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Afro-Diasporic Literatures of the United States and Brazil: Imaginaries, Counter-Narratives, and Black Feminism in the Americas

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Marielle Franco. Quem mandou matar Marielle? Marielle, presente!

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores contemporary Afro-diasporic literatures by black cultural producers in the United States and Brazil that resist, subvert, and dismantle the persistent myth of Brazilian racial democracy. From the US, I investigate John Keene's 2015 collection of stories and novellas *Counternarratives*, in addition to Gayl Jones' 2021 novel *Palmares.* Conversely, from Brazil, I examine Conceição Evaristo's 2003 novel *Ponciá Vicêncio*, as well as the black trans musician and slam poet Bixarte's social media performance art. Although these Afro-diasporic literatures deconstruct the myth of racial democracy in Brazil, at the same time, each is entangled with what Patricia de Santana Pinho defines as "the myth of Mama Africa," that is, the international black imaginary. With this in mind, and in concert with Michelle D. Commander's notion of "Afro-Atlantic speculation," I analyze how Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte, respectively, represent "Mama Africa" in Brazil and what Christina Sharpe calls "Black being in the wake of slavery." I read these Afro-diasporic authors' respective literatures as affective Afro-speculative imaginings of a black diasporic community in Brazil that represent the material realities of everyday black peoples living with hemispheric American racism—the afterlives of colonialism and slavery. Correspondingly, in dialogue with Jayna Brown's *Black Utopias*, I shift the notion of utopia into the "no-space" of non-citizenship, what Fred Moten theorizes as "statelessness," the liminal existence of being in the revolutionary interval between subject and object. Via statelessness, Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte perform "black utopia" in their Afro-

speculative representations of Mama Africa and/or *Améfrica* in Brazil, each of which functions as a "counter-narrative" to (inter)national discourses of racial democracy. However, I also employ Djamila Ribeiro's theory of "*lugar de fala*" along with Lélia Gonzalez's concept of "*Améfrica*" to critique the intradiasporic hegemony of African American cultural production within the discursive space of the international black imaginary. Ultimately, I argue that these Afro-diasporic literatures offer admonitions against recapitulating discourses of the nation-state in community-building projects of the international black imaginary. Accordingly, this dissertation rejects the transnational turn in African diaspora studies as an essentialist critical perspective that parallels nation-building discourses of miscegenation and racial democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

The African diaspora is a consequence of the history of the forced dislocation and enslavement of black peoples in the realization of colonization and nation-building projects in the Americas with the purported discovery of the so-called "New World" by Europeans. While officially the institution of slavery no longer exists today, its systemic aftermath continues to effect the present, as anti-blackness pervades the structures of global modern society, and particularly so in the nation-states of the American hemisphere. This is certainly true for the modern nation-states of Brazil and the United States alike, considering the two countries' common histories of colonialism and slavery. In *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States*, Laird Bergad claims that Brazil was one of "the first colonial societies to establish slavery in the sixteenth century," and furthermore, that when "[a]proximately a century later, British colonial Virginia was founded…slavery became an integral part of local culture and society" in North America as well (xii). Although slavery was abolished in many nascent nations and colonial societies across the American hemisphere by 1850, it remained with persistence in the southern United States and Brazil long after, until 1865 and 1888 respectively (Bergad xiii). [1] Despite the oppressive history of the enslavement of African peoples in the Americas, there also exists a concurrent and ongoing history of black resistance against systemic racism in all its forms. This dissertation is concerned with

[1] Some northern states in the US began abolishing slavery after the American Revolution; slavery was abolished in Haiti in 1804, and also in many independent Latin American

investigating manifestations of black resistance in the form of Afro-diasporic literatures produced in both the United States and Brazil. For many black cultural producers across the Americas, the imaginary, or what Benedict Anderson would term, the "imagined community" (24)[2] of the African diaspora is a source of Afrocentric—as opposed to Eurocentric—epistemologies for understanding the ways in which black peoples across the world continue to experience, navigate, and resist, the incessant afterlives of colonialism and slavery. In other words, the African diaspora is the discursive space of the international black community, a communicative space to share testimonies about everyday experiences and affective realities of being in the face of omnipresent anti-blackness, in addition to revolutionary ideas for combatting systemic racism around the globe. Correspondingly, this dissertation investigates different imaginings of the African diaspora as conceptualized by contemporary black cultural producers located between the United States and Brazil.

Although there are very few examples of US writers depicting Brazil in their works, John Keene and Gayl Jones are two contemporary black authors from the US who do indeed represent the Latin American nation, and who also happen to be renown in the field of African American literature.[3] On the other hand, there exist even fewer representations of the US produced by black Brazilian authors; nevertheless, the preeminent contemporary black Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo and the up-and-coming black trans performance artist Bixarte do still participate in the creation of the

[2] Anderson's 1983 book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* theorizes the ways in which, via print media like newspapers and novels, nations are socially constructed by peoples who identify as part of a larger collectivity.
[3] See also Paule Masrhall's "Brazil" in her collection of novellas *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1961).

imaginary that is the African diaspora. That is to say, whereas African American writers like Keene and Jones call out to Brazil, black Brazilian cultural producers rarely offer a direct response, instead often speaking to an imagined "Africa" within the space of their own nation, as is the case with Evaristo and Bixarte. Both Keene's collection of stories *Counternarratives* (2015) and Jones' novel *Palmares* (2021) imagine black peoples living in a speculative past of Brazil in order to understand the hemispheric and global implications of colonialism and slavery. Contrarily, Evaristo's novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* (2003) and Bixarte's recent corpus of social media performance art (circa 2020-2021)[4] are more concerned with representing the ways in which the afterlives of colonialism and slavery persist in the present-day for black peoples living in modern Brazilian society. In order to better comprehend the multiplicity of possible imaginings of the African diaspora, I juxtapose the Afro-diasporic literatures that are the subject of this dissertation in a mutual conversation, in which each piece serves as a "counter-narrative"—to borrow Keene's notion—to the others.

In spite of their many differences, the respective works of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte are all entangled in a common cultural history of international black thought and Afro-diasporic discourse. I am interested in exploring this web, and especially in traversing its black feminist offshoots, as well as concomitantly analyzing the convergences and divergences between Afro-diasporic literature in the United States and Brazil. Furthermore, I consider the tensions between notions of the local and the global, as well as the role of the nation, in various black cultural producers' respective imaginings of the African diaspora. In this manner, I also argue that black Brazilian

[4] For example, Bixarte's YouTube EP *A Nova Era* (2021).

literature, and Afro-Brazilian studies more broadly construed, provides an important "counter-narrative" to the hegemony of African American thought in the collective consciousness that is the African diaspora. While I do not believe Evaristo and Bixarte discount the importance of international solidarity among black peoples across the Americas, at the same time, their respective works are more invested in community building and representing the presence of the African diaspora in their home nation, Brazil, rather than an imagined space abroad, as is the case with both Keene's *Counternarratives* and Jones' *Palmares*. Nonetheless, I ultimately argue that, particularly when read together in juxtaposition, the Afro-diasporic literatures of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte reject the *trans*national turn in discourses of the *inter*national black imaginary that is the African diaspora while simultaneously dispelling the myth of "racial democracy" in Brazil.

Racial democracy, or *democracia racial* in Portuguese, is a term that arose in Brazilian political discourse in the 1930s (Guimarães 11), however, narratives falsely representing Brazil as a "racial paradise" date back to the early nineteenth century with abolitionist discourses in both the United States and Brazil (Azevedo 13). Celia Maria Marinho de Azevedo notes that contemporaneous with the emergence of the idea of a Brazilian racial paradise in abolitionist discourses in Brazil,

> a imagem do brasil como um paraíso racial já circulava há muito tempo entre os abolicionistas americanos, como um parte de um vasto esforço para derrotar os senhores de escravos do sul dos Estados Unidos e sues aliados nortistas [the image of Brazil as a racial paradise was already

> circulating among US abolitionists, as a part of a vast effort to defeat slave masters in the American South and their northern allies]. (13)[5]

Considering these international abolitionist connections between the two *American* nations, Azevedo asserts, "o mito do paraíso racial brasileiro é também parte da história cultural dos Estados Unidos" "[the myth of a Brazilian racial paradise is also part of the cultural history of the United States"] (14).[6] Analogously, the subsequent myth of racial democracy that comes about in the early twentieth century is also a part of both nations' respective cultural histories. Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães confirms that the myth of racial democracy in Brazil was already circulating in the United States during the period of racial segregation before it had surfaced in Brazilian political discourse in the 1930s:

> a noção de democracia racial foi divulgada nos Estados Unidos como um modo de convivência racial próprio do Brasil e da América Latina, que serviria de antídoto ao racismo norte-americano, marcado pela segregação e pelos linchamentos…era também ironicamente apresentada como solução aos intelectuais negros norte-americanos em luta por igualdade racial, política e econômica, que já conheciam a expressão pelo menos desde 1914 [The idea of racial democracy was disseminated in the US as a form of racial coexistence found in Brazil and Latin America that would serve as an antidote to North American racism, marked by segregation and lynchings… it was also presented, ironically, as a solution to black

[5] All translations are my own unless cited otherwise.
[6] For more on abolitionism in Brazil published in English, see Robert Conrad's translation of Joaquim Nabuco's *Abolitionism: The Brazilian Antislavery Struggle.*

> American intellectuals fighting for racial, political and economic equality, who were familiar with the term since as early as 1914]. (11)

Moreover, George Reid Andrews describes this dialogue regarding the myth of racial democracy between the United States and Brazil as "an extended, century-long conversation between the two countries—an American counterpoint, embracing both North and South America—on the topic of race" (484).[7] Correspondingly, this dissertation investigates the common cultural history of the myth of a Brazilian racial democracy shared between the two nations through black feminist readings of Afro-diasporic literatures produced in the hemispheric "American counterpoints" of the US and Brazil respectively.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories of (global/international) black feminism inform my thought throughout the analyses of this dissertation project. While I do include important black feminist voices from the US into this conversation, particularly that of the globally influential Patricia Hill Collins, I primarily dialogue with black feminist thinkers from Brazil whose works are often only published in Portuguese. The contemporary black feminist philosopher Djamila Ribeiro's book *Lugar de fala* (2019) is an incredibly important work in Brazil, but it still has yet to be translated into English, and is therefore virtually unknown in US black feminist circles. In fact, Ribeiro draws from Collins' seminal 1990 book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of*

[7] For more in English on the history of racial democracy in Brazil, see Andrews. See also France Winddance Twine's *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil* for more on racial democracy in modern Brazilian society.

Empowerment, however, she also recuperates the work of the late, yet ever-vital, Brazilian black feminist thinker Lélia Gonzalez. Therefore, against the US's cultural hegemony in the African diaspora, I elect to place Ribeiro's work at the center of my theoretical framework. In her 1984 essay "Racismo e sexismo na cultura brasileira," Gonzalez proposed, "O *lugar* em que nos situamos determinará nossa interpretação sobre o duplo fenômeno do racismo e sexismo" ["The *place* we occupy determines our interpretation of the doubling phenomena of racism and sexism"][8] ("Racismo" 76), and thereby, effectively articulated the theory of "intersectionality" before Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw officially coined the term in 1989.[9] Accordingly, Ribeiro expands upon Gonzalez's notion of "*lugar*" in the aforementioned essay because it critiques "a hierarquização de saberes como produto da classificação racial da população" ["the hierarchization of knowledge as a product of the racial classification of the population"] (*Lugar de fala* 24). Thus, Ribeiro's theorizes how an individual's particular social locus, or "lugar de fala" ("place of speech"), produces a distinct set of material and affective experiences and realities depending upon one's race, gender, class, and/or sexuality, etc., and in this way, seeks to dismantle social hierarchies (69). As Ribeiro explains,

> O falar não se restringe ao ato de emitir palavras, mas a poder existir. Pensamos lugar de fala como refutar a historiografia tradicional e a hierarquização de saberes consequente da hierarquia [Speech is not restricted to the mere act of emitting words, but also the ability to exist. We conceptualize place of speech as a refutation of traditional

[8] All emphases in quotations are original unless noted otherwise.
[9] See Crenshaw's "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

> historiography and the hierarchization of knowledge resulting from that hierarchy]. (64)

Said differently, if knowledge is understood to be power in the Foucauldian[10] sense, then to occupy a *lugar de fala*, or place of speech, on the bottom of the social hierarchy, is to encounter relentless obstacles while simply trying to *be*. For Ribeiro and Gonzalez alike, it is black women who experience the affective realities, the everyday experiences, of dealing with this oppressive social hierarchy most pronouncedly in Brazil and across the rest of the Americas (Gonzalez, "Racismo" 76).

Nevertheless, with *Lugar de fala* Ribeiro's aim is to educate everyday Brazilians (the book is purposefully cheap and easy to read despite being revolutionary as well) about the ways in which the Eurocentric hierarchization of knowledge since colonialism continues to structure society in modern Brazil via systemic oppression based on race, gender, class, and sexuality. Ribeiro also asserts that *lugar de fala* rejects all essentialisms or universalizing discourses, positing,

> A teoria do ponto de vista feminista e lugar de fala noz faz refutar uma visão universal de mulher e de negritude, e outras identidades... Ao promover uma multiplicidade de vozes o que se quer, acima de tudo, é quebrar como o discurso autorizado e único, que se pretende universal [Feminist theory and place of speech help us refute universal visions of women and blackness, as well as other identities… What is desired above all else in promoting a multiplicity of voices is a break with sole authoritative discourses that claim to be universal]. (69)

[10] See Michel Foucault's work on "power/knowledge" in *The History of Sexuality* and elsewhere.

That is to say, with *lugar de fala* Ribeiro proposes that it is imperative to recognize the material historical structures that create social hierarchies based on race, class, gender, and/or sexuality, and thus, to listen to and consider a diverse plethora of voices and discourses rather than accepting hegemonic master narratives. Accordingly, I employ Ribeiro's theory in order to critique the hierarchization of knowledge and the hegemonic role of African American thought in the diaspora as result of the social prestige of English and the United States position in the Global North. Therefore, with Ribeiro in mind, in my respective analyses of the Afro-diasporic literatures of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte, I examine the interplay between each cultural producer's *lugar de fala* within the international black imaginary when considering the intradiasporic cultural hegemony of black US thought in this discursive space.

In the scope of this project, my conceptualization of the African diaspora is primarily rooted in Brazilian scholar Patricia de Santana Pinho's groundbreaking book *Mama Africa: Reinventing Blackness in Bahia*. Santana Pinho's work provides a methodology for understanding how African American and Afro-Brazilian cultural producers alike imagine the African diaspora in Brazil. Santana Pinho extensively analyzes "the myth of Mama Africa," which she describes accordingly: "The myth of Mama Africa establishes that black people around the world are connected to one another as much as they are to an imaginary entity from which the past, the traditions, the characteristics, and the 'character' of all Afro-descendants purportedly emerge" (*Mama* 2). However, Santana Pinho is careful to clarify that her use of the word "myth" "is not in any way meant to diminish the power of the belief in a unity that exists among members of the diaspora" (*Mama* 1-2). Against essentialist notions of racial identity, Santana Pinho

implores her audience "to revisit the state that is constantly labeled the most African part of Brazil," that is, to rethink preconceived ideas about Bahia and its inhabitants, and in particular the city of Salvador, which is well renowned within the African diaspora (*Mama* 3). Santana Pinho is especially concerned with confronting US-centric idealizations of Brazil as a racial democracy, of which there exists a long history, as Santana Pinho also finds that beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, "the myth of a Brazilian racial paradise was formulated by Brazilian abolitionists with the help of their U.S. counterparts" (*Mama* 18).[11] Moreover, Santana Pinho re-affirms that up until the 1940s, African Americans continued to regard Brazil as a "'racial paradise,'" and that many continue to romanticize it to this day due to "its alleged Africanness" (*Mama* 14).[12] Although Santana Pinho remarks that it is wholly implausible to claim that Brazil is a racial democracy, she also argues that to suggest "the myth of racial democracy" is fading is categorically false (*Mama* 19). Nevertheless, it is in this vein that Santana Pinho seeks to comprehend and critique the perpetual association of the signifier "Africa" with Bahia within the black imaginary and across Afro-diasporic discourse.

Correlatively, the central line of inquiry in this dissertation project revolves around whether by imagining "Africa"—that is to say, the diaspora—in their particular representations of Brazil, Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte, respectively, recapitulate "the myth of racial democracy," or deconstruct this hegemonic master narrative of the Brazilian nation-state. Santana Pinho elaborates further on the importance of this imagined "Africa" to the collective imaginary that is the African diaspora in the

[11] Here, Santana Pinho cites Celia Maria Marinho de Azevedo's *Abolicionismo: Estados Unidos e Brasil, uma história comparada: século XIX* (2003).
[12] In this instance, Santa Pinho directs her readers to see David J. Hellwig's *African-American Reflections on Brazil's Racial Paradise* (1992).

following lines: “The notion of Africa has been central in the construction of black identities in the Americas. The diaspora’s longing [“*saudade*” in Portuguese] for Africa has generated several versions of what I call the *myth of Mama Africa*” (*Mama* 23). Said differently, Africa is imagined as the “motherland,” a “a place of symbolic—not actual—return, where Afro-descendants can recover from the difficulties encountered in the New World” (*Mama* 30). In other words, Africa is a discursive space of the diasporic imaginary, an affective community that exists across time and space for those Afro-descendants who choose to participate. Nevertheless, Santana Pinho also observes that “the myth of Mama Africa is largely centered on stereotypical notions of black motherhood,” and therefore, that it perpetuates essentialist racial identities and gender roles (*Mama* 31). Despite the patriarchal discourses embedded in “the myth of Mama Africa,” the diaspora, though imagined, is a revolutionary discursive space and epistemological practice that is very real to black peoples across the Americas and the rest of the globe who do indeed feel its collective unity and sense its radical potential.

Although Santana Pinho’s *Mama Africa* (2010) is key to my overarching analysis, at the same time, her book requires some more contemporary critical interventions from the field of global/international black studies. In particular, many scholars working in African diaspora studies have begun to question the paradigmatic status of Paul Gilroy’s research in the field, and especially his 1993 book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*—which is indeed at the crux of Santana Pinho’s own research (*Mama* 58). For her part, Santana Pinho states, “The diaspora discourse articulates…what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternative public spheres: forms of community awareness and solidarity that preserve identification beyond time and national boundaries, allowing for

transnational forms of belonging, despite local differences" (*Mama* 59). Although I agree with Santana Pinho, and Gilroy for that matter, that "diasporic discourse" creates "alternative public spheres," on the other hand, I do not believe that these black imaginaries *transcend* the nation-state, as I demonstrate through my analyses of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte's respective Afro-diasporic literatures. In this same vein, in his piece, "Notes on passage" from *Stolen Life*, Fred Moten traces a paradoxical thread of "cosmopolitanism" in Gilroy's *trans*national line of thought:

> Cosmopolitanism is understood…as having its origin and end in the claim of the citizen, the democratized sovereign, in such a way as to confirm the already given requirement that the relation of blackness to the nation-state can be understood as analogous to that between a stubborn monolith and a finally irresistible solvent. This problematic of mixture—of hybridity, if you will—is not at all reduced to a matter of miscegenation. What's at stake, rather, is how living outside or against the nation-state, when such an entity is understood to be the ground of a theory and practice of cosmopolitanism that simultaneously protects and undermines its sovereignty, is understood as the very form of deadly life. (*Life* 197)

In other words, from Moten's point of view, Gilroy's transnational "cosmopolitanism" attempts to incorporate black peoples as citizens of the sovereign nation-state, however, paradoxically the nation-state—and particularly so in the Americas—is founded in and structured by colonial systems of anti-blackness. Accordingly, Moten perceives a contradiction in diasporic projects that seek to transcend the nation-state, that is, to exist

"outside or against" it, considering that blackness is always already excluded from conceptualizations of sovereign citizenship in the nation-state.

Similarly, in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Alexander G. Weheliye also theorizes the pitfalls and paradoxes of Afro-diasporic projects in relation to the polemic of the nation. Weheliye argues, "*diaspora* suggests a concurrent de-emphasizing of specificities in the embrace of transnational frames of reference and a return of said particularities via the comparison of black populations that differ in nationality" (30). That is to say, like Moten, Weheliye claims that diasporic discourses attempt to transcend the nation while also simultaneously employing the nation as a reference point for comparison and, ultimately, imagining the African diaspora. Weheliye then goes on to assert that transnational paradigms and the diasporic turn in the fields of American studies and black studies, respectively, "frequently position the nation as a dialectical stepping-stone toward a supranational sphere that appears as more desirable than its national shadow… Still, these discourses often replicate and reify the very nation form they are seeking to escape" (30). While I am in agreement that this is clearly a glaring contradiction in much diasporic discourse, I do not discount the validity of the diaspora to those who find refuge in its affective *inter*national community, albeit imagined. Correspondingly, following Moten's work, I situate my conceptualization of the African diaspora in an *inter*national framework, as opposed to a *trans*national one. Moten, in defense of black internationalism in his essay "The New International of Rhythmic Feel/ings" from *Black and Blur*, admits that "it is tempting to say that internationalism or diasporism have become teleological principles run amok—false and empty universalities whose excesses align them with imperial,

neoliberal capitalism as an ideal and as a set of commodities" (*Blur* 116). Nevertheless, according to Moten, "An irreducible utopics of the International is still to be desired, against all positivisms…even if no one can locate it anywhere other than in its disrupted and disruptive locales… The International is in that it is in the local—the only and infinite possible space…for that impossible place, the Internation" (*Blur* 116). In other words, the nowhere that is "the Internation" is, and can only be manifested, in the local, wherever that locale may be across the expanse of the globe. With this in mind, I rely chiefly on Lélia Gonzalez's notion of *Améfrica* in formulating my theoretical framework for analyzing the ways in which Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte imagine the space of the Internation in their respective representations of the African diaspora.

Gonzalez's theory of "*Amefricanidade*" (i.e. "*Amefricanity*") stems from her notion of *Améfrica*, which is a *portmanteau*; a combination of the signifiers for the continents of "América" and "Africa."[13] Gonzalez links her own theory of *Amefricanidade* with global black movements, such as Panafricanism, *Négritude*, and Afrocentricity. It is by way of these confluential notions that *Amefricanidade* sustains the collective international imaginary couched in the signifier "Africa." Gonzalez posits that her theory of *Amefricanidade* in addition to the Afrocentric thought of other black cultural producers associated with the *Moviemento Negro Brasileiro* (i.e. Black Brazilian Movement),[14] offers epistemologies different from that of hegemonic Eurocentric culture—one based in the Enlightenment, and one that, despite its claims of humanism, perpetuates anti-blackness across the Americas. Gonzalez confirms the presence of this

[13] See Gonzalez's 1988 essay "A categoria politico-cultural de amefricanidade" (127-38).
[14] For more on the Black Movement in Brazil, see Emanuelle K. F. Oliveira's *Writing Identity: The Politics of Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literature* (2008).

conceptual shift in her own theory here: "a *Améfrica*, enquanto sistema etnogeográfico de referencia, é uma criação nossa e de nossos antepassados no continente em que viemos, inspirados em modelos africanos" ["*Améfrica*, though an ethnographic system of reference, is our creation and also one of our ancestors on the continent from which we came, it is inspired by African models"] ("Categoria" 135). Thus, with a new epistemology based in Afrocentric culture, black peoples, and black women especially in Gonzalez's view, throughout the American hemisphere are able to realize a form of liberty by reclaiming their own bodies via embodied knowledge and affective ancestral memory.

In this vein, Gonzalez proposes, *Améfrica* is based in the embodied knowledge of a "uma experiência histórica comum" ["a common historical experience"], that of anti-blackness, affective realities of the afterlives of colonialism and slavery ("Categoria" 135). Gonzalez confirms that the everyday affective realities brought about by systemic racism across the hemisphere is what unites "*Amefricanos*" from varying nations in the following lines: "Embora pertençamos a diferentes sociedades do continente, sabemos que o sistema de dominação é o mesmo em todas elas, ou seja: o racismo" ["Though we belong to different societies of the continent, we know that the system of domination is the same in all of them: racism"] ("Categoria" 135). Accordingly, for Gonzalez *Amefricanidade* is "uma 'categoria politico-cultural'" ["a 'cultural-political category'"] that refers to "*Amefricanos*," which is her way of saying, Afro-descendants living in the Americas. As Gonzalez affirms in her own words,

> Para além do seu caráter puramente geográfico, a categoria de *Amefricanidade* incorpora todo um processo histórico de intensa dinâmica

> cultural...que é afrocentrada... Em consequência, ela nos encaminha no sentido da construção de todo uma identidade étnica [beyond its purely geographic character, the category of *Amefricanidade* embodies an entire historical process of an intensive Afrocentric cultural dynamic… Consequently, Amefricanidade leads us to the construction of above all an ethnic identity]. ("Categoria" 135)

Thus, *Amefricanidade* attempts to subvert the hegemony of African American discourse in the diaspora, and also simultaneously to reconcile Afro-descendent peoples from all over the Americas in order to form a hemispheric community that does not transcend nations, but rather subsumes them in the space of the American continental land mass to create a new diasporic identity, however, not an essentializing transnational one. That is to say, *Amefricanidade* provides us with a critical lens for understanding the imaginary of the black Internation that is the African diaspora via its insistence on continental and hemispheric, as opposed to transnational, perspectives. In this respect, Gonzalez herself proposes that *Amefricanidade*,

> nos permite ultrapassar as limitações de caráter territorial, linguístico, e ideológico, abrindo novas perspectivas para um entendimento mais profundo dessa parte do mundo onde ela se manifesta: A *América* como um todo (Sul, Central, Norte e Insular) [permits us to surpass the limitations of a territorial, linguistic, and ideological nature, opening new perspectives for a deeper understanding of that part of the world where it manifests: *América* as a whole (South, Central, North, and Insular)]. ("Categoria" 135)

Significantly, Gonzalez does not mention "surpassing," or transcending, the nation. Rather, Gonzalez offers a way of envisioning the Americas that is conceptualized around the hemispheric continental landmass in its totality. Accordingly, Gonzalez seeks to coalesce an Afrocentric community across the diaspora of the Americas—from Brazil, to the United States, the Caribbean, et cetera—around the common quotidian affective experiences of living with the afterlives of colonialism and slavery and navigating a global society structured by anti-blackness.[15] Gonzalez's *Amefricanidade* allows us to concomitantly consider the particularities of the local, as well as the parallels of the global, in different cultural producers' representations of the Internation of *Améfrica* in Brazil. Therefore, I employ Gonzalez's *Améfrica* as a methodology for analyzing how the respective Afro-diasporic literatures of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte deal with the issue of hemispheric American racism throughout my dissertation.

Despite these important critical interventions to Gilroy's theory of the Black Atlantic, Santana Pinho's *Mama Africa* remains crucial for thinking about the ways in which Afro-diasporic cultural producers imagine "Africa," or the "Internation" of "*Améfrica*," in Brazil. In order to illustrate how black Brazilian cultural organizations themselves propagate "the myth of Mama Africa", Santana Pinho provides the example of the *Movimento Negro Brasileiro*, and specifically as manifested in the city of Salvador de Bahia. Santana Pinho reports that the diasporic organization's primary objective is

[15] Interestingly, in this same essay, Gonzalez expressly references black churches in South Carolina as communities of resistance against Eurocentric epistemic violence: "O puritanismo do colonizador anglo-americano…forçou-os ao esquecimento de suas *Raízes* africanas… Mas a resistência cultural se manteve, e…sobre tudo em comunidades da Carolina do Sul" ["The Anglo-American colonizer's puritanism…forced black peoples to forget their African *Roots*… But the cultural resistance continues, and…especially so in communities in South Carolina"] (133-4).

two-fold in the sense that it simultaneously seeks to challenge "the myth of racial democracy" while also establishing a particular black identity (*Mama* 21). In the same vein, Santana Pinho continues, stating, "[the black movement] believes this is necessary in order to reach two major goals: overcoming the long-held belief that racism does not exist in Brazil and proving that there is a black particularity in spite of the nations hegemonic discourse of *mestiçagem* [miscegenation]" (*Mama* 21). [16] While Santana Pinho certainly agrees that combating the myth of racial democracy and deconstructing Brazil's national project of *mestiçagem* is an important cultural task in Brazilian society,[17] she takes issue with the essentialist discourses and identity politics that the *Movimento Negro* concurrently propagates in doing so. Regardless, in conjunction with the larger *Movimento Negro*, the numerous *blocos afros* (i.e. black Brazilian cultural organizations) of Salvador have been exceptionally successful at rendering the city one of the most important cultural heritage sites of the Afro-diasporic imaginary—of course, indeed both Keene and Jones represent Bahia in their books. Correspondingly, Santana Pinho describes the dynamic relationship between Bahia and the African diaspora as well as the manner in which Salvador has become a stand-in for this imagined Africa:

> The search for Africa in Bahia, and specifically the city of Salvador, the locus of Brazil's most celebrated black culture…has made Salvador even more 'Africanized.' In turn, Bahia's increasing aura of blackness has

[16] Santana Pinho follows Peter Wade's approach to the history of nation-building projects of miscegenation in Latin America (*Mama* 19). See Wade's influential work *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* for more on this topic.

[17] For her part, in her piece, "Democracia racial? Nada disso!" "[Racial Democracy? None of That!"], Lélia Gonzalez states, "esse papo que a miscigenação é prova da 'democracia racial' brasileira não está com nada" ["talk that miscegenation is a proof of Brazil's 'racial democracy' isn't true at all"] ("Democracia" 203).

> rendered it extremely attractive to those in search of its purported Africanness, as can be seen in the ever-growing number of African American roots tourists. In essence, the diaspora has also searched for Bahia, a search that has shaped Bahia's position within the Black Atlantic networks that connects the imaginaries of blackness and Africanness. (*Mama* 23-4)

Here, Santana Pinho markedly suggests that the diaspora, and particularly African Americans, have sought out Bahia—in large part due to "the cliché that Brazil is the blackest country outside Africa" (*Mama* 15)—as a more accessible way to visit the motherland. In this way, Santana Pinho shows how Bahia, and by extension Brazil, functions as an imagined "Africa" in the diaspora.

Accordingly, in her subsequent book *Mapping Diaspora: African American Roots Tourism in Brazil*, Santana Pinho suggests that African American roots tourists perceive Bahia, and Salvador especially, as a more reachable "Africa." As she writes, "The contemporary reinventions of Africa have contributed to solidify Bahia's reputation as 'Africa in the Americas' and, thus, as a 'closer Africa' for African Americans" (*Mapping* 7). Keeping this diasporic phenomenon described by Santana Pinho in mind, what is at stake in this project is examining whether or not in their literary representations of Brazil Keene and Jones engage in a type of literary tourism. While the phrase "literary tourism" is perhaps most commonly utilized to describe acts such as visiting Miguel de Cervantes' birthplace outside of Madrid, or attending the James Joyce Bloomsday Festival in Dublin, etc., against this grain, I contort its commonly understood meaning to consider how authors and readers alike travel in Afro-diasporic literature. That is to say, I am invested

in better comprehending the ways in which from their *lugares de fala* in the United States, Keene and Jones both imagine the African diaspora via speculative acts of travel to colonial Brazil in *Counternarratives* and *Palmares*, respectively. Conversely, for the most part, Evaristo and Bixarte do not venture outside their home nations of Brazil in their representations of the African diaspora, and therefore, their works cannot be categorized as literary tourism. Nevertheless, in parallel fashion, I remain interested in exploring Evaristo and Bixarte's respective speculative journeys to an imagined Africa, that is to say, their invocations of the myth of Mama Africa via their *Candomblé*-inflected literary aesthetics.[18] Nevertheless, nagging questions remain about Keene and Jones' literary tourism: Are the publications of both *Counternarratives* and *Palmares* an act of cultural appropriation? Are they acts of exploitation or neocolonial violence? Are Keene and Jones' respective explorations (the cognate of which in Portuguese is, *exploitation*) of Brazil instances of US imperialism? In the chapters that follow, I will deal with these issues and more in order to consider African American thought's hegemony in the international black discursive space that is the diaspora.

Santana Pinho's *Mapping Diaspora* is helpful in answering these questions, as she further investigates the diaspora's continuous search for "Africa" in Bahia. Santana Pinho reconfirms that the practice of diaspora is often not realized as a physical return to the African continent, but rather, to a speculative Africa in the space of the black imaginary. To this end, Santana Pinho complicates traditional understandings of the diaspora, affirming, "The African American search for roots in Brazil confirms contemporary understandings that diasporas are as much about decentered, lateral connections as they

[18] For more on *Candomblé*, see James Lorand Matory's book *Black Atlantic religion: tradition, transnationalism, and matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé.*

are about the teleology of return to an allegedly exclusive center" (*Mapping* 2). Moreover, Santana Pinho also complicates contemporary understandings of tourism that are too quick to write it off as a form of neocolonial violence; as she states, "Despite tourism's intimate connections with exploitation and inequality, unilateral approaches that propose that tourism is evil, or a mere reenactment of colonialism, or just a new form of imperialism, do not suffice to understand tourism's complexities" (*Mapping*. 4). Consequently, following Santana Pinho, I contend that if, in fact, Keene and Jones' respective hemispheric Afro-diasporic aesthetics can be viewed as a type of literary tourism, one ought not necessarily see it as an act of neo-colonial violence or exploitation. Rather, African American roots tourism is a unique type of tourism in that African American roots tourists, as Santana Pinho asserts, "in contrast to other types of tourist, who are usually interested in the exoticism of the 'Other,' they crisscross the Atlantic hoping to find the 'same,' represented by their 'black brothers and sisters'" (*Mapping* 9). The homosocial act of seeking sameness abroad—that is to say, of imagining an affective community around the embodied knowledge and collective cultural memory of the history of slavery in the Americas and its ceaseless afterlives—is to practice the African diaspora. This diasporic phenomenon of seeking out sameness in the black imaginary can be observed in the travel narratives of African American roots tourists as well as in speculative literary tourism of *Counternarratives* and *Palmares* alike. Furthermore, I will also demonstrate that a comparable search for the "Same" is evident in Evaristo's novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* and Bixarte's corpus of social media performance art, in consideration of their mutual representations of Afro-diasporic ancestral memory and the myth of Mama Africa.

In continuation of this line of thought, Michelle D. Commander, in her book *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic*, offers a critical bridge between Santana Pinho's research on African American roots tourism in Brazil and the works of Keene and Jones especially. Influenced at least in part by Santana Pinho's book *Mama Africa*, Commander investigates the ways in which some black peoples imagine a speculative return to "Africa," that is, enact the Afro-diasporic imaginary. Commander deals not only with narratives of everyday African American roots tourists, as does Santana Pinho, but also with "Afro-Atlantic flights" as represented in black cultural production, predominantly in speculative literature and travel narratives. As Commander states, "Flights of the imagination, as physical movements or devices of cultural production, reconstruct middle passages to conceptualize the voyages as well as to lend a sense of revolutionary possibility to freedom dreams" (7-8). In summoning the middle passage,[19] Commander defines the speculative act of reconfiguring "middle passages" within the space of the black imaginary as a radical and revolutionary epistemology of the African diaspora. In her own words below, Commander concisely captures the theory that she develops over the course of her book, "Afro-speculation:"

> Afro-speculation as a modality for living is conditional and conjectural; the evidentiary matters not. Afro-speculation is an investment in the unseen and precarious; it is a gamble. It is the belief in the possibility of the establishment of new, utopic realities outside of dominant society despite the lack of proof that Black social life is conceivable. The humanistic qualities and liberatory nature of the genre renders speculative

[19] For more on the history of the "middle passage," see Stephanie E. Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (2007).

> thought a fantastic, radical epistemological modality through which Afro-Atlantic identity can be lived across time and space. (6)

Accordingly, Commander views "Afro-Atlantic flights" as a revolutionary mode of being that allows those Afro-descendants who choose to imagine themselves a part of the collective black imaginary to connect with others Afro-descendants across the divides of time and space. Commander articulates her definition of "flight" succinctly here: "Flight is transcendence over one's reality—an escape predicated on imagination and the incessant longing to be free" (7). To be clear, for Commander, "Afro-Atlantic flight," or what she alternatively calls, "Afro-Atlantic speculation" and "Neoteric Pan-Africanism," "is not synonymous with or contingent upon literal returns. It is about determining how to live more freely in the present and how to fly resolutely into the future" (19). Put another way, Afro-Atlantic flight—or, the practice of diaspora—does not signify an actual return to the continent of Africa, but rather, an imagined "Africa;" it is a speculative performance of black utopia that occurs in the present with the objective of affecting the future by understanding the past of the Afro-Atlantic and its history of colonialism and slavery. Correspondingly, in the course of my analysis, I will argue that Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte all create a form of Afro-speculative literature, though each in their own right, as described by Commander above.

