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EUROPEAN INTERDISCIPLINARY MASTER AFRICAN STUDIES

(Re)Adapting to Resist
The Case of Brazil's Urban *Quilombo Aparelha Luzia*

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Master's thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in European Interdisciplinary Master African Studies, supervised by Professor
Dr. Amélia Polónia da Silva

and by Professor Miguel Filipe Vilela de Oliveira Pinto Silva

Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto | Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the
University of Porto

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To my father Aristides

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Declaration of Honour

I hereby declare that I am the author of this thesis, which has never been used in other course units or subjects at this or any other institution. All references to authors (statements, ideas, thoughts, quotes) have scrupulously met the applicable citation rules and are, therefore, referenced in the text and in the bibliographical references, in accordance with the referencing rules. I am aware that plagiarism and self-plagiarism is an academic offense.

[São Paulo, September 27, 2022]

[Lucas da Silva Ferreira de Novais]

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Resumo

A seguinte dissertação de mestrado discute um fenômeno contemporâneo no Brasil: a criação de quilombos urbanos autointitulados. Se no passado os quilombos foram criados por negros escravizados para resistir à escravidão, atualmente eles foram readaptados para resistir a uma sociedade estruturalmente racista. Nesse processo, o quilombo urbano Aparelha Luzia, localizado no centro de São Paulo, rapidamente ganhou notoriedade para os afro-brasileiros, seja por sua singularidade, seja pelo sucesso de sua fundadora, Erica Malunguinho, na esfera política.

Seguimos a teoria da identidade cultural de Stuart Hall (1990, 2006) de uma reconstrução contínua da identidade cultural de alguém, que ocorre por meio de interações entre sua própria cultura com outras pessoas e culturas variadas; dentro dessa teoria, ao retornar ao passado, é possível reconstruir suas próprias identidades culturais. Aplicando essa teoria ao nosso estudo de caso, os afrodescendentes unem seu passado para o que eles se tornam. Esta tese analisará como esse retorno a um passado afro-brasileiro (ou seja, retornar aos quilombos) ajuda os frequentadores da Aparelha Luzia a reformular suas identidades culturais. Para responder a essa pergunta, aplicamos a teoria de Hall em um estudo autoetnográfico. Trata-se de entrevistas qualitativas e visitas de campo, nas quais vivenciamos o que é estar nas atividades da Aparelha Luzia e apreendemos diferentes formas de reconfigurações culturais da identidade.

Palavras-chave: quilombo urbano, identidade cultural, estudos culturais, estudos da diáspora, identidade afro-brasileira

Abstract

The following master thesis discusses a contemporary phenomena in Brazil: the creation of self-titled urban *quilombos*. If in the past, the *quilombos* were created by enslaved *negros* to resist against slavery, currently they were readapted to resist a structurally racist society. In this process, the urban *quilombo Aparelha Luzia*, located in the center of São Paulo, quickly gained notoriety for Afro-Brazilians, be it for its distinctiveness, be it for the success of its founder, Erica Malunguinho, in the political sphere.

We follow Stuart Hall's (1990, 2006) cultural identity theory of a continuous reconstruction of someone's cultural identity, that occurs through interactions between their own culture with others and varied cultures; within this theory, by returning to their past, one is enabled to reconstruct their own cultural identities. Applying this theory to our case study, Afro-descendants bridge together their past towards what they become. This thesis will analyze how this return to an Afro-Brazilian past (i.e. returning to *quilombos*) helps *Aparelha Luzia's* attendees in reshaping their cultural identities. To answer this question, we apply Hall's theory into an autoethnographic study. This consisted of qualitative interviews and field visits, by which we experienced what it is to be at *Aparelha Luzia's* activities and apprehended different ways of cultural reshaping of identity.

Keywords: urban *quilombo*, cultural identity, cultural studies, diaspora studies, Afro-Brazilian identity

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INTRODUCTION

Brazil was the main destiny of African slaves from the transatlantic slave trade, receiving an estimated total of 5.532 million enslaved Africans for the period that encompass from 1551 to 1860¹. With such a great number, much of the African influence introduced significant changes into the Brazilian society through the massive presence of slaves and their later descendants. Contrary to other countries that also had African slaves as their main workforce, as the United States or the Caribbean islands, Brazil (as much as other countries of Latin America) had a high degree of miscegenation. Sociologist Lélia Gonzalez (1988, p. 72) analyzes that this difference is due to the colonizers' different practices of racism, through segregation in the former and denial in the latter, arguing that Iberian societies perpetuated superiorities through hierarchical systems, derived from their historic formations.

After more than three centuries of slavery, its marks were definitely left in the development of the Brazilian society, mostly regarding the development of an unequal society, with impacts that are still felt nowadays, as a 2019 research of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in Social Inequality (IBGE, 2019, p. 5) shows. According to it, *negro* people make up for 55.8% of the Brazilian population, being represented at 27.7% of the top 10% with the biggest income, while on the other hand, are represented at 75.2% of the top 10% with the lowest income.

This unequal society, strongly attached to African enslavement, deeply entrenched with racism, leads to different issues regarding cultural identity. Amongst this class (if not racial) warfare, several movements of resistance have risen throughout the years, most notably the *quilombos*, alternative societies which welcomed fled slaves ever since the 16th century. For purposes of conceptualization, resistance is here understood as all the ways to counter systematic forms of discrimination and oppression. Nowadays, there are still remaining *quilombola* societies living in Brazil, as well as new movements from cultural institutions that are trying to bridge together their African past and the *quilombola* resistance in urban spaces. These are self-entitled as *urban quilombos*.

¹ Source: The Trans-Atlantic and Intra-American slave trade databases (<https://www.slavevoyages.org>)

*Aparelha Luzia*² appears as one of the best examples of these new *urban quilombos*. Founded in 2016, this independent cultural institution provides different artistic activities (dance, music, poetry slams) with Afro-Brazilian and African artists (from Angola, Ghana, Guiné-Bissau, among others), book launches, as well as cuisine experiments (Brazilian Northeasters, Congolese, e.g.) and debates, with themes that range from Black Masculinities to Race and Human Rights. Through culture, *Aparelha Luzia* seeks to provide Afro-Brazilians a space where they can share their cultural identities as *negros*, in order to continue resisting against a structurally racist society.

In this thesis, *Aparelha Luzia* is understood as an urban *quilombo*. As it is a recent trend, few are the works in academia regarding these new urban *quilombos* and the impacts they provide to diasporic African descendants. These include Batista's (2019) findings in communication studies and Pardue's (2021) on migrant studies, with the latter being seminal. We further expand on them by analyzing the engagement of *Aparelha Luzia's* attendees under the scope of Stuart Hall's (1990, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2016) cultural identity theory and Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionalities. In the words of *Aparelha Luzia's* founder, Erica Malunguinho, *Aparelha* is a place for *negros*³ to "be and write our narratives, a place of finding and existing"⁴ (Sanz, 2017).

On the scope of this subject, some research questions are to be answered:

- How urban *quilombos* may help Afro-descendants (re)shape their cultural identity as *negros*?

The main aims of this project are:

- Analyze and understand the benefits that urban *quilombos* may provide to Afro-descendants in Brazil;

² *Aparelha Luzia*, 2022a, <https://www.facebook.com/AparelhaLuzia/>

³ In Brazil, the term *negro* has a different connotation than other countries, such as the United States. *Negro* is colloquially used to define individuals from African descent, either black or *pardo*. From here on we will use the term "*negros*" as the Brazilian word identifying black people and Afro-descendants. To avoid a confusion with the *Negro* word in other countries, the Brazilian *negro* will always be referred to in *italics*. Pronunciation is key, as in Portuguese the international phonetics alphabets translates to "negru" and in English to "nigroʊ"

⁴ Own translation

- Present the complexities entangled within the construction of an Afro-Brazilian identity

The analysis will focus on a sociological perspective of resistance, which is the consequence of many historical, political, cultural and socio-economic events. Notwithstanding, three areas will receive greater attention: how these Afro-descendant diasporic lives express themselves currently, how they (re)construct their cultural identities and how intersectionalities may overlap in their identifications.

Although our analytical focus is on the present, to fulfill the above-mentioned analysis, the racial tensions and divisions within Brazil, specifically towards the *negro* population, shall be analyzed. Therefore, the thesis will briefly mention the context of slavery as an institution (16th to 19th centuries) and the post-abolition of slavery (Late 19th and early 20th centuries), to finally focus on the more recent times (late 20th and early 21st centuries).

The first two periods provide a context of events, and the last one the more recent plethora of experiences and practices serving our main purpose of analysis. The themes to be explored are slavery⁵, *quilombos*⁶, *negro* identity⁷, cultural identity⁸, structural racism⁹, segregation¹⁰ and necropolitics¹¹.

Within the EIMAS programme concept of Global Africa we will follow an interdisciplinary approach focusing on the programme's nexus between Identity, Territory and Sustainability. The thesis will present a current trend of Pan African resistance in Brazil, the country that most received enslaved Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade "forced diaspora". It follows the 2006 enactment of the African Union, which recognizes the African diaspora as Africa's "sixth region". This "*reignited trans-Atlantic Pan Africanism while perhaps serving to reunite it with continental Pan Africanism*" (Edozie, 2011, p. 278).

⁵ See e.g Black, 2015; Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010; Gomes, 2019; Gomes, 2022

⁶ See e.g Carneiro, 1958; Reis, 1996; Moura, 1986, 2021; Lara, 2016, 2021

⁷ See e.g Nascimento, 1980, 1989; Munanga, 1999; Silva & Leão, 2012; Hunter, 2007; Hall, 1990; Gonzalez, 1982, 1988

⁸ See e.g Hall, 1990, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2016

⁹ See e.g Almeida, 2019

¹⁰ See e.g Carril, 2006

¹¹ See e.g Mbembe, 2018; Alves, 2014

Based on the significant array of secondary literature, conceptual analysis will be undertaken, as well as a critical review of the mainstream state of the art related to each addressed theme. In Part I we will weave together the concepts and components in a cohesive timeline analyzed through a historic perspective, alongside a sociological analysis that ties together how/why the current urban *quilombo* came to be.

Part II presents an ethnographic account of the *Aparelha Luzia* urban *quilombo*. It is based on field trips, field notes, semi-structured interviews and photographs. Through it, we will be able to critically reflect on how the urban *quilombo* and its attendees engage with each other, in an attempt to further understand how this evocation of Afro-Brazilian culture might reshape the attendees' cultural identities. Our understanding of cultural identity follows Stuart Hall (2006) definition, according to which, it is a process, formed within the interaction between the self and the society. This is continually reshaped in relation to the ways by which we are represented or interspersed by the cultural systems surrounding us. These cultural identities are always historically defined and may be multiple. With multiple identities also comes intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2014; Guimarães Corrêa, 2020), where these different cultural identities (race, ethnicity, gender, class, nation, etc.) overlap and have an impact on the subject's own positioning in the world.

The methodologies applied are: a short-term ethnography (Pink & Morgan, 2013), that produces distinct ways of "understanding and being in (and with) the world" (Pink & Morgan, 2013, p. 359), based on intense encounters, participant observation, focus on detail, qualitative interviews and usage of audiovisual to re-engage with the materials, a method that was applied due to the own short-term and intense activities promoted by *Aparelha Luzia*. Autoethnography (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Santoro, 2014; Sumartojo & Pink, 2019) is also employed, due to my own ethnoracial identification as a *negro* (or Afro-Brazilian), therefore, part of *Aparelha Luzia's* major audience. The autoethnography method allows a "transformative act of reclaiming the self", whilst "positioning lived experiences of life on and from the margins as activism with the potential to create social, cultural, and political change" (Santoro, 2014, pp. 159-160).

PART I: ROOTS OF DISCRIMINATION AND RESISTANCE

1. Slavery in Brazil

The history of Brazil and of the African continent are profoundly intertwined due to the transatlantic slave trade, as Brazil was the main destiny of so many African lives and its descendants. This forced diaspora was a major aspect of Brazilian economy and social construction. In fact, the slaves served as the main workforce of the country, above all during the Portuguese colonial period (16th to 19th centuries). As unfortunate as it can be that both the African continent and Brazil are intertwined due to what is considered nowadays as one of the worst acts in human history, understanding that background from a historical point of view is crucial to this thesis. Not only it occurred, but lasted through the span of three centuries and has its impacts until today.

The first instances of the transatlantic slave trade can be traced back to the potential that Portugal and Spain saw in what came to be known as the “New World” in the beginning and middle of the 16th century¹². Portugal set foot in Brazil by 1500 and later initiated a sugar production for export to Europe as early as in the 1530s (Eltis *et al.*, 2004, p. 7).

Both countries, at first, relied their new economic activities in coerced or enslaved workforce of natives, but different political, cultural and religious reasons made both countries decide against the enslaving of the Indigenous population (Klein, 1988, p. 22). For instance, indigenous resistance (in both Portuguese and Spanish lands) and, in Spain’s case, a different set of policies and legal reforms that led to an illegality of some instances of native work (Phillips, Jr., 2011, p. 333), paved the way to searching a different workforce, which came to be African slaves from the transatlantic slave trade.

In the case of Brazil, it amounts as the destiny of the largest number of African slaves, with an estimated total of 5.532 million for the period that encompass from 1551 to 1860¹³. Such a

¹² Interest that led to the signing of the *Tordesillas treaty* in 1494.

¹³ Source: The Trans-Atlantic and Intra-American slave trade databases (<https://www.slavevoyages.org>)

large period, covering more than 3 centuries, saw varied economic activities that were based on African enslaved labor, with the main ones being agriculture, plantation and mining. As previously mentioned, initial labor force needs in the colony were supplied through the enslavement of natives, but difficulties in adapting those natives to systematic agricultural labor, as well as a highly susceptibility to European diseases, made the Portuguese turn towards their already established slave trade relations in sub-Saharan Africa to supply their labor demands. (Klein, 1988, p. 25)

Geographic factors, such as weather, a “new”, *denuded*, fertile soil and a proximity to the region of West Africa, transformed northeast Brazil into the center of Portuguese sugar production (Black, 2015). Economically, it also led to a better “investment”, as shorter voyages reduced the gap between the purchase of African slaves and their sale, as well as had a lesser death rate in between voyages.

The first Portuguese leaders in the colony were men involved with the East Indies trade, therefore, they could provide the capital required to acquire imported machinery and technicians related to sugar plantations. By the 1580s, the province Pernambuco already had more than 60 *engenhos* (sugar plantations) and Bahia closely followed it with 40, with both producing about two-thirds of all the sugar on the continent (Klein, 1988, pp. 38-39). This quickly turned into a boom and by 1600, Brazil had “close to 200 *engenhos* producing a total of between 8.000 and 9.000 metric tons of sugar per annum, and Brazilian output rose to 14.000 tons per annum by the mid 1620s” (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 29). Such an increase in production had its impacts in the demand for labor, leading to an upwards trend in the presence of African slavery in those sugar *engenhos*.

Changes in the political landscape reshaped some of the geo-political scenarios of then 17th century. By 1580s, Portugal and Spain were united, for a period that lasted 60 years, and such a union came with its own share of networking yet conflicts. In regards to the transatlantic slave trade, this allowed Portuguese slave traders to supply Spanish American markets with African slaves (Klein, 1988, pp. 28-29). Spain, under the control of Philip II, was in conflict with the region that came to be The Netherlands, which later involved Portugal and colonial Brazil. The Dutch eventually overtook Brazil’s Pernambuco and Portuguese settlements in the African continent in the 1630s and 1640s (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, pp. 30-31). With the Dutch having this control, sugar prices rose and supplies shortened, and to answer that, Brazilian planters resorted to the

enslavement of natives once again. However, the indigenous now enslaved were not the same Tupi people as once before, as this “new” source of labor were different and from distant interior tribes, hunted by *bandeirantes*, in expeditions through Brazil’s interior (Gomes, 2019, pp. 106-107). One of these expeditions found substantial alluvial deposits of gold in the region of what is today’s Minas Gerais, and with it, came a new economic cycle (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 36). Yet, Brazil sugar production was so massive that it “helped ensure that Brazil received 42 percent of the slaves imported into the Americas during the seventeenth century, the largest individual flow by colony. The number of slaves who arrived in Brazil exceeded that of white settlers” (Black, 2015, p. 42).

The finding of gold deposits in Minas Gerais led to a “gold rush”, also affecting the lives of African slaves that acted as the major labor force in the country. Therefore, not only migrations in the country occurred, but also, the main destiny of imported Africans (that came from varying regions, such as Cape Verde, Senegal and Congo-Angola) from the transatlantic slave came to be Minas Gerais , at least in the first half of the 18th century (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 38-40). In regards to the ethnic and geographic differences of Africans that came to Brazil, historian Jeremy Black (2015, pp. 77-78) states that:

the Portuguese bases in Angola supplied Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro with slaves, while West Africa supplied the sugar plantations of northeast Brazil that were also further north. This differentiation was an aspect of the wider range, but also specialization, of the Atlantic Slave trade

In any case, trends in Minas Gerais shifted, as the African slave population started to be able to free themselves, through the *alforria* system of buying your own freedom, as well as natural reproduction occurring, gave rise to a large population of free colored:

By 1786, when there were some 174.000 slaves in the province, the number of free colored, both those freed in their lifetime and those born free, had already passed the 123.000 level. Their growth now continued even more dramatically than that of the slave population (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 52)

The finding of gold and expansion to the South immensely changed the geo-politics of the colony, as production had to be exported through the port of Rio de Janeiro, which “soon out-paced Bahia in international shipping and trade (...) The Crown recognized this new geographic reality by shifting the capital of the colony from Salvador, in Bahia, to Rio de Janeiro in 1763” (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 56).

Within a diversified range of labor activities and geographies, we can notice that Africans (and Afro-descendants) had a large presence in Brazilian society. According to demographic estimates from Merrick and Graham (as cited in Livi-Bacci, 2002, p. 155), the total number of Africans (including mulattoes¹⁴) in the country by 1798 was of almost 2 million, which 1.582 million were slaves and 406 thousand were freedmen and women, whilst the country had a total population of 3.250 million.

At the beginning of the 19th century, outside factors such as the Haitian Revolution, a slave revolt that led to the independence of Haiti in 1804, as well as a decline in production of other sugar plantation countries in the Americas, contributed for Brazil to keep its spot as one of the major exporters of sugar. In the meanwhile, the Haitian Revolution left a gap in the world production and exportation of coffee, which was filled by some Brazilian states, such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais. In quick fashion, Brazil came to be the world’s largest producer of coffee by the middle of the decade (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, pp. 91-92; Gomes, 2022, p. 25).

The ending of the transatlantic slave trade started at late 18th century, due to rearrangements in moral principles and the consequences of a series of events. This surely had some impacts on the Brazilian society, which most of its labor force was provisioned by the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. Britain was of much influence in this abolition, due to a myriad of factors, such as economic problems in the West Indies (Black, 2015, p. 114) and a change in the religious position from some Quakers towards slavery, attempting to bring unity and “Africans to Christ” (Black, 2015, p. 106). The pressure from society, stemming from the call to reforms after different wars (Black, 2015, pp. 107-115) could be also accountable. All these factors, combined with a more reformist ministerial cabinet since 1805 (Black, 2015, p. 116), culminated

¹⁴ Mixed person of white and black heritage

in the *Abolition Act* of 1807, which “banned slave trading by British subjects and the import of slaves into the other colonies (...) subsequently, in 1811, participation in the slave trade was made a felony, a measure that underlined opposition to the trade” (Black, 2015, pp. 116-117).

Shortly after the Congress of Vienna (that occurred in January-February of 1815), Britain ensured a commitment that France would abolish the slave trade within 5 years, whilst Spain and Portugal would do so within 8 years (Jarrett, 2013, p.146). Despite these promises, Portugal, and later independent Brazil (which gained its independence in 1822), took some time until a final abolition of the slave trade. In the case of Brazil, a treaty was signed with Britain in 1827, promising to make the trade illegal in three years (Black, 2015, p. 123). Even though the trade came to be illegal, it continued. Throughout this period, the British policed much of the slave trade, especially on the coast of West Africa, ever since 1807, and later in 1819, the coast from Cape Verde in the north to Benguela (Angola) in the south (Bethell, 2009, p. 122). Ships were also stationed in the Brazilian coast by the mid-1830s (Bethell, 2009, p. 142). Britain acted through naval blockades and patrols (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 302), but the number of ships and even the questioned legality of the British actions prevented it to be more successful (Bethell, 2009, pp. 142-150).

In 1845, the Great Britain passed the *Slave Trade Act*, which authorized the British navy to treat any suspected slave ships as if they were pirates (Black, 2015, p. 123), therefore, outside legal jurisdiction. The act reduced Brazilian presence in the slave trade, and through this military and diplomatic pressure, in 1850, finally, Brazil passed the *Lei Eusébio de Queirós*, extinguishing the slave trade officially (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 302). Despite the law, a few instances of illegal transatlantic slave trade still occurred throughout the late 1850s (Bethell, 2009, pp. 370-375). The institution of slavery in Brazil, although, would only be abolished much later into the century, after a slow and gradual movement in the society. As Klein & Vidal Luna (2010, p. 305) states:

In contrast to the complex struggle between metropolis and colonies, or between regions as in the United States, the abolitionist movement in Brazil was a struggle between classes within one nation. Because slavery was so embedded within Brazilian society, the attack on slavery developed much later than elsewhere in Latin America. This was especially the case given the unwillingness of the master class to argue for the positive benefits of slavery for blacks. Unlike the United States, the Brazilian elite never made a positive defense of slavery and only defended its economic necessity until alternative labor could be found.

As an example of the division of Brazilian society, the 1872 census (the first of the country; Brasil, 1874, pp. 3-8), provides an interesting picture. The total number of free whites (men and women) were around 3.78 million, with a total of free *pardos*¹⁵ (men and women) being around 3.32 million and a total of free blacks (men and women) around 921 thousand. On the other hand, the total number of enslaved blacks (men and women) was around 1.03 million, with the total number of enslaved *pardos* (men and women) being around 476 thousand.

The first instance of a movement within society towards abolition was the *Lei do Ventre Livre* (Free Womb Law) in 1871, which “freed” new-borns, putting them in a status of “apprenticed” by their masters until they hit the age of 21 years old (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, pp. 305-306; Gomes, 2022, p. 27). The new law shifted enough gears that even legal cases, based on the illegality of the slave trade post-1830, started being moved against masters and effectively freed some slaves that arrived from 1830 onwards, with a more effective support starting in 1880, with a leadership that ranged from elite families to many different black and mulatto leaders (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, pp. 308-309). This pressure evolved to a new decree towards freedom, the *Lei do Sexagenário* (Sexagenarian Law) of 1885, which freed elder slaves of 60 years plus¹⁶ (Gomes, 2022, p. 27). But tensions were on a rise, as the movement was having more and more support from society. Eventually, in May of 1888, after gathering support even from the imperial family that governed Brazil, the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) was proclaimed, effectively abolishing slavery. Its two single articles read the following:

Article 1: From this date, slavery is declared abolished in Brazil.

