gender subjectivity that is subsumed beneath heteronormative paradigms of gender, race and nation, and caught in oscillation between violence and visibility. Unfolding elaborations of the transgender subjectivities in lusophone cultures are foregrounded by *travesti* visibility. Denilson Lopes argues, “Longe de virar mera alegoria abstrata da transitividade sexual contemporânea, o travesti representou um primeiro espaço de visibilidade de uma subcultura gay, ainda que a ela não se restringia” (Far from becoming a mere abstract allegory of contemporary sexual transitivity, the *travesti* represented a first site of visibility of a gay subculture, though not limited to that subculture”) (36). If the *travesti* has been the most visible of gay, Luso-Brazilian subcultures, then it is a marked visibility tied to sex work, framed as performed femininity, and ambivalently subsumed under gay culture. Moments of exception, such as Brazilian transsexual Roberta Close’s celebrity, as fashion model, actress, Playboy Magazine model, and rumored paramour of Hollywood stars in the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>11</sup> are held in place as exceptions by the mundane visibility of the *travesti* in precarious oscillations of sex and violence. *Travesti* Rubi reminded

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<sup>11</sup> Roberta Close published an autobiography, *Muito Prazer: Roberta Close* (1998).

everyone at a conference in September, 2013, of the National Meetings of Travestis and Transsexuals Working in the Fight against AIDS (ENTLAIDS), “All of you forget that when the LGBT movement was created in Brazil, while gays were protected in their homes, it was the *travestis* who were being beaten up in the streets by police and clients. You forget that it was the *travestis* who fought for citizenship in Brazil. You forget that it was us who literally got punched in the face” (Silva 224).

Deliberations on identity by political and organized *travestis* are occurring on a terrain of expanding transgender subjectivity that has brought the *travesti* out from under gay subcultures while not yet fully aligned with transgender subjectivity as they are thought in North American contexts. A central concern within this and other trans organizations in Brazil is *travesti* identity in light of the transgender medicalization that puts an “emphasis on genital surgery itself,” one which Brazil has allowed since 2008, and Alvaro Jarrín shows how medicalization “constitutes an ‘authentic’ transsexual,” while excluding other gender-variant identities,” (358). Some *travesti* reject sex-reassignment surgery as an imported bourgeoisie experience from Anglophone world, while still wanting hormones and other treatments (Jarrín 358). Others now question their identity all together “by saying something to the effect of, ‘Before I thought I was a travesti, but now I think I’m transsexual.’” (Silva 222). Communities of *travestis* are imbricated in a globalized world and have access to knowledge and debate from the global North (Silva 221-222). Yet, in an enduring and normative cultural matrix, and in the beginnings of a queer theory of lusophone cultures, the *travesti* is caught between their visible and violent history and stalled between perceptions of their identity as a gay subculture and medicalized transsexuality. Moreover, they are increasingly apprehended in a terrain of self-affirming transgender identitarian elaborations, perceived to be new forms of liberal modes of being that infiltrate

through globalization, but which in many ways seem to double-back to the *travesti*'s refusal of gender reassignment surgery and of stable identity moored in a heterosexist binary. This is a bind which suggests the *travesti* as always already the footnote, the unmoored, the unsure, the asterisk in trans\*. While the *travesti* may seem an applicable representation only in a Brazilian context, Luso-Afro-Brazilian popular culture travels along the same routes of globalized media, and discourses of gender, sexuality, race and nation in lusophone contexts share foundational, normative Luso-Brazilian contours.

The contemporary proliferation of queer popular music artists and culture in Portuguese, however, is marked by genre and gender transgression that unsettle the divide between global and local identities, where Portuguese-language popular music that is shared among masses of people in disparate places is heavily Afro-Brazilian, African, and Afro-diasporic. Yet, they are imbricated in LGBTQ+ identitarian models with similar Luso-Brazilian contours. Histories of homosexuality in Portugal, for example, show patterns of public scenes and selective permissiveness throughout the twentieth century (São José Almeida). After the Portuguese Revolution in 1974, and joining the EU in the 1980s, Portuguese LGBTQ+ politicization gained ground in the 1990s and has worked for legislative recognition of individualized identities, non-discrimination laws, self-affirmation laws, gay marriage, and adoption. Angola, mired in colonial cultural matrixes which transitioned to postcolonial cultural matrixes, has seen slower progress in LGBTQ+ rights. The ceasing of civil war violence in 2002, however, has allowed for some openings. LGBTQ+ identity in Angola shares much of the global LGBTQ+ discourse that circulates as human rights, and from South Africa's LGBTQ+ activism, which has been amplified around the efforts to stem HIV/AIDS epidemics. South Africa had its first recorded gender reassignment surgery in the 1982 (Theron), and a collective known as Social, Health and

Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa was founded in 2010 (in East London) (Merwe 2016). With the founding of Associação Iris Angola in 2013, the decriminalization of same-sex acts, and new laws against discrimination due to sexual orientation, Angola and other Portuguese-speaking African nations have moved toward improvements of LGBTQ + life. Still, Liesl Theron and Tshepo Ricki Kgositau argue that, “Systematic and institutionalized homophobia is regularly meted out to gender-nonconforming and trans people,” in many still-standing laws, and through the pulpit of many African leaders (580).

Beyond the tensions between globalized identities and local particularities, however, Sweet’s early redirection reminds us that there are African gender variance and same-sex desires and practices that have been documented and ignored or dismissed by scholars, discursively marginalized and oppressed by past colonial regimes, and seen by many African leaders currently in power as Western bourgeoisie imports that came along with colonialism and capitalism. When “homosexuality is acknowledged,” in older histories of sexual and gender transgressions of heteronormative paradigms, “its meaning and cultural significance are discounted and minimized,” as editors Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe argue in “All Too Confusing,” their introduction to *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities* (1998). The archaeological work in that anthology on dismissed, diminished, and ignored histories of homosexuality and gender transitivity in African cultures shows how current virulent homo- and transphobic attitudes were in many ways imposed upon many African societies through colonialism. “The colonialists did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather intolerance of it – and systems of surveillance and regulation for suppressing it” (Murray xvi). Presenting African gender and sexuality as a nonnormative utopian past, however,



obfuscates the power matrixes imbricated in a variety of genders, sex, kinship, and patriarchal and matriarchal societies, that existed and continue to exist alongside each other in differing iterations. In the interest of amplifying histories forgotten in Angola, though, I note an account published in 1925 by anthropologist Kurt Falk, which documents homosexual activity, bisexual activity, and the taking of “girls” that were young boys by older males, even as those older males would eventually marry female partners (168). Falk shares an interesting anecdote from the time of his research of an African soldier in the Angolan region who, when punished for having same sex-relations, asks “Doesn’t the sergeant know that there are men who from youth on desire women, and others, who are attracted only to men? Why then should he be punished now? After all, he knows not why, God created him like this – that he can only love men!” (170). These older histories muddle the teleological narrative of nonnormative gender and sexuality as a modern invention, cultural appropriation, or cultural aberration.

To contend with an archive of queer popular music and performance that includes Pablllo Vittar, a Brazilian gender non-conforming drag queen, and Titica, Angolan transgender woman, working in genres and cultures marked by their peripheral characteristics even as they are financially lucrative, globally recognized and very popular among fans, requires a diaspora reading that does not replicate the violence of transgender representations of in lusophone cultures in their oscillations of popular and precarious visibility, and can contend with differing scales of history and representation. These artists are not only visible in diaspora formations and as diaspora formations, however. They are also spectacular representations in relationships of mutual recognition with one another and with other spectacular representations. Walcott argues for diaspora reading practices to “take seriously diaspora circuits and the identifications, disidentifications, and cultural sharing and borrowing that occur in that symbolic and political

space,” where “black diaspora queers have actually pushed the boundaries of transnational identification,” toward a “borderless, large world of shared identifications and imagined historical relations produced through a range of fluid cultural artifacts like film, music, clothing, gesture, and signs or symbols, not to mention sex and its dangerously pleasurable fluids” (92). Yet, it is precisely the ability to account for and contend with that borderless large world that requires a shifting of scale.

This work considers the mass-mediated representation of transgender subjectivities in globalized discourse and popular media, and also accounts for the intimate material resonances of trans voice and body imbricated within local repertoires and cultural terrains. To do so, I have found Marcia Ochoa’s work with Venezuelan paradigms of femininity and trans subjectivities particularly useful. Ochoa looks at the role of “mass-media spectacle in the self-making projects of differently situated actors in Venezuela,” to speak to “not just the conditions of existence for transgender women but also to the ways in which these women are produced by the same society that treats them with so much violence and rejection,”(6). My work here is in kinship with Ochoa’s, and in many ways shares the same scale of mass-media spectacle in looking at queer performances of popular music. This is a scale of spectacularity is useful in thinking popular music beyond distribution, markets, and media, to think “performance, theatricality, and audience” through “spectacle as one register through which individuals signify” (211). Ochoa shows how, “Spectacularity... employs existing conventions of media spectatorship to signify beyond a semantic level of speech” (211). Popular music, as video and song, shared via social media, TV, music distributors, and other mass-media routes, offer ways of being besides the cultural matrixes and socio-spatial resonances of local, national and even Luso-Afro-Brazilian repertoires. In this way, spectacularity allows for different diasporic terrains and resonances to

form. Queer diasporas on spectacular scales allow for formations of subjectivities, of repertoires, and of desires along spectacular contours. They expand repertoires of gender and genre, and may offer ways into otherwise local, national, homo- and transphobic repertoires. Moreover, spectacular diasporas, as I develop in the conclusion to this work, offer formations of race, gender and sexuality particularly primed to intervene in colonial and postcolonial aesthetic regimes of representation that leave little room for queer thriving otherwise.

### **Trans Tessituras and Wily Methodology**

The music and videos of Pablo Vittar, Fado Bicha and Titica, and the genealogies of trans voices and embodiments within which I locate them, take from local, diasporic, and globalized repertoires of subjectivities. They do so through popular music scenes and genres that are in tension with an understanding of queerness in Anglophone scholarship as marginal, countercultural, and articulated, even as they challenge the tensions between different global North and global South queer subjectivities and methodologies. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV note, “Increased global visibility of queer sexualities and cultures,” though making queerness an object of consumption, “has also generated multiple opportunities for queer political intervention” through “globalized coalition politics” (1). Silviano Santiago, however, points to this globalized coalition as the principle actor in a disfiguring of Brazilian queerness. He marks the historical fault line in 1960s and 70s that Perlongher apprehends, when Brazilian gays and lesbians began to come out, to *assumir* (to assume, in this case a homosexual lifestyle), and “exhibit different behaviors in the public sphere and a particular sexual preference... marginal to the norm” (15). It is to this moment that Santiago argues “a broader theoretical interest in the public/private dichotomy may be traced among [Brazilians]”(15).

Coming out, he argues, was introduced by “North American ideas and concepts” (16). Instead of adopting the practice of coming out, he asks:

Couldn't we suggest that the public exhibitionism and protesting demanded of homosexuals by North American activist movements might be balanced by a wily form of exhibitionism, also public, in the style of the Catholic confession or of the rogue? Working necessarily with the ambiguity of language and behavior, lucidly separating conduct from the norm, instead of distinguishing norm and deviancy, refusing to exhibit the appropriate condition...refusing to adopt appropriate *bicha/sapatona* conduct... Couldn't and shouldn't the homosexual be more wily?

(18)

Santiago offers an interesting counterpoint to the ways in which globalized queerness has exposed and remade what were previously zones of shade and permissiveness, even when those zones of shade were not for everyone, as the *travesti*'s history of visibility and violence attest to. His attentiveness to wily ways of being offers a productive approach to analyzing queer bodies of people and of culture that pull worlds of nonnormative gender and sexuality into popular and public rotation.

Wily is defined as shrewd, smart, and crafty, among other possible meanings. I use it here to describe a methodology attuned to how cultural practices may strategically operate as sites of queer subjectivity in social, political and sexual formation. In this work I am attentive to how voices may register in wily ways, and may drag down or uplift in strategic deviations of music and form. Rather than the catholic confession, the figure of the rogue, or attentive to only homosexual ways, however, I show how these artists deploy wily forms of exhibitionism as they redirect genres of music, heritage, and nationalism around trans voice, peripheral bodies and

afro-diasporic performance. I orient my analysis around these resonances, and follow their citations, references, and reverberations to chart out formations of being in the world that allow them to thrive. Sara Ahmed explains orientation as a way we “gather on the ground, and create a ground upon which we can gather,” and as “a matter of how we reside in space...of how we inhabit spaces as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we inhabit spaces with” (1). Thinking popular music and performance as a gathering ground of references and resonances underscores how our sexed and gendered selves are social and constitutive parts of worlds in the making. In their local and spectacular iterations, however, they take on diasporic form in which the terrains, the practices, the wily tactics, may shift and morph. Evident of this shifting of ground, I have gathered an archive of recorded albums and art work, music videos, and critical reception through which I analyze vocal performances, visual stylings, lyrics, arrangements, compositions, thematic references, affective stylings in voice and body, voice types, and dance repertoires. To recognize and contend with the breadth of their innovations and transgressions – historical, cultural, and material – I deploy a wily methodology that incorporates deep listening, close and diaspora reading practices, and trans as an analytic, while also listening, hearing, seeing, feeling, and reading these trans formations through the reception to their work, and their resonances beyond their reception.

Listening as a critical practice of research for popular music in this work is informed by Pauline Oliveros’s conceptualization and practice of deep listening, as a methodology attentive to the ways we “categorize sounds...through experience” and those that we discard, misinterpret, disregard, or deliberately or unconsciously fail to notice (*Deep Listening*, xxii). In this work, I deploy a deep listening to apprehend the sounds, bodies, and histories heretofore occluded or unrecognized. Oliveros describes deep listening as:

Learning to expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound – encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible. Simultaneously one ought to be able to target a sound or sequence of sounds as a focus within the space/time continuum and to perceive the detail or trajectory of the sound or sequence of sounds. Such focus should always return to, or be within the whole of the space/time continuum (context). (*Deep Listening*, xxiii)

Oliveros's emphasis on listening to the whole space/time continuum as much as possible is a useful reorientation of our listening of popular music beyond the contemporary moment, to hear the histories, bodies, and voices that these genres and artists gather as a ground from which to emerge, within which to explore, and through which their gender and sexual transgressions subvert a teleology of normative cultural and national discourse. Moreover, deep listening allows us to focus intimately on a voice and body, in performance and reception, to perceive the detail of its trajectory within a transhistorical, and transnational context.

Deep listening is for me a shifting of scale, from the small to the grand, the particular to the whole, while keeping us intimately engaged with the voices and bodies that make up the performances I analyze in this work. To be attentive to this shifting scale through listening is, in a way, to be aroused and to be open to arousal by the bodies and voices in this work. As such, this dissertation and the artists I study are in what Sarah Hankins calls a queer relationship to music and the study of music, one that “is embodied, aroused, and situated. Arousal dissolves the boundaries between self and music by opening up the somatic apparatus to music's energies, and arousal enables the individual to locate herself, and to locate music, within social power structures that are undergirded by a sexual order... a queer relationship with music disrupts and

reworks received macroaccounts of meaning and arrives at no clear declaration or terminus” (88). Arousal also functions as an awakening, one that finds in repertoires of popular music knowledge of and intervention in gender and genre, as well as marking the material intimacies that music and performance provoke between bodies, of people, of culture. In many ways, I show how the popular music genres and performances I gather in this work arouse suspicion, excitement, and debate in promiscuous and political provocations.

Latin American queer theorist José Quiroga similarly offers a way to sustain critical reflection of queer subjectivities through cultural practices rather than identitarian articulations; to think beyond the “standard epistemologies” of the closet (1), invoking Sedgwick’s foundational work. These closets, as Lugarinho shows, are every shifting gradations of shade in a lusophone context. Quiroga suggests “broader circuits” [where] the closet is only one “part of a complex dynamic of subject and identity” (1). Rather than *assumir* or a coming out, Quiroga trains our attention on a queer praxis that is local and performative, that “does not entail hiding or closeting something, rather it is a form of speech that is transparent in different terms for different members of the reading audience, who have been initiated into one of its many circuits of meaning” (80), where “circuitousness, evasion, and avoidance” are not modes of denial but rather “particular ways of saying” (81). Quiroga underscores different ways of saying that inform my analysis of Brazilian pop star and drag queen Pabllo Vittar’s voice in video and song, through critical reception, and through her spectacular formations of femininity, which lends a connective thread to the following chapters of this work.

In chapter one, I show how Vittar’s countertenor voice type confounds critics and fans alike, and is in tension with her body as suggestive of a *travesti*, while performing genres of music associated with Brazilian peripheries of genres, people, and terrains. Through Vittar, I

propose a formation of the trans voice as a *trans tessitura*. In the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001), tessitura is “used to describe the part of a vocal (or less often instrumental) compass in which a piece of music lies – whether high or low, etc. The tessitura of a piece is not decided by the extremes of its range, but rather by which part of the range is most used” (Jander); while *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* defines tessitura as “the pitch range normal in the speech of some specific individual” (Matthews). The *New Penguin Dictionary of Music* defines tessitura as “The range most frequently used in a vocal role (or, by extension, solo instrumental part) or most comfortable for a voice. Either a role or a voice may be described as having a high or low tessitura” (Griffiths). All of these definitions of tessitura emphasize the tessitura as the most used or median of a vocal or musical range in a piece or vocalization. For a singer, rather than the part they are singing, the tessitura is that area of their vocal range most comfortable to them. It is not intended to mark out a range, which is defined by its extreme end points of high and low, but rather to designate a more commonly used part of the vocal range, and suggests a site of normalcy. Yet, as I show in this work, a trans tessitura – the voice when heard as transgender – is perceived as transgressing normative voice types and gendered codifications. In analysis of reception to Vittar’s voice, I show how a trans tessitura is a vocal resonance perceived as uncomfortable, refusing to be intelligible within conventions of gender and song. I deploy the trans tessitura to pull trans voice out of medicalization and biological essentialisms, and to consider the ways in which we hear voices that confound our notions of gender, body, voice, and singing, as they defy articulating their/our binary anchors. I deploy deep listening of trans tessituras in analyzing formations of voice, and of voice as it emanates from bodies in and of popular music genres, to show how it may also shift genres and genders out of time and out of national repertoires, into more spectacular diasporic formations.



One such shift I hear through a trans tessitura locates Vittar in a genealogy of transgender voices in which Ney Matogrosso's serves as archival referent, particularly as it is heard in his debut release. Matogrosso's long career, beginning in the 1970s and which continues today, has made his countertenor voice an iconic part of Brazilian popular music. It is the same voice type as Vittar, yet Matogrosso's voice is more readily claimed as "extraordinary" and "feminine" (Christopher Dunn, *Contracultura* 190-192). Cesar Braga-Pinto locates Matogrosso's voice in a history of "transgendered voices present in Brazilian music for many decades, particularly after the 1960s," and notes how Matogrosso's voice and androgynous, homoerotic stage aesthetic conceal queer desire in their ambiguity (189-193). Rather than Matogrosso as object of study, however, and conversely to Braga-Pinto's findings of a homosexuality that is always "under erasure" in Matogrosso's performance (193), I show what Matogrosso's voice voices, and what his body materializes in performance. Through critical reception of his debut album, I reveal how his trans tessitura materializes the black mother figure of Brazilian social and cultural history, giving voice to her lament. I show how Matogrosso's voice and body, in album art and recording, perform a poignant refiguring of Brazilian normative discourses through a cacophony of queer, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian referents deployed in album art and production. He does this through a recording of a Portuguese fado, transposing a genre of Portuguese heritage into Brazilian popular music.

Fado's transatlantic past, as a genre that formed through circum-Atlantic practices and personalities deemed deviant and peripheral, resurface in contemporary Portuguese queer fado duo Fado Bicha, who transgress the genre's gendered conventions of composition and performance. To show how they are able to refigure fado toward queer ends, however, in chapter two I trace the trans tessitura of fado's female repertoire that marks the feminine voice in fado as

an unbearable affect, discernable in critical reception to Portuguese new wave and gay icon António Variações's 1982 debut recording. I locate him in a genealogy of unbearable female *fadistas* (fado singers). I show how characteristics attributed to these *fadistas* mark them as formations of gender transgression, sexual deviance, and unbearable nationalism. In doing so, I use trans as an analytic, attuned to the ways that scholar Kai M. Green suggests trans can “articulate a unique relation between two or more identity categories where one marks the limits and excess of the other, simultaneously deconstructing and reconstructing or reimagining new possible ways of being and doing” (66). In revealing fado's trans tessitura, I show how fado has deviance built into its improvisational techniques, which allow for disidentification with its codified and gendered conventions, and for formations of fado as what José Esteban Muñoz call, “antinormative treasure troves of queer possibility” (x). I reveal fado's queer history, and show how it has been a queer praxis from its initial stirrings. Finally, returning to Fado Bicha, I show how they deploy the *bicha* in their name to mobilize fado strategically as intervention in globalized discourses of LGBTQ+ identities, while instantiating fado in the black and queer diasporas of Lisbon's contemporary peripheries.

Chapter three takes up these black and queer diasporas more directly through Titica, as a transgender woman and performer of Angolan's electronic music genre kuduro. Historian Marissa Moorman calls kuduro performance and production “an anatomy,” of current Angolan youth, expressed with “grit and humor,” and she points to its dance repertoire as ways of “remembering” Angolan bodies that have been mangled and maimed by decades of violence, corruption and mismanaged resources (24). Moorman argues, “kuduro creates alternative systems and infrastructures, addressing the state both through its production and promotion strategies and in the content of its performances. But thus far, these have not threatened

postcolonial forms of rule” (24). However, I consider kuduro’s emergence in postcolonial Angola through an aesthetics of vulgarity (Mbembe), which is spectacularly amplified through a popular music genre, to show how Titica’s kuduro repertoire exploits and is unbound by Angolan postcolonial aesthetics and context. I analyze her debut album through music videos to show how Titica’s kuduro re-members a transgender Angolan woman’s body by refiguring kuduro’s aesthetic terrain.

To hear Titica’s particular trans tessitura, I read Titica’s music through black and queer diasporas of popular music and performance. I reveal kuduro’s postcolonial aesthetic of vulgarity through Titica’s formations of gender and genre repertoire that are unmoored from it, imbricated instead within spectacular formations of black and queer popular music and practices. I analyze how Titica exploits globalized discourses of LGBTQ+ identity as interventions in a context of precariousness for transgender people, unsettling homonormative critiques. Moreover, through her collaborations with Angolan cisgender popular music singer Ary, known for more traditional genres, I reveal transfeminist formations in the re-membering of Angolan queer subjectivity. Finally, I show how Titica and Ary can be read as what E. Patrick Johnson calls resistant vernacular performances of black queer cultures, “In which black gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people demonstrate the ways of devising technologies of self-assertion” (140). I reveal Titica and Ary’s performance in video and song, as a resistant performance, through which Titica negotiates the distance between her identity as a spectacular transgender woman and performer, and her instantiation within Luandan *musseques*. In reading Titica through the diaspora, I show how Titica claims and refigures the local terrain. As a conclusion to this chapter, in an analysis of Titica’s recent collaboration with Pablllo Vittar, “Come e Baza” (2018), I mark their dinner party video as a refiguring of Luso-Afro-Brazilian postcoloniality and

cultural aesthetics, one that turns the tables on Luso-Afro-Brazilian discourses of miscegenation, devouring, and peripheries.

### **Spectacular Queer Diasporas**

In my conclusion, considering the array of artists, music, and videos I've analyzed, I offer a formation of their performances, collaboration and refigurings as spectacular queer diasporas of Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultures that are not beholden to nationalist, postcolonial, or lusophone aesthetics and configurations, nor are they bound to south-south trajectories or marginal and counter positionalities as always fugitive and small. I offer as evidence a queer residency that occurred in São Paulo in 2016, documented in the film *Cidade Queer / Queer City* (dir. Danila Bustamante, 2016). This residency brought together queer and queer of color artists from Brazil, Canada and New York to live, share, and perform their different experiences and repertoires in an urban setting. From urban landscape to domestic interior, from national terrain to transatlantic collaborations, and from lusophone cultures in promiscuous encounter with culture from elsewhere, I reveal a scale which can take spectacular queer formations into account, as mass media and as intimately felt and material resonances, which defy geopolitical boundaries and challenge conceptualizations of diaspora. These spectacular diasporic formations are a necessary site for future work in queer studies, and an imperative site for future work on lusophone cultures. Through these mass-mediated, popular culture diasporas of black, queer, and trans bodies, desires, voices and subjectivities as elaborations of Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultural repertoires, I locate ways out of oscillations between violence and visibility for queer lives that are, beside that bind, already imbricated in spectacular cultural repertoires of thriving and care.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Confounding *Travestis* and Crying Black Mothers

Pablo Vittar is currently the most famous drag queen in the world, according to *Vogue* magazine, which notes that she has “more than 7 million followers on Instagram (@pablovittar),” and “combined video views totaling 1 billion.” *Vogue* list her achievements, “Vittar is the first drag queen nominated for a Grammy, nominated as Best Brazilian Act at the 2018 MTV Europe Music Awards,” has “headlined the parade of one of Rio’s most storied samba schools at Carnival in 2018,”<sup>26</sup> is “the face of a Coca-Cola campaign,” and “has collaborated with... high-profile musical acts—like Major Lazer... Anitta, and Diplo.”<sup>27</sup> Her success through Brazilian *funke* and pop music genres disparaged as peripheral points to distinctions of class and race within Brazilian popular music that legitimate more acceptable repertoires of heritage. Moreover, though Vittar describes herself as a drag queen, she identifies as a gender non-conforming gay male and takes female pronouns. Vittar does not claim a *travesti*, transsexual or transgender identity. However, her mass-mediated image and performances and her ambiguous if not ambivalent gender identity invoke *travesti* history and visibility. Unlike the *travesti*, however, Vittar is a celebrated pop star, rather than shunned sex worker, while the peripheral nature of the music genres she works in drags other peripheries of class and race into the light. Vittar is also the voice of Goldiva, a character in Netflix’s pioneering animated series *Super Drags*, which features a superhero team of four drag queens, made for Brazil with English voice-over for North American release. Her signature countertenor

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<sup>26</sup> *The Guardian*, “Brazilian drag queen Pablo Vittar headlines Carnival,” February 12, 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/12/pablo-vittar-drag-queen-brazil-carnival>

<sup>27</sup> Alessandra Codinha, “What Pablo Vittar, Pop Superstar, Means to Brazil (and the Rest of Us) Right Now,” *Vogue.com*, November 17, 2018. Accessed April 13, 2019. <https://www.vogue.com/article/pablo-vittar-pop-star>

voice is immediately recognizable, fittingly, since the role was written with Vittar and her voice in mind.

Vittar's voice type reaches and overlaps that of the female soprano. It has received a range of descriptors from extraordinary to being described as irritating yelps and yells.<sup>28</sup> In its reception, Vittar's voice has proved unsettling and confounding, and locates her within a genealogy of transgender voices in Brazilian popular music with Ney Matogrosso, now an enduring star of *música popular brasileira* (MPB). Matogrosso was an immediate success upon debuting as singer of the rock band Secos e Molhados in 1972, notorious for his flamboyant stage presence and homoerotic stylings at a time of authoritarian rule, and where politicized and activist gay identities were just taking shape. Avoiding public declaration of his sexuality, his stage presence framed his feminine voice in homoerotic stylings and thinly-veiled allusions to homosexuality. Matogrosso's solo debut *Água do Céu-Pássaro* (1975), however, deploys his feminine voice across an amalgam of Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultural references and resonances in a genre still in formation as an audiovisual and material saturation of queer, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian intersections. Together, Vittar's visibility and voice, and Matogrosso's audiovisual cacophony, present a queer archive and critique that reaches across time in the material reverberations of their voices. Through their different recordings and genres, in performance and composition, they shift Brazilian peripheries of sexuality, class and race, in trans formations of the Brazilian *travesti* and the Freyrean *mãe-preta* (black mother). At different times and in different cultural contexts, Vittar and Matogrosso resonate with unfolding understandings of identity through transgender and transatlantic resonances that register as critiques of hegemonic Luso-Afro-Brazilian discourses of gender, race and nation.

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<sup>28</sup> Nicole Froio describes Vittar's singing on her debut album *Vai Passa Mal* (2017) as "high-pitched yelps." *Remezcla*, 2017. <https://remezcla.com/features/music/pablo-vittar-interview/>

### **Popular and Precarious Oscillations – *Pablo Vittar***

Born as Phabullo Rodrigues da Silva in 1994, in the interior of Brazil's Maranhão state, and moving to the urban centers of São Paulo and Minas Gerais in her early teens where she began to perform at clubs and find community, Pablo Vittar has since achieved an unprecedented level of visibility and reach through music genres that are extremely popular and yet peripheral in mainstream Brazilian music scenes. As a drag queen who has attained mainstream music success, in her celebrity and in the popularity of her music, she is a highly visible representation of sexual and gender transgression. Notably, in her short but remarkable career, she has consistently featured collaborations with popular cisgender heterosexual male artists in videos that exploit Vittar's sexualized appearance and performance style through heightened moments of sexual tension. Vittar first appeared in drag only in 2014 at the young age of 18. Social media gave Vittar early success after videos she uploaded to YouTube of herself singing in her own voice while in drag landed her on Brazilian TV show *Amor e Sexo*, and the interest of music producers Bonde do Rolê. After recording a single and an extended play release with electronic artists Major Lazer, DJ Snake, and MØ, Vittar released the debut full-length album *Vai Passar Mal* in 2017. The album features original compositions performed by Vittar and produced by American electronic music artist DJ Diplo. In these collaborations, Vittar plays different iterations of sexual vixen, romantic lover, or disaffected femme fatale. She has done all of this as a drag queen situated in Brazil, peripheral to the explosion of drag culture that has happened in the United States, but with its own history of drag culture, yet she has surpassed their levels of fame. Moreover, though her voice, body and styling represent as female and feminine, Vittar has stated she is a gender non-conforming gay male and not transgender, while

she uses female pronouns. In her refusal of a transgender identity and in her stylings, Vittar is in tension with various trans identities, from medicalized understandings of transsexuality, to the representations of *travestis* as a gay male subculture, and self-affirming forms of gender variance. In this tension of representation, and through her celebrity, Vittar's music and videos offer provocative refigurings of deep-rooted Brazilian archetypes of gender and sexual variance.

As an international star, Vittar's appearance and sexualized performances in gender presentation, song, and dance, pull at histories of visibility and violence that mark public representations of gender and sexual transgressions in Brazil, particularly through the figure of the *travesti*. The *travesti* has a long and troubling history of visibility and violence in Brazil, coupled with an ambiguous gender identity that has been in tension at different times with changing homosexual identities and, more recently, with unfolding iterations of transgender subjectivities beyond strict adherence to binary gender codes. Don Kulick's ethnography *Travesti* (1998), documents these tensions, stating that the *travestis* have "female physical attributes and male homosexual subjectivity," and "despite the fact that they live their lives in female clothing, call one another by female names, and endure tremendous pain in order to acquire female bodily forms, *travestis* do not wish to remove their penis, and they do not consider themselves to *be* women" (5-6, emphasis in original). Moreover, Kulick notes that, though they exist throughout Latin America, "In no other country are they as numerous and well known as in Brazil, where they occupy a strikingly visible place in both social space and the cultural imaginary" (6). They are fixtures in every big city, visible during Carnival, and often invoked as representative of Carnival's spirit of topsy-turvy inversions, of society and of gender. They've appeared on TV programs, in television dramas, and one *travesti* was "widely



acclaimed to be the most beautiful woman in Brazil in the mid-1980s. That *travesti*, Roberta Close, became a household name throughout the country” (7).

Kulick juxtaposes this cultural visibility and perception with a lived experience for the vast majority of *travestis* he studied that was marked by sex work under the cover of night, and by consistent violence. Notably, Roberta Close famously traveled to Europe for gender reassignment surgery, becoming in Brazilian trans terminology a transsexual. Most *travesti* in Kulick’s work, however, did not seek that option, did not have the means to travel to Europe or have the surgery done elsewhere, and were not considered the most beautiful women of the nation, though they were visible in other ways. “Those *travestis*, the ones that most Brazilians only glimpse occasionally standing along highways or on dimly lit street corners at night, or on the crime pages of their local newspaper, are one of the most marginalized, feared, and despised groups in Brazilian society... They are regularly the victims of police brutality and random assassinations” (7). Kulick’s description of glimpses that seem, however, quite common and mundane, underscores the paradox of visibility and violence in which *travestis* existed in while he underwent his study in the late 1990s. Moreover, he offers a critique of this paradox that touches on the ways in which a contemporary lusotropicalism seems to undergird lusophone formations of queer theory. Kulick argues that celebrating the *travesti* as an example of permissive gender transgression in Brazil is “an elaborate myth that Brazilians enjoy telling one another about themselves, in an attempt to convince themselves and others that they are more liberated, tolerant, and hip than they really are. It’s a smokescreen” (9). Kulick argues further that the *travesti* represents a concentration of “general ideas, representations and practices of male and female... the *travestis* elaborate the particular configurations of sexuality, gender and sex that undergird and give meaning to Brazilian notions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’” (9).

Zones of permissiveness for sexual and gender transgressions have been the recourse of men through homosexual acts recorded in colonial times (Mott) carnival practices and drag balls (Green), and in sex work, as many histories of homosexuality in Brazil record. Nester Perlongher's study of male prostitution in São Paulo maps out shaded zones in the urban metropolis where men find other men to hire for sex, each representing different formations of race and gender on a moving scale from white to black, macho to effeminate (102-103). Scholars working in queer theory in Luso-Brazilian contexts turn to these histories to note the uniqueness or particularity of a lusophone cultural matrix of sexual deviance, tolerance, and permissiveness as "a shady zone" of "less intense homophobia... experienced in the practices of everyday life in Portuguese-speaking societies" (Lugarinho 285). Notably, however, already at the end of the 1980s, Perlongher was concerned with the position of the *travestis* in this matrix, as they were doubly marginalized as overly feminine and hyper-visible, usually very poor and living off of sex work. New modes of queerness entered Brazilian discourse, in the 1970s, 80s, and into the present day, through market-based commodification of LGBTQ+ identities post-Stonewall, and the politicization of LGBTQ+ identities in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemics, circulating in Anglophone and North American contexts. Gay men of a certain class that present a more acceptable form of homosexuality could leave the rapidly disappearing zones of shade and enter mainstream discourses of gay rights and assimilation into proper society. For cisgender gay men and women this meant entering monogamous relationships and seeking recognition by the state through marriage, adoption rights, and protections. For transgender people, this meant access to medical strategies for gender transitions. For the *travesti*, however, zones of permissiveness have never been for them outside of their utility in providing sexual services, and the more contemporary assimilationist politics of the global LGBTQ+ movement also prove ill-fitting.

Under myths of inverted social mores, more tolerant society, and zones of sexual deviance and gender transgression, *travestis* have lived in varying shades of precariousness. James Green argues that the *travesti* in name and profession, was “inextricably linked to prostitution” (251). In their role as prostitutes, however, they have been the target of both desire and violence, visible on street corners and in the statistics that paint a picture of Brazil as a truly dangerous place for LGBTQ+ people. Luiz Mott, anthropologist and president of Grupo Gay de Bahia, recorded in *Epidemic of Hate: Violations of the Human Rights of Gay Men, Lesbians, and Transvestites in Brazil* (1996), how a homosexual was murdered every 4 days in Brazil, and that many of the LGBTQ+ people murdered, killed, or violated in Brazil were sex workers (Green 3). These numbers and statistics have not subsided in recent times. UK paper *The Guardian* reported that in 2017, “At least 445 LGBT Brazilians died as victims of homophobia... a 30% increase from 2016, according to LGBT watchdog group Grupo Gay de Bahia,” and they noted the particularly gruesome murder of “Dandara dos Santos, a transsexual woman who was beaten to death in the north-eastern Brazil city Fortaleza in March. A video of her being beaten and kicked circulated on social media with her torturers calling her homophobic slurs.”<sup>29</sup> In a quote to the paper, Luiz Mott, still active in LGBTQ+ movements in Brazil, condemned the violence. Brazil continues to top the list of nations with the most murders of transgender people. The Trans Murder Monitoring project notes that along with visible trans communities, existing trans publications, their own terms for trans people, trans protection legislation, trans anti-discrimination legislation, and other good practices, Brazil had over 800 murders of trans people, that have been reported and tracked, between 2008-2016.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Sam Cowie, “Violent deaths of LGBT people in Brazil hit an all-time high,” *The Guardian*, January 22, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/22/brazil-lgbt-violence-deaths-all-time-high-new-research>

<sup>30</sup> Data accessed on April 13, 2019: <https://transrespect.org/en/map/trans-murder-monitoring/>

Brazilian *travestis* also oscillate between the varying iterations of trans in Brazil. Kulick shows the ambiguous position of the *travesti* as both feminine and not transitioning in a manner that is recognized by medicalized understandings of trans. Notably, it is through medicalization that many trans people have been able to seek protections, medical assistance, and gender reassignment surgery if needed, as well as hormones or other medical strategies for bringing their bodies more in line with their gender identity. Anthropologist Alvaro Jarrín notes that Brazil's universal health-care system has "covered the cost of sex-reassignment surgeries undertaken in certain accredited hospitals across" since 2008. Yet, he argues that this medicalization restricts transsexuality to a strict definition attached to gender reassignment surgery. The "travestis were considered ineligible patients at hospitals that provide sex-reassignment surgeries because they wish to retain their sexual organs and thus do not fit within the normative biomedical definition of transsexuality" (358). Amongst themselves, in organized activist groups of *travestis*, the changing parameters of the transgender debate, from medicalization to conceptualizations of trans identities that include gender variance, have pulled at their long-standing, highly visible, and culturally significant identity. Heated debates have been recorded between members of the National Meetings of Travestis and Transsexuals Working in the Fight against AIDS (ENTLAIDS), that have met every year for the last twenty years in efforts to support their community against the violence of police and patron, and in the oscillations between cultural significance and public marginalization. While some refuse to be anything besides a *travesti*, retaining their penis, others wonder if they have been or are now, perhaps, a transsexual (Silva). The lexicon has come along with policies and public discourses that legitimate some gender transitions and transgressions while continuing to push others into dangerously exposed peripheries.

Pablo Vittar steps out onto this cultural terrain as a provocative conflation of visibility, gender transgression, sexual deviance, and pop culture stardom, invoking gender identities and performing in genres that resonate with cultural peripheries of sex, class and crime. In each video and performance, she straddles the popular and peripheral, and pulls her collaborators in as accomplices in unsettling the oscillations between popular and peripheral, visible and precarious. “Corpo Sensual” (*Vai Passar Mal*, 2017), features Pablo Vittar in a collaboration with Brazilian performer Mateus Carrilho, a star of a Brazilian pop music genre known as *technobrega* that is made up of international pop music references with electronic versions of Brazilian *forró* and other backlands and country genres, usually played on guitars and keyboards, featuring country scenes, straw hats, and references to a Brazil that differs from the familiar cityscapes of Brazil. These are genres far removed from the sophisticated urban centers of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Brasília, and removed from the popular music that gets attention in music press and in international circuits. In cultural resonance and popularity, these genres are more associated with Brazilian geographic peripheries, such as Vittar’s home state of Maranhão in Brazil’s northeast. Technobrega is part of a proliferation of Brazilian popular music genres that Hermano Vianna calls “parallel music,” which he describes as the “genres that survive in this twilight zone that combines mass success with invisibility in the official mass media,” in which he includes technobrega, *forró*, and Brazilian funke (247). Vianna suggests that these parallel genres are the real popular music of Brazil, in their immense popularity and in their circulation through networks of people and distribution often circumvented by major music labels and media outlets in Brazil. Peripheries shift into popular and public view through this parallel music. Coming from everywhere in Brazil, Vianna argues that “city outskirts invent new

cultural circuits and new economic solutions, however precarious or informal,” where “party circuits proliferate informally” even as they “attract multitudes” (248).