In this vein, in her investigation of African American cultural production that represents Brazil, and particularly Bahia, Commander employs the Portuguese word "*saudade*" in a theoretical valence to express a "longing," "nostalgia," or "homesickness," for a speculative Africa that only exists in the black imaginary of the African diaspora. As Commander explains in her own words, "Portuguese-speaking

peoples often utilize the term *saudade* to express [a] sentiment of nostalgia for some person, thing, or place—a rememory of an essence and a desire for nearness to it again. Afro-Atlantic saudade is an active response to the disconnections that African-descended people feel as a result of slavery and its subsequent diasporas" (128). Therefore, as a result of feeling the affective sensation that is saudade, some Afro-descended peoples in both the US and Brazil embark on their own respective flights of return to "Africa" via the black imaginary. In alignment with Santana Pinho, Commander examines narratives from African American roots tourist in Salvador de Bahia. Commander points out the complex multivalent nature of imagining the diaspora contingent on one's lugar de fala; as she states, "The persistent refiguring of Africa in Bahia suggests that literal migrations from the United States to Bahia, as well as the flights of the imagination that guide cultural productions in Bahia, are indicative of Afro-Atlantic peoples' concurrent traversals of a spectrum of fantasy" (157). In other words, there is a vast array of radical potential imaginings of the diaspora via Afro-speculation, however, one's lugar de fala factors heavily into the ways in which it is conceptualized by individual black peoples in different locales. The multiplicity of possible imaginings of the African diaspora between black cultural producers in the United States and Brazil is precisely what interests me in this dissertation.

With all this in mind, I not only read Keene's *Counternarratives* and Jones' *Palmares* as examples of "Afro-Atlantic speculation" in agreement with Commander's theory, but I also interpret the works of Evaristo and Bixarte in the same manner, despite that they primarily represent their home nation, Brazil. While Keene and Jones take "flight" to Brazil, on the contrary, Evaristo and Bixarte imagine a return to a speculative

"Africa" in their engagement with cultural traditions of the Afro-Brazilian religion *Candomblé* in their literature and performance art, respectively. Analogously, Jayna Brown's innovative research in *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds* provides insights into the very real radical potential of black speculative literature and performance across the African diaspora. Brown's central argument "is that because black people have been excluded from the category *human*, [they] have a particular epistemic and ontological mobility. Unburdened by investments in belonging to a system created to exclude [them] in the first place, [black people] develop marvelous modes of being in and perceiving the universe" (7). That is to say, Brown claims, "there is real power to be found in such an untethered state," and this is black utopia. Brown emphasizes that while the term *utopia* "is often used as a pejorative to indicate the failure of a humanist project…or to acclaim the hope of its fulfillment," conversely she shifts "the concept of utopia into a no-place, into an elsewhere" (6). Brown asserts that it is in this liminal space of "alienation," or what she calls "this shadow state," "that [black people] have built, and continue to build, alternative worlds, in this dimension and in others, and practice alternative ways of being alive" (7). In demonstrating her notion of "black utopia," Brown explores the works of experimental black musicians, such as Alice Coltrane and Sun Ra, in addition to black speculative writers, like Octavia E. Butler and Samuel R Delany.[20] Accordingly, in line with Brown, I will analyze the ways in which, via their speculative literatures of "Afro-Atlantic flight," Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte, each practice a distinct form of black utopia in imagining and representing the African diaspora from their own particular *lugar de fala*.

[20] John Keene's *Counternarratives* is dedicated, in part, to Samuel R. Delany.

Through my investigation of the Afro-diasporic speculative literatures presented in this dissertation, I will contemplate the ways in which each cultural producer deals with "the myth of racial democracy" as well as the tensions between the nation-state and the international black imaginary that constitutes the diaspora. In conjunction with Brown's concept of "black utopia," Moten's theorization of "statelessness" from *Stolen Life* is key to my thinking in this regard. Again, in his piece "Notes on Passage," Moten considers the figure of the refugee, and in doing so, also the radical potential of "statelessness" in "the middle passage," that is, the journey enslaved black peoples were forced to make by slave ship from the African continent to the Americas. In this vein, Moten offers some key critical interventions in diaspora studies as well as a corollary to Brown's work that simultaneously elucidates the Afro-diasporic literatures of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte. For Moten, the study of the refugee parallels the study of diaspora, as it is "[a] study of and in displacement, in and through this interval, [that] occurs in some regions we are making and unmaking, the region of our making and unmaking, called the Atlantic World" (*Life* 196).[21] Although Gilroy also deals extensively with the middle passage, Moten's conceptualization of statelessness is in direct contradiction to "the Black Atlantic," as the latter critiques his counterpart's "unfortunate romance with the nation-state" (*Life* 198). According to Gilroy, "Ships…refer [one] back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialization and modernization. As it were, getting on board promises a means to reconceptualise [sic] the orthodox relationship between modernity and what passes for its prehistory" (Gilroy 17). However,

[21] To clarify, Moten's use of the first-person plural here refers to black peoples.

again Moten is not interested in re-conceptualizing linear narratives of history, or the progress of the nation-state. Rather, like Brown's black utopia, Moten's notion of statelessness opens unto another dimension, or as he calls it a "slit or envelope in spacetime" (*Life* 209), the "interval" between subject and object, which is analogous with the middle passage, and it is from this mode of black being, this ontology, that revolutionary epistemologies of resistance emerge.

Nevertheless, beyond his disagreement with Gilroy, Moten observes a fundamental flaw at the core of transnational discourses of the African diaspora, in particular the respective scholarly works of Kamari Maxine Clark and Michelle M. Wright. As he elaborates, "The operative distinction is neither between the postcolonial state and diaspora nor the (neo-)imperial state and diaspora; the problem is the relationship between the state, however it is conceived and instantiated, and statelessness" (*Life* 200). In other words, an African diasporic state, a Pan-African, or a Black Nationalist state, is just as dangerous as any neoliberal state, in consideration of the inherent dangers of the nation-state as proven throughout modern history. Hence, Moten proposes statelessness, which commingles with Brown's notion of black utopia, and this becomes remarkably palpable in the following passage:

> The middle passage is and opens onto an alternative warp, enacting its own singular rupture of the space-time continuum, of a transcendental aesthetic that lays down the terms and conditions of possibility for the modern subject of knowledge and power. Having been abandoned to ceaseless passage the prisoner, the refugee, the black student is enjoined to

> enjoy that abandon wherein statelessness is imagined and enacted as a kind of aninterpellative shift. (*Life* 209)

Though their vocabulary may differ to some extent, there are clear confluences between Brown and Moten's respective notions. The interval or "alternative warp" that is Moten's conceptualization of the middle passage is congruent with Brown's theory of black utopia. That is to say, Moten's notion of "passage" is an ontology and epistemological practice that is representative of the everyday experience of the African diaspora; of living with the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in *Améfrica*; of the affective realities of anti-blackness; of being displaced; of statelessness. Thus, statelessness allows the black student (for instance) to perform an unlearning of anti-black, heteronormative Eurocentric hegemonic cultures and structures, and thereby to be liberated in the "no-place"—to borrow an adjective from Brown (6)—black imaginary that is the African diaspora. Brown herself would simply dub this the art of black utopia. Ultimately, against the rubric of the nation, Moten makes a proposition in the form of a question: "What if what remains of value of in Afro-American thought and life is the example of life in statelessness and not…emergence into citizenship?" (*Life* 211). Moten's implication here is that for black peoples to exist in the middle passage, that is, to be in the interval between subject and object, a non-citizen, in effect *nowhere*, consequently engenders an ontology and epistemology that allows for radical reimaginings of the nation-state and its master narratives of history. Therefore, with Moten, Brown, and Commander all in mind, I argue that from the interval of statelessness, the revolutionary space of passage, Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte practice black utopia in their Afro-Atlantic speculative

representations of the diaspora in Brazil, each of which functions as a counter-narrative to the nation-state's discourse of racial democracy.

While there are many important distinctions to be made between the respective Afro-diasporic literatures of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte, each of these four black cultural producers are similarly invested in resisting the afterlives of colonialism and slavery that span the American hemisphere. The pieces of Afro-diasporic literature studied in this dissertation dismantle systems of anti-blackness across the Americas by imagining alternative forms of community building via Afro-Atlantic speculation, and in doing so, exemplify black utopia and statelessness. Furthermore, Christina Sharpe's book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* theorizes "the weather" as a metaphor and method for understanding the "pervasive climate of anti-blackness" (106) across the Americas that has surfaced "in the wake," which is to say, in the afterlives, of colonialism and slavery. In her study, Sharpe contends that "Black being in the wake" is a "form of consciousness," and moreover, that "to be *in* the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding" (13-14). In this same respect, Sharpe later explains, "To be in the wake is…to live in the no-space that the law is not bound to respect, to live in no citizenship" (16). From this philosophical standpoint, Sharpe posits that through the practice of "wake work," "we [black peoples] might continue to imagine new ways to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery's afterlives, to survive (and more) the afterlife of property" (18). More succinctly, Sharpe asserts that wake work is "a theory and praxis of Black being in diaspora," or in other words, a method for existence in an omnipresent atmosphere of anti-blackness (19). Correlatively, in accordance with Sharpe, I consider the Afro-diasporic literatures of this

dissertation as "wake work," by which I mean to say, black cultural production that reveals the afterlives of colonialism and slavery as well as the ubiquitous climate of anti-blackness that stretches across the hemisphere while also offering revolutionary Afrocentric epistemologies for community building and resistance.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Chapter 1 of my dissertation examines four key stories from John Keene's collection *Counternarratives*. With "Anthropophagy," Keene represents the renowned Brazilian modernist Mário de Andrade in an Afro-Atlantic speculative narrative that portrays the historical figure as finding affective refuge in Brazil's black homosexual community, as opposed to in the modernist art circle of Oswald de Andrade and the likes. In doing so, with inspiration from Evaristo, Keene dramatizes the disentanglement of Mário's novel *Macunaíma* from its cultural association with discourses of the Brazilian nation-state, and instead re-appropriates it as *Literatura negra*, which is to say, literature produced by black Brazilian authors. I argue that this story is vital to understanding *Counternarratives* because Keene co-opts Mário's literary aesthetic of *"Antropofagia*" to represent the plurality of black culture and experience in various locales of the African diaspora. Through my analysis of "A Letter on the Trials of the Counterreformation in New Lisbon," which takes place in colonial Brazil, I demonstrate the fantastic thread of Afro-Atlantic speculation in Keene's fiction. In this story, Keene represents a "sorcerer" named Burunbana, who through the embodied knowledge and Afro-Brazilian religious practices of *Quimbanda*, is able to open a portal to another dimension, the space of "black utopia," and thereby, access a fugitive community, or *quilombo*. However, Keene

prompts his audience to read "The Lions," the final piece in his collection *Counternarratives*, as "a counterpoint to and culmination" of the others, and thus, with this particular story, he warns against employing the radical potential of Afrocentric epistemologies in the service of black nationalism, or any nation-state for that matter. Finally, Keene's story, "On Brazil, or Dénouement: The Londônias-Figuieras," distills a centuries-long familial revenge saga into a speculative short fiction that depicts the ways in which the specter of slavery continues to haunt modern Brazilian society by linking the *quilombos* of the past with the "*favelas*" of the present. Ultimately, I propose that when read in juxtaposition, the stories that comprise *Counternarratives* represent Keene's speculative imagining of statelessness in the African diaspora of the Americas—*Améfrica*.

In Chapter 2, I explore Gayl Jones' new novel *Palmares*, which is a palimpsestic re-imagining of her 1981 book-length epic poem *Song for Anninho.* I argue that Jones' aesthetic in *Palmares* draws from the Afrocentric tradition of oral storytelling, the US literary tradition of slave narratives, and what I have defined elsewhere as the quixotic picaresque (explain). Because Brazil does not share the US's tradition of slave narratives, I contend that with *Palmares*, Jones unearths the buried histories of slavery in seventeenth-century Brazil by representing her protagonist Almeyda's first-person account in the form of an Afro-Atlantic speculative, *neo*-slave narrative. Through Almeyda's testimony, Jones represents colonial Brazil as a globalized, pluralistic multicultural society, and in doing so, complicates the nation-state's totalizing discourses of racial democracy, which seek to establish an essential Brazilian national identity via the process of miscegenation. Furthermore, against essentialist notions of Afro-diasporic

identity, Jones' *Palmares* underscores the plurality of black peoples by representing an array of Afro-descendant characters with different religious, ethnic, and cultural beliefs stemming from the distinct traditions of Christianity, Islam, and *Candomblé*, respectively. In her novel, Jones depicts the historical *quilombo* Palmares as well and its leader King Zumbi against the trend of mythologizing legends that portray the fugitive community as an idealized society, a utopian racial democracy. Instead, Jones' representation of the diaspora in *Palmares* is an instantiation of the Internation that exists between the US and Brazil, and her imagining of statelessness/black utopia, of *Améfrica*, offers a speculative cautionary tale against recapitulating the nation-state.

Chapter 3 of my dissertation evaluates Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* as an especially significant example of Afro-diasporic literature because it is one of the few novels authored by a black Brazilian woman that has been translated and published in English. I situate Evaristo's poetics of "*escrevivência*"—that is, her term for writing from everyday life experience (another *portmanteau*)—in the tradition of Brazilian *Literatura negra* by linking her aesthetics to Carolina Maria de Jesus' foundational work *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada* (1960) (English: *Child of the Dark*). Via her poetics of *escrevivência*, Evaristo writes, concomitantly, from her own individual experience as a black woman living in modern Brazil as well as through the Afrocentric epistemology of *quilombismo*, which maintains fugitive community-building as its chief imperative. As a parallel, I read *Ponciá Vicêncio* as an Afro-diasporic work of *Literatura marginal* (Marginal literature) that navigates slavery's "wake" and resists the alienating space of the modern Brazilian "*gueto*" (*favela*) in and through the revolutionary communal space of the *quilombo*. Melissa Schindler's essay "Home, or the Limits of the Black Atlantic,"

couches Evaristo's novel in its national context, arguing against Paul Gilroy's theory for analyzing *Ponciá Vicêncio*, and thereby, attempts to extricate it from the *inter*national black imaginary. While I too agree that Gilroy's *trans*national paradigm is flawed, in contrast to Schindler's argument, my analysis shows that Evaristo indeed imagines the Internation of the African diaspora via her *fantastic* Afro-speculative representation of the community of re-fugitivity to be found in the embrace of Iemanjá and Oxum—*orixás*, or deities, in the Afro-Brazilian religion of *Candomblé*. In this way, Evaristo imagines black utopia/stateless in her home nation, and posits *quilombismo* and *Amefricano* embodied knowledge and communal memory as epistemological practices for living with the afterlives of slavery in modern Brazil.

With Chapter 4, I expand my conceptualization of Afro-diasporic literatures by exploring the "black digital poetics" (to borrow a phrase from Keene) of Bixarte's social media performance art, which primarily circulates on apps like YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify. Bixarte's name is yet another *portmanteau*; in this case, of the Portuguese words *bixa* and *arte*, thus signifying her artistic objective of representing her black trans community (explain). Accordingly, following José Esteban Muñoz, I interpret Bixarte's body of work as "ephemeral queer performance," and thus, employ Patricia Hill Collins' notion of "self-definition" in order to consider the ways in which Bixarte's social media performance art fosters an Afro-diasporic black trans community in queer "safe spaces" of the internet. In this regard, I propose that the four music videos that make up Bixarte's digital EP *A Nova Era* ("*The New Era"*) subvert global heteronormativity and anti-blackness—what the Brazilian black *trans* feminist Letícia Nascimento potently refers to as, the "*cistema*" (cisgender-system). Moreover, like Evaristo, Bixarte also dismantles the

Eurocentric heteronormative *cistema* by invoking Afrocentric epistemologies of *Candomblé* in her imagining of the African diaspora. I then go on to argue that Bixarte's digitally recorded slam poem "A Paz do preto" ("Black Peace")—which was originally performed "in the wake" of the murder of George Floyd and first posted to Instagram—is her particular imagining of black utopia; her representation of the "stateless" Internation that is *Améfrica*. With her hemispheric queer performance, then, Bixarte urges us, her audience, to ask ourselves: if when we say "As vidas negras importam" (#BLM), are we including black *trans* lives? In this respect, Bixarte's "A Paz do preto," as well as her larger corpus of Afro-diasporic social media performance art, is a call for visibility and the recognition of black Brazilians and all black *trans* peoples, alike, in the discursive space that is the international black imaginary.

To conclude my dissertation, I ultimately propose that while the black US literatures of Keene and Jones primarily represent the African diaspora in a speculative past that imagines the erased histories of enslaved peoples in colonial Brazil, Evaristo and Bixarte's respective modes of Afro-speculative literature are more concerned with representing the ways in which everyday black peoples navigate and resist the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in today's modern Brazilian society. Nevertheless, at the same time, all the Afro-diasporic cultural producers whose works I study are similarly invested in the common objective of dispelling the enduring (inter)national myth of racial democracy in Brazil. In order to definitively debunk this nationalist racist myth, I contend that more cross-cultural translations of Afro-diasporic literatures between the US and Brazil are absolutely key (Portuguese to English, and vice versa). Although there exists some contemporary examples of works of Brazilian *Literatura negra* published in

English, I believe that if we US academics were to direct our critical gazes to Brazil by engaging with the cultural production already available in translation, we would help to further facilitate the conditions of possibility for the discursive space that is the international black imaginary. To do so, I argue, is to counteract the intradiasporic hegemony of African American thought in the international black imaginary, which in turn, is also to contest totalizing essentialist notions of Afro-diasporic identity.

CHAPTER 1: JOHN KEENE'S *COUNTERNARRATIVES*

John Keene is an author, translator, poet, critic, professor, and also a 2018 recipient of a MacArthur "genius grant." Still, there has been very little criticism published on his work to date. However, with its profound artistic scope and expansive philosophical underpinnings, which ultimately comprise a speculative re-imagining of the past and future of the African diaspora, Keene's most recent work *Counternarratives* (2015) demands further study. *Counternarratives* is a mind-blowing collection of thirteen stories and novellas centered around various portraits of fictional characters as well as reimagined historical actors, especially black artists and performers, whose respective stories resonate as a novelistic whole. Keene's collection offers an intertextual montage of individual histories from different counterpoints in both space and time within the diaspora that, when juxtaposed without hierarchization, accompany one another in symphonic fashion. In harmony, these pieces aspire to represent the collective shared experience of anti-blackness suffered by peoples of African descent—or those similarly marginalized—in the Americas within the context, as well as the afterlives, of slavery and colonialism. Keene's stories are thus concerned with issues of representation, as they remember the forgotten, unearth the buried, rewrite the erased, imagine the undocumented, and give voice to those marginalized due to their race, gender, class, and/or sexuality.

Keene's collection is virtuosic; his stories not only map blackness throughout much of the hemisphere, they also span from the early 1600's to the imminent future,

forming a bricolage of distinct print-cultural artifacts. In other words, each story is quite different in its form, as Keene's palette of generic styles ranges from neo-baroque to borgesian, academic to lyrical, historical to fantastic, and beyond. For instance, in a fashion similar to Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda's "false *Quijote*,"[22] Keene writes a palimpsestic continuation of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from the formerly enslaved Jim's point of view, and thus, readers see Huck, the personification of rugged American individualism, cast in a new light—as a quiet but violent racist. Other examples from the collection include Keene's rendering of the final moments and eventual suicide of Bob Cole, the Black composer of the infamous minstrel song "A Trip to Coon Town" in "Cold" as well as a story about Langston Hughes in Mexico with "Blues", and another about a Black woman trapeze artist who eludes the gaze of Edgar Degas in "Acrobatique," among too many more to list here. Nonetheless, outside Keene's native country of the United States it is to Brazil that he returns to most in *Counternarratives*. Accordingly, I argue that in his brand of literary tourism, Keene co-opts Mário de Andrade's aesthetics of *"antropofagia"* to represent various nodes of the African diaspora in space and time through the practice of what Michelle D. Commander calls, "Afro-Atlantic speculation." Furthermore, I claim that Keene's deconstruction of Western modernity in his representation of the diaspora is the speculative art of "black utopia" as well as "statelessness," in conversation with Jayna Brown and Fred Moten, respectively. By extension, I also contend that Keene's imagining of the African diaspora in *Counternarratives* is analogous with Lélia Gonzalez's notion of "*Améfrica*."

[22] Avellaneda's *Segundo tomo del ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, which is an apocryphal sequel to Part I of the original *Don Quijote* novel (1605), was published in 1614 before the printing of Miguel de Cervantes' Part II in 1615.

Before zooming in for a closer look at *Counternarratives*, let us first deal with some burning questions that require more immediate answers: Why Keene? Why Brazil? Put quite simply, Keene is a polyglot and Portuguese just so happens to be the second language he first learned. In a blog on the *Poetry Foundation* website titled, "Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness," Keene discusses his affinity for languages, which began at quite a young age, and other cultures. As he recounts, it was by "autodidaxy, library books, perhaps as far back as middle school, mainly out of a childhood fascination with Brazil, and its people, history, and cultures" ("Translating"). Correspondingly, it is evident that for Keene, one whose "place of speech"—or "*lugar de fala*" as Brazilian black feminist philosopher Djamila Ribeiro would dub it—finds footing in the US, Brazil is central to his imagining of the African diaspora, especially as manifested in his writings, creative and academic alike. Therefore, line with Patricia de Santana Pinho, I read Keene's *Counternarratives* as an Afro-diasporic expression of imagining "the myth of Mama Africa" in Brazil. In this same essay on translating literature from the diaspora, Keene also contends US publishers produce far too few translations into English of black authors' work from around the globe. Keene, in his own words, claims, "I believe there is a considerable body of literature by writers from across the African Diaspora that is not regularly or readily being made available in English, and this…is a longstanding and continuing problem" ("Translating"). Conversely, Keene suggests, "were more black voices translated we would have a clearer sense of the connections and commonalities, as well as the differences across the African Diaspora, and better understand an array of regional, national, and hemispheric issues" ("Translating").

With these lines in mind, Brent Hayes Edwards' *The Practice of Diaspora* (2003), which has been a seminal work in the field of black diasporic studies since its initial publication, emerges as a fruitful corollary. Edwards asserts that "black internationalism," or what could also be described as the Afro-diasporic imaginary, "necessarily involves a process of linking or connecting across gaps—a practice we might term *articulation* [original emphasis]"—this word he borrows from Stuart Hall (11). For Edwards, translation and "difference" is essential to "the practice of diaspora:"

> If a discourse of diaspora articulates difference, then one must consider the status of that difference—not just linguistic difference but, more broadly, the trace or the residue, perhaps, of what resists or escapes translation. Whenever the African diaspora is articulated…these social forces leave subtle but indelible effects. Such an unevenness or differentiation marks a constitutive *décalage* in the very weave of the culture, one that cannot be either dismissed or pulled out. (13)

Edwards explains that the French term *décalage* is itself a word that is resistant to translation, however, he gives an especially intriguing and well-suited definition for this music-based essay: an "interval" (13). Edwards then clarifies by stating, "a *décalage* is either a difference or gap in time…*or* in space [original emphasis]…[it] is the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged, the received biases that refuse to pass over when one crosses the water" (13-14). Ultimately, Edwards suggests that any articulations of the African diaspora ought to be considered through this interval that is *décalage*. While Keene has translated works from Portuguese to English, *Counternarratives* is a different type of diasporic practice. Keene performs a distinct type

of translation by representing Brazil in English, yet with his Afro-diasporic poetics, he also represents the common experience of anti-blackness suffered by peoples of African descent in the American hemisphere—*Améfrica.*

In another intriguing short piece titled "'You have permission to do this,'"[23] Keene also reveals the immense influence that the Afro-diasporic Paule Marshall has had on his career as a writer. Keene just so happened to begin New York University's graduate Creative Writing program the year Marshall joined the faculty ("You" 1). In the same celebratory reflection on Marshall, Keene continues to say, "*Counternarratives* is in some ways directly influenced by and resuscitating a conversation with [Marshall's] *Soul, Clap Hands and Sing*," and even divulges that his story about Langston Hughes was significantly inspired by an anecdote she once told in class ("You" 2). Indeed it is quite apparent that the formal structure of *Counternarratives* owes much to *Soul, Clap Hands and Sing.* Marshall's 1961 work is a collection of four stories or novellas, respectively titled, "Barbados," "Brooklyn," "British Guiana," and "Brazil." Despite being written fifty years apart, both Marshall's and Keene's books share an objective of representing black experience not only in the United States, but in other locales of the diaspora as well. Beyond these connections to Brazil in the black imaginary, Keene even published an English translation of the renowned Brazilian writer Hilda Hilst's *Cartas de um seductor* as *Letters from a Seducer* in 2014.[24]

Furthermore, in a handful of recent web publications, Keene has expressly stated his interest in *Literatura* negra, or black Brazilian literature. In Brazil, the concept of

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[23] See "'You have permission to do this': John Keene Reflects on Paule Marshall's Influence." *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-3.
[24] Hilst, Hilda. *Letters from a Seducer*. Translated by John Keene, Nightboat Books, 2014.

Literatura negra is a novel way of distinguishing itself from the oft-appropriated field of Afro-Brazilian literature (the works of Jorge Amado being the premier example). That is to say, the former is distinctly written by black authors, whereas the latter merely deals with black subjects. The Brazilian black feminist philosopher, novelist, and poet Conceição Evaristo has developed the concept of *Literatura negra* most extensively, is its preeminent proponent, and publishes black Brazilian literature with regularity. In an article titled, "Literatura negra: uma poética de nossa afro-brasilidade" ["Black literature: the poetics of our Afro-Brazilianness,"] Evaristo rails against those who, predominantly motivated by white supremacy, deny the existence of black Brazilian literature, and briefly define the field of study by asserting, "[*Literatura negra*] se constituiria como uma produção escrita marcada por uma subjetividade construída, experimentada, vivenciada a partir da condição de homens negros e de mulheres negras na sociedade brasileira" ["*Literatura negra* is written cultural production that is distinguished by its particular subjectivity, which is constructed, experienced, and lived by black men and women in Brazilian society"] (17). Evaristo's work has often drawn comparisons to Toni Morrison by Brazilian and American critics alike, though only her debut and most famous novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* (2003) has been translated to English (2007).

Keene is undoubtedly familiar with Evaristo's work and other discourses of *Literatura negra*, as he makes clear in his collaborative online essay in *Words Without Borders.* Aside from contemporary black Brazilian literature, Keene is also invested in classic pieces of the Brazilian literary canon, notably those of Machado de Assis and Mário de Andrade. However, with inspiration from Evaristo and other prominent advocates of *Literatura negra,* he now reads and contemplates such works through the

theoretical lens of black Brazilian literature. In fact, the shortest yet most aesthetically representative story of *Counternarratives* is a dramatization of Keene's preoccupation with rereading the Brazilian canon under the framework of *Literatura negra*, and it comes in the form of a quotidian vignette, titled "Anthropophagy," depicting Mário de Andrade sometime during his final years circa 1945, which I will examine shortly.

Two of Keene's three pieces on Brazil represent entirely fictional characters. "On Brazil, or Dénouement: The Londônias-Figuieras" explores the afterlives of slavery by juxtaposing the *quilombos* of the past with the "*favelas*" of the present in a cyclical saga of revenge revolving around the Londôndias-Figueiras familial clan. The epistolary story, "A Letter on…the Counterreformation in New Lisbon" deals with religious and cultural tensions between the catholic Portuguese, the protestant Dutch, Jewish mysticism, African traditions, etc., in early seventeenth-century Brazil. The story depicts a Jewish man passing as a Catholic priest named Dom Joaquim D'Azevedo as he is tasked with righting an aberrant monastery in the Brazilian colony of Alagoas. On the other hand, "Anthropophagy," portrays a fictional version of Mário de Andrade hungover after another monotonous night of Carnaval celebrations, in a (counter-)narrative that at once humanizes and critiques the immensely important cultural figure of Brazilian Modernism. However, in analyzing each story, I choose to read these three pieces out of order, beginning with "Anthropophagy," as I believe this prose poem/flash fiction, despite being a mere two and a half pages, is key to unlocking Keene's, at times cryptic, overarching aesthetic in *Counternarratives.* Additionally, it will be imperative to examine the final story of the collection, "The Lions," as well. This piece, as Keene suggests in an interview with Tanya Foster, "functions as a counterpoint to and culmination of the first

twelve" and that although each story certainly stands on its own, they fundamentally resonate as a whole (*Bomb*). Thus, with this interplay between counterpoints or "counternarratives," there emerges an antiphony—a call and response—between each piece and "The Lions." Accordingly, the accompanying pieces are like notes in a scale. On their own, each story rings singularly representing a specific place and time, but when placed in symphony, music plays out between each note, and it is by way of these intervals—that black affect, or these *décalage* as Edwards would have it—that Keene, with his material aesthetic focused on the radical potential of bodies, articulates his imagining of the African diaspora, as I will demonstrate below.

"ANTHROPOPHAGY"

The title of Keene's "Anthropophagy" ought to be a clue to the nature of the author's aesthetic project; moreover, the fact that it is a flash fiction/prose poem also links the piece to the literary tradition of *antropofagia* in Brazil. *Antropofagia* can be defined as a mode of artistic cannibalism, in which cultural producers of Brazilian modernism consumed influences from both inside (i.e. Native American) and outside (i.e. primarily European) of Brazil (Rosenberg 78-9).[25] António de Alcântara Machado describes the primary tenet of the Brazilian modernist movement accordingly, in the 1928 inaugural edition of the *Revista de Antropofagia*,

> Não o índio. O indianismo é para nós um prato de muita sustância. Como qualquer outra escola ou movimento. De ontem, de hoje e de amanhã.

[25] See Fernando J. Rosenberg as well as Saulo Gouveia's *The Triumph of Brazilian Modernism: The Metanarrative of Emancipation and Counter-Narratives* for more on Brazilian modernism and *antropofagia*.

> Daqui e de fora. O antropófago come o índio e come o chamado civilizado: só êle fica lambendo os dedos. Pronto para engulir os irmãos [Not the Indian. Indianism is for us a plate full of substance. Like any other school or movement. Of yesterday, today and tomorrow. From here and abroad. The *antropofagista* eats the Indian and also eats the so-called civilized: only he is left licking his fingers. Ready to swallow his brothers]. (1)

Keene clearly invokes the Brazilian modernist movement associated with both Mário and Oswald de Andrade,[26] considering that, as Fernando J. Rosenberg asserts, "Anthropophagy came to stand…for the whole movement that had been officially launched at the 1922 multiple-arts festival in São Paulo" (Rosenberg 78). However, there tends to be a conflation of the two figures' aesthetics as well as a forgetting of Mário's defection from the *antropofagistas,* still Keene offers a corrective with this piece by incorporating into *Counternarratives.* In an article from the *Luso-Brazilian* Review, Kimberle S. López explains the de Andrade rift further: "Mário…collaborated in the first phase of the journal… but later did not hide his objections to some of the more radical tenets of the Anthropophagist movement… In spite of these differences, *Macunaíma* is widely recognized as a vital practical enactment of what Oswald…put forth…in his manifesto" (28). However, Keene does not confuse the two, rather his story represents Mário as estranged from Oswald and "the other radicals" (*Counter* 275). In fact, Keene appropriates Anthropophagy for his own aesthetic project. Moreover, in many of the stories throughout his hemispheric collection, Keene co-opts a Latin American aesthetic

[26] Oswald de Andrade's 1928 "Manifesto antropófago" ["Cannibalist Manifesto"] is generally seen as the paradigmatic example of Brazilian modernism or *antropofagia*.

of the fantastic that is reminiscent of something *à la* Jorge Luis Borges' *Historia universal de la infamia* (1954) or Roberto Bolaño's *La literatura nazi en América* (1996)[27]— in the sense that *Counternarratives* (re)presents apocryphal historical narratives—while also simultaneously in the line of the Black Radical Tradition and *antropofagia*. Keeping in mind Keene's intertextual incorporation of various black artistic and cultural traditions into his Afro-diasporic literature, I consider the collection as whole to be cannibalistic in nature. As a parallel to Rosenberg's analysis of Mário's novel, in which he claims, "*Macunaíma* reads *antropofagia* against the grain, exploring its impasse in relation to the colonial legacy of the modern nation—a legacy that anthropophagic theory was established to contain" (80), I believe Keene's cannibalism also to be contrapuntal, that is to say, "against the grain" of the *antropofagistas*. However, the author's collage of Afro-diasporic culture in the Americas continues where *Macunaíma* leaves off, offering a possible solution to the problem of the nation and its incessant colonial afterlives as will become clear via my analysis of "Anthropophagy."

In resisting superficial readings that "make [*Macunaíma*] stand for the sum of Brazilian nationality," Rosenberg posits that Mário's novel "exists as a model for the essential mystery of Brazilian identity" (83-4). For Rosenberg, "*Macunaíma* transcends…what Mário…called 'the stupidity of borders'" (80), accordingly, the work engages in the act of "degeographization," which he defines as "the intended juxtaposition and convivial proximity of components of different sections of Brazil…brought together in the novel with no particular concern for taxonomic order or regional origins" (86). With this in mind, Rosenberg effectively points out the ways in

[27] Published in English as *A Universal History of Iniquity* (2004) and *Nazi Literatures in the Americas* (2008), respectively.

which *Macunaíma* parodically reveals the inability of the respective theories of hybridity, transculturation, and *antropofagia* to create a national unity due to their entanglement with colonial discourse and its afterlives. In Rosenberg's words, "It is the haunting presence of the colonial that imposes in Macunaíma a belatedness that can't be solved inside the narratives of the nation. The novel represents [a] disarray of synchronicity by presenting certain narrative elements stuck in their geographical locale, eschewing every impulse of degeographization, not yet cannibalized, not integrated into a national choir" (100). From this perspective, while *Macunaíma* brings to light the failure of these discourses to establish a national identity, it does not propose an alternative model for community. Accordingly, with his appropriation of Mário's degeographizing *antropofagia* throughout *Counternarratives,* by way of his Afro-speculative literary tourism, Keene envisions a trans-national choir, an diasporic collectivity that coalesces not under the rubric of the nation, but rather, around what Gonzalez calls "the common historical experience" of anti-blackness shared by black peoples—that is, *Amefricanos*—across the Americas. Thus, Keene's collection represents a kaleidoscope of black artists, many times musicians, who express their experiences in a range of performances in which corporeality, sensation, and representation are all vital elements. In this way, Keene gestures toward, imagines, an Afro-diasporic community of black affect across the hemispheric space of *Améfrica*.

Music, performance, and representation are not only key in *Counternarratives*, but in *Macunaíma* as well. The episode in Mário's "rhapsody," as the novel is often called, in which Macunaíma participates in a *Macumba* ritual to punish Pietro Pietra, is one of the most obvious examples of performance in the novel. However, I am especially

interested in the meta-performative aspects that appear in the epilogue, in which the story is revealed to indeed be a rhapsody, that is to say, an ecstatic improvisatory musical and lyrical expression of emotion—an oral history of Brazil's diverse cultures as embodied in "o herói sem nenhum caráter" ["the hero without any character"]. The tale of Macunaíma is handed down to man by a parrot. This man (a musician/performer) makes a direct address to readers in the final lines of the novel, stating,

> eu fiquei pra vos contar a história…ponteei na violinha e em toque rasgado botei a bôca no mundo cantando na fala impura as frases e os casos de Macunaíma, herói de nossa gente (222) [I stayed on in order to tell you this story… I struck a few chords on my little fiddle, and with a sweeping touch started the mouth of the world singing in vulgar speech the deeds and words of Macunaíma, the hero of our people]. (Goodland 168)

In this final ludic act of representation, Mário suggests that everyday communal music, song, and oral history, as opposed to the written word, will proliferate Macunaíma's influence on the world.

Correlatively, Saulo Gouveia's analysis of Mário's *Ensaio sobre a música brasileira* further illuminates Mário's search for a national collective subject in folklore and popular music, and therefore, also helps to set the stage for Keene's story, "Anthropophagy." In contrast to Mário's concern with revealing the failures of the nation-state in *Macunaíma*, as is evident in his *Ensaio sobre a música brasiliera* (1928), the Brazilian modernist believed the regional folkloric and popular music of Brazil, particularly that of *O Nordeste*, to be representative of national identity, and thus,

declares “A música popular brasileira é a mais completa, mais totalmente nacional, mais forte criação da nossa raça até agora” [“Popular Brazilian Music is the most complete, and entirely national, creation of our race to date”] (7). In this respect, Gouveia locates Mário’s writing from the 1920’s in the realm of “social primitivism” by examining the author’s interest in anthropology and musicology. As Gouveia asserts, “[Mário] expresses his belief in the pragmatic, redemptive, and transformative value of folklore… To him, popular culture, especially popular music, represented a reservoir of authentic, unadulterated material that should be not only preserved but assimilated and transformed into artifacts of high art” (182). This belief is in part what Keene critiques with his representation of Mário in “Anthropophagy;” that is to say, Keene takes issue with Mário’s co-opting of Afro-diasporic culture in service of establishing a national Brazilian subject, specifically the appropriation of black music. In this vein, with *Counternarratives* Keene demonstrates that the collective affective experience of anti-blackness, the ineffability of which is chiefly expressed in the performance of Afro-diasporic music, cannot be sequestered within the bounds of the nation-state for the political purposes of constructing a national identity.