Article 2: All dispositions to the contrary are revoked.”

¹⁵ *Pardo* can be roughly translated or interpreted as “brown”. It is officially considered as a Brazilian ethnically mixed of any ethnic origin, but the term is usually utilized for Afro-descendants.

¹⁶ The law still granted owners three more years of work from their enslaved

(Brasil. Lei nº 3.353, de 13 de maio de 1888. Declara extinta a escravidão no Brasil. Diário Oficial da União. 14 mai 1888; p. 1, col. 1¹⁷)

Abolition did not lead, though, to a more balanced integration of former slaves into this new “free labor” society. In fact, most coffee plantations resorted to immigrant work (Gomes, 2022, p. 30; Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 315), due to their cheapness in contrast to these new free workers of African descent, as Klein & Vidal Luna (2010, p. 316) expands:

(...) The dual process of emancipation and transition to free labor had resulted in profound changes in the social, economic, and even geographic organization of most of the old slave societies. It also led to varying patterns of integration and marginalization among the liberated slaves. In most cases, whether land was secured or not, ex-slaves found themselves still living in the areas of the old plantation regimes and mostly at the lowest level of their respective socioeconomic systems. Entering free society with little or no capital – often with skills only adaptive to a new declining plantation economy – and faced with continuing discrimination based on their color or former slave status, most found it difficult to rise from the working class. In Brazil, ex-slaves often found themselves in the most backward economic areas even of the most dynamic of regions

2. The *negro* resistance against slavery

If, up until now, it looks as if the discussion on the subject of slavery is guided towards the business, productive and institutional side of it, with not much of a focus in the *negro* agency, that is because part of the literature is, indeed, focused on these aspects. So much that sociologist Clóvis Moura (1986), in his seminal book *Os Quilombos e a rebelião negra* (The *Quilombos* and the *negro* rebellion) provides an outlook of the non-passive role that slaves had in the process of slavery, as he puts:

¹⁷ Available in Portuguese at <http://legis.senado.leg.br/norma/545155> and in English at <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/>

(...) the slave was not just a *thing*, in agreement with the laws of time. If so, there would not be another social dynamic throughout the slave-holding regime besides that printed by the other classes and layers. If he slave, however, on one side, was just a thing, in the other, it was a *being*. However inhuman slavery was, they did not lose, at least not totally, their interior humanity. And this was enough for, by willing to deny thyself as slave, created movements and attitudes of denying the system (Moura, 1986, p. 8)¹⁸

2.1. **Quilombos: societies, movements, way(s) of living**

Besides working for another person (i.e. “the master”) as a property, for little to no financial gain, as it is commonly known, a slave could be repressed/punished in many ways, such as whipping, which was applied through almost the entirety of the slave period and used to be institutionalized through the article 50 of the Imperial Criminal Code (Moura & Moura, 2004, p. 17). Torture instruments as the *anjinho* (little angel), a metallic circle that was placed in a slave’s finger and tightened until the slave begged or confessed, many times leading towards the fracture of the bone (Moura & Moura, 2004, p. 44). Ironing, as in marking the slave with a blazing iron, also acting as a property seal of sorts (Moura & Moura, 2004, p. 126) is among many other ways of torture.

Henceforth, it is not a surprise that Brazilian *negros* would come to resist the institution of slavery, either through individual acts (Reis, 1996, p. 22) or collective revolts and slave rebellions (Reis, 1996, pp. 21-24), that ranged from sabotaging to fights (Funari, 2000, p. 28). One of these acts of resistance is the fleeing of slaves that came to form organized groups called *quilombos* or *mocambos* (Reis, 1996, p. 16). As Moura (1986, p. 16) explains, the *quilombo* was defined as “*every habitation of fled negros [constituted] of more than five, in an inhabited place, even if there are no built ranches nor mortars are found*”¹⁹ according to Portugal’s king in December 2, 1740 after being consulted by the Overseas Council.

Through the definition alone, we can already infer that the *quilombos* spread throughout the whole country, and indeed it happened. Even the Amazonian region, in the North of the country, had its share of *quilombos*, such as *Inferno* and *Cipotema*, situated on top of the *Curuá*

¹⁸ Own translation

¹⁹ Own translation

river and destroyed in 1812 (Moura, 1986, p. 31). Nevertheless, despite the *quilombos* being usually located in hard-to-reach and distant (from the central) areas, they were not secluded from contacting other groups. As per Reis (1996, p. 18), the *quilombolas* (members of a *quilombo*) used to live close to *engenhos*, farms, villages and cities, right at the corner of slavery, interacting with slaves, free *negros* and also whites. Through this supporting network, they were able to gather information regarding repression troops, negotiated food, weapons, ammunition, among others, establishing emotional, friendly and even parental links. In their own organization, the *quilombos* were usually situated in fertile zones, cultivating many vegetable crops, and close to areas that were rich for fishing and hunting, with some members also providing work as farmers and artisans (Carneiro, 1958, p. 20-21). Reflecting on the *quilombos*, Carneiro states:

The *quilombo* was, therefore, a singular event in national life, whatever is the angle through which we see it. As a way of fight against slavery, as a human establishment, as a social organization, as the reaffirmation of African cultures values, through all of these aspects, the *quilombo* reveals itself as a new fact, unique, peculiar - a dialectic synthesis. A movement against the lifestyle that the whites desired to impose them, the *quilombo* maintained its independence through the farms of former slaves that learned with their masters and it defended, when necessary, with firearms from the whites and bows and arrows from the indigenous. And, besides generally against the society that oppressed its members, the *quilombo* accepted much of this society and was, without a doubt, an important step for the nationalization of the enslaved mass.

Through the point of view here considered, *negros* had to adapt themselves to the new settings' conditions, through another, the *quilombo* constituted, certainly, a lesson in land use, both due to the small property and policulture, both unknown to the official society. But this was not its own utility. The fleeing movement must have contributed to soften the "rigor of captivity", but the *quilombo* mainly served to the exploration of forests beyond the penetration zones of whites and the discovery of new enriching sources. (Carneiro, 1958, pp. 24-25)²⁰

The biggest, and probably most researched *quilombo*, was *Palmares*, located in the captaincy of Pernambuco, in a region of the current state of Alagoas. Moura (1986, p. 17) considers

²⁰ Own translation

that around 20 (twenty) thousand used to live in *Palmares*. Edison Carneiro states that *Palmares* already existed since the early 17th century and, in being a *quilombo* was:

(...) a reaffirmation of culture and african lifestyle. The type of social organization created by the *quilombolas* was so close to the type of organization then dominant in African States that, even without further reasoning, one may say, with a certain amount of security, that the *negros* responsible for it are in great part recently arrived from Africa and not creole *negro*, born and raised in Brazil. (Carneiro, 1958, p. 14)²¹

Lara (2021, pp. 31-35), while discussing the current developments in *Palmares'* cartography, reiterates that the *Quilombo dos Palmares* was constituted of several *mocambos* (*kimbundu* for hideouts). These *mocambos* acted as cities, with thousands of houses each, and a hierarchy that configured itself, according to Lara (2021, p. 35), with “the political shape of a state”²². Anthropologist Kabengele Munanga (1996, p. 60) states that the word *quilombo* originates from the bantu people in the beginning of the 17th century, with its inception into the Brazilian society from enslaved Africans that descend from the Congo-Angola region. According to Munanga (1996, p. 60), the word has a “connotation of a men association, open to all (...) where members were submitted to dramatic rituals of initiation that removed them from the protectorate of their lineage and integrated them as co-warrior in a regiment of super-men invulnerable to its enemy’s weapons”²³. Other linguistic evidences, as the *mundombe* people, umbundu speakers from near Benguele, *quilombo* meant “initiation camp” around the 19th century; others, such as the *imbangala*, used the word as in a meaning of “being brave” and/or “extensively wandering through the territory”. In one way or another, it was closely attached to a sense of a warrior organization.

Historiography reveals that *Palmares* was very much organized, as a chronicle from 1678 details that its members were workers that planted their own food and obedient to their “king”

²¹ Own translation

²² Own translation

²³ Own translation

Ganga Zumba, which had his own guards and officers. Palmares also had its judges, ministers, a chapel and a military body highly hierarchized (Lara, 2016, pp. 74-76). Moura (1986, pp. 38-40) also states, based in reports and documents from the mid 16th century, that the exceeding of production was given to the Palmares state, as a form of contribution to social wealth and as a defense of the system itself, with solidarity and cooperation as early practices, which led to an economy of abundance in a communitarian regime. *Quilombos* were varied in their activities, with some, such as the *Quilombo do Ambrósio* (Ambrósio's *Quilombo*) in Minas Gerais, having a model of "discipline and organization, of communitary work"²⁴ (Moura, 2021, pp. 45-46). Assessing the configuration of Brazilian *quilombos*, Munanga (1996, p. 63) states that:

By content, the Brazilian *quilombo* is, without a doubt, a copy of the african *quilombo* reconstructed by the enslaved to oppose a slave-holding structure, by implanting another political structure in which all the oppressed would find themselves. Enslaved, revolted, organized themselves to flee from senzalas²⁵ and plantations and occupied parts of non-populated Brazilian territories, usually of hard access. Mimicking the African model, they transformed these territories in some sort of fields of initiation towards resistance, fields that were open to all those oppressed by the society (*negros*, indigenous and whites), prefiguring a model of pluriracial democracy that Brazil is yet searching for. It is undeniable the presence, in the leadership of these organized fleeting movements, of enslaved individuals from the bantu region, specially of Angola, where the *quilombo* was developed. Despite the *quilombo* being a bantu model, I believe that, by uniting Africans from other cultural areas and other unhappy non-Africans, it [*quilombo*] received diverse influences, where its transcultural character stems from. With effect, transculturalization seems to me a fundamental data of afro-brazilian culture²⁶

For Moura (2021, p. 47), the *quilombo* resistance was not just a force that worn the slave-holding system, but also presented the possibility of a society formed by free men, it was "*the example of racial democracy that is often referred, but that never existed in Brazil, outside the quilombola units*".

²⁴ Own translation

²⁵ Small houses where *negros* inhabited within the *engenhos*

²⁶ Own translation

2.2. A Tradition of Adaptation

Arriving at the “New World” after the dehumanizing trans-Atlantic crossing, it was difficult for the enslaved to keep their traditions and culture, after all, this was never a goal for those that enslaved them, instead, it was usually only expected that the enslaved acted as labor force. Therefore, as Reis (2006, p. 12) places:

Fact is that, removed from their geographical ground and cultural locus (birthplace and family clan) and having social death because being enslaved still in African territory, the inhabitants defined as *negros* by the West, originated from various parts of the continent, were brought to the Americas and had to resignify knowings²⁷. Resignify implies giving new meaning to words, relations, things, practices and rituals. Summarizing, the Africans had to resignify the slave life in the Land of Santa Cruz, adapting their knowings and culture to many historic ambients in this continental country, Brazil.²⁸

One of these resignifications, which is already an adaptation due to the new surroundings, would be with their lost ancestral ties (Reis, 2006, p. 17), that led to a sense of kinship with the other enslaved, regardless of ethnicity. Those already “acculturated”, that is, adapted to the new culture, and introduced the new ones to these new contexts, habits, values, language, as if they both were from the same bloodline and family.

Religion also came to be adapted, as the 19th century saw many religious cults arising, reproducing different *nagô* and *yorùbá* traditional religious elements and cultural aspects (Prandi, 2000, p. 60). These religions, that had different names along the states, as *candomblé* in Bahia and *xangô* in Pernambuco, at first, were syncretized with the running catholicism of colonial Brazil (Prandi, 2004), so the African deities, such as the *orixás* had their figures assimilated to catholic saints. Another interesting adaptation of *candomblé* is directly linked to the loss of family ties, as originally the religion believed that each person descended from a deity directly linked to that person’s bloodline. With oneself losing your ties, the new religion kept believing that one descends

²⁷ In Portuguese: *saberes*, form the latin *sapere* - to know, knowledge; freely translated to knowings as knowledge is usually associated with the Portuguese word *conhecimento*.

²⁸ Own translation

from a deity, but independent to your bloodline and that will only be revealed to you through the oracle (Prandi, 2000, p. 62). In the rituals, it was also offered food to the orixás, such as the *acarajé*, of Yorùbá origin (Mascarin, 2013), that became a Brazilian national dish and one of Bahia's cultural symbols.

Along with the religious practices, ritualistic drumming also came. Such drumming, or *batuques*, as it is called in Brazil, incorporated itself into peripheries and urban centers and evolved into samba (Neto, 2017, p. 21), the musical genre which is a pillar of Brazilian culture. Moura & Moura (2004, p. 67) defined the *batuques* as a generic name that was applied to all percussion rhythms produced by *negros*, pointing that it had a social function, often providing some sort of leisure to the enslaved.

Another famous Afro-brazilian practice is *capoeira*, the dance/sport/martial art that, at first, to avoid being understood as a way of defending oneself, was designed as “playful”, with the *berimbau* instrument introduced as an alert (Moura & Moura, 2004, p. 86). Whilst there is not enough data to directly point towards its origin, *capoeira* was most popularized by Angolese enslaved and shares close similarities to *engolo*, a martial dance from the south of Angola (Obi, 2008, pp. 108-115).

3. Miscegenation, whitening and struggles towards a *negro* identity

Miscegenation in Brazil, at first, could be pointed out to sexual practices and violations performed by the colonizers towards the Indigenous and African slaves. In some families, female slaves were considered the first sexual partners of the family's son (Freyre, 2003, p. 113). Later, natural reproduction alongside a rise in slaves' manumission (turning them free) contributed to a population that got more and more colored (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 142).

Reflecting these changes and, in a way, trying to better understand the demographic impacts of slavery, Brazil issued its first national census in 1872 (Brazil, 1874) with a question regarding color/race, which involved four categories: white, black, *pardo* and *caboclo*. In this case, *caboclo* stands for indigenous and white/indigenous mixing, whilst *pardo*, allegedly, would capture the descendants of freed slaves and/or born-free (Camargo, 2009, apud Campos, 2013, p. 83).

The results of this census, regarding demographics, was of a total number of free whites (men and women) around 3.78 million, with a total of free *caboclos* of 386 thousand, a total of free *pardos* (men and women) around 3.32 million and a total of free blacks (men and women) around 921 thousand. On the other hand, the total number of enslaved blacks (men and women) was around 1.03 million, with the total number of enslaved *pardos* (men and women) being around 476 thousand.

In the next census, performed in 1890 (Brazil, 1898), that is, just two years post-abolition, the word *pardo* would be replaced by *mestiço* (mixed). Questions regarding color/race would be absent from the 1920 census (Brazil, 1926) and return in the 1940 census (Brasil, 1950), which had the categories of white, black, *pardo*, yellow and undeclared. It's relevant to note that in the 1940 census, the *pardo* category was not one of the provided answers to the population but aggregated every self-identification that differed from white, black or yellow (Brasil, 1950, p. xxi). From 1940 onwards, not only the census would be performed each 10 years, but color/race would be a staple, except for the 1970 census, which did not provide a reason for the omission (Piza & Rosemberg, 1999, p. 125).

Afro-Brazilian sociologist, artist, pan-Africanist militant and politician Abdias do Nascimento (1989, pp. vi-vii), in the preface to the second edition of his seminal book "*Brazil: Mixture or Massacre? Essays in the Genocide of a Black People*", states that at that time of publication, "until very recently, the norm was to nullify Black identity by placing Afro-Brazilians indiscriminately in the category of 'Brazilian people' or 'the working class', in order to avoid Black people's specific problems emerging as a serious social question"²⁹, denouncing that the topic of race/ethnicity was usually avoided or suppressed, as in an attempt to incorporate the socio-economic issues of the *negro* population as of a higher order of class, and not of race/ethnicity or racism and its ramifications. In order to further his point, Nascimento (1989, pp. vii-viii) refers to Brazil's official statistics of the 1980 census, where 44.34% of the population was considered as Afro-Brazilians (by bundling the *preto* and *pardo* populations together, with just 5.89% classifying themselves as *pretos*). These were represented as those with less education (46.7% of *pretos* and

²⁹ Own translation

48.2% of pardos had only one year of schooling or less, compared to a 24.3% of whites in the same category) and lesser income (33% of pretos and 32.5% of pardos earned just a minimum wage, compared to 17.8% of whites in the same category).

As one can see, there is a socio-economic ethnic hierarchy at place amidst a greatly miscegenated country with a more than tri-centennial history of enslavement and two questions might arise: “what (else has) prevented the Afro-Brazilians (or *negros*) from ascending in this hierarchy?” and “why is there (still) a color division regarding the Afro-Brazilian/*negro* ethnicity?”. Both questions have a plethora of answers, with some of the latter (ethnicity) being addressed in this chapter and some of the former (socio-economic ascension) will be addressed in the next chapter.

3.1. Whitening

The concept of whitening was much popularized by Arthur Gobineau’s work “*An Essay on the inequality of human races*” from 1853-1855, where it was theorized that the white race was superior to others, especially the blacks, borrowing elements from linguistics, anthropology and biology to sustain his claim. Gobineau was a purist, but also claimed that the mixture of bloods could be beneficial to the mass of humankind, raising and ennobling it at the expense of humankind itself, by humiliating its noblest sons (Gobineau, 1915, p. 210). Thus, the concept of whitening consists of miscegenating towards a society that is whiter, therefore, more superior and noble.

As Brazil was the last country in the Americas to abolish slave trade (Black, 2015, p. 139), socio-economic divisions came into play, since one demographic grew economically on behalf of others’ labor force for more than three centuries. Historians Klein & Vidal Luna further expand on this division following abolition:

(...) That black color was considered a negative identity, and that “whitening” of skin color was held a prerequisite for successful mobility, were part of the cognitive view of all American societies until well into the twentieth century. What distinguished Brazil was not so much the lack of prejudice as it was the subtle differentiations that prejudice would create.

Class was such a powerful determinant of position that the attributes of class would often influence the definition of color, whatever the phenotypic characteristics shown by the individual. Black lawyers were often defined as mulattoes, just as mulatto ones were defined as whites. (...) Because class had an important influence on color definitions, the role of prejudice was far more subtle and discrimination far less precise than in those societies such as the United States where color was defined solely by phenotype and origin. (Klein & Vidal Luna, 2010, p. 317)

The Brazilian intellectuals of the 19th century were very influenced by eugenics ideas derived from European theorists like the previously mentioned Gobineau and Cesare Lombroso (Maciel, 1999, pp. 124-125). Such an influence got its way into the Brazilian society of the time, which was already much hierarchized, with the white European viewed as “civil and superior”, whilst indigenous and blacks were viewed as “savages, primitive and inferiors” and *mestiços* as “degenerates”, leading eugenics and the “enhancement of the race” as mechanisms to further solidify the discrimination and racism already present (Maciel, 1999, p. 126). In fact, in 1890, just two years post abolition, Brazil opened itself to receive plenty of immigrants for labor, except natives of Asia and of Africa, that were only admitted by authorization of the National Congress (Skidmore, 1974 apud Nascimento, 1989, p. 74). Eugenists embraced and propagated many ways to “enhance the race”, such as whitening through reproduction, immigration control and marriage regulation (Diwan, 2015, p. 92), among others, with their height in popularity between the early 1920s and late 1930s. It is within this context that Campos (2013, p. 83) argues that eugenics influenced the suppression of race questions in between the 1920 and 1940 census.

By the late 1970s, sociologists Hasenbalg and Silva started to study Brazilian censuses to track socio-economic mobility, finding that chances in class ascension between whites doubled those who were non-white; those studies also brought novelty in methodology, by bundling the black and *pardo* populations as “non-whites” (Campos, 2013, p. 84). In that regard, *negro* movements in Brazil from late 1970s and 1980s, influenced by black movements in the USA, attempted to redefine the Brazilian *negro* to not only those that would be determined as blacks by phenotype, but also *mestiços* (mixed) with black heritage (Munanga, 1999, p. 124). From then on, both blacks and *pardos* would be usually referred through the ethnic term *negro* or Afro-

Brazilian. While the ethnic term *negro* found its way into society, it did not make it into Brazil's census or demographic surveys, which still uses the color categories of white, black, *pardo*, yellow and indigenous.

3.2. Colorism

The concept of colorism is defined by Hunter (2007, p. 237) as “*the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts*” and, in the Brazilian case, derives from the class divisions and whitening politics previously presented. In a survey from 2019 (Silveira, 2020), the number of blacks and *pardos* have been on a rise since 2012, as it amounted to 14 million blacks, 89 million *pardos* and 92 million whites in 2012 and in 2019 are 19 million, 98 million and 89 million respectively. This might show an upwards trend in self-identifying as “colored”, but the *pardo* term in demographic surveys is still defined as “*the mixing of two or more options of color or race, including white, black, pardo and indigenous*” (IBGE, 2019, p. 32), not directly corresponding to the *negro* or Afro-Brazilian identity.

Nevertheless, recent studies from Silva & Leão (2012), focusing on the *pardo* experience through qualitative interviews, classified the interviewed *pardos* in three groups: *negro-pardos*, *pardo-negros* and *pardo-pardos* (Silva & Leão, 2012, pp. 126-130), the first two groups identifying themselves as *negros* usually due to racial discrimination, but still referring to themselves as *pardos* due to a lesser presence of black phenotypes or lack of a darker skin tone. On the other hand, the latter group of *pardo-pardos* had a more consistent perception of not suffering racial discrimination (Silva & Leão, 2012, p. 130), with a more prominent perception of socio-economic barriers.

Regarding the different instances and/or levels of racism, sociologist Oracy Nogueira (2006, p. 296) stated that “*in Brazil, the intensity of prejudice varies in direct proportion to blackish features*”³⁰. Such differences, mainly connected to skin tonality, can lead to colorism, with benefits to people with lighter skin, as sociologist Margaret Hunter (2007, p. 237) states:

³⁰ Own translation

Lighter-skinned people of color enjoy substantial privileges that are still unattainable to their darker-skinned brothers and sisters. In fact, light-skinned people earn more money, complete more years of schooling, live in better neighborhoods, and marry higher-status people than darker-skinned people of the same race or ethnicity.