Vianna’s work predates by just a few years a transformative year for Brazilian popular music, with Vittar’s debut in 2017, the same year that saw the release of Brazilian singer and Latin American pop star Anitta’s “Vai Malandra,” the first Portuguese-language song to chart on streaming-music site Spotify’s Global Top 20.<sup>31</sup> Anitta’s song, much like Vittar’s music, is also part of what Vianna calls parallel music genres, in the electronic music genre of Brazilian funk, unlike American funk music, which emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s in Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas* and urban bohemian lifestyle, influence by Miami base and house music. Funk is associated, through its origin and as ongoing practice, with poor communities of color. The playing of funk and hosting of funk parties were targeted by police in their aggressive clean-up policies in the *favelas* in the mid-2000s, and funk has been conflated with crime by the Brazilian media in two particular phenomena. In the 1990s, funk parties were associated with *arrastões*, coordinated mass-muggings of Rio’s more tourist-friendly open-air beaches and public places (Filho; Costa Trotta). In the 2010s, funk’s popularity with the youth and its proliferation in subgenres to other cities, was associated with mass youth mobilizations known as *rolezinhos*, where thousands of youth coordinate online and overwhelmed São Paulo’s high-end shopping centers. The conflation with crime was so complete that a *funkeiro*, which designates someone in the funk scene as either performer or fan, is synonymous with troublemaker (Costa Trotta 91).

Despite its criminal associations, funk is credited with redrawing “the national phonographic market, opening the way for several young artists to ‘acquire voices,’ come out of anonymity, and project this cultural expression of the periphery of the city” (Filho 228), though

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<sup>31</sup> *Spotify*, “Straight out of the Favela: Brazilian Funk,” <https://newsroom.spotify.com/2018-05-30/straight-out-of-the-favela-brazilian-funk/>

it continues to be considered a peripheral practice, as what Felipe da Costa Trotta describes are practices of “*preto, pobre e favelado*” (black, poor, and from the favela) (91). If funk, and parallel music redraw markets in Brazil, they also refigure cultural archetypes. Anitta’s song “Vai Malandra” plays on funk’s *favela* aesthetic and on the Brazilian archetype of the *malandro*, which Marc Hertzman describes as a “flashy, womanizing, hustler” figure, associated with samba, and who rose to iconic status along with that genre in the 1920s and 30s (593). While *malandro* might have “negative connotations,” *malandragem* was cast as a “quintessentially Brazilian form of cleverness” (594). Anitta’s song takes up the sexualized hustler figure and genders it female as a *malandra* in song title, in lyrics, and through a video that turns the objectification of women’s bodies in mainstream Brazilian culture into a site of feminist agency, with Anitta and a cadre of women in bikinis directing their own sexualized selves.

Similarly, Vittar’s collaboration with Carrilho refigures the contours of both the hyper-sexual and macho Brazilian male and representations of Brazilian *travestis*, while pulling parallel music genres into different transits of mass-mediated popular culture. Carrilho is a successful performer in his own right. Yet, in “Corpo Sensual,” Vittar’s notoriety as a drag queen and her success in other genres of music, along with her many millions of social media fans, displaces technobrega’s peripheral or parallel status. Moreover, in body and performance, Vittar also shifts shades of precariousness that mark not only the geographic peripheries of cultural centers, such as the Brazilian interior, but also peripheries of normative gender and sexuality. In her video with Carrilho, Vittar disidentifies with the *travesti*’s history of visibility and violence, while exuding the *travesti*’s spectacularized femininity. The song title and the lyrics call out her sensual body as capable of changing minds, of driving you crazy, of giving you fevers. The video features Vittar standing in a doorway of a small rural Brazilian village, while Carrilho

drives by. He can't help but notice her. The scene is reminiscent of the ways in which *travestis* work as “streetwalkers [and wear] tight mini-skirts, low-cut blouses, high-heeled shoes, net stockings, and carefully coiffed wigs” (Green 252). Yet, both the sensual descriptor in the title of the song and Vittar's playful and provocative movements, do not exhibit the pain associated with *travesti* visibility, of injections, implants, other body modifications (Kulick 6). Rather, Vittar is sensual, sexual, arousing Carrilho's interest as she stands not in shaded areas or furtive corners, but in the bright light of a sunny day. Carrilho cannot help but follow Vittar into a local *lanchonete*, or a bodega. The two of them dance together, erotically, and sing toward the camera. The bodega clerk and an elderly man seated at a table are indifferent to their antics, one staring out into the blaring daylight, looking past the couple, the other tending to his work. Carrilho and Vittar dance, embrace and seduce each other against the *lanchonete*'s counter (Fig.1).



Figure 1 – Video still, Pablo Vittar, “Corpo Sensual,” feat. Mateus Carrilho (left), *Vai Passar Mal*, (2017)

This juxtaposition of Vittar and Carrilho's affair against the ennui of the everyday and the dusty stillness outside the *lanchonete* disrupts the oscillations of popular peripheries and gender transgression marked by visibility and violence. Though Vittar's appearance and



sexualized styling readily invites associations with the *travesti*, the meeting between her and Carrilho is not sneaky, secretive, or furtive. Moreover, we are not in a carnival scene, nor is she performing a drag show in a venue. She is seen at home, at her door, and in a typical *lanchonete*. Vittar is dancing, showing, seducing. In performance, she refuses toxic connotations attached to *travesti* visibility. Her movement exudes confidence, sexuality, and desirous pleasure. Their affair is not burdened by threat of exposure, but plays out in a picturesque village on a bright sunny day. Vittar's sexualized representation is part of the landscape, as colorful as the blue skies and brightly-colored buildings; in the same frames as a church steeple visible from the bodega's counter. The everyday is a scene of queer seduction through a genre of music most readily associated with backland backwardness. Vittar offers us a formation of gender-variance that refuses to be relegated to the cover of night and murder statistics. Vittar's performance resonates as a moment of queer thriving, where same-sex desires and transgender subjectivity are not divested of sexual pleasure or agency, nor relegated to precarious peripheries. Vittar is arousing, desiring, desired, and confounding, and in all this, as the video seems to suggest, she is as commonplace as the everyday.

Vittar's collaborations with Carrilho and other cisgender heterosexual male performers exhibit what Kulick marked as a concentration of the Brazilian archetypes of gender and sexuality revealed through the *travesti*. Vittar, however, does not fit the logic of this configuration. She does not take up a trans formation recognized in Brazilian discourse through the *travesti* or through medicalized and juridical definitions of trans. Moreover, through her collaborations, Vittar claims cultural and sexual agency through the music she performs, how she presents herself in performance, and who she performs with. Though there are significant monetary gains in having hit music singles, performing with Vittar carries social and cultural

risks. Vittar's notoriety as a famous drag queen may present challenges to those that choose to work with her, casting their own reputations and careers alongside Vittar and opening themselves up to trans- and homophobic criticism and retaliation. Vittar does not play subordinate roles in her videos, and the narratives of her songs and video productions often call for very intimate acting. With each thrust of her hips, embrace, or revealing outfit, she challenges viewers, fans and detractors alike, to consider her gender non-conforming male body in drag as desirable, within and against heteronormative confines, arousing and making accomplices of her collaborators, of the lingering camera lenses, and ultimately of every gawking pair of eyes her videos produce.

Her most famous collaborative seduction has been with American electronic music producer and performer Diplo, who produced and appears in the video for Vittar's song "Então Vai" (*Vai Passar Mal*) as her romantic interest. The video is shot in a rural town with a green field by a river. Vittar wears a rainbow-colored one-piece thong body suit. The rainbow that hugs her curves, and shows off her legs and buttocks, drags her out of myopic Brazilian configurations of nonnormative gender and sexuality and into globalized LGBTQ+ politics with queer and trans identitarian models that are increasingly capacious. Queer identities in Brazil began to align with globalized discourses of LGBTQ+ rights and activism in the 1980s and 1990s. Contemporary elaborations of transgender subjectivity as a spectrum of gender variance are in tension with long-enduring Brazilian archetypes of the *travesti*, and with medical and legal gains that guarantee transgender rights and legitimize a particular transgender subjectivity. Yet, in the video, Vittar is an avatar for a rainbow of gender and sexual subjectivities. The lyrics tell of a resilient Vittar who has decided that the only way to deal with a tumultuous affair and heartbreak is to enjoy herself. The video shows her dancing with a group of friends in a field by a river

against a blue sky, with brown and black bodies, male and female of different contours, touching, laughing and loving. As it ends, a montage of playful and passionate kissing begins, and the revelers start to couple up. First there is a man and woman, then two women. Diplo, who up until this point has been watching Vittar from outside the revelry, approaches and they embrace. In their coupling, they are a gender non-conforming gay man and a cisgender straight man, but this is too simple of a read. Vittar's performance, body, and voice charge her identity with highly-feminized attributes, while the history of the *travesti* seems peripheries away from the sweet summer day. The kiss between Vittar and Diplo lasts a long twelve seconds on screen, passionate and involved.



Figure 2 - Pabllo Vittar and Diplo (right), "Então Vai," *Vai Passar Mal* (2017)

The kiss is an enduring moment where Vittar disidentifies with narratives of homo- and transphobic violence, and refigures her identity in an intimate collaboration that suggests nonnormative gender and sexuality are enmeshed within normative, popular, and parallel worlds. It is a long kiss, often called out in the media, with *Billboard* featuring the video on its website

along with a headline directly pointing to the “steamy make out session” between Vittar and Diplo (Rishty). The kiss is a physical collaboration in music, video, and affection. Vittar manages to bring Diplo back to her through her circle of fun-loving and carefree friends. Diplo’s attraction to Vittar as expressed in the passionate kiss, and all the kissing and dancing between the group of revelers, rejects isolation, marginalization, violence, and urban blight. The scene is bucolic, the vibe is free and fun, the genders and sexualities are diverse and fluid. The kiss suggests a model of intimate sociality that makes the bodies and desires of cis, trans, and queer people vulnerable and desirable to one another, and as such in each other’s care – intimately, sensually, and sexually. In this vulnerability, Vittar and Diplo suggest a model of dispossession through which we may understand how peripheries of permissiveness and precariousness depend on one another, and how zones of shade may protect some while leaving others precariously exposed to violence and marginalization. Vittar is not alone in these scenes, partnered either with a man or surrounded by friends, people, the mundane happenings of the everyday, the serene landscapes of the countryside. In this sociality, Vittar is imbricated in social, sexual, and physical terrains.

The videos I’ve analyzed above suggest a dispossession, as Judith Butler argues, that “marks the limits of self-sufficiency [and] establishes us as relational and interdependent beings” (3). Butler marks dispossession as “precisely what happens when populations lose their land, their citizenship, their means of livelihood, and become subject to military and legal violence,” revealing a “basis of relationality – we do not simply move ourselves, but are ourselves moved by what is outside us, by others, but also by whatever ‘outside’ resides in us” (3). The video offers a model of this dispossession, where dancers move one another, loves are undone and remade, bodies kiss, move, embrace. The members of this group are beside themselves; the

logic is one of vulnerability and desire. They are disposed to each other; and Diplo is taken into the circle and moved enough to let go and give in. In his capitulation to queer intimacy, Diplo's dispossession of his straight sexuality, aroused and seduced by Vittar, moves the *travesti* archetype away from isolation and towards imbrication. Vittar, as both the vestiges of a gay male subculture of Brazil, and as an iteration of trans gender variance, pulls Diplo, Carrilho, *travestis*, and others who identify with, are aroused by, or gawk and desire her, as collaborators, as fans, as critics, out of their sedimented binaries. Butler argues, "Dispossession establishes the self as social, as passionate... as driven by passions it cannot fully consciously ground or know, as dependent on environments and others who sustain and even motivate the life of the self itself" (4). In her refusal of gender binaries, both cis and trans – as neither transsexual or *travesti*, yet performing in ways that evoke those tensions and histories, Vittar dispossesses these positions of their subjective weight.

Vittar remains, however, in tension with communities of transsexuals and *travesti* for whom such recognition is vital. Working with organized groups of *travestis* in Brazil, Joseli Maria Silva and Marcio Jose Ornat show how "the rise of transgender subjectivity in Brazil" is seen by some *travestis* as "an attempt... to overcome the fact that the word *travesti* is linked by many with prostitution, violence, poverty, and disease" (Silva 223). When discussions turn toward eliminating the term *travesti* altogether, since *transsexual* already describes living one's life as a woman, in this way refusing difference based on biology or surgery, *travesti* Rubi rejects the idea, reminding everyone, "All of you forget that when the LGBT movement was created in Brazil, while gays were protected in their homes, it was the *travestis* who were being beaten up in the streets by police and clients. You forget that it was the *travestis* who fought for citizenship in Brazil. You forget that it was us who literally got punched in the face" (Silva 224). Rubi

refuses to identify with a transgender position that implies she has surgically transitioned. Her male parts are part of her identity, as well as an archive of her history as a *travesti* and of the oscillations between visibility and violence, cultural representation and social marginalization, that she has had to endure. Though Rubi seems to underscore anxiety about biological differences that have come with cultural marginalization, predicated on the *travesti* having male genitalia, her position reveals how transgender subjectivity may be unmoored from binary anchor points even as gender recognition remains vitally important. Jack Halberstam argues that transgender describes a relationality, “not simply an identity but a relation between people, within a community, or within intimate bonds. . . [important] to people who want to place themselves in the way of particular forms of recognition” (*In a Queer* 85). It remains important to Rubi that her history as a *travesti* is signified in her identity and with her body. In some ways the globalized discourses of LGBTQ+ communities dispossess the *travesti* of cultural significance. Yet, in others the oscillation between terms may continue to make peripheries within peripheries. Vittar, however, undergirds a queer thriving predicated on the shifting of paradigms and peripheries away from violent oscillations that are moored in biological and cultural sediments, and toward more intimate and imbricated social relationships of care. The collaborative intimacy in Vittar’s work is in an unsettling relationship with these unfolding elaborations of *travesti* and transgender, and she gives us a material archive of that tension in the reverberations of her voice.

### **Trans Tessitura**

Vittar’s success in popular music is surprising beyond her visual provocations, and though she continues to grow in celebrity, in accolades and in success, Vittar’s countertenor

voice remains a point of contestation. In critical reception and media descriptions, Vittar's voice proves to be a confounding meeting ground where cultural anxieties over gendered conventions of voice play out. Vittar's success as a drag queen has come mainly through music and videos in which she sings with her own voice. As a drag queen, singing in her own voice is a peculiar, if not unprecedented feature. While drag queens are known for lip-syncing to music in theatrical performances, superstar American drag queen Rupaul first broke into the mainstream by singing in her own voice, with the dance song "Supermodel (You Better Work)" (*Supermodel of the World*, Tommy Boy, 1992). That release catapulted Rupaul's career into the mainstream as well. *Rupaul's Drag Race*, the award-winning North American drag competition TV show, frames the lip-synch, where queens mouth the words to a song as they act it out in dance or other creative ways, as the ultimate drag talent. Drag queens voicing the feminine, however, have also been a vital part of drag culture. In Esther Newton's groundbreaking ethnographic work on drag culture *Mother Camp* (1972), she notes how vocalizing was an element of drag performance, and how some of the drag queens used their voices to give "the impression of femininity...more by the intonation, stress, and pronunciation than by the pitch itself. This intonation is parodying sweetness, rather mincing. It is a convincing imitation of affected female speech and style," while the "the tone and stress" could also be varied "for special effects, especially to break the female illusion" (72). Newton shows how in drag performance the voice could convey a gendered representation and also disrupt the illusion of femininity through an array of vocal techniques.

Vittar, however, in interviews, in social media videos, and in video recordings sings and speaks in the same strident countertenor voice, yet critics have implied she has modified it, fakes it, stretches it, damages it, and does all sorts of things to her voice, in an effort to explain its

particular quality. In performance or in social contexts, the voice is subject to gendered social and cultural conventions, and, as Suzanne Cusick argues, musical performances make bodies culturally intelligible as gendered and sexed (25-49). Cusick marks vocalization as a crossing, from inside the body to its external borders, that is then received into a cultural context. “Voices are always performances of a relationship negotiated between the individual vocalizer and the vocalizer's culture...all voices, but especially singing voices, perform the borders of the body” (29). She marks how vocalizing crosses the borders of the body, as voice leaves one body and reaches another. In comparing song to speech, Cusick argues, “Song, like Speech, is always a performance of the idea of subjectivity (in the sense of inner life) ... The act of singing a song is always an act that replicates acceptance of patterns that are intelligible to one's cohort in a culture,” (29). She notes how singing and subjectivity are in relation to one another,

For most of us, successful functioning depends on learning vocalizations that will both delineate the... borders of our body by continually crossing them and console ourselves over the discovery of borders by crossing them in a way that affirms both the perception, ‘I am still here. I hear myself,’ and the perception ‘I am still here. They can hear me. If I shape my vocalizations to be intelligible to them, I can retain some control. (29)

Cusick underscores a vocal dispossession, where to assert our own being requires hearing ourselves and knowing that we have been heard by others. Our intelligibility is dependent on another's recognition of our voice.

For transgender people, the vulnerability of reception marks a vocal relationality, where transgender voices desire to be heard as particular gendered forms of recognition but may not be able to affect the outcome. Beyond the discursive significations of speech, Andrew Anastasia



suggests that voices have “something to say about the body's age, sex, race, nationality, or ability.” He argues, “How others make sense of a trans\* voice, especially relative to one's physical appearance, can provoke great anxiety or pleasure. The voice . . . can pierce us in unexpected ways, turning us toward (or away from) another in an acoustic and affective register. . . . One can never predict how our voices will be heard, and unpredictable reception is part of the voice's value” (262). Anastasia shows how voices can mark a site of anxiety or pleasure depending on the desired reception. This instability operates in both directions, as Cusick's concept of vocal border-crossing suggests, where there may be pleasure or anxiety in the vocalization, and also at the site of reception as our voices are heard and made intelligible to those within range. Transgender subjectivities, then, may have visible and vocal components. Transgender people may undergo vocal modification, through hormones and vocal exercises, to shift vocal ranges toward voice types conventionally associated with either male or female voices.

Vittar's countertenor male voice type is located in a history of transgressive voice and body modification, particularly in performance. The castrati were singing eunuchs, castrated at a young age before the onset of puberty to keep their voices high and unchanged. Castrati were utilized throughout Europe at least from the mid-sixteenth century in liturgical music and in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in opera, though a history of castration as subjugation and singing eunuchs predates this tradition.<sup>32</sup> Historically, as Joke Dame shows, castrati and countertenors have been associated with androgyny, hermaphroditism, sexual ambiguity, femininity, conveying a sense of the angelic, the weak and the nonhuman. However, Dame also notes how, when the male body from which the voice emits is considered, countertenors are

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<sup>32</sup> For more information on eunuchs see Shaun Tougher, 2002; For more on the liturgical and operatic castrati, see Richard Sherr, 1980.

perceived as “powerful and strong” with a voice that “penetrates the accompaniment... with tremendous staying power,” suggesting the “castrato’s virility, the phallus, has been displaced into his voice” (142-143). Vittar’s voice is a material locus of all these significations. The countertenor’s traditional male voice type can move into high registers of the female range. In this way, it is a transgender voice, and Vittar’s countertenor is in tension with histories of castration, transgender voice modification, vocal penetrations, and enmeshed in her own non-conforming, ambivalent relationship to her male body.

Vittar’s voice as a locus of meanings confounds her critics, and suggest a voice type unmoored from binary anchor points, remaining unsettling, unintelligible, even as it sounds out, is heard, affects others, and affirms Vittar’s own subjectivity. To my ears, Vittar’s voice is high-pitched and powerful. She is very comfortable belting it out on stage and in recorded works. While she is often soft-spoken in interviews and on social media, still with the same high-pitched voice but deployed gently and shyly, her singing is forceful, loud without reserve. It is a piercing voice. It stands out among beats, synthesizers and other vocal tracks, and it has caused much discussion. Noted Brazilian MPB, soul and jazz musician Ed Motta stated publicly through his social media accounts that Vittar’s rendition of Whitney Houston’s “I Have Nothing,” which Vittar recorded and uploaded to YouTube in her initial attempts at being a performer, made him cry in its beauty. His praise sparked mixed reactions and confusion about whether or not Vittar can actually sing well. Brazilian newspaper *Estado de Minas* brought together a panel of music scholars and performers to evaluate Vittar’s singing, unable, apparently, to distinguish for themselves if what they were hearing was pleasurable or painful (Peixoto).

The panel convened judged Vittar’s voice in ways that oscillate between placing her within a known and recognized tradition of countertenor singers, and marking her voice as rare,

unique, odd, off, undisciplined, or interesting. In doing so they debated whether she has modified her voice hormonally, or if she pulls her voice out of its *tessitura*. In vocal performance, *tessitura* is the range where a singer's voice is most comfortable performing. It is not the full extent of the vocal range, but rather the place along that range where a singer's voice spends the most time, feels the most characteristic, and resonates with a texture and timbre particular to each performer. Professor of voice at Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais and countertenor in the Coral Lírico de Minas Gerais, Sérgio Anders called Vittar's voice infantilized and attributed its high pitch to "questões hormonais" ("hormonal questions"), suggesting Vittar has taken hormones to affect her voice, something Vittar has not admitted or claimed. Anders also suggests that Vittar goes beyond her *tessitura* in her songs, placing the blame for his unsettled reception of her voice on her refusal to sing in her proper vocal median. His admonishing of what he considers to be Vittar's unruliness by refusing to sing in her proper *tessitura* suggests ways in which gendered voices are policed through reception. Anders accuses Vittar of willfully stretching her voice beyond a rightful *tessitura*, causing her voice to be strained, sharper than it would be otherwise. He suggests if she sings a bit lower on her range, "Vai ficar mais agradável" ("It will be more pleasing") (Peixoto).

Lara Tanaka, also a part of the Coral Lírico de Minas Gerais, places Vittar in a long history of men who sing in feminine voices such as the castrati. Though she says Vittar has a good vocal range, she thinks at times Vittar is yelling, and warns of the risks in improper vocal technique over time. The unsettling nature of Vittar's voice is here attributed to a lack of discipline. Singer Marcelo Veronez puts a performative spin on Vittar's vocalizations, celebrating her career and success as allowing us to hear something different than what the public is used to. He claims that Vittar's most important voice is in the discussions that she

provokes towards acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities and desires. He hears her voice in a politicized way and argues that questions on whether she has a good or bad voice are part of a history of class hierarchies masked in aesthetic formations, of high art vs low art, pointing to several successful contemporary Brazilian women singers with less than perfect voices. Letícia Reis claims that Vittar is breaking with conventions, and hears Vittar's voice as representative of freedom of expression tied to the proliferation of LGBTQ+ cultural visibility. Moreover, she also puts Vittar in a Brazilian genealogy of countertenor voices by mentioning Edson Cordeiro. Still another analysis, by voice instructor Tassiana Oliveira, affirms Vittar's ability to hit difficult notes, declaring her vocal reach interesting. Soprano Gabriella Crimi agrees, and judges Vittar's voice as special, with the potential of becoming a classical or operatic singer with, of course, much needed training. While the panel seems mostly positive on Vittar's career and success, they are less so on her technique and repertoire, there is still even more uncertainty as to whether they find her voice to be pleasurable or painful, underscored by the multiple accusations of yelling, straining, and undisciplined singing.

In Vittar's confounding voice, evident in the confused and unsettling reception and judgement she receives from the panel of experts above, I mark a tessitura that is particularly trans. A *trans tessitura* does not map onto the body that vocalizes it according to heterosexist, cisgender norms, and seems unintelligible as part of a repertoire of gendered voices. The judgements above insist on Vittar's voice as particular, even if located in a genealogy of transgender voices. Moreover, Anders's accusation of Vittar having modified her voice, or singing beyond what should be her tessitura, marks a site in which a trans tessitura is differentiated from tessituras of voices perceived as unmodified, whether hormonally or willfully manipulated. Vittar's trans tessitura disrupts Anders's judgement and disturbs him enough to

prompt a suggestion that she could sound more pleasing if she wanted to. This accusation implicitly charges Vittar not only with a willful transgression of vocalized gender norms but also of willful aberration, resembling homo- and transphobic aspersions of gender and sexuality as unnecessary, unnatural choices. Conversely, Anders marks the potential of a trans tessitura to provoke curiosity, judgment and derision, even as it remains unintelligible. A trans tessitura can be the median vocal range of the vocalizer, the voice at its most characteristic – in the way that Vittar very comfortably sings and speaks in her voice type – even as it is heard as discordant, disorienting, and bristling when received through cisgender heteronormative cultural conventions. A trans tessitura marks both a comfort and a tension; it is the trans voice at its most complacent and unsettling points. Beyond performance, a trans voice may provoke unintended recognitions and anxiety for those desiring to pass as a gender to which their tessitura does not fully comply. A trans tessitura is also the potential for this moment of unsettling affect turned back on the speaker. Recalling Anastasia’s observation of the unpredictability of vocal reception, as anxiety and value, a trans tessitura may affect pleasure and pain, for either speaker or listener, or both – the anxiety and the value are interchangeable. A transgender man whose voice signifies as female in its most comfortable range is in tension with the body that vocalizes it. The trans tessitura has the affective potential of pleasing or unsettling performer and audience, speaker and listener, alike. A trans tessitura is, thus, the median that is also the extreme. It may sound out at the most pleasurable point even as it provokes the question, doubt, concern, enticement, curiosity, ambiguity, danger, and risk of transgression.

The trans tessitura unsettles as it fails gendered conventions of voice type in speech and in song. Anastasia writes, “Trans\* voices can fail to make sense in spectacular ways when our voices no longer provide adequate evidence for the bodies that emit them” (263). In Vittar’s

music, she spectacularly presents in performance a hyper-feminized form, traditionally seen in a Luso-Brazilian cultural matrix as the *travesti*, who is seldom heard or given legitimacy within normative discourses of gender and sexuality. Vittar's voice pierces that cultural matrix as she stridently sings out in her comfortable range, that does not get legitimized as female, but exhibits poignant intersections of critique with female voices that may be heard as troublesome, irritating, unsettling of heteronormative and patriarchal paradigms. For all her success, Vittar's voice is often derided by critics and even some fans, as *chata* (annoying), if not altogether awful. Yet, their dispersions of Vittar's voice as irritating show that her tessitura gets under their skin as it leaves her own, a border-crossing that upends gendered differences mapped on to skin through vocal reverberations that arouse – voice as body into bodies. Vittar dismisses her detractors:

Dou muita risada quando dizem: 'Ela é linda, mas a voz é muito chata'. Eu amo a minha voz! Ela é fina, aguda, diferente. É com essa voz que faço sucesso, que subo ao palco e canto... Então amores, podem continuar falando porque eu amo a minha voz, se não gosta é só não ouvir. (I laugh when they say: 'She is pretty by her voice is irritating.' I love my voice. It's refined, strident, different. It's with this voice that I am a success, that I get up on stage and sing... So, my loves, you can keep talking because I love my voice, and if you don't, then don't listen to it.)

(Aguar).

Loving her voice in all its strident qualities, Vittar tells naysayers they can choose to not listen. But can they? It is admittedly hard to avoid Vittar in Brazilian popular culture and music at the present moment. She is a top-charting success with collaborations across music, TV and other media. Vittar's trans tessitura is amplified in this spectacular mass-mediated way well beyond her body.

Vittar's success points to the value of her tessitura in its enjoyment, and in how it continues to unsettle conventions of gendered voice in Brazilian popular music. The first single from her latest album *Não para Não* (Sony Music Brasil, 2018), "Problema Seu" seems to tease and exploit Vittar's ability to seduce and unsettle. The first word she sings is her name, projected in her tessitura, while the lyrics then go on to suggest that her ability to provoke is not her problem; it's your problem. "Meu corpo te enlouqueceu; Problema, problema seu; Se você gosta de mim... Quem mandou você se apaixonar?" ("My body drives you crazy; That's your problem; If you've fallen for me, who told you to?"). It is a fitting reversal of Anders's claim that Vittar's voice unsettles because she willfully sings beyond what he deems her proper tessitura. "Problema Seu" turns the onus back onto the listener to consider the cultural contexts and gendered conventions of body, sound and sex that mark Vittar's voice as a problem. She states, in song, and in her resonating trans tessitura, that the problem lies outside her and not within. The song also provocatively asks her audience to consider why they find her so compelling – confirmed by billions of views on social media, and high-profile artistic engagements. Her extensive visibility and popularity enable her trans tessitura to enmesh us in an intimate, and confounding relationality of trans voice, body and desire.

Vittar sounds out a queer resilience in unsettling timbres, which locate her in a genealogy of transgender voices in Brazil and also map onto a terrain of queer black diaspora cultures and practices. She is scheduled to appear as a guest judge on *RuPaul's Drag Race* in 2019 and credits RuPaul for her own drag identity, telling online media outlet *Remezcla* "I am a daughter of RuPaul" (Froio). Vittar's claiming of a drag mother beyond Brazil projects her into a transatlantic configuration of black culture and queer communities of African diaspora that connect Harlem and Brazil. Vittar uses a language of kinship when discussing RuPaul, invoking

practices of a black queer diaspora that have transatlantic histories and resonances. Chosen families are a mainstay of queer communities. Drag queens often take on daughters who are fledgling queens in the process of perfecting their art. Moreover, Harlem's drag balls and ballroom culture are made up of houses, or families, with a head mother in charge. These queer configurations of kin have historical and diasporic precedents. James Sweet connects Afro-Brazilian spiritual practices of *condomblé* to African gender variance through the *pais de santos*, priests in rituals that may be homosexual and are perceived to be penetrated by the *candomblé* deities (198), a role reserved for women (Landes). Ruth Landes's 1947 ethnography of *candomblé*, *The City of Women*, recorded how these *terreiros*, or houses of ritual practice, are more than places of worship. They are also communities of care, with a head mother, a *mãe de santo*, under whom others would take tutelage, seek protection, and where homosexual and gender-variant Afro-Brazilians, men and women, could form bonds outside of heteronormative, Luso-Brazilian society. These diaspora archives offer a compounding configuration of black queer cultural practices of kinship and care in which queer of color bodies and desires come together, and in which mothers and mother-figures play central roles. Vittar's claiming of RuPaul as a mother resonates in Brazil, however, with black mothers of a different kind. Vittar has been compared and analyzed against Ney Matogrosso as the other primary example of a countertenor voice and queer Brazilian popular music artist. It is also through Matogrosso, unexpectedly, and particularly through his 1975 solo debut, that a Brazilian black mother resurfaces as material resonance within a genealogy of queer and trans voices, exposing and refiguring occluded bodies and voices that underpin normative formations of Brazilian nationalist discourse of race and nation.



## **Queer Cacophony – Ney Matogrosso**

Ney Matogrosso topped Brazilian popular music charts as the singer for the rock band Secos e Molhados, which debuted in 1972, with a slender figure and a strident countertenor voice. His immediate success with that band translated into an established solo career that continues today as he approaches 78 years of age. When he first began, however, Brazil was under a military dictatorship aligned with US capitalist interest, but which controlled and censored political and cultural dissent. Music, however, was a site of ample creative production at this time, with the emergence of Tropicalism, or Tropicália in 1967, which ushered in a “universal sound” that blended progressive rock influences from the US and the UK with more classic Brazilian rhythms, arrangements and references, such as bossa nova and samba (Dunn, *Brutality Garden* 65). In the context of global social and political upheaval of the long 1960s, Brazil’s traditional outlets for gender and sexual transgression took on more modern contours. Theatrical group Dzi Croquettes put on flamboyant, androgynous, and homoerotic productions (Dunn, *Contracultura* 188-190), while Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil had also styled themselves on stage and as intimate friends in ambiguously homoerotic ways (Dunn, *Contracultura* 176). Urban artists of popular culture were permitted some room for cultural provocations masked in innuendo and allegory, as Tropicália had proven, though the regime rounded up and imprisoned Veloso and Gil in 1969, who were then exiled in London for two years. Their musical transgression, however, opened the genre of Brazilian popular music to electrified and progressive rock from Anglo-American influences, as well as other music, such as African American soul and funk.

Though Tropicália transgressed genres, and their more visible artists played with homoeroticism, it was Matogrosso, in his debut with Secos e Molhados in 1972, who

materialized in body and voice gender and sexual transgressions. Matogrosso had begun affirming his homosexuality by the mid-1970s to the press (Dunn, *Contracultura* 194). On stage, he wore make-up and adorned his half-naked body with beads, feathers, and talismans, among other things. In performance he would sway, dance, and move in suggestive ways. His voice punctuated his provocative stage presence, ringing out in a radiant countertenor that could travel from sensual feminine tones into high-pitched, penetrating timbres. Matogrosso's voice, painted face, costuming and stage presence in *Secos e Molhados* underscored ambiguous references in their music with more overtly gay and homoerotic suggestions.<sup>33</sup> Matogrosso's 1975 solo debut *Água do Céu-Pássaro*, established his talents beyond the antics of showmanship. As a solo artist in charge of creative direction and able to select his own repertoire, Matogrosso's debut album delivered an audiovisual intervention in the cultural tropes and narratives of Brazilian heritage and history. Onto the terrain of his body and through his voice he maps a cacophonous and contrapuntal amalgam of Brazilian cultural and nationalist discourses heavily shaped by foundational myths of Brazilian society formed at the beginning of the twentieth-century, now consigned to an authoritarian regime.

For all of Matogrosso's provocative stage presence during his career, however, his voice has been a constant point of praise and contention. Cesar Braga-Pinto identifies Matogrosso as one of many "transgendered voices [that] have been present in Brazilian music for many decades" (189), while Christopher Dunn argues that Matogrosso was "the supreme avatar of [a] transgendered gay sensibility" during the "countercultural ethos" of the late sixties and early

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<sup>33</sup> *Secos e Molhados* first hit, "O Vira," (*Secos e Molhados* 1973) plays with a man turning into a werewolf, turning as a reference to sexual orientation, and the turns of a traditional Portuguese folkloric dance, while "Sangue Latino" (*Secos e Molhados* 1973) refigures the masculinist tropes of Latin culture through Ney's performance, from his countertenor to performing in face paint and feathers, topless with sashaying his hips. A video of a live performance of Sangue Latino can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zLicyzaH5A>

seventies popular culture and music in Brazil (*Brutality* 172). Both Dunn and Braga-Pinto mark Matogrosso's voice as transgressing the normative registers of male and female singers. As a countertenor, Matogrosso's voice plays with this ambiguity on his debut, transitioning from sensual to strident highs and a gritty mid-range often in the same song. Matogrosso explains, "A minha voz foi o grande impacto, porque as pessoas se perguntavam se era homem ou mulher" ("My voice was the big hit, because people wondered if I was a man or a woman") (Vaz 123). While his voice provoked associations with gender transgression, however, Matogrosso has not claimed any kind of transgender subjectivity or gender variant identity. On the contrary, he has said in interviews that he enjoys being a cisgender man. "Gosto de ser homem, sempre mostrei o peito cabeludo e nunca quis ser mulher na minha manifestação artística; procurei apenas checar o limite imposto entre o masculino e o feminino. E acho que o público sempre percebeu que era um homem fazendo tudo aquilo" ("I like being a man, and have Always shown my hairy chest and never wanted to be a woman in my artistic presentation; I sought only to test the imposed limit between the masculine and the feminine. And I think the public always knew I was a man in all that") (Vaz 87). Matogrosso's contestations of transgender identity echoes back to the *travesti's* tense and ambivalent relationship with male bodies and feminine presentation. Yet, recalling Anastasia's underscoring of the unpredictability of vocal reception, and Cusick's vocal border-crossings, the voice can mark an unintended gender transition.

During his initial years, a telling critique of Matogrosso reveals that regardless of intention, Matogrosso's voice triggered aversions to perceived gender transgression. One such aversion caused him to be censored from the pages of the cultural column, Caderno B, of *Jornal do Brasil* for approximately two years. Editor Walter Fontoura admitted to avoiding Ney in print, saying "Não gostava do cantor e das músicas. Para o meu gosta não se tratava de um artista.

Posso estar certo ou errado, mas não reconhecia nele méritos para sair no Caderno B. Detestava ouvir uma voz de mulher num homem... Continuo não gostando” (“I didn’t like the singer or his music. For my tastes, he wasn’t an artist. I might be right or wrong, but I didn’t see any merit in him to be featured in Caderno B. I hated hearing the voice of a women in a man... I continue disliking it”) (Vaz 87). Fontoura first builds his defense for censoring Matogrosso from his publication by dismissing the music and then the artist in a judgement of talent and merit, but betrays his transphobia when he proclaims his dislike for transgender voices. Though Matogrosso has not put himself in the way of a trans identity, his voice type provokes an affective response that infers a move across genders, and his detractors acted out in ways meant to silence him, an instance of transphobic violence retold without thought to the ways in which transgender voices are consistently snuffed out in Brazil. Yet, Matogrosso’s voice is amplified, not only in the success of his career, but notably in the saturation of sound and amalgam of visual references in contrapuntal tension with his trans tessitura.

In *Água do Céu-Pássaro*, Matogrosso moves beyond genre transgressions and towards a refiguring of his body and voice against a sonic landscape of tropical sounds and fuzzy guitars as a cacophonous critique of Luso-Afro-Brazilian history and hegemonic discourse. Matogrosso’s debut is a saturation of visual and sonic queer, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian references. In the photos that serves as album artwork, he looms as an assemblage of mythical and monstrous parts, a hybrid of man and tropical bird. His costume points to indigenous lore and imaginings through feathers, horns, and talismans, while European colonialism is suggested in leather and horsehair in a headdress that is both a beak and the battle helmet of a warrior. The sparse dark hair of his chest and abdomen are set against the whiteness of his skin. He wears very little else, and the photos on the inside album art suggest that beyond the headdress and the adornments of

on his upper body, he is almost naked. The photos show him posed in various positions, crouching on the ground, gesturing in attack, suggesting dance, and ritualistic movement. The album's name calls into being a formation that gestures toward indigenous mythology and Afro-Brazilian folklore, while implicitly invoking Brazil's vast territory, flora and fauna. A hieroglyph representing the album title adorns the back cover (Fig. 3).



Figure 3 – Front, back (top) and inside (bottom) album art.  
Ney Matogrosso, *Água do Céu-Pássaro* (1975)

Matogrosso's visual amalgam is part of a broader history of Brazilian cultural and aesthetic appropriations of indigeneity in abstracted forms. Modernist manifestos of the 1920s

root Brazilian modernity in *antropofagia*, a cultural cannibalism as the aesthetic gesture of devouring anything and everything that leads to the production of Brazilian particularities. Oswaldo de Andrade mobilizes cannibalism as an aesthetic force in his *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928), which suggests that Brazilian difference lies in this logic of devouring and digestion. Mário Lugarinho argues:

Oswald de Andrade posited difference as the indelible hallmark of our unique and exoticized relationship with the other” and offers *antropofagia* as a way to “understand the relative nature of the relationship between peripheral and core cultures.... Without clear centers, we are mediated through the act of ‘anthropophagy,’ that is, we devour the culture of the other, diluting our identity in an intense process of multiculturalization. Through such a perspective, we observe a certain ‘chaos’ in Brazilian culture, where there seem to be no clear hierarchies regulating symbolic exchanges. (280)

Imperatively, the aesthetic appropriation of a cannibalistic gesture that devours everything in the formation of Brazilian identity is a gesture that devours the indigenous referent it encapsulates, quite literally. While Brazil has a federal agency for the protection of indigenous peoples, and demarcated and protected indigenous lands, they have both been subsumed as historical abstraction into a modernity that has increasingly made their existence and territory precarious.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, Lugarinho’s underscoring of *antropofagia* as a chaos of peripheries and forms is visibly present on Matogrosso’s body in the album art, while the album production is a discordant soundscape of vocal and geographic terrain. Songs bleed into each other without dead

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<sup>34</sup> Recently declarations by the Bolsonaro administration has sharpened the threat with intentions to incorporate indigenous lands into the national terrain, predicated on a discourse that the tribes have essentially already assimilated into a general Brazilian way of being, and lands should be assimilated as well.

air or pauses to separate them. Rather, the sounds of wildlife, wind and water transition the album from one track to the next. “Homem de Neanderthal” opens the album with a fade-in of bird squawks, monkey calls, and the hissing of a forest alive with life, giving way to thunderclaps and rain, blaring horns and, finally, Matogrosso’s voice introducing himself as a primitive man picking snails riverside. His howl turns sultry as the next verses spill out in supple tones. “Eu vivo apenas com meus próprios meios; eu vivo em penas com meus sentimentos” (“I live only within my means; I live in pity/feathers with my feelings”). The verses are implicitly seductive and suggestive of many meanings. *Penas* can mean feathers, and is also the word for pity, punishment, and may suggest pain as well. When *a* is added, as in *apenas*, it suggests simplicity. Notably, as he sings about feathers, pity and punishment, feathers adorn Matogrosso’s body on the album art. He sings *apenas* to say he only has these simple adornments, and then teasingly twists it into feathers and perhaps pity, in sensual turns of phrase. Meanwhile, his outfit in all of its materials is a fetishistic composition, and the feathers on his body, on his headdress, and in his lyrics are in context with his feminine voice and his atavistic styling. Together, he renders *penas* (feathers) as vectors of sentimentality and sexuality, sorrow and shame, pity and punishment, regret and compassion, fetish, bondage, and sadomasochism.