Despite these dissimilarities, Keene and Mário share similar ideas about the relationship between the individual and the collective. Regarding Mário, again Gouveia argues, “In his conceptualization the anonymous and collective expression of the popular represents the only authentic expression of the national. It is a definition that challenges the notion of authorship” (184). Accordingly, in his musicological efforts, Mário acted not as an author, but as a cultural compiler working to create an assemblage of folkloric and popular art that would represent a national subjectivity. With its degeographizing

Antropofagia, *Macunaíma* functions analogously, cannibalizing a myriad of elements from the Brazilian cultural landscape. If one recalls the parrot and the performer at the novel's metafictional finale, it is clear that Mário indeed relinquishes his role as author. Still, the rhapsody of Macunaíma is entrenched in discourses of the national, whereas in *Counternarratives*, Keene also in repudiation of authorship, orchestrates a hemispheric concerto of *"Amefricanos"* across the African diaspora.

In the story "Anthropophagy," Keene portrays Mário in his final years reflecting on his life and the passing of time. The piece is only three pages in total, but provides a poignant vignette of Mário before his death sometime during World War II. Overall, the story conveys a rather bleak tone, as Keene also paints its backdrop with the lingering Depression and contemporaneous Gertúlio Vargas dictatorship. In this context, Keene depicts Mário as being disillusioned with the celebratory culture of Carnaval in an era of strife; as he writes, "the endless clangor and perfume of the streets outside the windows, once a comfort, now a menace, requir[e] a miracle to survive another Carnaval" (*Counter* 273). Here, Mário's disenchantment is experienced on a corporeal-sensory level. Furthermore, Keene foreshadows Mário's imminent death by focusing on the character's arrhythmic body; as he writes, "[Mário's] heart's berimbau quiver[s] in irregular time, a rhythm only the reaper can and will discern if allowed" (*Counter* 237). Nevertheless, Keene also imagines corporeal sensation as affirmative affect. Indeed, he represents Mário "in those moments when the hours fall away…in dreams or awake and a record cycles on the player…Villa-Lobos, Pixinguinha, or a disc grooved from the recordings of catimbó from the northeast; its sonorities drumming out a bridge between the present and the past" (*Counter* 273). In the story, similar moments of spatiotemporal displacement—

intervals—occur while Mário is having sex with young men, black men in particular. The nameless young black man who Mário is with in the narrative present of the story is described as "danc[ing] inside him, the[ir] beat mutual and infinite in its tenderness and knowingness" (*Counter* 274). This scene parallels "The Aeronauts" and "Blues" also from the collection, as Keene explores queer space and the erotic potential of the body in homosexual encounters in all three pieces.

To return to "Anthropophagy," on this day, after making love, his body still abuzz, Mário enters the streets of Rio and has a corporeal experience with an affective landscape and thus becomes unbound in space and time; as Keene writes, "[Mário walk[s] toward the competing planes of gold sand and the Atlantic's silvery waves, the lines blurring like a freshly painted watercolor… He is here in Lapa [Rio]….and there, on the dais in the Municipal Theater in São Paulo" (*Counter* 275). During this transportation in time and space Mário remembers how "Oswald and the other radicals" once perceived him, that is, as their "Pierrot," their "Miss São Paulo," their "brown-skinned bucktoothed hero with such character" (*Counter* 275). In this moment of the character's stream of consciousness, Keene represents the trauma Mário experienced as a result of the homophobic anti-black social atmosphere of the predominantly white heteronormative Brazilian modernist circle.[28] Following this bitter memory, the story ends abruptly, but on an optimistic note, as in the final line of the piece, Keene represents Mário "thinking to himself…we must never let the lies and the tears devour us, we must devour and savor the years" (*Counter* 275). Thus, Keene describes Mário trying to forget his failed past endeavors with the *Antropofagistas*, while simultaneously finding a sense of homosocial

[28] Made up of writers like Mário and Oswald de Andrade, Paulo Menotti del Picchia, Manuel Bandeira, Guilherme de Almeida, José Pereira de Graça Aranha, and others.

community with his current lovers. In this way, Keene humanizes the major figure of Brazilian Modernism, Mário de Andrade, and also imagines his entanglement with a larger Afro-diasporic collectivity in the Americas. That is to say, Keene represents Mário as he disassociates from the nation-building projects of Brazilian Modernism in order to instead get in touch—via his body in the forms of sex and music—with the radical potential of an affective black community.

In this vein, Fred Moten's *Black and Blur* provides an effective lens for analyzing how Keene's "Anthropophagy" is enmeshed with the other stories in *Counternarratives*. Moten situates his conceptualization of blackness in the ineffability of the violent scream of Frederick Douglass' Aunt Hester;[29] as he writes, "the scream's content is not simply unrepresentable, but instantiates, rather, an alternative to representation… [it is] the expression of an irredeemable and incalculable suffering from which there is no decoupling since it has no boundary and can be individuated and possessed in neither time nor in space" (*Blur* ix, xiii). Moten goes on to claim that Aunt Hester's scream is "diffused in…black music in particular and black art in general" (*Blur* x). And it is Moten's notion of "diffusion," that interests me here, specifically, the ways in which the affective potential poured into and out of black music, what he calls "ani*mater*iality," always already exceeds the limits of representation and is uncontained by spatiotemporal bounds. With his collage of stories and novellas about black artists and performers, John Keene, as *bricoleur* rather than author, shows the diffusion of this ani*mater*iality throughout the African diaspora by taking up Mário's degeographizing *Antropofagia*. In his story, Keene alludes to Mário's failed attempts to create a Brazilian national identity

[29] Frederick Douglass' Aunt Hester is severely beaten by a slave master in Chapter 1 of *The Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845).

via the ethnomusicological "discovery" and aesthetic appropriation of folkloric and popular music, of which black music is a major part. In the passage in which Mário listens to records of Pixinguinha and discs of *catimbó*, etc., Keene points to Mário's anthropophagic consumption of musical styles; however, this consumption also implies a co-opting of the cultural production of marginalized peoples in order to establish a nation that will only continue to marginalize those same peoples in the afterlives of colonialism. By representing Mário's estrangement from the *Antropofagistas* as in part the result of homophobia and racism, as exemplified by the epithets "Miss São Paulo" and "brown-skinned," Keene demonstrates the ways in which Brazilian Modernism's cultural nationalism recapitulated the Eurocentric racist, heteronormative, and patriarchal discourses of colonialism. In this way, Keene puts to rest the myth of Brazil's racial democracy, and gestures towards a collectivity of black affect diffused throughout the African diaspora—an imagined, yet felt—space. Keene's readers learn to sense this intervallic space more concretely in the story "A Letter on the Trials of the Counterreformation in New Lisbon."

"A LETTER ON THE TRIALS OF THE COUNTERREFORMATION IN NEW LISBON"

Paul Gilroy's 1993 book *The Black Atlantic* has been a seminal work in studies of the African diaspora despite also fielding a wealth of healthy criticism, and Keene is positively familiar with Gilroy's research. In the same interview with Tonya Foster, regarding *Counternarratives* he claims, "The Enlightenment is the backdrop to a number of these stories. One movement throughout from the dawn of modernity forward into

modernism… I think about Paul Gilroy's famous, eponymous statement on "the Black Atlantic as a counterculture of modernity" (*Bomb*). In his work, Gilroy focuses on the consequences of Enlightenment thought on the cultures of the Atlantic World, proposing that "cultural historians could [and should] take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (15). Gilroy's book examines many different forms of Black Atlantic cultural production; still, music is of perhaps the most significance to his investigation, and it is also a source of inspiration for Keene.

In their Gilroy-inspired study of the Lusophone Black Atlantic, Nancy Priscilla Naro, Roger Sansi-Roca, and David H. Treece highlight the Portuguese-speaking world that exists within this oceanic space. Naro, et al. also affirm the importance of music in their study, finding it to be a powerful form of cultural expression for colonized peoples. As the trio suggests, "colonial cultures are not just countercultures…they not only resisted the West, but transformed, expanded, and enriched it. Perhaps they should rather be seen—or heard—as *counterpoints*...as distinct yet simultaneously resonating voices weaving a polyphonic texture" (6). This musical analogy resounds with Keene's Afro-speculative imagining of the myth of Mama Africa. To conceive of distinct locales of Afro-diasporic cultures across space and time as harmonizing and disharmonizing, in and out of rhythm, with one another along with the hegemonic cultures of Western modernity, is to envision the Black Atlantic from the contrapuntal perspective that Keene offers in his collection of stories and novellas. In this way, *Counternarratives* provokes readers to forget everything they know about Western culture and to reimagine common understandings of the fantastical and the real, and this is particularly true in the story "A

Letter on the Trials of the Counterreformation in New Lisbon" (hereinafter simply referred to as "A Letter"), which employs a fantastic neo-baroque aesthetic more often seen in the Latin American rather than the African American literary tradition in the United States.

"A Letter" takes place around the years 1629-1630 in the Northeast of Brazil (*O Nordeste*), specifically in the state—or what would have been merely a settlement at the time—of Alagoas, and as its title suggests, the story is told in the epistolary form. Crucially, readers also learn that this letter, an apocryphal, ephemeral print cultural artifact, is scribed in an invisible ink that only appears when the page is placed over a candle flame. Keene has clearly done his research, as the time and place of the narrative are also incredibly significant; the backdrop of "A Letter" is the Dutch colonization of *O Nordeste*, which occurred from 1630-1654. João Silvério Trevisan helps to flesh out this historical and cultural context further, as he asserts, "The colonists who came from Europe were plagued by doctrinal disputes and firmly watched over by the Inquisition" (6), and this certainly produced an atmosphere of terror and paranoia among those working to colonize the New World. Nevertheless, on the other hand, as again Trevisan claims, "during the brief period of Dutch colonization in *O Nordeste* (Pernambuco in particular), Jews, Christians, non-Tupi natives, mulattos, *pardos*, and blacks all lived unfettered and free of sexual oppression" (7). Accordingly, "A Letter" is a dramatization of this fervent religious and cultural conflict, as the narrative follows a Catholic priest named Dom Joaquim D'Azevedo as its protagonist. D'Azevedo is sent from his former post in Olinda "to assume the position of provost of the foundation at Alagoas" (*Counter* 48). However, D'Azevedo is confronted with a crisis of identity and faith upon arriving at

a "Holy Office" in Alagoas in utter disarray, which the Dutch will eventually invade by story's end.

Therefore, "A Letter" is very much concerned with the multicultural complexity and globalized roots of northeastern Brazil as is evident in its depiction of an intense power struggle between opposing religions and cultures during the colonial period of the New World.[30] As Keene demonstrates with this (counter-)narrative in particular, Western ideology, and Christian theology especially (be it Catholic or be it Protestant), has led to the misunderstanding and persecution of "idolaters;" those cultures associated with sorcery were condemned by the Enlightenment's adherence to rationality. From the perspective of the West, as Roger Sansi-Roca contends, African religion was based on "the worship of material things," the corporeal; thus, "[f]or enlightened philosophers, African fetishists would be unable to distinguish objects from subjects" (19), which echoes the quintessential binary at the crux of Enlightenment. Sansi-Roca also recounts an intriguing history of *feitiçaria* in the Lusophone Atlantic, defining the practice accordingly, "*feitiçaria* or sorcery is not religion; it is magic—the techniques of enchantment. *Feiticeiros* are not priests, but private practitioners of the arts of magic—people who make spells and charms of love…and death" (21). Keene's story, "A Letter" incorporates one such *feiticeiro* or sorcerer as one of its main characters: Burunbana, also known as João Baptista to the Portuguese. Burunbana is a *quimbanda*, a fact which they—I have chosen this pronoun because the character is gender-fluid—state explicitly in the story, "I am a Jinbada, or as one says in your language [i.e. Portuguese] Quibanda [*sic*]. I can read the past and the future. I can speak to the living…and to the dead. I can

[30] See Leslie Bethell's *Colonial Brazil* (1987) for more on this topic.

feel the weather before it turns and the night before it falls. Every creature that walks this earth converses with me. I am such a one who is both…" (*Counter* 79-80). Burunbana's sorcery is derived from the body; it is a form of "embodied knowledge," to use Diana Taylor's concept from her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, a type of magic sourced in affect and sensation.

The priests of the monastery at Alagoas, including D'Azevedo for a time, find Burunbana to be subversive and thus malevolent due to their god-fearing Christian beliefs. Padre Pero, one of the *criollo* priests, who tries to kill "João Baptista" for his "devilish" ways, also describes him as a "Quimbanda," and "a source of mischief" (*Counter* 74). In this regard, Padre Pero refers to a particular tradition associated with *feitiçaria,* namely that Burunbana engages in the practice of transvestitism. In his essay on the history of homosexuality in Africa and Brazil, Luiz Mott argues that in "ritual homosexuality and transvestitism," *quimbandas* skillfully "used and abused their power" (80), of—what Westerners would deem—"witchcraft," eventually leading the West to misapprehend their art—one composed of corporeal affect—and to subsequently demonize their cultural traditions as Satanism and blasphemous sodomy. In fact, in colonial Brazil, as Trevisan notes, "nothing was more shocking to the Christians of the time than the practice of the 'pecado nenfando [nefarious sin]," that is to say, sodomy (3). However, as a result of Burunbana's at-times effeminate behavior, the character at one point discloses to D'Azevedo, "From the time I landed here the devils [i.e. the priests Padre Pero and Padre Barbosa Pires] bade me serve them, forcing me to lie with them when I did not want to, and commanding all the [enslaved] women, men, and children to do the same" (*Counter* 80). It is in this way that Keene portrays "'the disquiet that lurks

beneath the placid surface...'" (*Counter* 45)—the apocryphal epigraph at the beginning of "A Letter" attributed to D'Azevedo himself—that existed during Brazil's early colonial period. In other words, with "A Letter," Keene represents the hypocrisy of the Catholic Portuguese, personified by Padres Pero and Barbosa Pires, who did not live as they so professed. Despite the relatively more open-minded D'Azevedo and Dom Gaspar's inability to understand Burunbana's cultural practices or the nature of their magic, the *Jinbada* saves them both from impending doom in the form of the Dutch (i.e. Protestant) invasion of *O Nordeste*. Correspondingly, Burunbana practices an ethics of tolerance, sexual, religious, and otherwise, that the priests of the monastery in Alagoas generally do not, save perhaps for D'Azevedo, who through the course of the story is revealed to be hiding a dangerous secret of his own, that is, his Jewish ancestry.

During the climax of the story, Burunbana confronts D'Azevedo about his true identity. Up until this point in the narrative, the priests have all referred to Burunbana as João Baptista dos Anjos, however, with the approaching Dutch invasion, Burunbana lifts the polite façade and asks that D'Azevedo call him by his true name. Nevertheless, D'Azevedo refuses and exclaims that when speaking with him, "you will use your Christian name" (*Counter* 78). It is in this moment that Burunbana divulges his practically all-knowing power by retorting, "As you use yours, Manoel Aries ben Saúl?" (*Counter* 78), and in doing so, reveals to D'Azevedo that he is aware of his true identity as a *converso*, that is, a Christian convert, a closeted Jew. Still, there are other allusions made to D'Azevedo's Jewish heritage throughout the narrative, and in this way, Keene invokes Brazil's multicultural complexity during colonialism before its homogenization under the master narrative of the nation-state. Therefore, Keene again gestures toward a

plural community centered on the affective realities of enduring forced displacement and racism in a similar diasporic experience in the Americas, in this case between black and Jewish peoples alike. In his book *Jewish Voices in Brazilian Literature*, Nelson H. Vieira echoes this commonality, as he suggests, "Emerging from the Jewish Diasporist experience is the insight Jews have gleaned about others from their own perspectives of difference and alterity" (2). Speaking to the religious and political climate of the historical era in which Keene's story is set, Vieira affirms, "For three centuries Brazil hosted Jews, primarily as New Christians [forced converts] except for the twenty-for-year period (1630-54) during the Dutch invasion in northeast Brazil, when Jews were tolerated religiously and socially" (6). However, Vieira also continues to state, "Forced Jewish conversion had been instituted in 1497 by Portugal's King Manuel I… Although the Portuguese Inquisition was never formally established in the colony of Brazil, visitations from the Holy Office from the end of the sixteenth century created a climate of fear and oppression" (7). Accordingly, in "A Letter," the Enlightenment as manifested in the project of colonization forces both Burunbana and D'Azevedo (a.k.a Manoel Aries) to conceal their respective identities and cultural heritages in order to maintain contrived appearances and evade religious and ethnic persecution.

It is in large part due to their common affective experience of suffering systemic oppression that Burunbana shares his magic with D'Azevedo; as the former says to the latter also in their climactic confrontation, "I read you when you first passed through the gate, and believed you could assist in our [the enslaved peoples'] and your own liberation" (*Counter* 80). Burunbana is capable of immense power, the ability to read people is one such skill, but they are also able to open portals in space and time.

D'Azevedo in awe of Burunabna's sorcery and confounded by all that has just been relayed to him has no choice but to relinquish control and trust the *Jinbada.* Keene describes the sorcerer practicing his art as seen through the eyes of D'Azevedo's in the following manner: Burunbana was "peering into a bowl and muttering something barely audible. He had splashed the water from the urn in various places on the floor…then anointed himself… and tossed the water into the black cloister… The line the water left…glimmered as if studded with flecks of phosphorous, or miniature stars" (*Counter* 81-2). What D'Azevedo perceives to be a starry "line," is actually an interval, a third space, or in the words of Burunbana, a "portal," a planar leveling of the spatiotemporal field that allows the *Jinbada* to shirk subjectivity and liberate themself from the bounds of space and time (*Counter* 81-2).

From this point forward in the text, the narrator shifts tones, and like in the beginning of the story, again makes a direct address to the intended audience of the letter in "A Letter," Dom Inácio Lisboa Branco of the Holy Office in Bahia, who is D'Azevedo's superior and also a fellow Jew masquerading as a New Christian. The narrator then relays to Dom Inácio the fate of D'Azevedo, "who now once gain goes by the name of Manoel, as he "abandoned the cloth and practices the faith of his ancestors without worry" (*Counter* 82-3). Subsequently, the narrator also communicates that the Africans who were formerly enslaved in the monastery at Alagoas, "now live in such a place that does not exist on your map… There is no *leader*, only a community…" (*Counter* 83). Although the narrator does not state so explicitly, this place is undoubtedly a reference to the fugitive slave community, or *quilombo* in Brazilian Portuguese, known as Palmares, considering that this historical society was located in what today is the state

of Alagoas. With the story's closing passage, readers also discover more about the *Jinbada*, and in a metafictional turn, learn that they (Burunbana) are in fact the narrator. The letter that is the narrative of the story is signed: "with the proper date, Elul 5390" in accordance with the Jewish calendar (as opposed to the Roman) by " N'Golo BURUNBANA Zumbi" (*Counter* 83). The fact that the letter is signed in this manner is incredibly significant, as the name Zumbi is a direct reference to the historical and mythical figure Zumbi, who was a warrior and leader of Quilombo Palmares. This allusion connects Burunbana to a line of formerly enslaved insurrectionists—a community of black fugitivity. Still, Keene's representation of Palmares as leaderless can be read as an anachronistic idealization of the historical *quilombo*, considering that as Laird Bergad recounts, "Paradoxically, slavery existed within Palmares. The various communities and villages that made up Palmares engaged in extended periods of war with outsiders, as well as raids on neighboring settlements, and captives taken in battle were subject to enslavement" (214). Correlatively, as we will see in Chapter 2, Gayl Jones' novel *Palmares* complicates such idealizations of Palmares and its legendary leader Zumbi by representing the ways in which the *quilombo* recapitulated colonialism.

One question that undeniably remains upon the closing of "A Letter:" What are readers to make of Burunbana and their magic? Like music, painting, or even writing, Burunbana's sorcery is an art, a type of embodied performance based in affective sensation. With their ability to read people and to look into the past and future, Burunbana is a seer, one with an especially adept embodied knowledge of vision. This is their magic, a type of performance art. Nonetheless, when "A Letter" is juxtaposed with the other stories and novellas of Keene's collection, a correlation between embodied

performance and sorcery comes to light. In other words, throughout the stories and novellas that comprise his collection, Keene suggests that black art is magic, it is the practice of "black utopia," in line with Jayna Brown's sense of the term. Analogously, Burunbana's magic is the practice of black utopia that Brown describes. Therefore, in *Counternarratives*, Keene imagines the African diaspora via his representation of an array of black musicians, artists, and performers in various locales across *Améfrica* who themselves enact the embodied knowledge of black utopia. Correspondingly, I read *Counternarratives* as an Afro-diasporic literary act of "Afro-Atlantic speculation," to now employ Michelle D. Commander's notion, and thus, argue that the collection itself is Keene's imagining of black utopia.

Furthermore, in consideration of Burunbana's gender-fluid identity, I also propose that "A Letter," like many of Keene's other pieces in *Counternarratives*, is illuminated when read through the lens of José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia" The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. In fact, Brown draws upon Muñoz's seminal work in her own conceptualization of black utopia. However, Brown also goes against the grain of the oft-cited salient quote from *Cruising Utopia:* "Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows [one] to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present" (Muñoz 1). To the contrary, Brown "argue[s] for a spatio/temporal fold within the here and now… The versions of utopia [she] explore[s] involve relationalities that radically disrupt the very idea of the future, as they tune into an alter-frequency… [She] suggest[s] that [some black people] see and feel [their] way into an altogether different spatiotemporality that is not discoverable along a human timeline" (8). In spite of these important distinctions between the respective theories of Brown and Muñoz, ultimately affect and

corporeal sensation, that is to say, the embodied knowledge of "seeing," "feeling," and especially, hearing, are at the crux of Brown's theorization of performing black utopia. Therefore, I again suggest that through their sorcery/magic Burunbana practices a form of black utopia in Keene's "A Letter."

"THE LIONS"

Although in "A Letter," readers get a glimpse of the practice of black utopia, it is in the final story of *Counternarratives*, "The Lions," that Keene offers an extensive dramatization of Brown's novel concept. In her work, Brown focuses on music, and particularly the compositions of Afrofuturistic jazz performer Sun Ra. Correspondingly, a jazz epistemology is at the center of her ideas, and it is for this reason that she puts forth that "the present," as opposed to Muñoz's notion of futurity, "is actually dimensional and the place of great improvisations" (Brown 17). In parallel fashion, Keene's "The Lions" is written with an improvisatory aesthetic—it is literary bebop, a breakneck call and response between to interlocutors that reads like music on the page. Keene is certainly in touch with the vitality of music—or more broadly rhythm—to global black cultures as is clear from other stories in his collection, namely "An Outtake rom the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, "Cold," and "Blues." In an artist-to-artist interview in *BOMB* with Tonya Foster, Keene reveals the antiphonal nature of his collection, stating, "the final story…'The Lions,' functions as a counterpoint to and culmination of the first twelve" (Foster). Indeed, the pieces perform a type of call and response or antiphony with one another, often bridging vast distances and far-off times, and it is through this interval that a sonata representing the ineffability of collective black affect

resounds. Keene's contrapuntal finale "The Lions" is allegorical, and in some ways it encompasses the themes of each of the collection's preceding stories, ultimately leaving readers in awe of its massive scope.

Unlike the previous twelve pieces, "The Lions" is not set in the past but instead takes place on the brink of the future, or rather, in the "quagmire of the present" as Muñoz would have it, or what Brown would call "the place of great improvisations" (17). Physically, the story is set in an unknown location, perhaps in Africa, or maybe in Brazil, or even in the US; however, more likely is another dimension. In any case, Keene prefaces "The Lions" with two captivating epigraphs. One comes from Denis Diderot and focuses on Art and the pathic: "If there is any genre in which it matters to be sublime, it is evil, above all" (*Counter* 279). In this story, evil is certainly the art, and the artist figures indisputably reach the sublime. Ludwig Wittgenstein provides the other epigraph: "If a lion could talk, we would not understand him" (*Counter* 279). Although this story is narrated completely in free indirect speech in the form of a dialogue between two interlocutors, it is quite difficult to understand these conversing lions, as the finale does not tie up loose ends, but instead, purposefully leaves readers with more questions than answers. The finale centers on two anonymous male characters who like Burunbana have an incredible ability for channeling black utopia through affective sensation and embodied performance. Due to the fact that Keene chooses not to name these two characters, for intelligibility's sake, I will refer to them as Smell and Sound respectively. Indeed, Smell and Sound are the most adroit of all the artist figures in Keene's collection, however, they use their powers of black utopia for malevolent ends as opposed to creating community. This story, aside from disrupting normative conceptions of space

and time, significantly reflects on the cyclical nature of history; in fact, at one point the problematic of representation at the center of Plato's *The Republic* is reiterated: "Poetry, history, psychology, ban all of it" (*Counter* 289). "The Lions" is also the clearest instantiation of Keene's admonitions against black nationalism.[31] Not only are Smell and Sound proponents of a radical black nationalism, but they also each hold a perspicacious knowledge of the sensory. Smell and Sound have sharpened their logics of sensation to such a degree that they are able to come completely "unbound" in time. Unlike the rest of *Counternarratives*, in this piece, Keene finally reveals the inner worlds of the "portals" entered by the performers of black utopia, such as Burunbana. In the improvisatory place that is black utopia, the spatiotemporal field becomes tabular, like a chessboard, and indeed Smell and Sound engage in combat with one another through a dangerous game of playing with the past, present, and imminent future.

Because this story is a conversation written in free indirect discourse, it can be difficult to follow. Regardless, the scene is rather simple: two men in a dark room reminiscing, one bound to a chair, blindfolded—gagged at one point— and the other circling him like a lion stalking its prey. Smell and Sound have killed their leader, the leader of the black nationalist front, and now they have turned on each other. The movement of which they are (or were) a part seeks to "wipe the pestilence out," that is, it seeks to eradicate the earth of all the "Quislings," the treacherous black men "who pray to the whiteman as their only deity" (*Counter* 283). In correlation with this, in *Black Skin, White Masks,* Frantz Fanon laments, "[I am] a Negro…alerting the prolific antennae of the world…I embrace the world! I am the world!… The white man wants the world; he

[31] See William L. Van Deburg's *Modern Black nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan.*

wants it for himself. He discovers he is the predestined master of the world. He enslaves it" (107). This passage from Fanon recapitulates the tensions between Western modernity and African cultures, as Western powers have exhibited time and time again an extreme propensity for colonization and oppression, robbing black and other marginalized peoples of their right to subjectivity, freedom. Fanon continues his onslaught, "[t]he black man, however sincere, is a slave to the past… I am not a prisoner of history. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction… it is by going beyond the historical and the instrumental given that I initiate my cycle of freedom" (200, 204-5). Fanon's protestation brings to mind one of the epigraphs preceding Part II of *Counternarratives*, this particular one comes from Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá and reads: "I believe that if we have any notion at all of what has generally been called human nature, it is because History, like a mirror, holds up for our contemplation, an image of ourselves" (*Counter* 159). Accordingly, Keene's *Counternarratives*, as a collection with "The Lions" as its principal counterpoint, subverts and resists this Eurocentric mirror of History. In this way, through his Afro-Atlantic flights, Keene practices black utopia in imagining and writing speculative "counter-narratives" to the hegemonic master narratives of Western modernity.

In the text of "The Lions," Smell and Sound have learned "it's best to keep time itself out of sync. Take its beat, remake it in [their] own. Be untimely" (*Counter* 280), and thus, their power resides in their abilities to become "un-timed," that is, "to glide out of fate's schedule" (*Counter* 281). As seen previously, Smell and Sound, as performance artists of sorts, are able to accomplish such a feat through the practice of black utopia, which allows them to become unstuck from the normative rhythm of space and time, and

enter portals into other dimensions, or "alter-frequencies" in the words of Brown, much akin to Burunbana of "A Letter." Correspondingly, Fanon warns, "beware of rhythm, the Mother Earth bond, and that mystic, carnal marriage between man and the cosmos" (104). Of course, Smell and Sound do not heed this admonition; conversely, they abuse their power, as it is through their capacity for unpunctuality that they have been at the helm of countless historical events: massacres, bombings, assassinations, coups d'état, etc., all of which is accomplished via affective sensation, embodied performance. In the following passage, Keene provides readers with the clearest description of such utopian powers manageable in language: Smell taunts his enemy, "Your sense was sound, always sound, the most infinitesimal crackle or rustle, and you'd cock your head just so…like you had an invisible antennae instead of ears, a sonar, so exactingly tuned. The sound of words, of worlds" (*Counter* 284). The word "antennae" appears multiple times in this piece, and I read it as an allusion to Fanon, who himself uses the word on numerous occasions in *Black Skin, White Masks.*[32] Smell continues, now detailing his own sensation, "Mine was smell. Immaturity and ripeness, scents of all kinds, fragrances, stenches, nature's olfactory artistry…anything that could be marked by a scent, even emotions, usually emotions… Fear sends out a terrible perfume. The worst" (*Counter* 285). Fear is at the crux of what perpetuates white supremacist, heteronormative Western power structures, and thereby maintains the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Ultimately, fear becomes the issue that these contrapuntal characters continually riff on in their rhapsodic antiphony.

[32] See Fanon, pp. 32; 116; 127.

Over and over again in "The Lions," Smell and Sound refer to one particular night that is of the utmost significance to the fate of the world as they sense it. In Smell's words: "we were something…in the midnight clearing, your ears pricked and that invisible antenna…and me, my nose like an elephant's or bloodhound's" (*Counter* 285). Keene's description surrounding the events of this fateful night are exceptionally opaque; although there are many intimations of homoeroticism, what is surely clear is that Smell and Sound united themselves as one being by engulfing each other via an affective performance. Now that the bodies of Smell and Sound are conjoined, they resonate intensely as counterpoints, and in the interval that emerges between them, the two characters are able to channel the alter-frequencies of black utopia and harness its power to terrifying ends. This is precisely what occurred between Smell and Sound on that night; as Smell remembers it, "in the darkness in that clearing…when binding ourselves to each other…to overthrow our supposed leader…we devoured each other that night, like lions" (*Counter* 292). In other words, through synesthesia, Smell and Sound coalesce their respective affective sensations, and such an act of fusion creates an unimaginable source of energy, rhythm. Sound goes on to describe his adept sensory perception and the danger in possessing such power accordingly, "that insistent noise. It became habit… I could place myself in the minds of others, their bodies, and view the world through their eyes, step where they stepped before they knew they would. What they would do I could always counter it" (*Counter* 290). Sound is able to enter the "portal," the intervallic space and place of improvisation that is the present, and in this way control the will of historical actors, thus changing the fate of the world in past, present, and future time. Smell, who was the former protégée of Sound was once astonished by his teacher's power,

recognizing here, "I would say to myself, he foresees everything, moves men around like figurines… He has the insight of a seer and the might of a deity. That's why I called you, we all called you, The Prophet" (*Counter* 289). Nevertheless, Smell still intends to remove The Prophet (Sound) from "the algorithm" of the world, and this goal is what brings these two together in the narrative present.

Smell cannot tolerate fear, and he believes Sound to be entirely possessed by it. Although the two characters are similar in many respects, as the conversation continues, readers notice a divide between Smell and Sound. Keene again draws his audience's attention the ineffable affective radical potential of black utopia, when Smell says to Sound, "Listen, Prophet, listen… The roaring, isn't it fearsome? Pure poetry and science, beyond symbols or words" (*Counter* 297). In this moment of the narrative, Smell is enthralled by "fearlessness," it arouses him and confirms his power. Although he is fearless, he finds Sound to be merely courageous, still plagued with fear, that is, the veil of the oppressor. Smell feels cheated that Sound withheld a part of himself on that night in the clearing, as what was supposed to be a mutual devouring ended up lopsided. As Smell bemoans, "Fearlessness…A terrible, sublime roar…That is what I thought we had back then, chest to chest in that clearing" (*Counter* 297). However, Smell now knows this not to be the case, and because Sound is able to hear, sense, the future via the practice of black utopia, he remains calm even though he is aware that Smell intends to kill him. Thus, Sound personifies courage. In the closing passages of "The Lions," Smell retreats to silence and Sound is left to speak, inquiring, "Why should anyone fear…a lion so unafraid of anything it is incapable of understanding the sheer terror of life and death, a lion who will itself be devoured by another, waiting nearby, the lion's roar is anything

but music, just animalistic howling…the man who listens only to death hears nothing of life, your time will be up" (*Counter* 303-4). Moments following these passages, Keene arrives at the finale by portraying Smell as he stabs Sound with a crucifix in both of his eardrums repeatedly, and then closes the story as well as collection in a series of ellipses. I argue that this perpetual succession of lions devouring each other for the sake of power is Keene's allegorical metaphor for the cycle violence of inherent to (neo-)colonial projects of nation building. Therefore, "The Lions" is Keene's dramatized critique of nationalism in all its forms, be it black, white supremacist, or otherwise, an admonition in the form of allegory against the nation-state.

If indeed "The Lions" is also "a counterpoint to and culmination of the first twelve [stories]" (Foster), then readers must consider the specter of the nation and nation building in each piece of *Counternarratives.* What do "Anthropophagy" and "A Letter" say about Brazil? What do these stories say about the United States? Keene is invested in understanding the long history of national projects in the Atlantic World, and particularly in the American Hemisphere, and it is for this reason, that his collection reckons with the afterlives of colonialism through fictional, yet very real, (counter-)narratives. Keene's work counters the hegemony of white supremacist, heteronormative Western culture, and exposes the inherent vices of nationalist projects in the Americas. By allowing his readers to peer into portals of other potential radical dimensions, Keene offers a vision of black utopia. However, as Brown reminds, this is not "the achievement of the good life, in which all…earthly needs would be met by a given system" (6), rather "[u]topia is a state of being and doing" (7). Moreover, as Brown again asserts, "Dreaming in terms of utopia invokes an archive of black alternative world-making, to be found in the practices of

black mystics and musicians and in the imaginative worlds of speculative fiction writers" (7-8). I contend that Keene's *Counternarratives* is this type of Afro-speculative fiction—its is a bricolage of black artists, sorcerers, and performers whose stories amount to "an archive of black alternative world-making," as Brown would have it. Although the embodied performance of black utopia is most vivid and observable in "The Lions," Keene's audience "(en)counters" a multitude of narratives that exemplify such speculative imaginings against a present haunted by the afterlives of colonialism and slavery as manifested in the modern nation-state.

"ON BRAZIL, OR DÉNOUEMENT: THE LONDÔNIAS-FIGUEIRAS"

In the same vein, with "On Brazil, or Dénouement: The Londônias-Figueiras," which I will refer to as "On Brazil," Keene reveals the pitfalls of the nation-state and citizenship while also continuing to imagine black utopia through stateless Afro-Atlantic speculation in the hemispheric space of *Améfrica*. As in the entirety of his collection, Keene experiments with form in the story "On Brazil," in fact the story is presented as a "staff report" (*Counter* 7), that is a municipal government document that informs policies regarding land use and city planning. In this case, the city is the massive metropolis of São Paulo, though Keene's narrative takes place in Rio de Janeiro and the Northeast of Brazil as well. "On Brazil" assuredly differs from most staff reports, in that it describes not merely the land use of a particular city, but also details the long history of the "Londônias-Figueiras" family, from the 1610s to today, and their narrative coincides with the history of nation building in the formation of the Brazilian state. The first page of Keene's story is formatted in such a way that he draws attention to the staff report's

nature as a print cultural artifact; this is a clue from Keene to the fallibility of the written word and of what is to follow in the rest of *Counternarratives*—a sustained attempt to represent that which escapes the archive.[33] "On Brazil" begins in the present day with a piece of news. The fictional staff report is titled "Male Found Beheaded in Settlement Ranked Among the Most Dangerous in Metro Area," and by the story's end, it appears the purpose of this document is to justify razing the "new and unauthorized favela of N." (*Counter* 7). However, Keene again hints at the limitations of the historical archive, as the narrator bases their staff report on the apocryphal work "*Crônicas da Familia Figueiras-Londônia-Figueiras* [*Chronicles of the Figueiras-Londônia-Figueiras Family*]," which is written by a member of the extended family, Arturo Figueiras Pereira Goldensztajn (*Counter* 8). That is to say, Keene reaffirms the cliché yet true phrase: history is written by the victors. Nonetheless, the initial page of the staff report reads, "According to Chief Detective S.A. Brito Viana, authorities still have not confirmed…the deceased is banking heir Sergio Inôcencio Maluuf Figueiras" before breaking off into ellipsis in order to then recount the history of the Londônias-Figueiras clan. The name "Maluuf" here is particularly noteworthy, as Keene seems to implicate the right-wing Brazilian politician and former mayor of São Paulo, Paulo Maluf. Although it will not become clear for readers until moving further along in the narrative, all the names of the involved persons are highly significant, as they are representations of the ways in which the system of the nation perpetually propels the privileged to positions of power and the marginalized to the bonds of state oppression.