Even though the effects of racism and colorism are mostly felt by people with a darker tonality, there are also repercussions to people with a lighter tonality, as Hunter (2007, p. 244) expands:

The economic and social advantages of light skin are clear. In societies where resources are divided by race and color, light-skinned people get a disproportionate amount of the benefits. However, light skin may be viewed as a disadvantage with regard to ethnic legitimacy or authenticity. In many ethnic communities, people view darker-skin tones as more ethnically authentic. For example, light-skinned and biracial people often report feeling left out or pushed out of co-ethnic groups.

While analysing the interviews of Geraldo (2020) from the news piece “In historic discussion, pardo has a new identity: light-skinned *negro*”, one interviewee state the following:

They called me filthy, dirty white. My hair didn't grow down. So, I straightened it, ironed it, used a lot of hair cream. When I was 16, I compared my hand color with a friend, who was very white, And I said: 'Wow, my hand is black now'. And she said: 'How so? You are a *negro*'. I started doing hair transition and found that it was curly. Stop straightening it had everything with acquainting with social struggles. But I entered a limbo: some thought I was *negro*, others, white. On the internet, a dark-skinned black woman said that pardos identifying as a *negro* was disrespectful towards dark-skinned *negros*. But I didn't want to take nobody's place. I said I was pardo. I thought: I'm not white, because whites don't experience racism.

But there was fear of saying I was *negro*³¹

³¹ *ibid.*

In the same article, psychologist Marleide Soares contributes to the discussion of the perception of *pardos* in society:

The person does not have a full sense of belonging side-by-side with darker skinned people, because the closer it is to white, the more it is pushed to an understanding as if it was white. However it is an 'as if'. Whites won't see him or her as white as well³²

So, if, in one hand, you have a movement of transition where *pardos* identify themselves as *negros*, there are also *pardos* who do not, as one interviewee from Silva & Leão (2012). He states, when asked if there is racism in Brazil towards *pardo* people: "*Who suffers more racism is the negro [...] There's white who does not stand negro, and negro who does not stand white. [...] I'm there in the middle, cool, coffee with milk*"³³. Contrary to the United States, where the "one drop rule" declares anyone with any amount of African ancestry as *Negro/Colored/Black* (Orbe & Harris, 2015, p. 211), the Brazilian society created a third demographic to general mixing. Then making it more difficult for those classified as a *pardo* of African descent to identify themselves, despite the efforts from Afro-Brazilian social movements towards more unity.

3.3. Cultural Identity

Sociologist and culture theorist Stuart Hall (2016, pp. 19-20) explains that since the "cultural turn" in human and social sciences, culture has been understood as "not so much a set of things - novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics - as a process, a set of practices", a constant production and exchange of meanings between members of a society or group that leads to shared meanings. For Nilma Lino Gomes (2003a, p. 170), it is through this process, that is, within culture, that humans are able to "establish rules, convey values and meanings that enable the

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

communication of individuals and groups. Through culture, they are able to adapt to the environment, but also to adapt themselves, and more than this, transform it³⁴.

Analyzing the different diaspora experiences regarding the relationship with their African heritage, Hall (1990, p. 224) states that “Africa is the name of the missing term, the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning which, until recently, it lacked”. Nevertheless, cultural identity does not stop at this single instance of recognizing and identifying with the past, as Hall (1990, p. 225) expands:

There is, however, a second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute “what we really are”; or rather - since history has intervened - “what we have become”. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about “one experience, one identity”, without acknowledging its other side - the ruptures and discontinuities (...)

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being”. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.

In the Brazilian context, Abdias do Nascimento (1989, pp. 179-180), during a speech in Washington D.C. sponsored by the All-African People's Revolutionary Party, states that the Afro-Brazilian, “be he *negro* (Black), mulatto, moreno (brunette), pardo (brown), escuro (dark), crioulo (Black Brazilian), or any of those euphemisms of African descent in various gradations of epidermic color and ethnic classification -- forms a human group condemned to disappearance”, alluding that the experiences of racism, in a physical/biological level of aspiring towards whiteness,

³⁴ *Ibid.*

economically with unemployment/underemployment, among others, such as historical stereotypes, are all derived on a race/color of identification, that of an African presence.

Nascimento, along with Lélia Gonzalez, were both among the leaders and founders of the Brazilian Unified *Negro* Movement Against Racial Discrimination (*Movimento Negro Unificado Contra Discriminação Racial* in Portuguese), a group created in 1978 that united many cultural, academic and artistic Afro-Brazilian institutions to denounce and fight racism. In the movement's principles' letter (Gonzalez, 1982, p. 65), one can find the following statement:

WE, members of the brazilian *negro* population – understanding as *negro* every being that possesses in the skin color, in the face or in the hair, characteristic signs of this race –, together in National Assembly, CONVINCED of the existence of:

- Racial discrimination
- Racial, political, economical, social, and cultural marginalization of the *negro* people
- Terrible life conditions
- Unemployment
- underemployment
- Discrimination at job admission and racial persecution at work
- Sub-human life conditions of incarcerated
- Permanent repression, persecution and police violence
- Sexual, economical and social exploration the *negro* woman
- Abandonment and ill treatment of minors, usually *negros*
- Colonization, mischaracterization, crushing and commercialization of our culture
- Racial democracy myth

RESOLVED to unite our strengths and fight for:

- Defense of the *negro* people in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects through:
- More employment opportunities
- Better assist to health, education and housing
- Reevaluation of the *negro* role in the Brazilian History
- Valorization of the *negro* culture and systematic combat to its commercialization, folklorization and distortion
- Extinction of all forms of persecution, exploration, repression and violence that we are submitted
- Freedom of organization and expression for the *negro* people

AND FINALLY CONSIDERING THAT:

- Our freedom fight must only be directed by us
- We want a new society where all actually participate
- As we are not isolated from the rest of the Brazilian society

WE SOLIDARIZE:

- a) With each and every vindictive fight from the popular sectors of the Brazilian society that aim to the real achievement of their political, economic and social rights;
- b) With the international fight against racism

FOR AN AUTHENTIC RACIAL DEMOCRACY! FOR THE FREEDOM OF THE *NEGRO* PEOPLE!

Axé... ³⁵

The Unified *Negro* Movement's stance towards a *negro* identity came in opposition to what is understood as Brazil's "Racial Democracy Myth", initially diffused in the 1930s, in the same time-span that saw the influence of eugenistic ideas in the Brazilian society. Scholars (Munanga, 2019, p. 85; Ortiz, 1994, pp. 40-44) argue that this myth was spun by sociologist Gilberto Freyre's (2003) *Casa grande & senzala* (known as "The Masters and the Slaves" in English), a work regarding Brazil's formation that is much contested due to its positiveness on the cultural contributions from what was conceived as the *negro*, indigenous and mixed races (Munanga, 2019, p. 85), in which the Brazilian people and culture came to be essentially considered as mixed. This hybridization of culture is defined by Eakin (2017, p. 2) as "the essence of the Freyrean vision of Brazil, brasilidade (Brazilianness), and Brazilian national identity in the twentieth century". For Munanga (2019, p. 85), by hybridizing the culture, what could be conceived as cultural characteristics from *negros* themselves gets "expropriated and converted in National symbols by the diligent elites". Hall (2006, pp. 47-58) arguments that when Nations create a national identity, through a system of representation propagated by a national culture, they aim to make the culture and political sphere congruent with each other. To Eakin (2017, p. 20), the Brazilian nationalist project from the 1930s to the 1990s created a particular version of the Brazilian people, that is, a "new ethnicity created

³⁵ *Ibid.*

out of the collision of three peoples³⁶. Surely, Freyre would not be able to create this collectiveness by himself, rather as “Brazil increasingly saw themselves as Brazilians (as one people and one nation), they embraced in ever larger numbers the myths, symbols, and rituals of the dominant narrative of national culture – from the myth of *mestiçagem* to carnival, samba, futebol, a national anthem, and a flag” (Eakin, 2017, p. 237). It is in contrast to this view of a single ethnicity, that does not address the structurally racist conception of the Brazilian society, that the Unified *Negro* Movement was established, aiming to unify *negros* in order to “construct the solidarity and the identity of those excluded by the Brazilian racism” (Munanga, 2006, p. 53)³⁷.

Reflecting on the different practices of racism by colonizers in the Americas, such as segregation in the United States and denial in Brazil (Gonzalez, 1988, pp. 72-74), Lélia Gonzalez affirms that, in the latter, culturality presents itself as the best form of resistance against racism, in contrast to a more direct and multi-level resistance that one can notice in the former, i.e. the United States, whose segregational racism leads to a more palpable racial identity. Similar to Stuart Hall (1990), Lélia Gonzalez (1988, pp. 75-78) creates the category of *Amefricanidade* (Amefricanity), which acknowledges the African heritage, whilst not idealizing or mythifying the African continent. Instead, the concept looks towards the reality of all *Amefricans* in the entire American continent, that is, individuals with African heritage in Cuba, Colombia, Haiti, United States, Jamaica, Brazil, and all other countries throughout the Americas. Within the concept of *Amefricanity*, afro-descendants of the Americas would recognize the historic and cultural values of their African heritage, at the same time that they would share their own adaptive experiences as descendants in the “New World”. Amefricanity could then be seen as a Pan-African way of linking the two continents and times: past and present.

3.3.1. Quilombismo

In a similar pattern of discussion as Gonzalez’s *Amefricanity*, Abdias do Nascimento (1980) creates and proposes the term *Quilombismo* (Quilombism), which he institutes as a historic-

³⁶ The “three peoples” referred by the author are: the whites, the *negros* and the mixed (*mestiços*).

³⁷ Own translation

cultural scientific concept. Nascimento (1980, p. 247) argues that the Brazilian nation and dominant social classes always ignored, rejected and attempted to remove a positive remembrance of the African continent from the enslaved and their descendants, but that was still not able to obliterate the spirit and memory to *Mother Africa's* alive presence in Afro-Brazilians.

Abdias states that Afro-Brazilians role in Brazil was to raise the structures of the country by being its labor force, body and soul, but despite that, the white population still kept exclusivity of power, welfare and national income, pointing towards the *negro* population rates of unemployment, underemployment and residential segregation in the early 1980s (1980, p. 253). To Abdias do Nascimento (1980, p. 255) this has been the *negro* position throughout the Brazilian history and, due to that, Afro-Brazilians have an urgent need of defending their survival and assure their existence. Therefore, Abdias proposes that *quilombos* were the result of this vital necessity of the enslaved to rescue their freedom and dignity and we should return to this *praxis*, which he names as *quilombismo*.

The *quilombismo* proposed by Abdias acts as a manifesto for Afro-Brazilians of reclaiming their history, proposing an ethnic unity, participating in sciences by providing their narratives and understandings, and as a political movement that enlist 16 principles and purposes. Notably, *quilombismo* main principles states that the final objective would be a National Quilombist State, with a basis of a free, just, equal and sovereign society with a finality of promoting happiness to the human beings, which would be achieved by a community-cooperative economy in production, distribution and division of collective work results (Nascimento, 1980, p. 275). Lastly, it is also proposed an Afro-Brazilian Week of Memory to be taught in every school, starting in November 14 and culminating in *Black Consciousness Day* (November 20, a symbolic date that represents the death of *quilombo* leader *Zumbi dos Palmares*), encompassing the Afro-Brazilian history from ancient African societies, to slavery, revolts, *quilombos* and *quilombismo* (Nascimento, 1980, pp.279-281).

Historian and activist Beatriz Nascimento (2018, p. 345), defined the *quilombo's* motto as “to group, organize, distribute and love”. She defined her identification to the *quilombos* as a connection and constant *praxis*, in that she states “the Earth is my *quilombo*. My space is my *quilombo*. Whenever I am [placed], I am [placed]. Whenever I am [placed], I am [as a being]” (Ratts,

2006, p. 59)³⁸. This *praxis* could be understood as *aquilombamento* (Ratts, 2006, p. 55) or *aquilombar*, to “quilombize” thyself.

4. Ramifications into the Present

Within this overarching historic, social and cultural struggle for identity, representation, better living conditions and freedom, Afro-Brazilians continue to fight on a daily basis. Brazil developed itself as an unequal society, as a 2019 research of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in Social Inequality (IBGE, 2019, p. 5) can present us. According to it, colored (blacks and *pardos*) people make up for 55.8% of the Brazilian population. They are represented at 27.7% of the top 10% with the biggest income, while on the other hand, are represented at 75.2% of the top 10% with the lowest income.

For many, this struggle can be summarized as a “fight against racism”, but what is this racism? Is it a simple slur directed towards you because you are from a different color or have different physical features? Is it a different look that you receive at a job interview because of your skin color? How does it differ from the common immoral behavior of prejudice?

Sociologist Silvio Almeida (2019) argues that, usually, there are three discussed conceptions of racism: individualist, institutional and structural, each representing different specific dimensions of racism, with significant analytical and political impacts (Almeida, 2019, pp. 24-25). Nevertheless, racism is always structural, as it is an element that integrates the economic and political organization of society (Almeida, 2019, p. 15). Structural racism is entrenched deeper in a society; in its own structures.

4.1. Structural Racism

Historically, race is usually conceptualized as a biological characteristic (as in that racial identity is attributed due to a physical trait, such as skin color) or ethnic-cultural characteristic

³⁸ Own translation. In Brazilian Portuguese, there is a difference between being (*estar*), that is related to a transitory or spatial way of being and that of being (*ser*), which is more connected to a subject’s essence. reads: “*A Terra é o meu quilombo. Meu espaço é meu quilombo. Onde eu estou, eu estou. Quando eu estou, eu sou*”

(linking identity to a geographical, religious or linguistic origins, among others). However, Almeida (2019, pp. 21-23) differentiates racism from prejudice and discrimination. Whilst racism is a systematic form of discrimination based on race and manifested through either conscious or unconscious practices that can culminate in disadvantages or privileges to individuals, racial prejudice is a judgement based in stereotypes towards a racialized individual or group, that may or may not result in discriminatory practices, with racial discrimination being an act of a different kind of treatment towards racialized individuals or groups. Through this logic, racial prejudice could be the first step towards an act of racial discrimination, still in the thought level, with racial discrimination being the manifestation of it, either directly (as in slurs, violence acts, etc.) or indirectly (by denying or blinding thyself of a racial problem). Still, racism is where the act of discrimination manifests itself, it has a systemic character, as it is a process of subalternity and privilege conditions, unequally distributed and reproduced in politics, economics and daily relations.

Discussing the different concepts of racism, Almeida points that the individualist conceives racism as “an ethical or psychological phenomenon of individual or collective character, attributed to isolated groups; or, yet, that racism is an ‘irrationality’ to be opposed in the juridical field through the application of civil or penal sanctions”³⁹ (Almeida, 2019, p. 25), placing racism as a behavioral act of a selected few, and even though a racist act is an immorality and a crime, the individualist conception does not comprehend the whole systemic process that racism indeed is.

The institutional conception, however, establishes that racism is entrenched in an institutional level, that is, racial inequality is a characteristic of society because fundamentally “the institutions are hegemonized by certain racial groups that use institutional mechanisms to impose their political and economic interests” (Almeida, 2019, p. 27)⁴⁰. In this case, institutions are understood as the materialization of formal determinations of social life, as the sum of norms, patterns and techniques of control that condition the behavior of individuals and as a part of society itself (Almeida, 2019, p. 26). Therefore, if a certain group wields institutional power, it is

³⁹ Own translation

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

able to institutionalize their interests, rules, behaviors and patterns, among others, in order to maintain such power, preventing other groups from ascending, either due to the established rules or through the non-existence of spaces that discuss such matters (Almeida, 2019, pp. 27-28; pp. 30-31).

Structural racism differs from individualist and institutional racism, as it understands that the institutions are conditioned by the social structure that predates them, the racism of these institutions being part of this same structure, that is, society (Almeida, 2019, p. 31). Within this perspective, the author (2019, pp. 35-36) infers that structural racism could then be dismembered in two processes: political and historical. Political because being such a systemic discrimination process, racism requires political power, through the institutions that creates the necessary means (repressive, persuasive or dissuasive) to incorporate it to daily practices, and through ideology, that produces narratives to accentuate social unity instead of the existent fractures, such as class division, racism and sexism. Also historic as it lays the foundations of a society's formation, in Brazil's case, the heritage of slavery would play a significant role, as the legacy of years of abuse would be to "*maintain mental and institutional patterns of enslavement, that is, racist, authoritarian and violent*"⁴¹ (Almeida, 2019, p. 112).

4.2. Segregation

In 1850, 38 years before the abolition of slavery, Brazil decreed a *Law of Land (Lei de Terras)*, that regulated territorial property (Carril, 2006, p. 73). With such law, the procedures to obtain the land would be conducted by a registered buying of the marked land (Carril, 2006, p. 76), creating a market. In this context, where would the poor and, especially the formerly enslaved and/or recently freed go?

The city of São Paulo, for instance, through its urbanistic legislation in 1886, proposed a model of "hygienic villages", with small houses built on rows and always at the peripheries of urban centers, as Carril (2006, p. 78) states and expands:

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

The model of city that it was attempted to establish left out types of housing and activities, such as *cortiços*⁴², street professions and non-familiar agencies. It was instituted, then, an area of urban social marginality that contained, in a first degree, the *negros* and, later, the immigrants⁴³

If the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the poorest (which, of course, includes the majority of *negros*) living in collective households, as the *cortiços*, the 1940s and 1950s had a shift towards the peripheries (outskirts) of the city of São Paulo, leaving the *negros* to majorly occupy the regions more distant from the city's center (Carril, 2006, pp. 83-84). One of their solutions for the problem was the creation of *favelas*: small houses, built by themselves and segmented very near to each other, usually in previously non-populated places, sometimes in territories that were not designed for households.

The current segregational situation is not that distant from the one presented before, even though the population has risen, which concurrently, leads to a larger presence of *negros* in the peripheries. São Paulo's 2020 inequalities map (Rede Nossa São Paulo, 2021, p. 11) shows that the top 20 districts of the city with a higher percentage of *negros* are located in the farther outskirts of the South, East and North zones of the city, usually referred as "extreme" (Extreme South, Extreme East and Extreme North, respectively), to denote its distance from the center.

4.3. Necropolitics

Drawing from Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, philosopher Achille Mbembe (2018) created the concept of necropolitics and necropower, in an essay originally published in 2003. Mbembe (2018, pp. 5-6) summarizes biopower as the "domain of life over which power asserted its control". According to Mbembe, in Foucault's work, biopower "appears to function by dividing people into those who must live and those who must die" (Mbembe, 2018, p. 17), operating then in a control over the biological field, distributing mankind in groups and further dividing this

⁴² *Cortiços* are a type of collective housing

⁴³ Own translation

subdivision in subgroups. Mbembe understands that Foucault labels it as racism. Mbembe proposes the concept of necropolitics as a way to demonstrate that biopower is not sufficient to the contemporary forms of life submission over the power of death (Mbembe, 2018, p. 71), especially under the circumstances of a state of exception and/or a state of emergency. Mbembe quotes some characteristics of contemporary necropolitics such as territorial fragmentation (Mbembe, 2018, p. 43), denying a group to access certain zones; the technological enhancements of military power (Mbembe, 2018, pp. 48-49), and the emergence of a “war machine”, polymorphous and diffuse organizations of armed men that are highly capable of metamorphosis (Mbembe, 2018., pp. 54-55), even able to get entangled with the state.

Understanding Mbembe’s necropolitics as “*‘the work of death’, or the relation between politics and death in places where the Law cannot go*”⁴⁴ (Alves, 2014, p. 324), Afro-Brazilian anthropologist Jaime Amparo Alves analyzes the necropolitics of the city of São Paulo, where in 2011, “one out of five murders in the city of São Paulo was committed by the police. The profile of the victims is consistent: male, 15–24 years old, and black” (Alves, 2014, p. 326). Besides police killings, Alves (2014, p. 327) understands that state violence also includes the “letting die” of Afro-Brazilians, expressed by “their disproportionate rate of premature death”; mass incarceration, where “São Paulo’s necropolitical governance also entails a favela-prison pipeline, in which marginalized black youth have increasingly become the targeted population of the racialized penal system”⁴⁵. In 2010 São Paulo held approximately 35% (170.916 people) of the entire Brazilian prison population, with black young men constituting 50.86% of this prison population, and female-wise, women represent 4.77% of São Paulo’s prison population, with black women accounting for 53.17% of this number. In this necropolitical context, Alves (2014, p. 328) follows a theoretical perspective that points to “*racialization as the product of embodied experiences*”, arguing that:

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Here, one can evoke police brutality as a prime example of the dialectical (and macabre) process of identity-making in urban Brazil. The Brazilian ambivalence to identify one's race is called into question in the favelas by the police's ability to not only locate racial difference, but also to reaffirm that difference through and in death. When I caught my interlocutors in the black movement saying, 'If you want to know who is black and who is not in Brazil, just ask the police', it was obvious to me that they were referring to this simultaneous process of denying racism and producing race through mundane (deadly) interpellations.⁴⁶

Current statistics from the 2021 Violence Atlas (Cerqueira *et al.*, 2021, pp. 49-51) shows that in 2019, nationwide, 77% of homicide victims were *negros* (blacks and *pardos*), with a homicide index of 29.2 for every 100 thousand inhabitants, whilst non-*negros* (classified as whites, yellows and indigenous) have an index of 11.2, therefore, the chance of a *negro* being murdered in Brazil is 2.6 times greater than of a non-*negro*. The 2022 Brazilian Annual of Public Safety (*Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2022*; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a, p. 4) also shows that, nationwide, deaths due to police intervention dropped from 6.412 in 2020 to 6.145 in 2021, but nevertheless, had already risen exponentially from a total of 2.212 in 2013, the year that opens this historic series. Analyzing the year of 2021 alone (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a, pp. 9-10), the victim profile previously suggested by Alves is consistent: 84.1% of victims are *negros* and 43.6% are aged between 18-24 years old, even though the Annual does not directly correlate age and ethnicity. Lastly, even if the total number of deaths due to police intervention experienced a drop from 2020 to 2021, we should note that "white deaths" dropped 30.9%, whilst "*negro* deaths" risen 5.8%.

Overall, the panorama seems to be the following: Afro-Brazilians came to exist due to a history of slavery and had to constantly adapt to a scenario in which they were subjugated. Many forms of resistance came to exist, some being cultural (such as afro-syncretic religions, music, arts, among others), some being physical (as the slave rebellions), some being political and societal (such as *quilombos*). Despite the efforts, the constant subjugation and divisions that were instituted by the ruling power led to a racially hierarchized society that affects current Afro-Brazilians in a plethora of ways, such as: difficulties to finding an identity and ascending socio-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

economically, being geographically segregated and/or having a higher chance of death, all this being perpetrated by the own state that should provide them safety. All of these can be linked to a society that is racist at its own structures. That said, how are Afro-Brazilians organizing themselves in this setting? To some, a solution would be to return to *quilombos*, and the urban *quilombo Aparelha Luzia*, an independent cultural institution in São Paulo, is currently updating the idea of *quilombo* to this contemporary urban setting. We will now dive deeper in how it operates.