Matogrosso’s abstract indigeneity is compounded with these material resonances and implicit references of sex. The feathers which cover his body are also the vectors through which his transgender voice sings out against a saturated soundscape that evokes terrain, wildlife, and an overwhelming of the senses. It is a configuration of queerness that touches on early European accounts upon arriving in Brazil in the 1500s detailing anxiety over queer sexual practices of indigenous people they encountered. Europeans noted the pervasiveness of same-sex acts with piqued curiosity if not desire. João Silvério Trevisan notes how Europeans perceived the

nefarious sin of sodomy as raging through the indigenous population like a contagion (4-5), where gender roles were not clearly defined according to the European patriarchal binary of male strength and female fragility. Trevisan shows how there were “men-women and women-men,” men who gave themselves freely and openly to sex with other men, young boys sequestered together at play through sex or at work in delicate tasks of weaving, and other “incidences of same-sex relations” that both shocked and fascinated western onlookers and marked everyone as living in scandalous conditions below the equator (7). Matogrosso’s putting on of talismans, feathers, horsehair, leather, and a headdress as a vector through which to hear his transgender voice, as he sings about being a lonely and sentimental primitive man, resurfaces these queer sexualities and gender transgressions. Feathers can be both BDSM fetish gear and part of delicate handiwork. As part of his headdress, they are both delicate adornments and signifiers of virility. In his provocative twists of phrase and vocal suggestions, and in his costuming, his trans voice is embodied as at once delicate and a powerful, penetrative force, a queer vocal phallus.

Matogrosso compounds his sexually transgressive image and voice with a track list that travels through Brazilian history and references, all while he remains captured in album art as a turned-on, vulnerable and virile vestige of queer indigeneity. A cacophony of references transitions the album from the opening number to citars in “O Corsário” and “Idade de ouro” that may be intended to invoke Portuguese colonialism by gesturing toward Moorish Iberian history. “Cubanacan” and “América do Sul” play on Brazil’s positionality in a Hispanic Southern Hemisphere. “Açúcar candy” has almost explicit references to oral sex with explosions of sweet confections that climax in an aural orgasm, while “Bodas” brings together canons, war, and violence in a subtle critique of the military dictatorship in place at the time of the album’s release. It is a disorienting embodiment and audiovisual assemblage, cacophonous in sound,



song, and affective resonances – from orgasms, to melancholy, adventure to loss, and Luso-Brazilian to Latin American. Yet, it is not white noise. Rather, each element adds to the soundscape expanding the field of engagement and reception, and multiplying possible sites of intersection.

Matogrosso's cacophony does not reduce his references, his voice, and his visual presentation to unintelligible noise. Rather, they emerge as a polyphony of intensities, a collaboration of incommensurable affects. Jodi Byrd offers cacophony as "the competing representations of diasporic arrivals and native lived experiences" that encounter each other within discursive, cultural and political spheres (14). Matogrosso's debut performs this encounter in voice, body and repertoire. Queer and indigenous resonances emerge not as cannibalized monolithic narrative but as colliding desires and rematerialized histories. Byrd argues for cacophony as a methodology of reading the (post) colonial conditions of "contradictorily hegemonic and horizontal struggles . . . discordant incommensurabilities and misapplied representations that try to pass themselves off as coherent, consistent, and real" (53). Though Matogrosso's album brings all of these tracks together through his voice, under a hieroglyphic banner meant to evoke a bent constellation of the Southern Cross that is stamped on the album back cover, they are not in consensus, nor do they give way one to the other. Rather, as in a polyphonic contrapuntal composition, they each unfold in their own manners as part of an elaborate, intricate and incommensurable whole. Music, voice, sound and album art unfold in multidirectional and multirelational tensions. His howling, primitive man butts up against the leather and horsehair. His sweet sugar orgasms are followed by references to military weapons and war. His transgender voice is tasked at being feminine and masculine, and moving up and down his vocal range. These intense dispositions are strands of the same song, part of the same

headdress, but they are not the same. As intervention, Byrd suggests cacophony can make audible the “multiple colonial experiences grounded not only in race but gender, indigeneity, conquest, and sexuality as well” (53). It is a cacophonous “multidirectionality [that] creates the possibility for memory and resistance to forge alliances across historical and cultural experiences in opposition to the competitions upon which colonialism relies” (53).

The cacophonous tension of this album is replicated in Matogrosso’s trans tessitura in counterpoint to the monolithic and gendered discourse of racial hierarchies in Brazil. Gilberto Freyre’s *Casa Grande e Senzala (The Masters and the Slaves)* (1933) mobilizes miscegenation as the mechanism through which modern Brazil can claim to be a racial democracy, and casts the Portuguese colonizer, or Luso-Brazilian elite male, as sexual, political and moral authority. The close proximity of the master’s house to the slave quarters engendered intimate encounters, according to Freyre’s lusotropicalism, which mitigates the power dynamics between master and slave, and casts Portuguese colonization as a gentler, more benevolent, colonialism.

Matogrosso’s cacophony, however, serves as intervention in the reductive and flattening miscegenation that Freyre employs, and begins to unravel myths of benevolent colonialism, showing a misappropriation of a language of kinship that covers the gendered and racist violence of slavery in Brazilian history. Midway through *Água do Céu-Pássaro*, Matogrosso sings a Portuguese fado and makes an unexpected alliance with Afro-Brazilian history and resonances by breaking with conventions of song and gender, and resurfacing an Afro-Brazilian lament. Matogrosso’s recording of the iconic Portuguese fado “Barco Negro” that he renames “Mãe Preta (Barco Negro),” points to the original Brazilian samba “Mãe Preta,” whose melody was recast as a Portuguese fado. Beyond a disorientation of titles and genres, Matogrosso also resurfaces the Brazilian archetype of the *mãe-preta*, the black mammie figure of Brazilian

history that is a central figure in Freyrean narratives of Brazilian society, through a vocal performance of overwhelming and affected femininity.

### **Cries Like a Woman**

The original “Mãe Preta” was composed by Caco Velho (Matheus Nunes) and Piratini (Antônio Amábile), and recorded by Conjunto Tocantins in 1943. The lyrics offer a picture of life under slavery in Brazil through multipart harmonies, rhythmic guitars and a soft samba beat singing the life of the *mãe preta*, the black mother or mammie, an enslaved African or Afro-Brazilian wet nurse, nanny, and much more, who was taken up out of the slave quarters and sent into the big house to care for the master’s family. The *mãe preta* is the material embodiment of Freyre’s domestic drama projected as foundational national narrative, forced to nurture the master’s family, and expected to be grateful for it. The lyrics tell of *mãe preta* caring lovingly for her master’s children in the big house while wiping away tears as her own love is beaten in the slave quarters:

Era assim que <i>mãe preta</i> fazia	This is how <i>mãe preta</i> did it
Criava todo branco com muita alegria	Raised all the whites with joy
Enquanto na senzala	While in the slave house
seu bem apanhava	Her love was beaten
<i>Mãe preta</i> mais uma lágrima enxugava	<i>Mãe preta</i> dried another tear
<i>Mãe preta, mãe preta.</i>	<i>Mãe preta, mãe preta</i>
Enquanto a chibata batia em seu amor	While the whip lashed her love
<i>Mãe preta</i> embalava	<i>Mãe preta</i> cradled
O filho branco do sinhô	The master’s white son

It is a startling narrative of the physical and emotional violence of slavery visited specifically upon African and Afro-Brazilian women, separated from their own partners and families and made to nurture their oppressors. This is not the song Matogrosso records, however.

This original “Mãe Preta” is recorded by different singers that maintain the melody and lyrics,<sup>35</sup> until it appears in Portugal in 1955, completely transformed into a Portuguese fado, with new lyrics by David Mourão Ferreira, sung by Portuguese fado diva Amália Rodrigues. The song’s name was changed from “Mãe Preta” (“Black Mother”) to “Barco Negro (“Black Boat”). All that remains in Amália’s fado is the original melody, though dragged out of samba time and into fado’s more somber pacing. The only other indication that “Barco Negro” and “Mãe Preta” are the same song is that both titles make a reference to blackness – the black mother of the original Brazilian tune is now the black boat of Portuguese nationalist lament. Interestingly, Amália’s album labeled the song as “Barco Negro (Mãe Preta),” and credited the original songwriters for the melody. Though it was almost unrecognizable, the Brazilian black mother was parenthetically hovering over the Portuguese black boat. Twenty years after Amália’s recording, Matogrosso record’s her Portuguese fado and flips the names, calling his fado “Mãe Preta” (Barco Negro).” He reverts back to the original title, but holds the Portuguese black boat in parenthetical tension over black mother. Though he changes the fado’s name to honor the original tune, he records Amália’s Portuguese fado, singing Ferreira’s lyrics of a sailor lost at

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<sup>35</sup> David Ferreira, son of David Mourão Ferreira gives a history of the song’s iterations, from the first cover by Maria da Conceição with a pace and mood much more akin to Portuguese fado in Portugal either in 1952 or 1954, to other versions back in Brazil by Ester Abreu and Edson Lopes. The song was popular and traveled in different versions from Portugal to Angola, still under Portuguese colonial rule, and Brazil. Ferreira writes that in 1954-1955, his father, who had been writing poems for Amália’s fados, was solicited by the French filmmakers of *Les amantes du Tago* to write a fado for Amália to sing in their film. Ferreira does not explain why his father chose this melody but does disprove an often-repeated misconception that the Estado Novo censorship of the original caused Ferreira’s version to be written by pointing out Angolan band Duo Ouro Negro recorded a version of “Mãe Preta” in 1961 that was indeed censored by the Estado Novo. David Ferreira’s history can be found here: <http://www.valor.com.br/cultura/5116154/cancao-do-sambista-caco-velho-foi-%3Freimportada%3F-para-o-brasil>

sea, lyrics which dislocate the song away from the Brazilian plantation's big house and slave quarters and anchor it firmly on Portuguese shores and in Portuguese nationalist contours.

Opting for a layered arrangement of guitars, drums, and howling winds, Matogrosso's fado fits into the album's cacophonous layers of sound. The song begins with a crescendo of howling wind that leads into an upbeat tempo and a mix of instrumentation, from rhythmic guitars and piano to the Afro-Brazilian berimbau, while the familiar melody of the fado is plucked out on a guitar. As Matogrosso begins to sing, his countertenor takes on the female voice of the fado's protagonist who awakens on the sandy beach pleading softly for her lost lover's return. She has a vision of a black cross, a shipwreck, and her lover waving farewell. When older women insist that her lover is lost forever, the fado reaches a climax of fierce indignation. Matogrosso's countertenor voices out her powerful rejection, "São loucas! São loucas..." ("They're crazy! They're crazy..."). At this point in Amália's version and in the lyrics, the protagonist accepts that though her lover may not return, she feels him all around her, as she hums, resigned to her fate. Matogrosso, however, does not follow this pattern. After singing strident and aching "Ais!," guitars, drums and howling winds tumultuously head toward a fade out. Yet, Matogrosso refuses to relent. He does not leave the moment of anguish and trauma, and he does not hum. Rather, he drags out the ending into an exquisite drama, sobbing openly. The music fades out completely and all that is left is Matogrosso as a distraught woman weeping.

Matogrosso's intense ending prompted noted music critic and historian Jose Ramos Tinhorão to write, "Ney ficava chorando igual que uma mulherzinha," ("Ney stayed crying just like a little woman") (Vaz 87). Tinhorão's use of the diminutive of woman, *mulherzinha* (little woman), suggests he meant this as a negative critique. Definitions of *mulherzinha* describe it as a pejorative used to mark a vulgar, excessive and off-putting performance of womanhood or

femininity, such as a young girl acting out in a womanly fashion, or overly dramatic displays of emotion. It can also be used to describe an effeminate man.<sup>36</sup> Underscoring an aversion to the cries and sobs at the end of “Mãe Preta (Barco Negro),” Tinhorão reveals the unsettling effect of Matogrosso’s voice, and particularly of Matogrosso’s voice as a crying woman. For the entirety of the song, Matogrosso is a woman, singing the role of a woman waiting for her lover lost at sea in gendered grammar without changes. Tinhorão, however, points directly to the sobbing as excessive. His is not an aversion of Matogrosso singing a woman’s part. Rather, he is mocking Matogrosso’s voice as it cries like a woman, melodramatic, unsettling in its excessively affective performance. He uses *mulherzinha* to suggest Matogrosso as a crying woman is overtly exaggerated and implicitly false. Tinhorão uses it to disparage an excessively feminine display, to silence the sounds of feminine suffering by implying their falsity. Tinhorão marks Matogrosso’s womanly weeping not just as a move across genders but towards a vulgar and aberrant form of woman – one that would cry out in suffering and complaint.

Matogrosso’s extended weeping reverberates as an unsettling of normative gender and genre conventions, and a disruption of discourses that have historically silenced moments of gendered violence and trauma in the formation of Luso-Brazilian society and identities. It is a moment in which Matogrosso goes beyond Portuguese fado form. Fado singers often “hover on the break of sob” but do not actually cry so as not to “rupture [the] form” or lose control” (Gray 41-2). Ney, however, does not relinquish the melodrama. He breaks with genre conventions, and breaks out of this fado altogether. His extended sobbing reverberates across time, moving past Amália’s imprint, letting all the music fade out. With the song emptied of music, and only his

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<sup>36</sup> Michaelis Dicionário Brasileiro da língua portuguesa: <http://michaelis.uol.com.br/moderno-portugues/busca/portugues-brasileiro/mulherzinha/>; Infopedia Dicionários Porto Editora: <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/lingua-portuguesa-ao/mulherzinha>, both accessed on February 22, 2018.

weeping resonating, Matogrosso allows the cries of another woman, also once deemed vulgar and aberrant, to be heard. Rather than a little woman, however, Matogrosso's crying voice reaches back to resurface the tears of the *mãe preta* (black mother/mammie), enshrined in and then erased from the original lyrics of "Mãe Preta." This black mother looms very large in Brazilian nationalist discourse. Where the original lyrics of "Mãe Preta" describe the black mother as hiding her tears, and Mourão Ferreira's lyrics do not mention the black mother at all, erasing her narrative from the Brazilian melody, Ney rematerializes the black mother at the very heart of the Portuguese fado, by allowing his feminine sobs and weeping to ring out.

Rather than insipid, his cries reveal a transatlantic history of violence and subjugation that forces a reckoning with the deep-rooted nationalist mythology of the benevolent Portuguese colonialism of Luso-Brazilian lore. His cries are amplified as the tears of the black mother through song title and, paradoxically, through his recording of the Portuguese fado. Matogrosso's cries, called false, and overly feminine, unmasks the complicity in Luso-Brazilian discourse of race, gender and nation that undergird lusophone cultural matrixes. Matogrosso's unrelenting weeping turns the accusation of falsity back on this matrix, which is rooted in Freyrean lusotropicalism and the particular place of honor Gilberto Freyre ascribes to the *mãe preta* within that configuration. Matogrosso's weeping within a fado mobilizes the figure of the *mãe preta* in a critique that unsettles both Brazilian and Portuguese nationalist discourse of a benevolent society. Allowing the black mother to cry drags out the falsity of her invention as an honored member of the master's family, and reveals the gendered violence of the transatlantic slave trade doubly put upon her, occluded by discourses of racial solidarity in Brazil, and erased altogether from Portuguese nationalist discourse of seafaring adventurers.

## Black Mothers and Black Boats

Freyre lays the groundwork for a Brazilian national mythology of racial democracy on the figure of the *mãe preta*, who looms in Freyre's narrative with a centrality that places her at the heart of the master's big house and its intimate labors. Freyre's work refigures Portuguese colonization as a promiscuous enterprise (27), primarily in narrating colonial violence as a domestic and intimate affair, meted out in mixed-race sexual trysts and marriages by lustful overlords lacking white women in a lusotropicalist discourse of miscegenation. He offers this sexual violence as a place of compromise, where the distance between master and slave is mitigated. It is the *mãe preta*, however, who travels the few steps from the slave quarters to the big house as enslaved laborer rather than hyper-sexualized partner, and whose body must nurture the family of her enslavers. Jossianna Arroyo argues, "*Mães pretas* or black nannies played the most important role in the 'Brazilianization' of culture," as "a symbolic mother of the Brazilian nation, as well as a border figure that makes miscegenation possible" (59). The *mãe preta*'s centrality and importance is evident in Freyre's work, where he writes:

As for the black mammies, (*mães pretas*), tradition refers to the place truly of honor they would occupy within the bosom of patriarchal families. Freed, they would round out into enormous black women, to whom every want was given: children would take their blessings, slaves would treat them as ladies, drivers would take them in their cars. On feast days, whoever saw them, large and proud among the whites of the house, would imagine them well-born ladies and never ex-slaves from the *senzalas*. (369)

In Freyre's narrative, the *mãe preta* occupies a place "truly of honor" as he calls it, a privileged space within the patriarchal family. He focuses on bodily girth as a sign of that



privilege, claiming as evidence of their esteemed status the ways their bodies would round out into enormous black figures. His focus on their enormous blackness is a vulgar rendering of the black mother. In the original Portuguese, Freyre writes that the black mothers rounded out into *pretalhonas*, which does not translate as simply enormous black women. Rather, *pretalhona* indicates a vulgar aberration of blackness, where the immenseness of black (*preta*) material, of black female body, is vulgar excess. This fixation on big black women as vulgar, as an aberration, belies the fundamental importance Freyre assigns her in his lusotropicalist love triangle. Around her aberrant blackness, enormous and vulgar, an entire society coalesces in the formation of the Brazilian nation.

While emphasizing her enormity, in size and function, Freyre dislocates the *mãe preta* from any history prior to her role in the big house, with no mention of captivity, violence, or prior kin. She is an icon around which children gather for blessings, a respected elder paraded around, a diva whose every wish is granted. The myth starts to unravel, however, as he lists the qualifications to be chosen for such an intimate role and all the responsibilities that were put upon her:

It was natural that the Negro or mulatto woman who was to suckle the master's son, rock him to sleep, prepare his food and his warm bath for him, take care of his clothing, tell him stories, and at times take the place of his own mother should have been chosen from among the best of the female slaves; from among the cleanest, the best-looking, the strongest; from among the less ignorant ones, or '*ladinas*,' as they called them in those days, to distinguish the Negroes who had already been Christianized and Brazilianized from the ones who had only recently

come over from Africa or who were more stubborn in clinging to their African ways. (370)

The *mãe preta* in this passage is not a privileged member of the family, but a figure that is scrutinized for her beauty, her cleanliness, her strength – suggesting that her duties within the house went beyond that of wet-nurse, to include sexual, social, educational and manual labor as well. Rather than a place of privilege, as Freyre argues, the *mãe preta* is doubly put upon, taking physical and emotional work. The image of little ones gathering around the *mãe preta* seems to suggest that she was integrated into bonds of intimacy and ties of kinship, part of a familial structure, while Freyre’s description assigns gendered roles to the enslaved *mãe preta* as mother, mistress, nanny, and nurse.

The list of her duties recalls another list put upon black women, noted by North American black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers in “Mama’s Baby Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” (1987), in which Spillers reveals gender as a central vector of violence under slavery.<sup>37</sup> Spillers argues that the enslaving of African peoples also de-gendered them, dismembered lines of kinship, and disorganized social and cultural African life, which were then reinvented by and for the master’s will in the New World. She offers a list of names as representative of these inventions, “‘Peaches’ and ‘Brown Sugar,’ ‘Sapphire’ and ‘Earth Mother,’ ‘Aunty,’ ‘Granny,’ God’s ‘Holy Fool,’ a ‘Miss Ebony First,’ or ‘Black Woman at the Podium’” (65). To this list, I add the *mãe preta* as both implicit in “Aunty” and “Granny,” through the antecedent figure of the black mammie on southern US plantations, and deserving of its own mention as part of the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, that violent mechanism that

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<sup>37</sup> Spillers is critiquing ideas put forth in Patrick Moynihan’s report “The Negro Family” (1965). Published in the United States, Moynihan’s report calls out strong black women and African American matriarchy as the main problem facing black men and, by extension, black families in the United States who would find it hard to thrive outside the social and cultural patriarchal traditions of the American (white) family.

saw millions of African people enslaved and displaced onto North America, the Caribbean, and a majority to South America and Brazil. These names are representative of what Spillers calls “a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth.” Spillers argues that the United States “needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented” (65). Similarly, Freyre’s fable of a racial democracy as legacy of a Brazilian genesis rooted in miscegenation, played out through the relationship between the big house and slave quarters, requires the *mãe preta*, invents her as an enormous black and vulgar orb, made intelligible and socially acceptable only through her forced intimate labors and in the master’s domestic realm.

Spillers’ assessment of the violence enacted on African bodies offers a productive undoing of Freyre’s tale of promiscuous benevolence through a stark narrative of New World encounter as a “human sequence written in blood, [which] *represents* for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of *actual* mutilation, dismemberment, and exile” (67; emphasis in original).

Their New-World, diasporic plight marked a *theft of the body*- a willful and violent . . . severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least *gender* difference *in the* outcome, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. But this body, at least from the point of view of the captive community, focuses a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological fortunes join. (67; emphasis in original)

Spillers makes an important distinction between body and flesh, noting that flesh becomes body only in social and cultural relationalities. Spillers also cogently argues that heteronormative gender roles between men and women emerge in domestic and desiring contexts, something inaccessible to the enslaved peoples except through their reinvention. In this way, African women enslaved were ungendered, their flesh torn apart the same as men, with black lines of kinship severed, erased, violently stolen and forcibly beaten out. They are refashioned in Luso-Afro-Brazilian history as a society bound in lines of kinship of a different sort, according to patriarchal and racist will, and put to the task of creating the nation.

Notably, and as an unintended counterpoint to Freyre's romance of racial miscegenation, Spillers references a fifteenth-century Portuguese narrative of racist encounter with Africans in Gomes Eanes de Zurara's *Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea, 1441-1448* (*Crónica do descobrimento e conquista da Guiné pelos portugueses*). In a close reading of that account, Spillers notes, "Three genetic distinctions are available to the Portuguese eye, all along the riffs of melanin in the skin: in a field of captives, some of the observed are 'white enough, fair to look upon, and well-proportioned.' Others are less 'white like mulattoes,' and still others 'black as Ethiops, and so ugly'" (70).<sup>38</sup> These reflections reveal a hierarchy not dissimilar to Freyre's telling of a Luso-Brazilian adage, "With reference to Brazil, as an old saying has it: 'White woman for marriage, mulatto woman for f -, Negro woman for work,' a saying in which, alongside the social convention of the superiority of the white woman and the inferiority of the black, is to be discerned a sexual preference for the mulatto (woman)" (13-14). The off-putting

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<sup>38</sup> Josiah Blackmore reads Zurara's symbolic and spatial appropriation of Africa through an interpretation of hues of African skin: "By metonymically racializing African land through the colors of its inhabitants, Zurara and others attempt to establish otherness as an inert fact of nature waiting to be revealed through the hermeneutic act of writing" (*Moorings* 31). Skin color, then, serves as both pragmatic and racist distinction of productivity for the Portuguese in Zurara's account, and as literary device for its chronicler.

proverb, intended for men, reveals how women are categorized by their different skin tone as markers of their utility and reverberates as strikingly similar to Freyre's notes on the criteria for the selection of *mães pretas*. Spillers notes that Zurara's narrative is also about "males looking at other males. [...] Few places in these excerpts carve out a distinct female space [...] no heed is paid to relations, as fathers are separated from sons, husbands from wives, brothers from sisters and brothers, mothers from children—male and female" (70). As evidence of the long-enduring racism and body-theft that Spillers' points out, Freyre, who is writing approximately 500 years after Azurara's account, makes no mention to any kin, partner, or family of *mãe preta*. Her forced relocation, which Freyre calls a place of honor, is a double ungendering and estrangement, pulling the *mãe preta* away from any new world kinships and bonds of intimacy she may have developed after the Middle Passage, and reinventing her at the center of the master's home, according to the nation's need.

By her blackness alone, then, according to the racist hierarchy first noted in the fifteenth century and echoed by Freyre in the twentieth, the *mãe preta* is a worker rather than an honored member of the family, even if her labors are ensconced in the domestic space of the home as intimate, sexual, and emotional. As evidence for the gender violence and racism exposed in Spillers' observations, Zurara's account, and Piratini and Caco Velho's "Mãe preta," five hundred years after the violent start of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Freyre still makes no reference to the black mother's own kin. The description of a whip beating *mãe preta*'s loved ones in the original lyrics by Piratini and Caco Velho may underscore violence against her kin or loved ones as the cause of her tears. Yet, what Matogrosso's anguishing cries and Spillers' research make clear is the full spectrum of violence visited upon black women in this Luso-Afro-Brazilian formation. The whip also came down on *mãe preta*'s flesh, and her move from the

slave quarters to the big house was a second body theft, a second dismemberment of gender, sex, and ties of kinship.

By misnaming “Barco negro” as “Mãe preta” and breaking out of the song to cry unconsolably, Matogrosso makes space for the black woman of this violent history, for the loss and mourning put upon *mãe preta* to be heard. Though Spillers is defining an “American grammar” that addresses the history of the United States, the “American” descriptor applies equally to South America when the perspective is that of the enslaved and oppressed who were forcibly moved throughout the Circum-Atlantic, and not of the particularities of colonial histories and empires told from the top down. Her charge that “the violent formation of a modern African consciousness” in response to “the Atlantic Slave Trade [...] interrupted hundreds of years of black African culture” (68) is also justly put to Luso-Afro-Brazilian history. The tears of the black mother in the original lyrics of “Mãe Preta” are directly related to the theft of the body outlined in Spillers’ argument. To Freyre’s account of black women in a place of honor, the tears of the original lyrics and in Matogrosso’s unrelenting sobs are a public unsettling of sedimented discourses, but not only. In Matogrosso’s dragged-out weeping, he opens a site of queer, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian intersection that looms as a cacophonous alliance, that mobilizes other voices, materials, histories and laments. The exaggerated ending, refusing to fade out, in transgender sobs, are shades of permissiveness of a different contour. They give permission for queer, feminist, Afro-diasporic resonances to materialize their histories of violence not as trauma but as cathartic complaint, and register new forms of kinship, of families and care connected via unsettling voices and overwhelming drama.

*Mãe preta*, in the original lyrics and in Matogrosso’s weeping, cries for someone, and Spillers reminds us that even the enslaved “maintain the powerful ties of sympathy that bind

blood-relations in a network of feeling, of continuity” (74). These networks of feeling and of continuity are different iterations of kinship and of care. Matogrosso’s cries reach back to the tears of a black mother in a transatlantic and transhistorical diaspora of black and queer practices. These are the same intersections that allow Vittar to claim a black mother, in a house of drag performance, as a community of care in contemporary transits of black queer diaspora. Brazilian queer bodies, black bodies and transgender voices are in this way part of archives that are rooted in Luso-Afro-Brazilian conjuncture but not made victim to the moorings of their hegemonic discourses. The lusotropicalist myth is overwhelmed through this archive and by this diaspora, unraveling and revealing an elaboration of black, queer, and indigenous complaint in a saturation of references, sounds, and sobs.

### **A Fateful Reprise**

Matogrosso’s cover of a Portuguese fado, in its dramatic ending, ruptures with fado form and moves in multidirectional ways. I read his tessitura as part of a queer cacophony that he deploys in “Mãe Preta” to name the Brazilian black mother, and through his sobs, refigure her place of honor as a black and queer site of cathartic complaint. Moreover, he also unsettles Portuguese nationalist discourses that have distanced themselves in paradoxical ways from the very material of empire through which they lay claim to past glories. Just as Matogrosso materializes the *mãe preta* in his sobs and in song title, rather than reverting to the original lyrics, the Portuguese fado he sings, “Barco Negro,” bears the weight of history in its title. When considered besides its original form as “Mae Preta,” the fado “Barco Negro” takes on the literal description in its name. As a fado lament of black boats that was once the samba lament of a black mother, it holds a history of the transatlantic slave trade in tension through its title. Rather

than a Portuguese sailor lost at sea, the title emphasizes boats of blackness, invoking slave ships, black from the bodies of Africans captured and packed up for the Middle Passage. Here, too, Spillers offers insight on the gender violence enacted through enslavement, where “one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into ‘account’ as *quantities*” (72; emphasis in original). Further, Spillers argues that the enslaved were lost at sea, “Removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet ‘American’ either, these captive persons... were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all... culturally ‘unmade,’ thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness” (72; emphasis in original). The black boat of the fado’s title takes on a other shades of blackness when considered in the context of Portuguese slaving expeditions, recalling the lives lost during the Middle Passage, and those who made it to Brazil who were nevertheless lost and unmade. They are boats of blackness upon which Luso-Brazilian fictions of nations and subjectivities have floated ever since.

Matogrosso’s fado is an atavistic rendering that conflates Brazilian and Portuguese histories, by conflating Brazilian and Portuguese songs and genres, both of which are cultural formations that circulated around the Luso-Afro-Brazilian Atlantic. While on the surface he is covering a Portuguese fado, his Brazilian relocation of the fado shifts peripheries within peripheries of deviance and gender transgressions that mark fado’s early iterations as a cultural practice of peripheral people deemed seedy, sinful, racialized. Fado historiography points to fado’s early instantiation as an Afro-Brazilian dance form that encountered a Luso-Brazilian guitar-based song form (Holton 2006; Nery 2012). Since the mid-1800s, fado has relinquished its dance form and Afro-Brazilian past. Yet, Matogrosso’s fado is located in a fado genealogy of queer Luso-Afro-Brazilian popular music practice, one that has recently resurfaced and in which Portugal’s paradigmatic genre is refigured as a wily and unbearable queer praxis.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Unbearable *Fadistas*



Figure 4 - Fado Bicha, Facebook post, April 2019.

They debuted in 2017, just two years ago, and have mostly released only YouTube videos of performances, but already Fado Bicha have caused a sensation. The duo of Lila Fadista and João Caçador, together known as Fado Bicha, have been on Portuguese television, featured in magazines, as part of Lisbon's pride festivities, and toured internationally. Their YouTube videos have generated lots of interest, with their most polemic video released earlier this year,

“Lisboa Não Sejas Racista,” (“Lisbon Don’t Be Racista”) (2019), where Fado Bicha turn a well-known fado into a searing critique of Portuguese racism. Fans loved it, while many others harangued them for audaciously accusing Lisbon and Portuguese people by extension of being racist, or for even daring to call what they do fado. Fado Bicha, as their name insists, declare their fado to be *bicha*, a pejorative usually hurled at overly-effeminate gay men. Their Facebook post announces the upcoming release of their first song and video, “O Namorico do André” (2019), where they tell a passionate story of a pair of gay lovers through the registers, vocal stylings, and affective repertoire of an internationally recognized, nationally revered, quintessentially Portuguese genre of music and performance. The announcement teases, “E já que é bicha, o fado vai voltar a ser brasileira e angolano também!” (“And since its now *bicha*, fado is going to be Brazilian and Angolan again, too!”) (Fig. 4). Directly, they are referring to the actors in their upcoming video who play the role of two lovers - Jefferson who is Brazilian and Noé who is Angolan. Yet, they announce that the fado will be Brazilian and Angolan *again*, that fado will *voltar* (return) to this way of being.

Fado Bicha reveal all sorts of turnings in their triangulation of fado as *bicha*, Brazilian, and Angolan, resonating through elaborations of *voltar* – a return to, a turning back to, a revisiting: as *volta* – a spin, a turn, a stroll, urging someone to come back to you; as *voltinhas* – a euphemism for casual sexual trysts and also the improvisational techniques of fado vocal stylings. Their bold and pithy claim of fado’s return to Brazil and Angola comes along with fado’s instantiation as queer through their performances, their compositions, and their assured insistence that fado has always been queer. When asked why they call themselves *bicha*, a word that has a stronger Brazilian association, but that in Portugal is as pejorative as it is in Brazil. Lila responds:

A forma como utilizamos a palavra "bicha" no projeto é uma forma mais específica e ao mesmo tempo mais abrangente... Sabemos, para além de toda a questão identitária, quão repulsivo é só a expressão "Fado Bicha" para muitas pessoas. Nem precisam de ver mais nada, basta verem o nome... Bicha, como nós utilizamos, é um símbolo da subversão de uma série de coisas. A música que fazemos e a forma como fazemos subverte várias normas. Liricamente, com as alterações que fazemos às letras, e com as novas letras que escrevemos, trazemos uma existência poética que não existia no fado e que não existe praticamente na música popular portuguesa — ou existe muito pouco e não o suficiente. E também cantamos fado mas não tocamos com os instrumentos tradicionais, o João toca com uma guitarra elétrica. A forma como nos apresentamos em palco, que não é normativa a nível de expressão de género, é ela própria uma subversão. Portanto há toda uma série de coisas que trazemos na nossa proposta que são subversivas. E eu gosto imenso da palavra bicha. Não temos na língua portuguesa uma tradução direta da palavra inglesa "queer", que de certa forma abrange toda a dimensão da não normatividade de género e sexualidade, portanto uma série de pessoas e experiências, e para mim bicha talvez seja aquela palavra que uso com esse significado. (Vieira)

The way we use *bicha* in this project is very specific and also inclusive. We know, beyond questions of identity, how repulsive the expression 'Fado Bicha' is for many people. They won't need to see anything else, just the name... *Bicha*, the way we use it, is a symbol of subversion of a series of things. The music we do and the way we subvert various norms. Lyrically, with the changes we make to the poems, and the new lyrics we write, we bring a poetic existence that did not exist in fado and that practically doesn't exist in Portuguese popular music – or very little and not enough. We also sing fado but don't play the traditional instruments. João plays an electric guitar. The way we present ourselves on stage, which is not a normative expression of gender, is itself subversive. So, there is a series of things we bring in our proposition that is subversive. And I love the word *bicha*. We don't have a direct translation of the English word queer in Portuguese, which contends with the entire dimension of nonnormative gender and sexuality, a diversity of people and experiences, and for me, perhaps, [*bicha*] is the word I use for those things. (Vieira)

I've given the substantial quote in its entirety to show how quickly Fado Bicha subsume the question of what they mean by *bicha* in a description of how they play fado, as subversive of the genre's conventions. Fado emerges immediately in this telling answer as a very real queer praxis when conjoined to *bicha*. I also note how Lila offers *bicha* as a way to say, be, and translate queer in/into Portuguese. It is a provocative proposition that is tied up in abilities to maneuver through shades of permissiveness and peripheries, even as they go on to say that many

people have asked them why they can't just call themselves something else, describing how some gay fans are also critical of the name and of the femininity they evoke through *bicha* and through their performances. I will return to this tension, of *bicha* as a wily politicization of queer but also as a displacement of *bicha* from its specificity in Brazil, in the last section. It is a productive tension through which to read Fado Bicha's claims, performances, and the world of fado that they amplify. Rather than making fado queer only through the use of *bicha*, however, Fado Bicha pry open sites of diasporic cultural practices, gender transgression and sexual deviance that have circulated around fado since its formation.

*Fado* means fate in Portuguese, and tellingly, fado practice was associated with the city's underbelly of marginal characters, ethnic minorities, sexual encounters and ill-fated lives. Fado historian Rui Vieira Nery argues that in Lisbon, by the 1830s, the designation of *casas de fado*, fado houses, was given to Lisbon's bohemian venues and whorehouses, tying the lives of their patrons to a resigned and ill-fated life, marking off:

A universe on the edge of 'good society'... in terms of unequivocal moral and social disapproval, but at the same time conveying an implicit acceptance of this universe as a kind of necessary evil. And those who had fallen into it were to be regarded not so much as intrinsically perverse as star-fated, victims of ill fortune and a cruel, unavoidable destiny, and thus, on an individual level, to be pitied more than condemned... exactly the same sense as that of another mid-19th century euphemism used to refer to the same reality, that of *vida* (life), also understood here as a predestined path of perdition - a woman of fate (*fado*) and a woman of life (*vida*) are synonymous in this context. (57)

Nery shows how fado and houses of fado were places and practices of and for people with an unavoidable destiny, marked and fated, living apart from good society and yet responsible for the projection of that good society measured against their aberrant ways. Fado, however, has undergone transitions, and by the mid-twentieth century it had been elevated from a Lisbon cultural practice to national patrimony internationally recognized. It has a crowded roster of mainstream fado stars, it is a lucrative tourist attraction for Lisbon, has been designated immaterial cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO, and can claim an active amateur scene in Portugal, as well as thriving in many global pockets of Portuguese diaspora. Through Fado Bicha, however, fado is now also made a visible and vocal expression of LGBTQ+ life. As their Facebook announcement suggests, this is a return for fado, pulling at its past association with deviancy and its Luso-Afro-Brazilian formation.

Lila Fadista (Tiago Lila) and João Caçador have been Fado Bicha since May of 2017. Though Lila Fadista started as a drag queen, she is agender, uses female pronouns and when she wears dresses, heels, costuming and make-up, on stage or otherwise, she considers it part of a version of herself that has brought her closer to her own understanding of identity. Together, they perform in art spaces, gay spaces, and alternative venues. They have also performed at Lisbon Pride festivals, along with Pablio Vittar, and have been on Portuguese TV, magazines, and part of other cultural and activist projects. Caçador on electric guitar transgresses the genre's conventional arrangement of acoustic Portuguese guitar and Spanish guitar. Lila has sung mainly from fado's female repertoire, and Fado Bicha pen poems to known fados that refigure them into gay, lesbian, and trans narratives, that sing about love and loss, and also about gay cruising apps and contemporary queer life. They also write fados that are more directly addressed to racial discrimination and class stratification. When asked if they've been able to perform in more

traditional venues, or have received any recording contracts, they answer in the negative and Caçador elaborates, “Este tipo de música periférica e mais marginal fica sempre à porta. Fica à porta das rádios, das TVs e do Coliseu na noite dos Globos de Ouro. Há muita música multicultural, suburbana e ativista que continua a não ter espaço” (“This kind of peripheral and more marginal music is always left at the door. Kept out off of radios, of TV and out of the [Lisbon] Coliseum on the night of the Golden Globes. There is a lot of multicultural, underground and activist music that continues without a space”) (Vieira).

If physical and mediated spaces for fado have barred Fado Bicha, the guarded spaces within fado repertoire have tried to keep them out as well. When Lila first attempted fado singing she went for a lesson at Escola de Fado da Mouraria (Mouraria School of Fado), located in a Lisbon neighborhood tied to fado’s origins. She had picked a fado standard to sing for her lesson, “Ai Mouraria,” first recorded by iconic *fadista* (fado performer) Amália Rodrigues in 1945, and which includes a line that lingers on “o homem do meu encanto” (“the man of my dreams”). She was told, however, that this fado was not for men to sing, only for women. Caçador points to this moment as representative of how Lila had to make her own fado path, that transgressed these codes, to sing fados she wanted to sing. It also reveals that fado’s gendered codes, of repertoire and performance, are policed in fado schools, by fado venues, and in the very repertoire of fado songs and practices.