[33] See Allan Sekula's essay "The Body and the Archive" (1986).

The historical narrative included in Keene's fictional staff report begins with the "Londôndias," who the narrator notes, "were the proprietors of an expanding sugar *engenho* [plantation] in the northeasternmost corner of the captaincy of Sergipe D'El-Rei" (*Counter* 8). The narrator goes on to clarify that the plantation was located on "the southern sand banks of the Rio São Francisco," therefore, placing this part of the narrative in the same region as that of Keene's previous story regarding Brazil, "A Letter on the Trials of the Counterreformation in New Lisbon." According to the narrator's fictional, historical research, José Simeão was the "first Londônia in New Lisbon," and after marrying "an adolescent named Maria Amada…[who] was a product…of one of the earliest New World experiments: the coupling of the European and the Indian," raised one child, Francisco "Inocêncio [Innocence]," who was the only of their offspring that "lived to adulthood" (*Counter* 8). The narrator of the staff report concurrently provides a history and family ethnography, and the fact that Francisco is of both European and indigenous origins—a *pardo*—is an intimation towards the ethnic and racial composition of modern day Brazil. Nevertheless, Keene's story is a dramatized dismantling of nationalist discourses of racial democracy. The narrator continues the report, eventually relating that the "greatest achievement" of Francisco Inocêncio's adopted son, José Inocêncio, "greatest was to ally himself with and then marry into the prominent and clannish Figueiras family" (*Counter* 9). As a result of this familial union, the narrator states, "Within a decade, José Inocêncio…quadrupled the acreage of his father's estate…[and] enter[ed] the sugar trade as ships were disgorging wave upon wave of Africans onto the colony's shores," and of course, José took great advantage of this (*Counter* 9). The narrator paints a portrait of José Inocêncio as especially shrewd and

callused, "The mortality rate for slaves was extraordinarily high in 17th-century Brazil. It was higher still on the Londôndia's plantation. He could not abide indolence or anything less than an adamantine endurance" (*Counter* 9-10). However, due to the unrelenting cruelty that enslaved Africans were subjected to on the Londônia plantation, revolts and fugitivity also did occur. Specifically, the narrator makes note of "the *de facto* leader [original emphasis]" of the insurrection, Cesarão, who "after torching a field of cane and a dry dock, escaped across the river into the wilds of what is now the Brazilian state of Alagoas" (*Counter* 10). Cesarão's name resounds with significance later on in the narrative.

From this point on in the staff report, a particular figure of the Londônias-Figueiras clan comes into focus, Lázaro Inocêncio, and his story is the fulcrum on which the rest of the narrative hinges. The narrator mentions that Lázaro was also referred to as "'the Colonel' because of his assurance and hair-trigger temper" (*Counter* 11). Additionally, in the midst of "the final Portuguese invasion to recapture the capital city of Salvador, in 1625, [Lázaro] held steadfast against repeated charges" from the Dutch and was lauded as a hero" (*Counter* 12). Because of his reputation as a hardened military commander, in 1630 Lázaro is ordered to advance into the region of Pernambuco, which at the time was under Dutch control (*Counter* 13), and this mission becomes a pivotal event in his life as well as in the saga of the Londônias-Figueiras family. During this mission into dense and untamed terrain in and around the Brazilian *sertão*, Lázaro and his men are tasked with defeating any who claim allegiance to the Dutch, however, the arduous campaign begins to take a drastic toll on the Colonel and his men instead. Accordingly, the outfit become lost and end up venturing in circles in search of Olinda.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that Lázaro is another iteration in a long line of Inocêncios, like his predecessors, he exhibits a cold and calculating manner, and thus, along the way he does not hesitate to shoot mutineers, kills the local indigenous for pleasure, and undertakes other various acts of terror (*Counter* 13-15).

However, it is when Lázaro and his men stumble upon a *quilombo*, or a fugitive community of Africans who escaped the bonds of slavery, that the Colonel commits an act that will reverberate across space and time in order to haunt the present as a manifestation of the incessant afterlives of colonialism. Although Keene does not specifically name this community, I suggest that it is the same legendary Quilombo Palmares that appears in "A Letter." Upon approaching the *quilombo*, the Colonel recognizes from his childhood a specific former slave—now a "free man" in older age—Cesarão (*Counter* 16). Lázaro then decides to enact a plan of vengeance against Cesarão; as the narrator writes, "The Colonel had one goal: the chief rebel's head [Cesarão's]. With one swing of his sword, he got it" (*Counter* 17). After killing Cesarão and pillaging the *quilombo*, "The Colonel ordered all the enemy who had not escaped or been slain taken prisoner…since they had operated under Cesarão's control, they ought…to be returned to his father's estate" (*Counter* 17). Lázaro's murder of Cesarão is the event that continuously ripples into the present in all of its iterations, however, it is an altogether different misdeed that brings real consequences for the Colonel, if only temporarily.

In leaving the scene of his crime against Cesarão, the Colonel comes across a fellow Portuguese military commander named Viana in the Brazilian wilderness. Lázaro and Viana have a communication breakdown and an argument ensues that ends with the Colonel ordering his men to "bind and lash" Viana and his men "to trees" and more or

less leave them for dead. However, when Lázaro returns to the capital city of Salvador he is arrested "for violations of the military code…[and] was remanded to the military prison to await adjudication of his case" (*Counter* 18-19). Yet, when Viana is killed in a subsequent campaign in Pernambuco (*Counter* 22), "The Tribunal" trying the case against Lázaro becomes impatient and lets the Colonel off the hook with a slap on the wrist in the form of reassignment to Rio de Janeiro. However, immediately after reaching the port of Rio and stepping of the ship, Lázaro happens upon "a public scene," and in all the commotion, the Colonel is stabbed and killed by a "short, emaciated [man]…with the sun-burnt face of a recently arrived Portuguese" (*Counter* 23). While there is no other clear explanation from the narrator about the origins or purposes of the Colonel's killer, what matters is that Lázaro is dead. That being said, questions about Lázaro's death are sure to plague readers, but upon entering further into the subsequent pieces that comprise *Counternarratives*, it seems there may be answers that reside in characters such as Burunbana. Although in "A Letter," Keene demonstrates the affective radical potential of (counter-)narrative, with "On Brazil" he is more invested in showing its limitations, particularly in its manifestations as a staff report or a historical archive more generally. Nevertheless, the staff report that is "On Brazil" features a "Dénouement" that transports readers from 17th-Century Brazil to modern-day São Paulo, where the history of the Londônias-Figueiras clan continues.

It is in the Dénouement of "On Brazil" that the first page of the narrator's staff report again turns relevant. In the section of the narrative, readers learn about the origins of the man who is rumored to be the deceased, Sergio Inocêncio Maluuf Figueiras, in the beginning of the staff report. The narrator notes that in 1966 Sergio Inocêncio's parents

were married. This date is significant in that it coincides with the Brazilian Military Dictatorship of 1964, which was wholly supported by the United States government due to its anticommunist agenda. It is also yet another instance of the ways in which the Londônias-Figueiras family personifies the nation-state of Brazil. Sergio Inocêncio is a product of this marriage; he is a troubled child and young adult. In this regard, the narrator states, "[he] exhibited willful, sometimes reckless behavior, engaging in fights with other children, committing acts of vandalism, setting fire to a coach house on the family's estate that housed the cleaning staff" (*Counter* 24). This last example of Sergio's transgressions is one of Keene's sly but poignant hints to how the afterlives of colonialism continue to affect modern Brazilian society, as "the cleaning staff," who are almost certainly black, are present-day representations of the formerly enslaved. In this fashion, Sergio Inocêncio is a fervent racist like all the other Inocêncios before him. Readers also learn from the staff report that Sergio "developed a serious addiction to heroin and other illicit substances," had "a short involvement with a local neo-Nazi group," and was arrested "for possession," among many other offenses (*Counter* 24-5). Nevertheless, the narrator of the staff report ends Sergio's story in ellipsis before finishing the staff report with a concluding section briefly detailing the city of São Paulo and the inhabitants of its *favelas.* Accordingly, the narrator brings his staff report back to its intended purpose, to conduct public policy regarding land use in the city, and by extension, the nation-state of Brazil.

In the concluding portion of the staff report, the narrator cites the source of their data regarding the demographic makeup and spatial organization of São Paulo. Intriguingly, readers recognize one of the scholar's surnames, Dr. Arturo *Figueiras*

Wernitzky (*Counter* 25). This is a transparent reminder from Keene that print cultural artifacts fail to capture the whole story, there is always that which remains—the *décalage* of blackness across the African diaspora, to recall Edwards' notion. Furthermore, Keene also depicts the narrator revealing their biases when they qualify the scholar's research on the region as a "magisterial study" (albeit apocryphal) from which they gather the following piece of information: "millions of poor Brazilians many of them from the northeastern region…Bahia, Sergipe, and Pernambuco, have migrated over the last four decades to this great city…primarily in search of work and economic opportunities" (*Counter* 25). Subsequently, the narrator claims, "Among these *nordestino* migrants, many of them of African ancestry, were member of the Londônia family…who constructed and established unauthorized settlements, or *favelas*, across the city of São Paulo" (*Counter* 26). Finally, the narrator completes the staff report with one last sentence on the *"favela*" in which (the presumed) Sergio Inocêncio's body was found, which is referred to as "N.," "perhaps for… "'Nada Lugar' (No Place), though it is also known…among those who live in it, as 'Quilombo Cesarão'" (*Counter* 26). And with these words, Keene ends the staff report as well as the story.

What is still at stake, however, is the burning question: why was Sergio Inocêncio Maluuf Figueiras found dead in the *favela* known as "Quilombo Cesarão?" Karmic retribution and the cyclical nature of history is the obvious answer. That being said, I propose that Sergio's death is much like Lázaro's in the sense that is inexplicable within the generic conventions of a city staff report. However, if readers encounter Burunbana form "A Letter," Sound and Smell from "The Lions," and the other black mystics, artists, and performers dispersed throughout the collection of *Counternarratives*, and then return

to “On Brazil,” it is difficult not to imagine the practice of “statelessness,” from Moten’s point of view, or “black utopia” from that of Brown, at play. The staff report is a narrative that is written from the perspective of the nation-state, however, Keene teaches his audience to read between the lines, to look beyond the archive, and to imagine the radical potential of black art, affective sensation, and embodied performance. To read “On Brazil” in this manner is to practice black utopia and deconstruct the nation-state. It is an act of statelessness.

CODA TO *COUNTERNARRATIVES*

By way of conclusion, with all this in mind I suggest that Keene’s *Counternarratives* also parallels Lélia Gonzalez’s theory of *Amefricanidade*. Keene channels Gonzalez’s notion of *Améfrica* in his Afro-speculative literature and posits an diasporic collectivity of the Americas centered on the affective radical potential of blackness as an alternative frequency, that is to say, as a counter-narrative to master narratives of the nation-state, such as the myth of racial democracy in Brazil. I believe *Amefricanidade* coincides with what readers observe in much of Keene’s *Counternarratives*, that is, the practice of statelessness/black utopia by black performance artist-characters, like Burunbana and others, despite that Eurocentric hegemony often disregards their art as sorcery, voodoo, or with other anti-black slur. This form of embodied knowledge—a type of performance art, if you will—opens up to the radical possibility of an affective community, an international black imaginary that is the African diaspora, another dimension, a “no place” uncontained by the borders of the nation-state. In writing a collection of stories and novellas that reverberates across the degeographized

and untimed intervals of the Afro-Atlantic World with *Counternarratives*, from his *lugar de fala* in the United States, Keene himself speculates a stateless black utopia by imagining the African diaspora in Brazil and other contrapuntal locales of the American hemisphere, by representing *Améfrica*.

CHAPTER 2: GAYL JONES' *PALMARES*

Palmares is Gayl Jones' first work to be published in more than two decades, however, with this novel she returns to a familiar landscape in her corpus, seventeenth-century Brazil. In fact, *Palmares* is a retelling of Jones' 1981 epic poem *Song for Anninho* in novelistic form that despite just being published in 2021 has actually been in the works since the late 1970's. In *Palmares,* as in *Song for Anninho*, Jones portrays the protagonist Almeyda as she searches for her lost husband Anninho and the historical yet mythical *quilombo* known as Palmares.[34] Nevertheless, whereas in *Song for Anninho* readers are left to fill in the blanks in the condensed version of the narrative in its verse form, in *Palmares* Jones' audience enters into a much more fleshed out rendering of her representation of seventeenth-century Brazil and its multicultural inhabitants. Still, like in *Song for Anninho*, via her Afro-speculative literary tourism, Jones invokes *Amefricano* cultural memory and imagines "the myth of Mama Africa" in her representation of the diaspora in colonial Brazil. Therefore, I read Jones' historically and culturally grounded world-building in the novel as an extended act of "statelessness" and "black utopia" in agreement with Fred Moten and Jayna Brown's respective concepts. Although *Palmares* is a first-person narrative told from the point of view of Almeyda that incorporates many

[34] For more on the history of the *quilombo* Palmares in English, see R. K. Kent's "Palmares: An African State in Brazil" in *The Journal of African History* (1965) and/or Robert Nelson Anderson's extension of Kent's piece, "The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil" in *Journal of Latin American Studies* (1996).

traditional elements of the modern novelistic form as conceived in the West, Jones also draws heavily from Afro-descendent cultures of oral storytelling, and in this vein experiments with non-linear time and space in a manner that is innovative and revelatory for her readers. Correspondingly, *Palmares* is remarkable in its artistic scope for myriad reasons, not only due to its experimentation with form and its complex amalgamation of different literary aesthetics, but also for its fantastical world building and its nature as an expression of the black imaginary via its representation of the African diaspora in Brazil. *Palmares* is therefore a continuation of Jones' enduring hemispheric project of representing the common affective experience of black women and other marginalized peoples of color across the Americas.

Jones' first work, the novel *Corregidora*, was published in 1975 (Tate 142), and thus began her literary career with a novel dealing with Brazil, if only at a distance, that is to say, from the narrative space of Kentucky. However, until the very recent publication of *Palmares*, aside from *Corregidora*, *Song for Anninho* stood as her major treatise on Brazil, though she had also represented the country in *Xarque and Other Poems* (1985) in addition to various other short pieces scattered across her repertoire, some of which are now a part of the larger whole that is "*Palmares* (2021)." While I find *Corregidora* and *Song for Anninho* to be incredibly interesting, in this chapter I will largely avoid discussing these works, unless especially warranted, because they have been analyzed extensively—frankly, well picked over—in the last forty odd years.[35]

[35] See for instance, Lovalerie King's "Resistance, Reappropriation, and Reconciliation: The Blues and Flying Africans in Gayl Jones's *Song for Anninho*;" Trudier Harris' "A Spritiual Journey: Gayl Jones's *Song for Anninho*;" Casey Clabough's "Toward Feminine Mythopoetic Visions: The Poetry of Gayl Jones;" Madhu Dubey's "Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition;" et cetera.

Instead, I will focus my discussion chiefly on *Palmares*. To be clear, and also to forestall any potential criticisms of my analysis or the novel itself, I am less interested in searching for instances of verisimilitude and/or historical inaccuracies in the text of *Palmares* than I am in considering the ways in which Jones imagines the black diaspora, even if that means not always having her facts straight about seventeenth-century Brazil. While I anticipate that critics might gripe about Jones conflating the respective histories of slavery in Brazil and the United States, it is precisely this type of conflation that I believe to be most significant, even if the narrative is purely fictional, that is, imagined. In my mind, this is another iteration of the practice of diaspora; of black utopia; of statelessness.

Although there exists a plethora of academic articles, book chapters, and other publications on Jones' body of work, because *Palmares* is so new, aside from a handful of reviews there has been virtually zero critical analysis of the novel. Nevertheless, as a result of the connections shared between *Palmares* and *Song for Anninho* as well as Jones' career-long project of bridging the American hemisphere through her fiction and poetry, much of the critical dialogue regarding her earlier works also sheds light on her most recent. In my analysis of *Palmares*, I engage with the most relevant pieces of this discursive field, and in particular, will look to Brazilian scholars who publish in both English and Portuguese as well as to other researchers working outside the hegemonic United States. In particular, I dialogue with Lélia Gonzalez's theory of "*Améfrica*" in my investigation of Jones' Afro-speculative imagining of the diaspora from a hemispheric American perspective. Moreover, I will resume the conversation with Brown and Moten that I began in relation to John Keene's *Counternarratives* by bringing their respective theories of black utopia and statelessness to bear on Jones' *Palmares*. I explore new

avenues of critical analysis as well by dialoguing with Lusophone thinkers, such as Patricia de Santana Pinho, Djamila Ribeiro, and Grada Kilomba, while also considering the work of Michelle D. Commander, as well as discourses of diaspora and biopolitics from Angela Naimou, among others. Although Jones' *Palmares* may (re)present some historical inaccuracies regarding slavery in seventeenth-century Brazil, it is nevertheless notable for the scope of its project as an Afro-diasporic speculative literature of the black imaginary, and undoubtedly merits further discussion in the field of global/international black studies. Ultimately, by way of my analysis, I argue that by couching its narrative in a speculative past, it does not recognize the present-day effects of the institutions of colonialism and slavery on the modern nation-state and everyday Brazilians. However, via "Afro-Atlantic speculation"—to borrow Commander's concept—Jones' novel is invested in understanding the historical roots of hemispheric American racism, what Christina Sharpe refers to as the "pervasive climate of anti-blackness" (106), that spans from the United States to Brazil.

JONES' AFRO-DIASPOIRC LITERARATURE

In order to better comprehend *Palmares* as both a text and a piece of print culture it is crucial to understand Jones' relationship with Brazil and her writing process. Jones has clearly delineated her artistic aspirations of realizing a black American hemispheric literature in various interviews, scholarly works, and elsewhere. In an often-referenced interview with Charles H. Rowell of *Callaloo* (1982), Jones makes many significant points and offers readers some particularly lucid insights into her writing process for both *Song for Anninho* and *Palmares*. Here, Jones confirms that *Song for Anninho* and

Palmares are stitched from the same fabric; as she states, "The first version of *Song* was a lyrical novel entitled *Almeyda*… It was rewritten as a straight dramatic novel *Palmares* then that was readapted and published as *Song for Anninho*" (Rowell 40). Jones goes on further to assert her ultimate objective, "I'd like to be able to deal with the whole American continent in my fiction—the whole Americas—and to write imaginatively of blacks anywhere/everywhere" (Rowell 40). Echoes of Gonzalez's *Améfrica* resound in these lines from Jones, as the African American author professes her Afro-diasporic literary objective of representing "*Amefricanos*" across the hemisphere. However, keeping in mind Djamila Ribeiro's theory of "*lugar de fala*," what is at stake is whether Jones' novel recapitulates US imperialism in its Afro-speculative literary tourism of pre-modern Brazil. Furthermore, while it is clear that Jones seeks to create an Afro-diasporic and hemispheric American literature, in doing so she risks falling into the trap of essentialism in attempting to articulate a universal black subject. Nevertheless, various critics have teased out this simultaneously diasporic and hemispheric aesthetic in Jones' writing thread by thread, most notably Stelamaris Coser's *Bridging the Americas: The Literature of Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Gayl Jones*.

Coser's 1995 book stands apart as the only major publication on Gayl Jones by a Brazilian thinker in English, or Portuguese for that matter. Because *Bridging the Americas* has been so seminal, the majority of scholars who post-1995 have critiqued Jones' Brazil-centric work have drawn heavily from Coser's research.[36] In *Bridging the*

[36] See Angela Naimou's *Salvage Work: U.S. and Caribbean Literatures amid the Debris of Legal Personhood*; Elizabeth Christine Russ' *The Plantation in the Post Slavery Imagination*; Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg's "Living the Legacy: Pain, Desire, and Narrative Time in Gayl Jones' 'Corregidora;'" Sirène Harb's "Memory, History, and Self-Reconstruction in Gayl Jones's 'Corregidora;'" et cetera.

Americas, Coser asserts, "Using Brazil as a foil to realities of race and gender in the United States…Jones retrieves the African presence in the whole process of the creation of the America as a continent" (120). However, in her examination of Jones' hemispheric literature (as exemplified by *Corregidora* and *Song for Anninho*), Coser primarily relies on Immanuel Wallerstein's notion of "the extended Caribbean" for her theoretical framework. As Coser states, "Although…Caribbean islands as a whole resist simplistic generalizations regarding their sociocultural formation and development, Wallerstein's concept seems appropriate as a 'unifying alibi'" (3). While the extended Caribbean is applicable in some ways to Jones' work, including *Palmares*, there are plenty of black thinkers in the US and Brazil alike who offer more contemporary approaches to her Afro-diasporic literature, namely Patricia Santana Pinho and Michelle D. Commander. Additionally, I take issue with a more recent analysis from the 2008 collection of critical essays on Jones' corpus titled *After the Pain.* Fiona Mills, one of the editors of the collection, searches for "Afro-Latino/a identifications" in *Song for Anninho* and *Mosquito* with her essay, however, in doing so she erases black narratives to instead conform with the transnational master narrative of *Latinidad.* On the other hand, in a remedial effort against such elisions and obfuscations of Jones' Afro-diasporic literature, I contend that reading *Song for Anninho,* as well as *Palmares*, through the lens of Gonzalez's notion of "*Amefricanidade,*" as opposed to one of the extended Caribbean or "Afro-*Latinidad,*" yields more illuminating insights into Jones' larger corpus and its hemispheric objective of linking the common histories of colonialism, slavery, and anti-blackness shared between Brazil, the United States, and the rest of the Americas.

Notwithstanding the at-times universalizing tendencies of Jones' aesthetic project, in the aforementioned interview with Rowell, she goes on to elaborate on the artistic possibilities afforded by an imagined colonial Brazil, a fictional landscape that exists within the space of the black diaspora:

> "[G]oing to the Brazilian history and landscape helped my imagination and writing… I've done the necessary research for the historical and social facts for *Palmares* and *Song* but the characters and relationships are invention/imagination… the Brazilian experience (purely imaginative since I've never been there) helped to give a perspective on the American one—I can't really say what this means yet." (40-1)

The final lines of the above excerpt also ring with a peculiar yet poignant significance. In 1982 Jones had never been to Brazil, in her speculative practice of black utopia, that is to say, in the act of imagining *Améfrica* in Brazil, Jones comes to more fully understand America—both the United States and the continent—in relation to its history of colonialism and slavery as well as its white supremacist culture of anti-blackness. While black peoples from all different nations across the globe collectively imagine the diaspora, African American thought maintains a hegemonic role in diasporic discourse and cultural production. Thus, when analyzing Jones' representation of Brazil *Palmares* it is crucial to consider her *lugar de fala* as a black cultural producer in the United States. Nevertheless, I argue that in spite of her *lugar de fala* in the hegemonic US, Jones imagines *Améfrica*, an affective community of *Amefricanos*, between the United States and Brazil, and in this manner, deconstructs master narratives of the modern nation-state.

Although Jones' *Palmares* is an imagined neo-slave narrative, and therefore presented as the protagonist Almeyda's first-person account, it is still a polyphonic novel in the Bakhtinian sense, considering that a multiplicitous symphony of voices populate the text. In this way, Jones evades creating an essentializing monolithic Afro-diasporic voice, and instead emphasizes the plurality of black peoples from all across the globe in her representation of the multicultural complexity of pre-modern Brazil, that is, before nationalist master narratives propagated the myth of racial democracy. While Jones relies heavily on Afro-diasporic oral cultures of storytelling in crafting her literature, her fiction is a globalized *bricolage* of influences and confluences and fits well within the genre of World literature. Again in the same interview with Rowell referenced above, Jones lists her primary influences in the contemporaneous moment of 1982: "Chaucer, Carlos Fuentes, Jean Toomer, T.S. Eliot, Cervantes, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway… Margaret Laurence. Alice Walker. Anton Chekov, others." (52-3). From my perspective, when reading *Palmares* it is the respective influences of Cervantes, Fuentes, and Joyce that appear most immediately throughout the text, apart from the African American literary tradition that is. Jones' work, including her most recent, is often lumped into the literary genre of the fantastic, and it is this that she shares with Fuentes, whereas in the case of Joyce, in *Palmares* the author employs a stream of consciousness technique akin to *Ulysses.* Nonetheless, it is the Jones' connection to Cervantes that I find most elucidating in terms of the structure and style of her newest novel.

Jones' *Palmares* is narrated in an episodic fashion, and even includes an experimental section called "*The Narratives of Barcala Aprigio*," which are presented as a found manuscript and bear striking similarities to "*Las novelas ejemplares*" of

Cervantes' *Don Quijote*. Beyond this, Jones herself also alludes to the links between the picaresque mode and her novel *Palmares*, however, like many US authors—such as Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Jim Harrison to namedrop a few—she conflates *Don Quijote* and the picaresque mode. In other words, while *Don Quijote* certainly does contain elements of the picaresque, namely the episodes dealing with the *pícaro* Ginés de Pasamonte, Cervantes incorporates myriad narrative styles and techniques into his *magnum opus*, which ultimately comprise a more complex and polyphonic novelistic mode. Moreover, *Don Quijote*—with its metafictional aesthetic—is primarily related through a third-person narrator, which is a key distinction between the Cervantine and the picaresque modes, not to mention Jones' *Palmares*. Nevertheless, in the introduction to her book of literary criticism *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature,* Jones acknowledges the orality of Cervantes' novel, asserting, "Cervantes…in his *Don Quijote*…maximized the sphere of the novel through oral traditions of interpolated stories, folktales, proverbs, orations, recollections, and dreams" (3). Of course, an analogous polyphonic matrix of voices can also be observed throughout Jones' *Palmares.*

In a similar vein, in another frequently cited interview—this time with Claudia C. Tate in 1979—Jones recognizes a fascinating relationship between the picaresque mode (or at least the picaresque as she conceptualizes it) and US slave narratives. In conversation with Tate, Jones states, "When I read Cervantes…I make connections between *Don Quixote* and the picaresque Afro-American slave narrative, and consequently, *Don Quixote*, which is a favorite book, becomes even more important" (145). To double down, Jones also proposes this same analogy in *Liberating Voices* (2).

Correspondingly, in *Palmares* Jones manifests this confluence of narrative modes in the text of her novel by way of the protagonist's Almeyda's first-person account of growing up as an enslaved person in seventeenth-century northeastern Brazil, Pernambuco to be exact. In fact, in a key episode of *Palmares* called "Almeyda's Reveries" from the "A Leap through Time and Spirit" section of the novel, the protagonist encounters a pivotal character (that also figures significantly in *Song for Anninho*) named Zibatra a "*curandeira*" or *feiticeira* (akin to Keene's Burunbana) who reads Almeyda her past, and in a metafictional moment in the text, pointedly reminds her, "*This picaresque story is yours* [i.e. Almeyda's]. *A dream fantasista*" [original emphasis] (Jones *Palmares* 262). The second sentence in this quote is also significant, as "fantasista" means fanciful in Portuguese; therefore, Jones implies that the narrative readers encounter in the text is Almeyda's journey with Zibatra "through time and spirit" to better understand her past. While readers learn directly from the protagonist herself early only that she was taught to read and write as a child by the benevolent priest Father Tollinare, it is from this point on in the novel that *Palmares* becomes particularly aware of itself as a text. In fact, only a few pages later, Almeyda as dreamer, writer, and archivist, includes "*The Narratives of Barcala Aprigio*" into her autobiography. Ultimately, as a polyphonic picaresque Almeyda's narrative bears witness, serving as a firsthand account—or a fictional *testimonio* to consider the context of Latin American literature—of the atrocities of slavery in Brazil, and thus by extension in accordance with Jones' overarching aesthetic project, across the Americas.

Indeed Almeyda's autobiographical narrative is a picaresque riddled with Cervantine polyphony and elements of the fantastic, but it is also reminiscent of an

African American slave narrative *à la* Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and other examples of the genre. In *Liberating Voices*, Jones claims that "slave narratives serve as a precedent for African American writers in the New World and have in fact inspired many," and furthermore that "slave narratives might be the only continuous pre-twentieth-century examples of oral tradition in action" (2). However, as an imagined neo-slave narrative, Jones' *Palmares* is significant for its Brazilian setting in consideration of the fact that without a publishing industry supported by the likes of William Lloyd Garrison and other US abolitionists, there does not exist a common literary tradition of slave narratives in Brazil as there does in the United States. Nevertheless, it is in this way that via the black diasporic imaginary, Jones depicts a young enslaved woman in seventeenth-century Brazil in a dream-like quasi coming-of-age tale that spans the course of twenty-five years (circa 1676-1701). Accordingly, Jones creates a fictional (neo-)slave narrative in order to dramatize the historical reality of the Brazilian institution of slavery, as well as to represent the millions of African peoples enslaved in Brazil and the revolutionary acts of resistance that many of them undertook, such as establishing the legendary *quilombo* Palmares.

Jones' stylization of *Palmares* as a neo-slave narrative, that is to say, the fact that it is stylized as a first-person account (i.e. an autobiography), invokes Grada Kilomba's *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism*, in which she describes the telling of one's own story, and particularly for black women, as a revolutionary act of "self-definition," in line with Patricia Hill Collins' black feminist concept. In *Plantation Memories*, which is an interesting book that blends anthropology, creative writing, and performance criticism, Kilomba states, "[the] passage from objecthood to subjecthood is

what marks writing as a political act…[and] furthermore an act of decolonization" (10). In fact, Kilomba suggests that her own "book can be conceived as a form of 'becoming a subject'" (11). Analogously, I contend that in Jones' *Palmares*, Almeyda also passes from object to subject via the act of recounting her own narrative. Kilomba is concerned with uncovering "hidden histories" (10) by breaking the silence surrounding everyday anti-blackness and racism, and speaking about how the afterlives of the history of slavery and colonialism continue to affect black peoples across the diaspora today. Jones too seeks to unearth buried histories in *Palmares*, however, she relies on always already incomplete archive and her Afro-speculative diasporic imagination to expose the horrors and repercussions of slavery and colonialism across the Americas in her novel.

Nevertheless, Kilobma's work is helpful in comprehending the ways in which Jones' literary technique shatters the silence about how the colonial foundations of the American hemisphere are entangled in anti-black racism. Kilomba powerfully reveals the ways in which white supremacy has sought to silence black peoples since the colonial period of the Americas by invoking a portrait notorious for its depiction of racist cruelty in Brazil, *Escrava Anastácia* (circa 1818). In reference to this portrait, Kilomba exclaims,

> I want to speak about [the] brutal *mask of speechlessness* [original emphasis, as always]. This mask was a very concrete piece, a real instrument, which became a part of the European colonial project for more than three hundred years. It was composed of a bit placed inside the mouth of the Black subject, clamped between the tongue and jaw, fixed behind the head with two strings, one surrounding the chin and the other surrounding the nose and forehead… its primary function was to

> implement a sense of speechlessness and fear… In this sense, the mask represents colonialism as a whole. (14)

As a potent parallel, in *Lugar de fala* Ribeiro notes this section of Kilomba's book and juxtaposes it with a quote from Conceição Evaristo regarding the same portrait of the enslaved woman Anastácia. Evaristo movingly describes "the mask of speechlessness" that Anastácia was forced to wear as a metaphor for the radical potential of black women's speech,

> "aquela imagem da escrava Anastácia, eu atenho dito muito que a gente sabe falar pelos orifícios da mascara e às vezes a gente fala como tanta potencia que a mascara é estilhaçada. E eu acho que o estilhaçamento é um símbolo nosso, porque nossa fala força a mascara" ["that image of the slave Anastácia, I've said often that we (i.e. black women) know how to speak through the openings of the mask and at times we speak with so much power that the mask is shredded. I find that this shredding is our symbol, because our speech forces open the mask"]. (qtd. in Ribeiro, 76)

In this excerpt from Evaristo, she clearly contradicts Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to instead contend in spirit that yes, the subaltern can speak, and in fact, the subaltern—in this case, black women—can speak with such force that they dismantle the monolithic white supremacist discourses that try to impose silence upon them. Kilomba as well finds equivocations with Spivak, as she claims, "Spivak's position on the *silent subaltern* is…problematic if seen as an absolute statement about colonial relations, because it sustains the idea that the Black subject has no ability to question an counter colonial discourses" (24). Furthermore, Ribeiro also agrees with Kilomba and Evaristo in regards

to Spivak's polemical question, arguing, "pensar esse lugar [i.e. o lugar de fala do subalterno] como impossível de transcender é legitimar a norma colonizadora" ["to conceptualize the lugar de fala of the subaltern as impossible to transcend is to legitimize the colonizing norm"] (74). With all this in mind, I propose that Jones also intends to shred the mask of speechlessness in *Palmares* via a polyphonic novelistic technique. However, the question that remains is whether Jones, as a black cultural producer writing in the discursive space of the African diaspora from a *lugar de fala* in the hegemonic US, elides or uncovers the histories of *Amefricanos* in colonial Brazil via her protagonist Almeyda's first-person narrative—testimony.

Jones's Afro-diasporic literary technique across her career draws heavily from the oral tradition of what she calls "the African American literary tradition," again, in *Liberating Voices*. As Jones submits, "'freeing of voice'…is common to all literatures which have held (or assumed) a position of subordination to another literary tradition," and goes on to include "Third World" writers in this same lineage (*Voices* 178-9). Furthermore, Jones notes an interesting role reversal in the global literary sphere, declaring, "Whereas early African American writers were influenced by Western models…many European writers are now being influenced (and modernized) by writers of the Third World" (*Voices* 179). I suggest that Jones' *Palmares* is written with the same oral tradition of "freeing of voice" that she describes in *Liberating Voices*, as she looks to some "Third World" writers such as Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Marquez, Octavio Paz, and other authors often affiliated with magical realism. With all that being said, while Keene in his Brazilian pieces in *Counternarratives* is clearly aware of, and in dialogue with, the *Literatura negra* cultural movement associated with Evaristo and

others, Jones is evidently writing from a different rhizome of influences and traditions that spuds from outside the national borders of Brazil. In fact, significantly Brazilian writers, and most notably black women, appear to be entirely absent from Jones' survey of Latin American literature. This is to say, whereas Keene engages with Brazilian culture in a form of anthropophagy and thus cannibalizes *Literatura negra*, Jones is not invested in the same type of black diasporic project. Rather, Jones represents Brazil because it provides her diasporic imagination a *carte blanche.* Accordingly, it is on this blank page that Jones writes her Afro-diasporic literature, and thereby, practices black utopia in representing *Améfrica* in Brazil via Afro-Atlantic speculation.

Correspondingly, by way of "coda" to her chapter on saudade, Commander considers the role of Afro-Atlantic flight in Jones' *Song for Anninho.* In her brief but salient reading of Jones' epic poem, in which Almeyda laments the loss of her husband Anninho after the *quilombo* Palmares is razed by invading Portuguese soldiers, Commander claims, "Jones performs the speculative act of what Toni Morrison refers to as a 'literary archaeology,' the painstaking task of developing a narrative from the historical record, fragmentary evidence, and the author's imagination" (169). Although Commander is referring to *Song for Anninho*, I propose that with *Palmares* Jones performs a parallel "literary archaeology," however, it is simply *re*-presented via a dramatic narrative in the form of a polyphonic picaresque, and therefore, Commander's critical lens proves not only applicable to the novel, but fruitful as well. While Jones has certainly done substantial research on colonial Brazil and the *quilombo* Palmares, her novel falls more into the genre of (Afro-)speculative fiction as opposed to historical fiction, which is precisely what makes it so fascinating. Commander goes on to claim,

"[*Song for Anninho*] is a lyrical expression of Almeyda's yearning to be reunited with Anninho in the midst of her considerable physical and emotional pain as well as an articulation of her desire to retain connections with the local and distant pasts through rememory and the spiritual realm" (169). She then continues, contending, "Through Zibatra's mystical mediation, Almeyda is able to communicate with the deceased Anninho, offering wisdom from her grandmother that is instructive about…Afro-Atlantic expressions of saudade" (169). While this statement from Commander mostly rings true, by the end of Jones' new novel *Palmares*, readers learn that Anninho did not in fact die after all, but rather was taken captive by the Portuguese, however, he recounts to Almeyda that he was able to escape and the two are reunited as husband and wife near the narrative's finale. Regardless, in her final ruminations on *Song for Anninho*, Commander asserts,

> Almeyda reinforces the idea that while the foremothers may no longer exist in the flesh, there is an African interiority that remains in all dispossessed descendants of slaves. Many stories are unknown, lost to time. Afro-Atlantic speculative acts to reclaim Africa in Bahia and in places throughout the diaspora are deemed by [Afro-descendants] as necessary for tapping into that which they feel is inherent yet deeply obfuscated. (170)

With Commander's words in mind and in consideration of Jones' overarching aesthetic project of creating an Afro-diasporic that represents *Amefricanos* across the hemisphere, I argue that *Palmares* unearths the narratives that have been buried or erased by master narratives of history and the nation-state via Afro-Atlantic speculation. Accordingly, in

styling her novel as Almeyda's first-person narrative, Jones practices black utopia and gives voice to these histories lost to the intrinsic fallibility of the archive while concomitantly imagining "Africa" in Brazil.