PART II: ROUTES TO (RE)SHAPING CULTURAL IDENTITIES

1. The urban *quilombo Aparelha Luzia*

Created by Erica Malunguinho, a *negro* trans woman that currently mandates as a state congresswoman for São Paulo, *Aparelha Luzia* was “birthed” in April of 2016 with the intent to organize events to diffuse the Brazilian *negritude* (blackness, akin to the french *négritude*) artistic and political production (Gonçalves, 2017). According to Erica herself⁴⁷, it is a place where “*negras and negros reconnect with their own kind, reorganize the collectivity in an amplified dimension and learn to be together*”⁴⁸.

The name *Aparelha Luzia* derives from two homages: first the *aparelhos*⁴⁹, spaces where the Brazilian resistance against the military dictatorship (that lasted from 1964-1985) used to organize themselves (Gonçalves, 2017; Prado, 2016). The homage comes with a twist, as the word *aparelho* is put in feminine form (which is not common in the Portuguese language), displaying disruption and the female presence in *Aparelha* as an entity/institution. Secondly, *Luzia* is a homage to the oldest fossil discovered in the Americas, named *Luzia*, found in 1970s Brazil and estimated to be 11.500 years old; the fossil is subject of many ethnic/racial discussion, due to the

⁴⁷ In the same article by Gonçalves, 2017. <https://revistatrip.uol.com.br/tpm/erica-malunguinho-mulher-negra-trans-Aparelha-Luzia-resistencia-negra-sao-paulo-quilombo-urbano>

⁴⁸ Own translation.

⁴⁹ Could be translated as gadgets or apparatus, with the latter being the most applicable.

“negroid”⁵⁰ features of this recovered skull and the location where it was encountered (Gaspar Neto & Santos, 2009, pp. 449-450)

Aparelha Luzia is located at Rua Apa, 78, in the neighborhood of *Campos Elíseos*, part of the *Barra Funda* district. According to São Paulo’s 2020 Inequalities Map (Rede Nossa São Paulo, 2021)⁵¹, the district is currently populated 16.115 people, with only 15.7% of its population being black or mixed⁵². The map also provides interesting data regarding racial violence⁵³ (a 11.72 coefficient, the 2nd most violent district) and average familiar income⁵⁴ (R\$ 4.300,00, ranking as the 25th best district). In the 1930s, *Barra Funda* was known as a hub for the Brazilian *negros* in São Paulo, due to a strong presence of *samba*, in what Azevedo (2014) refers as “micro-Africas”, due to their characteristics of cultural resistance and majority of *negros* inhabiting.

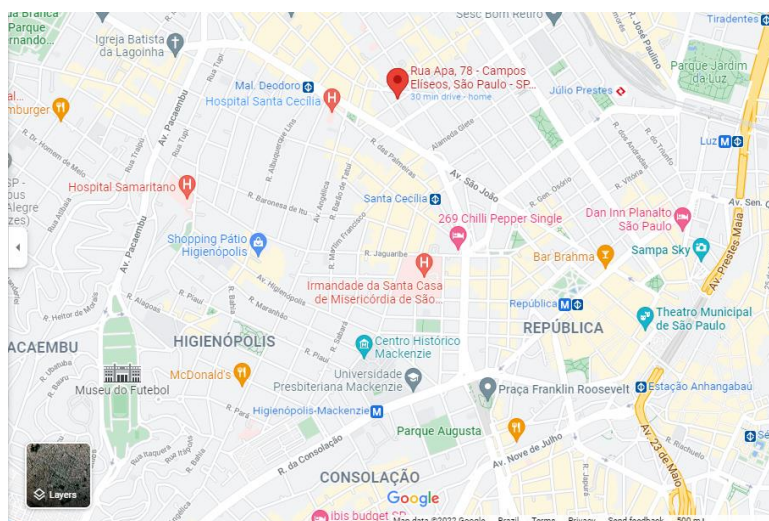


Figure 1 - *Aparelha Luzia*'s location

Source: Google Maps (2022)

⁵⁰ In their quoted article, Gaspar Neto & Ventura (2009, p. 476) emphasize that their use of the term *negroid* follows an anthropological understanding, regarding physical conformities, and is not directly linked to the sociological concept of race. The authors criticize this common misconception in journalism.

⁵¹ Rede Nossa São Paulo, 2021, p. 8

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 9; as mentioned in Chapter 4, blacks and mixed, a.k.a. *pretos* and *pardos* are usually bundled together in social analysis, constituting the *negro* population, which is the case in the quoted report

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 32

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67

Presented as a *quilombo* located at the very center of the urban chaos that is São Paulo and as Erica says, “reclaiming a territory” (Borges, 2017) of *negro* people at *Barra Funda, Aparelha* provides many different activities to its attendees. Through participation observation, we were able to experience *bailes* (dance balls), *blocos de rua* (street carnival blocks), *saraus*, lectures, book club discussions and a Webseries premiere. In the following chapters, we will present some results of our ethnographic accounts. The aim is to understand how it is to be part of *Aparelha* and how contemporary *negro* lives engage and reshape their cultural identities among the space that identifies it as a “*territory of art, culture and black politics. Space of mediation, circulation of negro arts and their multiple languages. Space of sociability, ancestry and affectivity*”⁵⁵.

2. Days in the life of *Aparelha Luzia*

2.1. Day 1: The humble reopening (February 19, 2022)

It was *Aparelha's* first weekend of 2022, as the *quilombo* had its last opening on December 19, 2021 and closed for the holidays. Its return date was originally set for January 21, 2022, but due to the pandemic situation of the São Paulo state around that time period, they chose to postpone the reopening.

The reopening was somewhat unannounced, as only on Thursday, February 17, 2022, the *quilombo* posted on their social media that “the works” would restart on the following day, February 18, 2022, with an afrobeat dancehall headed by “*Netos de África*”. Taking a look at *Aparelha's* social media in 2022, a pattern is noticeable: they are open at weekends, starting on Fridays; events take place usually by 8 pm and the weekend schedule is advertised just a day before the planned weekend. The most common type of event are dancehalls, either as “the main event” or as an “after-event”, following the scheduled main event that was scheduled.

I was able to join on February 19, 2022, their first Saturday of the year, arriving around 20h30. It took me around one and a half hour to arrive there leaving from *Vila Gustavo*, a

⁵⁵ Own translation, using a primary source of an Instagram story by *Aparelha Luzia* published in March 25.

neighborhood located in the North Zone of São Paulo. Heading from the *Marechal Deodoro metrô* station, you face a homeless population that uses the station's entrance as their homes. Within the 8 minute walk, the landscape does not change much. You face plenty of homeless people meshing with graffiti backgrounds, usually filled with political meaning, whilst bars and restaurants are abundant. Turning around *Rua Apa*, a not-so-luminous street where *Aparelha* is located, you will find your destination after one block, with *Aparelha's* graffiti doors, dim lights and outdoor benches welcoming you (Fig. 2).

Across the street, a large picture of Marielle Franco, a Brazilian sociologist and politician that served as a city councilwoman for Rio de Janeiro, and was murdered in 2017 in a – still – unsolved case, is displayed (Fig. 3). Marielle's picture is surrounded by statements, such as "*Escuta as Mulheres*" (Listen to the Women) and "*Idade Média II - Que Vençam as Bruxas*" (Middle Age II - May the Witches Win). Such political statements can also be seen at *Aparelha's* entrance, as in "*Escuta as Pretas*" (Listen to the Black Women), "*Vai ter Luta*" (There Will be Fight) and "*Narrar é Resistir*" (To Narrate is to Resist).

It is at the entrance that I meet Jefferson⁵⁶, who was also alone that night and reached out to talk about *Aparelha* right off the bat. Jefferson mentioned that it has been a while that he has not come, but he likes to go there because it is a political activity, it is not like a usual hangout, but more of a place to engage, organize and discuss in a political conversation aiming towards a better life for the Brazilian *negro* population.

At first, I can say that I was surprised, because even if I had a semblance of this idea beforehand, I did not expect that this would be my very first interaction, and it did not last 3 minutes of conversation for Jefferson to mention that he was a marxist-leninist-trotskyan. Then, Jefferson and I went out to grab a beer and a bonding began to happen. He introduced himself further, explaining that he is a historian and works with education, more specifically, teaching children and building projects that engage them in literature. Jefferson is based in the Far East Zone of São Paulo and sporadically visits *Aparelha* ever since he got to know the place, around

⁵⁶ Except for public personas (e.g. artists, politicians), all people referred are under a pseudonym, including those interviewed.

2018; what grabbed his attention in this first visit, back then, was the unisex bathrooms that included both cis and trans people, which was something that he was not used to.

Whilst drinking a beer with Jefferson, and waiting for him to finish up a different series of calls that ranges from potential lovers to his sister (who was supposed to join him at *Aparelha*), I notice the surroundings of *Aparelha's* interior, where one can grab a seat at a table with its own crew (but beware, the few tables available are not easy to obtain), right beside fabrics/prints from (or that emulate) various African nations.

In the kitchen, Congolese chefs from the restaurant *Elubu Ya Congo* are preparing the meals of the night. Every consumption within *Aparelha* helps to maintain the place, with customers also having the option to make a solidary contribution to the “house”. *Aparelha* also has a second floor, which is dedicated to art, although is not usually open. On top of this mezzanine/floor, there is a Haitian flag being held, probably in support of Haitian refugees that came to populate São Paulo (and its center) from the late 2000s onwards.



Figure 2 - *Aparelha Luzia's* entrance

Source: the author (2022)



Figure 3 - Across Aparelha Luzia's Entrance

Source: the author (2022)

It is now 10 pm and inside, it is not crowded yet. I notice a group of 3 gay *negro* men happily dancing to the sound of a song by the famous rapper Negra Li, in a playlist that flips between Brazilian funk and Brazilian rap. While visiting the kitchen, I notice that the refrigerators are also crowded with flyers, statements and stickers (fig. 4), such as “*Nós que amamos a revolução*”⁵⁷ (Us that love the revolution). One that stands out is a poster from Afropunk reading “*Sem sexismo. Sem racismo. Sem capacitismo. Sem etarismo. Sem homofobia. Sem gordofobia. Sem transfobia. Sem ódio. Sem palmitagem.*” (No sexism. No racism. No capacitism. No ageism. No homophobia. No fatphobia/body shaming. No transphobia. No hate. No palmitizing.), with the latter being handwritten, therefore, not present in the original poster⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ Probably a reference to a book, of the same title, launched in 2016 by journalist Américo Antunes, a romance set in the late 1970s student movement (<https://www.alamedaeditorial.com.br/sociologia/nos-que-amamos-a-revolucao>)

⁵⁸ *Palmitar* is a slang verb in Brazilian Portuguese attributed to *negro* people that gets romantically involved with white people, here allegorically compared to a heart-of-palm (*palmito* in Brazilian Portuguese)

Speaking of ethnicity, it is not a secret that *Aparelha Luzia* is focused on gathering the *negro* population in a space of their own, but that does not mean that white people are not allowed or something of sorts, nevertheless, they are undeniably the minority of visitors and usually the “oddest” of each circle when they are present, as in that day specifically, I noticed just one white person present per 6-7 person circle; except for a particular 5 person circle that was constituted of only white people. Many light skinned *negro* people were also present, embracing and displaying their most prolific “*negro* features”, especially the hair, either braided or afro (reminding the Black Power movement).

By 11 pm, Jefferson and I met Lucia, a *negro* trans woman who was surrounded by her friends. Jefferson and Lucia flirt with each other, but do not make any movement, and even though Lucia is with her group, she cannot stop talking with us, whilst displaying all her sensuality. Within our conversation, Lucia mentions to me that *Aparelha* is “a magical place”, where too many beautiful *negro* people get together and feel comfortable with being themselves, reflecting on the positiveness of having such a space that fully embraces people like us.

We go outside and continue our conversation, and even if Lucia does not have the same humanities academic background as me and Jefferson, it is palpable that she carries a lot of knowledge and desire to learn. The place is now getting a lot more crowded (fig. 5), with the outside area filled with many different circles (fig. 7); the conversations surrounding us range from political discussions to common daily life. In front of us, I notice that an elderly couple of *negro* friends are helping each other to use smartphones, in display of solidarity.

Me, Jefferson and Lucia, while discussing the role of *Aparelha*, shared with each other when did we understood ourselves as *negros*, with me and Lucia commonly stating that it was because of our hairs, in my case when I first combed my hair in an “afro” and in hers, when she first braided and saw how beautiful she looked. It is not that I did not understand myself as a *negro* before that moment, as I had already experienced racism, but similar to Lucia, this positive aspect was a new experience towards my cultural identity as a *negro*. This reminded me that Nilma Lino Gomes (2003a, p. 173), while conducting a study in “ethnic hair salons”, found that in many social settings, hair and skin color were bound in the construction of *negro* identities, often related as a mark of inferiority, but still, there are:

other spaces where hair is seen in a perspective of revaluation. They are: familiar contexts where an African ancestral memory is preserved, some spaces of political militancy, ethnic salons, among others. This revaluation extrapolates the individual and strikes the ethnoracial group that he belongs to. By striking him, it ends up referring, sometimes uncousciously and others not, to an African ancestry recreated in Brazil⁵⁹

For Jefferson, his recognition came in the shape of his job as a teacher, where he noted that he was the only *negro* teacher in the school. Me and Lucia reminded him that he was not alone, as we discussed some ways towards a better education, which to us, should come alongside content geared towards a greater approach to the Brazilian *negro* history. A clear bonding quickly had emerged.

⁵⁹ Own translation



Figure 4 - Aparelha Luzia's Refrigerator

Source: the author (2022)



Figure 5 - Inside *Aparelha Luzia*

Source: the author (2022)



Figure 6 - Outside *Aparelha Luzia*

Source: the author (2022)

2.2. Day 2: In February, there is Carnaval (February 27, 2022)

It was supposed to be the weekend of *Carnaval* in São Paulo, but in January of 2022, São Paulo's mayor canceled the street *carnaval* due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, many *blocos*⁶⁰ maintained their carnival activities as "rehearsals" for a later date.

Before I visited *Aparelha* on that day, I gathered along with longtime friends around 5 pm, at the rehearsal of *Filhos da Santa*, a *bloco de carnaval* from Santa Cecília, around 15 minutes away from *Aparelha Luzia*. It was not crowded, and the public and families eagerly awaited for *Mister Bygode's*⁶¹ concert, which was delayed. At the reserved place for the rehearsal, a large graffiti covered the side of the building behind the stage and displayed a black woman carrying a pot filled with books (fig. 8). Ethnically, the public was very mixed, but with a larger presence of *negros* amidst the public. It should also be noted that the event was frequented by many families, with a large display of kids running around everywhere. Overall, the public consisted of what we would call *povão* in Brazil, that is, the least favored social classes and the majority of the population in Brazil (InfoMoney, 2022).

Mister Bygode joined the stage by 5:45 pm and in just one hour, covered and rearranged many popular classic Brazilian songs, ranging from *samba* to *pagode* and even rap. The crowd was delighted and singing along with every song, with the *carnaval* vibes gathering more and more people throughout the concert, joining together a very diverse group that included families; elders and youngsters; blacks and whites; LGBTQIA+ and heterosexuals.

⁶⁰ *Blocos de carnaval* are social gatherings to celebrate *Carnaval*

⁶¹ A *samba* musician



Figure 7 - Black woman graffitti at *Bloco Filhos da Santa*

Source: the author (2022)

We migrated to *Aparelha* around 6:45 pm, right after *Bygode's* concert, and our group consisted of five people, that is: myself, two Afro-Brazilians and two white Brazilians. From our group, only me and Bruno, another Afro-Brazilian, visited *Aparelha* before. In fact, it was Bruno who presented me to the place in early 2019. Whilst strolling to *Aparelha*, we briefly discussed how *Aparelha* can be more perceived as a reference point to the *negro* community nowadays, comparing to my perception of previous years, Bruno agreed with a note: “but there is a lotta more whites now, if it was a 90 to 10 proportion in 2019, it is 70 to 30 currently”, with noticeable sarcasm but no semblance of disdain. I commented that in my previous visit, I noticed the “no palmitizing” poster on the refrigerator and found it simultaneously funny and intriguing, which he noted: “no palmitizing could be a thing of *Aparelha's* yesteryears, nowadays it does not mean much, people palmitize everyday”, with the same tonality as previously mentioned. Within such conversation, my two white friends reported to us that they were worried of not being allowed into *Aparelha* due to their skin color, to which me and Bruno jokingly replied: “relax guys, you are going to be our token whites today, every black can bring a ‘+1 white friend’ to the place”. Completely

reverting the tokenist and/or “the single black” logic (in which an institution can argue that is not racist due to the employment of a single or few black employees; Ribeiro, 2019, p. 26), *Aparelha* is one of the few places where being white might lead feeling of oddness in being the minority, in contrast to what Afro-Brazilians usually experience in spaces such as the university (Fonseca, 2020), job market (Aun & Lima, 2017), judiciary power (Conselho Nacional de Justiça, 2021, p. 57), legislative power (Agência Senado, 2021), and so on and so forth.

Arriving at *Aparelha Luzia* by 7 pm and facing a very different audience than before (ethnically and class-wise, with *Aparelha*’s attendees appearing as homogenously middle class), *Ilu Inã* was just starting their set (fig. 9). *Ilu Inã* defines themselves as an afro-affirmative *bloco de rua*, that is, a *bloco de carnaval* that plays in the streets and aims to affirm the *negro* identity. They are described by BlocosdeRua.com (2022), a website that aggregates *blocos de carnaval* around Brazil, as a “carnaval procession that represents a state of intention in making it open more roads and possibilities to the *negro* people (...) aims the cultural reencounter of our African matrices with the afrodescendant population of São Paulo, through the *Orixás* archetypal dance”. The *bloco* has existed since 2016 (Vieira, 2019), the same year that *Aparelha Luzia* was founded. *Ilu Inã* is already familiar with *Aparelha*, since they are partners and rehearsed there before, as for the *Carnaval* of 2019, for instance.



Figure 8 - Ilu Inã's performance at *Aparelha Luzia*

Source: the author (2022)

The *batucada* (drumming) starts and the place is on fire, with Ilu Inã's rhythmic drums, that much resemble traditional African ritualistic drumming, keeps everybody almost in a trance or hypnotic state. The *bloco* consists of a maestro, percussionists, trombonists and dancers, with the latter dancing in front of the larger crew, swaying and spinning in their performance. The set transits between traditional Afro-Brazilian genres, such as *samba* and *axé*, but always within *Ilu Inã's* own kind of *batuque* (drumming), that greatly contrasts with the previous *Carnaval* experience mentioned in this chapter. *Ilu Inã's* maestro is an *ogã*, the one that sings and plays in *candomblé* ceremonies (Vieira, 2019), which shows their connections with Afro-Brazilian religions. In *candomblé*, the rhythm of the drums is used to bring the *Orixás* (deities) to form, through possession (Bastide, 1978). It was my first time experiencing *batuques* in a more "African traditional way" and, if it was not an out-of-body feeling, I have to say that I could not move, I was completely entranced and attached to what was happening, this was another step in my cultural

identity as a *negro*, a new layer of identification towards a cultural symbol that I had yet not grasped.

Aparelha Luzia is particularly crowded on that night, and the only two air conditioners of the place do not seem to be enough to provide everybody a breath of fresh air, but still, nobody stays quiet despite the heat and lack of space, with some improvising their own fans. The majority of the crowd smiled from ear to ear, with two *negro* girls beside me stating that “this kind of performance you only have at *Aparelha*, this place is incredible”. We chatted for a bit and I asked one of them specifically why she thinks that *Aparelha* is incredible, to which she replied “everything, to even conceive that a place like this exists is unbelievable. Everybody can just be themselves, everybody is diverse and we can just enjoy and celebrate that we are still alive even after everything. And if anybody complains, we can scream back: ‘yes, there will be carnival, there will be a place full of black people in the streets and if you have a problem with that, you gotta fight us’”, presenting an understanding of collective action towards anyone that do not agree with this sociocultural *negro* gathering. She is not the only one that celebrates “surviving”, either due to the COVID-19 pandemic or due to the aforementioned necropolitics that greatly affects the Afro-Brazilian population. On the surroundings, I have heard some saying that *Aparelha* is a “breath of Carnival, freedom and the resemblance of a world without COVID-19”.

The set finishes at 8:30 pm and the *baile* (ball, as in a dance party) starts. We decided to take a breather outside, but before that, I noticed that a friend of mine, Samuel, was playing trombone for Ilu Inã on that day. We greet each other and Samuel asks me how my Master Thesis is going, as he knew about my EIMAS journey. I introduced to him that I am working on a dissertation regarding *Aparelha* and he enthusiastically replied: “it’s great that you are working on that, as it is here that Afro-Brazilians are reconnecting with their roots”. As we go outside, my white friends frantically scream “dude, I never saw anything like that. This is not the same kind of samba that I am used to, it is on another level”, showing that even my white friends were impacted by the experience.

Aparelha’s street is fully crowded, with people engaging in conversations, drinking, dancing and there are even street vendors profiting the space to sell jewelry and t-shirts with African patterns (fig. 9). Then I notice a homeless community that lives across *Aparelha Luzia*, in a sidewalk that is sharing the space with *Aparelha’s* attendees (fig. 10); the community takes up the majority

of that sidewalk's block and do not distress anybody, instead, they might even engage directly with people from *Aparelha*.