It is telling that Lila requested to sing a standard from Amália Rodrigues’s catalogue. It is Amália’s version that imprints the song, and her voice that has left the biggest imprint on fado. Amália is the genre’s, and Portugal’s, most celebrated and recognized diva. She performed from the 1940’s until her death in 1999, when she became the first woman to be laid to rest in Lisbon’s National Pantheon. Other internationally recognized divas have come after Amália, but

none have managed to supplant her place in the cultural pantheon of Portuguese performers.<sup>39</sup> When asked about who they think is fado's biggest diva, Lila does not hesitate: "Amália... Ela é a bicha-mãe" ("She is the mother-*bicha*"), and Caçador adds, "Até a forma como ela se apresentava em palco, não tenho referências de ver outras fadistas com aquela exuberância e com aquela forma de estar" ("Even her stage presence, I can't recall other times I've seen *fadistas* with her exuberance, her way of being") (Vieira). Lila and Caçador call out Amália not only as a fado icon but they call her the mother *bicha*, and mark her as a queer icon.

Amália has been a material part of queer experiences of fado, and imperative for Fado Bicha in understanding fado. It is an experience that many LGBTQ+ Portuguese people would understand and confess to themselves (including the writer of this dissertation). Amália's voice, vocal stylings, and biography are a connective thread in what emerges as a conflation of references and resonances heard and felt through the female repertoire of fado coalescing into a queer archive that is particularly Portuguese. Their love of Amália pull Fado Bicha into a genealogy of queer fado throughout its elaboration as a genre that has been marked by the genre's female repertoire and by its female divas. In 1982, António Variações, then a rumored homosexual, barber, and local celebrity of Lisbon's undergrown, and now an icon of Portuguese LGBTQ+ history and of Portuguese popular music, recorded "Povo que Lavas no Rio," one of Amália's iconic fados, as the B-side to his progressive pop rock debut *Estou Alem/Povo Que Lavas no Rio* (1982). To promote that single he appeared on a nationally televised Portuguese variety show and sung Amália's fado in his own iteration of *fadista*.

Variações as *fadista* on his debut release and in his televised performance is a transformative moment for understanding fado as archive and praxis for life lived queerly in

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<sup>39</sup> Mariza, born in Mazambique and raised in Lisbon, active 1997-present, has come close, but has also claimed that no one can supplant Amália.

Portugal and Portuguese diaspora. His career as a singer-songwriter and performer ended abruptly with his death in 1984, from complications attributable to HIV/AIDS;<sup>40</sup> however, he left two full-length albums and an archive of music videos and performances that enmesh progressive pop and new wave influences with allusions to homosexuality that also played with the rhythms and registers of Portuguese popular culture and folkloric practices. Since his death, his celebrity has grown: street names memorialize him, his life and work have been the subject of TV programs, other Portuguese musicians have recorded his music, and in December 2017, the Universidade de Coimbra organized the first academic conference dedicated solely to him. Though he is now hailed as “o inventor da pop portuguesa” (“the inventor of Portuguese pop”) (Abreu), half of his two-track debut release presents *Variações* as *fadista*, and provokes a consideration of his transgressive art and sexuality as it is expressed and performed through a more conventional Portuguese music genre.

Fado Bicha and *Variações* share a common referent for fado queerly felt in Amália Rodrigues and, through her, fado’s feminine repertoire. The female repertoire of fado is bound up with fado’s relationship to time – through the timing in a fado performance, through fado as an expression of its time, and in the circuitous return of fado’s affective resonances to the peripheral transits of its origins carried in the female voice. Nery suggests that fado is a performative genre “in permanent interaction with the specific cultural and social context in which it occurs and for this very reason in permanent change in its lyrical, compositional and choreographic configurations and in its ties of meaning and belonging to the communities in which it occurs” (66). Grounding fado in its local conjuncture, Nery argues that fado has

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<sup>40</sup> The official cause of death is recorded as bronchial pneumonia, though friends attest to *Variações*’s HIV/AIDS diagnosis. His family remained resistant to this diagnosis due to the unfavorable public perception that came with it in 1984 (Gonzaga 299).



“manifested itself in forms that have undergone constant renewal, through modifications that have been able to reflect a range of sociocultural realities that have conferred upon the country an even greater sense of identity with each successive phase of its history” (66). Fado’s history reveals this to be true. It has been a genre that has at different times expressed different things, from unrequited love, to loss, protest, and nationalist sentiments – and usually all at the same time. Fado’s permanent interaction with its cultural and social context, as Nery argues, traps fado in a bind, one that keeps fado constantly turning back, to its first stirrings as the expression of life lived on the margins, of hardships and improper desires. Moreover, ethnomusicologist Lila Ellen Gray shows the “genre as lived is specifically gendered and sexed and leaves a material trace in the texture and timbre of the singing voice, a trace that is audible, value-laden” (161).

Throughout its history, it has been the female voice and repertoire of fado that has had to bear the burden of the genre’s affective labor, both as its most sought-after performers, through whom fado’s melodrama is most keenly felt, and as bearers of the mark of fado’s material and affective traces. It is through the female repertoire, then, that a fado trans tessitura would find its terrain. In the female voice, fado is bound to its past in particular ways. Gray argues “The symbolic rendering of the male *fadista* – at times weepy, at times fatalistic – might contain elements of machismo, bravura, and, historically, criminal deviance. But... the female *fadista* invites more possibilities for polysemy... is the more sexualized or explicitly gendered” (161). Even as fado has transitioned from marginal to mainstream, fado’s female form is bound to the illicit sexuality of its origins, in reputation and in time. The conflation of *fado* and *vida*, fate and life, that Nery explains, marks fado as a certain kind of life and practice, underscored in fado’s formation in taverns and whorehouses, by the marked woman, a woman of a certain lifestyle, with a sordid past. Her past is her future, however, as fate predestines – a trans-temporality that

underscores the inevitability of fate. Fado, as fate, reaches back to deviant paths and pasts, and stretches them forward, marking a life that is beholden to its destiny.

Fado's temporality is replicated in the improvisational techniques called *voltinhas*, or "little turns," used colloquially to suggest sexual trysts. Fado performance is punctuated by moments of high-melodrama through these little turns. *Voltinhas* arrest the movement of the fado. They are vocal manipulations of time suggestive of deviance, moments where the *fadista* may hold the audience and the fado in affective anticipation and thrilling tension. They were popularized by Amália in the 1950s and 60s (Gray 81), and many performers describe them as the heart of fado, allowing listeners "to feel more" in moments "where it seems everything is going to explode" (Gray 40). While male *fadistas* also mobilize *voltinhas* to manipulate fado's drama, they are imprinted through Amália's voice as particularly feminine ways of performing fado, and through the female repertoire and marked voice, they are remnants of a deviant sexuality. Through fado's vocal turns and returns, deviance is built into its performance, resonating as the improvisational threats of fated women bound up in time. Elizabeth Freeman describes normative time, or chrononormativity as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity," and argues that "time binds," and "people are bound to one another, engrouped, made to feel coherently collective through particular orchestrations of time" (3). As Freeman shows, chrononormativity arranges lives and desires in progressions of proper time for those who can keep time, stay on track, and are privileged by the linear ticking of the clock. The nonnormative, however, run out of time, are left behind, doomed to repeat it, fated to return. The timing of a song also binds *fadistas* to fado. Through their *voltinhas*, however, they can overwhelm it, pulling the fado out of time. Mobilized in fado, these improvisational tactics underscore the female *fadista* as being outside of proper time, and offer a way into a queer

fado archive where its early deviance and itinerancy return in melodramatic manipulations of voice, breath and body.

Dramatic vocal improvisations in fado emerge as particularly wily ways of bringing fado to bear on queer lives, bodies and desires. Critical reception to *Variações*'s debut recording and performance reveal fado's female voices have always been beside themselves, in drama and as queer archive. Freeman asks, "Might some bodies, by registering on their very surface the co-presence of several historically contingent events, social movements and/or collective pleasures, complicate or displace the centrality of gender-transitive drag to queer performativity? Might they articulate instead of kind of temporal transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other so-called anachronisms behind?" (63). When put to fado, it is a question that binds fado's queer temporality to its female repertoire, which is both archival terrain and praxis for queer lives and performances. To understand the female repertoire as a vocal terrain in which time is dragged out or bound up requires an analysis of *Variações*'s initial turn as *fadista*, to lay bare the history of gender and sexual transgression upon which a contemporary queer fado praxis can lay claims. In it he takes up the feminine form of fado, and exposes a relation between the affective resonances of the genre, the gendered labor and marked sexuality of its female performers, and fado as a queer praxis, locating him within a fado history of risk-laden non-normative embodiments.

### **An Unbearable *Fadista***

Journalist and biographer Manuela Gonzaga locates *Variações* in Lisbon's "demi-monde" of the late 1970s and early 1980s, populated by "travestis, jovens músicos emergentes no boom da música portuguesa, artistas, gente ligada à moda," ("*travestis*, emerging young musicians in

the boom of Portuguese music, artists, fashionistas”), among whom Variações stands out as “uma figura estranha, uma ave rara, com aquela estridentíssima voz minhota” (“a strange figure, a rare bird, with the extremely strident *minhota* voice”) (193). Gonzaga’s account offers a menagerie of exotic specimens, from *travestis* to artists and fashionistas. Yet, she differentiates Variações by his strident voice, declaring it a telltale mark of his birthplace. The description and designation of *minhota* refers to the shrill singing that characterizes the folkloric traditions of Minho in Northern Portugal, with a vocal style that André Araújo argues is most recognizable in female singers, whose voices he describes as “high-pitched, loud, intense” (29-37). Gonzaga marks Variações through a reference to tone and geography that also suggests a gendered ascription of his voice with the feminine characteristics of those folkloric singers from his childhood home. Among other flamboyant and rare birds, it is his voice, recognizable in style as Portuguese and suggestive of a folkloric and feminine tradition, that is queerly situated in Lisbon’s progressive post-revolution nightlife.

His debut recording, however, suggests a different geography, locating Variações not in the folkloric North but within Lisbon’s fado. In accounts by contemporaries, Variações was deliberately enigmatic about ascribing an origin point for his music, suggesting somewhere between the Northern Portuguese city of Braga and New York (Gonzaga 208). It is both an anchoring in and an unmooring from Portuguese folkloric traditions and the progressive rock and new wave of Anglo-American music scenes as sites of inspiration.<sup>41</sup> Though Variações suggests an unknowability of place, his first release points to fado as a site of vocal and stylistic affinity. While his two-track debut features “Estou Além,” replete with the synthesizers and rhythms of contemporary new wave rock influences, Variações’s remake of “Povo que Lavas no Rio,”

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<sup>41</sup> On these sources, especially Joy Division and other post-punk and new wave bands, see Cardoso.

originally recorded by Amália and lionizing the harsh life of common folk in rural Portugal, serves as a provocative counterpoint. The fado is remade by Variações on his debut release with a disregard for conventional instrumentation and arrangement, while the choice of song and Variações’s singing style invoke the repertoires and techniques of the genre’s female performers. Moreover, through a transgressive embodiment of the female *fadista* in its differing affective forms, he makes a queer claim on Portuguese cultural practices sedimented as national heritage.

Appearing on Portuguese television network RTP’s *Retrato de família* in 1982 to perform “Povo que Lavas no Rio,” Variações takes the stage dressed in white with a long blazer over a white shirt unbuttoned to show a peek of his chest, pants hugging the curves of his legs, and a black sash around his waist (Fig. 5). The arrangement renders the fado a brooding post-punk rock song with electric guitars, buzzing synthesizer, and droning drums. Variações, in mustache and thick beard, sensuously whips his arms up around his head and back down again in a kind of dance, drawing attention to his body, his hair, and his face, emphasizing the drama of the song. While the instrumentation deviates considerably from the original, he sings with sliding glissandos and shimmering melismas – trademarks of fado’s *voltinhas*.



Figure 5. António Variações, performing live on RTP 1982.

Variações's recording of fado and proclivity for its vocal techniques, when considered alongside his homoerotic performances and compositions, provoke a consideration of the genre's affective dispersions of sex. Fado's *voltinhas* or "little turns," are called a name that may also suggest a stroll or jaunt, and may be used to imply a sexual tryst, marking *voltinhas* in fado as suggestive movements that deviate from the melody in heightened moments of drama. These dramatic improvisations were popularized by Amália Rodrigues, and they have become defining characteristics of fado performance, key devices in manipulating fados drama and provoking overwhelming emotional responses (Gray 81). António Pinheiro, the producer of Variações's second album, *Dar e receber* (1984), found Variações's use of these ornamentations strange at first: "Estranhei todas as modulações e a maneira como ele metia as modulações, ele faz muitos melismas na voz" ("I found all the modulations strange at first and the way he would insert these modulations, he does many *melismas* with his voice") (Gonzaga 244). Pinheiro's confusion underscores how such *voltinhas* were out of place in Lisbon's underground music scene, yet they are deployed by Variações in a vocal landscape of fado topography, marked by dramatic turns of improvisation that are intended to sound out particularly feminine desire and deviance.

Variações's *voltinhas* take up the gendered labor of the feminine voice in fado. Gray shows how men and women play different roles in fado practice, and how the woman's voice takes on particular affective structures (158-59). The differing iterations of the feminine in fado may be "weepy or tearful," and represented "as sacrificial, the eternal mother, as Mary, as the victim of male betrayal, as beaten down, as a prostitute or femme fatale with cigarette in hand, as melodramatic—Madonna, whore, mother" (Gray 162). Though fado repertoires cover a wide spectrum of emotions and scenarios, the feminine form can shape-shift from "illicit siren" to "mother-nation" (Gray 164). Fado's improvisatory tactics also allow women performers to "seize

fado's conventions of spectacularized high melodrama" more readily (Gray 177-78). *Variações's* use of *voltinhas* upsets this coded affective repertoire. Gray argues that fado is "a catchment of affect and of story... that binds people to place and to one another" (5), marking a relationality between participants and sites, between admirers and performers, and between bodies and narratives. It is a process of embodied encounter that affectively entangles performer and public in illicit and unexpected ways. When *Variações* deploys the female vocal repertoire, through his body and voice, he arouses his audience in unconventional ways according to fado gender codes, making his public complicit in the process.

*Variações's* performance turns on his transgressive use of fado's feminine forms. Through them, he locates himself in a relationship with his audience that is marked by intense affective resonances that are meant to drag out suspense, agony, ache, and take the listener up in body and breath, turning them on, or turning them off – as was the case for music critic Trindade Santos. In a *TV TOP* review from 1982, Santos declares *Variações's* refigured fado a serious contender for top prize in bad taste that year. He first praises the instrumentation, "Apoia-se numa fórmula bem concebida, que consiste na utilização de um discreto suporte harmónico e rítmico (sintetizado) sobre o qual a voz debita a sua parte" ("It's backed by a well-thought formula, which consists of using a discreet harmonic support and (synthesized) rhythm, over which the voice does its part"), but disparages the vocals, "A instrumentalização suporta-se. A voz é que não" ("The instrumental arrangement is bearable. The voice is not") (52). More than a criticism of talent, this pithy complaint casts as indiscretion the artist's embodiment of *fadista*. Trindade Santos judges the musical arrangement, in all of its post-punk and new wave irreverence, as discreet relative to *Variações's* unbearable vocal stylings. The criticism calls out

Variações's turn as *fadista* as an unbearable and indiscreet transgression. It is a telling admonishing of the upending of fado's gendered affectations.

Yet, Variações as an unbearable *fadista* reveals a genealogy of fado divas that have been mythologized and idolized in unbearable relationships with their public. Further, Variações's performance invokes this genealogy and unmask the sexual relationality between fado diva and public that underscores her ability to arouse, to penetrate, to hold you in suspense and get under your skin. Through Variações as *fadista*, unbearable to some though a commercial success, this relationship marks a site of fado's affective dispersions of nonnormative sexuality. Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman have argued that sex is also "the unbearable," a set of relations that both "overwhelm and anchor us," where "enjoyment itself can be unbearable," where we "negotiate intimate estrangement" by "both holding fast to and moving beyond our accustomed ways of experiencing ourselves and our connectedness to others," a "site at which relationality is invested with hopes, expectations, and anxieties that are often experienced as unbearable" (*Sex, or the Unbearable*, vii). Thinking sex as that which overwhelms, as an enjoyment that is unbearable, suggests that we are vulnerable to and affected by "social judgment, unconscious drives, and contradictory desires" even as such moments can lead to "discovering new ways of being and of being in the world," of "confronting our limit in ourselves or in another, of being inundated psychically or emotionally" (*Sex*, vii). Framing fado as an unbearable experience brings it closer to the unbearable scenes of sex and sexuality that Berlant and Edelman tease out, and push to the fore the formative intimacy of its affective inundations. It is a provocative rethinking of fado experience – to suggest that it is a sexual scene. However, it is a suggestion that is embedded in fado's origins and, more directly, in the mythology of fado's first diva, Maria Severa.



## Desiring the Unbearable – *Maria Severa*

Severa looms as a kind of avatar of fado's origin mythology, rooted in practices of Lisbon's periphery. She was of Romani origins, a prostitute, and a singer, conflating a perceived foreign ethnicity, with sexual deviance and a talent for singing her woes. Kimberly Holton's fado historiography locates the genre's genesis in the colonial transit of the Lusophone Atlantic, noting the itinerancy of cultural actors and influences as a distinct characteristic of fado's origins, which "developed in both Portugal and Brazil precisely because of the similarly diverse array of portuary denizens" ("Fado Historiography" 7). Rui Vieira Nery likewise argues that emerging fado forms along these routes served as vehicles of communication, with "elites in Brazil trying all the time to imitate what they considered to be the latest fashion in the capital, but with Lisbon in its turn allowing itself to be seduced by Brazilian songs and dances" (52). Holton underscores how fado was tied to itinerancy and deviance, routing through Lisbon where it eventually takes root, while Nery sexualizes this exchange as seductive interplay. Colonial power dynamics produced asymmetrical exchanges and fado was relegated to peripheral people and places: ports, docks, brothels, taverns, and ethnic enclaves. Though *fadista* is today a performer of fado, António Osório notes that it was primarily "um tipo sociológico" ("a sociological type") during the nineteenth century (32). Early fado historian, Pinto de Carvalho, likewise characterized the *fadista* as a "producto heteromorfo de todo o vício" ("heteromorphic product of vice") (31). Severa is a *fadista* of early nineteenth century Lisbon in the sociological sense of the word, tying the singing of fado to strange bodies, sexual deviance, and the inevitability of fate.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Severa had emerged as an icon of the genre that embodied its seductive, illicit and ill-fated characteristics. Born as Maria Severa Onofriana in

Lisbon in 1820, the daughter of a Romani prostitute who also owned a tavern, Severa took up the sex trade, became renowned for her singing, had an affair with the Count of Vimioso, and died of tuberculosis in 1846 at the age of twenty-six (Colvin, *The Reconstruction* 31). Where facts of Severa's biography are scant, legend fills in the gaps. Michael Colvin notes the importance of Júlio Dantas's drama *A Severa* (1901) and the first Portuguese sound film *A Severa* (1931) by Leitão de Barros, based on Dantas's earlier work, as pivotal in cementing Severa's characterization and legacy (*The Reconstruction* 31). Her story has become a mainstay of fado narrative and discourse. Gray argues that the Severa legend usually "maps onto contestations regarding fado origins," emphasizing that "Severa was from the lower class, rising through [illicit] association with royalty (just as fado as a genre 'ascended' from the lower classes to the higher)" (163). Notably, however, the fictionalized Severa materializes as more than just aspirational myth of class mobility. Dantas dramatizes Severa as overtly and explicitly sexual, marking not only her social transgressions but also her body as key vectors of her fado.

In Dantas' drama, Severa seduces the Count of Marialva, a fictional stand-in for the Count of Vimioso, in a scandalous affair. Jealous of her other admirers, he accuses her of infidelity and locks her up in his apartment. She escapes by jumping from a window. When the Count threatens the simpleton Custódia, her most loyal suitor, Severa publicly berates Marialva and he abandons her only to return too late. A heartbroken Severa dies while strumming a guitar and singing a fado. Tiago Baptista argues, "A fadista não morre apenas pelo conde, mas também pelo fado. [...] Desistir da vida, para a Severa, significa abdicar de um amor impossível e conformar-se ao seu estatuto de subalternidade social" ("The *fadista* does not die simply for the count, but also for fado. [...] Letting go of life, for Severa, means abdicating an impossible love and conforming to a subaltern social status") (92). Baptista underscores Severa's death as a

surrender to fate in her failure to rise above her social class. A fate of heartbreak, abandonment and death by fado are the markers of the Severa myth. Yet, she is defiant throughout. Through her escape from the Count's home, Severa rejects a capitulation to proper society. Even as she desires him, she refuses his way of life, while romancing and fantasizing with her other suitors. She runs from the normative trappings of life with the Count by throwing herself down from lofty heights, choosing instead the world of the fado.

Beyond her demise as a rejection of normative trappings, rather than the inevitability of fate, Dantas characterizes Severa's voice as imbricated in her body and sexuality, collapsing Severa's talent for singing fado onto her body as a sexual woman. The character Diogo describes her as "a maior fadista cá da Mouraria. Quando canta, parece que a alma da gente vai atrás dela. Mas, sangue de cigana, braço peludo e lume no olho. Não é quem quer, é quem ela quer" ("the best *fadista* from Mouraria. When she sings, it's like our souls go after her. But, blood of a gypsy, hairy arms and fire in her eyes. It is not who wants her, but whom she wants") (17). Severa, he claims, is the greatest *fadista* of Lisbon's old Muslim quarter, a neighborhood branded by prostitution and violent crime in the nineteenth century that was ultimately dismantled in the twentieth century (Colvin, *The Reconstruction* 21). Beyond localizing Severa in a seedy, ill-fated neighborhood, the description exoticizes her Romani heritage, and describes her body as bordering on the monstrous. Diogo warns of her strange blood, her hairy arms, and the fire in her eyes before proclaiming that Severa will have whom she wants. His warning is an allusion to her ability to choose her own sexual partners, and is both enticing and shared as a dangerous threat. While her voice is said to captivate the souls of her listeners, it is her sexuality and her body that punctuate Severa simultaneously as desirable and aberrant.

Dantas presents her with a virility that traverses gendered class distinctions and transits through non-normative sexuality, offering a reading of Severa and her death as site of queer potentiality. Severa's sexuality, in its virility and volatility, comes into sharper focus in contrast to the Count of Marialva, who represents a romantic Portuguese stereotype of a womanizing nobleman that emerged in the late eighteenth-century as a caricature of the "bullfighter, equestrian, and whoremonger," named after the Marquis of Marialva (Colvin, *Fado* 62). Portuguese anthropologist Miguel Vale de Almeida calls *marialvismo* "a moral and ideological discourse on hierarchy, gender and national identity shaping specific social practices" (5). Dantas' Marialva is paradigmatic of what Colvin calls a "maverick figure, defying the mores of society" by frequenting exotic, lower-class *fadista* milieus (*Fado* 63). He is matched, however, in fight and sexual prowess, by Severa in a seeming conflict of gender roles. Throughout the drama, she loves and leaves him, confronts him in public, hits and lashes out at him, and maintains her other suitors without giving up control. When imprisoned by the Count's jealousy, she rejects him and escapes back to life on her own turf and terms.

Severa possesses what Lauren Berlant calls "libidinal unruliness," which "heteronormativity attempts to snuff out" (4). Pointing to Gayle Rubin's demarcation of "sexual outlaws," Berlant marks these outlaws as populations cast as "moral and political threats that must be framed, shamed, monitored, and vanquished if the conventional good life [...] is going to endure" ("Sex in Public" 5). The Count seeks to tame Severa's unruliness and vanquish her libido through seclusion and monogamy. Patricia Vieira, writing on Leitão de Barros's film *A Severa* (1931), argues similarly that Severa "proves to be an independent, proto-feminist woman who endangers established morality. [...] It is patently impossible to chain Severa's libertarian drive and force her to accept an innocuous social position as the domesticated and silent lover of

an influential man. The only solution is the death of the protagonist” (158). Notably, however, Rubin underscores how queer communities “have developed elaborate technology for building public institutions for sexual outlaws” (131). Rubin allows a useful turn from the vanquishing of Severa as sexual outlaw toward fado practice as an institution in which sexual outlaws have thrived, and where Severa’s libidinal unruliness is ensconced in fado practice. Moreover, if the *fadista severiana* is a sexual outlaw, then being moved by her fado is a promiscuous affair, charged with illicit drives and desires. As evidence, Dantas’ drama ends with Severa’s death unfolding as a fado performance. She sings and dies while the Count of Marialva and Severa’s ever-loyal admirer Custódia embrace one other, enmity forgotten, intimately connected and overwhelmed by Severa. Rather than assimilation into or destruction by normative conventions of gender and sexuality, Severa as nexus of fado and desire engenders a promiscuous and homosocial scene inundated with queer intimacy.

### **Unbearable States – *Amália Rodrigues***

In fado’s transition from a practice of Lisbon’s peripheries to codified expressive practice of Portuguese culture, the *fadista*’s penetrative powers, shown to be tied to sexual transgression through Severa’s mythology, morphs into a sublime relationship with the nation concomitant with the success of Amália Rodrigues. Under António Salazar and the authoritarian Estado Novo regime (1933-1974), traditional gendered social mores were built into pedagogical policies and cultural conservatism, forcing the *fadista* into the form of a woman more consistent with official state ideology. Fado was at first inconvenient to Estado Novo folklorization<sup>42</sup> and ideology for

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<sup>42</sup> Kimberly Holton details how the Estado Novo promoted folkloric practices and impoverished rural life as spiritual counterbalance to the industrialized urban centers the different competitions and incentives the regime organized to promote folklore as part of their fascist pedagogy. See Holton, *Performing Folklore*.

its association with urban vice, its use as social protest,<sup>43</sup> and its forlorn postures. Fado's popularity, however, proved impossible to combat, and the Estado Novo installed an elaborate system of categorization, licensing and permitting of compositions, performers and venues to force fado into conservative social, moral and cultural molds. This institutional apparatus provoked self-censorship through revision, editing, and fado poets turned evermore to allegory (Corte-Real 33). Meanwhile, women were consigned to the home, and "economic independence and the emancipation [...] from masculine tutelage [was] discouraged" with fears that "women working outside of the home would trigger the dissolution of the family" (Vieira 161). By the mid-twentieth century, fado had been displaced from Lisbon's nightlife and projected as national heritage. Self-censorship had diffused fado themes and Amália's stature was on the rise.

Through Amália, the paradigmatic *fadista* undergoes a significant refiguring from seedy siren to mother-nation. Born in Lisbon in 1920 to parents who had traveled from the rural interior to the capital, Amália was a poor fruit seller who began to sing publicly in 1935 and debuted at fado houses in 1939 (Nery 327). Her biography reads as a contradiction of the Estado Novo's perfect peasant housewife. A professional performer, her career allows her to be well-traveled and she becomes conversant in several foreign languages. Though she married young, Amália divorced and, later, remarried, never having children. Even as she attained the highest levels of celebrity for a Portuguese performer in her time, however, Gray argues that her rural and humble origins allowed Amália a legitimacy as *do povo* (of the people) (187). Fado lore stresses Amália's "rag-to-riches life narrative, her humble upbringing, her working-class jobs, her lack of formal education and of formal voice training," while foregrounding "a voice and

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<sup>43</sup> Colvin shows how fados could voice resistance through complaint. Nery shows how turn of the century fado reflected the ways in which "the daily lives of this community could not be other than marked by [its] precarious living conditions" (174). Fado took root in other places and other experiences, through students and university life in Coimbra, for example.

public figure who brought Portugal and fado to international attention” (Gray 185-87). Though Amália was an independent artist, the regime put her to work as a “Portuguese representative” abroad (Gray 188), and the specter of the nationalist, rural and isolationist cultural policies hover over some of Amália’s most iconic fados, “Casa Portuguesa” (1956), celebrating the humble poverty of a Portuguese home, and “Lisboa, Não Sejas Francesa” (1955), admonishing Lisbon to be wary of foreign influences. Though she was not the typical rural housewife, Nery notes that she was an “exception,” a way for the regime to gain “various forms of political capital” (330).

Amália as an exception to the normative version of femininity promoted under the Estado Novo, ties her to fado’s past diva, Severa, carrying the marked femininity of its first diva through to its second. Though Amália was cast in several films about fado modeled on Severa’s mythology of doomed cross-class romance, however, Tiago Baptista argues, “[Amália] parece ter afastado da representação tradicional da fadista da Mouraria. [...] Não seria Amália a adaptar-se a Severa, mas sim a Severa a ajustar-se a Amália” (“[Amália] seems to have distanced herself from the traditional representation of the *fadista* from Mouraria”) (100). The *fadista severiana*, sexually deviant, ethnically strange, hairy and doomed, gives way to the *fadista amaliana* as the voice of a collective Portuguese condition. Where Severa’s affective power is located in her body and through her sexuality, Amália’s affective power is both in her voice and beyond her, as she is made to voice an essential Portuguese condition, emerging from authentic Portuguese roots, from the land and the people to which she gives a voice. Vítor Pavão dos Santos records Amália’s attribution of her talent and technique to the folkloric songs of her mother’s rural countryside:

A influência que tinha era da Beira Baixa. Daquelas ondas que o povo da Beira Baixa põe na voz quando canta. Não sei se será do trigo, porque lá não há mar,

mas deve ser do trigo e do milho grosso. [...] Além disso, trazia dentro de mim o sangue e a raça daquela gente. [...] Mas como nasci em Lisboa transportei essa forma de cantar para o fado. (*O Fado* 42)

(The influence I had was from the Beira Baixa. From those waves that people of the Beira Baixa put in their voice when they sing. I don't know if its perhaps from the wheat, because there is no sea there, but it must be the wheat and the thick corn.... Beyond that, I had in me the blood and race of that people... But since I was born in Lisbon, I brought that way of singing into the fado) (*O Fado* 42)

In contrast to Severa's gypsy blood, hairy arms and fiery eyes, Amália locates her fado in a voice that she attributes to rippling waves of wheat and corn, and flowing through the blood of peasant folk.

Amália is the full deterritorialization of fado away from Lisbon's itinerancy and dispersed onto the national terrain in a vocal formation of a rural and authentically Portuguese geography. Amália also distances the *fadista* from ethnicity, pushing away from Severa's Romani origins, insisting on her blood and race as fully, properly, Portuguese. She is in this way a disembodied voice. Her fado is not her own but that of the nation, abstracted as a resonating voice. Her body also transforms the paradigmatic *fadista* in performance at a time when women's bodies were jealously claimed and guarded by the governing regime's restrictive social mores and policies. Amália popularizes the use of a black shawl as modest cover up, invoking references to mourning and piety. In some performances, she is seen standing behind her guitarists, rather than in front (Fig. 6). While singing she often clasps her hands as if in prayer, eyes closed with her head titled back not in ecstasy but in supplication. Through Amália, the illicit *fadista* is made penitent, tasked with representing the nation as it was rendered under the



catholic, conservative and corporatist policies of the Estado Novo. Amália as the ultimate expression of an essential, and shared Portuguese condition cements her as the definitive *fadista*, a new classic, voicing the eternal Portuguese *saudade*, which “came to broadly signify the sense of feeling, history, uniqueness, and time of the Portuguese people and nation... the ‘essence’ of the ‘Portuguese soul’” (Gray 83).



Figure 6. Amália Rodrigues performing live on RTP (1961).

Amália’s conflation with fado, and fado with Estado Novo myth-making, lingered after the fall of the regime in 1974, and in a post-revolution reckoning with decades past, some saw fado and by extension Amália as complicit in the regime’s crimes and stagnation (Nery 338). Amália as a cultural agent of Estado Novo ideology, however, is complicated by the ways in which she circumvented institutional stranglehold and came into tension with the regime as one of its reluctant actors. Nery argues, “[Amália] followed an artistic path entirely [of] her own criteria, which was characterized by constant rebellion before the established traditions of the genre” (332). She was criticized for expanding fado into literary and artistic domains, putting some of Portugal’s most notable poets to music, having poetry written specifically for her and writing her own poetry for fados, usually the domain of men within the gendered labor of fado

practice. Her collaborations with Alain Oulman, first appearing on her 1962 album *Busto/Asas Fechadas*, which featured the original recording of “Povo que Lavas no Rio,” are notable for their deviations from fado’s standard forms. Another track on *Busto*, “Abandono” criticized the imprisonment of political dissenters. Though Amália claimed to not have associated the song with such criticism (Pavão dos Santos, *Amália* 139), Oulman was imprisoned and expelled from Portugal (Nery 344). By the time of her death in 1999, Amália’s reputation had recovered, and she was buried alongside monarchs, though not without controversy.<sup>44</sup>

Paradoxically, though Severa was primarily myth, her body looms within her narrative as a sexual, unruly and desiring woman, while Amália’s life and career, documented and televised, were in many ways abstracted and subsumed into her voice. The sculpted bust of Amália on the album cover for *Busto* eerily suggests the diva disembodied and cemented as statuary, an immortalization of the *fadista* that renders her lifeless; a fado reliquary. *Busto*, however, is also the album in which Amália breathes new life into the genre through unexpected collaborations with Oulman and also with Luis de Macedo and David Mourão-Ferreira. Susana Sardo argues that Amália in the 1960s “é talvez a fadista que melhores condições reúne para produzir... uma viragem no modo de conceber este género” (“is probably the *fadista* with the best ability to transform the mode of conceptualizing this genre”) (Sardo 455), suggesting Amália as an authority of the genre, able to intervene and transform its repertoire, and, by extension, repertoires of Portuguese heritage. Though disembodied, her voice could move, touch, change, and make meaning of Portuguese life as it was lived and practiced.

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<sup>44</sup> When Amália died in 1999, the Portuguese government declared three days of national mourning. She was first buried in a parish cemetery, while debates transpired over whether a female *fadista* deserved such an honor or if even the Pantheon was not enough for someone of her importance (Gray 180).

Through her pivotal role for fado and for the understanding and unfolding of a Portuguese character, Amália's voice is often described as provoking an ecstatic relationship between fan, *fadista* and national identity. Gray argues that Amália's voice "so went beyond itself that for many it became a means of deeply shaping personal subjectivity... a way of feeling Portuguese" (185). Moreover, "Fans, *fadistas*, and instrumentalists emphasize the affective power of Amália's voice as what enabled her to sing to the intimate, to the local, while singing to the world" (Gray 197). Notably, while Amália may have transformed the *fadista* from deviant to demure, a live performance on Portuguese national television in 1961 of "Povo que Lavas no Rio" shows how she rests her hands on her guitarists' shoulders, a tactile manifestation of her authoritative presence, her implicit capacity to touch people, and a potential betrayal of the underlying and marked sexuality of the *fadista*. Amália's touch is a suggestive move that disarms and makes vulnerable guitarist and audience in anticipation (Fig. 6). Ardent fans self-identify as *amalianos* and describe their experience of Amália's voice as "a divine, transcendent," while one *amaliano* declares it "a voice which completely makes one feel dizzy and drunk" (Gray 200-3). Through a vocabulary that suggests passion and penetration, they show how Amália's voice overwhelms, taking the listener up in a thrilling and unbearable experience.

Notably, the *fadistas*'s ability to penetrate people and leave them overwhelmed with emotion in an interplay of affective intimacy is turned back on her in the poem of "Povo que Lavas no Rio," written by Portuguese poet Pedro Homem de Melo (b. 1904 -1984). The poem is a confession of unbearable desires. Its verses romanticize a life of toil, reminiscent of Estado Novo fascination with poverty as pageantry. Yet, beyond glorifying a rural way of life, they lay bare a relationship between performer and *povo* that turns the emphasis away from the public's experience and toward the *fadista*'s desire, with each stanza addressing the people outright,

unfolding a charged and sensual exchange. João Vasconcelos argues, “O povo dos poemas de Homem de Melo é um ser essencialmente corporal, são músculos e sangue, é sensualidade pura” (“The *povo* of Homem de Melo’s poems is an essentially corporeal being, they are muscle and blood, its pure sensuality”) (466). If Amália was the voice of the nation, Homem de Melo’s poem suggests its body as a corporeal and sensual mass of rustic men that incensed him, that he sleeps with, or perhaps only feels that he does, drunk on rustic wine, sharing hidden kisses.

Fui ter à mesa redonda  
 Beber em malga que esconda  
 O beijo de mão em mão.  
 Era o vinho que me deste  
 Água pura, fruto agreste  
 Mas a tua vida não

I went to the round table  
 To drink from a cup that hides  
 A kiss from hand to hand  
 It was the wine you gave me  
 Pure water, rustic fruit  
 But not your life

Aromas, de urze e de lama  
 Dormi com eles na cama  
 Tive a mesma condição.  
 Povo, povo, eu te pertença  
 Deste-me alturas de incenso  
 Mas a tua vida não

Aromas of heather and mud  
 I slept with them in bed  
 And had the same condition  
*Povo, povo*, I belong to you  
 You gave me heightened, incensed moments  
 But your life, no

Homem de Melo wrote himself in an intimate relationship with the *povo* while insisting on an inevitable distance between them. Wine, heather, mud, and toil may symbolize a national condition of rurality shared as an imagined kiss.

Melo, however, was a known homosexual, and during the Estado Novo, despite constraints and risk, male same-sex acts played out in relatively public places.<sup>45</sup> São José Almeida’s history of homosexuality under the Estado Novo lists many rumored homosexuals in Portugal during that time, noting how Salazar showed complacency for gay men in elite circles

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<sup>45</sup> Homosexuality had been criminalized since 1912, and “the Penal Code of 1966 stipulated a maximum two-year sentence for repeated ‘indecent assault on someone of the same sex’” (A.C. Santos 43). See also Bastos. São José Almeida recounts a street culture of furtive sexual encounters in public urinals and gardens (170).

while stifling public discussion, rendering homosexual acts an “unmentionable” but widely practiced vice (127-130). It exemplifies what Mário Lugarinho calls an “ambivalence” in Portuguese cultures to homosexuality, where zones of permissiveness were allowed for men at times, mediated by class and the performance of gender roles (284). Notably, Pedro Homem de Melo is on São José Almeida’s list. A contemporary of the poet describes him as, “Assumido, toda a gente no Porto sabia, mas não se falava” (“Out, everyone in Porto knew, but no one talked about it”) (S.J. Almeida 176). The matter-of-fact declaration suggests Homem de Melo’s homosexuality is well-known. Moreover, throughout the twentieth century, while the Estado Novo mediated homosexuality through a culture of silence and political favor, their misogynist ideologies privileged Portuguese masculinity and their aggressive folklorization romanticized men’s labor. Melo’s “Povo” similarly exploits the cultural fascination with rurality by fetishizing the folk, articulating their bodies and labors in a grammar of affect and desire. In another poem, “O Rapaz da Camisola Verde” (“The Boy in the Green Shirt”) (1954), Homem de Melo describes a scene of gay patronage where an elite john cruises his lower-class object of desire.<sup>46</sup> It marks a homosexual culture where class and connection could enlarge or diminish shades of indulgence.

