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*Kuírlombo Epistemologies* CRGS Special Issue on Genders and Sexualities in Brazil



# *Kuírlombo Epistemologies*

## Introduction to the CRGS Special Issue

### Genders and Sexualities in Brazil

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## Introduction

The title for this Special Issue was inspired by the work of poet, literary scholar and writer Tatiana Nascimento, and the poet formiga (both of whom have work featured in this Special Issue). The word *kuírombo* is a play on the words *quilombo* and *cuir*. The word *quilombo* is the word maroon, palenque and cumbe in English, Spanish and Portuguese respectively. The word cimarrón (Spanish), marron (French), quilombola (Portuguese) refers to the people who liberated themselves from enslavement. Quilombo comes from the word Kilombo, which is from the Kimbundu language of the Ngola nation of the Congo.

In Eurocentric historical texts written about the Americas, these communities are referred to as runaway slave communities. In fact, they were societies of people, many of whom liberated themselves from enslavement, and were (what we would call today) multiracial and multi-ethnic societies given the type of democratic (for lack of a better word) societies that they created. As a result of the democratic social and religious structures that emerged in these communities, they were often implicitly/explicitly anti-capitalist. Members of these communities were living another vision of social order in the face of the oppressive societies established by various forms of European colonialism in the Americas.

Abdias do Nascimento, one of the key figures in the founding of contemporary Brazilian Black Studies, defined Kilombismo as a competing vision of social organization that emerged from the political and economic engagement of Africans in the Americas. It is an Afrocentric perspective that Nascimento argued is reflected in movements such as the Haitian Revolution, Garveyism and the Pan-African movement. Kilombismo is a form of African resistance centred on building free communities rooted in economic, political, social and cultural structures that are rooted in African cultural legacies. Tatiana Nascimento

appropriates the term in her essay entitled: *literary cuírlombism: black lgbtqi poetry exorbitating the paradigm of pain*. Tatiana Nascimento writes:

...i forge from my sexual-dissident afrodiasporic place the concept of literary *cuírlombism*... reacting to pain is also re-telling stories. speaking up our pain allows us to search for healing (if this is our project. and, for many of us, i think that it is). to feel the colonial wound, to think: how can we heal this intimate, collective, old, persistent wide wound? even if denouncing the cisheterosexual racism is a constant need of affirmation for black lgbtqi+ existences, we have more than denouncements to make. especially through our poetry, for it connects us to a black-sexual-dissident epistemic project pervaded by narrative disputes (p.10)... our existence informs not only about what happened after the kidnapping/trafficking/ enslavement, a historical crime that exacted y still exacts several strategies of resistance from us, but not only: reconstruction strategies too. literature is one of those forms of art through which we can invent (im) possible, utopic, dystopian new worlds: we found place in the telling. we create *kuírlombos*, not only of resistance but also of dream, affection, seeds. (p. 16)

In the notes section of formiga's poem, "Afro-Latina," the translators write "komposing with "k" is a reference to the anarcho-punk movement, that writes like this sometimes to bespeak the subversion of language." The usage of "k" in *Kuírlombo* is also very much about cuir Afro-diasporic populations in the Americas having agency, in the usage of the various colonial languages that we occupy, to do whatever we want to do with them as we bend, twist, break, enhance and reorganize them to fit, to reflect and to represent the realities, affects, histories and non-European epistemologies that we have inherited and embody. The idea for this special issue developed a few years ago in thinking about how we as Afro-diasporic subjects (at least culturally speaking), communicate with each other across and through our colonial languages.

In thinking about how, for the African Diaspora in the Americas, language and geographies function as a marker of specificity and difference, thereby delegitimizing any recognition of what connects us culturally, historically,

politically, affectively and economically, the discreteness of language and national boundaries as being the marker of difference undermines what could emerge if we (re)engaged our collective consciousness. While capitalism is understood as global, “Europe” and Eurocentric visions of whiteness are understood as unmarked and universal, a Black Brazilian, Cuban, U.S. African American from the Mississippi Gulf Coast and a Jamaican are understood as historically constituted subjects with no relation. Thus, for us, the publication of this Special Issue is an act of solidarity, an act of resistance that began with our African ancestors, an act of remembering and (re)constructing across our shared histories and points of origin as Afro-Diasporic peoples in the Americas.