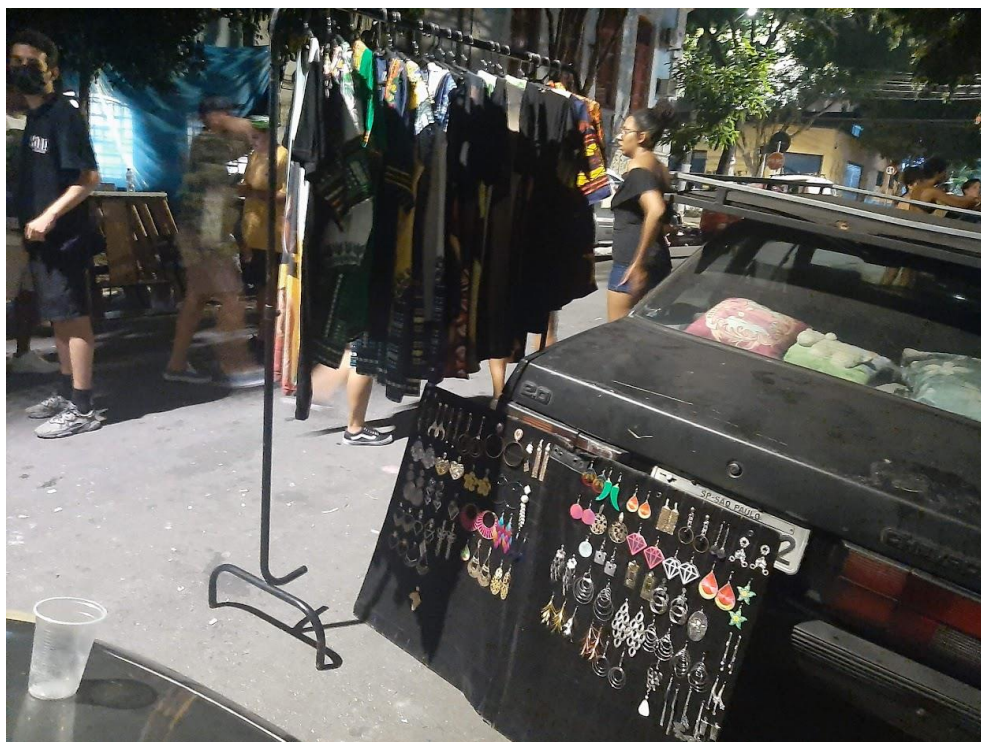


Figure 9 - Street vending at *Aparelha Luzia's* street

Source: the author (2022)



Figure 10 - Spatial division of *Aparelha's* attendees (right) and homeless community (left)

Source: the author (2022)

Inside *Aparelha*, the *baile* makes everybody move, with people joyfully dancing and singing along to many reggae and “black music classics”. It should be noted that “black music” is here understood as a plethora of US genres perpetrated by African-Americans from the 1970s to the 2000s, such as hip-hop, rap, soul, rhythm and blues, among others, following the same line of Silva (2012). Afro-Brazilian *Bailes* (a.k.a. *bailes black*), gained notoriety in the 1970s with dance halls focused on US soul music (Silva, 2012, p. 7) and are still much alive today, as experienced in *Aparelha Luzia* on that night, through a set that ranged from Bob Marley’s “Is This Love”, Sister Nancy’s “Bam Bam” and Ja Rule’s “Wonderful”, among others. Besides me, I listen to a girl stating in English to a black foreigner: “I told you that you had to come here, you couldn’t come to Brazil without experiencing that!”. After dancing for hours, we decide to leave and my other Afro-Brazilian friend, Marcos, is ecstatic: “guys, if every day is like this, I need to come back every week. I think I am getting it now, this is *negro* culture”. Despite Marcos racially identifying as *negro*, due to his own biological traits and previous experiences of racism, he is not used to consume what is usually conceived as *negro* culture, his interests are more related to a geek subculture (comic books and video games), and that day presented him a perspective of *negro* culture that

potentially moved him within the positioning of his cultural identity as a *negro*. I, for one, definitely was.

2.3. Day 3: Slam poetry for a slum poetess (March 05, 2022)

The evening was of great anticipation and excitement, as it was reserved for a *Sarau*⁶² honoring Carolina Maria de Jesus, an Afro-Brazilian author and poetess that lived in São Paulo's *Favela do Canindé* and used to work as a *catadora de rua* (literally translated as "street picker" or "litter picker", it is an informal "job" in which people recover recyclable material and resell it at junkyards). Carolina gained national fame after the release of *Quarto de Despejo* (Eviction's Room) in 1960, a book that compiles diary notes from her daily life as a *catadora* and slum dweller, through a narrative and language that exposed the hardships, the hunger and the reality of the *favelas*. The *Sarau* itself was supported by *Instituto Moreira Salles*, a traditional cultural institute from Brazil that was also holding an exposition themed after Carolina, that is: "*Carolina Maria de Jesus: um Brasil para os Brasileiros*" (Carolina Maria de Jesus: a Brazil for Brazilians), which lasted from September 25, 2021 to April 3rd, 2022 at IMS Paulista (IMS, 2022).

Aparelha's founder, Erica Malunguinho, acts at the night's master of ceremony, opening the event with a speech, in which she declares that *Aparelha's* existence is:

a mistake in History's point of view, but a success in the point of view of how violent this History was with black people. We resist because we need to exist, but we are not war tanks. That's why this place exists, so we can exchange affection, sew the ways of prosperity, I repeat, so we can look ourselves at the horizon and perceive ourselves. To feed and feed back

The *Sarau* has a variety of guests for the night, including: *Batalha da Matrix* (Matrix's Battle), *Slam das Minas* (Girls' Slam) and actress Dirce Thomaz. After introducing the event, Erica leads the way to our first guest: *Batalha da Matrix* (fig. 11), a battle rap collective that usually

⁶² *Sarau* is a cultural event, usually dedicated to music or poetry, that occurs at night. The word could derive from the latin "*serotinus*" and is more commonly seen in the french "*soirée*", another possibility of variance is from the galician "*serao*" or the catalan "*sarau*", with all related to a nightly event; Revista Arara, 2022.

occurs at *Praça da Igreja Matriz* (Matrix Church Square), which is not devoted to a religion around Neo from the 1999 movie *Matrix*, but is actually located at the heart of São Bernardo do Campo, in São Paulo's metropolitan region (Batalha da Matrix, 2022). In that night, two organizers of the *Batalha*, Éder Alexandre and Carlô, brought out a DJ: Murilex; two slam poets that were recently crowned as champions at the *Batalha* - Akins and Ray Tomaz - and two MCs that consistently perform at the *Batalha* - Winnit and YounGui. Together, they were all representing the *Batalha* to *Aparelha's* public.



Figure 11 - The stage is set for *Batalha da Matrix*

Source: the author

First off, *Batalha da Matrix* introduces the slam poets Akins and Ray, with each presenting a poem of their own. Akins begins, with a poem that weaves together many concepts regarding contemporary Afro-Brazilian life: a search for self-esteem, a refutation of beauty standards and affirming your own skin and hair, portraying criticism towards a depreciative representation of *negros* in the society, as well as criticizing the police's behavior towards *negros*, that often leads to another *negro* death. Ray Tomaz, the only female representative from *Batalha*, presented *Feita pra ser amada* (Made to be loved), a poem regarding relationships and a quest for being loved,

but a kind of love that does not have a price tag nor should be screamed just behind closed doors, closing the poem with an emphatic sentence: “my black skin is still the cop’s target, but luckily, I was only victim of your small talk”.

After a bit of slam poetry, the organizers of *Batalha da Matrix* take the stage to introduce the *Batalha*, citing that it was even the topic of a Master thesis and book, called “*Rap, cultura e política: Batalha Da Matrix e a estética da superação empreendedora*” (Rap, culture and politics: Matrix Battle and the aesthetics of entrepreneurial overcome), written by Felipe Oliveira Campos, that used to perform at the *Batalha* as Felipe Choco. In tonight’s presentation, we are starting with the following dynamic: three words/sentences will be previously set at the wall and each MC will have 40 seconds to freestyle whilst using all three; the words/sentences are all related to the nights’ subjects. The MCs for tonight are YounGui and Winnit, with Winnit having the first verse and needing to place “*quarto de despejo*” (eviction’s room, connecting to Carolina’s book), “*quilombo*” and “*povo preto*” (black people) within his rhymes.

In his verse, Winnit reiterates that we (as black people) are now far from being evicted and seen as threat, we are uniting ourselves to resist among the culture, wishing that we are able to find more Carolinas in the school, in *quilombos* and in every alleyway (*esquina* in portuguese). YounGui has to follow and fit “*Carolina M. Jesus*”, “*literatura*” (literature) and “*periferia*” (peripheries), which he does by relating his rapper position and social upbringings, coming from the peripheries and performing “*literarua*” (a neologist wordplay with *literatura* and *rua*, that is, streets literature), finishing with a parallel between *Racionais MC’s*⁶³ writing “*Diário de um Detento*” (“Inmate’s Diary”, a 1997 Brazilian rap song that chronicles an inmate reporting 1992’s *Carandiru* Massacre from the inside⁶⁴) and Carolina Maria de Jesus writing the “*Diário de uma Favelada*” (Slum-dweller’s diary). The crowd went wild for both MCs, and even a homeless woman

⁶³ Brazilian rap group, often hailed as a pillar in the foundations of rap culture, contemporary *negro* identity and social action.

⁶⁴ *Carandiru* used to be a prison in the North Zone of São Paulo and in 1992, an inmate rebellion was followed by a police operation that left 111 inmates dead. Not a single policeman was killed in the operation and every officer later convicted to prison was able to appeal out of prison. Memória Globo, 2021.

from the community across the street, who was attending the event, jumped between the MCs to congratulate them.

With an engaged crowd, the organizers asked Erica if they were allowed to fit a “traditional” battle in the event within their timeslot. Erica agreed and now we are under the *Batalha*’s usual rules: 30 seconds for each MC to “kill each other” and promote “blood”, since it is a “battle”. All in good terms, this vocabulary is quite common in Brazilian battle rap, as in a way to engage the crowd, the organizers ask “*quem gostou grita o quê?*” (“those who liked scream what?”), to which the crowd replies “*SANGUE!*” (“BLOOD!”), later hyping the MC with screams of “*mata ele! Mata ele! Mata ele!*” (“Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!”). Even if the more “traditional” battle is “for blood” or a “blood battle”, the MCs themselves (usually) do not have any kind of bad blood, despite verbally attacking each other on each round, as they understand that they provide a performance for the crowd where the criteria to win is “destroy your opponent”, that is, you have to deliver a clever wordplay, display your best skills and convince the crowd that you are a better MC than the other. Lee (2009) analyzes that this “playfulness” is an interactional tactic to gather the crowd’s engagement.

YounGui starts the “blood battle” replying to the crowd that he will not kill Winnit, but reeducate him, since for blacks to kill each other is what the “system” enjoys. Praising his own evolution and “punching Winnit’s ignorance”, YounGui picks on Winnit’s clothes (as he was using a Manchester City⁶⁵ jersey from the Brazilian player Gabriel Jesus) and closes with a rhyme that related Winnit’s “lack of enlightenment” (*falta de luz*) with YounGui being as good as Winnit’s idol, Gabriel Jesus. Winnit praises YounGui’s verse and strikes back that reeducation is within himself, proceeding with wordplays that relate to Jesus’ (Christ, not Gabriel) representation, ethnically as black and secondly, that he (Winnit) actually sees Jesus as a woman. The crowd, majorly consisted by *negro* women, is ecstatic with this last conception, at the same time that both MCs are embracing each other and happy with their performance. After a popular vote decided by crowd noise, Winnit is the winner of the “blood battle” first round.

⁶⁵ Football club based in Manchester, England.

As he won the first round, Winnit starts the second and now attacks YounGui's clothes, since YounGui had attacked him first. Claiming that he would use YounGui's t-shirt as a rag, Winnit goes back and compliments him instead, due to the political message that YounGui was sending (fig. 12) with said shirt. Retracing the steps of his attacks, Winnit finishes his verse stating that:

*Isso é sangue, simplesmente, a essência do povo preto
Dou o sangue, bebo o sangue, se for pra salvar um
preto*

*This is blood, plain and simple, the essence of black
people
I give my blood, I drink the blood, if it is to save
another black*

YounGui takes a different approach on this second round and attacked Winnit's youthness and social upbringings, stating that the only "system" that Winnit knows is a PC operational system (i.e. Windows, Linux, etc.), to then claim back on his own clothes' political statement, as "*an image is worth more than a 1000 words*" (fig. 11).



Figure 12 - YounGui's T-shirt, presenting a Ku Klux Klan member being shot

Source: *Aparelha Luzia* (2022b)

We are now entering the final round, since YounGui was able to win the previous one and the score is 1-1. To decide the winner, our last round will follow another dynamic: “*bate-volta*” (back-and-forth), where each MC will have a shorter time/verse to attack and defend. This time, both MCs are attacking directly at each other’s previous rhymes, with Winnit throwing the first “punch” and stating that even if YounGui’s t-shirt is worth a 1000 words, “*to say a 1000 words is the job of an MC*”. YounGui strikes back claiming that Winnit’s rhymes are “hereditary”, whilst YounGui speaks with his words and actions, both are necessary. Later I understood that Winnit’s brother used to battle rap, but right then and there, I sincerely did not understand the use of hereditary on that verse and found it arbitrary, nevertheless, Winnit picked on that, stating that his [Winnit] rhymes are not hereditary, rather full of sympathy, while YounGui’s rhymes are hereditary just like the captaincies⁶⁶. They continue back and forth, crossing many different thematics, from Brazilian literature to capoeira and finishing on Brazilian folklore, as Winnit compared YounGui to a “*mula-sem-cabeça*” (headless mule, a mythical figure and linguistic slang attributed to dumb people), with YounGui comparing Winnit to *Curupira* (the mythical protector of Brazilian forests, whose feet are backwards), which would explain him missing the way home. It was such a fierce round that the voting had to occur twice, but at the end and probably due to the stellar *Curupira* line, YounGui came out on top and won the battle.

Even though YounGui was the winner of the rap battle, next on stage is Winnit, singing a rap song of his own, called *Prisma*. The song criticizes the poor socio-economic conditions of Afro-Brazilians and the abandonment that he feels from the State, that should provide better conditions but instead, omits itself, or even then, is the one taking the action of killing more *negros* through the own police, in a similar discussion to the necropolitics of São Paulo by Jaime Alves (2014). Alongside clever rhymes, Winnit’s beat resembles a ballad and fuels emotion with the following chorus:

⁶⁶ Hereditary captaincies is the way Brazil came to be first divided by the Portuguese colonizers, with each piece of land (or “captaincy”) being ruled by a different settler

<i>‘Cês ama nós</i>	<i>You loves us</i>
<i>Mas ‘cês mata nós</i>	<i>But you kills us</i>
<i>Pra tentar ser nós</i>	<i>To try be us</i>
<i>Pra calar a voz</i>	<i>To shut up the voice</i>
<i>É sempre tanto faz</i>	<i>It’s always a whatever</i>
<i>Pra quem tanto fez</i>	<i>To those that gave everything</i>
<i>Mas chegou a vez</i>	<i>But now it’s our turn</i>
<i>E agora é nós</i>	<i>And now is us⁶⁷</i>

Reflections on the role of afro-diasporic music are found in Gilroy (1993, p. 76), in which he contemplates:

Where music is thought to be emblematic and constitutive of racial difference rather than just associated with it, how is music used to specify general issues pertaining to the problem of racial authenticity and the consequent self-identity of the ethnic group? (...) The invented traditions of musical expression which are my object here are equally important in the study of diaspora blacks and modernity because they have supported the formation of a distinct, often priestly caste of organic intellectuals whose experiences enable us to focus upon the crisis of modernity and modern values with special clarity.

The crowd erupted with Winnit’s song and the homeless woman that was enjoying the concert shouted “*now we’re only missing a ‘gogo boy*”⁶⁸, for the pleasure and laughter of the public. The organizers of *Batalha da Matrix* are then about to leave the stage, but before they leave, they remind the audience of their own work and give notice to another relevant project in their region of *São Bernardo do Campo*, an NGO (which the organizers refer as another urban *quilombo*, due to the cultural activities promoted by the NGO) called *Projeto Meninos e Meninas de Rua* (Homeless Boys and Girls Project) that assists homeless children and their families (Projeto

⁶⁷ Winnit’s rhymes are filled with linguistic slang that the Brazilian hip-hop audience is used to. In order to translate the lyrics and maintain the same appeal, I intended to translate with “intentional grammatical mistakes” that reflects the original slang and “grammatical mistakes” in Portuguese, staying true to Winnit’s lyrics.

⁶⁸ Also known as “gogo dancers”, stereotypical “sensual” muscular men usually hired for brides’ bachelor parties

Meninos e Meninas de Rua, 2022; ABC do ABC; 2022), and is currently facing the possibility of eviction after being at the same headquarters for more than 30 years. Lastly, *Batalha da Matrix* thank *Aparelha* for the invitation and support. *Aparelha* for them, is a unique place, “important because it spreads [itself]⁶⁹ and doesn’t allow history to be erased, as they⁷⁰ so much want to”. An intriguing aspect of my visits to *Aparelha* is that, often, political issues are alluded and implied, where participants recognize a place of conflict within the current politics towards *negros*, but they not always bring it in a more explicit manner, as if the shared meaning of the community would already understand by this implicit communication.

As the stage is now being set for the *Slam das Minas*, I go outside to get some air and find Winnit, which I reach to give some feedback on his beautiful song. Winnit appreciates the support and comments that he was pretty nervous for tonight, since it was not only his first time singing *Prisma* live but also his first time singing at *Aparelha Luzia*. I asked him if the fact that he was singing at *Aparelha* provided more pressure, and he emphatically replied: “Surely! This place has too much presence and importance for *negro* culture, I can’t fail here”, which shows how performing at *Aparelha* was significant for him in his cultural identity as a *negro*, providing a different experience than performing within his usual settings. Going back inside, we are having an open mic for anyone to reach out and declaim their own poetry, with poems that vary from romantic to political. At the same time that I notice the open mic, I also meet Jade, an old friend of mine from a former workplace. We update each other on how we are doing and I get to know that Jade changed her professional path, now focusing to be a leader on “Diversity and Inclusion”, a role that she understands that she has grown towards it, following different initiatives and projects she created in her career, which has led to affinity groups for *negros* in the workplace and a (small) rupture in “inate prejudices” from the Human Resources while handling interviews.

Close to 9 pm, the *Slam das Minas* begin (fig. 13) and today’s poetry slam is totally dedicated to Carolina Maria de Jesus, as contestants shall recite excerpts of Carolina’s work over two rounds. A poetry slam is similar to a rap battle, but instead of a “direct battle” between two

⁶⁹ As an idea

⁷⁰ Probably referring to either the State, the police, the dominant social classes or all of the previously mentioned, in line with the structural racism discussed in chapter 5

contestants over a beat, the slam is more focused on each poem and the performance alongside it. Regarding slam poetry in the United States, author Susan Somers-Willett (2009, pp. 68-70) arguments that:

A frequent mode of address at the National Poetry Slam is the identity poem, in which a poet performs specific aspects of identity for the audience.(...) Such performances most frequently stem from categories of marginalized race, sexuality, and gender identities

(...) Poets' proclamations of marginalized identities on the slam stage are articulations of diversity performed in resistance to the (somewhat exaggerated) homogeneity of official verse culture.

(...) The author's physical presence ensures that certain aspects of his or her identity are rendered visible as they are performed in and through the body, particularly race and gender but extending to class, sexuality, and even regionality. Embodied aspects of identity provide lenses through which an audience receives a poem, sometimes causing a dramatic shift in the poem's meaning and effect

By providing their space, *Aparelha* acts as a platform so that these multicultural identities come into place. Our *Slam das Minas* (Girls' Slam) hosts present the rules, with the first being that since this is the *Slam das Minas*, no cis male can be a judge, to the laughter and enthusiasm of the majorly female crowd. Besides this ruling, they state that the judge panel consists of 5 judges and both the best and worst grades are discarded, with the remaining 3 being averaged into a final score for each round. Lastly, they remind the audience that if someone gets less than a 10, the crowd should scream: "*CREDO!*" (an interjection in Brazilian Portuguese that could be translated as "*ewww, gross!*"), exemplified in one of the first declamations, as two 9.9 gradings are received by a loud "*CREDO!!!*".



Figure 13 - *Slam das Minas* introducing the slam

Source: the author (2022)

The slam had 3 contestants on that night: Ingrid Martins, Natasha Félix and Vic Sales, with Natasha representing the *Slam das Minas* branch in *Rio de Janeiro*, whilst Ingrid and Vic are regular contestants at São Paulo's *Slam das Minas*. The crowd maintained themselves focused throughout the entire slam, despite few sporadic conversations that were readily silenced by the rest of the public, so that everybody could listen to the poets. Contrasting with the rap battle, where rappers have to quickly improvise, the slam poets recite utilizing the help of smartphones, books, and sometimes from memory.

After two fierce rounds, the podium is declared: with an average of 29.55, Natasha Félix gets the third place, Vic Sales is second with an average of 29.85 and the grand winner of the night is Ingrid Martins, who got a 29.99 average. Once again, the crowd erupted, while also laughing from the hosts' comments, which kept everybody entertained by jokingly criticizing some of the

judges' gradings. Our winner, Ingrid, recited two works from Carolina Maria de Jesus, namely "O Pobre e o Rico" (The Poor and the Rich) and "Poeta" (Poet), with the former originally being a *samba* song that criticizes socio-economic disparities, whilst the latter is a poem that reflects on the poet profession. Below are both, in the respective order previously mentioned, in the way they were written by Carolina:

*"O Pobre e o Rico"*⁷¹ (Jesus, 1961, Track 5)

"Ohhh, ohhh, ohhh

"Ohhh, ohhh, ohhh

É triste a condição do pobre na terra

It's sad the condition of the poor in land

É triste a condição do pobre na terra

*It's sad the condition of the poor on Earth*⁷²

Rico quer guerra

Rich wants war

Pobre vai na guerra

Poor goes in war

Rico quer paz

Rich wants peace

Pobre vive em paz

Poor lives in peace

Rico vai na frente

Rich goes in front

Pobre vai atrás

Poor goes behind

Rico vai na frente

Rich goes in front

Pobre vai atrás

Poor goes behind

Rico faz guerra, pobre não sabe porquê

Rich makes war, poor doesn't know why

Rico faz guerra, pobre não sabe porquê

Rich makes war, poor doesn't know why

Pobre vai na guerra, tem que morrer

Poor goes in war, has to die

Pobre vai na guerra, tem que morrer

Poor goes in war, has to die

Pobre só pensa no arroz e no feijão

Poor only thinks in the rice and beans

Pobre só pensa no arroz e no feijão

Poor only thinks in the rice and beans

⁷¹ Own translation, almost literally, in order to keep any grammatical imperfections from Carolina

⁷² *Terra* is the same word in Brazilian Portuguese for Earth and land. As it has a double meaning, I decided to use both in the translation

*Pobre não envolve nos negócio da nação
Pobre não tem nada com a desorganização
Pobre e rico vence a batalha
Na sua pátria rico ganha medalha
O seu nome percorre o espaço
Pobre não ganha nem uma divisa no braço
Pobre não ganha nem uma divisa no braço*

*Pobre e rico são feridos
Porque a guerra é uma coisa brutal
Só que o pobre nunca é promovido
Rico chega a Marechal
Rico chega a Marechal"*

*Poor doesn't involve in Nation's business
Poor has nothing with the disorganization
Poor and rich win the battle
In its homeland rich wins medal
Their name runs the place
Poor doesn't even get a stripe in its arm
Poor doesn't even get a stripe in its arm*

*Poor and rich are wounded
Because war is something brutal
But the poor never gets promoted
Rich gets to be a Marshal
Rich gets to be a Marshal"*

*"Poeta"*⁷³ (Jesus, 1996, p. 91 apud Andrade, 2010, pp. 239-240)

*"Poeta, em que medita?
Por que vives triste assim?
É que eu a acho bonita
E você não gosta de mim.
Poeta, tua alma é nobre
És triste, o que o desgosta?
Amo-a. Mas sou tão pobre
E dos pobres ninguém gosta.
Poeta, fita o espaço
E deixa de meditar.
É que... eu quero um abraço
E você persiste em negar.
Poeta, está triste eu vejo
Por que cisma tanto assim?
Queria apenas um beijo
Não deu, não gosta de mim.*

*"Poet, in what do you meditate?
Why do you live sad like this?
It is because I find you pretty
And you do not like me.
Poet, your soul is noble
You are sad, what displeases you?
I love you. But I am so poor
And of the poor nobody likes
Poet, stare the space
And stop meditating.
It's that... I desire a hug
And you persist in denying it.
Poet, you are sad I see
Why do you schism like this?
I desire just a kiss
You did not give me, you don't like me.*

⁷³ Own translation

Poeta!