Notably, Homem de Melo was a fan of fado and of Amália, and Amália records both “Povo que Lavas no Rio” and “O Rapaz da Camisola Verde” as fados. These fados do more than narrate stories of homosexual exchanges, they are part of an affective ground of resonances and cultural practices on which homosexual desires could gather. Homosexuality had circled around fado from its outset. Not only eighteenth century sexual, criminal, and ethnic peripheries, but in twentieth century literary circles. Anna Klobucka considers Modernist poet, lyricist, and openly

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<sup>46</sup> São José Almeida points out how *Variações* would later set a similar gay cruising scene in his song “Canção do engate” (182).

gay bon-vivant of Lisbon's 1920s generation of intellectuals António Botto, possibly the first publicly queer Portuguese personality who wrote openly "homoerotic verse, prose and drama" (Klobucka 110). He also created a gay world of his own accord, through writings, imaginings, and inventions. Klobucka describes Botto's creations as, "um 'mundo gay'... complexo e diverso... [onde] se autoinventou como uma especial de ícone gay mas também construiu ao seu redor uma complexa realidade virtual... em que pôde prosperar plenamente como tal" ("a 'gay world'... complex and diverse... [where he] invented himself as a type of gay icon but also constructed a complex virtual reality around him... in which he could fully prosper as such") (Klobucka, *O Mundo Gay de António Botto* 12-13). In one these creative constructions he wrote about a stroll that never happened through the fado houses of Lisbon's Bairro Alto with Federico García Lorca, who he had never met. In his notes, he describes how Lorca visited him in Lisbon, and how they strolled through Mouraria, "Onde a Severa morreu no ciúme da paixão abraçava a marialva" ("Where Severa died of jealous passions embracing marialva"), and how he took Lorca to Bairro Alto, "Às tabernas de desgraça... onde à noite versos meus cantados pela mulher que vive para a saudade o entusiasmará até chorar, comigo, também" ("To disgraceful taverns, where at night, a woman who lived for *saudade* sang my verses and moved [Lorca] until he cried, with me, too") (Klobucka, *O Mundo* 71). The homosocial scene recalls Severa's death scene. Further, Botto claims he has written the verses of the fado being sung, and inserts his work in fado's female repertoire, which then acts as a terrain where gay men may meet, and be disgraceful, and through the voice of a *fadista*, be overwhelmed. The female repertoire of fado is in this way revealed to also provide shades of ambivalence and permissiveness for homosexuality.

Botto writes fado into his world as a ground through which he can stroll with Lorca, whose homosexuality had also been talked about. It is a fado setting as scene of desire. Botto imagined himself having a *voltinha* with Lorca, a little stroll through fado houses, where fado may serve as both the events they attend and as euphemism for sexual trysts. Fado is an actuated terrain in his gay world, a site through which Botto can thrive. Moreover, he writes that the voice of a woman overwhelms him and Lorca with her unbearable affective power, though notably she is singing his verses. Botto is allowed to desire, to stroll, to create his gay world through the fado. The woman of *saudade*, however, is tied to her fate as *fadista*, as the material ground through which he climaxes, in tears, in pleasure. São José Almeida notes that when he was exiled for one too many real-world indiscretions to Brazil in the 1940s, he was given a fado performance by Amália Rodrigues (98), another example of a *fadista* enabling gay inventions and reinventions. Botto was unique in his openness, but in his homosexual *voltinhas* he was not an anomaly. Fado has been a part of queer lives both real and imagined throughout its practice in public and mediated ways marked by the female *fadista* in voice and in repertoire. Since the mid-twentieth century, Amália's voice has been the imprint of that female repertoire, and the material ground on which same-sex desires may gather.

Amália's voice may too easily be read as a "glass closet," as Eve Sedgwick describes it, which hides the "open secret" of homosexuality and is "shaped by the conjunction of an extravagance of deniability and an extravagance of flamboyant display" (*Epistemology* 165). When Homem de Melo's poem is recorded by Amália as a fado, the mass of rustic smells, toil, wine, stolen kisses and heightened moments of sensuality is wrapped in nationalist sentiment. The *fadista*'s affective relationship with the *povo* renders Homem de Melo's poem a sublime confession of desire and of distance. Richard Elliott writes, "The poet Homem de Melo and the

singer Rodrigues take on the responsibility of hymning the people while also observing them at a geographical and temporal distance” (54). Though Elliott tasks them both with authorial labor, the poet is surpassed by Amália’s voice through which these verses became a fado classic and part of Portuguese heritage. Amália exhibits the *fadista*’s unbearable affect while safely keeping Melo’s desire wrapped in her voice as the *fadista* who is always at a distance.

The final line of each stanza – “Mas a tua vida não,” is an ambiguous distancing, however. It can be rendered as “But not your life,” suggesting the *fadista* is unable to access everyday Portuguese life and experience for herself, she may only sing about it. When read as, “But your life, no” however, it has a more incensed air about it – a refusal of the life of the people. The *fadista amaliana* is understood as the former, fated always to be a lamentable outsider, disembodied, her voice not her own, but of the people. *Variações*, however, offers us a potentially different reading of this verse, and a queer formation of *fadista* – the *fadista antonioana*. When he records Amália’s fado his performance suggests the more indignant refusal, rather than penitent resignation to fate. *Variações*’s recording of “Povo que lavas no rio,” prods at the ways in which fado gave ground for nonnormative desires. Yet, it is not an unmasking of fado to get at homosexual desires. Rather, it is the very vector of those desires, the very material on which *Variações* stakes his claim to his desires, imbricated and enmeshed with the *povo* that he desires, but not their heteronormative lives. Jorge Quiroga reminds us that glass closets and open secrets may be “part of [an] equation,” but not the only equation – there may be “broader circuits that [do] not necessarily end with an ‘outing’, or an identity as conclusion” (1). It is a useful orientation away from the connective thread of homosexual desires closeted by *fadista* worship and stylings, and toward fado practice as part of a circuit of practices that enable queer desires and subjectivities in Portuguese.



## **An Unbearable Outing – António Variações**

Richard Elliott notes Variações's intervention in "both fado and Portuguese pop" as "an openly homosexual appropriation of Portuguese music tradition" (145). Yet, fado has been ensconced in nonnormative sexuality and gender transgression from its initiation. When Variações records and performs "Povo que Lavas no Rio," Amália's national hymn of desire and distancing, he places his own vocal improvisations, homosexual desires and bare-chested body in bed with a rustic mass of men smelling of heather and mud. Though he did not publicly discuss his homosexuality, Variações put it on extravagant display. He was well-known in Lisbon not only as a unisex barber, but also for his transgressive performances and style.<sup>47</sup> His albums, videos and performances celebrate a queer life locally situated in Portuguese social and cultural contexts. A TV broadcast of Variações performing "O corpo é que paga" (1983) shows him bare-chested in a leather harness and straps, loosely whipping himself as he danced (PortugalMetal). Bondage and sadomasochism are alluded to in the song's verses about the body in pleasurable pain. On the cover art for *Povo que lavas no rio/Estou além* he is wrapped in scarves and fabrics in hues of pink and purple with deep cleavage revealing a hairy chest (Fig. 7). He pushes his image into the exoticized terrain on which Severa's sexual deviance was constructed. His head wrap and scarves and his open shirt invoke the dramatization of Severa as strange and hairy. The virility displayed through his open shirt and hairy chest is conflated with Severa's gender unruliness and confounded by his homosexual lifestyle. Through this album art, Variações is part of a genealogy of deviant sexuality that aligns him with Severa as sexual outlaw, while singing his desire and distance from the *povo* not as lament but as site of queer potential.

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<sup>47</sup> Gonzaga details Variações's early notoriety and offers a series of photos that document his transgressive styling and creative output.

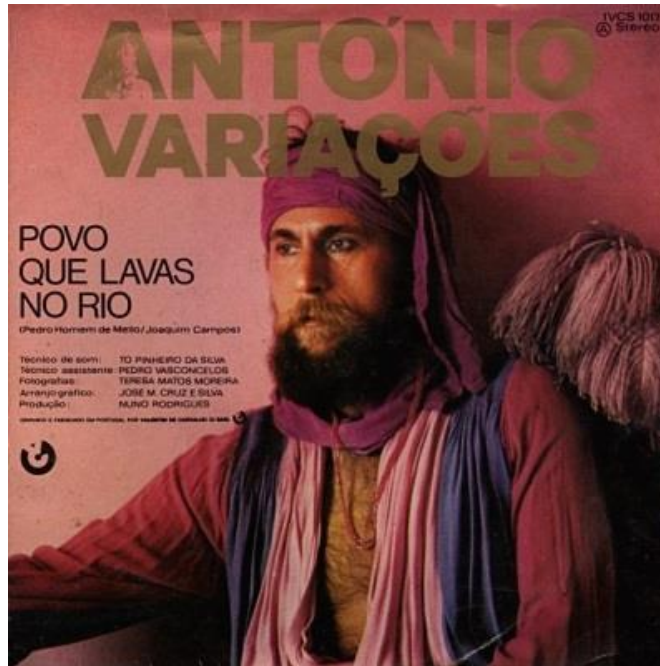


Figure 7. Cover art, António Variações, *Povo que lavas no rio / Estou além* (1982)

Variações reinscribes Melo’s words with outright homosexual desire and reclaims this fado as a queer narrative. While the lyrics speak to a remoteness between fadista and folk, they betray a physical intimacy that upends that distance and, sung by Variações, take on an overtly sexual nature. Variações shares wine with these men, in a communal bowl passed hand to hand as if sharing a kiss; he sleeps with them, overwhelmed by the mass of muscle with scents of heather and mud. He is a part of them through the affective experience of their bodies. In his televised performance of this fado, his sensual swaying eroticizes this bodily experience, while his *voltinhas* both invoke Amália’s imprint and supplant her disembodied voice with his embodied stage presence. Through him, the ending of each stanza seems less to suggest resignation at the inevitable distance between the marked *fadista* and the simple folk, and more a defiant rejection of their normative way of life, even as he desires and loves them. The queer potential of Severa’s death by fado is realized in Variações’s “Mas a tua vida não” (“But your

life... no”). In his version, he stretches the *não* (no), improvising, and amplifying each ending. He creates a terrain of material resonance with each extended and sustained *não*.

In arrangement, performance and vocal technique, *Variações*’s exploits the potential for transgression that resides in the genre as both improvisatory tactics and deviant sexuality. Improvisation in both performance and gender functions as a tool of citation and aberration, thought as “an act of collective memory and invention” (Parker 61), as the simultaneous “constraints and production of political possibilities as these emerge from the constant choreography of...meaningful movement and...subversion” (Delgado 18). Fado’s deviance, its silences, its interruptions, the dragging out of moments in dramatic heights and cascading drops, lend themselves to a queer praxis that is not foreclosed on by fixed identity, but elaborated through practices of “circuitousness” (Quiroga 80). Notably, it is through improvisation that Judith Butler troubles gender, as “a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint,” and as the key to gender’s undoing (1). Invested with a repertoire of suggestive deviations, charged silences and overwhelming experiences, *Variações*’s provocative turn as *fadista* pulls at the constraints of gender in fado’s repertoire – He is both Severa and Amália, pulls them into his voice and body, and sings them out in a long and sustained *não* – sounding a rejection of heteronormative constraints, and a desiring to be enmeshed with the cultural milieu that understands his *voltinhas*. In the TV appearance, he turns his body, his head, his face, his eyes, as he sings, even as the reworked music, new wave post punk and synthesized, may also be a wily way in which to apprehend fado, an improvisation that pulls fado out of its time bind, into a transitive expression of his 1980s and a return to the marked sexuality of *fadistas* past, and to the queer sexuality of underground urban peripheries in his contemporary moment.

By 1982, with a revised penal code, democratic Portugal saw significant changes to “moral standards, attitudes and behaviors,” with new dialogues and visibility for women’s rights, homosexuality and sexual intimacy, the decriminalization of sex acts between consenting adults in private, as well as drag queen “entertainers [who] gained nationwide visibility” (A.C. Santos 45). Notably, Variações’s abrupt death in 1984 pushed his sexuality into the public sphere as newspapers suspiciously posited in print the possibility of Variações having died from AIDS (Gonzaga 299). They also just as quickly circumvented his homosexuality and cause of death to honor his music.<sup>48</sup> A contemporary of Variações suggests that his implicit outing hurt sales of his second album *Dar e receber*, released weeks prior to his passing. “A ideia que o António podia ter morrido de Sida fazia muita impressão às pessoas, naquela altura. E não ajudou nada à vida do segundo LP do António” (“The idea that António could have died of AIDS left an impression on people, at the time. And it didn’t help the life of his second LP at all”) (Gonzaga 308). The rumors of his death from AIDS jolts the performer out of his culturally mediated milieu. If his voice, in all its resonances with fado and folklore, could imbricate his homosexuality in broader cultural circuits, the specter of AIDS pushed him out of those circuits, outside of Portuguese cultural peripheries all together. It was too public an outing. Though he had his sexuality on display, his death decontextualized his performance of queerness from Portuguese references, onto unmediated ground beyond too visceral and unbearable of a limit.

Nevertheless, Elliott argues that Variações suggested “the way the 1980s might sound” in Portugal, by directing the progressive turns of modern music through the registers of Portuguese genres. Yet, he also materialized queer desire as a terrain upon which the affective repertoires of

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, “A nossa capa,” in which the editors of *TV Top* explain, days after Variações’s funeral, that the use of his image for the issue’s cover is in remembrance of him and not to participate in any speculation regarding his cause of death.

Portuguese heritage move and map. He emerges as site of queer thriving that is locally defined, entangled with the normative practices and sexualities of Portuguese culture, even as he fails to succumb to their conventions. Beyond how the 1980s might sound, *Variações* serves as an example of how nonnormative bodies and desires also lay claim to fado not only as national mythology but as affective and constitutive social practice. The resonances of *Variações*'s pioneering can be felt through other *fadistas*: in the “androgynous nature” of Gonçalo Salgueiro's performances (Elliott 171), and Paulo Bragança's irreverent and punk aesthetic (Elliott 146), and in Gisela João's 2016 video for “Labirinto,” written by David Mourão-Ferreira, which features Fernando Santos in his drag persona Deborah Kristall lip-synching the fado sung by João. *Variações*'s most direct descendants in a line of unbearable *fadistas*, however, are *Fado Bicha*, whose cultural moment is decidedly more LGBTQ+ informed, revealing contemporary ways in which fado continues to offer a ground that is both now and a return to its gender unruliness, migrancy, and Luso-Afro-Brazilian roots.

### **Fado Bicha – Same as it Ever Was**

In promoting a then-upcoming *Fado Bicha* performance at their venue, *Favela 2.0* (a second iteration of the *Favela LX* venue and performance space in Lisbon) pointed directly at Lila's body as part of a fado lineage of deviance, transgression, and agitation, as part of a queer fado archive in the making:

O fado nasceu das bocas dos marginais e maculados, das prostitutas e enjeitadas, dos bêbedos, dos marialvas e marujos sem eira nem beira, rufiões e tatuados. Foi depois polido e adotado pelas elites portuguesas, mas pertence à rua, à viela, à sarjeta. E à Favela. Lila é uma *fadista* com pelo na venta e no peito também. Casaco tigrasse puído e copo de vinho barato na mão. Batam palmas e cantarolem com ela que o fado também é transgressão e alvoroço.

(The fado was born of the mouths of the marginal and tainted, the prostitutes and the abandoned, the drunks, the womanizers and sailors with nothing to their name, ruffians and tattooed. It was then polished and adopted by the Portuguese elite, but it belongs to the streets, the alleys, the gutter. And to the Favela. Lila is a fadista with hair in her nose and on her chest, too. A tiger-striped threadbare coat and a glass of cheap wine in her hand. Clap your hands and hum along with her, because the fado is also transgression and upheaval.) (Favela 2.0, Facebook)

Before announcing Lila, the event promotion sounds out a defense of fado as queer history, recalling its history as a practice of prostitutes and deviants, of marginal figures of society, liminal figures, provocative figures. It reminds the reader that, though fado is now national patrimony, it belongs to the streets, and the margins and peripheries of those streets, the alleys, the gutters. It announces that fado also belongs to the *favela*, in reference to the venue's name but also provocatively dislocating fado from its seemingly stable anchorage as Portuguese national song by pointing to its Afro-Brazilian. *Favelas* are the peripheries of urban centers in Brazil, the poor shanty towns and hillside ghettos of an urban landscape, historically populated by communities of color living in various stages of resilience; a site of traumatic histories, persistence, and its own collective cultural practices. Only then does the announcement introduce Lila Fadista, pointing out the hair on her chest much in the same way that Dantas made a point of mentioning Severa's hairy arms, meant to mark her as virile, powerful, dangerous. The implicit suggestion of Severa's gender transgression, is made explicit through Lila, revealed on stage and in body as actual gender transgression. When asked about her gender identity in an interview with Fado Bicha for this work, Lila says she identifies as agender.



Figure 8. Fado Bicha, from left to right: Lila Fadista and João Caçador. Photo by Hermes de Paula

Lila’s move out from under gender binaries is replicated in a quick-paced progression in Portugal in aligning with global LGBTQ+ rights discourse, resonating with the rainbow skirt she wears in a Fado Bicha promotional photo (Fig. 8), and toward depathologizing transgender identities. A quick elaboration of trans toward a variety of individualize gender variant positions, however, puts Portugal at the forefront of transgender self-realization without medical intervention required.<sup>49</sup> Trans Gender Europe says, “Portugal can still be legislative innovators on LGBTI equality – don’t stop now!” in light of the 2018 push that was able to have the *Lei de Identidade de Género* (Law of Gender Identity) passed by the Portuguese Parliament. The law grants the right of self-determination to transgender people without medical certification, for a change of name and sex on documents. The encouragement came after Portuguese President

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<sup>49</sup> BBC News reports that as of May 10, 2018, “Only five other European countries have a model based on self-determination, according to ILGA-Europe: Malta, Norway, Denmark, Ireland and Belgium,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44063016>

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa vetoed it, stating that the law's inclusion of minors 16 and above as an issue, and asked that medical certification be required for anyone under 18 years of age.<sup>50</sup> After a bit of rewriting, the Portuguese Parliament implemented the ask, and on June of 2018, for everyone 18 and over, gender became a personal, individual relationship between the citizen and the state, no doctor's note required.<sup>51</sup> Notably, in commemoration of the 2019 Transgender Day of Remembrance, the LGBTQ+ activist group ILGA-Portugal posted a message from Daniela Bento, trans activist and board member. In her message, Bento recounts a trans history lacking any Portuguese references. She mentions, "Stonewall, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Diego Sanchez, Masen Davis, Laverne Cox, JoAnne Keatley."<sup>52</sup> It is important for this contemporary moment in LGBTQ+ life in Portugal to claim their part in a larger identitarian family, beyond the confines of Portuguese history and cultural references.

Lila, however, came to her gender identity in part through fado. It was performing fado in drag Lila began to elaborate on her ways of being agender. As the Portuguese language, however, offers no easy way to avoid gendered pronouns, she is indifferent to them, but prefers to identify as female both on stage and in her own agendered ways off stage. Lila suggests in her declarations of gender ambiguity that she does not rush toward one gender binary anchor even as she has definitively pushed away from another, holding gender and genre transgression in tension and in place. Bearing markers of masculinity, such as a beard and hairy chest, all while using her body and voice in feminine ways, Lila is undoing patrimonial notions of gender roles codified through fado practices that have opened a site of gender elaboration for her as an

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<sup>50</sup> Announced in Portuguese on the Presidential website, May 9, 2018.

<http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=147430>

<sup>51</sup> Manuel Pestana Machado, *Observador*, June 12, 2018: <https://observador.pt/2018/07/12/parlamento-aprovadamente-lei-da-identidade-de-genero/>

<sup>52</sup> ILGA-Portugal, "Dia Internacional da Visibilidade Trans 2019 - Opinião de Daniela Bento", May 31, 2019: <http://www.ilga-portugal.pt/noticias/1096.php>



individual. On stage, Lila is a provocative presence, using her voice, which resonates as a male voice type, to capture all the drama inherent in fado performance. Her face is usually done up with some make-up, and though earlier shows and recordings show Lila wearing wigs, more recent performances have her without hair pieces, dressed in gowns or other costumes, sometimes head wraps, others times just her hair, earrings, charms, and other jewelry, with facial hair and a hairy chest provocatively in tension with the more feminine applications of make-up and dress.

While Lila began as a drag iteration of *fadista*, Lila has always performed in her own voice, and any drag components have been discarded or have morphed into Lila's own style. Still, across her body and through her movements, Lila drags fado out and registers in her performance and through her embodiment of *fadista* a conflation of collective pleasures and deprivations of fado and *fadista*, showcasing fado's transitivity and several historically contingent fado temporalities. Lila is Severa, Amália, and Variações, or rather she is located in a genealogy at a productive juncture to exploit all of their affective potentials. Severa's hairy arms resurface on Lila's beard and hairy chest. Her gender transgressions remade in Lila's gender unruliness. Amália's penetrative power is made a material threat through Lila, and the implicit transformation of Variações as *fadista* is in Lila performed outright. In Lila, fado's feminine repertoire is dragged out of time altogether, and given new contours. Elizabeth Freeman's thinking of gender drag through the dragging of time is a useful way to think of how drag lays a locus of bodies and times onto new space/time terrains. Lila's performance and embodiment as *fadista* drag out the details of the *fadista*'s deviance, forcing us to linger on her as *fadista*, as sexual, as agender, as feminine, as hairy. Moreover, Lila deploys the *fadista*'s tools of drama, which are also tools for the dragging out of musical time, and through every *melisma* and

*glissando* — every elongated note, punctuated silence, every rise and fall of her voice, Lila dictates time according to her desire, while dragging out of the audience's affective responses of bodies caught in heightened moments of tension, in collective breaths, tears, sighs, goosebumps, and titillation.

A notable transformation is also happening to and through João Caçador, in his presentation on stage as part of Fado Bicha and in his role as collaborative partner. Outside of Fado Bicha, Caçador is a *fadista* and performs fados regularly in the more traditional fado houses of Lisbon, part of a circuit of singers that do the rounds of Lisbon's lively and local fado scene, singing from the standard repertoire available to him. For Fado Bicha, however, he does not sing but, rather, plays an electric guitar, already well outside genre conventions. At the start of their partnership, however, Caçador seemed content to allow Lila center stage, to support her, play for her, watch her, listening, following, responding through his guitar, but, in contrast to Lila, dressed more plainly, almost quietly, letting his guitar ring out, make noise, feedback, and electrify, rather than his body. Through their time together, however, Caçador has become more comfortable in his role, enough to provoke and drag out tensions of his own. Now, he also wears make up at times, across his eyes, across his face. His clothes have become more attention-grabbing and he may wear tightly-fitted leather pants. His shirts have become showier and revealing of his chest as well. He has also taken to wearing stilettoed and high-heeled shoes on stage. He acknowledges this transformation, and credits his time in Fado Bicha as revelatory, allowing him to question his own performance of masculinity, and of facing down the anxieties of living openly as a gay man without drawing unwanted attention or criticism. As part of Fado Bicha he seems to welcome a different kind of attention now, and seems attentive to himself, to his own critique, through the clothes, the make-up, and his own sexual presentation — in his new

look he seems to be saying that he, too, has a body responding to and performing fado, tense and in tension, arousing and aroused. Though he admits that heels are still only for the stage, it is his transformation that allows us a transition from the body of *fadistas* to the body of fado as genre, and toward the role of composer and guitarist in fado as queer praxis. It is a transition that signals how Fado Bicha disfigure and remake fado's gendered conventions not just through Lila as *fadista* or Caçador in lipstick and high heels, but primarily through their compositions.

### **Fado Indiscretions**

Fado Bicha's triangulation of fado as *bicha*, Brazilian, and Angolan, is a wily reorientation of fado away from its constant re-sedimentation through turns and returns as Portuguese heritage. When this triangulation from fado as Portuguese to fado as Luso-Afro-Brazilian is considered along with their embodied performances, and the ways in which they improvise, disfigure, and rewrite fado repertoire, a new triangulation emerges where fado is hairy, *bicha*, black. Lila has declared in interviews, "Acho que o fado é muito bicha e sempre foi, só faltava alguém pegar nele dessa maneira," ("I think fado is very *bicha* and has always been. It's been missing someone to take it up in that way").<sup>53</sup> Caçador also argues that though queer bodies and desires are a documented part of fado history and practice, from composers to performers and fans, nonnormative lives and desires have never been explicitly written about, or sung about, in fado repertoire (Monteiro); that fado themes have never quite represented outright the queer lives that have always participated in its dissemination. They answer this lack through their music, taking up classic fados and breaking down guitar parts, forgoing the Portuguese guitar altogether for a more electric and progressive approach, reworking lyrics to suit a queer

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<sup>53</sup> In an interview with *dezanove.pt*, December 5, 2017: <https://dezanove.pt/o-fado-e-muito-bicha-e-sempre-foi-so-1134947>

narrative, remaking iconic fado songs with lyrics that speak to contemporary LGBTQ+ experiences and desires, and hitting at the heart of fado's masculine domain – the music, the guitars, and the lyrical compositions – through an irreverent circumventing of codified fado forms. Three fados that they perform, “Lila Fadista,” “Crónica do Maxo Discreto,” and “Lisboa Não Sejas Racista.” are examples of well-known and recognizable fados remade by Fado Bicha in composition and in form, through music and lyrics. Notably, this aspect of fado performance is also gendered. If the female repertoire of fado can more effectively wield vocal melodrama, the men in fado guard its compositional forms, or as Gray puts it, “Men are fado theorists, women fado performers” (160). Gray reveals how there are gendered roles in fado, where men are considered the gatekeepers and police of fado repertoires, and where men are the vast majority of fado instrumentalists, and make up the vast majority of fado poets and lyricists. Of those realms, there have already been some transgressions in fado's history. Amália Rodrigues was at first criticized for selecting poems to make into fados and for writing her own fado poetry, rather than continue to have poems selected and written for her. Her once transgressions became transformative landmarks in fado's narratives, moments that shifted fado repertoires and appropriated her transgressions as new classics.

Beyond that world of the fado diva and fado's more commercial, pop culture and international stars, however, along the routes of Lisbon's cobblestoned streets and alleyways, the terrain of fado in its more local guise, much of fado's gender code remains in place. Men play the guitars, lead the rehearsals, write or maintain fado poems and police fado's compositional forms, all parts of what Gray calls fado theory. It is a world that Caçador knows as an insider, and one that Lila was never a part of, having first sung fado in queer spaces and venues geared more toward LGBTQ+ events and nightlife. In an interview on the Portuguese TV program 5

Para a Meia Noite, Fado Bicha are asked about the ways in which they give gay themes to fado. Host Filomena Cuatela goes on to ask them about any criticism they might have received from the “*marialvas*.”<sup>54</sup> Lila and Caçador both take issue with the narrow description of their work as putting gay themes to fado music, replying that this is not the limit of their work, that they write and want fado to express LGBTQ+ themes, and not just gay, and are not limited to those as well. Notably, however, it is Caçador who takes up the question of the *marialvas*, and which underscores his transgression of Portuguese archetypes of masculinity – the fado guitarist, who has kicked open the gates of fado’s repertoire for rewriting; and the *marialva*, that masculinist, sexist, womanizer, that João as a gay man, and now a bit more *bicha*, does not fit. As noted previously, *marialva* refers to gentlemen of a certain class, historically in reference to the Count of Marialva, who was Severa’s lover in Dantas’ play *A Severa*. It is helpful to remember however, how *marialva* refers to upper class, aristocratic, cavalier, womanizing men who would frequent the taverns and inns of fado ill-repute, and have affairs with *fadistas*. Though the *marialva* moved through the bohemian and marginal fado life, taking up ill-fated lovers and lifestyle at will, he is always able to return to his privileged lifestyle and status as a member of good society.

To ask about criticism from *marialvas* is a telling reference to the policing of fado by its gatekeepers, and their gendered, sexist roles – how the male fado performer may step into fado’s terrain but is not bound up with the same shame as the feminine fado forms. It recalls the ways in which the Count of Marialva fell in love with Severa and then tried to imprison her in his apartments, to take her out of fado lifestyle, a move she rejects, escaping through a window and running away. The Count’s affair with Severa is mapped onto fado’s move from marginal urban

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<sup>54</sup> A video of the interview is made available on 5 Para a Meia Noite’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpssaiU-kgM>

practices to mainstream legitimacy in fado lore (Elliot). Through Severa's rejection of the count, and in her death, fado as deviant expression also seems to die, and in its place throughout the twentieth century, a more respectable fado emerges. Fado Bicha provoke this respectability, and just as Severa jumped out of the Count's window in rejection of her assimilation into good society, Fado Bicha reject the codes of behavior and performance expected of them in taking up the national artform. Caçador admits, though they have many supporters, there are those among fado's more traditional players that are very critical of them, with Lila adding that they are aggressively so.

Fado Bicha's descent into the back-alley ways of fado as marginal art form and deviant expression are evident from the first electrified note Caçador plays on any of their songs. In Fado Bicha, the primacy of the Portuguese guitar and gendered roles in fado composition unravel through the collaboration between Lila and Caçador. Caçador has more direct experience in fado performance and is a trained guitarist aware of the particularities of different fados. He knows what one can do to classic fado forms, which have recognizable chord progressions but with lyrics that can change and time signatures that may vary; and what one should not do to *fado-canção* (fado-songs), whose music and lyrics are unchangeable and usually considered within the repertoires of fado divas. These rules unravel in Fado Bicha, as both classic fado forms and fado-songs are up for disfiguring. Caçador states that rather than police their fados, he works to create conditions of possibility in his playing for their thriving. He is aware of fado timing and rhythm as crucial parts of a fado, timing that rules both guitar and vocal notes, that may dictate how words and syllables are vocalized over a series of notes. With Lila, whose talent for fado is not the product of rigorous lessons, nor has Lila been a part of the fado house circuits of Lisbon where fado codes and conventions are still expected, Caçador reveals he has learned to be

attentive to “os erros que não são erros,” (“mistakes that are not mistakes”) of their collaboration. Rather than policing Lila’s singing, word placement, time, rhythm and *voltinhas*, Caçador uses his guitar to create time and space for these mistakes that are not mistakes to flourish.

Turning away from traditional fado guitar arrangements, Caçador uses his skills in electric and jazz guitar to create arrangements that reference fado but are unbound by it. The buzzing of the electric guitar pulls fado out of codified mummification, insisting on fado as a contemporary expression, electric in its sound and affect. Reverb and other effects add space to each note, and to each arrangement, shaping Caçador’s guitar playing as a stylistic part of the fado performance, adding sparkle to the music as make-up and glitter do to their faces and clothes. While they rehearse their performances, fado is primarily a live artform, and an art that is affected and changeable by live performance. The *fadista* holds tremendous power once she begins to sing, power to cause disruption, to break out of the fado, to leave a fado’s drama unresolved. Thus, in their collaboration, an improvisational dialogue occurs between voice and guitar, as in traditional fado performance, where the *fadista* breaks out of a time signature to drag out notes in moments of drama; to drag out silences and create space within a fado; to take the audience up in anticipatory pleasure. Caçador must still listen and follow, plucking his electric guitar to the contours of Lila’s singing, even as he is sounding out his own voice through his arrangements, provocatively against fado stagnation and in favor of fado provocation, and gender provocation, and sexual provocation, electrified and electrifying a room.

Fado poems and lyrics suffer the same charged undoing and remaking in Fado Bicha, and in this Lila is both *fadista* and fado theorist, as she writes the lyrics of their refigured fados, taking up the roles of fado poet and performer – a move not unprecedented but that, through Lila, is unafraid to leave metaphors and allusions to homosexuality behind in favor of a more direct

narrative. While the LGBTQ+ moment may open up sites of articulation, however, Lila pulls from fado repertoire. Notably, she gives new names, new stories, and a contemporary voice to the deviance and affective inundations maintained in fado's feminine repertoire. Lila puts fado to the task of divesting female sexuality of its shame, investing fado's queer potential with the activism of the age, expressing queer bodies and desires, and calling out patterns of state violence, racism and oppression, all with the wit and talent of a writer for whom the pen was a first tool of artistic expression.

One such refiguring of fado song and iconography occurred for a performance that was part of the Miss Drag Lisboa competition in November of 2017.<sup>55</sup> Fado Bicha took to the stage and remade the fado "Júlia Florista" through their performance of "Lila Fadista," renaming and re-materializing Lila in place of Júlia Florista, the namesake of the fado by Joaquim Pimentel (cir. 1930s). Júlia was a flower seller at the turn of the nineteenth century in Lisbon's public squares who sang while she sold her wares and became renowned for her singing and gained fans from all ranks and classes. Her notoriety gave her access to the upper class, and she was invited to sing for them. She died relatively young in 1925, immortalized soon after in the fado that bears her name. The original lyrics of the fado "Júlia Florista" describe her as a bohemian, bizarre, figure – a true *fadista*. Fado Bicha take up the bohemian and bizarre description, but Lila writes her own name into the fado instead. Lila Fadista inserts herself as a figurehead of Lisbon's nights, and to *fadista* adds *bicha ativista* (activist *bicha*), connecting the performance of fado to LGBTQ+ activism. Performed live in a queer performance space removed from the well-worn fado paths of tourist maps, Caçador offers an instrumental introduction as Lila receives catcalls from the audience, "You're beautiful!" Caçador plucks out a rhythmic intro that breaks for

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<sup>55</sup> The performance is viewable on Fado Bicha's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EflCgsoX9iw>



punctuated exclamations from Lila, at first with a “Shhh!” playfully referencing the way in which fado performances demand silence from the audience in more traditional venues. Lila then offers a kiss through the mic, “Muah!” followed by a sensual moan “Unnhh...” The next expected interjection is met with a sly stare by Lila, a dragging out of silence that is more seduction than lament, eliciting chuckles and evidence of the performer holding the audience’s attention and the audience in tension. A cheeky “grrreow,” as Lila shimmies her hips and shoulders, leads into the first verse where a new *fadista* comes to life.

“Lila Fadista”

by (Tiago) Lila Fadista (and Joaquim Pimentel)

A Lila Fadista  
 Bicha ativista  
 Diz a tradição  
 Desta Lisboa  
 Figura de proa  
 Da nossa canção.  
 Figura bizarre  
 Que ao som da guitarra  
 O fado viveu  
 Trocava amores,  
 Mas os seus valores  
 Jamais os vendeu

Lila Fadista  
 Activist *bicha*  
 As tradition says  
 In this Lisbon  
 A figurehead  
 Of our song  
 Bizarre figure  
 That, to the sound of a guitar  
 Lived fado  
 She would change her lovers  
 But her values  
 Were never for sale

Ó Lila Fadista  
 Tua linda história  
 O tempo gravou  
 Na nossa memória;  
 Ó Lila Fadista  
 Tua voz ecoa  
 Nas noites bairristas,  
 Boémias, fadistas  
 Da nossa Lisboa.

Oh, Lila Fadista  
 Your beautiful story  
 Time has recorded  
 In our memory  
 Oh, Lila Fadista  
 Your voice echoes  
 Throughout the parochial nights,  
 Bohemian, *fadistas*  
 Of our Lisbon

Keeping Pimentel’s original chorus, Lila’s verse offers a *fadista* that is a queer activist rather than a flower seller. As she sings that second line of the first version, the audience erupts in

cheers and applause, recognizing the new dynamic iconography emerging for fado in this performance, presented here as *bicha* and activism, and the new image of *fadista* in Lila and in Fado Bicha. Lila is singing to them not from the past but in the present, and registering through her body, voice, and performance, the conflation of past fado icons, occluded fado deviance, and the potential of fado as queer praxis and futurity.

A similar refiguring happens at a separate performance to the recognizable fado-song “Nem as Paredes Confesso” (“Not even to the Walls will I Confess”), recorded by Amália Rodrigues in 1957. Through Caçador’s guitar and Lila’s lyrics and voice, that fado became “Crónica do Maxo Secreto” (“Chronicle of the Secretive Male/Macho”). The original fado has the *fadista* declare that regardless of how many times her suitors ask, beg, cajole, lie, implore her to reveal who she loves, she will not confess it, not even to the walls of her home. It’s a song about keeping one’s desire and love secret. Lila’s lyrics, however, turn the plot into a modern-day experience of popular cruising and sex apps, such as Grindr, Scruff, or Manhunt. On these apps, all sorts of suitors may ask, beg, cajole, lie, and implore to encounter other sorts. Lila’s lyrics are a send up of the masculine types that appear on the apps and claim to be heterosexual, in relationship with a woman, married, or unable to openly meet, yet asking for pictures, explaining their desires for other men away as mere curiosity, begging for discretion, as they trawl through pictures, videos and messages of other men looking for sex. As a song about the modern-day equivalence of public gay cruising, Lila’s fado poem recalls the work of Pedro Homen de Mello’s fado “O Rapaz da Camisola Verde,” with its implicit references to men cruising for men, and also Variações’s songs about gay cruising culture in 1980s Lisbon, “Canção do Engate.” Yet, Lila turns the secret that is at the heart of the original fado inside out, and rather than the *fadista*’s voice as ground for covert indiscretion, Lila exposes shades of

permissiveness to glaring light of fado humor and critique. Through Fado Bicha, the over-sexed *marialva* and the elite homosexual Portuguese man are exposed and rendered into fado repertoire.

Fado Bicha are expanding a new iteration of fado as queer history, archive, and praxis. Notably, the title uses *crônica*, which can mean both a chronicle, as in a story, or chronic, as in a condition that occurs repeatedly and is difficult to be rid of. Here, the need for discretion turns chronic condition that plagues the experience of gay cruising on the apps. It is an outing more in tune with articulating LGBTQ+ subjectivities as visible, and recognized, identities. Moreover, this chronic condition is diagnosed as *maxo secreto*, which wittingly points to two possible chronic conditions difficult to eradicate that may plague gay life and expression in Lila's poem: the need for discretion and how this discretion supports a masculinity that does not have room for queer desires. Yet, *maxo*, an intentional misspelling of the Portuguese word *macho*, means male and masculine. It operates in this fado to signify a maximum iteration of both man and macho as a hypermasculine gender model for men. Fado Bicha calls out that masculinity, sounds out its limit, and offers fado indiscretions as ways to undo toxic forms of gender and sexuality, but not only. Their indiscretions are part of a queer archive of fado indiscretions, from Severa's sexual prowess, Amália's improvisations, and Variações turn as *fadista*. Fado Bicha add compositional fado refigurings to a list of queer fado indiscretions.

Fado Bicha have also been a part of a different kind of outing, dragging Portugal's deep-rooted racism and racial injustices as they manifest in the present-day out into the light through their fados. Recent racist police violence against black Angolans in Lisbon's Jamaica community, one of the city's peripheral neighborhoods that are home to large portions of Lisbon's black and Afro-descendant population, was captured on video and virally shared on

social media, sparking outrage and days of demonstrations and protests across the Portuguese capital (Sousa). These slums on Lisbon's margins sprung up and expanded starting in the 1960s due to immigration from the then colonies and, after the Revolution of 1974, Portuguese-speaking African nations of Angola, Cabo Verde, Moçambique, Gíneu Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe; as well as internal migration from countryside folk seeking work in the city; and as a home for the country's Roma population. Many of these neighborhoods have expanded with little help or resources from the city, which views these areas as sensitive security zones. Though crime rates do not bear this designation out, city policies have had various iterations of plans for the cleaning-up or demolishing of the self-made structures and housing, which would effectively mean the dismantling of these communities and displacement of their residents. The incident is one of many,<sup>56</sup> but has brought a renewed and much-needed focus to Portugal's marginalized communities, highlighting issues of racism in policing strategies that also saturate nationalist discourse and Portuguese social and cultural norms. In response to the Jamaica case, and similar incidents as representative of a more ingrained and dispersed issue, demonstrators rallied by declaring, "There are many Jamaicas," with some protests escalating. "Across the suburbs cars have been set on fire and police stations targeted... reflecting an urban reality that is rarely discussed in Portugal" (Sousa).