This Special Issue is a result of conversations with Brazilian colleagues about theorizing Brazil as a Caribbean nation. In many ways Black Brazilian feminists have already started to engaging this conversation, or at the very least, exploring this connection. For example, Black Brazilian feminists, after the end of the dictatorship in 1985, began networking through international caucuses to exchange ideas with feminists globally and regionally. Before traveling to Beijing in 1995, they travelled to the Afro-Latin American Women's Network event in the Dominican Republic in 1992, later to the meeting of Black Women's Network in Costa Rica in 2002, the Fifth International Women's Conference in Cuba in 2003, and were organizers for the Tenth Latin American and Caribbean Feminist encounter held in Brazil in 2005<sup>1</sup>. In this special issue, we decided that we wanted to think about this question within the field of Gender and Sexuality Studies. Then the political assassination of City of Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco occurred.

Marielle Franco's assassination, in which she was targeted for both the intersectional nature of her identities and her expedient rise to political prominence, had ripple effects globally. The world's shock and grief impressed upon us the need to take a much-needed step forward with this project: we wanted to continue the work of Black Brazilian scholars and activists, to

strengthen the historical connections that we share in this Hemisphere, all of which are rooted in the emergence of the Caribbean.

Marielle Franco was a tremendously popular congresswoman in the City of Rio de Janeiro. She was raised in Maré, one of the slums targeted by Rio de Janeiro's "pacification" policies. The "pacification" policies have resulted in masked, militarized elite police forces entering into the neighbourhoods of slums and shooting indiscriminately for hours, usually during the day. The police are also often accompanied by police snipers, all of whom are known to primarily murder Black youth like Ágatha Félix and João Pedro. At night, these communities also have to deal with extrajudicial killings from militarized vigilantes who are current and former police officers.

In this context, Marielle emerged as a beloved activist and councilwoman who used her political power to directly challenge the impunity of both police and vigilantes and the militaristic policing in Rio de Janeiro. She was seen as the manifestation of the aspirations of the Black social movements, Black Feminist social movements and the larger political left in Brazil. However, the same reason that she was seen as the success of decades of political struggles is the same reason that she was targeted for murder: she was an openly lesbian Black woman from the slums who worked her way through Brazil's elite universities and landed a powerful position in government. Marielle was targeted because she was an individual whose subjectivity was constructed at the intersections of multiple identities, all of which she always held present. As a result, she was the face of multiple social movements on Brazil's political left. Her assassination sent a message to millions of people who were a part of and supported by various movements for human rights and dignity.

Briefly, in Brazil, during the initial fallout of her assassination which propelled her into international martyrdom, there were debates about why she was targeted. Initially it seemed that her assassination was going to be picked up by the left, in which the rationale would settle on the fact that she was openly lesbian and

fought for lesbian rights. Marielle herself publically identified as both a lesbian and bisexual. This is all the more reason why this Special Issue is entitled *Kuírlombo Epistemologies*, how Marielle self-identified and moved across communities reflects the tenuous relationship that Black cuir people have with hegemonic sex/gender classifications that are imbued with coloniality; hegemonic classifications which are also dependent on the fungibility of the Black female body. However, when it became immediately obvious just how many people grieved the assassination, and when people learned that she was one of the most popular city council members in any city government across Brazil, it became obvious that her murder should be understood on a much more profound and nuanced level. She was targeted because of her political success in challenging the emergent military state in Rio de Janeiro, her murder was strategically symbolic though the assassins probably never even imagined that her death would be grieved and protested globally since she was poor, black, female and lesbian.

The profoundly political nature of Marielle's assassination goes to the root of an intense process that is happening in the wake of the profound social changes resulting from the successful political, social and economic policies undertaken during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff administrations, all aimed at enfranchising all Brazilians as a part of a comprehensive national development strategy. The result was the massive mobility of scores of Black Brazilian citizens from poverty. The country is now in the midst of a profound struggle: after a century of failed whitening policies, Brazil is a majority Black/non-white Afro-descendant nation. Is the profoundly racist neo-colonial elite ready to give up a claim to citizenship, material and economic benefits that are rooted in white supremacy? For example, will this racialised elite be able to deal with newly empowered domestic workers who refuse to work on weekends? How were they going to deal with the sudden appearance of Black families in previously white-only spaces such as airports and shopping malls? The intensity of these questions, beyond understanding the resistance of Brazil's white elite and middle class as simply racism, can best be explained through understanding Brazil's social contract.