MULTICULTURALISM IN THE PRE-MODERN BRAZIL OF JONES' *PALMARES*

Indeed, with *Palmares* Jones takes flight to Brazil in order to reimagine Africa, and as I have demonstrated thus far in conjunction with my interlocutors, doing so is the practice of diaspora, or an act of Afro-Atlantic speculation to borrow Commander's phrasing, or even black utopia if we choose to use Brown's terminology. As I have also argued, Jones' *Palmares*, and really all her work representing Brazil, is an act of literary tourism, but a form of tourism, or rather a form of Africa diasporic speculation, that seeks out sameness as opposed to otherness. Nevertheless, that is not to say that Jones paints a homogenous picture of the diaspora that purports to represent some universal or essential Afro-diasporic identity. On the other hand, in *Palmares* Jones represents imagines Africa in her speculative flight to seventeenth-century Brazil that expresses the multicultural complexity of the diaspora as well as the global foundations of the Americas since colonialism by representing Afro-descendants from various cultures of the African continent, as I will demonstrate below. In doing so, Jones expands, especially, her US audience's understanding of the African diaspora, and moreover, of the United States' and Latin America's shared histories of colonialism, slavery, and anti-blackness. While Jones imagines Africa in Brazil, in *Palmares* she does represent the multicultural diversity of the African continent, particularly in terms of religion. In fact, the Inquisition that occurs contemporaneously on the Iberian Peninsula haunts Brazil from afar

throughout the course of the narrative. Furthermore, the two main characters of the novel, Almeyda and Anninho, are Catholic and Muslim, respectively. However, beyond this there are many episodes throughout Jones' sprawling novel that deal with religious tensions in the early "New World."

Jones is not only invested in depicting confrontations between Islam and Christianity in *Palmares*, but also in representing Yoruba and other African religious traditions. Throughout the course of her narrative, Almeyda encounters other characters who recognize something curious in her gaze. For instance, when at the age of 15 (*Palmares* 87), Almeyda is sold from Entralgo's plantation to Azevedo's, she meets a black male character with a Tupi[37] name, Antalaquituxe, who just happens to have knowledge of Egyptian culture, and about whom she remarks, "Perhaps he was made up of everyone in this New World" (*Palmares* 92). Antalaquituxe escorts Almeyda and tells her that her eyes "'look like perfect hieroglyphs,'" and also that "'from the profile [she] look[s] like bastet… The Egyptian goddess. The goddess of love and joy. Or…Oshun'" (I *Palmares* 93). The aforementioned episode and other instances in the narrative bestow Jones' novel with an Egyptological register that can also be observed in the works of Ishmael Reed and other African American authors. Subsequently, in the same chapter Almeyda meets another man named Xavier who when faced with her asks, "'Yemanja? Is this the goddess Yemanja?'" (*Palmares* 131). And then again in another example aligned with the previous, Old Vera tells Almeyda that she resembles "the African Queen of the Waves" (*Palmares* 156), before moments later calling her "Yemanja" as well (*Palmares* 158). These episodes take place rather early on in the narrative, and therefore, ultimately

[37] For more on indigenous Tupi-Guaraní cultures in Latin America/Brazil, see Hélène Clastres' *The Land-without-Evil: Tupí-Guaraní Prophetism*.

foreshadow that Almeyda possesses powers of divination similar to those of Burunbana in Keene's "A Letter on the Trials of the Counterreformation in New Lisbon." Readers learn in the latter half of the novel when Almeyda "leaps through time and spirit" with the shape-shifting Zibatra (a.k.a Luisa Cosme/Moraze/Old Vera), and also initiates training as a "curandeira," before eventually abandoning her education in order to continue her search for her lost husband Anninho and the "New Palmares." Furthermore, these episodes and others are significant in their invocation of two important Yoruba figures, "Oxum" and "Iemanjá." Oxum, the "goddess of wealth and sweetwater," and Iemenjá, the "goddess of motherhood and the sea," are deities, or *orixás*, that factor prominently into the modern-day Afro-Brazilian religion of *Candomblé* (Matory 151), and also into the respective Afro-diasporic literatures of Conceição Evaristo and Bixarte, as I will demonstrate in the coming chapters.[38]

Nevertheless, Jones further complicates the multicultural make-up of the African continent—which in turn, through colonization has also engendered a particular ethnic and cultural opacity in the Americas that is arguably most evident in the nation of Brazil—via her extended representation of Muslim culture in *Palmares*.[39] As noted above, Almeyda's husband Anninho is a devout Muslim man, but it is his father that occupies an especially significant space in the text, as he serves as personification of Islam. In the course of her search for her lost husband near the end of her narrative,

[38] See also Vanessa K. Valdés' *Oshun's Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas* for more on *Candomblé* in literature.
[39] There is a long history of Muslim culture in Brazil, and in Bahia in particular, as personified by the historical figure and black revolutionary leader in nineteenth-century Brazil, Luiza Mahin, who was the mother of the Brazilian abolitionist Luís Gama. For more on Mahin, see Aline Najara da Silva Gonçalves' *Luiza Mahin: Uma rainha africana no Brasil*.

Almeyda finally meets Anninho's father, who is referred to by numerous characters throughout the novel as the "Mohammed of Bahia" as well as pejoratively the "Fool of Bahia." Upon meeting Almeyda, the Mohammed declares to her, "'This world is a savage place. Savage and brutal. The only God is Allah,'" before then suspiciously inquiring, "'Are you a Christian woman?" (*Palmares* 407). When Almeyda answers in the affirmative and specifies that she is Catholic—though she is also referred to mysteriously as an "Enchanted Mooress" throughout the novel—the Mohammed (i.e. her husband's father) retorts, "'Católica? Ah, if I had not made my peace, I would have killed all of you… I'm surrounded by lunatics and New Christians'" (*Palmares* 407). This episode is illuminating in the sense that it illustrates that although Afro-diasporic peoples may share the same race, they do not necessarily share a universal ethnicity or culture, that is to say, an essential black diasporic identity does not exist. Jones demonstrates this fact over and over again in *Palmares* while also dramatizing other examples of religious conflict in the New World.

"The Russian" is perhaps to some an ostensibly extraneous episode that I actually find to be quite intriguing for its portrayal of the grand absurdity of the institution of slavery as well as the notions of freedom and human rights. On her journey to the New Palmares, Almeyda encounters a Russian man in the forest and they strike up a curious conversation. In their conversation, the Russian man says that he is faced with a serious bout of indecision as to whether or not he should stay in Brazil or return to his native country. In a moment of absurdist irony, the Russian describes his situation in his homeland under the oppressive system of serfdom in comparison to the potential opportunities afforded to him, as a white man, in Brazil:

> "I don't know what to do. If I go back I won't be free to choose my own life. Maybe I'll stay here and become a rich man and not lift a finger… The say all you have to do here is get seven niggers and the government will give you a sugar plantation… They say it goes all right at first but then all the niggers want to be freemen and run away, and so you have to buy more." (*Palmares* 416)

In the Russian's brief but potent admission, Jones portrays a metonymy of the white supremacist logic inherent in the "American Dream," by which I mean to say, the economic opportunity promised to those of European origins across the colonial Americas. The Russian goes on to intimate some other interesting points in his dialogue with Almeyda. After his remarks regarding slavery in Brazil, the Russian abruptly states, "'They say this country's full of Jews and Jesuits,'" to which Almeyda replies, "there were a lot of Jesuits, but that Jews are not allowed, unless they were converted Jews, 'New Christians'" (*Palmares* 416).[40] To this, the Russian ambiguously relates to Almeyda, "'I don't want to cut my beard or change my faith'" (*Palmares* 416). Here, the Russian's confession exacerbates the irony of his previous statements regarding black peoples' bondage and enslavement in colonial Brazil, as though he is evading persecution himself, at the same time, he finds no ethical qualms in persecuting "Others," who do not meet his Eurocentric definition of "the human." Accordingly, with this episode, Jones reveals the absurdity of Western Enlightenment, and furthermore Eurocentric logic more broadly construed, in its categorization and hierarchization of racial, ethnic, and religious identities.

[40] For more on the history of the Jewish diaspora in colonial Brazil, see Arnold Wiznitzer's *Jews in Colonial Brazil* (1960).

THE *QUILOMBO* PALMARES IN JONES' NOVEL *PALMARES*

Jones' representation of seventeenth-century Brazil in *Palmares*, though primarily imaginative, is not idealized—that is, utopian, in its traditional valence—but rather it is an Afro-speculative act of narration that challenges the (inter-)national myth of a Brazilian racial democracy. Moreover, with her novel Jones critiques the search for utopia in community-building projects that rely on the Eurocentric rubric of the nation and/or the state; this includes any form of sovereign Afro-diasporic state. Instead, through Almeyda's narrative Jones posits that (black) utopia is a mode of being, a radical epistemology, not to be found in a "New Palmares," but rather in the affective community of the relationship between two lovers. In the novel, Jones represents the *quilombo* Palmares under the leadership of King Zumbi as anything but utopian, rather the fugitive community as depicted in Almeyda's narrative recapitulates the equivocations of the European colonial projects of nation building that transpired all across the Americas. I will analyze some of the most elucidating episodes of *Palmares* in this respect in order to investigate the tensions between the nation-state and Afro-diasporic community-building projects.

However, before investigating Jones' imagining of the *quilombo* Palmares via her speculative Afro-diasporic literature, it is important to first examine historical accounts of this black fugitive community for a reference point, or counterpoint, to her narrative. Edison Carneiro's study *O quilombo dos Palmares* (initially published in Brazil in 1946) provides an accompanying counter-narrative that largely corresponds with Jones' non-idealizing representation of Palmares and chief Zumbi in her novel. Carneiro refers to Palmares as "um pedaço da África transplantado para o Nordeste do Brasil" ["a piece of

Africa transplanted in the Northeast of Brazil"] (2), and thus, reveals that the *quilombo* is even associated with the myth of Mama Africa in the historical archive. Carneiro also describes how methods of social organization originating from the African continent influenced the type of government established in the *quilombo*, accordingly,

> Formas de govêrno, naturalmente rudimentares, foram-se desenhado entre essa massa colossal de negros… [o Estado] constituiu-se uma oligarquia—um grupo de chefes mais ou menos despóticos…encabeçada pelo rei Ganga-Zumba e, mais tarde, pelo "general de armas" Zumbi... O quilombo dos Palmares foi um Estado negro à semelhança dos muitos que existiriam na África, no século XVII—um Estado baseado na eletividade do chefe "mais hábil ou mais sagaz," "de maior prestígio e felicidade na guerra" [Forms of government, naturally rudimentary, were established between the colossal mass of black peoples… the State constituted an oligarchy—a group of, effectively, despotic chiefs…headed by the king Ganga-Zumba and, later, by the "general at arms" Zumbi… The *quilombo* Palmares was a black State similar to many of those that existed in Africa during the seventeenth century—a State based on electing the "most adept or wise" chief, he with the most "prestige and joy in battle."] (2, 4)

As I will show below, in the narrative of her novel *Palmares*, Jones represents the *quilombo* in line with Carneiro's historical description, as a black despotic military state. In this way, via her Afro-speculative representation of pre-modern Brazil, Jones does not idealize the *quilombo* as a perfect society, a utopia in its commonly understood meaning. On the contrary, much like John Keene in *Counternarratives*, Jones exposes the cycle of

violence inherent to erecting and maintaining a (nation-)state in any and all of its possible forms, Eurocentric, Afrocentric, or otherwise. Hence, I claim it is in this manner that Jones practices "statelessness" or "black utopia," in *Palmares*.

In the narrative of Jones' novel, while working in Sobrieski's shoe shop, Almeyda meets an enslaved black man named Pedro III who experienced a traumatic series of events as a result of the perversions of the white supremacist structures inherent in the colonial foundations of Brazil, not to mention the rest of the Americas. Capao, another enslaved person at the shoe shop, relates Pedro's story to Almeyda, "he fought against his own kind… He was in the military…and they sent him on expeditions against escaped Negroes. And he captured many… They decorated him for all the niggers he has captured. Ha. Ha, but now he is a slave himself" (*Palmares* 137). This brief passage on Pedro exemplifies the precarious social position of black peoples in the colonial Americas solely based on race, one that has reverberated into the present via the afterlives of slavery. When shortly later in the narrative, Almeyda, Pedro, and others return to Azevedo's plantation, men from the *quilombo* arrive there, and Almeyda is brought to Palmares as a "free" woman, whereas Pedro III suffers a different fate. The men from the *quilombo* proposition Almeyda and the other enslaved persons at Azevedo's, "'Do you wish to come [to Palmares] freely with us and be free men and a free woman? …For if you do not come freely, you'll be slaves wherever you go'" (*Palmares* 144). Almeyda chooses to go on her own accord, while as a result of his resistance Pedro is brought to Palmares a slave.

When first orienting herself around the *quilombo*, Almeyda expresses feeling confounded that not everyone is free and that even in Palmares slavery still exists. There,

Almeyda meets another enslaved woman named Nobrega, to whom she inquires, "'Is it true we are free women here?'" to which Nobrega replies, "'It is true you are a free woman. I am a slave'" (*Palmares* 152). Upon being referred to as "Master" by Nobrega, Almeyda declares, "There are no masters here. We are all the same people. We are all free" (*Palmares* 153). However, unfortunately Almeyda is incorrect, as the *quilombo* she had idealized since childhood, and in which she had long sought utopia, repeats the same cycle of oppression in establishing Palmares under King Zumbi by implementing the institution of slavery into the structure of the state. Nobrega explains that she was not given a "choice" to be free in Palmares, rather, she states, "'There was *choice* when we got her. Those women who were *chosen* by certain men were free. Women like you. They captured me only to be a slave again'" (*Palmares* 153). In disbelief and with a sense of disillusionment, Almeyda tells Nobrega, "'All my life I've heard stories of this place… I was told black people were free here. I longed to escape here to be free" (*Palmares* 153). In the episode, "Martim Anninho; The Frist Meeting," Almeyda encounters the man who will become her husband for the first time, and in fact, as Nobrega implied, the narrative reveals here that Anninho "chose" Almeyda as his "woman" in this moment (*Palmares* 165). However, it is also in this initial meeting that Anninho further explains the laws of Palmares to Almeyda: "'Those who escape here on their own are free. Those who we bring against their will are not. Those who go against the laws here are slaves again. Those who desert are executed. Murder, adultery, theft, desertion are punishable by death. That is the way it is" (*Palmares* 165). All that being said, Anninho also tells Almeyda that in all actuality, "The women are never killed. There are always other uses" (*Palmares* 166). By this, Anninho of course means that

women are either made wives, or worse, exploited for breeding purposes, just as they were under enslavement on plantations. Obviously, for Almeyda, the picture Anninho paints of the *quilombo* here is anything but a black utopia; rather, Jones' representation of Palmares reveals the fallacies of erecting an Afro-diasporic state.

Jones elaborates further on the failed state that is the Palmares of her novel via her depiction of the way in which Pedro III redeems himself in the eyes as well as the laws of the Palmaristas. In the episode "A Slave Captures a Slave and Redeems Himself," Pedro does precisely what the title says, exclaiming to Almeyda at the *quilombo*, "I am no longer a slave… Don't you know the law here? ...That if a slave captures a slave he redeems himself… I'm a free Palmarista man" (*Palmares* 210). Pedro subsequently continues, ruminating, "What shall I do with my freedom? Freedom now to capture the slave whom *I* choose, and do what *I* choose with them... Isn't that a way to exercise my freedom? …Well, it is the way of the nation. Another man's freedom depends on the slavery of yet another" (*Palmares* 211). Nevertheless, despite Pedro's temporary stint of "freedom," in the next episode Almeyda, as narrator, reveals that he is discovered to be a "spy" by the Palmaristas, and is consequently sentenced to death by hanging (*Palmares* 215). Pedro's story is emblematic of the tenuous liminal space that Afro-diasporic peoples occupy in the nations of the American hemisphere. At every turn, state laws, whether instituted by the Portuguese or the Palmaristas, oppress Pedro, backing him into a corner that warps his own humanity, and also causes him to not recognize the human rights of others (or more appropriately, "Sames") who occupy an analogous liminal space due to their race. It is in this vein that Jones critiques nation building and the state in all

their possible iterations, including idealized imaginings of the quilombo Palmares, which historically has been mythologized as a symbol of black resistance in diasporic discourse.

THE NATION-STATE AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

The episodes of Jones' novel in which she imaginatively represents the historical place that was Palmares do not contribute to the essentialist mythology of the *quilombo* as a *utopian* site of black resistance. Conversely, Angela Naimou in her book *Salvage Work: U.S. and Caribbean Literatures amid the Debris of Legal Personhood* interprets Jones' representation of Palmares in *Song for Anninho* "as a meditation on the failure of sanctuary as a place, prompting [Almeyda] to locate sanctuary not in any place but rather in the practice of her spiritual and bodily healing" (145). Naimou clarifies her use of the word "sanctuary," which she states is "the exceptional granting of protection to refugees or fugitives under certain conditions and within certain spaces;" however, she also goes on to assert that sanctuary "presents itself as a utopian respite from a legal order that historically has denied human and civil rights to black bodies but is, ultimately, a dystopian space, complicit with the very legal order that defines sanctuary as its exception" (143). As I have shown in my close reading of the novel *Palmares*, Jones' representation of the titular *quilombo* through Almeyda's narrative is certainly more dystopian than utopian in its recapitulation of slavery, execution, and other forms of state oppression. Moreover, Naimou also suggests that Jones "points out what is missed by celebrations of Palmares that claim its significance on the basis of its establishment of sanctuary in the form of a sovereign state" (150). In doing so, I propose, Jones complicates traditional conceptualizations of the diaspora as a transnational space, and

instead presents an innovative utopic mode of being in the space of the Afro-diasporic imaginary. With this in mind, Coser's 2019 essay on *Song for Anninho* and *Xarque and Other Poems* requires some revision, as she claims,

> Inspirada pela longa e sofrida história da escravatura no Brasil e, principalmente, pela resistência palmarista, Gayl Jones dialoga com a historiografia e abraça a causa quilombola [Inspired by the long and difficult history of slavery in Brazil and, principally, by the Palmares resistance, Jones dialogues with historiography and embraces the *quilombola* cause]. ("Escravidão" 5)

While Jones does not outright reject the *quilombola* cause described by Coser, she also does not blindly accept the promise of utopia in the form of a sovereign state. Contrarily, as I have argued above, with *Palmares* Jones warns her audience against repeating oppressive cycles of history in attempting, or at least longing, to establish an Afro-diasporic nation-state.

Accordingly, in a 2005 reading of *Song for Anninho*, Coser proposes that via Almeyda's oft-repeated refrain "I've got the blood of the whole continent running through my veins" (which also appears on numerous occasions in *Palmares*), "Almeyda ultrapassa a nação ao identificar o próprio corpo com o continente americano" ["Almeyda transcends the nation by identifying her own body with the American continent"] ("Palmares" 638). I again disagree with Coser in this regard, as I do not find that Almeyda transcends the nation in uttering this phrase; instead, I believe she understands the ways in which the colonial project of establishing the nation-state of Brazil, and particularly the Brazilian institution of slavery, has left a mark on her body and spirit. In

this vein, Jones represents Almeyda as an "*Amefricano*," in congruence with Gonzalez's notion, that is to say, one who has experienced the affective and corporeal/material realities of colonialism and slavery. Almeyda is not suggesting that she is an amalgamation/mixture of the totality of races, ethnicities, and/or cultures to be found across the American hemisphere, as this would be a recapitulation of the myth of racial democracy. Rather, Almeyda expresses the ways in which the colonial practices and institutions of the Brazilian nation-state, as well as the entirety of the continent, have had a traumatic impact on her being, as a black woman. In other words, Almeyda recognizes that she will not find "sanctuary" (to borrow Naimou's term) in a sovereign state that seeks to objectify her through enslavement.

However, Almeyda resists such objectification, and instead like Grada Kilomba, tells her story, and in doing so, she becomes a subject. Accordingly, Naimou confirms Jones' suspicions of the ways in which diasporic projects, as normally conceived, are always already entangled with the nation-stat Although King Zumbi and the Palmaristas of Jones' *Palmares* attempt to create a sovereign black state that exists outside the confines of any nation—Brazil, Portugal, Holland, et cetera—readers observe that even before its destruction, the *quilombo* replicated the nation-state and its cycle of violence, Anibal Quijano theorizes this historical phenomenon as the "coloniality of power:"

> any given society is a power structure, and power is what makes diverse and dispersed forms of social existence into a single articulated totality, or a society. And any power structure is always…an imposition of someone or some group upon others. Thus any possible nation-state is both a power structure and a product of power. But if it can be expressed through its

> members as an identity, it is only because it can be imagined as a community. And it can only be imagined as a community when and where some homogenization of people has been accomplished… (222-3)[41]

Against such recapitulations of the nation-state, I propose that via her protagonist Almeyda's first-person narrative, Jones manifests black utopia elsewhere and otherwise. That is to say, in her speculative imagining of Mama Africa in Brazil, Jones proposes a "stateless" community of Sames, not others, centered on a common experience of anti-blackness, on the affective realities and the material/corporeal consequences of colonialism and slavery—a collectivity of *Amefricanos*.

In the same 2005 article mentioned above, Coser also touches on the theme of *utopia* in Jones' representation of Palmares. Coser suggests that "Gayl Jones mantém a esperança na utopia possível das lutas de resistência de comunidades unidas contra a opressão" "Jones maintains hope in the possible utopia found in the struggles of resistance fought by communities united against oppression" ("Palmares" 642). I do concur that Jones maintains hope for utopia in the form of "comunidades unidas contra a opressão," however, I believe the type of community Jones envisions is an imagined one, that is to say, "black utopia" (to again recall Brown's theory) is the diasporic imaginary, not a physical place or sovereign state. I argue Jones posits that *utopia* is not to be found in some transnational or supranational Afro-diasporic nation-state, but rather, that black utopia is a "statelessness" (to now elicit Moten's concept), that is to say, a radical epistemology that offers the revolutionary potential of imagining an affective community constructed around the everyday experiences of navigating systems of anti-blackness and

[41] See also Walter D. Mignolo's article, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of decoloniality."

structural racism all across the nation-states of Americas. In this vein, I suggest that, like Keene's *Counternarratives*, Jones' *Palmares* dovetails with Lélia Gonzalez's notion of *Améfrica* in its Afro-speculative imagining of the African diaspora in Brazil. Ultimately, Jones recognizes her hegemonic *lugar de fala* as an African American author writing from the United States, and does not reify the nation-state in a *trans*national representation of the African diaspora in colonial Brazil with her novel *Palmares*. Rather, via her Afro-diasporic literature, Jones speculates an *inter*national hemispheric neo-slave narrative that uncovers the plurality of global black peoples and cultures across *Améfrica*, and thereby, also the multicultural diversity of modern Brazil since colonialism. Accordingly, in this way, Jones subverts the Brazilian nation-state's persistent "homogenizing" myth of racial democracy.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEIÇÃO EVARISTO'S *PONCIÁ VICÊNCIO*

The fiction writer, poet, and black feminist thinker Conceição Evaristo is one of the preeminent figures of Afro-Brazilian literature today. Said more accurately, Evaristo is one of the preeminent figures of *Literatura negra* ("Black literature"), which she distinguishes from "Afro-Brazilian literature" with the qualification that the former is specifically written by black authors ("Poética" 17). Evaristo's fiction and poetry explores the quotidian lives of black women living on the margins of modern Brazilian society. Evaristo's first novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* (2003) is one such example, and also the subject of this chapter. However, Evaristo has published numerous works in Portuguese; notably, her collection of stories *Olhos d'água* ("Eyes of Water"*)* received Brazil's most prestigious literary award *O Prêmio Jabuti* in 2015. Unfortunately, *Ponciá Vicêncio* happens to be the author's sole work translated into English to date—and that occurred in 2007.[42] The lack of visibility for Brazilian *Literatura negra* in the US publishing industry thereby restricts discursive lines of communication between black peoples living across the African diaspora. Nevertheless, the English translation of *Ponciá Vicêncio* alone serves as a vast wealth of Afro-diasporic epistemologies for readers in the United States seeking to learn more about everyday black life in modern Brazil. In fact, in her novel

[42] Still, there has been a significant amount of cross-cultural criticism between the United States and Brazil in relation to Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio*. For example, in Portuguese, see Ângela Maria Dias' article "Longe do Paraíso: *Jazz,* de Toni Morrison, e *Ponciá Vicêncio,* de Conceição Evaristo." In English, see Sarah S. Ohmer's "Gender and Resistance: Afro-Brazilian Women's Anti-Naming as Recovery From Trauma in Conceição Evaristo' 'Eu-Mulher' and *Ponciá Vicencio*," among others.

Evaristo is especially concerned with ancestral memory, Afro-diasporic cultures of *Candomblé*, the body, representation, and the afterlives of colonialism and slavery. Although *Ponciá Vicêncio* is grounded in Evaristo's home nation of Brazil, her novel's thematic concerns reflect structural issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality that also exist in the United States.

Accordingly, in the course of my analysis, I will reflect on the intricacies of Evaristo's poetics by examining a selection of her critical essays and introducing them into dialogue with other thinkers, such as Djamila Ribeiro, Eduardo de Assis Duarte, and Vanessa Kimberly Valdés. I will also place Evaristo's work into its respective cultural context by glossing a brief history of black women's writing in Brazil that dovetails with the tradition of *Literatura marginal* "(Marginal literature) initiated by Carolina Maria de Jesus' 1960 *Quarto de despejo* (published as *Child of the Dark* in English). In my investigation of Evaristo's novel *Ponciá Vicêncio*, I will primarily focus on the ways in which the author portrays her protagonist's artistic ability to represent affective ancestral memory through the embodied practice of clay sculpture. Additionally, I will contemplate Evaristo's representation of *Candomblé* cultural traditions, the African diaspora, the Brazilian nation-state, and the city, in her novel. I am also invested in exploring how Evaristo's characters endure in the aftermath of colonialism and slavery by subverting the systems of anti-black patriarchal oppression of modern Brazil. Furthermore, in conversation with Melissa Schindler, Lélia Gonzalez, and Fred Moten, I will consider the ways in which Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* reveals the tensions between the nation-state and the African diaspora. Ultimately, with this chapter, I will argue that although Conceição Evaristo does not directly return John Keene and Gayl Jones' gazes

by looking to the United States in her diasporic literary project, she nevertheless participates in the global black imaginary via her representation of Afro-descendant cultures in her home nation of Brazil.

EVARISTO'S ESCREVIVÊNCIA AND *LITERATURA NEGRA*

In her essay entitled "Literatura negra: uma poética de nossa afro-brasilidade," Evaristo traces her own work, as well as other examples of *Literatura negra* written by black women, back to Carolina Maria de Jesus, whose book *Quarto de despejo* is frequently included in undergraduate curricula in US academia. In regards to Carolina, Evaristo asserts, "Ao se falar da escrita de mulheres negras, necessário se faz voltar ao final da década de 60 para retomar a imagem da escritora Carolina Maria de Jesus" ["When talking about black Brazilian women's writing, it is necessary to return to the 1960s in order to recuperate the memory of Carolina Maria de Jesus"] ("Poética" 27). Evaristo believes that it was a radical act in and of itself that Carolina, a black woman and "favelada" (i.e. inhabitant of the *favelas*), empowered herself to write her own story in 1960. Evaristo observes Carolina's writing as a revolutionary speech act that disrupts the systemic oppression of social hierarchization; as she puts it in her own words, "Quando uma mulher como Carolina Maria de Jesus crê e inventa para si uma posição de escritora, ela já rompe com um lugar anteriormente definido como sendo o dela, o da subalternidade" ["When a woman like Carolina Maria de Jesus creates and establishes herself a position as a writer, she escapes from her predefined social locus, that of subalternity"] ("Poética" 28). In other words, Evaristo contends that for Carolina to speak from her particular *lugar de fala*—to use Djamila Ribeiro's concept—as a black women

from the *favelas* of São Paulo, is to subvert white supremacist patriarchal social hierarchization and reject its imposition of silence, of subalternity. Evaristo situates her own poetics, as well as those of many other works of women's *Literatura negra*, in the literary tradition established by Carolina Maria de Jesus—a tradition of giving collective voice to the quotidian experiences and social realities of black women living on the peripheries of not only Brazilian, but also global, society.

Analogous to Carolina Maria de Jesus' *Quarto de despejo*, Evaristo's writings are concerned with everyday issues for black women as they navigate the afterlives of slavery and colonialism as manifested in the oppressive structures of modern Brazilian society. In this vein, Evaristo's overarching aesthetic project is crafted from a poetics of—what she calls—"escrevivência." Evaristo's neologism "escrevivência" is a *portmanteau* of the Portuguese words *escrever* and *vivência*, which translate respectively as, "to write" and "life experience." Although Evaristo does indeed write from her own life experience as a black woman living in Brazil, her work should be considered fiction and not memoir in spite of the fact that there are some autobiographical aspects to her literary corpus ("Escrevivência" 38). In fact, Evaristo asserts that while she does write from her individual *lugar de fala*, she speaks with a collective voice via her poetics:

> Escrevivência surge de uma prática literária cuja autoria é negra, feminina e pobre. Em que o agente, o sujeito de ação, assume seu fazer, o seu pensamento, a sua reflexão, não somente como um exercício isolado, mas atravessado por grupos, por uma coletividade [Escrevivência emerges from a literary practice whose authorship is black, feminine, and poor, and in which the agent, the subject of action, assumes their task, their thinking,

> their reflection, not only as a solitary exercise, but one realized in groups, by a collectivity]. ("Escrevivência" 38)

Accordingly, as is evident in the quote above, Evaristo delineates her poetics of escrevivência within a black feminist framework. Furthermore, in confluence with her poetics of *Literatura negra* ("Poética" 19), Evaristo links escrevivência with ancestral memory and discourses of the African diaspora. As Evaristo states,

> Nossa escrevivência traz a experiência, a vivência de nossa condição de pessoa brasileira de origem africana, uma nacionalidade hifenizada, na qual me coloco e me pronuncio para afirmar a minha origem de povos africanos e celebrar a minha ancestralidade e me conectar tanto como os povos africanos, como com a diáspora africana [Escrevivência brings our experience, the realities of living our condition as Brazilians of African origin, a hyphenated nationality, that in which I ground and pronounce myself in order to affirm my African origins and celebrate my ancestry and connect myself as much with African peoples, as with the African diaspora]. ("Escrevivência" 30)

Here, Evaristo couches her poetics of escrevivência in discourses of the Afro-diasporic collectivity that is the black imaginary. Therefore, with her poetics of escrevivência, Evaristo imagines and represents, via the vehicle of her fiction and poetry, a community of black women who share similar everyday affective realties as a result of anti-blackness and heteronormativity while also reflecting facets of her own individual life experience.[43]

[43] For more on "escrevivência," in English, see Claudia Maria Fernandes Correa and Irineia Lina Cesario's translated interview with Evaristo titled, "An Afro-Brazilian Griot: An Interview with Conceição Evaristo." In Portuguese, see Rosemere Ferreira da Silva's

Evaristo understands the relationship between the individual and the collective in her conceptualization of escrevivência through diasporic epistemologies related to the Afro-Brazilian religion of *Candomblé*. In particular, Evaristo alludes to the *orxiás* (i.e. deities or entities) of *Candomblé*, Oxum and Iemanjá. Oxum is an *orixá* of femininity and womanhood, and she is often affiliated with the "sweet" or fresh waters of rivers (Valdés 9-10). On the other hand, Iemanjá is tied to "salty" waters and motherhood, considering that she is a maternal figure for all *orixás* (Valdés 10). With this in mind, Evaristo appropriates the Eurocentric myth of Narcissus to instead consider the ways in which the mirror of Oxum—an object with which the river *orixá* is regularly associated—is symbolic of her poetics of escrevivência. It is in this vein that Evaristo states, "O nosso espelho é o de Oxum e de Iemanjá... No abebé de Oxum… [e]contramos o nosso rosto individual, a nossa subjetividade que as culturas colonizadoras tentaram mutilar" ["Our mirror is that of Oxum and Iemanjá... In Oxum's mirror we find our individual face, our subjectivity that the colonizing cultures have tried to mutilate"] ("Escrevivência" 38-9). Contrarily, in the case of Iemanjá, Evaristo asserts, "O abebé de Iemanjá nos revela a nossa potencia coletiva, nos conscientiza de que somos capazes de escrever a nossa historia de muitas vozes" ["Iemanjá's mirror reveals our collective power, it makes us realize that we are capable of writing our story through many voices"] ("Escrevivência" 39). In this manner, Evaristo intimates that she perceives herself, as an individual writer, to be a singular tributary that flows into a larger black feminist collectivity that is the motherly ocean of voices that comprises the African diaspora. Therefore, like Keene and

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essay, "Entre o literário e o existenical, a 'escrevivência' de Conceição Evaristo na criação de um protagonismo femnino negro no romance *Ponciá Vicêncio*."

Jones, via her writings, Evaristo also participates in "the myth of Mama Africa," to recall Patricia de Santana Pinho's notion, considering that she finds unity and solidarity in the black imaginary that is the African diaspora. That being said, while Evaristo's Afro-diasporic literature shares many speculative elements with that of Keene and Jones, particularly in conjuring *orixás* of *Candomblé*, in conversation with Melissa Schindler's essay on *Ponciá Vicêncio*, "Home, or the Limits of the Black Atlantic," I will argue that the black Brazilian author is more concerned with representing the everyday reality of living as a black woman in modern Brazil, as opposed to in a distant colonial past.

Although Evaristo's writings of her life experiences are intertwined with Afro-diasporic religions and the discursive black imaginary, her escrevivência is steeped in a tradition of black resistance in Brazil, the origins of which even predate the publication of Carolina's *Quarto de despejo* in 1960. That is to say, Evaristo's corpus is rooted in the Afro-Brazilian epistemology and practice of *quilombismo*, a notion that recuperates the memory of the *quilombos* of Brazil's colonial past, such as Palmares, and their history of resistance. In her essay, "Literatura negra: uma voz quilombola na literatura brasileira," Evaristo argues that within the Afro-diasporic imaginary of Brazil, *quilombos* are "um espaço de vivência marcado pelo enfrentamento, pela audácia de contradizer, pelo risco de *contraviver* o sistema" ["a space of living/life experience marked by confrontation, by the audacity to contradict, by the risk of living against the system ("Quilombola" 8). Evaristo subsequently goes on to say that for many black Brazilians, the legends of *quilombos* impart a revolutionary sentiment, and moreover, offer an alternative model for community building. As the author herself states,

> Há uma mística quilombola…como forma defensiva e afirmativa do negro, na sociedade brasileira. A retomada do nome Quilombo e/ou Palmares…aponta para o significado da ação quilombola como um paradigma de organização social entre os negros brasileiros [There is a *quilombola* mystique…like a mode of defense and black affirmation in Brazilian society. The reclaiming of the name *Quilombo* and/or Palmares…points to the meaning of *quilombola* action as a paradigm of social organization for black Brazilians]. (Evaristo, "Quilombola" 7)

Indeed, the *quilombola* model has been invoked in the creation of various Afro-diasporic social organizations across Brazil; in this case, the most remarkable example is undoubtedly the black literary collective known as Quilombhoje. "Quilombhoje" is another *portmanteau*, the significance of which Emanuelle K. F. Oliveira describes accordingly, "[it is] a name that combines the words *quilombos* (communities of runaway slaves) and *hoje* (today), conveying the idea of present-day black resistance" (5-6). Quilombhoje has been providing a space for black Brazilian writers to publish their work through the pioneering journal, *Cadernos negros* ("Black Notebooks"), since 1978 (Oliveira 5). In fact, Evaristo's earliest professional publication comes in the form of a series of poems in issue 13 of Quilombhoje's *Cadernos negros* in 1990 (Assis Duarte 80).[44] Correspondingly, Evaristo's poetics of escrevivência in her *Literatura* negra sustains the revolutionary spirit of—and the radical potential in—the collective space of the *quilombo*, which is theorized as a site of black resistance and affirmation.