These are the new people and states of migrancy that now make up the peripheries of Lisbon's good society, the new ill-fated of Lisbon's urban landscape, that are turned into fado repertoire through Fado Bicha, who use fado as petition and amplification. There most polemic

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<sup>56</sup> According the Sousa's reporting: "Heavy-handed policing in the suburbs is blamed for the deaths of at least 10 people in the last 15 years – among them 14-year old Elson Sanches in 2009 – and no police officer has ever been convicted in connection with them. Then there is the high-profile case, currently in court, in which 17 police agents stand accused by the public prosecutor of a litany of crimes against a number of young black men and women from the self-built neighborhood of Cova da Moura, including aggravated kidnapping, falsifying testimonies, racial abuse and assault."

performance, before the release of their upcoming video, was in refiguring the well-known fado, “Lisboa Não Sejas Francesa,” (Lisbon Don’t be French) recorded by Amália Rodrigues (1945) while Portugal was under the Estado Novo. “Lisboa Não Sejas Francesa” reflects that regime’s anxiety over foreign influences. The song playfully compares Lisbon to a young lady in danger of losing herself to the latest French fashions and foreign suitors. Lisbon is reminded that, as a good Portuguese girl, she has all she needs right at home. Fado Bicha play with the metaphor of Lisbon as female, but in their version, Lisbon has grown up. She is now a mature woman. Rather than seduced by French fashion and lovers, Lila implores Lisbon not to be racist in a searing critique of police brutality, unresolved prejudices, institutional racism, and heavy-handed denial in “Lisboa Não Sejas Racista,” (Lisbon Don’t be Racist) with lyrics by Lila and recorded by Fado Bicha in response to the Jamaica incident, and subsequent demonstrations.

Uploaded to their YouTube profile,<sup>57</sup> the video shows Caçador and Lila in some make-up but rather than on stage, they are in a living room, underscoring the impromptu decision and urgency felt in the writing, recording, and releasing of this song. It is an urgency that permeates the lyrics, which lay out a litany of violence, victims, culprits, activists, complaints and petitions as a reckoning for Mrs. Lisbon. Lila casts the city as in denial of its systemic and historic racism, marginalizing city-dwellers of color while continuing to gloat over a colonial past masked as glorious accomplishments. In a progression of verses, Lila implores Lisbon to see and hear the black voices, activist voices, fascist voices, *bicha* voices, and displaced voices of the city.

“Lisboa Não Sejas Racista” (2019)

Lyrics by (Tiago) Lila Fadista, music by Raúl Ferrão

Dizes que não és racista  
 Senhora Lisboa  
 Vou dar-te só uma pista

You say you’re not a racist  
 Mrs. Lisbon  
 I’ll just give you a hint

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<sup>57</sup> The recording can be viewed on Fado Bicha’s YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBk5Q4tpYTM>

E olha que não falo à toa  
Lembras-te do quanto  
Chutaste para canto  
Quem filho do Império fora?  
Bastardos serão, portanto  
Do Jamaica à Cova da Moura

And I'm not talking lightly here  
Remember how you  
Swept to the corner  
Those once children of the Empire?  
I guess they're just bastards  
From Jamaica to Cova da Moura

Lisboa, não sejas racista  
De visão simplista  
Só te fica mal  
Lisboa, a Joacine diz-te  
O racismo persiste  
Porque é estrutural  
Lisboa, mas sempre na berra  
O «vai prá tua terra»  
Ouves-te a falar?  
Lisboa, não sejas racista  
Um psicanalista  
Podia ajudar

Lisbon, don't be a racist  
This simplistic approach  
Doesn't become you  
Lisbon, Joacine tells you  
Racism persists  
Because it's structural.  
Lisbon, always so quick to say  
"Go back to where you came from"  
Do you hear what you're saying?  
Lisbon, don't be a racist  
I think a shrink  
Could help

The first verse and chorus layout the stakes of Lila's poem, to call out the contradiction at the heart of Portuguese nationalist discourse, one that relies on the continuing glorification of past Portuguese sea voyages without mentioning the colonial expansion and violence enacted in that process, from the transatlantic slave trade to years of war in the colonization of African nations. This history, however, is viscerally felt and invoked in the ways that black, African and Afro-descendent people are marginalized and segregated in contemporary Portuguese society. That segregation is twofold, in the peripheral neighborhoods of their own construction, which support the lives of many people but which remain, however, as sore spots marked for eradication by city and government policies; and in the ways which Portuguese social and cultural discourse still see black people as a different race, as a people apart, as fodder for ridicule, as a locus of prejudices and preconceptions, as the downfall of Portuguese greatness in Africa, and as a contemporary invasion, taking work, homes, and space away from more deserving and properly Portuguese citizens. These discourses are not conjecture, as Fado Bicha

points out. They bear out in the unequal distribution of homes, social services, and rights of citizenship in Portugal, and in the unfair meting out of violence motivated by deep-rooted racist pathologies. As Lila writes in fado poem form, the people of African nations once deemed Portuguese provinces now find themselves cast aside and outside proper Portuguese society, marginal, even as their histories, their bodies and their lives continue to feed nationalist discourses built on a mythologized past and current tourism booms that promote Lisbon's multiculturalism.

Notably, Lila mentions Joacine Katar Moreira by name. Moreira is President of the Institute of the Black Woman in Portugal (INMUNE), and a researcher at the Center for International Studies of the University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL). Joacine has been an activist voice in Lisbon in recent years, and a vocal critic of continued racism and oppression of black lives in Portugal, particularly of how black women in Portugal are impacted. Through her reference to Joacine, Lila implores Mrs. Lisbon to listen to black women. Lila aligns Fado Bicha in solidarity with those who actively work to undo the structural racism Lila and Joacine are unmasking. It is a black and queer intersection that resonates with fado's history as the expression and practice of black, Afro-Brazilian, Roma, and queer lives. It is also a feminist collaboration in the form of a lyrical association that takes black women and people of color into account as a necessary part of a queer fado archive in the making. In the following verses, Lila's criticism is directed at recent plans to build a new museum in Lisbon initially to be called the Museum of the Discoveries. After that name sparked criticism and debate about the nature of Portuguese colonial expansion and the transatlantic slave-trade, various other names have been suggested, such as Museum of the Voyages, and other innocuous terms that serve to glorify a violent era of Portuguese history, which is already mythologized throughout the city and the

nation in various museums, monuments, institutions, holidays, history books, architecture, tourism campaigns, and many other components of Portuguese nationalist discourse. Lila puts her fado to work in unraveling that discourse.

Revisita a tua história	Review your history
Senhora Lisboa	Mrs. Lisbon
Aprende a quem deves memória	Learn to whom you owe memory
Os caídos da tua coroa	The fallen from your crown
Mas ouvi dizer	But I've heard told
Que agora queres fazer	That you now plan to make
Um museu da lusa aventura	A museum of Portuguese adventures
Chega de enaltecer	Let's stop glorifying
Um império assente em escravatura	An empire built on slavery

The song continues with each verse and chorus bringing new offenses and petitions to bear out on a well-known melody that Lila's voice maps out while articulating a Lisbon that is blind to the past and the diversity of bodies, lives, and desires she must attend to. Caçador's electric guitar references the original fado even as he eschews instrumental breaks and bridges to give Lila space for all she has to say.

Through their collaboration, fado's temporality, circuitousness, turns and returns, are mobilized to reveal that city as black and Portuguese. In the third verse, Lila calls out a history of police violence that stretches back to the recent past, connecting the current irruption of violence against black bodies and the history of the transatlantic slave trade to a pattern of violent actions against black lives in Portugal. Lila admonishes Mrs. Lisbon to remember Alcindo Monteiro, a Portuguese citizen of Cape Verdean descent who, on June 10, 1995, was murdered in the early morning by a group of 17 white men who identified as skinheads, trolling downtown Lisbon while celebrating a soccer win by a Portuguese national team. It was also one of Portugal's national holidays, June 10<sup>th</sup>, which commemorates Portuguese culture and history, also called the day of Luis de Camões, the sixteenth century Portuguese writer, and the Day of Portuguese



Communities.<sup>58</sup> The skinheads, who were later caught and brought to trial, celebrated the soccer win by violently attacking several black men that night, men they saw as not truly Portuguese. The attackers faced prison sentences. Twenty-three years later, however, one of those convicted of Monteiro's murder is now the head of a nationalist political party.<sup>59</sup> Under Salazar's fascist rule, the June 10<sup>th</sup> commemoration was called The Day of the Portuguese Race, and while the fall of Salazar's regime in 1974 is a celebrated moment of Portuguese history, the notion of a Portuguese race have been harder to undo. The ghosts of fascism have rematerialized recently, most clearly for Lila in the return of one of Monteiro's murderers as a legitimate politician. Lila writes her outrage into fado repertoire:

Lembra sempre o bom Alcindo	Always remember Alcindo
Lisboa, na praça	Lisbon, in public squares
Tempos maus vejo aí vindo	I see bad times coming
Pela corja do dia da raça	From the scum of "race day"
Que agora ri	Who now smiles
No sofá da TVI	On the TV talk show couch
A falar bem do Salazar	Speaking wonders of Salazar.
São opiniões, é só um nazi	It's just opinions, he's just a Nazi
Não vê mal em normalizar	You see no harm in normalizing

Lila ends the song with two rousing choruses that name other activists fighting against structural and institutional racism in Portugal and amplifies the plight of Lisbon city-dwellers in light of a surging boom in tourism and unaffordable housing.

Lisboa, não sejas racista	Lisbon, don't be a racist
Sorriso trocista	Mockingly smiling
Às queixas que há	at the complaints that arise
Lisboa, celebra a Beatriz	Lisbon, celebrate Beatriz,
O que a mulher negra diz	What black women say,
E o Mamadou Ba	And Mamadou Ba
Lisboa, com ecos de PIDE	Lisbon, with echos of PIDE
A vir de Alfragide	Coming from Alfragide

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<sup>58</sup> Associated Press reported on the incident: <https://apnews.com/7266b16f7b8f2a831af9b12d1f36afeb>

<sup>59</sup> <https://sol.sapo.pt/artigo/615240/faz-hoje-23-anos-que-alcindo-monteiro-foi-espancado-ate-a-morte>

Segurança pra quem?  
Lisboa, não sejas racista  
Cassetete fascista  
É bosta e bem

Safety for whom?  
Lisbon, don't be a racist  
Fascist batons  
Are shit, truly.

Lisboa, não sejas racista  
Não é só pra turista  
Vir e ocupar  
Lisboa, não sejas racista  
Velha cavaquista  
Não queiras voltar  
Lisboa, não sejas racista  
E crê que esta lista  
Não vai amansar  
Lisboa, não vives não falas  
Tira-me essas palas  
E aprende a escutar

Lisbon, don't be a racist  
You're not just for the tourists  
To come and occupy.  
Lisbon, don't be a racist  
Old Cavaco Silva supporter  
Don't go back to times of yore  
Lisbon, don't be a racist  
And believe me, this list  
Will not go soft  
Lisbon, don't live it, don't say it  
Get the blinders off your eyes  
And learn to listen

Remember Beatriz, listen to black women, and to Mamdou Ba, Lila urges, almost as an incantation, calling into her fado important voices of anti-racist activism in Portugal and beyond. Beatriz Gomes Diaz is a member of the activism group SOSRacismo, an organization that has existed in Portugal since the 1990s, and founder of Djass-Associação de Afrodescendentes (Djass – Association of Afrodescendents) to fight for the rights and lives of Portuguese of African descent. Djass successfully organized to have Portugal commit to erecting its first memorial to Africans affected by the slave trade on a quay where slaving ships would dock, a decision that has stirred up controversy and debate in a nation that is reticent to revisit its past as anything but a brave adventure and a kinder gentler colonialism than its European counterparts.<sup>60</sup> Mamadou Ba is a leader of SOSRacismo, an activist, writer, and voice in the fight against racism in Portugal and elsewhere. Lila calls all these voices into action in a litany that reads as diagnosis and prescription, laying out as points on a map the voices and paths of new terrain that does not

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Ames, "Portugal Confronts its Slave Trade Past," *Politico.eu* February 2, 2018. Accessed on March 7, 2019.

cover up past wounds. Rather, these wounds remain open sores of deep-rooted trauma. In these rousing stanzas, Lila's lyrics are resplendent with criticism and blackness, she does not stop at the trauma, but amplifies the activism, points to the black men and women in Portugal that fado, that Portuguese culture, should be listening to. Fado Bicha turn and return fado as black, and they have one more redirection.

In the final verse, Lila Fadista warns Mrs. Lisbon of selling out to tourists while city residents are bought out of their homes and pushed out into the city's margins. Lila rebukes this displacement amidst a tourism surge which has made many areas of the city unaffordable to longtime residents. Tourism, investments in courting foreign businesses, a vibrant arts scene, a perception of affordability relative to other European capitals, and an element of discovery inherent to Lisbon's new designation as a European must-see tourist stop vis-à-vis other European cities, has made Lisbon very trendy and part of its appeal is a perceived multiculturalism and safe quality of life. The irruption of racial tensions, police violence, demonstrations, protests, and increased discussion of all those things in Portuguese media and online disrupts the newly minted image of Lisbon. Fado Bicha's move to underscore the negative effects of tourism on the life of Lisbon residents is also in tension with Lisbon as a new gay destination. Moreover, Fado Bicha have found themselves imbricated in the reinvention of Lisbon as gay destination. Lila and Caçador play a part in Lisbon's pink iteration, one in tension with their name, *bicha*.

### **Fado in Pink**

Sine their debut in 2017, Fado Bicha have performed at various venues in Lisbon and around Lisbon, from alternative spaces, to queer spaces, and including Lisbon's Cinema São

Jorge. They've performed in other Portuguese cities, and at international venues, as part of pride festivities, on TV and have an upcoming video. Their most consistent engagement, however, has been at The Late Birds, a guesthouse in Lisbon that caters to a gay male crowd and is part of the growing trend that situates the Portuguese capital not only as a must-see European city for tourism, but also as a gay and gay-friendly destination. Fado Bicha perform their queer fado, hairy, black, and *bicha*, at an upscale boutique hotel with a gay monied, muscled, male and mostly white clientele. Fado Bicha admit to having had reservations about performing at The Late Birds, which promotes on its website that they are "an urban resort for the gay male community," though all guests and friends of guests are welcome. Riffing on their name, they write, "Late Birds look out for each other, and if one Late Bird needs another, the whole flock will fly to their same-feathered friend. Take heed: Late Birds mean business and love all others at the same time" ([thelatebirdslisbon.com](http://thelatebirdslisbon.com)). Telling by the photos they use on social media, these are birds of a light-skinned feather, in varying stages of undress, and uninhibited, happy, muscled gay men lounge at the pool and on the grass. There are models in photo shoots and famous gay porn stars, too. They come with the lifestyle that The Late Birds invites you to be a part of, and they are implicitly sold to anyone considering a stay at the guesthouse as part of the package, promising potential skin to skin run-ins at any moment.

The Late Birds is a beautiful guesthouse that was one a dilapidated building in one of Lisbon's trendy quarters, now renovated into a multistoried boutique hotel that keeps the integrity of its architecture intact, and they offer an outdoor courtyard and a pool – a rare amenity for smaller hotels in a tightly filled city like Lisbon. The hotel is also part of Lisbon's recent history of real estate renovations, gentrification, and displacements. It is owned and operated by Carlos Sanches Ruivo, who is also a founder of Variações - Chamber of Commerce and Tourism

LGBTI of Portugal (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex).<sup>61</sup> Taking the name of Variações for their organization is evidence of how António Variações has become an avatar for LGBTQ+ life in Portugal. The organization reports it was founded to encourage and support existing and new businesses in Portugal for and by LGBTI people, to take advantage not only of the approximately one million LGBTI Portuguese consumers who live in the nation, but also of over two million LGBTI tourists who visit Portugal annually,<sup>62</sup> the vast majority passing through Lisbon. It reflects a new era of market-minded and business-oriented actions that caters overwhelmingly to the gay in LGBTI, and less so to the other subject positions and identities in their name. The surge of tourism in Lisbon has brought new kinds of gay life to old streets, predicated on pink dollars. While there has been gay life in Lisbon long before this surge in tourism, there are now more bars, new restaurants, hotels, and homes-turned-hotels through Airbnb, and new opportunities for gay businesses and business owners to expand and exploit what they offer. Lisbon's coastal beaches have always had gay sections, such as Praia 19 on Costa da Caparica. Now, brochures promote this beach, organize guided excursions to it and include these excursions as part of hotel packages.

Lisbon as a gay destination, or Lisbon's pinkwashing, has come along with the increased activism for more visibility, rights, and public spaces for queer life in the city, part of the larger homonationalist trend in other nations that create semblances of equality around assimilationist politics. Activists have fought for specific rights of marriage, adoption, non-discrimination, and benefits have accrued, most of which are still imbricated in hierarchies of class, race, and gender, benefiting economically well-off white gay men and couples seeking a more traditional family.

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<sup>61</sup> This is the acronym the organization uses for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex. I use it in their name and in reference to their organizational agendas, reports, and targets, while using LGBTQ+ in my writing.

<sup>62</sup> As reported in *dezanove.pt* "Variações. Empresários LGBTI querem trazer Europride para Portugal," December 17, 2017: <https://dezanove.pt/variacoes-empresarios-lgbti-querem-1136944>

The global gains in gay rights have improved the lives of many queer people around the world. Yet, the globalization of gay rights activism and pink dollar business initiatives may ignore the intersections of race, gender and sexuality and the particular precariousness within which transgender and gay people of color exist. Moreover, these initiative project gains in businesses marketed for gay travelers as gains in civil rights, and site themselves as evidence of an accepting and safe society. It is an interesting point of reflection in Lisbon, as housing becomes less affordable and longtime residents are forced out of their homes in what have become trendy and desirable areas of the city. Pinkwashing serves to color Lisbon a happy and gay shade, while the details on the ground continue rather murky, as current escalations of racial tensions and demonstrations against the Airbnbization of the city center attest to.

The way of living offered by The Late Birds is not what Fado Bicha had in mind when Lila started to sing fado. For Lila, and for Caçador, Fado Bicha has been about transgressing gender norms, breaking down sexist paradigms, and undoing a masculinity that has been allowed to fester in varying shades of permissiveness, at the cost of other ways of being and desiring. Built into their name is a pejorative for an overly-effeminate gay man most readily associated with Brazil. Richard Parker's study of homosexuality in Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s shows how the influx of market-driven identitarian gay politics, which brought in foreigners, money and a more globalized, and politicized gay lexicon is in tension with the *bichas*, *travestis*, and *entendidos* (those in the know) (1999). This tension continues unresolved as *bicha* has not yet been fully recuperated as a rallying and politicized identity. It is a marker that for many has been a site of harassment in Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultures. *Bicha* points to the devaluation of the feminine form in a sexist, masculinist, patriarchal, heteronormative society. Archetypes of masculinity carry through into peripheries of same-sex acts, marking hierarchies of homosexual

ways of being by their distance from archetypes of masculinity. *Bichas* are exposed when others find shady zones of permissiveness in lusting after them or in targeting them with violence, as Parker shows (31). A *bicha* is caught in a gendered bind. *Bicha*, however, also underscores an identity formation that can shift out from under market-driven LGBTQ+ identities. It may be a particularly Luso-Afro-Brazilian way of being queer. It has yet to be fully politicized, it has also not yet been fully appropriated into or snuffed out by the white-washed gay or academic theorizations of queer (and I hope this work keeps that trend), continuing to insist on localized and contextual elaboration. Being *bicha* may suggest a wily way of stepping out from under global gay archetypes, and may signal to other *entendidos* a thriving identity beside muscled, monied, and macho.

Through Portugal's cultural interests in anything Brazilian and immigration back and forth, there are and have been *bichas*, *travestis* and *entendidos* in Portugal, too. Yet, the language is particularly Brazilian, marking these forms as itinerants, the product of Lisbon's migrant movements. They are the sound of a queer transatlantic lapping onto Lisbon's shores. In claiming to be *bicha*, Fado Bicha take up a wily way of orienting fado along more queer, transatlantic contours that include trans, lesbians, and gender variance unmoored from binaries and/or saturated in femininity. Fado Bicha's transgressive fado resonates with an amplification of the feminine, not according to fado's gendered conventions, but according to its affective resonances. In *bicha* the feminine form is amplified, excessively. It is the excess that is the transgression, that marks the *bicha* as desirous, rousingly vulgar, and provocatively aberrant. It is an excess of being that finds a rich affective repertoire of unbearableness in fado's female repertoires, and which saturates Fado Bicha's fado in unbearableness. Notably, *bichas*, and other

*entendidos* are not explicitly represented in the Late Birds social media campaigns, even as they hosted Fado Bicha twice a month, and charged their guests for the privilege.<sup>63</sup>

Fado Bicha do not shy away from this tension in my interview with them. Their performances at the Late Birds make them part of what city residents see as a split economy (Minder), one that deals with tourists and benefits from the tourism surge, and one that doesn't, where residents try to survive the ever-increasing cost of living with little change to their income. They were approached to perform at the Late Birds first for a private event and then offered a regular spot in the guesthouse's parlor performing for guests and for paying spectators. Hesitant after an unpleasant first experience, they have found their biweekly engagements at the Late Birds to be a welcomed event, a place of experimentation, and a consistent form of income for their work. Most of their other performances at more outsider and queer performance spaces do not offer remuneration outside of tips collected from the audience. The crowd at the Late Birds, however, can afford the cover charge and they often play to a crowded parlor of visitors, fans and friends, some with little prior knowledge of fado or of Fado Bicha, others with a desire to experience fado in a different setting and performed in a different way. In this way, The Late Birds exposes their feathered community to the flocks contained in Fado Bicha's repertoire. While the Late Birds association with gay porn stars might seem to gesture to a certain sexual libertinism that could resonate with fado's early sexual deviancy, both Lila and Caçador point to the marginal, queer, and alternative venues they perform at as more representative of Fado Bicha, as a stronger link to fado's past. In this way, they exploit pink dollars to draw returns on fado, to ground their performances in activism and in representing incommensurable subjectivities. They carry *bicha* in their fados, even as they are bound up in the city and the

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<sup>63</sup> Fado Bicha have recently ended their engagement at The Late Birds, as their career continues to grow.



genre's unresolved tensions. They revel in these tensions as sites of arousal, of dispossession, of letting go, and being turned on.

### **Returning the Touch**

Fado is a genre in circuitous renewals and returns that has built an elaborate litany of feeling Portuguese upon an affective and temporal bind of its female repertoire in voice and body. A genealogy of unbearable *fadistas* reveals a feminine repertoire with queer potential marked by a sexuality that had been displaced from Severa's body to Amália's voice, mobilized by *Variações* and is now refigured through Fado Bicha to give voice and body to a new array of itinerant, peripheral and desiring characters. These *fadistas* pulls at histories that reveal same-sex desires, gender transgression, intersectional points of tension imbricated into fado practice. These are queer lives lived through fado, implicitly sung, explicitly felt. Queer lives have made fado houses, fado practices, and *fadistas* vectors of their desires, and they have done so by transgressing the genre's codification, sedimentations, and conventions. Gray shares a telling anecdote about a lesbian couple, drunk at a fado performance "with glazed looks of rapture on their face... lost to the fado. (174). They break with decorum when one reaches up and kisses the *fadista's* hand and hem of her skirt, inattentive to the snickering crowd (Gray 173-74). Gray notes the snickering as proof that fado venues and performance are sites of actively policed normative social and cultural mores. Yet, in an unbearable moment, a lesbian enraptured disrupts the fado performance and reaches out to the *fadista* with a kiss that reciprocates the intimacy and returns the touch. It is, in some way, a return that Fado Bicha perform, finding fado unbearable in its silences and omissions, transgressing its coded repertoires and conventions, kissing fado with open mouths that tell queer tales, rally against systemic racism, and return fado to a Luso-

Afro-Brazilian diasporic formation. Meanwhile, Angola's popular electronic music genre kuduro and its transgender star Titica are disrupting Luso-Afro-Brazilian diaspora and aesthetics altogether.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Reading Titica



Figure 9. Video still of Titica in the documentary *I Love Kuduro* (2013)

Mid-way through the trailer for *I Love Kuduro* (dir. Mário Patrocínio, 2013), a Portuguese-language documentary produced in Angola about kuduro, the popular electronic genre of song and dance, artist and transgender woman Titica appears rehearsing sweat-inducing repetitions of choreography with dancers. The documentary cuts to Titica at a crowded show. As she walks out on stage, she asks the audience, “Does anyone want to marry me?” Dressed as a hybrid of pageant queen, show girl and blushing bride, Titica receives riotous applause (Fig. 9). A voiceover declares, “Kuduro is a way for us to show our potential, our Angolan strength,” while the trailer cuts again to a man dancing on a corrugated metal rooftop. He flips into the air. Body hinged at the waist, legs held out in V formation, his body seems suspended in motion in an abbreviated flip, and he comes slamming down onto the roof in the kind of move that gives

the genre its name – kuduro, from a play on the words *cu duro*, meaning hard ass, and implying struggle, stubbornness, and resiliency. Though Titica appears for only a moment in the trailer, she has been one of kuduro’s most sought-after stars since her debut album *Chão* (2011). Born in 1987 as Teca Miguel André Garcia in the capital city of Luanda, she is also Angola’s most visible transgender woman, performing in a genre whose international popularity serves as a cultural counterpoint to decades of violence and government corruption. *Chão* (floor) launched Titica’s career, from kuduro dancer and performer for other artists, to being named kuduro Artist of the Year in 2011 by Angolan national newspaper *O País*. The album’s title track was the most played kuduro record that year. A second track, “Olha o Boneco,” features cisgender female Angolan singer Ary, who has been named an Angola diva in national media, and is known for the more traditional Angolan genres of kizomba and semba. Titica has since released two other full-length albums, *De Última à Primeira* (2014) and *Pra Quê Julgar?* (2018), has toured in Africa, in Europe, and performed in North and South America. She has appeared at Rock in Rio (2017), The Red Bull Music Academy (2018), and has released a single with Pablló Vittar this year, “Come e Baza” (2018), a remake of a track on *Pra Quê Julgar?*

Titica’s prominence in kuduro as transgender woman has led to her role as LGBTQ+ activist in Angola. In 2013, the Joint United Nations Task Force on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) named Titica as a National Goodwill Ambassador, announcing her as an Angolan music icon who can “help raise awareness on issues relating to HIV prevention and treatment, especially among young people in Angola.”<sup>64</sup> Both Titica’s prominence and kuduro’s popularity in Angola and in other parts of the world are new looks for the nation. Angola has recently decriminalized same-sex acts with the adoption of a new penal code that overwrites laws implemented in 1886,

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<sup>64</sup> UNAIDS, “UNAIDS appoints Angolan music icons, C4 Pedro and Titica as National Goodwill Ambassadors,” October 8, 2013: [www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2013/october/20131008angolagwa](http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2013/october/20131008angolagwa)

when Angola was still under Portuguese colonial administration.<sup>65</sup> After 133 years, and 10 years of debates and negotiations, the Agência Angola Press Agency states the new code responds to the “economic, political and social reality” of the nation “in actuality,” and is “genuinely Angolan.”<sup>66</sup> The code implements limits on large sums of money that can be removed from the country at one time, increases the maximum penalty for incarceration, legislates environmental protections and penalties for the poaching, decriminalizes abortion and legislates against sexual discrimination, though there are no specific protections for transgender individuals in the new law.

The new penal code undoes legal vestiges of Portuguese colonial rule in Angola. Luanda, the nation’s capital, was founded as a colonial port city by the Portuguese in 1576 and served as a center of slave-trading with the Portuguese colony of Brazil, a relationship that continued with an independent Brazil after 1822. Portuguese interest in the Angolan territory grew throughout the nineteenth century, and Luanda was expanded as an economic hub and a cosmopolitan city, while incursions into the interiors were meant to stem off other European interests in their scramble for Africa. In the mid-twentieth century, under the authoritarian Estado Novo regime, Portugal fiercely resisted independence movements within African holdings and calls for decolonization. In 1961, the existing liberation movements MPLA, FNLA and, in 1966, UNITA went to war against the Portuguese. The war for independence raged for 13 years, mostly outside of Luanda. War, international sanctions, inflation, and fatigue with the Estado Novo in Portugal led to the April 24, 1974 Portuguese Revolution and a mass exodus of Portuguese interests, administration, business and people out of Angola, while the different political factions vied for power within. The MPLA declared independence on November 11, 1975, and civil war broke

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<sup>65</sup> Carrie Thompson, “Angola Decriminalizes Homosexuality; Bans discrimination,” *The Jurist*, January 25, 2019.

<sup>66</sup> ANGOP, “Deputados aprovam novo código penal,” January 23, 2019. All translations are my own.

between the MPLA, backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, and UNITA, supported by the United States and apartheid South Africa, in a Cold War context, while lasting beyond the thaw. (Moorman 5). The Angolan civil war lasted 27 years until 2002 with few respites of truce. Moreover, from 1979 to 2017 José Eduardo dos Santos was President of Angola, marking a long-period of less than democratic rule marred by corruption and the funneling of money from Angolan industries and resources to family members, creating “simultaneously an exceptionally wealthy country and yet one of the poorest in the world” (Arenas *Lusophone Africa*, xxxii). The new penal code is meant to address the historical problems of corruption and extreme economic disparity. Meanwhile, though Dos Santos is no longer president, his children continue influential, with his daughter, Isabel dos Santos (b. 1973), consistently topping lists as Africa’s richest woman.

Kuduro’s history is entangled with the long years of war, and with its history of corruption, even as it has become a site of queer thriving not only through Titica’s fame but through Dos Santos’s other child, his son José Eduardo Paulino dos Santos (b. 1984), who goes by the name Corean Du. Du is the producer of *I Love Kuduro*, through his media and content production company Semba Productions. He is also a fashion designer, music artist, producer, and was recently featured in southern California monthly magazine *Rage* with the headline, “From Angola with Love – Corean Du, a Proud Angolan, Queer Artist, and Defender of LGBTQ Rights.”<sup>67</sup> He is deeply involved in promoting kuduro beyond Angola, and at an international conference on the genre, he declared “Kuduro *is* Angola” (Moorman, “Anatomy” 26). As part of the Dos Santos family, Du’s is a controversial figure to be promoting an LGBTQ+ lifestyle, with a proximity to political power that offers him protection from common place homo and

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<sup>67</sup> Joel Martens, “From Angola with Love,” *Rage*, April 20, 2019: <http://www.ragemonthly.com/2019/04/10/coreon-du/>

transphobic violence. He is also a polemic figure as part of kuduro, which developed through the 1990s through local and global influences, and as a product of a devastated national terrain after countless years of war.

Kuduro emerged in both Luanda and in Lisbon's Angolan enclaves through cyclical patterns immigration of middle-class Angolan youth (Sheridan 84). Lisbon *kuduristas* Buraka Som Sistema grabbed the attention of European and UK electronic music artists and DJs, and had a notable collaboration with British artist MIA, releasing the single "Sound of Kuduro" (2008) and receiving interest from a wider audience. Arguably the most famous kuduro song is not a kuduro song. Luso-French dance music artist Lucenzo's "Vem Dançar Kuduro" ("Come Dance Kuduro") (Yaris/Universal Music 2010), was a European hit with a generic Latin dance rhythm. The song turned global Latin pop hit after Don Omar recorded a Spanish-language version, "Danza Kuduro," (Machete 2010). While kuduro has a "transnational mobility... both within and without Portuguese-speaking circuits: in Salvador de Bahia... as the cutting edge "progressive" sound of contemporary Lisbon... as the "ghetto" darling of London techno houses... and on the Latin American and Lusophone dance scenes worldwide," Moorman argues that kuduro is "the vibrant pulse of Luanda's youth. It is woven deeply into everyday urban life and contemporary history" (Moorman, "Anatomy" 24).

As a modern genre of electronic music and dance, kuduro is marked by Luanda's urban matrix of city and *musseque* – the makeshift communities on unpaved roads that surround the city's urban center. Historian Marissa Moorman argues that the *musseques* are "the crucible where popular urban Angolan music was created, and within an around it a sense of nation. Alternately damned and lauded, the musseques, while on the physical periphery of the ever-growing city, have always been at the center of urban discourse and life" (*Intonations* 28).

Kuduro straddles the urban center and the musseque. A modern pulse resonates through the different electronic beats, the equipment needed, recording and production studios. Its production and distribution is hybrid, from the technology of samplers and sequencers used to make kuduro *batidas* (instrumental components of kuduro), to the locally-specific method of distribution and airplay, where aspiring producers and artists give new music to Luanda's blue and white *candongueiros*, mini-bus taxis, to play for their passengers (Moorman, "Anatomy" 24). Its dance repertoire roots the genre in the dusty unpaved musseques and the conditions of life on the ground.

Kuduro dance has a vernacular of movement that oscillates between rigidity and flexibility, flows and interruptions, with dips, falls and lifts. The tension in kuduro's movements resemble broken limbs suddenly made new. Moorman describes kuduro as an anatomy for a cultural body responding to material conditions in Luanda, where "kuduro creates alternative systems and infrastructures through its production and promotion strategies and in the content of its performances," to address the state's "absence of and... failures of infrastructure" ("Anatomy" 24). Kuduro dancers move their bodies in ways that suggest bones shifting, breaking, or absent altogether. Moorman argues, "As a result of war and mismanagement, Luanda's material conditions—dilapidated buildings, insufficient or improperly maintained infrastructure, disease, poor sanitation, high unemployment—are bone crushingly grim. So better to have no bones than to have them crushed" ("Anatomy" 30). Kuduro dancers break with the beat, lock up their limbs and fall to the ground and rise back up in patterns of rigid and flexible movements. Kuduro's "bodily contortions—sucked-in cheeks and stomachs, lunatic looks, and dramatic drops to the ground," are for Moorman representative of "violence done to the body and the creativity that survival under such circumstances demands" ("Anatomy" 30).



Dancers who are missing limbs—from land mine explosions, war, and other tragedies of life—turn their physical liabilities into performance boons. Dance choreography moves dancers deeper into their circumstances and produces an excess, a margin of maneuverability. Rather than escape their circumstances, or erase the history and memory of war, kuduro dancers re-member (put back together differently, reunite, or articulate) their bodies and their world through dance. Yet kuduro dance is not mnemonic or memorializing. Instead, it uses the body to push back against the forces of history and contemporary life, writing a story of triumph against circumstance, including the mud and dilapidation of the musseques, and creating corporeal virtuosity and pleasure. (“Anatomy” 31)

Moorman outlines a kuduro anatomy that takes on a salient contour when considering Titica’s success and visibility in the genre as a transgender woman. If kuduro re-members Angolans who have lost limbs, literally, as Angola is one of the most landmine-contaminated countries in the world (Onishi), then Titica’s kuduro must similarly re-member her transgender body; it must also gather together a cultural anatomy that accounts for her gender transgression, and reconfigures her as “corporeal virtuosity and pleasure,” to underscore Moorman’s terminology. It is a provocative analytic through which to analyze how Titica’s music and performance deploy Angolan cultural repertoires and resonances in instantiating her, as artist and as transgender woman, as a culturally, socially, and politically resonant Angolan woman. It may also show how Titica gathers materials from elsewhere, and where local Angolan cultural contexts and aesthetics reveal their limits.

### **Spectacular Vulgarity**

Though Angola has seen recent openings in legal protections and recognition for LGBTQ+, Titica’s youth makes it clear how social and cultural conventions do not necessarily reflect changes in the law. In an interview for Red Bull Music Academy (RBMA), she was asked: “Angola is a Catholic country and a former Portuguese colony and so laws discriminating

against LGBT people are a part of this legacy. What is the status of LGBT rights in Angola today?” Titica pulls her answer from personal experience,

Thank God, I’m more respected today. But in the past, I was pelted with stones. I was not allowed into certain places. But since a ‘no’ to me always meant ‘yes,’ I have always been a hard worker. And I’ve never offended anyone. Thank God. My dance performances could engage the children. I was welcomed into their homes or into someone’s life because of the kids... [they] would drive their parents crazy if I did not sing on their birthday. There would be no party. If I sold a CD, all the kids would buy one. Or else they’d be tough on their parents... As for prejudice in Africa, things have changed a lot. Because we could... I, Titica, I could change the mentality of many people in Angola, with my music, with my art. I could show that being different is only because we look different when you only see the front, that what matters is the love and not what you look like. Each one does his best and when we are born, we don’t choose our relatives. What matters is the love. Then I had my music to give. I never offended anyone. I always overcame my hurdles. Thank God, my young fans have contributed to me being Titica. I have also been able to change the mentality of the Angolan and the African people. Thank God. (RBMA 2018).

It is a harrowing narrative that Titica tells in the first few words, where her harassment at times came in the form of stoning. She tells this story often, and her repetition of it is both a marking of scale, to show how far she has come, but also a reminder that it has been through her visibility as a performer that she has managed to overcome that harassment – her transgender identity required instantiation in forms of cultural practices that have enough value to allow her to be. Recounting her move from visibility and violence to celebrity through performance, she punctuates her answer with “Thank God.”

The question suggests LGBTQ+ discrimination as a vestige of Portuguese Catholicism, colonialism, and conservative social mores. It is an argument echoed by scholar James Sweet, in studying the effect of European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade on African gender and sexual variance when he notes “the devastating impact that Christian morality had on those Africans whose system of values was different from that of the Europeans” (184). It is also an argument echoed by contemporary “African and Africanist activists and scholars [who] embrace

queer perspectives” as Ashley Currier and Thérèse Migraïne-George show in “Queer Studies/African Studies: An (Im)possible Transaction?” (*GLQ*, 2016). They note how Stella Nyanzi, a Ugandan medical anthropologist, “uses queer as a label in her work without question to recognize gender and sexual dissidence in indigenous cultural practices” (288). Nyanzi, moreover, argues her use of queer is less a recognition and more a reclaiming of “African modes of blending, bending, and breaking gender boundaries” (66). Nyanzi offers a useful turn toward gender and sexual difference in Africa that is not indebted to queer studies for queer subjectivities, where queer is an analytic of an already existing relationship of social, cultural and sexual identity. Conversely, many African regimes, including Uganda, the site of Nyanzi’s ethnographic work, profess sexual and gender variance away from heteronormative, cisgender patriarchy to be bourgeois Western imports, not coming with colonialism, but with the more recent politicization of identitarian difference based on gender and sexuality spread through global LGBTQ+ initiatives and popular culture.

Titica’s “Thank God,” in answer to the question, however, opens a site of slippage between the dismissal of discrimination as postcolonial ghost, and presumption that she has overcome marginalization at odds with an Angolan culture that is Catholic and socially conservative. Her punctuating prayers suggests that she is a spiritual person. In my interactions with Titica, she uses the same blessings, and on her social media often posts prayers and blessings, and speaks of being polite, kind, and even culturally demure. It is all in striking counterpoint to her image and performance repertoires, which are spectacular in their presentations of a transgender female body with curves, and she is not shy about showing them. Further, kuduro’s dance repertoire puts the body into contortions, bends, dips, falls and lifts, that often focus on the *cu* of kuduro, and Titica’s repertoire includes twerking, hip and thigh

movements, and an emphasis on her ass, as do other *kuduristas*. I call out this juxtaposition not to mark a site of impropriety or to suggest Titica is insincere in her spirituality and claims at modesty. Rather, it is the visibility of her body, and the various way she exceeds social and cultural limits of the body, with curves busting out of shirts, exaggerated hips and ass, moved in ways meant to accentuate these excesses, the excess of gender transition with a material body falling out of bounds, that suggests a body and display in spectacular tension with perceived social and cultural mores that lay claim to the distinctions between the vulgar and the grand, the profane and the sacred.

A song from her most recent album makes this provocative use of prayer and vulgarity explicit. “Reza Madame”(P*ra Quê Julgar?*), is in its title already directing someone to pray, with the verb *rezar* (to pray) conjugated in the imperative tense. The *madame* suggests a riff on a chaste lady of elite society through a lampooning of the French. In lyrics and in the video, Titica outlines her body in ways conservative Angolan cultural mores deem obscene and vulgar when mixed with prayer. Titica is a threat, she is a hot ticket, she is wanted, and she has an ass like Godzilla. The chorus pivots from “Kill ‘em baby, Kill ‘em,” to “Pray, lady, Pray!” and the video puts it all on display.

Mata, neném, mata  
Mata, neném, mata

Kill ‘em, baby, Kill ‘em  
Kill ‘em, baby, Kill ‘em

Reza, madame, reza  
Reza, madame, reza

Pray, lady, pray  
Pray, lady, pray

Ajoelhóu, tem que rezar  
Bumbum é grande tipo Godzilla

Now she’s kneeling, gotta pray  
Ass is big like Godzilla

Qualquer idioma sou gata falada  
Vou lhe fazer ficar fiel  
sem você precisar abrir uma igreja

In any language I’m a known vixen  
I’m gonna make you faithful  
Without stepping into church

In the video, she plays with prayerful positions, bending over in supplication, hands together in prayer, to accentuate her Godzilla-like ass, coming to destroy (Fig. 10).