Brazil's social contract is not based on republican citizenship ideals rooted in social and political rights, but one rooted in a sexual contract upon which the modernization and development of the national project depends. This sexual contract is one in which colonial domination continues within the realms of intimacy, desire, and the erotic. Brazil's decolonial project is going to need to be a sexual one; it will need to be a process centred on decolonizing desire and intimacy. Given this overall context, this Special Issue will take an intersectional approach to understand the relationship between race, gender, sexuality, and decolonization: this issue will focus primarily on the lesbian question in Brazil via centring Brazilian activist and intellectual engagement with Caribbean theorists, and vice versa.

### **Contextualizing Race, Gender and Brazilian Sexual Citizenship**

Brazil is one of the few countries in the region that gained its independence before the twentieth century, that has no unifying national story of collective struggle, or vision of national unity, resulting from a national war for independence. Most countries in the Americas that gained their independence before 1900 had, at some point, a national struggle for independence and/or a civil war for enslaved and/or indigenous liberation. These wars addressed the social and psychological legacies of chattel slavery for both the formerly enslaved and their enslavers (as in the case of countries such as the U.S., Cuba, Mexico, Haiti etc.). Brazil is the only country in the hemisphere where the colonial crown moved to the colony thereby making the colony the seat of the colonial empire. Thus, the independence of Brazil and the end to chattel slavery nearly sixty years later was more about the vision of a united royal and slaveocratic elite who, at the time, wanted to create a modern empire-state.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, there is no national myth of the state emerging organically from “the people,” as a result of a collective national struggle where scores of people died for the nation – Brazil is not a republican nation in the sense of the kind of republicanism represented by the hemispheric American (regionally speaking)



republican revolutionary spirit of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where all aggrieved groups in the nation could lay claim (even if it is not respected), to have fought to bring their modern western nation into existence. That is, there is no claim to equal citizenship rooted in the myth of a popular origin of the nation through collective struggle. Brazil's national origin myth, however, is rooted in what Richard G. Parker (2009) calls the ideology of the erotic, which centres on the process of *embranquecimento* (whitening).<sup>3</sup>

Race and racialization are central to the contemporary origin myth of the Brazilian nation, which is iconized in Gilberto Freyre's *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (*Masters and Slaves*). While Gilberto Freyre's work is foundational to the imaginary of the Brazilian nation as a *racial democracy*, also central to his highly eroticized text is that the work that is done in the manifestation of the Brazilian "racial democracy" is largely sexual. It is sex, the sexual desire, and the erotic that form, reproduce, and could even liberate the Brazilian nation. It is not an armed nationalist struggle, but a successful whitening of the family and thereby the nation. Also intertwined into how Freyre' myth of national origin is experienced today are the coloniality of affect and the coloniality of the erotic.<sup>4</sup>

Freyre's book is a colonial contract, one in which racial and cultural domination and subordination are mapped onto sexual relations in which the active and passive roles in sexual relations are racialised and gendered. The coloniality of affect "evinces how desire and affect may be informed by colonial histories and imaginaries.<sup>5</sup> In Brazil, as in much of the Americas, social groups are, as Juana María Rodríguez (2015, 21) argues, "bonded through blood, sex, tears, and scholarly theorizations to other realized bodies of abjection, bound together through relations of power filtered through colonialism, slavery, conquest, subjugation, migration, exile, and the insidious architectures of power that permeate heteropatriarchy across cultural sites."<sup>6</sup>

Because the most intimate aspects of our social lives are imbued with coloniality, these spaces also become sites from which to launch resistance to coloniality, specifically as they pertain to love, affect and desire for oneself and other subjugated groups is a central concern of Black queer artists and activists<sup>7</sup>. While several scholars have focused on this question as it pertains to gender and sexuality, through a focus on Brazilian lesbian studies in particular, we can understand these dynamics as it pertains to the political nature of *affect*, desire, and the performativity of intimacy, desire and resistance, which is the primary focus of the essays in this Special Issue.