Não queixas suas aflições

Aos que vivem em ricas vivendas

Não lhe darão atenções

Sufrimentos, para eles, são lendas”

Poet!

Don't complain your afflictions

To those that live in rich housings

They will not give you attentions

Sufferings, for them, are legends”

Following her win, Ingrid has the stage to present a poem of her own. Through a dramatic and tense performance, she asks the audience: “Tell me. Tell me. Which is the knife that cuts you? Tell me. Hey! Hey!! Tell me. Which is the knife that cuts you? The blade, the saw, a dull hacksaw or a crowded bus full of men humping and cutting your womb?”. The performance gets more and more intense, as between her lines, a man starts screaming back, apparently demanding respect and directly confronting Ingrid, leaving everybody in the room on their feet. Nobody is sure if it is part of the performance or not, with the hosts trying their best to keep the man far from Ingrid, who continues her poem despite the man screaming at her. At the end of the poem and after the crowd’s ovation, Ingrid says that everything was a setup and part of the performance, but ambiguously enough, right after leaving the stage, she comes back and states that “there is nothing against the guy, sometimes we get under influence when hanging out, and it’s a black guy so mad respect, but you know, when we [women] are talking, we would like to be heard”. This whole interaction is still confusing, as I don’t know if it was “staged” or not, but nevertheless, through Ingrid’s statement we are able to identify a shift in positioning due to the intersectionalities of her cultural identities: as a woman, she demands to be listened and echoes a sentiment of continuously being silenced; still, despite the displayed aggressiveness of her intervenor, she presents an empathy based on their cultural identities as *negros*. The man shortly left after this interaction.

After this very tense declamation, I went outside to get some air, where I noticed an interesting scene: two gay men were talking between themselves, one of them was white and one was *negro*, with the latter sharing that he needed to work on his own self-esteem and self-care, because he does not believe he is not ugly, even though he “knows” that he is not. The white friend, then, provides support and comfort to the other, stating that he [the *negro* male] “surely is not ugly”, while asking “where the hell did you get this idea from?”. Veiga (2018, p. 81)

arguments that by being *negro* and homosexual in Brazil is to have a second diasporic experience, as this identity and the stigmas that comes alongside it, disattaches them from being integrated by their own families, communities and even in *negro* movements. As we can see, this was not the case in *Aparelha Luzia* throughout our visits.

As I am going back inside, the actress Dirce Thomaz (who has more than 40 years of acting career) is about to start her poetic performance/play “*Um Farol para Carolina*” (A Lighthouse for Carolina). Before the performance begins, Erica Malunguinho reminds the audience to pick their own trash, because as *negro* people, “we have a history of servitude”, pointing out that we [*negro* people] should not maintain this historic pattern and leave other *negro* employees to perform heavy cleaning duties, supporting the audience to have a shift of attitude in this space of *negro* solidarity.

Dirce joins the stage dancing (fig. 14) and smiling, but her expressions change abruptly, as now in character, she reminds the audience of a dream she had, one in which she dreamed about dreaming and in this “dream within a dream”, she met Carolina Maria de Jesus at Carolina’s own home in *Parelheiros*. Dirce is playing a researcher that decided to have Carolina as her doctorate subject, utilizing her play as a way to present some facts from Carolina’s biography, such as the move to *Parelheiros*, in the extreme South of São Paulo in the early 1970s. At the time, it was an area that was mostly empty, both population-wise and land-wise. The first act of the play focuses on this introductory dream dialog between Carolina and the researcher, as the researcher comes from the center of São Paulo and Carolina is surprised that there are *negros* still living in the center of São Paulo, because Carolina herself had no option other than moving to *Favela do Canindé*, alongside many other *negros* that found their “home” at the peripheries and *favelas* of São Paulo. While the conversation moves, Carolina falls asleep and the researcher wakes up from her dream.



Figure 14 - Dirce Thomaz joining the stage

Source: *Aparelha Luzia* (2022b)

In the second act, Dirce provides a critical approach on Carolina's feats and public repercussion, as she states that the major public in Brazil was skeptic over how the *favelada* (slum-dweller) Carolina was even able to write her work and that Brazil itself fails to recognize her and Abdias do Nascimento, both being born on the same date (March 14) and prime examples of Afro-Brazilian agency in their fields (literature and sociology, respectively), claiming that annual National celebrations over their figures should be held, which is not the case. Dirce reminds the audience that Carolina has been celebrated in countries such as Germany, France and Portugal since the 1960s, but in her own country, Carolina began to be recognized just in the past 20 years, if much. A recognition that should occur due to the conditions in which she wrote (poverty, hunger, lack of electricity and in an age where computers did not exist), at the same time that raising three children by herself.

Over the last act, Dirce thanks the many different *negro* women who were inspired by Carolina and bringing Carolina's legacy forward in varied areas and fields of study. Dirce also utilize her space to thank her ancestors and the continuous resistance of the current Afro-Brazilian generation, that is now being able to have more opportunities to shed light on Afro-Brazilian icons such as Carolina, who according to her, should be studied in the elementary and high school National curriculum. Lastly, she presents a final scene from her play, in which she explains that

“the researcher” represents Carolina’s superego, with the character reprimanding those in *Aparelha Luzia* that are there just to have some fun, as the space provides knowledge and a safe refuge for ideas that help Afro-Brazilians to continue resisting. She leaves the stage inviting the audience to a waltz, with just a few timidly joining her in such a dance, but still, profoundly moved by the entire lecture/play.

I head back outside and the street is now packed. I am able to find Jade again, completely thrilled with the entire event and surrounded by female friends from an afro-centric collective called *Rolê de Preta SP* (Black Woman’s Hangout São Paulo), where she acts as one of the administrators. Now with more room to talk, we are able to better update on each other, especially discussing the “diversity actions” our former workplace came to perform after declarations from its co-founder in 2020 that were perceived as racist. Jade, who helmed an affinity group for *negros* in that workplace, argues that the actions were not effective in practice, as even though she was not at the company anymore, many *negro* employees confided with her that they are still underrepresented as only 10% of the company’s population and with little room to grow within, mainly relegated to junior and entry-level positions.

If me and Jade are focused on discussing Afro-Brazilian representativity in the job market, her friends are engaging in a conversation about relationships, with one of the women sharing that she is “tired of *negro* men”. I ask her why, to which she replied: “I don’t know what happens with you guys, sometimes it feels like you are dumb. We ask for simple things like housekeeping, keeping in touch and displaying affection but it is always one or two out of the three. Men are never able to do all three”. I jokingly reply back that “if it is not working with *negro* men, you can always palmitize”, in order to get her perception on this surrounding concept. She emphatically states that this is not happening, because “even if a white guy is able to do all three, he will still never understand the pain that I have to go through as a black woman. He will hardly comprehend my pain as a woman, but he will never understand the black part”. Within this conversation, I share that I have a relationship with a white woman, to which I received back a “yeah, this is a very light-skin thing to do”, pointing towards my lighter tone. As she saw that I did not receive this comment too well, she complemented: “oh dear, I hope things bodes well for you”, as in feeling sorry that I would have to go through the “non-understanding” scenario that she pictured. This interaction is still conflictual in my mind, as for one, I understand that her positioning as a *negro* woman is linked

to the “*negro* woman solitude”, which philosopher Sueli Carneiro (2019, p. 143) conceptualizes as a phenomena that

has been instituting the *negro* woman as the antimuse of Brazilian society in such a way that demographic studies identify an accentuated disadvantage from *negro* women in the affective market, what characterizes as a situação of structural ‘solitude’ motivated by the disinterest of white man and desertion of a major part of black men⁷⁴

On the other hand, reflecting on the mentioned interaction, should my own cultural identity as a *negro* be discredited based on my relationships? Should my skin tone even be put in discussion? For now, all I can say is that palmitizing and multicultural identities are complex.

It is almost 00:00 now and I head to a bus stop nearby (at a street parallel to *Aparelha*), so I can get a bus straight to my home in the North Zone of São Paulo. I waited for around 30 minutes and João joined me. João is a homeless white man who asked for a sip of my beer so he could sleep in a better mood. I gave João all the beer that I had left, as he thanked me for listening, which according to him is something that is getting rarer and rarer. João guarantees me that I am totally safe there, because “nobody would be crazy to mess with a friend of mine”. He shares his life story with me, stating that he already traveled through every Brazilian state ever since he left his home in *Vitória da Conquista*, a city in Bahia, but now he is “stuck in the streets and with a woman that rejects him because he stinks”. After many weird stories, confusing dates and my best attempts to help him mentally organize his next day, my bus arrives; as we part ways, I listen to him saying: “that’s why I like *Aparelha*, you guys are all educated. Thanks Lucas, tomorrow I am sure that I will change my life”. I was astonished, since I never mentioned to him that I was at *Aparelha Luzia* and his supposition could be an indication of how *Aparelha’s* attendees interact with the homeless population surrounding it.

⁷⁴ Own translation

2.4. Day 4: (Never) An Ordinary Day (April 09, 2022)

Uneventfully I returned to *Aparelha* on a supposedly ordinary day. There were no advertised events at *Aparelha's* social networks for that date, and I did not know what to expect, a part of me just guided itself towards the *quilombo* after not being able to join for a few weeks. As in my first visit, I came by myself, but did not have the same luck as before, where I met somebody like Jefferson in just 5 minutes. In fact, I was alone for the majority of the night, as the place was somewhat empty and most people were already gathered in their own groups. It was not as easy to engage, similar to the narrated story of Arnoud, a Congolese immigrant visiting *Aparelha* in Pardue's (2021) ethnography, that had difficulties in connecting as "*identification and racial sharing are occasionally awkward*" (Pardue, 2021, p. 203). Still, I did not feel weird or out of place, actually, I had a feeling of comfort that I rarely felt anywhere else. It is difficult to describe, but to realize that in many experiences in my Brazilian life I felt excluded as one of the few *negros* in the setting, and now I can tangibly feel that I am not alone anymore, I was feeling afloat and with an overwhelming sense of identification among equals, in a reshaping of my own cultural identity as a Brazilian *negro*, that due to this intersection of nationality, might differ from other foreign *negros* that seek *Aparelha* for a cultural connection.

At 10 pm, *Sereia Afrikana's* (Afrikan Mermaid) concert started. I was pleasantly surprised as I did not know that a concert was supposed to occur that night. *Sereia* is the alias for Yara Kassandra, a young black female rapper from *Grajaú*, a neighborhood in São Paulo's "extreme South". Throughout the 1 hour concert, Yara performed her own songs and a few covers, with songs regarding themes that ranged from Afro-feminist empowerment, financial constraints in Afro-Brazilian life and a need for critical thinking. While on stage, Yara complained about the difficulties to reach *Aparelha*, as the distance from *Grajaú* may lead to a 2 hour trip via public transport; engaging with the crowd, Yara also asked the female audience to come forward as "it was difficult for us to come, but we came. Bring the women forward", in allusion to the female presence as a social minority, which occurs even at the hip-hop scene, once again displaying how intersectionalities come into place and in her positioning cultural identity, she is a *negra*, but also a woman, therefore, she attempts to unite and engage the other *negro* women to engage alongside her. At the end of her concert, Yara thanked the crowd and *Aparelha*, for the opportunity

they provided her to sing for more than 5 people, as well as for opening the space to geographic extremes.

Having seen Yara's concert, I had to visit the bathroom, where I noticed that many messages and statements were left. One in particular (fig. 15) grabbed my attention the most: the drawing of a black woman, with a powerful black power and a note inside her hair that said "*bixa preta, você é linda!*". In Brazilian Portuguese, *bicha* (there spelled with an "x" instead of a "ch") has a historic offensive connotation guided towards the LGBTQIA+ community and could be translated to "queer" or the (very offensive) "fag". The word *bicha* is a feminine substantive, therefore the noun agreement should also be in feminine form, even if the word is directed towards a male homosexual. That is to say that, similar to how African-Americans came to resignify "the N word" and now utilize "nigga" as an empowering word, the LGBTQIA+ community in Brazil are resignifying the word *bicha*, and this was explicitized by that bathroom message of "black queer, you are beautiful!", with this message portraying a sense of solidarity and support for those with the multiple cultural identities of *negro* and queer. Right beside this message, I also faced an appeal to resistance through art, as in: "*sempre que eu sentia raiva, rosnava poesia*" which translates to "whenever I felt anger, I growled poetry".



Figure 15 - Aparelha Luzia's bathroom

Source: the author (2022)

As usual, the *baile* follows and today's musical set is contemporary US "black music" with sprinkles of contemporary "Afrobeats". I danced for a while and wandered alone, as despite my efforts for socializing, it felt as if it was not my day. Luckily enough, this was not the case, as I was about to leave, I noticed Lucia on the horizon and she recognized me.

I greeted Lucia and we updated each other on the last couple of months. Lucia was accompanied by Thelma, who she had just met. We quickly bonded and Thelma shared with me that she also came to *Aparelha* on that day without thinking too much, she just felt like she should. According to Thelma, she had just attended a sewing class somewhat close to *Aparelha* and decided that she had to join so she could have a day "among her own kind", an experience that only *Aparelha* is able to provide her. The expression "among my own kind" is later repeated in the interviews that I collected, showing a unity in culturally identifying as *negros* in that place.

Thelma joined by herself on that day, the same way that I did, something that we also discussed, as she stated: "it does not matter if we are coming by ourselves, we will always find a good company and sharing of ideas around here". In a glimpse, the three of us engaged in a conversation that lasted for more than an hour, where I had the privilege hear Thelma's story, one that involves a 42-years old *negro* woman who used to be a model, traveled worldwide, learned english by herself, battled through hardships and vices, came close to losing it all but fought back and is currently living a healthy life among her foreign husband and their sons; throughout her story, she confided that her identification as a *negro* woman occurred due to a situation of sexual abuse, when she felt as the "most vulnerable and lonely person in the world", that led to a reflection on why she had to go through this experience, the answer came in her intersectional identification of her two cultural identities: as a *negra* and as a woman, an experience that I would hardly have, but greatly affects women, that are 88.2% of sexual abuse victims, and especially *negras*, that are 52.2% percent of these statistics (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022b, p. 6). Thelma, as many Afro-Brazilians, is exceptionally exceptional, as her fight to overcome struggles and the later rejoices that she achieved are far from the socio-economic norm destined for the Brazilian *negros*; the fact that I was able to meet such a unique person and story left me inspired and with an assurance that "yeah, this is a meeting that could only happen at *Aparelha*". At the end, we were so connected that Thelma even asked us for a selfie, so she could show her "new friends" on Instagram.

2.5. Day 5: A different type of education (April 15, 2022)

Tonight's event promised to be quite unique, as a lecture on sex education was scheduled, but not to be delivered by health professionals, as it is usually done. Professional pornstar *Nego Catra* would be the guest with his lecture "*Seja mais que um pornstar na cama*" (Be more than a pornstar in bed). I arrived by 21:15, with *Aparelha* still being prepared for the presentation. An Afrobeats playlist filled the space and the melodic voice of Angolan singer Anna Joyce brought a different spice of the Portuguese language to *Aparelha*. Outside, there is a guy named Jaime celebrating his birthday and gathered with some friends, mentioning that many are still to come. A homeless litter picker passes by and engages with *Aparelha's* attendees, asking if anybody has seen Erica [Malunguinho] and complimenting her beauty. He then jokingly flirts with a crew of black males, later asking: "do I look like a faggot? Does a faggot even have a [single] look?"⁷⁵. This littler picker is already known at *Aparelha*, spending long minutes talking with one of the Congolese assistants from *Elubu Ya Congo*, that were once again providing the food.

Speaking of Congolese, while waiting for the event to start, I met Roger, a young Congolese man that resides in São Paulo for 5 years already. He told me that he came to Brazil so he could have more job opportunities, later staying because he became a father. Despite missing his Congolese family and home, he does not intend on returning, but everytime the feeling of missing (what we would call *saudade* in Portuguese) is too strong, he heads to *Aparelha*, which he describes as "the closest to what I have back home". Surprisingly enough, Roger leaves shortly after our conversation, as he did not know there was a lecture for tonight and was not interested in the subject at hand.

Nego Catra's lecture started at 10 pm and Roger's sentiment echoes through some other attendees, with a few leaving in the first 10 minutes, mentioning that they did not know there would be a lecture and did not head to *Aparelha* for a lecture, but rather for partying. Notwithstanding, Nego Catra introduces tonight's theme of "*masculinities, sexuality and empowering*". Revising his own curriculum (fig. 16), Nego Catra lists his accolades, which includes:

⁷⁵ In Brazilian Portuguese: "*eu lá tenho cara de viado? E viado lá tem cara?*". *Viado* has the same historic offensive connotation guided towards the LGBTQIA+ community as the previously mentioned *bicha*.

more than 100 recorded scenes; best fetish scene of 2017⁷⁶; best straight actor of 2018; best double penetration scene of 2019; having slept with more than a 1000 women, among many others. One thing is for sure: this lecture on sex education is being provided by someone that definitely has had a lot of sex throughout his life and professional career.



Figure 16 - Nego Catra (central silhouette) presenting his curriculum

Source: the author's (2022)

According to Catra, the intent of the lecture is to demystify black masculinity as merely following the stereotypical “*macho*” from 1980s Hollywood or the “*gangsta rapper*” from the mid 2000s, instead, he aims to present that there are varied masculinities, place questions over how the masculine audience perceives and performs at the sexual act, as well as serving as a messenger,

⁷⁶ All of the “best scene/best actor” here listed were awarded by *Prêmio Sexy Hot*, considered by many to be the “Oscars of Brazilian porn” (Furtado, 2019)

so that the audience can bring this lecture back to their own *quebradas*⁷⁷ and educate the current teenagers on some needful tips regarding hygiene and personal care. This is exemplified by the first questions to the audience: “do you trim your own pubic hair? Do you wash your ‘best friend’ regularly? What type of soap do you utilize?”.

Interestingly enough, the male audience was answering timidly, while the female audience was thoroughly engaged and screaming: “yeah Catra, teach these men!!”. Nego Catra notices the male silence and provokes them: “c’mon guys, ask any women what intimate soap they are using, they reply back 5 seconds. We need to be as ready and clean as them. Your fella down there is your partner in crime, so you gotta treat him right”. The discomfort from the male audience can be explained due to a position in popular culture that objectifies the *negro* man as a “virile, masculine, sexually tireless and always ready and disposed to satisfy sexual desires” (Rodrigues, 2020); to shift their cultural identities in that intersectionality is a task, hence their silence and the support from Catra and women to demystify this cultural construct and broaden their possibilities of continually become *negro* men.

The discussion over hygiene and the need for sexual protection is then followed by professional tips on sexual performance, where Catra teaches the male audience to avoid attacking a vagina as if it was a burrito, claiming that you can be more intimate than that, through kissing and focusing on the whole surrounding area, that is, thighs, vulva and also (but not solely) clitoris. He finishes his lecture with a note to the audience: “at the end, the important thing is that everybody can cum/come⁷⁸”.

Even if the (male) audience did not have such a good response to Catra’s lecture, the topic on sexual education is of extreme importance. As an example, *negro* people are historically the

⁷⁷ *Quebrada* is a term in Brazilian Portuguese that can be translated as “ghetto”. The term can be applied to peripheries in general, and not just to *favelas*.

⁷⁸ In Portuguese, the act of pleasure itself is called *gozar*. In Brazilian Portuguese, however, the verb *gozar* is currently applied to the act of orgasm. In the context of his lecture, Catra utilized the verb with both meanings, a double *entendre*, therefore I translated with a similar wordplay.

most affected by HIV⁷⁹ (Ministério da Saúde, 2021, p. 20). In 2021, 60.7% of the diagnosed men were *negros*, while 64% of the diagnosed women were *negras* (Ministério da Saúde, 2021, p. 32). Catra's approach can then serve in four different ways: provide *Afro-Brazilians* a different (and professional) point of view over the importance of personal hygiene (for sanitary and romantic purposes); remind the audience to protect themselves in such an act; have a critical outlook on their own conceptions of masculinity and lastly, spread the message itself. In any case, the *baile* is about to start and if the audience was engaged enough, who knows, some of them might even use a few of Catra's tips on that same night.

2.6. Day 6: A 2-for-1 Special (April 23, 2022)

On my last ethnographic visit to *Aparelha Luzia*, I arrived earlier than usual, this time around 17:00. The reason behind this move is because the activities at *Aparelha* on that day were supposed to begin much earlier than the norm, as the *quilombo* would host two different events for the same day: a book club meeting and a web series premiere.

As I arrive, the space is still being organized for *Clube Negrita*, a book club created and managed by *Malokêarô*, the alias for Bruna Tamires, a book enthusiast, drawing artist and graduated in public policy. The club was founded in 2017, in order to "incentivize *negro* literature and reading" (Malokêarô, 2022⁸⁰). This is the first time that I could actually count how many people were present at *Aparelha*, and the total was of 25 people, out of those 25, between 2 to 3 would be considered as white Brazilians, with the rest of attendees being Afro-Brazilians. Curiously enough, one of the few whites was beside me, accompanied by a black friend. As I eavesdropped on their conversation, I understood that this white male was already a supporter for the club and invited his black friend to join. In this first visit to *Aparelha Luzia*, "the black friend" did not contain his reaction to the surroundings: "it really is a very powerful space". Both then discussed the

⁷⁹ The Brazilian Health Ministry divides exposition in two major categories: sexual or blood. In 2021, around 85% of the diagnosed men were placed in the category of sexual exposition, whilst the percentage is of 87.2% for women in the same category (Ministério da Saúde, 2021, p. 33)

⁸⁰ Own translation.

current literary scene and the importance of *negro* literature to “keep on with the fight”, even citing the works of the previously mentioned Carolina Maria de Jesus.