Figure 10. Titica praying, video still, Titica "Reza Madame," *Pra Quê Julgar?* (2018)

Titica choreographs an entire routine out of prayerful movements. Her dance troupe of both men and women bring their hands together, kneel, touch the ground and rise up, raising their hands to heaven in a kuduro repertoire of spectacular and vulgar spirituality (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. Kuduro prayers, video still, Titica, "Reza Madame," *Pra Quê Julgar?* (2018)

Titica's "Reza Madame" juxtaposes catholic spirituality with kuduro song and dance through a repertoire that is both humorous and unsettling. Her ass is a threat which Titica turns into a vernacular of movement that suggests she is desirable, corporeal, and thriving material through which cultural practices like prayer are made complicit in her embodiment, and in her bodily desires. Bodies are outlined in short flashes of white lines, asses up bumping, rippling, twerking and writhing. While prayer suggests penitence and supplication, Titica bends over in provocative submission, asking for it, and daring you to take it.

Titica offers her body in provocative prayer, bent over, ass out, as a kuduro repertoire in which vulgarity is revealed as a central discourse of the cultural and political terrain. Doubled over, she recalls the position of social and sexual vulnerability of marginalized trans women as sex workers in Luanda, visible, available, and subject to discipline, fetishization, and punishment. Titica's prayerful kuduro repertoire reveals the sacrosanct as enmeshed within a discourse of vulgarity and obscenity, ensconced within a lustful, coercive, patriarchal, cisgender and heteronormative social and cultural terrain. Titica mobilizes an aesthetics of vulgarity that is already available to her, through what Achille Mbembe argues is the way the "obscene and grotesque [are] intrinsic to all systems of domination and to the means by which those systems are confirmed or deconstructed" (80). While Moorman sees kuduro repertoire as the vibrant pulse of Luandan youth, Titica reveals how an Angolan aesthetics of vulgarity underlies kuduro aesthetics, and underscores kuduro as a spectacle of vulgarity. The crudeness with which bodies have been mangled and maimed for decades is re-deployed through kuduro in spectacular banality, in dance as a crudely constructed apparatus for their own thriving. It is vulgar in its grotesque history of damaged and diminished bodies; banal in its crude construction. It is spectacular in its popular culture formation, as spectacle and mass-mediated cultural export.

Titica's display of her body is not a resistance to vestiges of Portuguese catholic, conservative, colonial administration, but rather a deployment of contemporary Angolan postcolonial aesthetics and subjectivities. She bends over and takes up this Angolan iteration of postcolony, as Mbembe defines it, "a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence... chaotically pluralistic" and with an "internal coherence... characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion" (80). Excessively long-enduring wars and political corruption are conjoined to the disproportionate distribution of wealth, where the majority of the masses are poor in a siphoned economy that produced the first African woman billionaire in the former president's daughter. Mbembe notes how the postcolony is "made up of a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence," and also how it is characterized by the "distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation," which he underscores as "a particularly revealing, and rather dramatic, stage on which are played out the wider problems of subjection and its corollary, discipline" (80). Stage, in my reading, is a moment in time and a platform, a theatrical scene, a staging of performance, to consider the ways in which the visibility of an aesthetics of vulgarity affects the identities multiplied, transformed and put into circulation; and the spectacular visibility of Titica's transgender body in public and popular performance.

Titica puts her body on spectacular display in this video, which suggests a visibility that is both precarious and potent site of intervention. Angola's emergence on a global cultural stage because of kuduro and Titica opens a second site of slippage in a follow-up question by RBMA, asking about her single "Olha o Boneco" (*Chão*) and her UNAIDS designation: "You also became a UNAIDS ambassador and this song I think kind of helped bring a lot of international

attention to your story. How has the attitudes of international attention kind of changed the way people feel about you within Angola?” Titica answers, “It was a very big change. From there people started to see the difference. They do not link my sexuality to my work. I’ve always struggled for people to differentiate my sexuality from my work. The singer Titica is the singer. My sexual option is how I live.” Titica points to her recognition by a global LGBTQ+ activist organization (part of the United Nations) as a pivotal moment when her visibility becomes imbricated with Angola’s visibility through international perception. It is a challenge to the criticism of globalized market-driven models of LGBTQ+ politicized identities which undergird a homogenized discourse of gender variance and nonnormative sexuality.

Globalized homonormative discourses flatten gender and sexual differences into a neoliberal discourse that, Lisa Duggan argues, aggressively shapes a “demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 179). Jaspir Puar shows how such homonormativity shapes a homonationalism “contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary,” which is projected on a global scale in the “global dominant ascendancy of whiteness,” through the “engendering and disavowal of *populations* of sexual-racial others” (Puar 14). It is a salient critique that points to queerness imbricated in “biopolitical arrangements of life and death” (Puar 3). On the ground, homonormative formations can also put non-conforming bodies and desires in jeopardy, creating peripheries within peripheries, making scapegoats out of perceived sexual and gender deviation that attract the wrong kind of global attention. However, this critique hovers above the discourse it means to undo – it is a critique with a bird’s eye view of the world, global in its scope and thus, homogenizing in its assessment.



It is a grand narrative that flattens out important particularities with intimate and local implications.

In comparison to the list of organizations in the United States, which include the Human Rights Campaign, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, among others, Angola has one agency – Associação Iris Angola, only recently legalized. In an interview for this work, Director Carlos Fernandes reports how he takes a strategic approach in addressing the agency’s urgent needs and desires. He is ambivalent about activism around gay marriage, “O casamento não faz parte das nossas prioridades” (“Marriage is not a part of our priorities”).<sup>68</sup> Rather, his organization works “toward protecting the rights of sexual minorities and for the continued development of the LGBTQI community.”<sup>69</sup> However, he also describes how LGBTQ+ people may be shunned at home and at school, leading to a high drop-out rate. As in other places, work is hard to come by for LGBTQ+ people living openly, and he reports that many trans women in Luanda are sex workers as well as being activists in the community. When asked about reports of violence against trans people, Fernandez reveals that no formal methods or organizations either local, federal or institutional exist for tracking that violence that he is aware of, or that work with him. Efforts at curtailing discrimination are tied to AIDS curtailment campaigns. In 2015, laws were added to the penal code prohibiting discrimination on bases of sex and HIV/AIDS status. Fernandez confirms there is financial investment and support, primarily from foreign organizations in this area, though their strategy is too often “picar e testar” (“prick and test”), which he notes does not address issues of social and cultural fulfillment. Yet, Associação Iris Angola exploits this attention, and takes the help.

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<sup>68</sup> Carlos Fernandes is quoted in the *Portal* article.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Carlos Fernandez, October 25, 2017. Transcripts with author.

Titica's experiences with harassment, underscoring the legitimization of the UNAIDS appointment, and the realities that Iris Angola face in Luanda, indicate tensions between a queer ideal of incommensurable identities, the effects of globalized homonormative discourses, and the risk of differentiation pushing people in precarious positions further away from local, social and cultural terrains of recognition and support. Neville Hoad argues that, "to some extent, attributing these social changes to international capital is only possible from a certain privileged perspective," and warns, "too quick an assertion of cultural imperialism and sexual identity as cultural imperialism misses the ways in which these images/identities are consumed and may be used from below to very different ends" (xviii). For Titica, the UNAIDS designation had a positive effect: she was shown more respect; performed for then-President Dos Santos; and may have been seen, and exploited, as a legitimating voice by an Angolan political elite wary of negative perceptions. Interestingly, Titica is adamant in her reply that her "sexuality" is not linked to her work as an artist, and yet it is through her music that she claims to have found support. This reply contradicts, in part, her earlier assertion that it was through music that she was able to win young people over. Titica suggests a strategy of approach that is not anchored to an ideal or principle, but that shifts and morphs according to the changing contexts.

Titica points to a productive tension by differentiating between her identity as transgender and as an Angolan artist. It is a differentiation that she undoes in her music, as in her single "Olha o Boneco," which plays on Titica's transgender subjectivity, analyzed in the upcoming sections. Titica's music suggests she can take some liberties with repertoire, that it may be through her particular configuration of Angolan popular culture mobilized from the ground up, that she can claim a queer cultural ground within a normative terrain. Other moments in Angolan popular culture suggest a similar possibility. Though Titica is a very visible transgender woman

in Angola, she is not alone. Angolan transgender model Imanni da Silva lives between London and Luanda with a successful modeling and hosting career since transitioning in 2007.<sup>70</sup> Other trans kuduristas and popular personalities such as Diva Ariel, Mãe do Zongue, Yuca Pimenta and Hady Lima, are known to be transgender and, like Titica, have travelled to Brazil for their treatments.<sup>71</sup> Brazil as a destination for Titica and other Angolan transgender women seems to suggest a particular Lusophone transatlantic route of gender and sexual variance. It is tempting to consider, in this configuration, Tchindas, a visible and beloved transgender woman of Cape Verde, as the documentary *Tchindas* (dir. by Pablo Garcia Perez de Lara and Marc Serena, 2015), shows. *Tchindas* is a “revered resident of a working-class corner of the city,” who, along with her other transgender and gay friends, are enmeshed in the local community’s preparations for Carnival festivities.<sup>72</sup> Yet, the familiar trope of carnival conjoined to gender transgression is too myopic for Titica, who slips out from under this triangulation, and outside of a neatly delimited Lusophone transatlantic configuration in a final interview exchange with RBMA.

Titica suggests her transgender subjectivity moves besides kuduro’s transnational mobility in queer ways. Throughout the RBMA interview, Titica mentions artists she has collaborated with, and artists she admires, such as Angolans Ary and Paulo Flores, both superstars of more traditional Angolan popular music genres. She mentions her collaborations with Pablio Vittar, her love of Brazilian soap operas, and admiration for Cape Verdean *zouk* music. She also references Congolese music in her influences, noting her father is from the Congo, and she likes Nigerian music as well. Notably, when asked about how she incorporates

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<sup>70</sup> *Platina Line*, 2014. “Imanni da Silva fala sem tabus da sua mudança de sexo” January 4. <http://platinaline.com/imanni-da-silva-fala-sem-tabus-da-sua-mudanca-de-sexo/>

<sup>71</sup> *Rede Angola*, 2016. “Hady Lima faz Mudança de sexo” December 4. <http://m.redeangola.info/hady-lima-faz-mudanca-de-sexo/>

<sup>72</sup> Sherri Linden, “‘Tchindas’: Outfest Review,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 15, 2015: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/tchindas-outfest-review-807822>

different influences into kuduro, Titica replies, “Kuduro also has its influence. Nowadays, you can sing rap in the kuduro beat, you can sing kuduro using the rap beat. Then kuduro and hip-hop also have common points... There are other rap influences... You can see I have also found inspiration in Nicki Minaj and other singers such as Cardi B. They are big influencers in my music. A mix of Africa and America also helps with the sales.” Titica pulls kuduro out of its Luandan terrain and shows how it takes in, and resonates with other genres. Kuduro, and Angolan popular music, is in this way vulnerable and able to exploit global transits of popular music via mass and social media. While Angola may seem far removed from North America, and kuduro may offer formations of rhythms and dance repertoires particular to Angolan experience, Titica recalls how kuduro emerged in part through global circuits that operate besides the Lusophone transatlantic. More directly, however, she locates herself within an archive of North American women artists of color working in popular music, “I’m happy to see great black female artists having success in the world. I can mention Nicki Minaj, Kelly Rowland and Beyoncé... the world is changing. We are being respected” (RBMA).

The Luso-Afro-Brazilian configuration as a diaspora from which Titica can inform her transgender and kuduro repertoire cannot account for the presence of Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, Kelly Rowland, or Cardi B. Titica does not limit herself to Angolan genres, African genres, or Luso-Afro-Brazilian genres. She also does not limit herself to representations of gender transgression or black women in Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultures, which would subsume Titica as a visible and vulgar spectacle under black mothers, ill-fated singers, and the hierarchized, racialized degree of effeminacy that order the subcultures of gay men, where visibility is bound up with carnival, sex work and violence (Perlongher; Green). Rather than peripheries of permissiveness in Luso-Afro-Brazilian popular culture, Mbembe shows how an aesthetics of

vulgarity enacts violence through chaotic and multiple ways. The chaos of carnival emerges through such an aesthetics not as a zone of permissiveness but as a discourse in which vulgarity is visibly deployed in particular degrees of feminine degradation. Titica moves beyond this bind in her popular music references to spectacular black women as famous artists outside Luso-Afro-Brazilian aesthetics altogether. Moreover, the sutured nature of Luso-Afro-Brazilian in name and discipline might suggest a lusophone diaspora on equal footing. However, Boaventura de Sousa Santos's formulation of the Portuguese condition as peripheral in a global North context does not lift from the bottom up, but rather shifts the bottom even further down. Titica's repertoire and positioning, however, insist on a move toward the cultural practices of African American and queer communities in black diasporas of the global North.

### **Reading the Spectacular African Diaspora**

Dragging repertoires of black queer cultural practices into her repertoire, Titica lifts herself up in the process. Titica's debut single "Chão" draws your attention to the floor, directs you down onto the ground, and then lifts you back up. *Chão* is floor in Portuguese, and in the accompanying video, dancers flow and break as they get down low and rise up again, synchronized to the chorus that drills the directions, "Chão! Chão! Chão!" followed by "Cima! Cima! Cima!" ("Floor! Floor! Floor!; Up! Up! Up!"). It is a productive reversal of trajectory that does not uproot her so much as it uplifts. While Titica mobilizes the postcolonial aesthetics that undergird kuduro repertoire, she does not limit her music and performance to them, but rather refigures her kuduro as enmeshed with diasporic formations of music, queerness, and black femininity. Angolan aesthetics, in their state of change and postcolonial resonances, are what Mbembe argues, "chaotically pluralistic... constantly being shaped and reshaped, as much by the

rulers as by the ruled, in attempts to rewrite the mythologies of power” (80). Mbembe points to how interventions in forms and repertoire may occur on the ground, and shows how it is the condition of postcolony that allows for such a mobilizations, “By making it possible to play and have fun outside the limits set by officialdom, the very fact that the regime is a sham allows ordinary people to say the unsayable and to recognize the otherwise unrecognizable” (84-85). Kuduro’s makeshift systems of thriving call out Angolan institutional shams, and Titica does as much when she inserts herself among Beyoncé and others, rewriting narratives of power with black feminine forms of popular culture and thriving that are spectacular but whose formations lay beyond Angolan postcolonial aesthetics.

In her citation of North American black and Latina female popular music artists, Titica marks out an iteration of spectacular femininity in which she sees herself. Marcia Ochoa defines these femininities as:

Femininities that employ the conventions of spectacularity in their productions... [in] genre, narrative structure, temporality, and archetype. This also includes conventionalized gender formations... that render the production of these femininities as highly legible... and they are always inflected with (trans) national discourses of race, empire, and corporeality” (208-209).

Ochoa’s conceptualization of a spectacular femininity, through her work on *misses* (beauty pageant contestants) and *transformistas* (a person who is assigned male at birth but begins to transform her body and make herself a woman) in Venezuela, is a useful marking out of gender performativity and mediation in the making of archetypes of femininity and trans femininities. Popular music offers a mass mediated amplification of popular music artists as archetypes of femininity, and is also the means through which Titica amplifies herself as a spectacular form of

femininity. In Titica's repertoire and music she lifts herself up into a diasporic configuration of black femininity not as a refiguring of herself as other, but by locating herself within a repertoire of black queer and feminine bodies, desires and cultural practices, in mutual recognition. As in the form of her sentence, she is beside the women and the music that she mentions, and not subsumed within them, and forms a vernacular that requires a reading of her music informed by the repertoires and vernaculars of the black queer diaspora.

Titica points to a configuration of popular music artists that is both black or of color and of African diaspora. She does not dislocate herself from Luanda. Rather, she draws a black and feminist diasporic configuration into her repertoire. Currier and Migraine-George argue that, in addition to the continent, "Africa can also be productively understood as 'people' within the diasporic perspectives of writers, artists, and critics... to eschew the problematic divide between the continent and the diaspora(s), but also subvert narrowly Afrocentric politics of homophobia deployed in various parts of the African continent" (286). In writing her music and creating her repertoire, Titica puts diasporic references to popular music besides kuduro and undergirds her subjectivity in formations of blackness, queerness, and femininity that subvert Angolan aesthetics. She does not, however deterritorialize herself from place. She instantiates herself as more than place. Rinaldo Walcott argues that, "Black diaspora queers have actually pushed the boundaries of transnational identification much further than we sometimes recognize. Black diaspora queers live in a borderless, large world of shared identifications and imagined historical relations produced through a range of fluid cultural artifacts like film, music, clothing, gesture, and signs or symbols, not to mention sex and its dangerously pleasurable fluids" (92). To account for these shared identifications and imagined historical relations, Walcott suggests a "rethinking of community that might allow for different ways of cohering into some form of

recognizable political entity... to make a community of singularities of which the unworking of the present ruling regime, a regime that trades on the myths of homogeneity, must be central. In short, a different sociality is required—a sociality of mutual recognitions” (93). Walcott points to a way out from under monolithic discourse on race, gender, and nation, in reading African diasporic differences, of sex, of aesthetics, of music, as a project of black queer diaspora, not as a singularity, but in a relationality of mutual recognition.

Diaspora has been a part of kuduro from its formations in Luanda and in Lisbon through Angolan communities of the Portuguese capital’s periphery. There is a relationality of return in this transit of Angolan cultures and lives, where the transit is circuitous, and may seem to re-enact what Joseph Roach calls the “the concept of a circum-Atlantic world...the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and South, in the creation of the culture of modernity” (4). It is a productive refiguring of the transatlantic transit, not as straight lines that travel back and forth, but as circuitous movements and moments, in which “circum-Atlantic memory retains its consequences... the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible: the most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred” (4). Yet, kuduro does not remember the unspeakable or forgotten, it re-members the maimed and mangled. There is no unspeakable in kuduro, it is all amplified. The very processes through which kuduro comes about and which it responds to is a spectacular display of an aesthetic of vulgarity, of bodies reworking in repertoires of song and dance that flow and stop, lock and break, dip and slam, as ramshackle strategies for thriving. In her kuduro, Titica recognizes herself in a diaspora of blackness, queerness, femininity, and music. It is a recognition not of geopolitical or linguistic bonds, but “an understanding of a black queer diaspora across and within, in which artifact, desire, pleasure, and disappointment can sometimes be the basis of the



struggle over and the making of imaginary community” (Walcott 98). Walcott is addressing black studies in North America when he critiques the limits of national demarcations of blackness. Rather, he urges scholars to “really go down—that is, to really go south,” (98) directing their attention to blackness within diaspora and the global South. An analysis of Titica’s music, however, requires that we go up, into the black queer cultural practices of North America, as she pulls US popular culture references into a kuduro repertoire that reveals black queer and diasporic recognitions.

Titica’s repertoire of kuduro is a refiguring of its aesthetics into a repertoire akin to E. Patrick Johnson’s description of “resistant vernacular performances” (139), thinking through José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification. He describes these as grounded in the “notion of performance as a site of agency,” through which, “gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people of color... work on and against oppressive systems,” calling out specific performers and specific practices as evidence: “Performance practices such as voguing, snapping, ‘throwing shade,’ and ‘reading’ attest to the ways in which black gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people demonstrate the ways of devising technologies of self-assertion and summoning the agency to resist” (140). Reading Titica through the diaspora reveals what Jafari S. Allen calls a “Black/queer rhizomatic way of seeing and saying,” like a mass of “connections/roots/routes that are neither limited to one place or destined to go in one direction,” but rather a “queer temporality and sociality that is processual – not teleological...all in the pursuit of an elaborated litany for thriving” (28). Turning to an analysis of Titica’s kuduro videos and music performances as a part of these flows reveals the “space, desires and socialities [that] claim family and children not merely from biological or legal means but also by a process of nurture and nourishment” (28). Surprisingly, as I show in the following sections, diasporic

reading practices attentive to the resistant vernaculars of black queer cultural practices reveal abuses, citations, feminist configurations, and a practice of ‘reading’ that Titica deploys to resurface a Luandan *musseque* as the ground on which she thrives.

### **Reading Kuduro Trans Formations**

In reading Titica’s kuduro I suggest quite literally that the lyrical references Titica makes in her verses can be read as evident of black queer cultural practices in mutual forms of recognition, from Titica to the diaspora, from my diaspora reading to Titica. That Titica’s kuduro offers us a bit of reading, however, is notable. Moorman argues that kuduro is kinesthetic, with inherently non-verbal qualities (Moorman 25), where the body is paramount. Titica also underscores kuduro’s dance repertoire as the main site of articulation a number of times in her interview, “I define kuduro as dance; The dance is very important; Kuduro without dance is no kuduro” (RBMA). Cabo Snoop’s hit kuduro song “Windeck” (2010) repeats the songs title, and teases with each verse to offer a definition of what windeck means without every really doing so. Yet Berlarmino Van-Duném, political analyst and professor at Universidade Lusíada de Angola, wrote an opinion for the *Jornal de Angola* that suggests kuduro has the potential to say quite a lot, and he was concerned about what he perceived were vulgar aspects of the genre.<sup>73</sup> “Há necessidade de padronizar esse estilo musical, procurando elevá-lo a patamares que possam contribuir para dignificação da cultura nacional, tal fez Amália Rodrigues relativamente ao fado ou Louis Armstrong em relação ao jazz” (“There is a need to standardize this style of music, in an effort to elevate it to a level that can dignify the national culture, like Amália Rodrigues did to fado, or Louis Armstrong did to jazz”) (Van-Duném). He wants kuduro protected from

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<sup>73</sup> Belarmino Van-Duném, “O Kuduro e a sua dimensão internacional,” *Jornal de Angola*, May 31, 2012: [http://jornaldeangola.sapo.ao/opiniaio/artigos/o\\_kuduro\\_e\\_a\\_sua\\_dimensao\\_internacional](http://jornaldeangola.sapo.ao/opiniaio/artigos/o_kuduro_e_a_sua_dimensao_internacional)

debasement and the lack of genre-defining standards presents a crisis, as kuduro's transnational mobility and its low-brow appeal threatens to cheapen the genre imperceptibly.

Women emerging as kuduristas, he argues, is a positive thing, but their music and content are little better than the men with their gripes. Notably, in a list of popular female *kuduristas*, he mentions Titica writing, "Titica...foi considerada(o) pelo *O País* como personalidade do ano 2011" ("Titica was considered (he) by *O País* as personality of the year 2011"). Van-Duném writes the word *considerada* (considered) in the feminine, but adds the masculine ending *-o* in parenthesis. Beyond an implicit dig at Titica by suggesting she is more personality than kuduro talent, Van-Duném takes the opportunity to misgender Titica in a typographical act of gender violence that he brackets neatly within parenthesis. Van-Duném's typographical misgendering underscores Titica's precarious position, even as a popular artist, in the conservative Angolan context. Titica, however, removes the bracketing herself, refusing to be visible and confined, and plays with gendered endings in the chorus of her single "Olha o Boneco," (*Chão*) a collaboration with Ary.



Figure 12. Titica featuring Ary (left), "Olha o Boneco" *Chão* (2011)

Titica repetitively flips the gendered ending of masculine *boneco* (doll) to the feminine *boneca* in the chorus of "Olha o Boneco," and taunts fans and critics alike bolstered by a cadre of

women companions that include her artistic collaborator Ary, who performs with her on the song, and a group of women dancers in the video that accompanies the release. The oscillation of gender forms of *boneco* is an overt reference to Titica as transgender woman, and seem to contradict her claims at trying hard to keep her “sexuality” separate from her music. This song relies heavily on her transgender identity. The song repeats the taunt, almost as enticing invitation, where doll can signify toy and plaything – “Olha o boneco, olha a boneca,” before Titica pivots to counter and rhyme discrimination with globalization. “Não ligo à discriminação; sigam globalização” (“I pay no mind to discrimination; follow globalization”). Titica’s callout to globalization suggests the ways in which LGBTQ+ activism and political gains outside Angola help to sustain and invigor queer lives within it. By invoking globalization, Titica directs our attention to the ground in a wily abuse of the concept. Gayatri Spivak argues for “the urgency of our task of ab-use,” where ‘ab’ says much more than ‘below,’ and can also indicate “both ‘motion away’ and ‘agency, point of origin,’” (3-4) through its etymology. Spivak proposes the use of ab-use as a reorientation from below that does not just mark a positionality under hegemonic discourse but “signals its undoing and re-location” (14). This re-location allows for uses of globalization that are at once urgent and yet bound up in homogenizing critiques of homonationalism and neoliberal proliferation. Titica’s mention of globalization is an ab-use of a phenomenon that refigures, in real ways, conditions on the ground for at risk communities. Titica writes globalization into a kuduro song, dragging it out of grand narratives and onto the ground, suggesting in the process how it uplifts that terrain.

Titica’s lyrics continue, however, to play with desire and abjection, doll and aberration. Moving from taunting us with her visibility as a transgender woman and ab-uses of grand narratives to monstrous and murderous associations. She announces she is in the building like

“Michael Jackson in ‘Thriller,’ ” a move with monstrous connotations. Jackson undergoes a monstrous transformation in the video for “Thriller,” and through Titica’s verse the reference becomes an implicit metaphor for her perceived aberration as transgender. Titica’s allusions to monstrosity are in tension with the connotations of *boneco* (doll) as a plaything. The oscillation between *boneco* and *boneca* disorient the doll from plaything to threat and, in a more menacing tone, Titica lets us know she came to slay.

Não admirem mamóites  
Essa é pra rebentar com as noites  
Podem trancar vossos papóites  
Esta dama vai causar mortes!

Don’t be shocked mommas  
This one is to blow up the nights  
You can lock up your daddies  
This lady will slay!

The reference to causing death, the promise to slay, can carry many meanings. The promise of death can be used to express admiration, desire, and pleasure, as when something is so good it is to die for. The promise of death can also be life-giving, understood through the vernacular of black queer cultures.

Slaying, metaphorically, emerged in a number of possible conjunctures of black queer cultures, from fashion to dance and in the Ball/House or Ballroom cultures that began in New York City’s Harlem in the 1960s, but which have “expanded rapidly to almost every major city in the United States and Canada” (Bailey 2). In popular music, however, Titica’s verse resonates in recognition with a more recent reference in Beyoncé and her song “Formation,” from the album *Lemonade* (2016), which received critical praise and provoked discussion in popular media and in the academy, launching seminars on its formations of race, gender and nation in the United States.<sup>74</sup> In that song she repeats “I came to slay!” numerous times. The accompanying video uses New Orleans as a backdrop, with flooded buildings and streets invoking the aftermath

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<sup>74</sup> Billboard reported on this phenomenon. See Alexandra Cheney, “Beyoncé 101: The Rise of Teaching Queen Bey in College,” *Billboard* September 17, 2017: <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/lifestyle/7973629/beyonce-college-classes-now-exist>

of Hurricane Katrina that claimed many of the city's black community, and left many others stranded. That tragedy was highly visible in American media. Beyoncé's video now became a second visible re-telling of the aftermath. At one point in the video, Beyoncé wields a baseball bat and smashes through police car windows.

Writing in *Rollingstone* music magazine, Zandria F. Robinson sees Beyoncé's song and video as the formation of a specific blackness in which she is "every black southern woman possible for her to reasonably inhabit," and when Beyoncé is "at her limits," of representation, "the voices and presence of genderqueer folks enter to take over... They also give us the most audacious commands to slay regardless, even if we are taken" (Robinson). Though some criticized the song and video for exploiting the effects of Hurricane Katrina and the Black Lives Matter movement,<sup>75</sup> Robinson argues,

Formation is a different kind of resistance practice, one rooted in the epistemology of (and sometimes only visible/detectable to) folks on the margins of blackness. [It] is a metaphor, a black feminist, black queer, and black queer feminist theory of community organizing and resistance. It is a recognition of one another at the blackness margins—woman, queer, genderqueer, trans, poor, disabled, undocumented, immigrant—before an overt action. (Robinson)

Robinson offers that Beyoncé is in conversation with a broader category and context of blackness. Notably, she underscores the song as a resistance practice that requires diaspora reading to fully apprehend as it is only detectable on the margins of blackness, on the peripheries imbricated in other peripheries. Importantly, she sees the song as a theory of community and

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<sup>75</sup> Shantrelle Lewis, 2016. "'Formation' exploits New Orleans' Trauma." *Slate*, Feb. 10.

recognition that is transfeminist in its cast of characters. In this formation, to slay, which is repeated as an imperative and declaration in the song, is not the promise of death but a practice of life. Slaying is not devoid of threat, however, as a life-giving practice. It is reverberating with threat as it sustains life for communities audacious enough to thrive despite concerted attempts at their demise. To slay is to beat back your opponent with your existence. Titica recognizes this community of blackness, and wields the practice as her own. I do not recognize her Portuguese lyric “Esta dama vai causar mortes!” as the awkward literal translation, “This lady will cause deaths.” Rather, reading through the black and queer diaspora is the only way to find the translation of mutual recognition with Beyoncé’s formation, declaring that Titica came to “slay!”

A final stutter jolts us into Titica’s black queer and feminist formation. Following Robinson’s reading of Beyoncé’s “Formation”, slaying in black queer feminist contexts is a theory of community organizing. In Titica’s video, the community is the women who have been with her throughout the song. They dress and style Titica for what appears to be her wedding later that night. They surround her on the beach as onlookers draw in closer. On city corners, they line up dancing side by side with her, as passersby stop to take photos of the group. With her troupe of friends, Titica takes to the town and from asphalt to sand, they dance kuduro. This repertoire, however, does not re-member maimed limbs and remake mangled resources. Titica’s kuduro formation resonates with a convivial and provocative spectacularity, as they make themselves visible dancing throughout Luanda. There is an emphasis on ass, hips, legs, and having a good time. Head-spinning and hair-whipping reference similar dance movements in African hair-whipping traditions that exist from Ethiopia to South Africa, and in the hair-whipping of black queer cultures in diaspora. To a crowd gathering around them, the women bend their knees into a slight squat, turn up their backsides and twerk a bit. They are together at

the end of the video, when a man arrives at their hotel room with a wedding cake and is pulled inside into a group affair. The video shows Titica as part of a collective of women in a feminist formation that takes transgender women into account. In a separate interview, recounting how she has suffered from stoning, Titica adds, “Já fui apedrejada e espancada na rua. As minhas amigas é que me defendiam” (“I’ve been stoned and beaten in the street. My girlfriends have defended me”).<sup>76</sup> This transfeminist collective have been the main protagonists of the video. Ary sings the final verse and declares:

Não me vês, já sou Lady Gaga!	Don’t you see me? I am already Lady Gaga!
Agora tás a ga-ga a ga ga gaguejar	Now you are ga-ga a ga ga stuttering
A ga ga a gaguejar, xé eh!	A ga ga a stuttering, yea you are!

Ary uses Lady Gaga to suggest that she is also already Gaga. In the verse, Lady Gaga’s name is disfigured and remade as *gaguejar* – the Portuguese onomatopoeic word for stuttering which suggests a ga-ga-ga sound as one stutters. In true kuduro fashion, the sound of Gaga is interrupted, broken up, dragged out, and remade as *gaguejar*.

More is at play here, however, if we read Lady Gaga into that dragged out and interrupted space. Ary call’s herself Lady Gaga in this verse, which would make Titica Beyoncé, if you know how to read this reference to Lady Gaga and Beyoncé’s collaboration and long-playing video “Telephone” from Lady Gaga’s *Fame Monster* (2009). The monster in Lady Gaga’s album title resonates with the monsters Titica has made of herself. Moreover, the relationship between Lady Gaga and Beyoncé in the video suggest the relationship between Ary and Titica. In the video for “Telephone,” Lady Gaga and Beyoncé go on a joyride and together and wreak havoc through their antics, they poison and kill customers eating at a diner and drive off into the sunset. That video offers a slew of imagery about “women, desire, and the end of men” as Jack

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<sup>76</sup> Louise Redvers “Transsexual artist Titica takes Angola by storm,” BBC News, April 12, 2012: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17628726>



Halberstam argues (*Gaga* 62). As a reference in Titica's song, however, it resonates as representative of the relationship between Titica and Ary as one of powerful, feminist, co-conspirators. Complicit in the ruckus that Titica is causing around town with her *kuduristas*, Ary's presence in Titica's song and video is not devoid of risk. Ary is an established performer of more respected Angolan genres of music, cosmopolitan and popular genres such as *kizomba* and *semba*, that make up a repertoire of Angolan heritage. They are not the electronic mash ups of kuduro, the dancing is usually partnered in both, and they have celebrated histories. Ary has twice been recognized as a diva in the annual *Divas Angola* competition, which recognizes the talent of Angolan women, and she has won several MTV Africa Music Awards for Lusophone artists and albums.<sup>77</sup> She risks her fan base by stepping out of her genres and moreover, she risks social stigma in supporting Titica publicly. Conversely, Ary seems to be pushing her image into new terrain in this video, sporting defiant poses and a mohawk while dancing in a sweet yellow dress (Fig. 12). In doing so she throws her credibility behind Titica, and exploits Titica's progressive edge to give depth to her own image. The relationship is one of mutual recognition. The song and video locate Titica in a feminist collective that improvises repertoire, that morphs cultural forms, outrageous and up in people's faces. Halberstam offers Lady Gaga as referent for such a formation; "Gaga feminism is outrageous [...] impolite, abrupt, abrasive, and bold. This feminism is not about sisterhood, motherhood, sorority, or even women. It is about shifting, changing, morphing, extemporizing political positions quickly and effectively" (*Gaga* 62-63). This feminism requires "a recalibration of the ways in which we know, recognize, and value each other's genders, desires, and embodiments" (*Gaga* 59).

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<sup>77</sup> MTV Africa Music Awards 2015: [www.mtvbase.com/news/the-2015-mtv-africa-music-awards-winners/11yivv](http://www.mtvbase.com/news/the-2015-mtv-africa-music-awards-winners/11yivv)

Though Halberstam marks a useful formation of feminism “invested in innovative deployments of femininity...well represented by pop performances characterized by their excess, their ecstatic embrace of loss of control, and a maverick sense of bodily identity,” the aesthetic categories singled out, “punk aesthetics, anarchic feminism, and the practice of going gaga” (*Gaga* 6), only partially contend with Titica and her collaborations with Ary. This song is a popular music performance, and in it they have been a bit maverick with their bodily sense of identity, but they have not really gone gaga. They have stuttered on gaga, interrupted gaga, remade gaga into a kuduro break beat and Portuguese onomatopoeia. There are other formations at play in Titica’s collaborations with Ary that are not marginal, punk, or anarchic. Halberstam argues that a gaga feminism is “about improvisation, customization and innovation. The gaga feminist...cannot settle into the house that the culture has built for her. S/he has to tear it down, reimagine the very meaning of house in form and function” (*Gaga* xiv). Titica’s music, in references and repertoires, suggests gaga’s house is not enough in its punk and marginal aesthetics. Titica asks that we reimagine the very meaning of house in form and function. A second collaboration between Titica and Ary takes us to a *musseque*, the unpaved peripheries of Luanda’s urban center, where Titica drags a table out onto a dusty road and, surrounded by local people and their quirks, makes a house of her own.

### **Reading the *Musseque***

Released in 2014, “Pelo Menos 50” (*Picante* 5 2014),<sup>78</sup> brings Ary and Titica together again in a song that moves away from kuduro. It was written by Titica and Keny Bus, and produced by DJ Dias Rodrigues, who describes it as incorporating folkloric rhythms of Angolan

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<sup>78</sup> See “Pelo Menos 50” video here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8em714u\\_dk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8em714u_dk)

music. The lyrics call up a litany of people, things and situations that, upon closer examination, are not what they seem. The lyrics take down typical scenes, people, and practices of everyday life, only to lift them up again in the chorus. The video sets an intimate scene in a public setting – the Bairro Operário *musseque*. In the middle of the road, around a white plastic table, Titica, Ary, and DJ Dias Rodrigues sit, drink, laugh. The mood is convivial and vibrant, with Ary and Titica wearing boldly patterned head wraps of more traditional Angolan dress (Fig. 13).



Figure 13. Titica (left), Ary (center), DJ Dias Rodrigues (right), “Pelo Menos 50,” *Picante Vol 5* (2015)

Before an analysis of the song, however, the scene has already been set by the table. The table is both an anchor and a disorienting positionality. The table is outside in public view, and brings Titica Ary and DJ Dias Rodrigues together around it. Sara Ahmed argues, “To orient oneself can mean to adjust one’s position, or another’s position, such that we are ‘facing’ the right direction: we know where we are through how we position ourselves in relation to others” (51), and suggests that “bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other” (54). Our protagonists are similarly directed toward another by sharing this table, while the camera’s position suggests the side with no chair is for us. The scene at the table invites us to pull up a seat, and we are in this way oriented toward and included in Titica’s *musseque* gathering in Bairro Operário. Moorman shows the Bairro Operário to be “closely

associated with Angolan nationalism” through music (*Intonations* 60), and with the band Ngola Ritmos who “were jailed in a crackdown on nationalist activity in 1959,” for promoting “an African aesthetic in their music, dance, and presentation ... [that] ran counter to the cultural politics of colonialism that urged the assimilation of Portuguese culture and traditions” (*Intonations* 60-61). Though this *musseque* has history tied to music, it has more recently been tied to precarious living conditions, designated for *requalificação* (requalification) and the removal of 3,000 families to another area, to which the local government says they are offering homes to be finished by the inhabitants according to their liking.<sup>79</sup> Reporter Miguel Gomes visited the area and registered the people’s feelings about displacement. Between the complaints and laments of local residents, frustrated with a government they say does not care about them, we get a feel for the life that still circulates through these muddy roads, “Todos se conhecem e se cumprimentam. As ruas são de poeira e de areia e de lama, e o bairro tem vida própria” (“Everyone knows everyone, and they all greet one another. The streets are of dust, and sand, and mud, and the *bairro* has its own life”) (Gomes).

On this road, with the ghosts of history and music heavy with nationalism, the eminent threat of displacement, and the social camaraderie of everyday life, Titica, Ary, and DJ Dias Rodrigues sit at their table as part of the social tableau, but it is Titica and Ary, the women in this scene, that are the main writers of the story they’re about to tell. As Ahmed shows, gendered tables make gendered work possible, “We could say that the kitchen table provides the kind of surface on which women tend to work. To use the table that supports domestic work to do political work (including the work that makes explicit the politics of domestic work) is a reorientation device” (61). Reorienting the lowly white table, perhaps from a kitchen, a back

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<sup>79</sup> Miguel Gomes, “Um adeus à vida no Bê Ó” *Rede Angola*, April 10, 2015: <http://www.redeangola.info/especiais/um-adeus-a-vida-no-be-o-2/>

yard, or a table meant to be upfront, as so many other chairs, benches, and tables are set up here for watching and commenting on life going by, they bring their *musseque* aesthetic into view. The music is traditional, vibrant, rhythmic. Ary sings most of the verses, Titica supplies a drilling bridge toward the end of the song, while punctuating Ary's verses with interjections. There is dancing in the streets, Titica showing a troupe of women how to move, or just moving with them. Ary introduces herself and Titica as an invincible duo and sings out "Pelo menos!" ("At the very least!"). The title serves as an exclamation and as the chorus of the song, while Titica and accompanying voices respond, "Ai Ai Mama...Aiué!," and "Uwo wo ui!" expressions of surprise that seem to feign shock, scandal, and knowing commiseration. Trading exclamations and vignettes, the lyrics tell of life in the *musseque* as the video shows these vignettes acted out.