In returning the focus to Brazil's national origin myth, the sacrifice necessary for the emergence of a modern Brazilian nation is one in which whites engage in transgressive sexual acts for the benefit of whitening the nation. Meanwhile, Black, and non-white Afro-descendant Brazilians should play a passive role in the production of the white nation by producing light-skinned/white offspring. Additionally, Black and non-white Afro-descendant Brazilians should be ready to pay the ultimate sacrifice: physical, economic, socio-cultural, and political death. Blacks are expected to reproduce and simply disappear into Brazil's distant past as it moves forward in achieving its goal of "order and progress." In a context where national unity is largely a sexual one geared towards creating whites while speeding up the Black genocide, a context where Indigenous populations are imagined to no longer exist, the policing of gender norms is particularly rigid. At the same time, there is the implicit sanctioning of transgressive sexual acts, which is necessary to sanction miscegenation while affirming white supremacy and Eurocentrism. Therefore in a context where the idea of nation and national unity depends on sexual relations and the reproduction of whitened citizens with an abject body and that must be killed, this also allows the possibility for various types of transgressive sexual and gender identities to emerge.<sup>8</sup>

In an overwhelmingly non-white country that is fixated on producing a nation through whitening, the non-white body is contemptuously tolerated; it is

rendered invisible. The Black body, specifically Black femininity, can both be contemptuously tolerated and serve as an object of disgust. Here I say the Black feminine body because in Brazil, given how the intensity of the sexual transgression increases sexual tension within Brazilian erotic ideology, gender does not map onto sexual orientation in the same way it does in other contexts. If we use the analytical lens of scholars such as Hortense Spillers and C. Riley Snorton, Black women's bodies (symbolically/ontologically) do not have a gender, Black women are not women within a Eurocentric western ontology, but are gendered within the realm of femininity. If we also consider that the Black women's bodies are fungible, then that means that Black femininity is not necessarily rooted to Black women's body - it is not rooted in a specific (imagined as stable) gender classification. In a country that has inherited an imperial national identity, that sees itself as (regionally) American only in relation to the United States, a fellow empire-state, and as a nation that is majority non-white Afro-descendant (that is Black), Brazil's ideology of the erotic has profound implications for how gender and sexuality are organized and understood in Brazil and throughout the Diaspora. We will return to this point again shortly.

In returning to Brazil's ideology of the erotic, the ideology openly encourages exploration of any kind of sexual proclivities rooted transgressions, outside of public purview, that can be read publically as disgusting or repulsive. That is, the repulsion that the person feels in a sexually charged moment actually increases the sexual tension of the person if they are also experiencing repulsion. In this way, one can hold a tension where one can experience both the desire to dominate and to kill (through whitening) the object of that desire. Here we return to Gilberto Freyre's erotic narrative of racial domination and elimination through sexual conquest. In a highly sexualized society, where sexual citizenship takes on an entirely different meaning, actions at the level of everyday interactions, or *gestures*, becomes particularly important in understanding the (re)production of racial identities within multiracial families, and in larger society. As Juana María Rodríguez (2015) writes, "gesture functions as a socially legible and highly codified form of kinetic communication, and as a cultural practice

that is differentially manifested through particular forms of embodiment." In the Brazilian context, we have to remember to consider how the performance of gender and sexual desire do and do not map onto how gender identity and sexual orientation are understood or are even related, in non-Brazilian contexts.

In the essay following this introduction, entitled: "Black *Sapatão* Translation Practices: Healing Ourselves a Word Choice at a Time," the translators for this Special Issue, Bruna Barros and Jess Oliveira, offer context and definitions for some of the sex/gender identities that exist in Brazil. By taking an intersectional approach to Brazil's sex/gender system, echoing our understanding of Brazilian genders and sexualities, the translators argue that Brazilian sex/gender terms are very much racialised. For example, in the case of "female homosexuality," *sapatão* is often referred to as a butch/dyke or even lesbian, but it is also a racialised term that is not exactly any of those sexual identities. Like the *bixa* (feminine identified gay men), *bixa preta* (Black feminine identified gay men) and *travesti* (a third gender identity that is feminine and pertains to those born with penises/assigned male at birth), the *sapatão* falls into a third gender category that is associated with women and femininity, but not exactly a woman, nor, like the *bixa* and *travesti*, transgender. These genders that exist on a spectrum of femininities challenge the western biologic binary and Eurocentric narratives of *how* one comes to identify with a gender.