[44] For more on Quilombhoje, see Niyi Afolabi, Márcio Barbosa, and Esmeralda Ribeiro's translation of selected pieces from the literary group's journal *Cadernos negros* titled, *Cadernos Negros/Black Notebooks: Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literature* (2008).

In agreement with the tenants of Quilombhoje, Evaristo distinguishes the communal affirmative space of the *quilombo* from the oppressive alienating space of the *gueto* (i.e. "ghetto"). In her own words, Evaristo states, "Enfatizo a diferença entre quilombo e gueto… enquanto *gueto* supõe impotência, *quilombo* traz em si a idéia de resistência, de organização" ["I emphasize the difference between *quilombo* and *gueto*... while *gueto* connotes powerlessness, *quilombo* maintains the idea of resistance, of organization"] ("Quilombola" 8). In this way, against Keene and Jones' representation of the space of the *quilombo* in a speculative past, Evaristo enacts its revolutionary community-building potential in the everyday present. Furthermore, Evaristo then continues by differentiating *quilombos* from the space of *senzalas* (i.e. "slave quarters"), "Distingo ainda quilombo de senzala, porque quilombo é um lugar de escolha, senzala, como *gueto*, guarda um sentido de lugar vivido por imposição" ["I even distinguish *quilombo* from *senzala*, because *quilombo* is a place of choice, *senzala*, like *gueto*, retains a sense of a place lived by imposition"] ("Quilombola" 8). With these important distinctions in mind, in his essay "Escrevivência, Quilombismo e a tradição da escrita afrodiaspórica," Eduardo de Assis Duarte asserts that in Quilombhoje and the works of Evaristo alike,

> "quilombo" se coloca como antípoda de "gueto," entendido como espaço forçado de reclusão. Diferentemente do "quarto de despejo"—metáfora carolineana de favela como reencarnação da senzala ["*quilombo*" is the opposite of "*gueto*," understood as a forced space of alienation. It is different from the "room of waste/eviction"—Carolina's metaphor for the *favela* as a reincarnation of the *senzala*]. (80)

Here, Assis Duarte suggests that rather than represent the oppressive spaces of the *gueto*/*senzala* in their works as did Carolina Maria de Jesus in *Quarto de despejo*, Evaristo and her fellow collaborators in Quilombhoje disrupt stereotypical representations of black Brazilian life by instead writing from the revolutionary collective space of the *quilombo*. In doing so, Evaristo implements the Afro-Brazilian epistemological practice of *quilombismo* into her poetics of escrevivência, and this is clear throughout the narrative of *Ponciá Vicêncio*.

PONCIÁ VICÊNCIO AND *LITERATURA MARGINAL*

Evaristo's novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* portrays the titular character and her family in their unspecified rural homeland located somewhere on the peripheries of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Evaristo's aesthetic project is especially concerned with representing the ways in which the material history of slavery and colonization continue to haunt modern Brazilian society, and the affective realities of systemic anti-blackness for everyday black peoples.[45] Evaristo represents an array of voices in the polyphonic narrative of *Ponciá Vicêncio*, as she deals with the corporeal consequences of labor on racialized and gendered bodies alike. Assis Duarte posits that this polyphony of black voices forms "um tecido textual quilombista pelo qual se recupera a memoria de uma dor que é física e moral, individual e coletiva" ["a *quilombista* textual fabric through which the memory of a physical and moral, individual and collective, trauma is recuperated"] (90). In this vein, Evaristo's novel reveals the specter of slavery that hangs over Brazil by underscoring the

[45] See Robin E. Sheriff's *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race, and Racism in Urban Brazil*, and/or again, France Winddance Twine's *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil*, for more on the subject of systemic racism in modern Brazilian society.

parallels between colonization and modernity; that is to say, the issue of (slave) labor is an essential theme woven throughout the narrative. This theme is chiefly connected to the problem of land ownership, and is manifested in Ponciá's family's status as sharecroppers, though Evaristo also shows that the city provides no refuge from the hardships of rural life. In parallel fashion, Assis Duarte asserts, "*Ponciá Vicêncio* evidencia quanto o passado escravocrata impregna os rumos da modernização que atrai a personagem…rumo à cidade grande" ["*Ponciá Vicêncio* demonstrates the ways in which the history of *slavocracy* pervades the structures of modernization that bring the protagonist to the big city"] (90). Despite that Ponciá attempts to find economic opportunity in the city, she instead encounters only suffering, and thus feels *saudade*, or nostalgia/longing, for her family, home, and community. It is in this manner that *quilombismo* inflects Evaristo's poetics of escrevivência in *Ponciá Vicêncio.*

The community-centric epistemologies of *quilombismo* in Evaristo's novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* run parallel to the social and cultural objectives of contemporary *Literatura marginal* in Brazil. Accordingly, with the above scenes from the novel in mind, and in further consideration of Evaristo's connections with Carolina Maria de Jesus, I argue that *Ponciá Vicêncio* benefits from readings conducted through the lens of *Literatura marginal.* The term "*Literatura marginal*" is primarily applied to works of literature portraying the respective urban cultural landscapes of the *favelas* of Rio or the *periferias* of São Paulo. Eliane da Conceição Silva argues that Carolina Maria de Jesus' *Quarto de despejo* and other publications are foundational texts for the genre of *Literatura marginal*. As the Brazilian scholar states in her own words,

> a escrita caroliniana [sic] inaugura um tipo de literatura que hoje se define como literatura marginal…por sua produção ser feita por aqueles que historicamente não tiveram voz, os marginalizados da periferia [Carolina's writing inaugurated a type of literature that today is called *Literatura marginal*…because it is produced by those who historically have not had a voice, the marginalized of the *periferias*]. (Conceição Silva 27)

Nonetheless, while the origins of *Literatura marginal* may date back to 1960, the 1999 novel *Capão Pecado*, written by the *São Paulo* rapper, author, and activist Ferréz, is the book that popularized the genre in Brazil. In her study of Ferréz's work, Leila Lehnen defines *Literatura marginal* as, "texts…or documents that…denounce social conditions in the margins and voice a program of sociocultural resistance… [and that] aspire to generate discursive and material spaces of empowerment for members of subaltern social groups" (127). Moreover, as Lehnen continues, "Marginal literature…seek[s] to reestablish ties within the fractured terrain of the metropolis, both within the community and with other disenfranchised communities/social sectors" (127). In consideration of the spatial aspects of the narrative of Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio*, in which the main characters traverse the margins of both the city and the country in search of community, I propose that the novel dovetails with Lehnen's definition. Furthermore, the rejection of individualism and the community-building imperative evident in Evaristo's *quilombola* poetics of escrevivência can also be observed in Lehnen's theorization of *Literatura marginal*. "The communitarian aspects of…[*Literatura marginal*] counteract the dismantlement of traditional social and civic bonds and accompanying individualism," as Lehnen reaffirms (127). With all this in mind, by way of the *quilombola* imperative

inherent to her particular mode of *Literatura negra*, Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* transports *Literatura marginal* from the oppressive space of the modern city's "*gueto*" to the black revolutionary communal space of the "*quilombo*."

Analogously, with her novel Evaristo is also concerned with drawing her audience's attention to the racialization of space in Brazil. To this end, in the narrative Evaristo represents Ponciá and her family as sharecroppers who live on "a terra dos negros" ("the land of the blacks"), though they work on "a terra dos brancos" ("the lands of the whites"). In doing so, Evaristo critiques the ways in which modernity—through exploitative systems that equate to modern-day slave labor like sharecropping—recapitulates the oppressive anti-black structures of colonialism and slavery. In the course of the novel's plot, Ponciá and her brother Luandi thus journey to the urban center in order to attempt to escape the feudalism of sharecropping on the rural peripheries by finding economic and social mobility in the utopia of the modern city, a "racial democracy" ostensibly apart from the racialized landscapes of their homeland. Ponciá's brother Luandi, in particular, aspires to become a soldier, and believes that such mobility is a feasible possibility for a black man in the modern city, which he perceives to be an egalitarian space of racial democracy. As Evaristo's narrator relates,

> Luandi pensou na figura de Vô Vicêncio, mas aliviado estava, pois, acreditava que o tempo da escravidão já tinha passado. Existia sofrimento só na roça. Na cidade todos eram iguais (63) [Luandi had worried about being tapped in Grandpa Vicencio's world, but he was now relieved because he could finally see that the days of slavery were now past. That

> kind of suffering was only kept alive in the country. In the city everyone was equal]. (Cruz-Martinez 70)

In spite of the utopian promise mythologized in the modern city, Luandi and Ponciá alike, in addition to many other black characters in the novel, are subjected to the afterlives of slavery, as they are perpetually confronted with systemic white supremacist oppression. Although, Luandi certainly encounters his own difficulties in attempting to become a black soldier, it is his wife-to-be Bilizia (i.e. "Blissa" in the English translation), a black woman, who suffers the gravest consequences as a result of systemic racial and gender violence in Evaristo's representation of modern Brazil in *Ponciá Vicêncio*.

While in the city, Luandi meets Bilizia in one of Rio de Janeiro's prostitution districts, where she is forced to earn her living. Luandi learns that Bilizia also hails from the rural peripheries and came to the city to find a better life, but after working as a prostitute for five years, she is unable to improve her financial circumstances, considering that "[todo seu] dinheiro era repartido com a dona da casa e com Negro Glimério, que era protetor dela e de outras" (85) "[all her] money was handed back to the landlandy and Black Climerio, their protection"(99). The irony in these lines of course is that Bilizia's dona/madam and Negro Glimério/Black Climerio are agents of exploitation, not protection. They personify the oppressive structures of global capitalism and the industrial violence of the progress of Western modernity. Glimério in particular is a predator and pimp who exploits Bilizia for his own capitalist gain under the hierarchical social rubric of the modern neoliberal city. Glimério thereby renders Bilizia expendable

corporeality; "bare life" in Giorgio Agamben's sense of the term,[46] material for the means of the production of patriarchal pleasure.

Correlatively, in conversation with Agamben, Sayak Valencia, in her "transfeminist" manifesto *Gore Capitalism*, professes that with the rise of "the global era," there are innumerable examples of the ways in which the nation-state, always already a "state of exception," enacts the "extreme infringement on personhood" that is bare life (206). Valencia continues, asserting, "It takes the form of the utter destruction of bodies stemming through predatory use and their incorporation into the deregulated neoliberal market as another commodity, from the sale of organs to exploitation as a quasi-enslaved labor force. In both cases, we lose our *property rights to our own bodies*" (206). Considering that I read *Ponciá Vicêncio* as a speculative narrative of "wake work," in agreement Christina Sharpe that such Afro-diasporic literature imagines innovative epistemologies in order "to survive (and more) the afterlife of property" (18), I thus argue that this biopolitical phenomenon Valencia describes is observable in various instances of the novel. Specifically, the protagonist's long employment as a maid, but also in regards to Bilizia's forced prostitution. Therefore, when Glimério realizes that Luandi wishes to interfere with his profit by marrying Bilizia, and thus, removing her from her imposed situation of modern-day slave labor in the form of prostitution, he murders her instead: "Negro Glimério havia matado sua Bilizia-estrela… Matou a sua mulher!" (97) ["Black Climerio had killed his Blissa-star… He killed his wife!"] (114). In this sense, biopower becomes necropower in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, as Valencia contends, "Necropolitics desacralizes biopolitics and commodifies the process of dying" (210). That is to say,

[46] See Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998).

under the neoliberal ("gore") capitalist logic of modern Brazil, Luandi exercises necropower in making a final collection on his investment by murdering Bilizia. It is in this manner that Evaristo represents the ways in which the systemic effects of colonialism and slavery persist in modern Brazilian society as manifested in structural racism and gender discrimination, even in the ostensibly utopian space of the city. Moreover, Evaristo reveals how black women occupy an especially precarious position in this global capitalist system. Thus, by way of her *quilombola* poetics of escrevivência, Evaristo imagines an alternative to the promise of modernity in the neoliberal city by affirming the affective ancestral community that is the African diaspora.

THE BODY AND MEMORY IN *PONCIÁ VICÊNCIO*

In *Ponciá Vicêncio*, Evaristo explores the radical potential of the body and memory for black women in the process of community building. Indeed, it is via, what I call, affective ancestral memory, that which she channels through the art of clay sculpture, a type of "embodied knowledge," or "performance," that Ponciá joins her Afro-diasporic community in the space of the black imaginary. I draw primarily from Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* in my interpretation of the ways in which Evaristo represents her novel's protagonist Ponciá "performing cultural memory" in the hemispheric space of *Améfrica*. For Taylor, "Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity… performance also functions as an epistemology. Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing" (2-3). Subsequently in her book, Taylor posits, "There is a continuum of ways of storing and transmitting memory that spans

from the archival to the embodied… multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, reconstituting themselves—transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next" (192-3). As I will demonstrate via my analysis below, Ponciá's practice of clay sculpture as a type of embodied knowledge as well as form of artistic communication with her ancestors, particularly Vô Vicêncio. That is to say, I read Ponciá's art as the transmission of—what Taylor refers to as—"communal memory," and thus by extension, an Afro-speculative imagining of "black utopia," in agreement with Jayna Brown.

In tune with and extension of this corporeal aesthetic of embodied knowledge, Flávia Santos de Araújo studies contemporary "representations of the black female body in Afro-Brazilian literature," including Evaristo's corpus. Santos de Araújo views Evaristo's writing "as a product of the history of the African diaspora in the Americas," and therefore, contends that it "open[s] up paths in which to re-address the memory of the oppression that marks this history—the embodiment of colonization and conquest…but also to nourish a transformative embodiment that creates a space for the liberation and celebration of black female bodies across and beyond borders" ("Flesh" 151). Elsewhere, Santos de Araújo claims narratives like Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* demonstrate that "Afro-diasporic women writers have engaged in a project of re-claiming this history of oppression in order to articulate subjectivities and re-imagine identities in the making of a present-day consciousness" ("Diaspora" 120). By way of her poetics of escrevivência, then, Evaristo realizes her vision of this black feminist consciousness in the revolutionary communal space of the *quilombo.* Santos de Araújo's analysis of the black female body in Evaristo's poem "Eu-Mulher" (i.e. "I-Woman") also illuminates the corporeal aesthetic

of *Ponciá Vicêncio*, as the two works alike deal with "the memory of oppression" and the "embodiment of colonization and conquest" ("Flesh" 151). In both pieces, the figure of the mother becomes a significant symbol, as Evaristo considers the historical relationship between black women's reproduction and slave labor ("Flesh" 161). According to Santos de Araújo, in "Eu-Mulher," Evaristo "plac[es] the female body as the matrix of the world…[which] also connects the female body to the idea of continuous renovation, a source of self-sustainability, resistance, intervention, and transformation" ("Flesh" 161). However, whereas maternity is a source of life in Evaristo's poem "Eu-Mulher," conversely in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, the protagonist views procreation as tantamount to death. Accordingly, instead of looking for hope in future generations and the promise of Brazilian modernity, Ponciá immerses herself in the embodied knowledge and affective ancestral memory of her family and larger Afro-diasporic community, as I will show promptly.

As a result of the series of hardships Ponciá faces in the course of the novel's plot, Evaristo's protagonist is no longer able to see the act of giving birth as a creative force. Instead, as a consequence of the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in the Americas, Ponciá believes that to bring another black child into a modern world structured by racial and gender violence is merely to subject her loved ones to unnecessary suffering. Evaristo's narrator informs readers that Ponciá gave birth to seven children, but that all of them died. Accordingly, in the face of all this tragedy, Ponciá asks herself in contemplation, "Valeria a pena pôr um filho no mundo?" (70) ["Was it worth it to bring a child into the world?"] (80). She then goes on to reflect on the nature of the modern

systems of race and class in Brazil, and how that those who are born into poverty, tend to be impoverished throughout the entirety of their lives. As the narrator states,

> Lembrava de sua infância pobre, muito pobre na roça e temia a repetição de uma mesma vida para os sues filhos… Crescera na pobreza. Os pais, os avós, os bisavós sempre trabalhando nas terras dos senhores… Os negros eram donos da miséria, da fome, do sofrimento, da revolta suicida] (70)
>
> [She recalled the poverty of her childhood and the terrible hardships of the fields, and she feared giving her own children the same kind of life… They would grow in poverty. Parents, grandparents, and great grandparents working always in the lands of the masters… The blacks were masters of misery, hunger, suffering, suicidal revolts]. (80-1)

In this manner, Evaristo represents the intergenerational effects of the history of colonialism and slavery on black Brazilians and their extended families. Additionally, Evaristo reveals the ways in which the oppressive modern structures of race and class, those which still persist in the aftermath of colonialism and slavery, intersect to shape the everyday experiences and affective realities of black peoples living in Brazil. In again reflecting on the deaths of her seven children, Ponciá thinks to herself,

> A vida escrava continuava até os dias de hoje. Sim, ela era escrava também. Escrava de uma condição de vida que se repetia. Escrava do desespero, da falta de esperança, da impossibilidade de travar novas batalhas, de organizar novos quilombos, de inventor outra e nova vida (72)
>
> [The slave's life still went on. Yes, she too was a slave. Slave to a condition that kept repeating itself. Slave to despair, the absence of hope,

> the impossibility of launching new battles, organizing new communities, imagining a better life]. (82)

Here, Ponciá links the systemic oppression imposed on black peoples in modern Brazilian society to the nation's history of colonialism and slavery in order to reveal the ways in which the afterlives of this violent past continue to haunt the present moment. However, there exists an important distinction between the Portuguese original and English translation of the above passage from *Ponciá Vicêncio*. In this instance, Paloma Martinez-Cruz opts to translate the word "quilombos" as "communities," and therefore, she elides the history of black resistance that resides in Evaristo's potent lines. Furthermore, in doing so, in her role as translator Martinez-Cruz obfuscates the revolutionary Afro-diasporic epistemology of *quilombismo* that is inherent to Evaristo's poetics of escrevivência.

Evaristo's radical line of *quilombola* thought of course extends to the community-building aesthetics of her novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* as well. Ponciá, Luandi, and their mother Maria, all feel a sense of social alienation while living in the city, and moreover, they miss each other and long to come together as a family again at home. Ponciá, especially, experiences a strong desire to be reunited with her family, as in various chapters of the novel she is overcome with a flood of affective ancestral memory that calls her back to her home community in "the land of the blacks." Although Ponciá expected to inherit land from her grandfather Vô Vicêncio, she eventually learns that her family "herança" ("inheritance") refers to a type of "loucura," or "madness." Actually, Ponciá's "inheritance" is her grandfather's frenzied bouts of laughing and crying, in other words, his affective ancestral memory, or embodied knowledge, that which illuminates

the intergenerational effects of the history of slavery on the family's bodies and everyday lives. When Ponciá begins uncontrollably channeling her Vô Vicêncio's ancestral memory, she returns home from the city to join with her Afro-diasporic community by becoming one with the river, that is to say, the *orixá* Oxum. Correspondingly, in reference to Ponciá, Santos de Araújo notes, "as she pieces together the fragments of her family's past, Evaristo's heroine manages not only to unearth the root causes of her community's suffering, but also to embrace the African past that marks her own identity" ("Diaspora" 119). In this vein of *quilombola Literatura marginal*, and via her poetics of escrevivência, Evaristo represents black characters living on the peripheries of modern Brazilian society—who in the face of systemic racism and violence engendered by the patriarchal white supremacist structures of global capitalism, as personified by the city—find solace in home, family, community, and affective ancestral memory.

In the novel, Evaristo represents Ponciá's grandfather Vô Vicêncio as a personification of the embodied knowledge affective ancestral memory of her Afro-diasporic community. In fact, Ponciá is in many ways a double to Vô Vicêncio, and early on in the narrative, the narrator establishes the significance of this figure on the novel's protagonist:

> Guardava mais a imagem dele, do que a do próprio pai… Vô Vicêncio faltava uma das mãos e vivia escondendo o braço mutilado pra trás. Ele chorava e ria muito… Ela reteve na memória os choros misturados aos risos (15) [His image remained fixed in her mind…Grandpa Vicencio was missing one of his hands, and always hid the severed limb behind him. He

> cried and laughed a lot… Her memory clung to tears mixed with laughter]. (4)

Later in the story, readers learn the story of how Vô Vicêncio lost his hand, but what is more important here is Evaristo's representation of Ponciá's memory of her grandfather as an embodied affective experience, in this case, in the form of "tears mixed with laughter." Eventually as Ponciá ages, the trauma that she endures as a consequence of the oppressive structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality—recapitulations of colonialism and slavery—in modern Brazilian society exhausts the affective limits of her mind and body. It is in this moment that Ponciá inherits her grandfather's embodied knowledge and affective ancestral memory, though the narrator intimates that it has been archived in her body since she was a baby, a history of black suffering and resistance written in muscle memory. In representing Ponciá's body as an archive of ancestral memory, Evaristo depicts the protagonist's first steps as a child:

> Andava com um dos braços Escondido às costas… Fazia quase um ano que Vô Vicêncio tinha morrido… Quando o avô morreu, a menina era tão pequena! Como agora imitava o avô?] (17) [She walked with one of her arms hidden behind her back… It had been nearly a year since Grandpa Vicencio had died… The girl had been so small when the grandfather died! How could imitate him now?]. (5)

The answer to the narrator's questions is never entirely clear, but what is more is that Ponciá is also able to reproduce Vô Vicêncio's image in clay art. Referring to Ponciá, the narrator states. "Um dia ela fez um homem baixinho, curvado, magrinho, graveto e com o bracinho cotoco pra trás" (20) ["One day she made a short little man, curved, thin, like a

little twig with a cut-off hand curled around his back" (11)]. Subsequently in the narrative, the narrator confirms that it was Vô Vicêncio who Ponciá "havia copiado de sua memória para o barro" (26) ["sculpted from her memory into clay"] (19). Therefore, via her own body, Ponciá senses an Afro-diasporic collectivity, an archive of embodied knowledge and affective ancestral memory, of which her grandfather is a part, that she is able to channel through the practice of her art, the performance of clay sculpture; the imagining of black utopia in *Améfrica*.

Although the clay figurine of her grandfather holds special significance for Ponciá, she and her mother also use their clay art to build or reconstruct community in their homelands in a manner that evokes *Literatura* or *Arte marginal*. In one of her return trips from the city to "the land of the blacks," as the narrator recounts, Ponciá "visitou a casa de uns e outros. Em todas, encontrou trabalhos de barro, feitos por ela e por sua mãe" (54) ["visited in the homes of several families. In each of them she found clay pottery that she and her mother had made"] (58). With the dispersion of all of Ponciá and her mother's clay pieces throughout the space of the rural peripheries, the two characters organize their Afro-diasporic community around art, that is, through representations of their collective affective ancestral memory, performances of embodied *quilombola* knowledge. In Evaristo's novel, Ponciá and her mother's clay art also functions as a tool for reconnecting with family/community in other ways, most remarkably when Luandi, the protagonist's brother, happens to encounter their artwork in a museum in the city. In this scene, the narrator portrays Ponciá's brother accordingly, "Luandi olhava os trabalhos da mãe e da irmã como se os vise pela primeira vez, embora se reconhecesse em cada um deles" (89) ["Luandi looked at the pieces made by his mother and sister as

though for the first time, recognizing himself in each one of them"] (105). This moment of recognition in the city museum leads Luandi to have an affective experience that evokes memories of his family and community, as the narrator describes him as "não aguentando mais guardar as lágrimas" (89) ["unable to contain the tears any longer"] (105) in a manner that is reminiscent of Ponciá or Vô Vicêncio's embodied knowledge, his laughing/crying. It is at this point in the narrative that Luandi, overcome with affective ancestral memory, decides to return to his home to reunite with his family and community. Accordingly, from its anti-individualistic community-building perspective of *quilombismo* and *Literatura marginal*, Evaristo's novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* thus represents the radical potential of performing affective ancestral memory, embodied knowledge, and thereby, imagining the African diaspora in modern Brazil.

CANDOMBLÉ IN *PONCIÁ VICÊNCIO*

In Evaristo's poetics of escrevivência in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, these revolutionary communities are realizable through the cultural traditions, epistemological practices, and embodied knowledge of Brazilian *Candomblé*. Correlatively, in her book *Oshun's Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas*, Vanessa Kimberly Valdés reads Evaristo's novel from a methodology based in Afro-diasporic religions in order to consider the *orixá* Oxum (i.e. the Yoruba deity of fresh/sweet waters associated with rivers) in relation to Ponciá. Valdés recognizes that while economic and social disparity are the catalysts that prompt the protagonists and her brother Luandi to leave their homelands, at the same time, the act of leaving "also occasions a disruption of the sustenance of a vibrant spirituality that is characteristic of [their] community" (150).

Accordingly, near the end of the novel when Ponciá, Luandi, and their mother Maria are reunited after experiencing the hardships of the city, the family then returns to their homelands together in order to reencounter the "vibrant spirituality"—to borrow Valdés' phrasing—of their community. As Valdés asserts, "Instead of solitude and isolation, Evaristo emphasizes community and unification of family by infusing her novel with representations of Afro-Brazilian spiritual systems" (150). For Ponciá in particular, this return home is especially significant because the trauma that she has endured in the course of her life culminates at the end of the novel in such a way that she experiences an affective state of catatonia in which time and space opens up, and her being is completely overcome with ancestral memory. Ultimately, Ponciá finds refuge by joining the *orixá* Oxum in the "águas-mãe" (i.e. "mother-waters") of the river. Therefore, the narrative of Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* is circular in nature. That is to say, at the beginning of the novel, when Ponciá is a child, she is described as being remarkably drawn to the river, and that same river becomes of the utmost significance at the narrative's end. Early on, the narrator states that when Ponciá "ficava na beira do rio, se olhando nas águas, como se estivesse diante de um espelho, a chamar por si própria, ela não guardava ainda muitas tristezas no peito" (19-20) ["went to the river to peer at herself in the waters and call out to herself as though she were in front of a mirror, she did not feel so much sadness in her chest"] (11). In this passage, readers observe that the mirror of Oxum in the waters of the river reflects Ponciá's own image as a black woman, rather than that of Narcissus in the Eurocentric cultural hegemony of global modernity. Still, while Oxum's mirror reflects Ponciá individually, Evaristo's *quilombola* poetics of escrevivência also emphasize the

mirror of Iemanjá, the "mother-waters" that represents the protagonist's greater Afro-diasporic community and affective ancestral memory.

In the penultimate passage of the novel, which importantly is told from the point of view of the protagonist's mother Maria Vicêncio, Evaristo dramatizes the cultural significance of the river, that which serves as a representation of "the myth of Mama Africa" for Ponciá and her home community. In this episode of the narrative, Maria herself has an affective experience of ancestral memory; as the narrator relates,

> A mãe com os olhos fechados revivia outras cenas: a menina, Vô Vicêncio, a passagem dele…a sapiência de Nêngua Kainda…os trabalhos de barro…a Resistencia teimosa e muitas vezes silenciosa dos negros… (107) [Through closed eyes their mother saw a web of images: the girl, Grandpa Vicencio, his passing…the wisdom of Nengua Kainda…the works in clay…the frightened resistance of her people…]. (128)

With these lines, Evaristo represents Ponciá's mother as she affectively envisions a series of images tied to the embodied knowledge and ancestral memory of her family and community. Maria observes a continuum of black suffering and resistance in the face of the afterlives of colonialism and slavery embodied by and stretched between Vô Vicêncio, the elder healer of their community Nêngua Kainda, and her own daughter Ponciá. When Ponciá becomes one with the river—which is to say, drowns herself in "suicidal revolt"—Maria believes her daughter to be reborn from the womb of Mama Africa—that is, the African diaspora—in the waters of Iemanjá, and therefore, that she will live on in the realm of ancestral memory. As Evaristo writes,

> O tempo indo e vindo…Ponciá Vicêncio voltava para ela. Para ela, não!… Voltava para o rio, para as águas-mãe… Ponciá voltaria ao lugar das águas e lá encontraria a sustância, o húmus para o seu viver (107-8) [Time flowing back and forth…Ponciá Vicencio was returning to her. No, not to her… She was going back to the river, to the mother-waters… Ponciá would go back to the place of the waters where her life force, her sustenance, lived]. (128-9)

Here, in consideration of all the suffering that her daughter was forced to endure as a black woman living with the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in modern Brazil, Maria perceives the affective community of the African diaspora to be an alternative to the social death that is Western modernity for everyday black Brazilians like Ponciá.

In parallel fashion, Evaristo ends her novel with the following lines: "Ponciá Vicêncio, elo e herança de uma memória reencontrada pelos seus, não haveria de se perder jamais, se guardaria nas águas do rio" (111) ["Ponciá Vicencio, link and heir to a memory newly uncovered by her relations, would never be lost; would be kept in the waters of the river"] (132). Therefore, while Ponciá may have taken her own life, the narrator intimates that she nevertheless lives on in ancestral memory of her family and community. According to Valdés, although Ponciá comes into the world "bearing the angst of humanity, [she] also is provided with a means by which to ease this responsibility, that is remaining close to the river" (160). However, in her arduous attempts to obtain economic and social mobility in the city, Ponciá strays from home, her Afro-diasporic community, and the "mother-waters" of the river. Due to the trauma that Ponciá bears throughout her life because of the ways in which the afterlives of

colonialism and slavery haunt her everyday reality, returning herself to the river is akin to entering an affective asylum in the space of ancestral memory. Correspondingly, in an act that I read as a performance of "suicidal revolt," Ponciá deconstructs the ritual of social death in the nation-state, as exemplified in the alienation of the modern city, by contrarily enveloping herself in the embodied knowledge and affective ancestral memory of the river's "mother-waters." In this way, Ponciá, like Vô Vicêncio and those extended family members before her, becomes one of her community's ancestors, and thus, a part of the affective ancestral memory collectively felt by *Amefricanos*.

MODERN BRAZIL AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Many literary scholars, like Flávia Santos de Araújo and Vanessa Kimberly Valdés, for instance, have placed Evaristo's body of work, and *Ponciá Vicêncio* in particular, into conversation with discourses of the African diaspora. However, Melissa Schindler's essay "Home, or the Limits of the Black Atlantic" provides an important critical intervention by reading Evaristo's novel against the grain of Paul Gilroy's transnational paradigm in *The Black Atlantic*, a ubiquitous line of thought in many iterations of African diaspora studies. This is not to say that Schindler suggests that Evaristo does not engage with discourses of the African diaspora whatsoever. On the other hand, Schindler contends that with *Ponciá Vicêncio* Evaristo is predominantly concerned with community-building projects in the space of the nation and "home," rather than in a transnational imaginary. In reference to Evaristo and similar authors, Schindler claims, "In contrast to the black Atlantic paradigm, these writers do not reach out to transnational black communities to supplement missing national solidarity, even

though they are active in African diaspora academic routes. Instead, theirs is very often an appeal to the national, a hopeful and pained demand…" (75). In other words, as opposed to attempting to transcend the nation, according to Schindler, Evaristo and the likes "see the nation as a valuable project," as they seek to "resolv[e] the problems of the nation rather than disassembl[e] [it]" (75). Although I agree with much of Schindler's work, this suggestion is problematic. In my view, it is not that Evaristo does not seek to disassemble the oppressive structures of the nation-state, but rather that she recognizes the more immediate everyday realities for her Afro-diasporic community, and especially black women, living in modern Brazil. All that being said, Evaristo is simultaneously invested in unearthing the history of colonialism and racism that is common to all nations of the Americas, and the ways in which the afterlives of this violent past are perpetuated into the present across the hemisphere.

Still, Schindler does demonstrate the incompatibility of Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* with Gilroy's "black Atlantic" paradigm, considering that it maintains "hybridity" as a core concept, which Schindler equates with the myth of "racial democracy" in Brazil (76). Certainly, echoes of the myth of racial democracy can be observed in Gilroy's own definition of his paradigm here: "the black Atlantic can be defined…through [the] desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (19). Moreover, Schindler observes "international travel," a privilege often not easily accessible for black women around the world, to be at the crux of Gilroy's desires for the transcendence of the nation under the black Atlantic rubric (73). Contrarily, Schindler argues that in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, Evaristo recognizes the Afro-diasporic community that resides within her home nation of Brazil.

Furthermore, in light of Brazil's "discursive" racism of national *embranquecimento*[47] (i.e. racial whitening), Schindler finds hybridity—or "creolization" in the terminology of Gilroy—to be effectively synonymous with the concept of racial democracy (77). Due to the fact that Schindler perceives Gilroy's transnational paradigm of the black Atlantic to be "essentializing" (77) or universalist, she argues that Evaristo instead focuses on home, the space of the nation, and her respective local social and cultural context, in the fulfillment of her aesthetic and political community-building project. Accordingly, for Schindler, "Evaristo's livature," that is to say, her escrevivência, "[is] a form of resistance and survival… [in that] it reinserts the commonplace aspects of women's lives at home into the national consciousness" (78). In other words, through her *quilombola* poetics of escrevivência in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, Evaristo represents the everyday affective realities of black women, as a community, those who are most subjected to living with the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in modern Brazil, by extrapolating from her individual quotidian experience.

Although Schindler's investigation of *Ponciá Vicêncio* offers a unique critical perspective that brings about new readings in its challenge of Gilroy's now out-of-date methodology, her essay requires a reconfiguration of the concept of African diaspora. I concur with Schindler that Evaristo is not interested in the project of forming a "utopian" transnational community, however, I also argue that her engagement with the cultural traditions of *Candomblé* is in and of itself the practice of diaspora. In conjuring the "mother-waters" of Iemanjá in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, Evaristo indeed expresses her

[47] France Winddance Twine states, "The ideology of *embranquecimento* (whitening), and the concomitant practice of *mestiçagem* (race mixture), has been described by numerous scholars as a primary pillar of white supremacy in Latin America" (87).

investment in "the myth of Mama Africa," to again borrow Santana Pinho's notion. Furthermore, representing Ponciá's dissolution of her individual self in the collectivity that is the embrace of the mother-waters of Iemanjá, is an act of imagining "black utopia" that is congruent with Brown's sense of the term. All that being said, Schindler is correct in her assertion that Evaristo's aesthetic and political project is ultimately concerned with black resistance and building new communities in the space of her home nation, and this is because the author is working in a continued tradition of *quilombismo* and *Literatura marginal*. Nonetheless, due to the Afrocentric epistemologies of *Candomblé* that are manifested throughout Evaristo's *Literatura negra*/*marginal*, her artistic scope always already exceeds the borders of the nation-state, especially in this current era of global modernity.

Beyond all this, keeping in mind Evaristo's own conceptualization of the poetics of *Literatura negra*, which includes her *quilombola* literary mode of escrevivência*,* it is impossible to extract *Ponciá Vicêncio* from its international discursive context of the African diaspora. As Evaristo proposes, "[o] discurso literário afro-brasileiro não está desvencilhado das pontuações ideológicas do Movimento Negro" ["Afro-Brazilian literary discourse is not detached from the ideological punctuations of Brazil's Black Movement"("Poética" 25). In further linking *Literatura negra* to the intellectual history of the *Movimento Negro Brasileiro*,[48] Evaristo unearths the international roots of the black cultural movement around the globe, and describes its origins in Brazil accordingly,

> O Movimento de Negritude de…Senghor, Aimé Césaire e outros, tardiamente chegado ao Brasil, vem misturado ao discurso de Patric

[48] For more in English on the *Movimento Negro Brasileiro*, see David Covin's *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*.

> Lumbumba, Black Panther, Luther King, Malcolm X, Angela Davis e das guerras de independência das colônias portuguesas [The *Negritude* Movement of Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and others, which arrived late in Brazil, were mixed with the discourses of Patric Lumbumba, the Black Panthers, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and the wars of independence in Portugal's African colonies]. ("Poética" 25)

Evaristo thus claims that it is from this historical nexus of Afro-diasporic discourse—dispersed via lines of black thought from all over the globe—which the poetics of *Literatura negra* emerge. As Evaristo affirms in her own words,

> Amplia-se então um discurso negro…que levará a uma produção literário marcada por uma fala enfática, denunciadora da condição do negro no Brasil e igualmente afirmativa do mundo e das coisas culturais africanas e afro-brasileiras [a black discourse arises…engendering a literature distinguished by its emphatic denunciation of the condition of black peoples in Brazil and that is equally affirmative of the world and of African and Afro-Brazilian cultures]. ("Poética" 25)

With these passages, it is clear that Evaristo's *Literatura negra* is concomitantly grounded in the Afro-Brazilian epistemology of *quilombismo* and the Afro-diasporic discourses of global black rights movements. Bearing in mind Evaristo's representation of *Candomblé* cultural traditions in *Ponciá Vicêncio* as well, it is difficult to separate her work from the discursive field of the African diaspora, in spite of Schindler's efforts.