Ary: Pelo menos! (ai ai mama) Tô pensare é amiga, aiué! Afinal é rivale, iwo!	At the very least! I'm thinking she's a friend, oh yea! Turns out, she's a rival! Oh!
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Titica: Mana granda rivale!	Sister, what a rival!
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(The video shows a well-dressed driver pocket his client's cellphone)

Ary: Tô pensare é bancário, aiué! Afinal gatero é (gatero é) Gatero é, gatero é	I'm thinking he's a banker, oh yea! Turns out, he just a hustler! A hustler he is
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Titica: Granda gato mana, gateiro!	What a hunk, sister, that hustler!
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(Ary gestures to the table, food, and all around her)

Ary: Tô pensare que é meu, aiué! É embora da vizinha, uwo wo ui!	I'm thinking this is mine Turns out, belongs to the neighbors!
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Titica: Cuidado não é nosso, é da vizinha mana! ha, mas o quê!	Careful! It's not ours It's the neighbor's, sister Ha Ha, and so what!
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Ary: Tô pensare é fezada, aiué! Afinal é feitiço, hummm!	I'm think its good luck, yeah.. Turns out it's a curse!
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interjecting, laughing, agreeing, and towards the end of the song, she offers a rapid vocal bridge where her voice is both rhythm and verse, a mix of slang, of local Angolan and Congolese words and phrases in Kimbundu and Lingala, and always the assertion that she is sexy, and that her collaboration with Ary is as threatening and tight as ever.

Tá crocante, tá xuxuado,	It's crispy, it's sexy
tá picolas, tá bem bom!,	Its balls, its damn good!
A dupla imparável, imbatível	The amazing duo, unstoppable!
Pelo menos vai orare	At the very least, go pray
para Deus te abençoare	So that God will bless you
Como nós, como nós ê	Like us, like us, see
O talento é naturale!	Natural talents!

Around their table, Ary and Titica expose a litany of characters and situations that are all putting on false airs and appearances. They sing about skin lightening, fake hair, fake friends, while the video juxtaposes the old *musseque* with fancy cars and selfies. There are old women mourning lost kin, and oblivious young girls; fake muscles, fake asses, and even a false sense of security, when Ary gestures around and mockingly sings about thinking any of this was hers. The song puts on a show of collective experiences, shifting perspectives and titillating surprises. This is a house of public reckoning, through which they turn the tables on any accusations against Titica of falsity, of inauthenticity, and of any iterations of transphobia. Rather than being outted, Titica and Ary out the *musseque*, airing its dirty laundry for all to see. While the lyrics seem highly critical, the feigned shock, the laughter, and the conviviality suggest everyone has known these things all along. Rather than exposing hypocrisies, Titica and Ary reveal how the *musseque* on the ground, socially, and materially, has an aesthetic of its own.

The aesthetic of this *musseque* as shown in the video is spectacular and, in its commonality, it is vulgar, of the people, from below. We can get no lower than the muddy roads. As the song shows, we have been invited to a gathering where somehow everyone has a bit of

mud on them, figuratively – and Titica and Ary are here to dish the dirt. Reading these lyrics as an exposing of open-secrets, or an upending of normative hypocrisies, will not suffice, based too much on “standard epistemologies of the closet” (Quiroga 1); what Diana Fuss calls “the problem...with the inside/outside rhetoric...that such polemics disguise the fact that most of us are both inside and outside at the same time...To be out...is precisely to be no longer out; to be finally outside of exteriority and all the exclusions and deprivations” (Fuss 5). While the lyrics are an exposé, the video shows a sociality around Titica and Ary through dancing, presenting them as mothers of this realm, knowing and experienced, dressed in patterned headwraps and grass skirts. This is a critical take down that does not foreclose on the local *musseque* aesthetic. Rather, they are a part of this world, inside of it and outside of it at the same time.

Though Titica and Ary have told us a story, and Titica has written lyrics, which I have reprinted here, and which you are reading now, there is another reading act that is happening, that is less obvious to the uninitiated. Walcott points in the right direction when he suggests we mobilize diaspora reading practices, but we seem so inside at the moment. We have been given a seat at this table, we are intimately involved, the scene is circuitous, the camera moving in and around the *musseque*. There are no references to popular music from beyond this terrain, no one has gone gaga here, and no monsters in sight. Black and queer diasporas seem far away from here. They are not even evident in the music and rhythms, with their very Angolan references to *semba* and folkloric registers. Even the outfits are locally-minded, spectacular in the way they reflect the milieu they are being worn in. The *musseque* may be margins of the city but this song has centered it, and Titica’s table, round and inviting, is its heart. In their list of detractions, revelations, takedowns, and accusations, the table that was once domestic work, and where it



seemed a story was being told, has taken on new work. Rather than eating, drinking, or story-telling, Titica's table is for reading.

Titica and Ary have been "reading" this *musseque* throughout this song. It is a practice that E. Patrick Johnson lists in his repertoire of resistant vernacular performances (139), and is mutually recognizable in this song and in the cultures of the "house/ball culture" or Ballroom culture (Bailey 4) of queer communities in North America. This kind of reading is the act of exposing and exaggerating the flaws of others in elaborate and witty insults. As with many aspects of the queer of color Ball/House scene, many of these practices first came to more mainstream attention through Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990). More recently, Sara Jordenö's documentary *Kiki* (2016) outlines the kiki scene as an evolution of the earlier ball houses and competitions. As Bailey shows, the Ballroom culture is kinship; the houses that form and compete in balls are archives of, and have genealogies carried through, black queer families. "Houses and balls are inseparable core social dimensions of Ballroom culture. Houses are family-like structures that are configured socially rather than biologically... Houses are also alternative families that are led by 'mothers' and 'fathers,'... a 'house' does not signify an actual building; rather it represents the ways in which its members... view themselves and interact with each other as a family unit" (Bailey 5). One of the ways these families interact is through reading, and the practice has become very popular and recognizable in popular culture in North America, and for other fans of American popular culture worldwide.

Ballroom culture has been around since the 1960s, and new generations of families and houses and competitions have evolved around the US and in other places from Harlem's original nexus. Ballroom culture, and now the Kiki scene, have made "direct and indirect contributions to popular culture while simultaneously resisting hegemony and absorption through the use of

codified language and organizational structure” (Monforte). Reading is one of those acts, a tactic that has become more visible and whose understanding has gone more mainstream in the last decade thanks in great part to the American drag competition show *Rupaul’s Drag Race*. It was first documented however, in *Paris is Burning*, defined by drag queen Dorian Corey, whose description still rings true. Reading in this family is the art of insult, a picking apart of someone’s flaws, a sophisticated takedown of another member of that community that seeks to be witty and get a reaction. Dorian Corey explains, “We can’t call each other black queens cause we’re both black queens, that’s not a read, that’s just a fact... If we are the same thing, then we have to go to the finer points.” Notably, Corey emphasizes that when the insult comes from outside the community then it is more rightly considered an offense. A read, following Corey, is community-forming, it presumes a community, and serves to sharpen wit and skill. Moreover, it requires an audience as witness to the read. Reading is in this way performative – beyond the caricature of someone’s flaws, it interpellates the reader and the person being read as part of the same collective; Reading is a family thing, and reading creates families when the audience responds appropriately.

Reading in Ballroom culture is a performative speech act shared in community through artful insult meant to sharpen skills, expose flaws, and generate reaction. Moreover, it is a performative speech act that creates a family. This family-building, socially bonding act is very different, however, from the marriage vows that JL Austin used in his classic example of performative speech acts, though they both rely on the reactions from others than the main parties involved. Eve Sedgwick and Andrew Parker have shown how compulsive heteronormativity is enacted through heteronormative wedding vows that interpellate silent witnesses who forever hold their peace. Through the performative speech act of “I do,” a

community is required, produced and reinforced, “It is the constitution of a community of witnesses that makes the marriage; the silence of witnesses (we don't speak now, we forever hold our peace) that permits it” (Parker 10). Reading, in contrast, requires the artful insulting of a willing participant, and interpellates community not through compulsory silence but through exuberant expression. A good read generates lots of reaction. The best reads get gasps, awes and roars as recognition of the talent of the reader, the truth of the critique and the art with which it was delivered. Reading requires the reader to be sharp and courageous, and it requires the person being read to be strong enough to take the critique. Reading exposes vulnerabilities as a way of encouraging fortification. Reading is a way of accepting and of being accepted. Titica and Ary take down everyday people in their eccentricities and falsity as a way to perform their instantiation within this community, as insiders, as family members of a queer and motley group of people failing and vulnerable. After every read, there is a chorus of voices showing their approval, “Ai ai mama!” in recognition of their critique, of its artful take down of pretention in song and dance, and as a sign of acceptance – to show that Ary and Titica are women among family, mothers of a social and particularly Luandan house.

Reading “Pelo Menos 50” through diaspora methodology allows for reading practices of mutual recognition that reveal performances of reading through which houses are built and families are made. Globalization is far removed from these lyrics, yet the diaspora arrives in resonances and reverberations of black queer kinship and performance. Rather than the outrageous gaga or defiant command to slay, here Titica and Ary preside over the dusty *musseque* as two mothers, wrapped in traditional headdresses, around a table, trading wits in a public performance of song and dance. Their performance allows for other diasporic resonances to ripple in and out – of the queer kinships in Afro-Brazilian *candomblés*, where there are

mothers of a spiritual kind presiding over families of nonnormative gender and sexuality; of drag mothers, of black mothers, of mother-nations, and mothers upon whom nations are built. Mother is unmoored from biological apparatus, but there are roots, archives, genealogies and material traces that we can recognize. Titica imbricates herself within the local *musseque* as a strategy for thriving, to claim the cultural resonances which resurface as voice, body, and performance. This tableau of the *musseque*, exposed for all its flaws and falsities, is performatively uplifted, and expands the terrain through which Angolan queer lives and desires, and transgender voices and bodies, may be heard, recognized, and thrive.

### **Eat Me Wrote You**

Titica and Pablllo Vittar collaborated on Titica’s recent single “Come e Baza” (2019), a spectacular diasporic collaboration of Luso-Afro-Brazilian popular music alongside Vittar in a song that, nevertheless, finds and surpasses the limits of representation of lusophone configurations of diaspora, in which trans voices, bodies and performances are mediated through distinct but imbricated discourses of nonnormative subjectivity. In the song, Titica and Vittar invite a lover to come and eat them, playing on *comer* (to eat) as a euphemism for sex, and then to disappear through the use of *baza*, which plays with the Portuguese from of bazar and *vaza* or *vaziar*, to empty, to vacate. The title and the lyrics suggest that Titica and Vittar are in control, they want sex, and they don’t want to hear anything else from their lovers afterward.

Come, baza  
 Come, baza  
 Come, baza  
 Come, baza

Eat, go  
 Eat, go  
 Eat, go  
 Eat, go

Come mais quem come calado  
 Para o show, não és o Calado  
 Não faz balão, não liga

You’ll eat more if you eat quietly  
 Stop the show, you’re not Calado  
 Don’t make a scene, pay no mind

Não manda mensagem, controla a emoção!	Don't send messages, control your emotion
Me viste, finge que não me viste!	You saw me, well pretend you didn't!
Ai, não causa estresse!	Don't stress me out
Ei psiu, segue a bala...	Let's go
Hora da kitota, come, baza baza baza	Its time, go, go, go, go
Come, baza	Eat, go
Baza, baza, baza, baza!	Go, go, go, go
Come, come, come, come...	Eat, eat, eat, eat

The video features Titica and Pablllo Vittar in a lavish mansion, throwing a lavish dinner party, and they take turns pounding out and chopping up food in the kitchen (Fig. 14). Food is everywhere, their dinner party guests are stuffing their faces, and men end up on tables, eating, undressing, the camera is close up, the effect is extravagant and grotesque, sexual and messy, fun and over-the-top.



Figure 14. Titica feat. Pablllo Vittar, "Come e Baza," (2018)

Bringing Titica and Vittar together in a video about having sex and shutting up, sung by a transgender Angolan woman and a Brazilian drag queen with a transgender voice type, turns the tables on a Luso-Afro-Brazilian queer history and theory that has often silenced, ignored, or occluded trans and queer of color voices and desires. For Titica, I underscore here the extravagant and excessive aesthetic, a dinner party of sexual abundance played out in wasteful devouring of food, as the mobilization of an aesthetic of vulgarity that does not rely on postcolonial foreclosures of body as vulgar repertoires, but re-makes the repertoire and fashions the over-the-top to give excessiveness to her subjectivity. She is powerful, sexual, spectacular and not limited to a kinesthetic of movement that re-members where materials fall short. Titica, in this and the other songs I've retraced here, has a voice made material in the references and movements that instantiate her position as transgender Angolan woman located in a spectacular black and queer diaspora. Titica is reading the scenes around her, dragging them down into a repertoire of abundance, and uplifting herself in the process. In ab-using an aesthetics of vulgarity, of which kuduro is a spectacular example, Titica drags, lifts, and locates herself beyond the *musseque* and of the *musseque*.

Hosting this dinner party with Vittar, as the video suggests, allows Vittar to be eaten on her own terms. I invoke the *antropofagia* that undergirds Brazilian cultural discourse because it is unavoidable – there is so much devouring of food, and food as sex, in the video that the modernist aesthetic underpinnings of a cultural cannibalism which frames Brazilian modernity also frames Vittar's invitation to come and eat. As the most visible example of gender and sexual transgression on the Brazilian popular music scene, Vittar is also a refiguring of that historical visibility. In this video, as in her others, Vittar is in control of how she is desired or wanted. In this song, her voice sends the directive to be quiet and go. It is a fitting reversal of the oscillation

between visibility and violence that is marked by how transgender voices and bodies are in many ways unintelligible in Brazil. Vittar's celebrity and popularity are not permissive shade but the amplification of her voice as material resonance and the bright lights of mass adulation. Her voice pierces, penetrates, extolls you to come and eat in this song, even as critics, fans, and a history of Luso-Brazilian thought on gender, race and nation continue confounded, unable to hear desire, crying, complaint and command unmediated by old tropes and gendered paradigms.

Portugal is present at this party too, not least as the location of the video shoot. Titica and Vittar met and recorded the video for this song in Lisbon and so in many ways the grand mansions, the feasts, the narratives are here provided by the once-metropole of empire. Yet, as the backdrop to a spectacular video and song, it is unnoticeable as such, diminished in ways by the brilliance of the two stars, the brilliance of the popular music coming from the other two stitches of the sutured Luso-Afro-Brazilian. Lisbon is the backdrop for a lot of talk of multiculturalism, as the next-best European capital to see, ready to take on some color, as long as it stays in tones of pink, and doesn't get muddled in brown and black. Yet, the vestiges of marked woman, of racialized woman, of ill-fated woman hover over the paradigms of femininity that both Titica and Vittar have refigured, and re-made in loud and lavish, sexy and crass, spectacular Luso-Afro-Brazilian diasporas and beyond of popular music. Titica's "Come e Baza" is sex and reading, on her own terms. In the title of this chapter conclusion, "Eat Me Wrote You," I reference a quip from RuPaul's Drag Race that suggests a read is the final word. When drag queens on the show successfully read someone, "read you wrote you," suggests there is nothing left to say, it's been read, said, written. It's a brash dismissive of any possible retort. Conflating the act of reading with the act of eating, I refigure the performative read. Eating in this song exposes the vulgarity of the terrain on which queer bodies and desires are imbricated.

The community formed in this performative eating depends on how you feel about sharing your food, but our queer and trans Luso-Afro-Brazilian hosts are busy in the kitchen, pounding out the meat.



## CONCLUSION

### **Lisbon is Burning**

Over eleven days in August, 2016, in a home in Vila Nova York on São Paulo's east side, a community of engaged visual artists, performers, dancers, cultural agents, activists, and researchers came together to live in a “zona autônoma temporária” (“temporary autonomous zone”), to think about and harness the potential of their “corpos periféricos urbanos, dispostos a assumir, com suas ideias, saberes, lutas e presenças, o protagonismo e a transformação do mundo atual, especialmente no contexto brasileiro, tomado por retrocessos, conservadorismos e violência” (“peripheral urban bodies, ready to take on, with their ideas, knowledge, fights, and presence, the preeminence and transformation of the actual world, especially in the Brazilian context, overrun by setback, conservatism and violence”).<sup>80</sup> This was the Explode! Residency, organized by Brazilian artists and activists Claudio Bueno and João Simões, and part of the larger Cidade Queer São Paulo project, which involved other artists, scholars and activists from abroad. The aim of Cidade Queer São Paulo was to have queer and queer of color people reside, claim space in, and use the city, while also coming together to discuss issues of identity, precariousness, and to perform together. For Explode!, coming together in what had been the childhood home of Claudio Bueno, was an opportunity to think and dialogue with one another about gender, sexuality, migration, race, feminism, coloniality, peripheries, performances, and questions of subjectivity, community, kinship and care.<sup>81</sup> There were visitors to the home, discussions, events, listening sessions, everyday activities of feeding and caring, and there was fashion, music and dance.

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<sup>80</sup> The web site for, and description of the Explode! Residency can be found at <http://explode.life/#residency>

<sup>81</sup> This description comes from their website, and is informed by their publication, *Queer City – A Reader* (2017).

The project was captured on film by Danila Bustamente, whose documentary *Cidade Queer / Queer City São Paulo* (2016)<sup>82</sup> shows how these different people of varying genders, races and sexuality, encountered each other in Brazil's largest city. São Paulo hosted the largest Gay Pride parade in 2018, noted by several news sources as one of the largest of its kind in the world, and certainly the largest Portuguese-language pride event.<sup>83</sup> Yet, with the commercialization of LGBTQ activism, and the increasingly corporate nature of Pride events celebrated worldwide,<sup>84</sup> Bustamente's documentary brings a different queer urban culture into view. It is intimate, celebratory, made up of diverse genders, sexualities, and races, and interacting with black, latinx and queer culture from abroad. The series of events that were part of the *Cidade Queer* project, and the film itself, allows us to consider what is a queer space in both material territory and in the material resonances of cultural practices. More directly, the artists involved say their intention was to create "temporary autonomous zones," as a queer city within the city.

The documentary opens with Mavi Veloso, a performance artist, activist, and trans woman recounting a recent interaction with someone who assumed she was a drag queen. Mavi corrected the assumption, stating that she identified as trans. Her interrogator followed up with a question about whether she still had male genitalia, as this would either authenticate or negate her trans identity. After confirming that she did indeed still have a penis, Mavi's interlocuter dismissed her trans identity outright, to which Mavi tells us she offered an awkward laugh and

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<sup>82</sup> The documentary is viewable on Artseverwhere.ca <http://artseverywhere.ca/2018/01/14/queer-city-film/>

<sup>83</sup> The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2018/jun/04/sao-paulos-gay-pride-parade-in-pictures>; CBS News <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gay-pride-parade-brazil-sao-paulo-today-2018-06-03/>; and others reported the event as one of the largest, if not the largest, Gay Pride celebration in the world.

<sup>84</sup> Sam Bourcier takes up a critique of the commercialization and neoliberalization of global gay movements built around equality and marriage rights in *Homo Inc. Orporated: Le Triangle et la Licorne que Pète* (2017); while Alex Abad-Santos, writing in *Vox*, June 25, 2018, examines the commercialization of Pride in the US: <https://www.vox.com/2018/6/25/17476850/pride-month-lgbtq-corporate-explained>

suggested they slow down, avert the rush to judgement, and consider the complex issues of body, sex, and identity. She suggests a dragging out of time to allow for discussion and reflection, as an intervention in the rush to identity body and gender. Her response underscores the social relationships and judgements that Mavi navigates and within which she is imbricated. The exchange highlights the particular tensions in Brazil as elaboration of trans identities move beside a history of *travesti* identity, transsexual identity bound up to medicalization, and histories of visibility and violence bound up in enduring paradigms of masculinity and femininity. For her interrogator, trans was attached to a medical procedure that Mavi has not sought to have. Her body speaks louder than her voice, even as it emanates from that body. In many ways, trans voices and bodies continue to confound, and do not register on the material terrains that they encounter, through which they encounter others, and from which they gather materials to recount their subjectivities, as response to interrogations, as ways of accessing institutional resources, and as performances that instantiate their subjectivities in multiple terrains.

As the exchange unraveled in implicit and multiple (mis)understandings of trans, the opening scene similarly gives way to a montage that tumbles through all sorts of queer bodies and performances set to pulsating music. *Cidade Queer / Queer City São Paulo* brings together various artists, performers, and people to discuss and build up a network of bodies, a community of reflection and performance, to understand how queer people and desires occupy the city. The film introduces some of the participants and we hear what it meant to each of them. Claudio Bueno says they encountered “non-binary bodies, trans, black, the female body, black women, bodies that live at the peripheries of the city of São Paulo, bodies that dance...all the multiplicity possible of bodies.” The residency was complimented by “an open program that contemplated discussions around the body and periphery, pedagogy, immigration,” and Simões explains that

“other activities were proposed by the sound art collective Ultra-red,” based primarily in North America and Europe, which interject the politics and issues of people living with HIV and black queer communities into their work. Cadu Oliveira, Brazilian activist, LGBT advisor and participant of the Explode! Residency, explains how they got involved to learn more about the black communities of North America and their cultural practices, underscoring concern and commonalities between African Americans and Afro-Brazilians, who historically share the legacy of violent enslavement, displacement, commodification and dehumanization. It is a sentiment reiterated by Michael Roberson, artist, educator, health professional, and a member of Ultra-red, who asks in the film, “What does it mean for a people to be taken out of their homeland and enslaved in a transatlantic way.” He suggests a formation of shared experience and resilience that forms “not black in America, not black in the Caribbean, not black in Brazil, not just black in continental Africa, but this...ontology of blackness.” Roberson’s recognition of threads of black experience reaffirms the urgency in E. Patrick Johnson’s call for the consideration of different African diaspora cultures “not separate from, but in relation to U.S. blackness and queerness,” to make a critical intervention in the theorization of black queer subjectivity (3).

The final event of the residency, and the climax of the documentary, is *Ataque!* (Fig. 15), an international black and queer ball that takes its references from Ballroom culture in North America held in a venue in São Paulo’s city center. In describing their event, Roberson and Simões offer a history of the Ballroom scene as emerging in response to trauma, as a sanctuary of queer black expression. The dance style known as voguing began as one of the competitive categories and is now, as choreographer Pony Zion describes in the film, “the avatar of the ballroom community.” Zion and others are shown teaching and instructing participants in the art of voguing. The final Ballroom dance-off in the heart of São Paulo is a voguing extravaganza,

one which may seem as an import of non-Brazilian black and queer culture to effectively queer a Brazilian urban space. The archives of song and dance I've brought together in this dissertation, however, refute that criticism. Tellingly, Simões addresses this claim implicitly by referencing another theme of the residency: discussing the use of the English word queer to speak about Brazilian LGBTQ+ life and expression. He explains that whether the word originates in Brazil is beside the point, for it references a lived experience outside heteronormative and binary confines in Brazil just as it does so in other contexts.



Figure 15. *Ataque! Queer City, A Reader* (2016)

Simões's response addresses the anxieties behind Silviano Santiago's call for a wily Latin American way of being homosexual, and speaks to José Quiroga's focus on praxis rather than on identitarian articulation. Simões acknowledges the tension of how to account for being queer here and not there, the anxiety of whether there is a here that can be fully apprehended through a queer methodology from over there, and whether we can hear, see, and feel queer here. All of

this consternation, however, is beside the point for Simões. In calling out the beside-ness of the queer question in Brazil, he implicitly reveals how the Explode! Residency, as well as the queer performances of popular music I've analyzed in this work, exist in formations beside themselves, beside the normative underpinnings of their repertoires, and beside myopic views of nation, globalization, and diaspora. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers a way to think an affective understanding of besides as an escape from duality and dichotomy, a way of "being that is between this and that" (*Touching Feeling* 8). Simões illustrates this beside, when he suggests that where queer is, is beside the point. He does not dismiss the question, it remains in tension, but it is not the point. We are charting out points beside points in this formation. As the film shows dancers voguing in São Paulo, the music shifts, the movements change, the dancing continues. There is house music, samba music, funk, and other shifts of sounds and bodies. The event is exuberant, and the participants are beside themselves with emotion, laughing, loving, intimately connected in a moment of care. Just as ballroom repertoire has been made and used as an affirmation of black queer bodies and existence, what Michael Roberson defines in the film as "intraventions, which are interventions made [by the Ballroom community] to take care of itself," Bustamente's documentary reveals this encounter of seemingly disparate people and practices as its own formation of queer thriving. From different scenes, genres, nations, and diasporic formations, they constitute this moment, as part of this project now documented, and as part of spectacular queer diasporas that move beside other ones. They exist within a scale of experience that is both mass-mediated and intimately shared, seen, heard, expressed, performed and felt. Explaining the sounds they heard during the residency, from music to discussions, the participants also heard, "sons noturnos do bairro – do possível ladrão de galinhas no telhado ou do tiro seco do trêsóitão" ("nocturnal sounds of the neighborhood – the possible chicken thief on

the roof, or the dry shots of a .38 caliber”).<sup>85</sup> The reference to chickens, theft, and gunshots are particular to this Brazilian urban experience, and yet have resonances in the precariousness and criminalization of black lives elsewhere.

The Explode! Residency and Ataque! event exemplify the scale necessary to chart out the formations of queer subjectivity and cultural practices that move beside formations. In Explode!’s words:

Dançamos diferentes estilos musicais de contestação, de resistência e de luta. Músicas que potencializam corpos negros, feministas, não binários, transgêneros, gays, pobres, latinos etc. – como o vogue (ênfático nesse período pela presença do *legendary icon* Pony Zion e do brasileiro Félix Pimenta), – além do funk carioca, do hip-hop, do samba e outros. Caminhamos pelo entorno da casa, nos colocamos no bairro, dançamos na rua e partilhamos uma longa conversa e escuta.

(We danced different music styles of contestation, resistance and struggle. Genres that potentialize bodies that are black, feminist, non-binary, transgender, gay, poor, latino, etc. – like vogue (marked by the presence of the *legendary icon* Pony Zion and the Brazilian Félix Pimenta) – in addition to funk carioca, hip-hop, samba, and others. We walked through the house, into the neighborhood, danced in the streets and had ourselves a long talk and listen). (Explode!)

In their description they draw out cultural practices that resonate in formation with what Jafari S. Allen calls “an elaborated litany for thriving” (28). Just as in Ballroom culture, this event shows how queer cultural practices are not just interventions, but are formative kinship bonds and strategies of care for queer thriving. Moreover, they move within a house, and then within the neighborhood, and they dance in streets to music genres that are from there beside being from elsewhere. They are a queer family, their shared space is domestic and public, and they recognize themselves in spectacular formations of popular culture and queer diaspora. From inside and outside this house, I mark spectacular queer diasporas imperative for elaborating on queer lives and desires in the lusophone world.

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<sup>85</sup> This description comes from the Explode! website description of the event: <http://explode.life/#residency>

In thinking queer diasporas, my work is aligned with Gayatri Gopinath's argument that they have the potential to unmoor diaspora studies from a tendency to always look back. Gopinath explains how "queer desire reorients the traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora... [the] peculiar relation to the past that characterizes a conservative diasporic imaginary" (*Impossible Desires* 3). Rather, Gopinath suggests diaspora can benefit from the "ways in which queer art, scholarship, and activism have always evinced a sense of obligation to document, analyze, archive, and value the small, the inconsequential, and the ephemeral, so much of which make up the messy beauty and drama of queer life-worlds," (*Impossible* 4). To do so, Gopinath thinks diaspora through region to "produce a new mapping of space and sexuality; this alternative cartography rejects dominant cartographies that either privilege the nation-state or cast into shadow all those spaces, and gender and sexual formations, deemed without value within the map of global capital" (*Impossible* 5). The potential as Gopinath argues, is such that "the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora create new cartographies that produce South-South, region-to-region, and diaspora-to-region connectivities that critique, subordinate, and at times bypass the nation-state" (*Unruly Visions* 18).

Though I share the concerted effort to document, analyze, archive, and value the ephemeral, messy beauty and drama of queer "life-worlds," the archive I've studied here demands a bigger scale. Gopinath's formation of queer diaspora is relegated to the small and operates via a South-South trajectory aligned with her efforts to be critical of how diaspora terrains may be undergirded by processes of globalization. Indeed, in this work I have shown that some are. The music and videos of Pablllo Vittar, Titica, kuduro, funk, and the world of fado are not small, and they are of very real value to global flows of capital, as are the LGBTQ+ subjectivities that are imbricated in their performances. These are mass-mediated archives that transit in spectacular ways, but this is not a cynical observation – it is an imperative one to



understand how queer performances in popular music genres and shared in mass-mediated ways shape and transform people within nation, region, and neighborhood, with representations from outside of nation, linguistic group, and along South-North trajectory, rather than just South-South, or North-South. They are spectacular in the ways that their mass-mediated forms inform intimate local lives, practices, and desires, even as they are absorbed, appropriated, refigured and transformed in their reception.

Marcia Ochoa defines spectacularity “as a register on which to consider the performativity of gender and how spectacularity is used to produce particularly legible forms” of gender and sexuality (202). Spectacle is related to mass mediation and to interiority, theatricality and imagination. Ochoa explains:

By moving through this argument about performance, theatricality, and audience, I am proposing that we consider spectacle as one register through which individuals can signify—a register that remains unaddressed in the theory of gender performativity. Our use of spectacularity in signifying practice, a complex and multifaceted form of citation, places us in a universe of symbolic resources and provides opportunities for imaginary projection beyond the material conditions in which we find ourselves. This kind of imaginary projection... also critiques existing material and symbolic regimes... So then what makes something spectacular? Spectacularity, as I am using it, employs existing conventions of media spectatorship to signify beyond a semantic level of speech. That is, spectacular performance is the kind of performance Butler would call ‘theatrical.’ Only you do not have to be in a theater to be theatrical. (211)

This formation of spectacularity accounts for both mass-mediated representations and more intimate and interior forms. Ochoa moves beyond fretting over how media is received, distributed, or in what directions, and describes a way of understanding the important resonances of mass-mediated cultural forms, of gender and of genres, of sexualities and femininities and masculinities, in producing and authorizing subject formation and survival (203). Ochoa provides a scale to understand how mass-mediated representations play out in the “lived experiences of people,” allowing for a “complex understanding of spectacle as a cultural form,

produced through specific histories, genres, and practices” (204). For Ochoa, spectacularity allows for modes of receiving spectacles and being a spectacle, of being affected by and performing in spectacular ways in which “the discursive conventions related to mass mediation are available for not just citation or miming but for all kinds of everyday performance” (210). The performances I’ve gathered in this work speak to the ways in which spectacular formations of gender and genre can resonate as a terrain where queer bodies, desires, and practices may gather, in process of subject formation, and as strategies of survival. In the material resonances of body and voice, and the cartographies mapped out across popular music genres and not only in small and ephemeral ways, I recognize queer diasporas that confound nation, region, and south-south configurations altogether.

Spectacular queer diasporas are thus aligned with queer diaspora intentions while attuned to scales in which popular music can be a site of queer thriving; in which globalization can offer vernaculars formations as modes of survival dragged down into local discursive terrain, as Titica does with globalization, when that terrain is otherwise hostile to queer life. Spectacular queer diasporas as a material terrain accounts for the ways in which Pablllo Vittar’s voice, in its confounding, may pull *travesti* archetypes out of violent oscillations, and peripheral music genres into mainstream formations. This diaspora is mass-mediated and valued, globalized and decentering, embodied, deployed and mobilized in grand and intimate ways. The subtitle to this conclusion, “Lisbon is Burning” is a reference to Livingston’s *Paris is Burning*. I invoke it not only to underscore how the Explode! Residency and Titica are revealed in diasporic reading practices, but also to suggest how, just as Paris was a reference for the Ballroom scene that was, in many ways, beside the point, Lisbon is in many ways beside the point to Luso-Afro-Brazilian diaspora even as luso sutures through a shared language and cultural matrix. The name of Livingston’s film was taken from an annual ball run by house mother Paris Dupree, and it also

suggests Paris the city, as a locus of high culture and haute couture, which are not simply emulated by the ballroom scene and voguing. Through their performances, Paris goes up in flames. The image of Paris burning suggests how black and queer communities take down the house that culture built, a black and queer iteration of Halberstam's gaga feminism, and rebuild that house in their own way, fashioning their own locus of culture, bodies, and community, even as the references, the labels, the house names and competition categories are rooted in white, eurocentric standards of beauty and racist and classist modes of life. The ballroom community emerges beside itself as Paris burns from aberrations and redirection, slaying with their poses, and dragging the inaccessible into a world of their making.

I substitute Lisbon for Paris here to amplify queer Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultural formations and as a way of sending diaspora figurations that limit these formations to the lusophone world up in flames. Portuguese is a black language, and a queer language. Lusophone cultures are imbricated in popular music and media that has little do with colonial histories and that offer new bodies and voices to refigure postcolonial aesthetics. Spectacular queer diasporas are not tethered to circuitous Luso-Afro-Brazilian turns and returns, even as they gather the material resonances of that terrain beside others. Titica expands what Tanya L. Saunders has noted as an "understudied phenomenon: the transnational, queer Afro-diasporic, black feminist encounters and exchanges occurring across national borders," which she ascertained through her work with hip-hop and black lesbian feminist activism (149). When Titica is limited to a reading of her music as only a Luso-Afro-Brazilian formation, and not in the black and queer diasporas that she calls out in her music and through her practices, a lyric from "Come e Baza" serves to ask the question, "Don't you see me? Ah! Pretend that you don't see me!"

Titica's collaboration with Vittar also allows us to consider what we hear when we hear trans voices. Vittar's voice in the collaboration is the same voice that receives scrutiny in

Brazilian media, and that continues to sell records, amass millions of streams online, and in 2019, asked to head up a Carnival block for Brazil's biggest party and national cultural performance, to which Vittar invited Titica. What I have marked as Vittar's trans tessitura bristles both critics and fans alike – turning them off and on respectively – but also resonating as that vocal range that reveals in its bristling the fault lines of gendered codes in performance of song and dance and in performance of personhood, community and nation. Vittar's tessitura holds in unresolved tension the affective responses to her voice and asks that we come to terms with what it is we hear and feel when we hear her. Taking trans as an analytic here allows us to consider how the gender binary pulls towards resolutions that are often obfuscations of our own unbearableness. The trans tessitura drags these tensions out, reverberates in vocal range, pitch, and timber, as both the vector of trans expression and the shifting of terrain in which gendered conventions and codes are rooted.

Lisbon is in many ways burning. The recent surge in tourism has come with its problems. The Euro Crisis negatively impacted the Portuguese economy, followed by austerity measures that further depressed salaries and pensions. A new anti-austerity government, in place since 2015, has reversed some of that depression.<sup>86</sup> Tourism has fueled rapid growth and change. But it has come at a cost, with rents rising and locals ever more displaced into the peripheries of the city.<sup>87</sup> It is in those peripheries, however, that much of Lisbon's people of color have always resided. The city's multiculturalism is due to the presence of immigrants and Afro-descendent people from Portuguese-speaking African nations and from Brazil. Historically, however, these

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<sup>86</sup> Liz Alderman, "Portugal dared to cast aside austerity. It's having a major revival," *New York Times*, July 22, 2018: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/22/business/portugal-economy-austerity.html>

<sup>87</sup> Trisha Lorenz, "In Lisbon: Shopping in the Shadow of History and Rebirth," *New York Times*, October 25, 2018: "The global financial crisis left deep scars in Portugal: Almost 5 percent of the population, more than 485,000 people, left the country between 2011 and 2014. This was followed by a tsunami of tourism: a 168 percent increase from 2010 to 2016. Tourism has fueled international property speculation, leading to skyrocketing rents, and many stores — particularly those serving the local market — are struggling or have closed."

communities, along with white and poor Portuguese and Roma families, have been relegated to makeshift homes and shantytowns on Lisbon's peripheries (Ascensão). These settlements have grown over decades into large communities of people of color who are aggressively policed. The Jamaica case revealed how Lisbon's multiculturalist guise is paper thin. Joana Gorjão Henriques, writing for Portuguese newspaper *Público* about the spontaneous protest for racial and social justice, describes the demonstrators and lists the many peripheries of Lisbon:

Não pertencem a nenhum grupo activista. Têm por volta dos 20 anos. Uns são estudantes e outros também trabalhadores. Usam a rede social Instagram para comunicar e foi através dela que se mobilizaram para ir à manifestação da última segunda-feira, organizada de forma espontânea. E não, não são todos do bairro da Jamaica: são do Cacém, do Seixal, de Loures, de Oeiras, de Lisboa, da Amadora, de Rio de Mouro... Vieram de bairros como o 6 de Maio, Cova da Moura, Casal da Boba, Quinta do Mocho, Penha de França, Campolide...

(They don't belong to any activist group. They are in their twenties. Some are students, others are workers, too. They use the social media app Instagram to communicate and it was through Instagram that they mobilized in protest last Monday, spontaneously. And no, they are not all from the Jamaica neighborhood: they are from Cacém, from Seixal, from Loures, de Oeiras, from Lisbon, from Amadora, from Rio de Mouro... They came from neighborhoods like 6 de Maio, Cova da Moura, Casal da Boba, Quinta do Mocho, Penha de França, Campolide...) (Henriques)

Henriques's list of cities, and neighborhoods within cities, refigures the periphery as multiple and as multitude. It is a visible expanse of lexicon as well as an accounting of the many places in and around Lisbon that fail to take their communities of color into account. These are spectacular diasporas within peripheries of diaspora. Lisbon's branch of Angolan kuduro made a huge impact on the genre's popularity, and much of Lisbon's hipness suggests some kind of cultural hybrid, both exploitatively and derisively called *lusofonia* (lusophony), a concept that Fernando Arenas criticizes:

*Lusofonia*, a geocultural reality made up of a vastly heterogeneous group of nations united through a common linguistic bond, has become a utopian compensatory space for the Portuguese national imaginary (even if Portuguese is not spoken by all citizens of this pan-Lusophone world, as in parts of Africa or

East Timor). However, this space is inevitably a contested one in which Portugal, even though it constitutes the original linguistic matrix, must abandon its claims as the center and instead recognize as well as foster multipolarity where Brazil, the five African states and East Timor... together with Portugal, can build a community of mutual interests. (Arenas 98)

Arenas's criticism underscores what a concept like *lusofonia* centers. Yet, asking Portugal to abandon its claims to the center is a request made in an echo-chamber, as the number of Portuguese-speakers outside of Portugal is many-millions more than Portuguese-speakers within it. Meanwhile, spectacular queer diasporas move beside this amorphous claim of *lusofonia*. They are imperative in perceiving the Portuguese-speaking world as imbricated, embodied, and performed in ways beside being lusophone – in confounding, unbearable and black ways that are queer and spectacular and untethered to Lisbon's concerns of centrality.

This dissertation shows how popular music performances are made sites of queer thriving in the gathering resonances of transgender voices, queer sexualities, and decentered genres of cultural practices. As an archive of a spectacular queer diaspora, the music and artists gathered in this work, their collaborations, citations, references, and affective provocations form and inform queer subjectivities across Luso-Afro-Brazilian cultures and beside them. In globalized transits of media, money, power and violence, spectacular queer diasporic repertoires of care resonate out, like a dance routine that slays, a piercing voice, sustained sobbing, or the most unbearably beautiful fado show, gathering others. Considering these repertoires of performance as strategies of queer care requires a scale that can move from the mass and mediated to the interior and imagined; from the social to the private, and the distant to the intimate. While the residency project had a goal of queering the urban metropolis of São Paulo, from the opening credits that transition to a kitchen scene in which someone is chopping onions for a salad, we are given a house tour, shown the bathrooms, see the clothes strewn about, how the artists are living

together, sleeping together. We are in a home, and this is a queer family even if it is only temporary. Gopinath argues that, along with unsettling nation and normative diaspora, “the framework of a queer diaspora radically resituates questions of home, dwelling, and the domestic space that have long concerned feminist, queer, and postcolonial scholarship” (*Impossible* 14). This dissertation has shown that home can be the gathering of queer lives and desires on a dizzying scale of terrains and differing forms, from mansions, to streets, *favelas* to *musseques*, and the material resonances of voice and body in song.

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