What emerged was the articulation of a localized identity: the *sapatão* [roughly translated to giant shoe]. *Sapatão* is neither female (but kind of), nor lesbian (but often misidentified as one because lesbians are women who only desire women). However, in Brazil, homosexuality is not simply defined as sexual intercourse with those of the same gender or feeling affect for someone of the same gender, but it based primarily on where someone falls on the extremes of masculine and feminine, specifically as being a macho and woman, active and passive.<sup>9</sup> The *bicha* is always treated as being a little woman while *sapatões* are read as incorrigible machos. The *bicha*, like the *machão*, has an image associated with the penis. However, this relationship principally focuses on a

lucid dimension of sex centred on the fantastic. Through sexual practices that are considered unconventional and transgressive, sexual experiences with *bichas*, especially with *bichas pretas*, both excite desire and repulsion.<sup>10</sup>

Returning to the previous arguments where we consider the fungibility of Black women's bodies, the Brazilian ideology of the erotic and the sexual social contract, one could easily argue that Marielle Franco was assassinated because she was a powerful and visible Black *sapatão*, and for this reason, she was an intense political threat. She literally threatened the viability of the Brazilian nation rooted in imperialist, Eurocentric, white supremacist colonial legacies; a vision of a nation whose manifestation depended on a Black genocide through transgressive sex with passive, feminine bodies, especially bodies whose racial classification also rendered those as feminine (passive/acted on) bodies, and any desire for those bodies, as abject desire.

Thus the transgressive nature of *bixas pretas* racially, sexually and in terms of gender, makes *bixas pretas* both intensely desirable and repulsive for machos, while the *sapatão*, especially the Black *sapatão*'s, rejection of the passive sexual role assigned to her in order to whiten the nation, is understood as extremely dangerous. It is for this reason that, in light of Marielle's assassination, we curated a Special Issue that centred on introducing scholarship on Brazilian lesbian studies (one that addresses *sapatões* as an intensely politicised sex/gender category), to a larger international audience. We do this while placing Brazilian scholars and activists in conversation with scholars writing from other Caribbean (re-defined) contexts. We thought it important to highlight the experiences of Afro-descendant women whose lives are under-theorized in Gender and Sexuality Studies throughout the Americas. That is, this issue is not solely focused on lesbian studies, as much as it is about contextualizing *sapatão* as a racialised gender identity that undermines the Brazilian erotic social contract and, therefore, undermines elite efforts at modernizing Brazil through whitening and Black social, political, affective and political death.

In addition to under-representation, there are even fewer conversations about these topics occurring across the regions and languages of people whose histories and lived experiences converge in significant ways, and diverge in ways that can be tremendously productive in decentring a Eurocentric perspective on Gender and Sexuality. This Special Issue contributes to the work already underway in this area by scholars and activists such as M. Jacqui Alexander, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, Ochy Curiel, Yuderkys Espinsa, Mignon Moore, Rinaldo Walcott, C. Riley Snorton, Sandra Alvarez, Yolanda Pizarro Arroyo, Osmundo Pinho, Alan Costa, Malayka SN, Ani Ganzaga, Jota Mombaça, Michelle Mattiuzzi, Yesenia Selier, Titolindodelmar, SomosMuchoMas, Roberto Strongman, Gloria Wekker, Krudxs CUBENSI and many others who are rethinking Black genders and sexualities by centring localized genders and sexualities. These scholars also undertake important genealogies of how sex/gender identities and practices come into existence (or fail to according to a heteronormative model), epistemologically, ontologically, and cosmologically, as they pertain to the Afro-Indigenous foundations of Caribbean cultures and religious practices. This work is important in order to produce a theory that reflects our cultures and realities through a comparative lens, and to offer us the possibility to think about what constitutes decolonization. The articles in this Special Issue highlight these productive tensions in ways that we did not initially expect.

Considering the current political context, the present edition of the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies was designed to recognize the serious political, social and cultural context that has been developing in Brazil, where lesbian existences have been impacted by profound setbacks in the movements for gender and sexual equality. These setbacks have intensified in the wake of the political, media-supported, legislative coup, which culminated in the deposition of President Dilma Rousseff, and greatly reinforced the invisibility of the experiences of women and their narratives. Lesbian women in particular, faced intense invisibility in research, and have also faced sharp increases of targeted physical violence and murder. There has been a marked increase in the murders of Black women in Brazil, with a significant portion of them being Black lesbians.

To this, we say: Yes! *Sapatão*! As a call, using a word that initially was a pejorative slur attributed to lesbians in Brazil. For those of us who identify as *sapatão*, we take it for ourselves; we re-signify the term and transform it into a term of subversive power. It is an erasure of the norm in an uprising that echoes the affirmation of the voices of *sapatões*.