In *Ponciá Vicêncio*, Evaristo may indeed center the narrative in the space of the nation and the home, as Schindler claims; however, the affective ancestral memory that

the novel's protagonist inherits from Vô Vicêncio is a form of embodied knowledge that testifies to the history of colonialism and slavery across the various nation-states of the Americas, not just Brazil. I make this claim in consideration of the atmosphere of anti-blackness that has surfaced "in the wake" of slavery, that which permeates the space of the hemisphere and engenders "uma experiência histórica comum" ["a common historical experience"] (Gonzalez, "Categoria" 135) felt by *Amefricanos* across the diaspora. Whereas some writers working in the discursive space of the African diaspora do in fact seek to build a transnational community in order to seek recognition outside the borders of a nation from which they are excluded, Schindler shows that Evaristo is principally focused on combating the oppressive structures or race, class, gender, and sexuality in modern Brazil. Nevertheless, as I explain below, while Evaristo looks to the nation for her community-building project, she still recognizes that the afterlives of colonialism and slavery persist in many different locales throughout the American hemisphere.

Correspondingly, I read Evaristo's representation of the embodied knowledge and communal/ancestral memory, that which manifests itself in the Vicêncio family as uncontrollable laughing and crying, as an expression of black affect, of *Amefricano* embodied knowledge and cultural memory. That is to say, parallel to the cries of Frederick Douglass' Aunt Hester, as theorized by Fred Moten in *Black and Blur*.[49] For Moten, the study of blackness in the African diaspora is the "[e]xhaustive celebration of and in and through [black] suffering" (*Blur* xiii) Concomitantly, I consider Evaristo's representation of Ponciá and Vô Vicêncio's laughing and crying as a celebratory

[49] As a reminder, Moten calls her cries, "the expression of an irredeemable and incalculable suffering from which there is no decoupling since it has no boundary and can be individuated and possessed in neither time nor in space" (*Blur* ix, xiii).

expression of this suffering—a black affect which knows no spatiotemporal bounds, and therefore, extends throughout the African diaspora. While, yes, Evaristo is most concerned with issues at home in Brazil, her novel *Ponciá Vicêncio* still speaks to the afterlives of colonialism and slavery that span the American hemisphere. Thus, with Gonzalez's notion of "*Améfrica*" in mind, I suggest that *Ponciá Vicêncio* should be read in a manner which considers both the global/international space of the African diaspora as well as that of the local, the nation-state, in this case, modern Brazil.

Furthermore, although Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* is specifically grounded within its everyday national and local context of Brazil, at the same time, her narrative resonates with the affective realities of many other *Amefricanos* who happen to live in distinct nation-states scattered all around the African diaspora of the Americas. Paloma Martinez-Cruz's translation of *Ponciá Vicêncio* into English, in addition to the respective editions of the novel in Spanish and French, further facilitates the conditions of possibility for Evaristo's *quilombola* poetics of escrevivência to build an international—not a transnational—community that unifies everyday black peoples across the nations of *Améfrica*, through the act of reading Afro-diasporic literature produced in Brazil. As Brent Hayes Edwards corroborates this assertion, stating, "the cultures of black internationalism can be seen only *in translation*" (7). Consequently, in order to continue to foster the international black imaginary that constitutes the African diaspora, there is a dire need for additional translations of Evaristo's extensive body of work, especially into English, the language of global hegemony. The interplay between the local and the global/international is precisely what we have observed in our analysis of Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio*. Evaristo's *quilombola* poetics of escrevivência represents everyday

issues for black peoples, and women especially, living with the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in modern Brazil—her local nation. However, Evaristo's poetics is also entangled with the history of international black discourse from which *Literatura negra* stems, as well as with the Afro-diasporic religion of *Candomblé*. Therefore, in consideration of these connections, against Schindler's attempts to remove the novel from its global/international context, I propose that the Internation of *Améfrica*, the African diaspora of the Americas, is always already reflected in Evaristo's representation of modern Brazil within the narrative of *Ponciá Vicêncio*.

CHAPTER 4: BIXARTE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PERFORMANCE ART

In his 2015 article "The Work of Black Literature in the Age of Digital Reproducibility," John Keene poses an intriguing set of questions regarding the status of "Black Literature" in an era in which the internet is the primary means for the circulation of global cultural production.[50] As Keene inquires,

> why, given the ubiquity of the digital and its presence materially and thematically in various forms of American and global contemporary literature and literary practice, and given its extensive incorporation in other forms of Black artistic and cultural production, does it seemingly remain so absent still in contemporary Black literary production, especially Black poetry? A corollary question would be, is it really so absent? Additionally, what would or could a Black digital poetics look like? (288)

To answer Keene's corollary: No, it really is not so absent. While Keene is well versed in the Brazilian tradition of *Literatura negra*, his U.S.-centric scope in this article simply seems to be too limited. In Brazil, there exists an ongoing and vibrant confluence of the digital and black poetics that is taking place in black feminist slam poetry circles, on the peripheries of São Paulo and many other Brazilian cities, known as *saraus de poesia*.[51] In

[50] As its title insinuates, in this piece, Keene dialogues with Walter Benjamin's 1935 piece "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
[51] See Lucía Tennina's article, "Saraus das periferias de São Paulo: poesia entre tragos, silêncios e aplausos" (2013).

the aforementioned piece Keene's attention is solely on black American "works categorizable as "literature," which as he suggests, is "the art of written, textual works" (289). However, on the contrary, via my analysis below, I expand Keene's categorization of literature as such to include what I refer to as social media performance art. In this vein, I contend that the slam poetry and music of the Brazilian black trans performance artist Bianca Manicongo, who is known professionally as Bixarte, offers a vital vision of what a "Black digital poetics" might look like.[52] Furthermore, I argue that Bixarte's corpus of social media performance art imagines the African diaspora via its dialogue with discourses of international black (trans) feminism, its investment in "embodied knowledge" and "communal memory," to recall Diana Taylor's notions, and also its representation of anti-black racial violence across the Americas, and particularly in the hegemonic United States. In this chapter, I will examine Bixarte's work in dialogue with theories of black feminism from Patricia Hill Collins and Djamila Ribeiro before then amplifying their respective theorizations with critical interventions of (black) trans feminist thought from Marquis Bey and Letícia Nascimento. Furthermore, I will place Bixarte's corpus into conversation with Jayna Brown's theory of "black utopia" and Fred Moten's notion of "statelessness."

Bixarte is a multi-hyphenate, that is to say, a *poeta marginal*, slammer, *MC*, and rapper from Santa Rita, Paraíba—located on the peripheries of the Brazilian state's capital city, João Pessoa. Bixarte emerged in her local *poesia marginal* (i.e. poetry produced in Brazil's *perfierias* and *favelas* that deals with residents everyday experiences) and slam scene circa 2018, and has since forayed further into the realm of

[52] For more on "digital poetics" and poetry circulated via YouTube, see Urayoán Noel's article, "Bodies that Antimatter: Locating U.S Latino/a Poetry, 2000-2009."

Brazilian popular music (a.k.a *Música popular brasiliera* or *MPB*).[53] Bixarte's work incorporates elements of various styles of world music, including Brazilian *funk*, Northeastern *brega funk, Tropicália,*[54] techno, Afrobeat, trap, hip-hop, et cetera. It is predominantly by way of music, and with the aid of the internet, that Bixarte has recently begun to garner public recognition across Brazil and many other locales of the Lusophone world. In fact, Bixarte's performance art, which is primarily circulated via social media applications like Instagram, Spotify, and YouTube, tends to blur the generic lines between poetry and music. In an interview with *SIM São Paulo*, Bixarte discusses her origins as a black trans performance artist and the revolutionary agenda of her aesthetic project:

> "Bixarte nasce depois que eu vou pro Slam Brasil em 2018. Eu perdi e voltei para Paraíba com esse sentimento de que eu estava fazendo errado, eu era uma mulher... Daí, comecei a batalhar nas batalhas de rap e me apaixonei pela música, enxerguei ali a oportunidade de vender minha música mas também de protestar. Eu nunca esqueço que moro no país que mais mata travesty [sic] então vejo minha arte como denúncia também." ["Bixarte was born after I went to Slam Brazil in 2018. I lost and returned to Paraíba with the feeling that I was going about things all wrong, that I was a woman... From then on, I began competing in rap battles and fell in love with music, I saw there an opportunity to sell my music and also to protest. I never forget that I live in the country with the highest rate of

[53] For more on *MPB*, see Charles A. Perrone's book *Brazil, Lyric, and the Americas*.
[54] See also Christopher Dunn's book *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* for more on *antropofagia* and *Tropicália*

murders against trans people, so I also see my art as a denunciation."]

(Antonio)

Indeed, Bixarte's poetry and music is very much politically and culturally engaged, as she speaks about the visibility of trans and other LGBTQIA+ peoples, black rights, class inequality, religious intolerance, and many other subjects. Specifically, Bixarte's most current performance art, which mainly takes the form of music, touches on many topics and everyday social issues, including black and trans pride, Afro-diasporic and indigenous cultures, sexuality, the abuses of Brazil's government under President Jair Bolsonaro, the global COVID-19 pandemic, and body positivity. Moreover, Bixarte's performance art is often a vehicle for fervent social critique that not only deals with her native country of Brazil, but also extends beyond its borders. Although Bixarte's work is chiefly centered in the social and cultural context of Brazil, many of her artistic preoccupations regarding the intersectional themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality, reflect parallel issues that also can be observed in the United States, not to mention the rest of the American hemisphere. In this manner, Bixarte participates in the creation of the black imaginary that is the African diaspora.

Keeping all this in mind, I propose that although Bixarte's social media performance art is immersed in the everyday local context of her home nation, it also contains global political dimensions. Indeed, Bixarte's work dovetails with discourses of international black (trans) feminism and the African diaspora, demonstrating a critical concern for human rights across the Americas, and in particular for black and trans peoples. While it is key to gloss Bixarte's most recent music in order to better comprehend the inner workings of her overarching aesthetic project, I am especially

interested in analyzing a recorded performance—one that continues to exist in the digital afterlife that is the world wide web—of her slam poem "A Paz do preto" ("Black Peace"). This poem is, in part, a contemporaneous reaction to the murder of George Floyd, which was an event that rippled across global media, yet resounded markedly in Brazil due to the fact that it acutely reflected the South American nation's own issues of structural racism.[55] Therefore, in conversation with Christina Sharpe, I will ultimately argue that the notion of "American racism" ought to be understood in its hemispheric valence considering that anti-blackness is not merely a problem in the United States, but also in Brazil despite the persistent and pernicious myth of racial democracy. Furthermore, in this same regard, I will also complicate the issue of hemispheric American racism and anti-black violence through the lens of black trans feminism as well as Lélia Gonzalez's notion of *Améfrica*.

BIXARTE, BLACK FEMINISM, AND TRANSFEMINISM

Before proceeding further it is crucial to discuss the nuances of Bixarte's stage name. "Bixarte" is a *portmanteau* of the words "*bixa*" and "*arte*." Although the latter half of her name, of course, reflects that Bixarte is a performance artist, it is the polysemic signifier *bixa* that is especially notable and potent. Generally speaking, in Brazil this word is used in a pejorative sense to refer to homosexual men. However, in certain regions of *O Nordeste* (Brazil's Northeast), including metropolitan João Pessoa, *bixa*—and often times its diminutive, "*bixinha*"—is used among women as a term of

[55] See Lu Sudré's piece reflecting on the murder of Floyd one year later titled, "George Floyd: um ano do levante global que entrou para história da luta antirracista" in the online publication of *Brasil de Fato*.

endearment or admiration. Therefore, by incorporating *bixa* into her stage name, Bixarte simultaneously re-appropriates the vulgar slur against homosexual men, and furthermore, celebrates her own identity as a (black) trans woman. In naming herself accordingly, Bixarte signifies to her audience the non-heteronormative epistemology that runs throughout her body of performance art. Of course, intersectional feminism inflects Bixarte's poetry and music; nonetheless, as a black trans woman, she also foregrounds race and class in her work in addition to the correlative themes of gender and sexuality. In this vein, I contend that Bixarte naming herself accordingly can be viewed as an act of "self-definition," that is, as theorized by the seminal international black feminist thinker Patricia Hill Collins.

Djamila Ribeiro enters into an extensive dialogue with Collins' research in her theorization of "*lugar de fala*," remarking that it is necessary for black women to learn how to take advantage of their marginal position as an "outsider within," which is really to occupy a "*não lugar*" (i.e. nowhere), a non-place of power (45-6). Collins, in her groundbreaking book *Black Feminist Thought*, demonstrates the radical potential of "self-definition" in this non-place. In this respect, Collins asserts that "empowerment through self-definition" is absolutely vital in a white patriarchal hegemonic public sphere in which discourses and "controlling images" dictate the ways in which black peoples, and particularly women, are conceptualized (111). As Collins affirms, "When Black women's very survival is at stake, creating independent self-definitions becomes essential to that survival" (123). For Collins, Black women are able to "speak freely" and construct their own respective self-definitions in "safe spaces," which she perceives to be "a necessary condition for Black women's resistance [because]…these safe spaces help Black women

resist the dominant ideology…" (111). In her theorization of "self-definition," Collins states, "Self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead, self is found in the context of family and community" (124). Correspondingly, for Bixarte and many other black cultural producers around the globe, this family and/or community can, for instance, take the shape of the black imaginary that is the African diaspora. However, for Bixarte specifically, it can also take the form of the global (black) trans community. Collins suggests that the self-definition of the community that is black feminism is an epistemological practice when she posits that "[i]n this process Black women journey toward an understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class" (125). In this vein, I contend that in her music and poetry, Bixarte performs her identity in an artistic act of continuous self-definition that reveals the ways in which her race, class, gender, and sexuality affect her everyday reality as a black trans woman living in Brazil—which as she herself noted above, is the nation with the highest rate of homicides against trans peoples. Therefore, Bixarte's performance art is both a "*denúncia*" and an act of self-definition that occurs in black trans safe spaces of the internet community.

Letícia Nascimento, in her book *Transfeminismo* from Ribeiro's editorial series "Feminismos plurais," confirms the importance of the internet as a safe space for the proliferation of (black) trans discourses. As Nascimento claims "A internet possibilita a amplificação das vozes transfeministas em um espaço de sororidade que salva vidas" ["the internet facilitates the amplification of transfeminist voices in a space of sisterhood that saves lives"] (76). In the case of Bixarte, her voice is amplified via her social media

performance art, that which circulates in the digital "safe space" of the internet's (black) trans community. Nascimento conceptualizes her envisioning of "transfeminism" in dialogue with black feminism, and in particular, Collin's notion of self-definition is especially significant. In accordance with Collins and Ribeiro, Nascimento affirms, "a autodefinição entende a importância de pensar espaços coletivos, e também seguros, para que nossas narrativas possam ser compartilhadas" ["self-definition understands the importance of imagining collective, and safe, spaces so that our narratives can be shared"] (103). The Brazilian (black) transfeminist thinker subsequently goes on to elaborate "*transfeminismo*,"

> o transfeminismo é esse espaço coletivo de afirmação e validação de nossas experiências, de compreensão mútua, conflitos e disputas; um espaço politico e epistemológico de entendimento de nossas experiências tans* de um modo não essencialista, patologizante, criminalizante nem subalterno [transfeminism is that collective space of affirmation and validation of our experiences, of mutual understanding, of conflicts and disputes; a political and epistemological space of understanding of our experiences as trans* people in a way that is not essentializing, pathologizing, criminalizing, nor subaltern]. (Nascimento 104)

Here, Nascimento describes "transfeminism" as an epistemological and cultural discursive safe space and community of positive affect—much like the African diaspora, but—for "trans*" people. To clarify, Nascimento employs the signifier "trans*" as a way of encompassing an array of non-cisgender identities in order to avoid falling into the trap of articulating an essentialist "trans" identity (18). Accordingly, Nascimento states that

"Quando os corpos trans* assumem processos de produções discursivas sobre suas subjetividades passam a rechaçar o pensamento colonizador" ["when trans* bodies assume control of the discursive production of their own subjectivities they actively reject colonizing thought"] (107). It is in this way that trans* peoples subvert and resist heteronormativity, or what Nascimento refers to as, the "*CIStema* colonial moderno de gênero, " that is, the modern colonial *cistem* of gender (17). In this same vein, by way of her social media performance art, Bixarte challenges and deconstructs heteronormativity with performative acts of self-definition within safe spaces in the black trans communities of social media platforms, such as Instagram, and YouTube, and Spotify.

BIXARTE'S *A NOVA ERA*

Shortly after winning first place in the third annual Festival de Música da Paraíba in December of 2020, Bixarte received funding from the Fundação Cultural of the Perfeitura de João Pessoa through the Lei Aldir Blanc to continue her work and collaborate with other trans artists during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lacerda). Consequently, in April of 2021 Bixarte re-launched career as a rapper with four fresh singles on YouTube and Spotify, each of which is accompanied by a music video.[56] Bixarte dubs this collection of new music *A Nova Era* (*The New Era*), which simultaneously signifies a "new era" of her work, and also a "new era" for (black) trans peoples across Brazil and the rest of the globe. "Black Bitch Travesti" is the final installment in the series of songs that comprise Bixarte's *A Nova Era*, and it is in this specific piece that Bixarte establishes the importance of her voice as a black trans woman

[56] Bixarte's first EP *Revolução* and her first LP *Faces* were both released in 2019, and are currently available to stream on YouTube and Spotify.

in the cisgender male-dominated Brazilian rap scene. Furthermore, "Black Bitch Travesti," captures Bixarte's parallel intersectional concerns for issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also offering a snapshot of her larger corpus. In this manner, Bixarte raps,

> Me viam como piada / Hoje pagam pra poder me ver / Teu rap é pra macho bombado / O meu é pra trava bolada / As sapa sempre do meu lado / As bixa tão tudo aramada/ ... / O segredo não tá dinheiro / É ser black bitch travesti [They saw me as a joke /Today they pay to see me / Your rap is for macho meatheads / Mine is for smart *travestis* / The lesbians always by my side / The queers are totally armed / … / The secret isn't money / It's being a *black bitch travesti*]. (*YouTube*)

With these verses, Bixarte distinguishes herself from stereotypical representations of "*playboy*" rappers and "macho" *MCs* in Brazil, and she explicitly aligns herself with the greater LGBTQIA+ community as well.[57] Moreover, in these lines Bixarte contends that the "secret" to her success as a performer has nothing to do with money or class privilege, but rather, is a result of her self-definition and pride as a black trans woman. Beyond the lyrics of "Black Bitch Travesti," in the song's respective music video, which was written, co-directed, and co-produced by the artist herself, Bixarte also represents her identity and community in an extended act of self-definition. Nevertheless, prior to discussing the music video, it is necessary to take a brief but important detour through José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* in order to bring the notion of queer performance to bear on Bixarte's art.

[57] For more on hip-hop and rap culture in modern Brazil, see Derek Pardue's article, "Putting *mano* to music: The mediation of race in Brazilian rap."

Diana Taylor claims, "there is a politics behind notions of ephemerality, a long tradition, which in the Americas dates back to the Conquest, of thinking of embodied knowledge as that which disappears because it cannot be contained or recuperated through the archive" (193). Correlatively, in his book, Muñoz writes against this "long tradition" of the politics of ephemerality in the Americas. As Muñoz affirms, "It has become somewhat axiomatic within the field of performance studies that the act exists only during its actual duration;" however, he disagrees and instead theorizes what he calls, "a hermeneutics of residue that looks to understand the wake of performance" (71). For Muñoz, the notions of "gesture" and "ephemera" are at the crux of these residual hermeneutics of queer performance. As he elaborates, "Ephemera are the remains that are often embedded in queer acts," whereas, gestures—i.e. the "atomized movements" of performance—"signa[l] a refusal of a certain kind of finitude;" moreover, as Muñoz continues, "[g]estures [also] transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities within a phobic majoritarian public" (65, 67). Accordingly, when a queer act ceases, what remains in the wake of the performance? Muñoz answers this rhetorical question with, "ephemera," or in other words, the memory of gesture (71). Although Muñoz acknowledges that "we cannot simply conserve a person or a performance through documentation," he does propose that "we can perhaps begin to summon up, through the auspices of memory, the acts and gestures that meant so much to us," those which partially (re)live in performance's documentation (71-2). With all this in mind, while performance is usually understood to take place in the fleeting moments that comprise the present, I concur with Muñoz in his assertion that the ephemera of queer performance continue to reside in the aftermath of the act via the memory of gesture.

Furthermore, in consideration of the ephemeral nature of social media content on apps like YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify, Bixarte's documentation and circulation of her performance art on the internet is a queer act in and of itself. Despite their ephemerality, the black trans safe spaces of the internet remain a vital (web)site of self-definition, community, and collective memory.

Now to return to "Black Bitch Travesti," in the song's video, Bixarte is joined in performance and production by a group of several other black trans women and/or "*travestis*." In an interview with *Ponte Jornalismo*, Bixarte overtly declares her work to be political: "Meu trabalho é um trabalho político" (Fontes), therefore, with this song Bixarte recognizes *travesti* as a legitimate gender identity. Nascimento notes in her book that the gender identity *travesti* is one that is "bastante marginalizada socialmente" ["very socially marginalized"] (19). Nascimento attributes this to the fact that "a cisgeneridade impõe a consequente produção de uma hierarquia social que considerará abjeto todo corpo que fugir à tal normatividade" [the *cistema* imposes the consequent production of a social hierarchy that considers abject every body that deviates from normativity"] (125). Nonetheless, like Bixarte, Nascimento argues for plural conceptualizations of what it means to be a "woman" in feminism, black feminism, *transfeminismo*, and any other new wave to come ashore. In this regard, in the same interview with *Ponte*, Hiura Fernandes—a core collaborator on *A Nova Era* and a co-performer in "Black Bitch Travesti"—in agreement with Bixarte states the following in agreement with Bixarte about the gender identity *travesti*:

> "Travesti é uma identidade brasileira, latino-americana, que existe muito antes do LGBTQIA+. Travesti existe desde sempre. Qual o medo de falar

> a palavra travesti? Porque travesti é a pobre, é a preta... A questão com a palavra travesti é o racismo, porque a gente estereotipou o corpo travesti. A travesti é…um corpo que não é branco…existe uma intersecção e é o racismo em nossas vidas…existe uma discrepância enorme em ser uma travesti e ser uma mulher trans de classe média e vista no mundo como branca." ["*Travesti* is a Brazilian, Latin American, identity that existed long before LGBTQIA+. *Travesti* has existed forever. What is the fear of speaking the work *travesti*? It is because *travesti* means poor, *travesti* means black… The issue with the word *travesti* is racism, because people stereotype *travesti* bodies. The *travesti* is…a body that is not white…there exists an intersection with racism and our lives…there exists an enormous discrepancy between being a *travesti* and being a middle-class trans woman who is perceived in the world as white."] (Fontes)

With the above quote, Fernandes elaborates on the political objectives of Bixarte's "Black Bitch Travesti" by revealing the ways in which *travestis* experience systemic oppression in a multitude of intersectional valences because of the especially precarious *lugar de fala* they occupy as a consequence of their race, class, gender, and sexuality. Whereas a white "trans" woman may have the economic ability to fund gender affirmation surgery, black "*travestis*" are likely more often than not unable to afford such class privileges. Correspondingly, Nascimento again proposes in *Transfeminismo*, "Precisamos pautar a autodeterminação como direito que as pessoas trans* possuem de assumirem suas identidades de gênero e a fabricação de seus corpos de modo autônomo" ["We need to maintain self-definition as a human right that trans• people possess for

assuming their gender identities and the autonomous fabrication of their bodies"] (140). Thus, via their embodied queer performances in the music video for "Black Bitch Travesti," Bixarte and her collaborators represent their identities and self-define their respective "trans*" community.

The scene of the music video is set in the streets and allies of an unspecified working-class neighborhood of city of João Pessoa in Brazil's *Nordeste*. The video begins with a short dramatization in which Bixarte exchanges a poem for money with a young man. In this fashion, Bixarte satirically portrays herself as "uma traficante de poesia," and thus, in direct opposition to representations of "macho" drug dealers or some other analogous stereotype all too often associated with "*as favelas*" (this is Bixarte's word choice). When the beat finally drops, Bixarte's name and the title of the song is juxtaposed over images of the group's faces before the camera subsequently pans to various cuts of their moving, dancing, gesturing bodies. Bixarte and her co-performers hide nothing from the camera, as in their performance they display their bodies without shame—in fact, they exude corporeal pride. According to Western radicalized standards of beauty, Bixarte and her collaborators would assuredly be hierarchized as "abject," "too fat," "too skinny," "too black," "too ugly," or some other pejorative employed to impose biopolitical control over women's bodies—and of course this includes trans* women. Bixarte and Nascimento alike incorporate the political struggle against *gordofobia* [fat-phobia] into their respective works. For her part, Nascimento argues that "Dentro de uma politica transfeminista, é importante incorporar o *body-positive* como tática de valorização de nossas diversidades corporais" ["In a transfeminist politics, it is important to incorporate body-positivity as a tactic of affirmation of our corporeal diversity"] (156).

Bixarte's "Black Bitch Travesti" is also a performance of the affirmation the (black) trans* community's corporeal diversity. In this vein, Bixarte concludes her rap with the following, "Black e Travesti / Mais gorda, pesada / Bandida, ladrona / Mais gorda, pesada" ["Black and Travesti / Fatter, heavy / Bandit, thief / Fatter, heavy"] (*YouTube*). In this manner, the audience observes Bixarte's enduring pride for her own identity as a "Black Bitch Travesti," which is to say, an impoverished black trans woman who is comfortable in her own skin. Furthermore, Bixarte's self-definition of what it means to be a "Black Bitch Travesti" incorporates a pluralistic understanding of corporeal diversity into her black trans* community.

In accordance with Muñoz, when the act comes to a close at the video's end, I argue the ephemeral queer gestures that remain most remarkable in the audience's memory of the performance of "Black Bitch Travesti" are related to the ways in which Bixarte and her co-performers don and manipulate their jewelry, that which clearly resembles chains. Throughout the course of the video, Bixarte and her co-performers wear these chains—many of which are broken—as necklaces, earrings, and bracelets while they dance and sing along to the music. Because Bixarte views her art as a "denúncia" and form of protest against trans-phobia, racism, *gordofobia*, classism, et cetera, I thus interpret these chains as a representation of the bondages imposed on black trans women, and specifically *travestis*, in Brazil's heteronormative and anti-black society. Therefore, the fact that many of the chains are broken is incredibly significant, as it is in this way that Bixarte represents the liberation of her own identity as a black *travesti* as well as the self-definition of her black trans* community by way of the revolutionary aesthetics and politics of queer performance. In other words, the broken

chains can be read as the residue of the oppressive structures of the global white supremacist patriarchal *cistema*, considering that in their performance, Bixarte and her co-actors deconstruct heteronormativity and anti-blackness by re-appropriating these chains, wearing them with pride, provocatively chewing on them, twisting them, toying with them in a sequence of subversive queer gestures.

The thread of subversive queer performance evident in "Black Bitch Travesti" is interwoven throughout the other three songs of Bixarte's *A Nova Era* as well. In "Travesti no comando da nação" Bixarte imagines a Brazil in which she is at the top of the social hierarchy, as she speaks directly to various stereotypical "machos" of Brazilian society, demanding that they now address her as "Senhora Travesti" ["Madam *Travesti*"]. For example, in the song's lyrics, Bixarte calls out and admonishes "O macho que pensa que pode pegar sua voz e me silenciar…O macho que ocultou a história das preta & das Índia" ["The macho who thinks he can speak and silence me / The macho who erases black and indigenous histories"] (*YouTube*). The video for "Travesti no comando da nação," begins with an overhead shot of Bixarte on a small boat in a river as she provides a voiceover of a poem, in which she exclaims passionately, "Nós declaramos o fim desse milênio que fabricou a intolerância multiplicada sobre nossos corpos / declaramos uma nova era... ["We declare the end of this millennium which produced multitudes of intolerance on our bodies / we declare a new era…"] (*YouTube*). Thus in this fashion, Bixarte reveals the further significance of her most recent artistic project's title. That is to say, "*A Nova Era*" not only refers to Bixarte's blossoming career, but also a new global cultural and political era in which (black) trans peoples are no longer relegated to the lowest *lugar de fala*—the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy. As I will argue below,

Bixarte's imagining of herself in the chief position of power in the nation-state is the Afro-speculative practice of black utopia; it is an envisioning of statelessness.

The video for "Travesti no comando da nação" bears many stylistic similarities to that of "Black Bitch Travesti." In this case, the setting of "Travesti no comando da nação" is an abandoned and dilapidated house, presumably somewhere near João Pessoa. The walls of this place are tagged with graffiti, one of which reads, "Deus é uma mulher negra" ["God is a black woman"] (*YouTube*). Accordingly, this (safe) space effectively functions as a stateless black utopia, a *não lugar*—or nowhere—for Bixarte's performance of identity and self-definition. A Fúria Negra (i.e. Black Fury)—who is a frequent collaborator of Bixarte and one of the other black trans* performers in "Black Bitch Travesti"—joins Bixarte as the sole co-actor in this particular music video. Like the previous video, there are many sequences in "Travesti no comando da nação" that present various angles of Bixarte and A Fúria Negra's bodies as they touch their bellies, thighs, hair, et cetera, and simultaneously dance and sing with black trans* joy and pride. Nevertheless, it is A Fúria Negra who through her body expresses the performance's subversive gesture that consequently resides as queer ephemera in the audience's memory of the act. At one point in the video, as Bixarte is rapping down her list of "machos" that need to be exposed for their offenses, the shot cuts to A Fúria Negra as she points her fingers in the shape of a gun directly into the camera. A Fúria Negra subsequently pulls the trigger, so to speak, and draws her hand back as if she were experiencing recoil, before then blowing on her finger pistol playfully and provocatively in order to connote the queer subversive nature of their performance. Although Bixarte's lyrics can be perceived as a serious admonition to machos everywhere, her ludic

performance, as documented in the music video for "Travesti no comando da nação," does not indicate a physical threat of violence, but rather a subversive demolishing of the social hierarchy as structured by the global *cistema*. As a *denúncia* and a protest against white heteronormative patriarchy, subverting the biopolitical/necropolitical power of the *cistema* over black trans* bodies is at the crux of Bixarte's corpus of social media performance art. Analogously, subversion is also central to Marquis Bey's notion of "fugitive hope," which will amplify our understanding of Bixarte's overarching aesthetic and political project.

In their book *Black Trans Feminism*, Bey proposes that black trans feminism "is an agential and intentional undoing of regulative gender norms…a kind of gendered deconstruction, an unraveling that unstitches governant means of subjectivation…the reiterative un/gendered quotidian process of how not to be governed" (3). Nascimento calls this a dismantling of the "*CIStema*." In any case, Bey later goes on to state, "black trans feminism theorizes power, and, more important, the subversion of it," maintaining at its core a "commitment to nonnormativity" (5). The subversion of power and commitment to nonnormativity that Bey mentions are observable across Bixarte's body of work, but especially so in "Black Bitch Travesti" and "Travesti no comando da nação," as we have seen. However, I also argue that Bey's notion of fugitive hope illuminates Bixarte's performance art. Bey asserts, "Fugitive hope is the living outside of time and civilization because it yearns for something not legible in current frameworks" (216). Here, Bey theorizes fugitive hope as an epistemological mode of manifesting a radical future in the everyday present via the black (trans) imaginary. Bey then affirms, "Fugitive hope aspires for life in and through blackness…[it] is an escape from fixed

rootedness, which is thus a radical opening of possible futurity. Grounded in black feminist grammars, it concerns the tense of futurity colored by deviancy… It is the power to imagine beyond current fact, a prefiguration of living the future now as imperative rather than subjunctive" (203). In other words, fugitive hope is a creative escape from one's *lugar de fala*, a subversive mode of living by imagining other radical dimensions that exist outside the temporal and spatial confines of the global anti-black *cistema.* As Bey confirms, "The antiblack, transantagonistic, cis male supremacist world that structures dominant history is not the only world we have; there are most definitely, other worlds within and beside, beneath and above that world" (204). In this regard, Bey's theory of fugitive hope clearly resonates with Brown's notion of black utopia.

Brown's research provides key insights from a different, yet parallel, critical perspective into the radical potential of Bixarte's performance of black (trans) identity and self-definition of community. In her book, Brown posits that black utopia is an epistemology that allows one to become dislodged in the linear present of time in order to enact a radical futurity in an "alter-frequency," or as Bey would call it, "another world in the world" (204),

> Utopia is a condition of being temporally estranged… It is not accessible in standard linear time or in normative spaces. As we open ourselves up to the possibility of new ways of being, we must be brave enough to accept the idea that there are temporalities and spatialities beyond human imagining… We access these realms through states of ecstasy, the fulfillment of passions, the denial of passions; through sound waves and

> vibration… Music is the vehicle through which to merge with a larger cosmic consciousness. (8, 10)

With the quote above, Brown describes the ways in which the improvisatory ecstasis of black musical performance deconstructs normative understandings of time and space allowing the performer to create and live in new realms of being that exist far beyond the limits of the global white supremacist *cistema*. Bey would call this practice "fugitive hope." Thus, with all this in mind, I contend that in many pieces across her body of work, Bixarte not only performs her identity and self-defines her black trans* community, but also, concomitantly practices the art of black utopia with fugitive hope by way of her engagement with the black imaginary that is the African diaspora.

In the other two music videos that make up half of *A Nova Era*, "Oxum" and "Àrólé," Bixarte opens up her aesthetic and political project to the black (trans) imaginary, or in other words, the international discursive space of the African diaspora. In fact, much of Bixarte's performance art is entangled in the nexus of black trans and Afro-diasporic discourses. Nonetheless, in the two aforementioned songs, Bixarte focuses on themes of Afro-diasporic religion and ancestral memory by invoking traditions associated with Brazilian *Candomblé*. Referring specifically to *Candomblé*, Stefania Capone describes its primary objective accordingly, "The movement to preserve ancestral knowledge and compensate ritual loss is the true basis of the group dynamic of Afro-American religions" (225). Capone consequently claims, "The journeys to the centers of tradition there take the form of a return to what was lost… This revisit to Africa…represents a reactivation that is more symbolic than real of a 'pure' tradition that must be reconstructed in the diaspora" (225). Such journeys to an imagined Africa, that is

to say, the epistemological process of decolonizing one's mind and immersing oneself in African cultural traditions, is called "re-Africanization" (225). Correspondingly, in *Mama Africa* Patricia de Santana Pinho concurs with Capone's assertion, when she posits that the "re-Africanization" process in *Candomblé* "recreates the symbolic relationships between Africa and Brazil" (33), which then in turn, contributes to "the myth of Mama Africa," which she defines as "the belief in a unity that exists among members of the diaspora" (1-2). Therefore, for Santana Pinho, the myth of Mama Africa is synonymous with the diaspora, and it is within this black imaginary that Africa is conceptualized as "the motherland," that which "stands for the affective dimension of the diaspora," as Santana Pinho affirms (30). Bearing all this in mind, I propose that in "Oxum" and "Àrólé" alike, Bixarte's audience can observe her affective journey through the discursive space of the African diaspora—or rather, the black imaginary—via the vehicle of her queer social media performance art.

"Oxum" is the first single and music video in *A Nova Era*, and it signals Bixarte's connection to, and dialogue with, the African diaspora in her social media performance art. The song's title refers to the eponymous *orixá* (i.e. Yoruba goddess), a key figure in the Afro-Brazilian religion of *Candomblé*; this is of course the same Oxum that we have also seen in Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* in the preceding chapter of this dissertation. As Vanessa Kimberly Valdés reminds us in her book *Oshun's Daughters*, Oxum "is the quintessence of femininity… an entity that represents and embodies all aspects of womanhood" (132-3). With "Oxum" then, Bixarte embraces her femininity, that which is contested by the global *cistema*—via a queer performance of self-definition and identity affirmation as a black trans* woman. The music video begins with a close-up

shot in black-and-white of the *orixá* Oxum, as portrayed by Bixarte's co-performer Djully Bernardo. Bernardo is depicted dressed in white and wearing a veil of seashells over her face, which coincides with traditional representations of Oxum in Afro-Brazilian culture. In various shots throughout the video, Bernardo holds a hand mirror as she gazes into it, which as Valdés affirms, Oxum does in order to "appreciate her own beauty and sensuality" (132). With guidance from the titular *orixá*, this is precisely what Bixarte does in her performance of "Oxum." As Bixarte begins to sing, the camera pans to the artist herself and her co-actor A Fúria Negra drinking from and bathing themselves in a river. The fact that the setting for this music video is a river is highly significant, considering that Valdés notes, "Oshun [Oxum] is affiliated with sweet waters, specifically with rivers" (10). Indeed, the lyrics for "Oxum" spring from "sweet waters," as Bixarte states in an interview with *Alma preta*, "Por falar da orixá das águas, a canção retrata essa instabilidade emocional durante a pandemia, algo que é vivenciado no coletivo… Como resposta, quis deixar um recado de amor e força" ["Speaking of the orixá of water [Oxum], the song deals with emotional instability during the pandemic, something experienced collectively… As an answer, I wanted to leave a message of love and hope"] (Lacerda). This quote from Bixarte further illustrates the ways in which she interweaves fugitive hope for the black trans* community throughout not only "Oxum," but also the rest of her corpus of social media performance art.