Bruna welcomes those who are present and introduces the club, stating that it is their 5th anniversary, with *Aparelha* serving as the first place that received them, around 5 years ago. *Clube Negrita* promotes these meetings in diverse places that concede their space to the club and today marks the first physical meeting in 2 years. For Bruna it serves as a sort of “survival’s breath” following the COVID-19 pandemic. The date, April 23, is also regarded as the “day of *São Jorge*⁸¹” and the *International Book Day*, therefore, we have two extra reasons to celebrate the date. Still in her initial statement, Bruna reiterates that we have free water and fruit (brought by the club) if anybody is in need. In the year of 2022, the club is also asking for a collaborative funding, so it can not only have some sort of remuneration but also cover logistic costs while providing a few rewards to its contributors, such as books, stickers, fanzines, etc. Before we head to our reading, Bruna introduces today’s special guest, Joyce, the owner of a bookstore focused on *negro* literature and located in the North Zone of São Paulo.

The selected reading piece is *Four fancy sketches, two chalk outlines and no apology*, a short story from Nafissa Thompson-Spires’ (2019) “Heads of the colored people”, which is also available to be bought there in case you’d like a copy. Bruna introduces our short story, justifying the selection due to parallels that could be traced between the contemporary US black middle class and the contemporary Brazilian *negro* middle class. In the reading, each paragraph (or half paragraph in case of a lengthy one) can be read by a volunteer from the meeting, which stimulates everybody’s participation.

We began our reading (fig. 17) and entered into the world of Riley, a geek black man who liked *cosplay*⁸² and went to an anime and comic book convention wearing “blue contacts and bleached-blond hair” (Thompson-Spires, 2019). The short story, right off-the-bat, discusses that our main character did not attempt to portray himself as “non-black” due to any kind of self-hatred, in fact, Riley was just being himself and confident in his own portrayal. The author also

⁸¹ *São Jorge* (Saint George) is a warrior and unofficial catholic saint. In the Brazilian context, the “Saint” was also syncretized with the *candomblé’s orixá* Ogum.

⁸² To dress up as a pop culture character, very popular in Japan and geek convention worldwide

discusses that, in the context of US racial relations, Riley often dated black women and did not feel any kind of shame for his race or ethnicity, but nevertheless, he often felt a discomfort that others might contest his “blackness or degree of his loyalty to the cause”. At the convention, Riley ignored the black author Brother Hotep, who was cosplaying his comic book character “*Brother Man*” in order to promote and sell his own comic books. This led to an altercation between the two geeky black men, one who did not accept being dismissed by one of the few black men at the convention, while the other did not respond well to an “uppity, gay-looking nigga” offense. At the end of the day, the Los Angeles police arrived at the scene to answer a complaint, which ended with both men shot “offscreen” by the cops. The story also involves three other black characters that are somewhat related to Riley and Hotep, who were murdered. For more details on the story, I suggest the reading of the short story, even though I already provided some spoilers regarding the end of it. The plurality of each character, while constantly relating to issues that are endemic to the US “black race”, is something that the author calls “*black network narrative*”, a concept that is the subject of much reflection in how the story ends:

(...) What is a black network narrative but the story of one degree of separation, of sketching the same pain over and over, wading through so much flesh trying to draw new conclusions, knowing that wishing would not make them so? (Thompson-Spires, 2019)



Figure 17 - Clube Negrita's book reading

Source: the author (2022)

The powerful ending to the story led to a question and topic of discussion: “why did this story felt so different yet so similar?”. Joyce starts the discussion by commenting that this type of *negro* subjectivity is something that is lacking in pop culture, citing that when she graduated in library science⁸³ around the year 2000, not only she was one of the few *negros* on campus (therefore, also in her specific graduation), *negro* literature was barely a subject of discussion, while literature itself rarely focused in *negro* stories, concluding with an emphatic statement: “my business only exists due to racism, and I know that”. Others also followed the same line of discussion, questioning why we do not have as much “*negro* stories” on the “public eye” if you consider the size of the *negro* population in Brazil, with every argument frustratingly fading and falling in the usual suspect: structural racism. Comparisons were then drawn towards the United States, where even though blacks are usually considered as 13% of the population, more black stories, authors and artists are reaching the *mainstream*, with examples such as director Jordan Peele with his horror movies “*Get Out!*” (2017) and “*Us*” (2019), as well as artist Donald Glover with his TV series “*Atlanta*” (2016 - 2022) and musical alter-ego Childish Gambino. Many remind that this move towards more non-stereotypical black representation in the United States media follows a larger historical claim for rights, that may be reaching its breaking point with the rise of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement in 2015 and latest protests over the death of George Floyd in 2020. This reflection led to a question of “why are we, Afro-Brazilians, not claiming at the same pace as them?”, with a consensus that the “Brazilian racism” acts different than the “US racism”, which leads to more dissonance in the Brazilian *negro* population and “more deafness” for those unaffected or privileged by the structural racism that is in place.

Notwithstanding, this discussion only regarded the first part of the question (“why does it feel so different?”), and Bruna again posed the latter part to the audience: “why does it feel so similar?”. Opinions were unanimous that, once again, we are facing a story where black people ended up being killed by those who should protect them, that is, the police. “But why do we fall back on this? It’s either police brutality or racist killings, why did the author finish the story with an ending that is fairly common?”, asked Bruna. The members of the audience consensually replied: “so we can never forget that this is a common ending in the real world”. This sparked an

⁸³ In portuguese: *biblioteconomia*, which merges *biblioteca* (library) and *economia* (economics).

interesting debate over the role that *negro* people usually attribute to themselves when they have narrative control and a large audience, that is, if one *negro* is having an opportunity that is not usual for other *negros*, we often feel that we should (almost like a Kantian categorical imperative) utilize this opportunity to bring forward and denounce the issues that we face on a daily basis due to our race/ethnicity, which maybe is exactly what Thompson-Spires did with this short story and her concept of “black network narrative”.

Moving towards the end of today’s meeting, Bruna asked the audience that “since racism was constantly cited, I would like to know: in what way did racism not stop you?”, with her own answer being that “similar to Riley, I was also a geek/otaku and went to anime conventions in my adolescence, usually being one of the few *negros* visiting the space”. One black woman replied that “racism did not stop me from loving and enjoying rock and roll, even though the current audience is majorly white, I still go to ‘rock spots’ and concerts”. Both of these answers presents us how in the intersectionalities of their *negro* cultural identity and that of their subcultures (*otaku* and rock fan), their identity as *negros* came first, but not without struggle. Another interesting answer was that of a black man, who replied: “racism did not stop me from coming here, but it asks me to not be here”, implying either: 1. a fear of not being alive due to his skin color or 2. that the racist structures dislike the idea of events like *Clube Negrita* and places like *Aparelha Luzia*, if not both combined.

Reaching to a conclusion, Bruna makes a final question: “how can we even get away from the racism theme and close our eyes to everything that happens daily?”. The audience quietly agreed that we can’t run away from discussing the theme, but one *negro* woman decided to provide a final reply, directly connecting to *Aparelha Luzia*: “on my daily life, where I have to deal with white bosses that do not understand me, I feel powerless to discuss racism, but whenever I feel the need to re-energize myself, I come here and then I feel the strength to go on”. With that final answer and having exceeded the allotted time for the meeting (which lasted two and half hours), we came to an end, where everybody dispersed, made some connections, bought some books and gathered for a photo. Before anybody could scream the usual “cheese”, Bruna asked everybody to scream their favorite fruit, to which a surprised audience loudly shouted “BANANA!” and Bruna timidly smirked. I still reflect on this simple yet remarkable final interaction, as I might say that unconsciously enough, I had never allowed myself to admit that banana was my favorite

fruit. Actually, I even avoided eating it in public numerous times. Why so? It is difficult to put it in words, but the common racist offense to compare *negros* and monkeys, often televised and discussed due to incidents in football arenas⁸⁴, definitely had a place in this “defense mechanism” that my mind created. It might be trivial, but it was liberating to scream that “BANANA!” and not have any kind of fear of judgment, so much so that I ate a few bananas later on.

Speaking of culinary, it is in this “interlude” that I finally manage to dine at *Aparelha Luzia*, where I ate a congolese dish (fig. 17) from Elubu Ya Congo that consisted of rice with carrots, white beans with palm oil, fried fish and bananas. Even though the food is not that different from the traditional Brazilian rice and beans, it is compelling to think how much one can travel worldwide through culinary and how many cultural similarities we are able to find as well.



Figures 18 and 19 - Elubu Ya Congo’s dish (left) and menu (right)

Source: the author (2022)

⁸⁴ Lacerda Abrahão & Soares (2009) have an interesting article regarding racist incidents in Brazilian football arenas and how it echoes the reproduction of racist ideas in Brazilian society. Notwithstanding, the racist practice is notorious in European and South American football arenas alike, as for instance, in that same April of 2022 when the *Clube Negrita* meeting happened, at least five cases of racial discrimination in the *Copa Libertadores* were filed, which included argentinian *River Plate* supporters throwing bananas to supporters of the Brazilian *Fortaleza* (Barreto & Janone, 2022)

While dining, I also engage with Beatriz and Silvia, two young *negro* women who are cousins and returning to *Aparelha* after not visiting it for a while. I was able to sense that they were reconnecting to each other and updating themselves in what is happening on each one's life, with Silvia frustrated with her latest relationships and sharing that "these black men are scared of black women, because we are fierce and speak our minds, we do not bow to them". She reflects that she might be too harsh sometimes, but concludes that "it is not my problem if they are not ready for a black woman that takes a stand". Beatriz then asks Silvia if by having this attitude, wouldn't she be contributing to the "angry Black woman" stereotype and pushing men away, to which Silvia replies: "I shouldn't hold myself based on stereotypes, I am me before and above anything else". Even though the "angry Black woman" is often discussed in the United States, it gained more prevalence in the Brazilian scenario around 2015. The "angry Black woman" could be described as a:

"(...) mythology [that] presumes all Black women to be irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite the circumstances. The stereotype is well known in informal settings but has a lack of representation in professional literature. Angry Black women are typically described as aggressive, unfeminine, undesirable, overbearing, attitudinal, bitter, mean, and hell raising (Malveaux, 1989; Morgan & Bennett, 2006). Black women described as tart tongued, neck rolling, and loud mouthed are archetypes perpetuated in the media (Jones, 2004). Chapman (2001) further identifies several "attitudes" held by Black women, including rage, control, desperation, materialism, shame, and cynicism that reinforce the stereotype. The angry Black woman stereotype is pervasive and parasitic; it affects Black women's self-esteem and how they are viewed by others (Morgan & Bennett, 2006)" (Ashley, 2013, p. 28)

João Carlos Rodrigues (2011) is one of the references in listing the *negro* "archetypes and caricatures" (as he calls it) of Brazilian cinema, which he does in the book "*O negro Brasileiro e o cinema*" (The Brazilian *negro* and cinema). Rodrigues (2011) lists 13 archetypes, that range from wise and religious black men (such as *preto velho*⁸⁵); well-educated and "white integrated" (*negro de alma branca*, which could be translated as "black with a white soul"); revolted; "*favelado*"

⁸⁵ Literally translated as "old black man", *preto velho* is both a "mythical figure" and an umbandan "religious deity".

(slum-dweller) and many others, including hyper-sexualized archetypes such as the *negão* (“big black man”) or the *mulata boazuda* (“damn good mulatto woman”). *Negro* women might fit in all 13 archetypes, but in Rodrigues’ book, they are usually relegated and portrayed as the “*mãe-preta*” (the careful and struggling black mother), “*mulata boazuda*” (the sexy and seductive *negra*) or “*nega maluca*” (the clumsy, confused and “crazy *negra*”, often the comic relief). Candido & Feres Júnior (2019) revise the female stereotypes and representation in Brazilian cinema, noting that Rodrigues (2011) left many female protagonists out of analysis. In their article, the authors analyze the annual top 20 of most popular Brazilian movies from 2002 to 2014, concluding that only 5% of *negro* women are represented in this sample, whilst *negro* men make 15% of the cut. Looking at the stereotypes/archetypes themselves, the revision of Candido & Feres Júnior (2019) consists of 7 female stereotypes: the same hyper-sexualized *mulata*; the *favelada* (slum-dweller); the *crente* (evangelical); the *trombadinha* (could be translated as mugger); the *revoltada/militante* (revolted/militant); the *empregada* (housekeeper) and the *batalhadora* (struggling/fierce). Out of these, we can infer traits of violence and poverty in the *favelada*, *trombadinha* and *revoltada* stereotypes, which can be compared to the United States “angry Black woman” due to their “aggressiveness”, “hell raising”, “loud mouth”, among others.

In a similar discussion, but focusing on a lack of LGBT *negro* representation in Brazilian soap operas (*telenovelas*), Soares (2017, p. 257) analyzes 46 years of Rede Globo’s⁸⁶ soap operas, stating that in the referred period: “(...) it existed 156 characters that fit in LGBT archetypes, but only eight were *negros*. Out of these, five *negro* men, a bisexual woman, a travesti, a transgender and no lesbian”.

Directly connected to female (and even more specifically LGBT) Afro-Brazilian representation in the audiovisual, the premiere of “*Keila Quer Mais*”⁸⁷, an independent web series whose casting solely consists of lesbian *negras*, is about to start. The audience has completely shifted from *Clube Negrita*, as we now have a public majorly populated by young LGBT *negro* women and (some few) men (fig. 19). The web series tells the story of Keila, who works in a call

⁸⁶ Biggest television network in Brazil. The analysis period is from 1970 to 2016.

⁸⁷ Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtU_kF3Y2-o (Luneta Vermelha, 2022)

center and constantly daydreams about finding love, which she believes she has never found. In her daydreams, Keila is often kissing other female characters that are brought to the scene, but she desires to find a sole partner that she can devote her attention and romantic interests. Keila's wandering impacts many areas of her life and that leads to her boss asking for a private meeting at her office. What was supposed to be a reprimand turns to an intense kiss, ending the premiere with thunderous applause.



Figure 20 - *Aparelha's* audience watching the premiere of “*Keila Quer Mais*”

Source: the author (2022)

The independent web series is able to fill a representational gap for a segment of the Afro-Brazilian LGBT population, but moreso, despite acting “flaws” that are expected from an independent production, provides a dose of realism in the portrayed characters, that are not stereotypical. The different scenarios and locations present in the series are also familiar to the audience, such as a shared apartment, a therapist office and a call center. Following the premiere, we are invited to a round table with the actresses, who bring forward how much they think their web series is revolutionary, from the casting to their execution on presenting this Afro-lesbian world. The cast believes that “art changes, love changes and we should go beyond: Netflix, love, affection and beyond”, with some in the audience asking “even Netflix?”, to which they emphatically reply: “why not? To dream small spends the same amount of energy as to dream big. We deserve to dream bigger”.

3. *Aparelha Luzia* in the eyes of its attendees

In order to have a better grasp on how those who attend *Aparelha* feel and relate to the urban *quilombo*, we interviewed four Afro-Brazilians from two different genders (male/female) and age groups: between 18-30 years old and 30-45 years old. The interviews were semi-structured, with a questionnaire that covered themes of their history, identification, relationship and interactivity with *Aparelha Luzia*. Those interviewed were selected based on experiences and connections established at the visiting days described in the previous chapter. The interviews were collected between June and August of 2022.

The two interviewed women could be considered as “entrepreneurs”, with Jade (27 years old) being a publicist and internet content creator, whilst Joyce (40 years old) is the owner of a bookstore focused in African-related literature. The two interviewed men, on the other hand, are employed in operational roles, with Bruno (29 years old) being a tech support manager and Samuel (43 years old) currently working as a quality specialist for a technology startup. Informally, though, they all shared that their skills and hobbies go way further than that, with some having active roles in “Afro-centered” collectives. Except for Bruno, all interviewees reside in the peripheral zones of *São Paulo*, with an average of 1 hour to arrive at *Aparelha Luzia* via public transport; Bruno currently lives in the neighborhood of *Vila Buarque*, so he is able to arrive in a mere 15 minutes walk. Most of the interviewed started frequenting *Aparelha* around 2018, with the youngest (Jade and Bruno) engaging more regularly since 2019 and continuing to do so on a regular basis, while the eldest (Joyce and Samuel) currently visit sporadically, even if they were more active in *Aparelha*’s “early years”, e.g. Joyce has visited *Aparelha* since its inception in 2016.

All of the interviewed met *Aparelha Luzia* due to positive word of mouth from friends who were already engaged with *Aparelha* and/or “Afro-centered” spaces. In that regard, Bruno shares that his current geographical surroundings aggregates many traces of *São Paulo*’s peripheral culture, since there is a current flux towards that area due to bars and nightclubs, leading to a *negro* presence where *negros* and *negras* often refer *negro* hangouts to each other. The neighborhood of *Vila Buarque*, which partially integrates the district of *Santa Cecília*, is currently the subject of much discussion regarding gentrification, both in public media (Lisboa, 2020; Campos, 2020) and academia, with Alcântara (2020, p. 646) noting that “throughout the 2010s,

however, a series of events occurred and the region returned to gather attention from the press and, mainly, from a younger segment with a progressive political leaning from superior layers of São Paulo's population"⁸⁸.

Concerning what attracts them the most, our interviewees cited a plethora of reasons, such as identification, *acolhimento*⁸⁹, a majority of *negro* people, the quality of social exchanges, political engagement and the cultural events that are promoted. This connects with the feelings they experience at *Aparelha*, where the answers are usually focused in feeling “*at home*” (Jade), “*welcomed*” (Joyce) or a “*singular and/or unique experience*” (Bruno and Samuel). Aiming to better explore this uniqueness, I often asked them if they understand that *Aparelha* can establish a link between the African continent and the Afro-Brazilian diaspora, to which I highlight a few answers from Samuel:

I arrived there and it had a different format than anything I expected. People themselves, you know? Around that time in 2018, 2019, most were Africans themselves. This friend of mine [who led me] was part of UCPA, that is the União dos Coletivos Pan-Africanistas [Union of Pan-Africanist Collectives] and presented me to many Africans there, so I was able to have this closer interaction indeed, let's call it as a 'diasporic African'.

(...) To think [of a link between Africa and Brazil] in a time conception of past, present and future, I think it reduces a lot. What is it actually to live an experience of contact with Africa? I believe that *Aparelha* is able to put both the Mythic Africa and Mystic Africa within conversations and life experiences, as well as the Afrofuturist Africa. It is a very big experience, very intense. I joined meetings that gave me more quality, every year, for instance, there was a celebration of Haiti's independence, that for me, is a reference in thought and life. (...) [Also] African birthdays, the way Africa celebrates life. So this connection is able to bring since the farthest chronological time in Africa to a future [Africa] to be conceived.

Speaking of “Africa”, Jade mentions that her last attendance (before our interview in June/2022) was in May 25, considered as the “Africa Day”, and answering if *Aparelha* could establish a link between Africa and Brazil, she replied:

⁸⁸ Own translation

⁸⁹ Could be literally translated as “welcoming”, but I interpret it as a “nurturing welcoming”, related to comfort.

That day [May 25] was the proof of that, of the creation of this 'bridge' [or link]. Because many people barely have access to what is African culture, and on that day there were some Africans. There was African dance, there was African music. Everybody was very happy, so we opened a circle and each person went to the middle and danced in their own way. So for many, that was a first "African experience"

The envisioned "Africa" presented in both answers is intriguing and reminded me of the words of Mia Couto in an interview for Luz (2009), where he stated that "the Africa that exists in most people's minds is folklorized, idealized. It is an Africa that does not exist"⁹⁰. Senegalese Fatou Ndiaye, when speaking of a case of racist attacks that she experienced in 2020 (at the age of 15 years old), provided a similar statement to Mia Couto, in which she explains that there are two extremes regarding the Brazilian knowledge of Africa:

The first is that Brazilian that has a much folklorized vision of Africa. That believes that we dance the entire day, play drums the entire day, that we don't want to speak of development (...) of economy, that we live in the animal jungle, etc. (...) And there is the vision of the ignorant Brazilian, who thinks that Africa is in extreme poverty, that we don't have anything to offer to the world, that we are not able to produce any kind of epistemology. (Alves, 2021⁹¹)

Monteiro (2004) had also analyzed this mythical and folkloric Africa in the Brazilian imaginary, where the continent is usually seen as either static, homogenous or has several aspects (cultural, memories, symbolic and historic references) generalized as "Africanities", that are produced within the Brazilian understanding of each, already biased by its own racial relations. Both Couto, Ndiaye and Monteiro speak of a folklorized perception from the general population and non-specific to Afro-Brazilians, but Oliveira (2012) provides both a counterpoint and explanation for this supposedly idealized Africa by Afro-Brazilians themselves. One that is based in

⁹⁰ Own translation

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

an African cosmovision that was recreated in Brazil to combat racism, leading to a sense of community that kept the Afro-Brazilians alive and resisting.

The Africa created by us is in everything more African than the Africa that stands in the current negroid continent. We opted for this choice as a starting point: we are Africans in our own way, which provides us a unique singularity - a more than legitimate pleonasm in the cultural game that we intend to bestow. From our material culture to our symbolic richness, we, afro-descendants, reintroduced the lost Africa in Brazilian soil, be it through an idyllic, epistemic, political, artistic and even economic recreation. (...) We produced our own Africa and our subjectivity in the streams of flow and reflow that do not stop traversing us (Oliveira, 2012, pp. 38-39)

Notwithstanding and returning to Bruno's singular experience, he emphasizes on the connections that he is able to establish at *Aparelha*, noting that having a place where the vast majority is black and looks like him is already a shift in his daily life, where he usually is the only black person in that context. He also cites that the diversity of those that attend, who might come from different regions in São Paulo, different states in Brazil or even different parts of the world (such as Congo, Moçambique and Angola), as well as a strong LGBT presence (specially trans people), provides him a cultural interchange that is not usually reproducible in other places. He expands on that while criticizing the demography of his neighborhood:

Vila Buarque is a majorly white neighborhood. A neighborhood that, I believe that nowadays, is closer to a high middle class due to the proximity with Higienópolis. So it is some kind of middle ground between the 'Old Center of São Paulo' and this 'New Expanded Center'. [Lately] I even had an epiphany, if you take Minhocão, the elevated, you divide the neighborhood. There is [then] East Minhocão, [with] Campos Elíseos, this area that is devalued, and West Minhocão, [with] Santa Cecília, Vila Buarque, Higienópolis, that is more and more valued. So you also have a racial acceleration in occupying these spaces [East Minhocão], due to this gentrification [of West Minhocão]. So, yeah, it [*Aparelha*] differs from where I live (...) it is a place that white people were not able to occupy in a major way. They are arriving little by little, as in other places of São Paulo, but *Aparelha* is really different in all aspects, there is no place in São Paulo, for me, that compares to *Aparelha* in regards to belonging and the quality of exchanges and interactions.