In the context of Brazil, this Special Issue is extremely important as the publication of this work in an international academic journal also does the work of giving visibility and a platform to the trans, lesbian and gender non-conforming women producing this academic work, and undertaking this activism in Brazil. It is an opportunity for agency and transformation, for the possibility of visibility and the building of collective resistance. In this way, this Special Issue takes a step further in order to produce a Brazilian *sapatão* epistemology that, given Brazil's politicized context as it pertains to race, class and gender identity politics, seeks to break with the narratives dominated by a white, cis-gendered gay male perspective; narratives which continue to almost exclusively dominate academic production in gender and sexuality in Brazil. The dominant perspective has, historically, homogenized sexual dissidences and makes the specificities of lesbians and *sapatonas* invisible, which has very specific implications considering the specific ways in which gender, gender identity and sexuality are constructed and experienced in Brazil.

We aim with this production to develop a decolonizing perspective on the knowledge and existences of the geopolitical Global South. We aim to challenge the erasure of the discursive construction of the lesbian/*sapatão* existence, and to contribute to the interruption of the silencing that structures the life of these women, especially the Black women. Furthermore, with this edition of the Journal, we imagined not only to contribute to the visibility of subordinate experiences, but also to mirror their multiple, intersectional resistances in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, social class, generation, region and aesthetics, which can also be markers power when they are openly discussed and problematized. They cease to be secrets and start to be told,



because, as Kilomba (2019, 41) states, the “truths that have been denied, repressed and kept quiet, as secrets” cease to be kept at a distance and quiet when they leave the margin.

For example, an unprecedented study carried out in Brazil regarding the murder of lesbians in the country between the years 2014 and 2017 and called “Lesbocide - the stories that nobody tells,” identifies that there is a significant growth in the murders of lesbians in Brazil in the studied period and that such crimes are motivated by prejudice against lesbian women; therefore, they are configured as hate crimes. These murders occur not only because of the woman's lesbian condition, but are also very much intertwined with misogyny, racism, and other markers of oppression that intersect and feed these crimes. According to the dossier (2018) produced from that study, from 2014 to 2017 there was a 237% increase in cases of lesbocide, from 2000-2017 a 2700% increase and since 2013 this increase has been constant, with an increase of 80% in crimes from 2016 to 2017.

Over the last approximately six years, the contemporary Brazilian social and political context has experienced an intensification of far right-wing conservative thinking that has been reverberating politically, culturally and economically. Fascist, xenophobic, racist, LGBTI-phobic and misogynistic ideas structure, not only the narratives which have a moralistic and discriminatory tone, but also public policies. It is revealing an unequal and rights-violating State, which through its institutions promotes genocidal policies for certain segments of society. In this case, the state of exception is exercised as a state right and not a suspension of the rule of law. As Mbembe (2016) argues, the necropolitics of state violence is constituted intersectionally and, therefore, categories such as race, class, gender, sexuality and urban space, for example, will define what lives are to be victimized by this homicidal violence, through which the state operates its sovereign power.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in this process, there is a classification that hierarchises the population and some urban locations with the discretionary distribution of policies that promote death and that are



structurally racialised. This management of the geographical space and the control of the population, which has a despotic character, distribute death in a dissimilar way, forming the state necropolitics.

It is necessary to consider, however, that the fascist character of this State cannot be sustained without the participation of the population. Despite the fascist tendencies present in power relations and in public policy, it is also in the subjectivity of individuals, in the way they perceive, understand and act on phenomena. Therefore, the fascist discourse now produced by the state reverberates in the subjectivities and the consequent violent actions that we see being committed daily against all lives considered abject. Today we are experiencing within Brazilian society, an extreme conservatism that is combined with a process of centralization of State power across all sectors of society including civil society, this being driven by the expansion of the political power of the evangelical sectors and through the rigging of the State's electoral processes. As a result, there is increased reproduction socially, on a large scale, of macho discourses, sexists, misogynists, LGBT-phobics and racism.

The reactionary segments of the right-wing State have focused specific actions on issues of gender and diversity in the country. One example is the Escola sem Partido [Schools without Party] movement, which was created in 2004 and had its peak in 2016. The movement formulated and subsidized conservative and authoritarian public education policies based on Christian fundamentalism, some of them were converted into bills, that were presented to the National Congress by politicians aligned with the conservative agenda. These political actors aimed to restrict freedom of expression in schools and to prevent critical learning skills, rooted in science, from being taught in schools. Instead, they worked towards promoting a Christian moral education that threatens not only the emancipatory education project but also the secular state, generally speaking.