Bixarte begins her rap in "Oxum" by recognizing and self-defining her black trans* community. As she sings, "As neta das bruxas são preta / As netas das bruxas são trava" ["The granddaughters of sorceresses are black / The granddaughters of sorceresses are *travesti*"] (*YouTube*). Bixarte then goes on to rap, "No barulho do rio eu escuto oxum

/ Sei que sem sua bênção vou pra lugar nenhum" ["In the sound of the river I hear Oxum / I know that without her blessing I am lost"] (*YouTube*). In these lines, Bixarte intimates that it is not only by bathing in the river, but also by listening to its sound, that she makes contact with Oxum—echoing Jayna Brown's assertion that is via sound waves that performance artists tune into black utopia. Near the end of the song, Bixarte makes an "oração," or prayer, to Oxum on behalf of her community:

> Que tua correnteza traga vida pra todas as travestis do Brasil e do mundo / As travestis sertanejas recebam através do teu rio / Força e proteção que só a senhora sabe dar / E que nenhum macho consiga nos derrubar [Let your stream bring life to all the *travestis* of Brazil and of the world / Let the *travestis* from the interior receive through your river / Strength and protection that only you know how to give / And that no *macho* is able to bring us down]. (*YouTube*)

Here, Bixarte appeals to the *orixá* of femininity to give life with her sweet waters to all the *travestis* of not only Brazil, but the entire world, even those in dry far-off places like *O Sertão*, the arid region of Brazil's Northeastern interior. Moreover, Bixarte makes a plea to Oxum for empowerment in her revolutionary struggle against the global anti-black *cistema*. After singing this prayer, the camera cuts to a profile angle of Bixarte's face as she proceeds to pour honey—another common motif associated with the figure of Oxum in Brazil—all over her body in an act of offering to the *orixá*. There is then a montage of shots of Bixarte's body—her breasts, hips, and legs—as honey oozes all over it. Bixarte's gestures in these scenes as she covers herself in honey are the queer ephemera that linger after her performance concludes.

In "Àrólé," Bixarte deals with many of the same themes presented in “Oxum.” The title of this song and accompanying music video refers to the salutation associated with the *orixá* Oxóssi, a deity of the forest and the hunt in Brazilian *Candomblé* (Souza 57). In an interview with *Paraíba.com.br*, Bixarte elaborates on the message behind her song, “Àrólé fala sobre dar autoridade para nossos orixás conseguirem trabalhar e olhar para a gente, pois nós somos o sonho dos nossos ancestrais [“Àrólé speaks to giving authority to our *orixás* so that they work for us and look to us, we are the dream of our ancestors’] (Domingues). Bixarte then goes on to state, “tem como proposta a caça pelo que foi roubado de pessoas pretas, travestis e trans. É a busca pela nossa felicidade” [“the song’s subject is the hunt for that which was stolen from black, *travesti*, and trans peoples. It is our search for happiness”] (Domingues). This is to say that like in “Oxum,” Bixarte, as a black trans* woman, appeals to and venerates an *orixá* of *Candomblé* in order to request guidance in navigating the white supremacist *cistema*. The video for “Àrólé” commences with various shots of leaves on the forest floor, plants, and the bark trees, before cutting to Bixarte as she begins her verse. With the following lines, Bixarte denounces religious intolerance and anti-black racial violence: “Os terreiros não vão mais queimar / Nos metrô cês não vão mas pegar / Vão ter que aprender a respeitar / Nossa luta cês só vão escutar” [“You will no longer burn our temples / In the metro, you will no longer beat us / You will have to learn and respect us / You will to listen to our struggle”] (*YouTube*). Pedro Rolim, who plays the role of Oxóssi, joins Bixarte in her video performance of “Àrólé.” In one particular scene, Oxóssi playfully chases Bixarte through the forest as she lifts her dress above her ankles to run though the flora and hide behind trees, laughing joyously at the *orixá*’s pursuit. The gestures and affective gazes that occur

between the two co-actors in this forest-chase sequence are the queer ephemera that remain in memory once Bixarte's performance has finished.

Nevertheless, "Àrólé" is significant for yet another reason. In the lyrics of the song, Bixarte references "Mãe Stella de Oxóssi," who was the chief priestess of the preeminent *Candomblé terreiro* Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá (Santana Pinho 33) in Salvador da Bahia since the 1970s (Capone 220) until hear death in 2018. Thus, it is in this vein that Bixarte connects her work to a longer history of black (religious) rights movements in Brazil. However, with her intersectional perspective as a black *travesti*, Bixarte also aligns the struggle for trans*, LGBTQIA+, and feminist rights with *O Movimento Negro*. As Bixarte raps in closing "Àrólé," "Como mãe Estela dizia tem que aprender a magia / Tem que ter fé na mandinga / ... / Tem que ter fé mana / Tem que ter fé pra poder continuar" ["As Mãe Estella said, you have to learn the magic / You have to have faith in sorcery / … / You have to have faith, sister / You have to have faith in order to carry on"] (*YouTube*). Here, Bixarte speaks directly to her community of black trans* sisters, reminding them that they must have faith in "Mama Africa," that is, in Afro-diasporic spirituality and ancestral memory. To have faith in the affective community that is the black imaginary, or African diaspora, is an act of fugitive hope. Moreover, Bixarte coalesces the respective fights for black and trans* rights into one mutual revolution in "Àrólé" and the rest of *A Nova Era*. Accordingly, Bixarte's social media performance art is an aesthetic and political project with—not just black, and not just trans, but—black trans feminist underpinnings. The revolutionary black trans feminist epistemology coursing throughout Bixarte's music extends to her corpus of slam poetry as well.

BIXARTE'S "A PAZ DO PRETO"

Bixarte's "A Paz do preto" ("Black Peace") is slam poem that was a once-viral Instagram post, and which ultimately came about in the aftermath of a confluence of tragic events: On May 18, 2020, police in Rio de Janeiro killed a 14-year old black child named João Pedro de Mattos Pinto; one week later on May 25 in Minneapolis, Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd; and on June 2, Miguel Otávio Santana da Silva the five-year-old son of a black domestic worker in Recife, fell to his death as a result of the criminal negligence of his mother's upper-class white boss.[58] It was in this atmosphere of hemispheric American anti-black racism that Bixarte crafted her slam poem "A Paz do preto" as a *denúncia* and protest against the killing of black peoples across the diaspora. Correspondingly, with Christina Sharpe's theory of "being in the wake" in mind, I argue that Bixarte's affective performance of her social media slam poem "A Paz do preto" is an act of "wake work" that links the African diaspora(s) in the United States and Brazil. Bixarte realizes statelessness and black utopia in her self-definition of a hemispheric community of *Amefricanos*, and in doings so, reveals the ways in which the afterlives of slavery continue to loom—specter-like—over both modern nations, in addition to the rest of the Americas, by remembering, that is, by embodied knowledge/communal memory, a queer "wake" in the form of a slam poem for all the black (trans) bodies across the diaspora who died as a result of racial violence.

In sharp contrast to the music videos of Bixarte's *A Nova Era*, the recording of "A Paz do preto" is rather rudimentary, considering that it is a single take entirely shot from

[58] See the article, "#BLACKLIVESMATTER: A Study of Social Representations from Twitter" (2022) by Marieli Mezari Vitali, et. al. for more on social media reactions to these three deaths in United States, Brazil, and around the globe.

one angle, likely on a cell phone. These differences of aesthetics are, in part, a result of funding, as the state government of Paraíba co-sponsored the production of *A Nova Era* (Lacerda), whereas the video performance of "A Paz do preto" appears to have been filmed spontaneously. In this way, the visual aesthetics of "A Paz do preto" signify Bixarte's concern with quotidian experience, with the everyday affective realities of living as a black trans woman in Brazil—in the Americas. This particular video performance was originally posted to Bixarte's Instagram account, which also indicates its ephemerality as well as its preoccupation with the everyday; however, the artist has ostensibly since removed it from her own page without explanation. Nevertheless, despite the ephemeral nature of social media, the queer ephemera of Bixarte's performance art reside in the memory of the internet. That is to say, the wake—or afterlife—of Bixarte's social media performance art takes the form of reposts and shares in queer and black trans spaces of the world wide web. Bixarte's documented performance of "A Paz do preto" currently appears to be solely published on the YouTube and Instagram pages of the hemispheric American slam poetry project, Abya Yala. I, therefore, suggest that Abya Yala Poetry Slam serves as a (web)site of embodied knowledge and communal memory, a place to re-encounter the ephemera of Bixarte's queer performance, and furthermore, as a vital reminder that there is still much work to be done to combat racial and gender violence across the American hemisphere.

In the documented performance of "A Paz do preto," the framing of the video presents Bixarte primarily from the chest up as she stands in front of the dirty vinyl siding of a nondescript building, further grounding her slam poem in the space of the everyday. In a highly significant visual cue, Bixarte is wearing a red dress and is made up with

vibrant red eyeshadow, lipstick, and fingernail polish. Accordingly, because the symbol of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker's Party of Brazil) is a red flag with a white star, I read Bixarte's costume design for this performance as a nod to former Brazilian President Luíz Inácio Lula da Silva (known simply as Lula) and his political party. Moreover, I interpret Bixarte's meticulously curated optics as a performative stance of resistance against neoliberal capitalism, specifically as exemplified by current President Bolsonaro's extremist right-wing government, which has been exceptionally hostile to black (and) trans* peoples living in Brazil. Nevertheless, due to her hemispheric concern for representing *Amefricanos* in both the United States and Brazil with "A Paz do preto," I contend that, in this particular Afro-diasporic performance, Bixarte posits the US as the epicenter of neoliberal capitalism, and thus, seeks to subvert the imperialism of the anti-black *cistema* globally.

In the video of "A Paz do preto," Bixarte gazes directly into the camera with great intensity and delivers her slam poem at breakneck speed, not only for effect, but also to not surpass 60 seconds in order to adhere to the generic conventions of IGTV (i.e. Instagram Television). Bixarte delivers her performance in exasperation at the systemic, and thus recurring, killing of black peoples across the diaspora from the US to Brazil. Moreover, Bixarte performs her slam poem in rejection of ex-"aspiration," in other words, the suffocating or snuffing out of black life, as it is difficult for black peoples to "breathe" in the "pervasive climate of anti-blackness"—to use Sharpe's terminology—that spans the American hemisphere. With the 2014 police chokehold death of Eric Garner and other acts of racial violence from what she calls, "the archives of breathlessness," in mind, Sharpe contemplates the nuances of the word "aspiration" (109-

10). For Sharpe, "aspiration," by which she in part means, the "*audible breath* that accompanies or comprises a speech sound," is a radical method for black peoples, and particularly (performance) artists, to unearth "the archives of slavery" by telling their stories of "Black being in the wake" as a form of bearing witness (109-110). Furthermore, Sharpe suggests that aspiration is a way of disrupting the cyclical acts of racial violence that occur in the wake of slavery and its afterlives. Just like Eric Garner, George Floyd cried out, "I can't breathe," to the police over and over again, and even still, officer Chauvin kneeled on his neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds, ultimately murdering him. Consequently, during the infamous summer of 2020, "I can't breathe" became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States.[59] In this context, Bixarte's queer performance of "aspiration" in "A Paz do preto" uncovers the long history of slavery in the Americas and the ways in which black peoples in the diaspora continue to live in its wake. All that being said, Bixarte performs this slam poem from her respective *lugar de fala* as a Brazilian black trans* woman, and in doing so, multiplies the valences of the phrase, "as vidas negras importam" ("black lives matter").

In this vein of black trans feminism, Bixarte begins "A Paz do preto" with the poignant lines: "Dos estados unidos ao Brasil, preto nunca tem paz / uns passam de vente e dois outros com doze anos aqui jaz / existe uma grande diferença entre o elite e o proletariado" ["From the United States to Brazil, black people never have peace / some make it to 22, others die here at just 12 years old / there's a big difference between the elite and the proletariat"] (YouTube). Thus from the start, Bixarte's diasporic aesthetic is evident, as she connects the US and Brazil through their common systems of anti-black

[59] See Ben Okri's piece, "'I Can't Breathe:' Why George Floyd's Words Reverberate Around the World" for more on the global impact of this anti-racist rallying call.

racism as manifested in the police killings of black peoples—children! Nevertheless, Bixarte also injects the issue of the global class system, that which is recapitulated even within anti-capitalist discursive spaces such as the African diaspora, into her slam poem. It is in this way that Bixarte intimates that the police killings of black peoples in Brazil do not receive the same amount of attention as they do in the United States, and this is because in the hegemonic US, Brazil is perceived to be the "Third World." Accordingly, I argue that with "A Paz do preto," Bixarte practices "wake work," in Sharpe's sense of the term, in consideration of the fact that her poem was performed in the wake of the deaths of three black peoples that were killed in the wake of slavery and its afterlives. However, speaking from her respective *lugar de fala* as a black *travesti* from Brazil, Bixarte complicates Sharpe's theory of navigating everyday racism—that is, of living in the wake of slavery—with critical interventions specifically grounded in themes of class, gender, and sexuality, in addition to race.

Bixarte continues her queer performance of "A Paz do preto" by now bringing gender issues to bear on the phrase "black lives matter." Bixarte denounces those who turn their heads and look the other way when they witness violence against (black) trans* women; as she exclaims in song,

> Cês dizem que as vidas negras importam / somente quando um preto no caixão vai parar / mas no dia a dia a travesti preta passa na roleta do busão / tu escondê-lo do celular [You all say black lives matter / only when there's a black man in a coffin do you stop / but day to day when a black *travesti* passes through the roulette of the public bus, you hide it from your cellphone]. (*YouTube*)

With these verses, Bixarte denounces the "American public"—by which I mean that of the entire hemisphere—of looking the other way when it comes to racial and/or gender violence against (black) trans people. This sentiment echoes resoundingly with Leticia Nascimento and Marquis Bey's respective theorizations of "*transfeminismo*" and "black trans feminism." Nascimento, for her part, asks, "Quando afirmamos 'Vidas negras importam,' estamos também, nos referindo a mulheres e homens trans e travestis negras e negros"? ["When we say 'blacks lives matter,' are we referring to trans women and men and black *travestis*"? (161). Nascimento implies that this is most certainly not the case, and thereby, consequently declares that there is "uma urgência para que os movimentos negros entendam a importância de abordar, entre suas reflexões, as questões vividas por travestis e transexuais" ["an urgency for global black movements to understand the importance of incorporating, in their reflections, the issues experiences by *travestis* and trans* peoples"] (177). Analogously, Bey proposes that one of black trans feminism's primary imperatives is to form "coalitions" that are not dependent on an individual identity group, but rather a truly intersectional collectivity. As Bey claims, "coalitions are irreverent toward established identifiable vectors that might be called identities, parties, groups, organizations, and the like" (208). Bey then continues on, affirming, "Coalitions are black trans feminism's praxis in one sense, and this means *a radical togetherness on grounds that do not abide the categorical or taxonomic*… coalitions are the doing of fugitive hope" (208). Although Bixarte performs a *denúncia* in "A Paz do preto," in doing so with fugitive hope, she seeks to self-define a community that includes black peoples, trans* peoples, black trans peoples, that is to say, everybody, even decolonized white cisgender straight men.

Near the finale of her slam poem performance, Bixarte reminds her audiences in Brazil, the US, and everywhere in between, of the extensive history of the institution of slavery across the Americas and its incessant afterlives by affirming that "o racismo existia mais de quinhentos anos / somente agora tá sendo filmado" ["racism has existed more than five hundred years / it's just that it is now being filmed"] (*YouTube*). In today's digital present, there exists a hyper-visibility like never before as result of smartphone technology. Despite that more than ever racial violence committed against black peoples is being caught on video, there does not exist the same hyper-visibility and awareness for the (black) trans community. Therefore, via her queer performance, Bixarte denounces this lack of visibility in Brazil and the United States alike, demanding to be seen, and moreover, that her black trans community be recognized and their voices heard across the diaspora. Ultimately, Bixarte ends "A Paz do preto" with a revolutionary stance of fugitive hope in declaring that with "*a poesia marginal*" as a weapon, "vamos explodir a porra da casa grande" ["we are going to explode the fucking master's house"] (*YouTube*). In this way, Bixarte defines the aesthetic and political objective of her social media performance art, proclaiming that by producing "poetry from the margins," the black trans community, in coalition with international black movements, feminists, LGBTQIA+ activists, et cetera, is going to denounce, subvert, and demolish "a casa grande," which is to say, the global anti-black *cistema* that persists in the wake of the Americas' history of colonialism and slavery.

All that being said, Bixarte's choice to employ the words "a casa grande" also evokes the title of Gilberto Freyre's *Casa grande e senzala* (literally: "The Master's House and the Slave Quarters"), which as Santana Pinho notes, propagated the "idea of

harmonious conviviality among races" in Brazil, though it did not originate "the myth of racial democracy" (*Mama* 18).[60] Nevertheless, for this reason, I claim that with her final lines in "A Paz do preto," Bixarte also voices the need for African American and/or black thinkers and cultural producers, from their *lugar de fala* of intradiasporic hegemony in the United States, to recognize the experiences of black, trans, and black trans, life in Brazil, as opposed to perceiving the Latin American nation as a racial democracy. Thus, the lingering question we must ask ourselves is: What does it mean for Bixarte—a black *travesti* from Brazil—to create queer Afro-diasporic performance art that addresses issues of systemic racism and gender inequality in her home nation and the United States alike? In my view, to speak to power, to confront the hegemony of African American discourse in the black imaginary, from the *lugar de fala* of a Brazilian black trans* woman, is to critique the ways in which US imperialism permeates global politics, even in purportedly revolutionary spaces, such as the African diaspora. Consequently, I contend that Bixarte's "A Paz do preto" is a call for recognition; a plea to return the gaze; an appeal to the African diaspora and to the rest of the world, particularly those in the US, to open their collective eyes and witness the realities of racial and gender violence in Brazil, rather than simply continuing to idealize the nation as a racial democracy; a demand that we finally listen when black trans* peoples around the globe speak.

[60] See David Lehmann's review of various studies on Freyre's entanglement with the myth of racial democracy titled, "Gilberto Freyre: The Reassessment Continues."

CONCLUSION

In my investigation of Afro-diasporic literatures of the United States and Brazil, I have revealed how John Keene, Gayl Jones, Conceição Evaristo, and Bixarte, respectively imagine the black affective community of *Améfrica* in Brazil from their particular "*lugares de fala,*" and via their distinctive literary modes of "Afro-Atlantic speculation." Although there are many distinctions between each author's particular mode of Afro-diasporic literature, the black cultural producers that I study in this dissertation are all commonly invested in the unifying "myth of Mama Africa." At the same time, they also represent the diverse plurality of black peoples and black cultures in the African diaspora. Furthermore, as we have seen through the course of my analysis, there exists a shared focus on the body, memory, and religion across the Afro-diasporic literatures of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte. In their various Afro-speculative representations of Brazil, all four of these diasporic cultural producers are concerned with the "embodied knowledge" and "communal memory" of *Americanos*, that is, the "common historical experience" of living "in the wake" of the Americas' history of colonialism and slavery. Keene represents an array of black artists and sorcerers who perform the embodied knowledge of "statelessness," and thereby, enact "black utopia" in the stories of *Counternarratives.* In *Palmares*, Jones' protagonist Almeyda practices black utopia as a *curandeira* in statelessness by narrating her own story of her "journeys through time and spirit," the affective realities of her search for her lost husband Anninho. For her part, Evaristo represents the performance of affective ancestral memory

through the embodied knowledge of clay sculpture while simultaneously conjuring Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions of *Candomblé* in her novel *Ponciá Vicêncio*. Keene, Jones, and Evaristo all imagine black utopia in their Afro-speculative works of print culture (i.e. codices) that represent black performers, whereas Bixarte's Afro-diasporic literature is in and of itself a performance of "statelessness," of the embodied knowledge of "*Amefricanidade*." That is to say, in her social media performance art, Bixarte imagines a hemispheric Afro-diasporic community, a black utopia across *Améfrica*, in which black trans* peoples are also expressly visible.

In spite of all their parallels, there are significant ways in which the respective Afro-diasporic literatures of Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte serve as counter-narratives to one another that must be discussed as well. As Afro-diasporic authors writing from the United States, Keene and Jones alike appear to recognize their hegemonic *lugares de fala* within the international black imaginary by mostly shying away from representing modern Brazil. Instead, in their Afro-diasporic literatures, both Keene and Jones represent black Brazilian history and culture by imagining a speculative past. That is to say, Jones' *Palmares* is entirely set in a speculative pre-modern Brazil; similarly, Keene's *Counternarratives* primarily imagines speculative histories of colonial Brazil and World War II-era Brazil. On the other hand, as Afro-diasporic cultural producers working in their local context of modern Brazilian society, Evaristo and Bixarte are more invested in everyday social, cultural, and political issues in Brazil today. I do not mean to suggest that the works of Keene and Jones do not speak to contemporary issues of anti-blackness and systemic racism in the Brazilian nation-state whatsoever, only that their bearing on modern Brazilian society is more indirect. Readers must infer

Keene and Jones' commentaries on the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in the modern Brazil, whereas Evaristo and Bixarte more palpably represent the ways in which these hemispheric American institutions of systemic oppression are presently manifested in the Brazilian nation-state. In other words, Keene and Jones maintain an allegorical distance in their Afro-speculative narratives of Brazil, a distance that is not evident in the black Brazilian counter-narratives offered by Evaristo and Bixarte.

Evaristo, in particular, recognizes the everyday realities of black peoples living with the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in the modern nation-state of Brazil through her *quilombola* poetics of escrevivência. Evaristo imagines the African diaspora by exploring the ways in which affective ancestral memory and the performance of this embodied knowledge factor into quotidian life for everyday black Brazilian women, as we have observed in her novel *Ponciá Vicêncio*. Although the Afro-diasporic nature of *Counternarratives* and *Palmares* may be more immediately apparent than it is in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, considering that Keene and Jones expressly write beyond the borders of the United States, Evaristo's *Literatura negra* is still very much invested in the international black imaginary. At the same time, Evaristo's primary literary objective is the empowerment of everyday black Brazilians by building a community of *Amefricanos* in the local context of her home nation. However, that is not to imply that Keene and Jones are not also committed to dealing with everyday issues for the black community in the United States, or Brazil for that matter. Contrarily, I propose that Keene, Jones, Evaristo, and Bixarte all recognize that the nation-state is itself an afterlife of colonialism and slavery, and moreover, that however unjust, it is presently a material/corporeal reality that continues to perpetuate hemispheric American racism across the continent. That is to

say, the Afro-diasporic cultural producers that I study in this dissertation do not attempt to transcend the nation, but rather imagine *Améfrica* from their respective *lugares de fala* in their home nations. The Afro-speculative imagining of *Améfrica* in Brazil is an instantiation of, what Fred Moten calls, the "Internation," that is, the revolutionary space of statelessness, the African diaspora. All of this further corroborates Moten's claim that the Internation is only possible in the space of the local, the nation.

Analogously to Evaristo's Afro-diasporic literature, Bixarte's social media performance art is grounded in the everyday reality of modern Brazil. However, in contrast to Evaristo, there is a contemporaneous, and/or ephemeral, nature to Bixarte's corpus that captures the zeitgeist of the digital present in a way that traditional print culture simply cannot. Additionally, while Evaristo dialogues with international black thought and represents Afro-diasporic cultural traditions and affective ancestral memory in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, her writing does not concretely consider quotidian black life in the United States, as does Bixarte's "A Paz do preto." With all this in mind, it is clear that Bixarte's social media performance art exhibits an intradiasporic social, cultural, and political scope that is neither evident in Evaristo's escrevivência, nor the respective Afro-diasporic literatures of Keene and Jones. That is to say, of the four Afro-diasporic cultural producers studied herein, only Bixarte speaks to contemporary everyday issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality that reverberate between the locales United States and Brazil. Furthermore, Bixarte's music and slam poetry performances, those which are solely published on social media applications like Instagram, YouTube, and Spotify, offer an immediacy of significance that global audiences have been conditioned to expect in the twenty-first century as a result of the exponential development of new technologies. Of

course, this is not to discount the respective works of Keene, Jones, and Evaristo, as each is important in its own right. Instead, I claim that Bixarte's "Black digital poetics"—to again use Keene's term—is directed toward where "literature" is heading, and moreover, that her social media performance art is at the vanguard of global/international black feminism, which is always already black trans feminism.

Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated the ways in which the international black imaginary is a revolutionary affective community for those Afro-diasporic peoples around the globe who believe in the collectivity of the myth of Mama Africa. Nevertheless, in the wake of colonialism and slavery, even the radical discursive field of the African diaspora is not without hierarchization, as black thought produced in the US maintains a position of intradiasporic cultural hegemony. By making this statement I do not mean to discredit or diminish the significance of African American cultural production's contributions to the history and continuation of the international black imaginary. Rather, my intention is to echo Bixarte's call for further recognition of and visibility for black Brazilians, as well as black trans peoples globally, in the "imagined community" that is the African diaspora. Yet still, the intradiasporic hegemony of African American thought is a consequence of US imperialism, and thus, ought to be resisted. Its is incumbent on all of use who study the African diaspora to acknowledge these global power dynamics by thinking beyond the borders of the nation-state, which is to say, by critically dialoguing with black thought produced in Latin America, Africa, and/or other locales of the Global South. While Keene's *Counternarratives* and Jones' *Palmares* are enlightening launch pads for readers in the United States seeking to better comprehend the history and afterlives of colonialism and

slavery in Brazil, there exists a plethora of black Brazilian cultural production that has been far too often overlooked inside and outside US academia. Notwithstanding that this is, in part, a result of the lack of translations of *Literatura negra*, and thereby, a matter of accessibility, the fields of global/international black studies and/or African diaspora studies must work to facilitate the conditions of possibility for the further English-language publication of black Brazilian literature by directing their critical gazes to Brazil. Consequently, additional English translations of *Literatura negra* would foster the conditions of possibility for imaging the international black community—*Améfrica*—between the United States and Brazil as well as other contrapuntal locales of the African diaspora.

I advance the argument above in agreement with Keene's assertions in his *Poetry Foundation* piece "Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness." In this essay, Keene contends, "we need more translation of literary works by non-Anglophone black diasporic authors into English, particularly by U.S.-based translators, and that these translations should then be published by U.S.-based publishing organs, including literary periodicals, as well as by publishing houses large and small" ("Translating"). Accordingly, Keene demands that the US publishing industry recognize black peoples around the globe by printing translations of Afro-diasporic literatures produced in non-Anglophone languages, and moreover, non-European languages originating from the African continent. Keene proposes that if US publishing houses were indeed to prioritize the translation and publication of non-Anglophone Afro-diasporic literatures,

> More of us might grasp that in Brazil, there have long been discourses of resistance that draw upon, complement, inflect, and in some cases

> challenge the prevailing discourses in the Afro-Anglosphere. We might be able to understand with far greater nuance the ways in which race and racism function within the Dominican Republic, and speak and write with more subtlety and care not only about its relationship with its neighbor on the island of Hispaniola, Haiti, but about the relationships between Dominicans and other peoples of African descent throughout the hemisphere, including as they unfold within the context of U.S. society, and in relation to African American history and culture. ("Translating")

In a way, this is exactly what Keene accomplishes with *Counternarratives* in the face of such an absence of translations of global/international black literatures. That is to say, Keene speculates, or "translates," histories from Brazil, Hispaniola, and various other locales of the African diaspora, and then compiles these "counter-narratives" into a collection that collectively imagines the stateless black utopia of *Améfrica*. Nevertheless, Keene still acknowledges the radical potential afforded in the further translation of non-Anglophone Afro-diasporic literatures into English by posing the following question:

> What might happen if through our engagement with these translated works we were able to deepen our understanding of the conversations already underway across linguistic and cultural barriers, while also learning from them new ways to decenter Western and U.S. hegemonic perspectives about blackness and black people, which might include black Americans' participation in furthering that hegemony. ("Translating")

With these lines, Keene intimates how the further translation of non-Anglophone Afro-diasporic literatures in the United States will contribute to the subversion and dislocation

of US hegemony and imperialism in the discursive space of the black imaginary. I agree with Keene wholeheartedly, as I too believe that reading and studying non-Anglophone Afro-diasporic literatures in translation will illuminate the ways in which US black cultural producers currently maintain a hegemonic *lugar de fala* in global/international black discourse, and in turn, that this act of recognition will ultimately catalyze the deconstruction of the intradiasporic hierarchization of knowledge.

While in "Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness" Keene proposes the US publishing industry print non-Anglophone Afro-diasporic literatures from all over the globe, for purposes of practicality, I suggest that the English-language translation of black Brazilian literature is a prosperous starting point. Therefore, in concert with Keene, I repeat my call for additional translations of black Brazilian literature into English, including Evaristo's body of work. Why has Evaristo's other novel *Becos da memória* ["Alleys of Memory"] (2006) not been published in English, or her short-story collection *Olhos d'água* ["Eyes of Water"] (2014), or even her book of poems *Poemas da recordação e outros movimentos* ["Poems of Recollection and Other Movements"] (2008)? Why has Ana María Gonçalves' *Um defeito de cor* ["A Color Defect"] (2006)—a 900-plus-page novel about an elderly African woman who travels to Brazil at the end of the nineteenth-century in search of her lost son—not been translated into English, but the Chilean author Roberto Bolaño's thousand-odd-page book *2666* (2004) has? Social, cultural, and political structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality are certainly at play in the decision-making process about what gets translated and published within the institution of the US publishing industry. In other words, black literatures, and especially poetry produced by black women, does not maintain the same cultural capital, as does

fiction produced by white male authors, for example. However, global language politics undoubtedly factor into these matters; the present absence of English translations of *Literatura negra* in the United States has as much to do with Brazilian exceptionalism as it does American exceptionalism. That is to say, the linguistic singularity of Brazil in the American hemisphere coupled with the United States' geographic proximity to much of Hispanophone Latin America, means that the Lusophone nation is frequently disregarded in US collective consciousness, as Spanish holds a cultural capital, a social prestige, that Portuguese does not. This is clearly exemplified by the relative scarcity of Portuguese language programs, in comparison to Spanish, across US academia. Correspondingly, I reiterate my appeal to we scholars in the hegemonic United States who research and teach African diaspora studies and/or global/international black studies to direct our critical gazes to Brazil.

If more US-based scholars were to engage with the black Brazilian cultural production already circulating in English, it would generate further academic interest, and thus, a stronger demand for the publishing industry in the United States to respond with additional translations of *Literatura negra*. Even outside the field of African diaspora studies specifically, English departments in the US university system should takes steps like prioritizing the incorporation of translated works written by black Brazilian authors, such as Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio*, into course syllabi for (under)graduate seminars in global contemporary literature and/or world literature, over now-canonical books like Bolaño's *2666*, or J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), et cetera. Aside from *Ponciá Vicêncio*, Ana Paula Maia's three novellas *Entre rinhas de cachorros e porcos abatidos* (2009) and *Carvão animal* (2011), which were translated and published in English as a

collection titled *Saga of Brutes* in 2016, is another piece of black Brazilian print culture that would fit well in these types of syllabi. The same can be stated for Geovani Martins' *O sol na cabeça* (2018), which was printed in English as *The Sun on My Head* in 2019, and generated a substantial amount of buzz in the US press. Furthermore, to move beyond conservative conceptualizations of literature, two of Marcelo D'Salete's graphic novels, *Cumbe* (2014) and *Angola Janga* (2017), have been translated into English as *Run for It: Stories of Slaves Who Fought for Their Freedom* (2017) and *Angola Janga: Kingdom of Runaway Slaves* (2019), respectively, and both deserve more critical attention. Although there exists a handful of other examples of contemporary *Literatura negra* available in English, further translations of black Brazilian literature are imperative to better comprehending the shared histories/afterlives of colonialism and slavery in the United States and Brazil alike, as well as across the rest of the Americas. At the same time, a wider variety of black Brazilian narratives would also help to amplify understandings of the plurality of black life and everyday experience in the African diaspora, and thereby, counteract essentialist notions of a global/transnational black identity.

The US publishing industry ought to commission the translation of pieces of black Brazilian literature written by contemporary authors producing today, such as Jarid Arraes, Jeferson Tenório, and Mel Duarte, among many others. Moreover, the academic publishing industry in the United States, in particular, should publish English-language translations of black feminist theory produced in Brazil, Djamila Ribeiro and Lélia Gonzalez's respective bodies of work especially. However, at the same, the US publishing industry must also be mindful not to recapitulate the colonial history of

resource extraction in Latin America, and for this reason, it should collaborate with independent publishers of black Brazilian cultural production operating in Brazil when producing translations. In spite of the shortage of translations of *Literatura negra* presently circulating in the US public sphere, there is also a remarkable deficiency of African American (i.e. black US) literature published in Portuguese. In my mind, this is a consequence of the systemic afterlives of colonialism and slavery in both the US and Brazilian publishing industries. While many of Toni Morrison's books, as well as those of Octavia E. Butler, have been translated into Portuguese and circulated in Brazil, not a single one of Jones' numerous works has been published and sold in the Brazilian literary market. If Jones' *Corregidora*, *Song for Anninho*, and/or *Palmares*, along with Keene's *Counternarratives*, were to be translated into Portuguese, everyday black Brazilian cultural producers would truly have the opportunity to respond, to critique African American representations of Brazil. On the other hand, a significant number of works of black feminist theory from the United States have been published in Brazil, notably books by Angela Y. Davis, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks. Still, further translation and publication of Afro-diasporic literatures and black feminist theory, in the United States and Brazil alike, is key to continuing the resistance against hemispheric American racism because the international black imaginary is a radical *cross-cultural* space for the *exchange* of discourse, and the creation of a revolutionary community founded in cultural memory and the affective realities of global anti-blackness.

In the further translation and publication of Afro-diasporic literatures in both the United States and Brazil, it is absolutely crucial that trans* voices are included in this cross-cultural conversation in the international black imaginary. Keene concurs in the

same aforementioned essay, stating, "I believe too that we should have far more translations…of work by women, by LGBTQ peoples, by Indigenous writers, by working class and poor writers, by writers with disabilities, and so on" ("Translating"). However, considering the structural issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality that are at play in publishing industries globally, securing representation in traditional media like print culture can prove difficult. Accordingly, in *Black Trans Feminism*, Marquis Bey proposes that "there is something crucial to be gained by not simply drawing on the work of established black women or black femme writers whose books have been published by academic presses but focusing also on black and trans women who have self-published their books or published with small, lesser-known, independent presses" (30). Therefore, I suggest that the US and the Brazilian publishing industries alike ought to look to independent presses and self-published works when acquiring manuscripts for the translation and publication of black trans* and Afro-diasporic literatures. Furthermore, in an extension of Keene and Bey's lines of thought, we should expand traditional conceptualizations of literature to include digital poetics, and call upon those of us working in the fields of African diaspora and/or global/international black studies must critically engage with Bixarte's corpus, as well as other examples of black (trans*) Brazilian performance art that is circulated outside traditional routes of publication, like via social media applications such as YouTube and Instagram. However, the lingering question that must be asked is: what about translating Bixarte's work?

With Brent Hayes Edward's notion of *"décalage*" from his book *The Practice of Diaspora* in mind—which as a reminder, he asserts, "provid[es] a model for what resists or escapes translation through the African diaspora" (13)—we can also consider the Afro-

diasporic ephemera of Bixarte's black trans* social media performance art, that is, the ineffability of blackness that resists and escapes translation, as art that does not even require translation. In other words, Bixarte's body of work is immediately intelligible on an affective level, if not a linguistic one; that is to say, she performs *Amefricanidade*, or rather Afro-diasporic communal memory, by way of her body, through corporeal sounds, movements, and gestures. Of course, a translation of Bixarte's slam poems, or of the lyrics to her songs, augments non-Portuguese speakers' comprehension of the thematic content of her work, but the *décalage* of the African diaspora is expressed through the ephemeral gestures of her performance(s) of black trans* embodied knowledge. Voices like Bixarte's are thus vital to representing the plurality of black being and black experience across *Améfrica* from the United States to Brazil as well as globally. Therefore, again it is imperative that we US academics direct our critical gazes to Latin America in order to see and hear black (trans*) Brazilians. In doing so, we will more fully understand hemispheric American racism, which is to say, the history and afterlives of colonialism and slavery in the United States and Brazil, and moreover beyond that, the global implications of systemic anti-blackness today.

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