Jade and Joyce, who are more into “Afro-centered” spaces, also focus on the fact that by having a *negro* majority, they feel more welcomed than elsewhere, comfortable that they will not feel judged. Still, contrary to the other interviewees, Joyce reported some negative experiences that she had:

I saw people being oppressive with other people in front of me, and that was not cool. With the homeless people, who are the actual residents there. They are there from the beginning, so they circulate at *Aparelha*, they enter *Aparelha*, but some people might not have too much sense and end up mistreating them, having that judgment in their eyes. (...) Sometimes there were also situations where [female] friends of mine did not feel good, [they] were oppressed inside [*Aparelha*] due to colorism reasons

Joyce stated that those situations happened only in 2017, but nevertheless, provides us a point of view that was not experienced in our visits. It is possible that the current public might not reproduce these ideas anymore, as *Aparelha* seems to be broader in skin tones and races/ethnicities that now visit the space; the experiences that were reported in the field trips also presents us a place that has some sort of integration with the homeless community across the street, but some questions still arise: “is it always like this? Are people always as welcoming as they seem?”.

Our interviewees were unanimous in stating that *Aparelha* provides them a different experience than elsewhere, mentioning that it has a political edge and that it acts as place of *negro* resistance. I also asked them how they would define resistance itself. Jade connects both her feelings to *Aparelha* with what she understands as resistance:

We know that when we go to a place where we are the minority, people will give you a crooked look, they will look at you like ‘what is this person doing here if she is not supposed to be here?’. They will look at you with a judgmental look, you know? You will not feel comfortable, you will not feel welcomed, so when I attend places with a proposal like *Aparelha*, or when I go to places with my own *quilombo* [her collective Rolê de Preta SP], taking the *quilombo* there, then I think that it changes a little, because I am with my own kind, so there is an exchange, a respect, there is this question of positioning ourselves, you know? Politically as well.

(...) I believe that *Aparelha* is a place of *negro* resistance, yeah. It is a political place, a place that reclaims a space where we can feel comfortable, that we can feel that we have the right to have fun, the right to get informed. The right to live that [*Aparelha* experience] right there. (...) I think that resistance is the right to be alive and be happy, and for you to be able to claim your dignity, for you to be in a place where you have dignity and be respected. I define that as resistance.

Bruno connects this political characteristic of *Aparelha* in a more direct link, using our interview to vent, but citing that, through *Aparelha*, he had interactions with contemporary politicians. He also notes that this does not mean that *Aparelha* sides with specific political parties, despite Erica herself being a state congresswoman, therefore, linked with a political party:

As I said, it is a political place, and a place that is more political than ‘partisan’⁹², even though there are partisan preferences in that regard. By being a place of *negro* resistance, it is a place majorly left leaning. In the point of view of *negro* resistance, I believe that the discussions that happen in there are also a way for us to discuss how to occupy spaces and continue resisting.

I believe the [social] exchanges that happen, between people from different political parties, yeah, I had many good exchanges with candidates and now deputies from the ‘*Partido dos Trabalhadores*’⁹³, from the ‘*Partido Socialista*’⁹⁴, from the ‘*Partido Comunista*’⁹⁵, and in all of these, the main argument was how can we try to equalize the game, how can we resist in any way.

So we can’t forget that left-leaning governments and right-leaning governments passed by this country. Not exactly left, right? But we had PSDB, PT and now PL in power, and in all of them there was a massacre of the black youth. In all of them there was a rise in murder statistics, specially of young *negros* and *negras*. (...) So, for instance, we are now in July of 2022, with an election happening in a few months, where the main

⁹² *Partidário* in Portuguese could be translated as “partisan” and in the Brazilian political context, refers to someone that sides with a specific political party, often defending said party in every instance.

⁹³ Lit. translated as “Workers Party”, the largest “left leaning” Brazilian political party that ruled Brazil from 2002 to 2014.

⁹⁴ Lit. translated as “Socialist Party”. Currently, Brazil has no party with this specific name, so it is unclear if it is the more progressive PSOL (*Partido Socialismo e Liberdade / Socialism and Freedom Party*) or the more traditional PSB (*Partido Socialista Brasileiro / Brazilian Socialist Party*). I suspect the former, due to their own positioning in the political sphere and Erica’s former affiliation with them.

⁹⁵ Lit. translated as “Communist Party”. The same applies here, it is unclear if it is the currently more expressive PCdoB (*Partido Comunista do Brasil / Communist Party of Brazil*) or the elder PCB (*Partido Comunista Brasileiro / Brazilian Communist Party*) founded in 1922.

presidential candidates, one of 'extreme-right' [Jair Bolsonaro] and the other of 'center-left' [Lula], all of them have a ministry composition that is totally white. So gender-wise, we advance, but racially not.

Samuel, on the other hand, gave us an answer of a broader connection that is established by this ethnoracial cultural identification provided by *Aparelha Luzia*. He stated that, when he is at *Aparelha*, he feels as if he is:

(...) at the umbilical cord, you know? Because the uterus is that thing that births, right? The umbilical cord feeds you, so it is to be at the umbilical cord with my own kind, which sometimes you never saw in life, [but] you go and are able to have a conversation there, and [you] see that is worth it, and intense, and grand, and it keeps on going.

(...) This 'aquilombamento'⁹⁶ is this black reunion. We have a reunion, manifestation and black resistance that we cannot find in other places. So this connection that I do with the [umbilical] cord is that of giving an experience where I can connect with my own kind and that I am a black man, in movement with that place.

(...) [*Aparelha*] acts as a place of resistance, not [just] black resistance, but resistance of what is understood as a minority in Brazil, mainly. And the resistance by the simple fact of existing, because for you to have a [black] space in the center of São Paulo, right? All other spaces are hegemonically white and for you to create a space where the black population can arrive and feel at ease - not that other people do not feel that way - in the sense of, at ease to see your own kind, listen to your roots and do not be at risk of being overthrown by racism. Whatever [racism] that may be. Any racism there is abolished even before the root is able to grow. So, yeah, the simple fact of existing is resistance

Joyce follows a similar route and recognizes that *Aparelha* is a place of resistance by existing and providing a programme that is focused on *negros* and *negro* culture, also bringing up the fact that *Aparelha* was able to resist the Covid-19 pandemic, despite many cultural spaces going bankrupt. Even though Joyce values *Aparelha*, she still has some criticisms on its accessibility. She is our sole interviewee who mentions that *Aparelha* is mainly visited by a *negro* middle class, if not high middle class, also pointing that despite the efforts, not everybody will be able to feel

⁹⁶ The act of "quilombing" oneself, that is, to be and feel part of a *quilombo*

integrated or identify with *Aparelha*. It is in this discussion regarding accessibility that she reflects over *Aparelha's* location in the center of São Paulo:

I think it is a location that has access to the majority of people, in that independent of where they live, they are able to arrive there, even though the centrality bothers me a little, I also see that it provides an access to everybody. (...) Even if you live far, more or less, people either live in the center or work close to the center or work in the center.

(...) [but] there are people that do not even know about *Aparelha's* existence. Black people, I know people myself. I live here [in the North Zone], but I know that where my mother lives, many people do not know about *Aparelha's* existence. (...) What I want to say is that it's interesting that other *Aparelhas* are born in diverse locations around São Paulo, not only one *Aparelha*, right? I also think it's important that these other *Aparelhas* are outside the center of the city, because we are not only at the center, we are in other spaces too. *Aparelha* is a political space, right? It's a cultural and political space, so may other *Aparelhas* born as well, and in peripheral regions so that [more] people may have this racial literacy [that is provided in *Aparelha*].

In our second-to-last question, I asked them why is *Aparelha* important for each one. Both Jade and Joyce recollected their previous answers and summarized *Aparelha's* importance in the fact that it exists and acts as a place of *negro* resistance, of *negro* political engagement and as a celebration of *negro* lives. Bruno centered *Aparelha's* importance in acting as a "lantern" that leads *negro* people towards more racial knowledge, but also as a place that unites the diaspora in resisting as *negros* in the Brazilian context. Samuel defined *Aparelha's* importance as a place to "reconnect and create, because it sews this patchwork (quilt)⁹⁷", where he reconnects with his own kind and is able to have experiences of past, present and future, mentioning that he even brought his infant son to *Aparelha* twice, certain that his son has these memories ingrained. Lastly, our interviewees had to define *Aparelha* in a single word, which varied but are still related to each other, that is: *acolhimento* / welcoming (Jade), belonging (Bruno), resistance (Samuel) and political (Joyce).

⁹⁷ In Brazilian Portuguese: *costurar (uma) colcha de retalhos*, a popular expression that symbolizes something constructed by various disjointed pieces but still tightly tied together.

Conclusion

In the past, *quilombos* could be seen as a peculiar event (Carneiro, 1958) that exemplified a model for a racial democracy (Moura, 2021), uniting all those oppressed by the society (Munanga, 1996) through a vital necessity to rescue their freedom and dignity (Nascimento, 1980). They resisted colonial oppression by presenting different models of society based on their ancestral roots in the African continent, an alternative to an imposition that they did not comply with.

As we could see in the case of the urban *quilombo Aparelha Luzia*, their update of the concept of *quilombo* is not that far from its origins. It was created to resist a structurally racist society, that was molded by marginalizing *negros* and consistently placed them in positions of inferiority - if not outright killing them. This re-adaptation of a cultural element traditionally linked to Brazil's African ancestry consists of a series of peculiar events and aims to unite those oppressed by today's society, especially those that share this ancestral link, those that inherit the blood, sweat, tears and struggles because of their skin colors - those that identify themselves as *negros*. Through this urban *quilombo*, we experienced many ways that its *negro* participants are enabled to re-shape their cultural identities as *negros*. But how?

(Re)Identification through (negro) diversity

For Hall (1996, pp. 4-5), identities are only constructed through difference, through a relation to the *Other*. A positive meaning is obtained through a negative. There is always an opposition to construct an identity, henceforth, a cultural identity as a *negro*, placed in a setting of racial hierarchy, would come in direct opposition of a cultural identity of white. As Fanon (2008, p. 82), places it: "*for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man*". At *Aparelha Luzia*, we are able to experience another relation to this identity through difference, one that connects its members through a same ethnic category of cultural identity, the majority of attendees' are all *negros*, but they also identify through a difference within themselves. Stuart Hall (2000) discussed a similar reconstruction in his 1988 essay "*New Ethnicities*", regarding a new type of black cultural production in England:

(...) we are beginning to see constructions of just such a new conception of ethnicity: a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses difference and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities (...) This marks a real shift in the point of contestation, since it is no longer between antiracism and multiculturalism but inside the notion of ethnicity itself. What is involved is the splitting of the notion of ethnicity between, on the one hand the dominant notion which connects it to nation and 'race' and on the other hand what I think is the beginning of a positive conception of the ethnicity of the margins, of the periphery. That is to say, a recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture. (Hall, 2000, pp. 271-272)

We consistently experienced this reconstructing and many ways to be a *negro* through diversity, which leads the attendees' towards a greater cultural identification as a *negro*. This was presented in several instances, as Lucia and her "magical place", where we connected and identified with each other by sharing our first moments of recognizing ourselves as *negros* (Day 1); the fightful *negro* girl at *Ilú Inã's* concert (Day 2); the artistic and poetically critical *negro* positionings from the *Sarau* (Day 3); feelings of being afloat and the encounter with Thelma (Day 4); the different sex education lecture, that deeply questioned the male audience in reflecting their positioning as *negro* men (Day 5); and the 2-for-1, if not all-at-once, of Day 6, where the audience directly approached the racism theme and criticized a lack of *negro* representation within popular culture, be it in our discussions in the book club, be it at the premiere of *Keila Quer Mais* and its exclusive cast of lesbian *negras*. To resist a single way of being and to incentivize different ways of becoming a *negro* was (and may be) always present within the days in *Aparelha Luzia*, both in an embrace or even in conflict, as the *negro* women constantly desired for *negro* men to be better (as men - and as *negro* men in their intersectionalities). Through all of our interviews, we were also able to gather this greater sense of identification, this feeling of being welcomed, embraced and within "their own kind".

Notwithstanding, questions still arise in how integrative this diversity may be, as I remember Joyce's remarks of *Aparelha* consisting of a somewhat homogenous *negro* middle class, while she also experienced situations of colorism and mistreatment of the homeless in the surroundings. Even if these situations were barely experienced in our visits, despite a single colorist

comment towards myself, it is still valid to question: “will all *negros* be embraced, even those not as phenotypical or politically progressive, i.e. left-wing leaning?”; “will a *negro* from the lowest socio-economic classes be able to arrive and get integrated to *Aparelha*?”. These can be new questions for further studies.

It should also be noted that we were able to experience an Afro-Brazilian point of view and small glimpses from Africans who identified with *Aparelha* as “the closest to what they have back home”. Pardue (2021) was able to provide a migrant point of view in the stories of Madeleine and Arnoud, both from the Democratic Republic of Congo, with Madeleine sharing a similar feeling of “close to home” that our friend Roger from Day 4, while Arnoud felt dislocated. We would also suggest further studies focused on this (re)identification from Africans that visit *Aparelha Luzia*.

(Re)Identification through tradition and adaptation

For Hall (1990, pp. 223-224), cultural identity lies within an identification with the past, with a sense of understanding where is your “being”, as well as where do you position yourself through this identification, what will you “become”. *Aparelha Luzia* is a concrete example of this conception. By updating the concept of a traditional symbol of resistance, the *quilombos*, they enable their attendees to identify themselves within both ends of the spectrum, what we were when resisting colonial power and what we will become to resist the structural racist system that was molded by it.

Some of the cultural activities promoted within *Aparelha* allow attendees to bridge this gap, and in our visiting days, we were able to experience this in *Ilu Inã's* concert (Day 2) and the *Sarau* for Carolina (Day 3). Through *Ilu Inã*, that presented a fusion of *samba* and *candomblé* (which was already an Afro-syncretic recreation); both Marcos and I were able to reposition our identifications with Afro-Brazilian culture. At the *Sarau*, the poetic performances also enabled the audience towards an identification of what it was, what it is and what to become in their cultural identities as *negros*. In both instances, the activities reflected past, present and future, even within the own succession of events, where Day 2 had a flow from tradition to contemporary (*candomblé* to a later dancehall) and Day 3 went from hip-hop to slam poetry to a poetic performance recognizing an important Afro-Brazilian author, Carolina Maria de Jesus.

At our interviews, respondents (Jade and Samuel) also provided us answers of reconnecting with their African ancestry, which greatly enriched them and broadened their cultural identities as *negros*. In the words of Samuel, that directly links with Hall (1990) and the cultural identity of the diasporic: *Aparelha* provides a connection that brings the farthest chronological Africa to a future one to be conceived, even if it is the envisioned Africa by the Afro-Brazilians themselves.

(Re)Identification through music

Music is one of the cultural elements that is mostly related to the African continent and diaspora as a whole. Former president of Senegal and one of *négritude's* leaders, Leopold Senghor, even stated in his classic poem *Prayer to Masks* that “we [black people] are the men of the dance whose feet only gain power when they beat the hard soil” (Senghor, 1998, p. 14). In the context of Brazil, *negro* music was always present as one of the key elements of a *negro* cultural identity, be it through the drums of afro-syncretic religions, be it through the rhythm of *samba* that became the country's national symbol, be it through the current expressions in rap, trap, hip-hop and funk. Regarding music and identity, Frith (1996, p. 110) states that:

(...) in talking about identity we are talking about a particular kind of experience, or a way of dealing with a particular kind of experience. Identity is not a thing but a process - an experiential process which is most vividly grasped as music. Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective.

(...) It is in deciding - playing and hearing what sounds right (I would extend this account of music from performing to listening, to listening as a way of performing) - that we both express ourselves, our own sense of rightness, and suborn ourselves, lose ourselves, in an act of participation.

The *negro* cultural identity and music have been intrinsically tied together, producing and portraying new ways of living, new traditions of representation (Hall, 2003, p. 342). In our visiting days, music was always involved and all of our interviewees mentioned that *Aparelha* providing them a space for *negro* music in São Paulo is of great importance, serving as one of the main

reasons for their visits. By being a hub for these *negro* cultural expressions through music, *Aparelha* definitely helps its attendees in re-shaping their cultural identities.

(Re)Identification through education

Education is another instance where *Aparelha* thrives in helping with these re-shapings. Gomes (2003b, p. 77) understands that the school is the social institution that is responsible for “organizing, transmitting and socializing knowledge and culture”⁹⁸, but what if this culture has been produced and transmitted by those on top of the racial hierarchy? For Gomes (2003b), this could reveal the school setting as a space that diffuses negative representations of *negros*. After years of struggle from the Unified *Negro* Movement and other *negro* associations, Brazil established the *Law 10.639*, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture be mandatory in the national curriculum of primary and secondary education (Gomes, 2003a, p. 180), but the application of said law is still subject of much discussion, with many institutions not implementing such content in their pedagogical projects (Gonçalves, 2018, p. 435). In my own school experience, I remember learning solely about slavery, in an approach that greatly diminished the consequences of this historical event.

Within the activities that we experienced in *Aparelha*, we were able to see an alternative *negro* education, with highlights to the *sarau* that introduced and criticized a lack of proper national recognition towards the peripheral Afro-Brazilian author Carolina Maria de Jesus, where the actress Dirce Thomaz even requested that such an author should be incorporated into the national curriculum of education (Day 3). Catra’s sexual education lecture, whose approach aimed to reconstruct *negro* masculinities and proliferate reproductional health to the attendee’s *quebradas* (ghettos; peripheries), where the majority of São Paulo’s *negro* population is; and *Clube Negrita’s* meeting, that engaged the audience to reflect in their current situations as *negros* and discuss how to change it for the better, with some citing that just by being there (at *Aparelha* and

⁹⁸ Own translation

Clube Negrita), they were reenergized to continue resisting against the manifestations of structural racism.

(Re)Identification through political articulation

In our visits and interviews, a political engagement at *Aparelha Luzia* was often mentioned as one of the reasons that attendees visit the space⁹⁹. For many, the sole existence of *Aparelha Luzia* as a place that gathers negros at the center of São Paulo (referred by Alves, 2014, as a necropolis) is an act of resistance, as a political act to fight against oppression.

Aparelha is a place visited by *negros* within many intersectionalities, i.e. cis male, cis female, trans male, trans female, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, among many others. Through these intersectionalities, political engagement and articulation is broadened in perspective, as in, if one used to have a singular point of view of a cis *negro* male, he can now have another point of view from a trans *negro* female, expanding his *negro* political agency towards discussions that accounts for both subjects and their intersectionalities, even if their focus is still majorly in their cultural identities as *negros*; this exact situation happened in our interaction with Jefferson and Lucia at Day 1. Facchini *et al.* (2020, p. 12) studied this phenomena of intersectionalities in social movements, analyzing that “*the construction of meanings for political engagement is presented as inseparable from a process of re-elaborating the self and its social relations*”¹⁰⁰, therefore, a constant reconstruction and re-shape of their cultural identities.

Despite the act of visiting *Aparelha* being a political engagement in itself, how this *praxis* occurs is sometimes implicit, with some conversations that only allude to social issues (as we experienced in remarks to COVID-19), and sometimes more explicit, with a more direct approach in some activities (mainly Day 3 and Day 6) and conversations (as mentioned by Bruno in his interview).

⁹⁹ Although this political aspect is not at the center of this work, we cannot forget to mention it as a possible focus for further studies.

¹⁰⁰ Own translation

Notwithstanding, *Aparelha Luzia* is both a reality and a promise of better days for Afro-Brazilians. The ones that visit it, feel a connection that is energetic and recharges them, in order to keep on fighting, resisting and attempting to organize themselves for a brighter and more inclusive future. The limit of their reach is a question, but if the praxis of *quilombamento* is able to spread thysself, whenever and wherever someone *quilombizes* themselves, it spreads.

Summing up

The Brazilian history is not a happy one for Afro-Brazilians, after all, this history started with enslaved Africans that had to go through a forced diaspora, an inhumane transatlantic crossing over three centuries of slavery. Within this period, enslaved Africans were the country's major workforce, at the same time that due to their status as properties, little to no monetary gain was achieved. To resist this punishing and oppressive institution of slavery, many forms of resistance came to life, including the *quilombos*, where fled slaves occupied non-populated areas and readapted to these surroundings by creating alternative societies, reaffirming their African cultural values (Carneiro, 1958; Munanga, 1996). Alongside the *quilombos*, other cultural traditions were kept alive, as in cuisine, music and syncretized religions. Still, in a racially hierarchized society, that went through different practices of whitening and cultural assimilation, led the Brazilian *negros* towards difficulties in culturally identifying as such.

Nowadays, the scenario is still not the best for Afro-Brazilians, since they are the majority of the population at 55.8%, but also the least favored socio-economically (IBGE, 2019), those with a higher chance of being homicide victims (Cerqueira *et al.*, 2021) and in the case of São Paulo, usually segregated in the farther outskirts (Rede Nossa São Paulo, 2021). Within this context, the self-entitled urban *quilombo Aparelha Luzia* came to fruition in 2016, as a form to resist this current scenario and help Afro-Brazilians in (re)shaping their cultural identities.

Throughout our study, we were able to experience how it is to visit *Aparelha Luzia* and some of the impacts that it has in the cultural identities of its *negro* attendees. By bridging the gap of how Afro-Brazilians came to be and giving them a platform towards what they will become, we understand that *Aparelha Luzia* helps them (re)shape their cultural identities through different processes of (re)identification, namely by having a contact with: a *negro* majority and diversity;

traditions and adaptations; music; education and political articulation. We were also able to identify some questions for future studies, such as: “is there a limit in this *negro* diversity?”; “what are the impacts in the cultural identities of Africans that visit *Aparelha Luzia*?”; “how will this political articulation come into play?”.

Nevertheless, we can conclude that, in the words of its Afro-Brazilian attendees, *Aparelha* provides them a space where they feel welcomed, re-energized, reconnected and belonging, which is an experience that they do not have elsewhere, providing them with new ways of becoming. By searching for their roots, they are now enabled to explore new routes and continue to resist. As Beatriz Nascimento (2018, p. 190) defines, the quilombo is “*a possibility in the days of destruction*”.

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