These right-wing actors are working with right-wing Christian fundamentalists in the United States who, having nearly lost the culture wars in the United States, are working to undermine the Brazilian and Latin American left challenges to social inequality. The paradigms that underpinned this conservative educational project also had as one of its main concerns, the prevention of discussions about gender and sexuality in educational institutions, including sexual and reproductive health, sexual and domestic violence. Understood as threatening to the formation of children and young people, initiatives that seek to discuss issues of gender and sexual orientation in schools, in order to combat related discrimination, were called "gender ideology." Thus, legitimized by the state's ultra-conservative discourse and by the religious fundamentalism which infiltrated state discourse and policy, actions of violence, often lethal, now directly target lives that are dehumanized by these discourses and policies, because they carry the mark of difference, whether in bodies or in ideas.

Initiatives like this affected not only schools, but have also enabled the rise of an ultra-conservative political project at the highest level of political representation. In 2019, Brazil's President-elect Jair Bolsonaro, in his inaugural speech affirmed that his government's priority is to "combat gender ideology" while conserving traditional and Christian family values and thus making "Brazil free from ideological bonds." Bolsonaro's speech reverberates in political strategies aligned with other actors and governments throughout the region. One of his first actions as president was to reformulate the Ministry of Human Rights, suppressing all programmes and actions related to gender and diversity. Headed by an evangelical pastor who, in her inauguration ceremony, publicly declared that this "is the beginning of an era in which girls wear pink and boys wear blue," the ministry became the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights."

In the *Atlas da Violência's* (the Atlas of Violence) 2019 research, carried out by the Institute of Research and Applied Statistics (IPEA) and the Brazilian Forum on Public Security (FBSP), it is possible to identify data directly related to the

increase of violence in Brazil. The 2019 edition is extremely important because it is the first edition that considers violence against the LGBTI+ population. The data presented were collected from two different bases: from the complaints registered in “Dial 100,” from the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, and from the administrative records of the Notifiable Diseases Information System (Sinan) from the Ministry of Health. This edition of the Atlas of Violence indicates that there was an increase in female homicides in Brazil in 2017, with about 13 murders per day. In all, 4,936 women were killed, the highest number registered since 2007. In relation to the LGBTQ population throughout Brazil, the number of homicides reported to “Dial 100” rose from 5 in 2011 to 193 in 2017. On the other hand, bodily injuries increased from 318 in 2016 to 423 in 2017, the rate had drastically dropped from its peak of 783 cases in 2012, as a result of more inclusive social policies. Now that those policies have been directly attacked and reversed, we are now seeing a rapid increase.

These data are particularly important to analyse because the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights, despite claiming on its official website<sup>12</sup> that “LGBT-phobia kills, now supports anti-LGBT policies. Brazil is considered one of the most violent countries in the world, including for the LGBT population. Its public institutions are no longer making available the reports containing this data used by the Atlas of Violence. As pointed out by some of the articles presented in this Special Issue, the most recent data are those of 2017 and little official information is available for 2018 or 2019, making the research and reflections presented here central to understanding the importance of this issue.

In this introduction to this Special Issue, we will first offer some additional important context in order for the reader to situate the profoundly political nature of this Special Issue. We will then discuss how this work of translation, of connecting across and through colonial languages, is a political act. We will include a discussion of how this Special Issue was initially going to be published with another journal in the area of gender and sexuality studies. We will discuss why we, as the co-editors for this Special Issue, decided to leave that journal,

and why, in thinking seriously about our commitment to decolonialising intellectual production and dissemination, we feel that CRGS is the best home for this Special Issue.

### **The Social and Economic Contexts of Black Brazilian Youth and Black Women**

In order to understand the situation of Black women and youth in Brazil, it is important to understand that we take a Federal State-centred approach to the various themes that involve thinking, and acting, to overcome the intersectional challenges created by gender, race and generation in Brazilian society. Thus, it is important to understand that for us, much of it is first and foremost guided from the perspective of State sanctioned human rights: human rights are a duty of the Brazilian State. Considering the guarantee of the right to life, the right to equality and non-discrimination, which are enshrined in the Federal Constitution in the text of two articles: Article 5, which states: "Everyone is equal before the law, without distinction of any nature, guaranteeing Brazilians and foreigners residing in the country the invaluable right to life, freedom, equality, security (...)" and article 227 which states that: "It is the duty of the family, society and the State to ensure children, adolescents and young people, with the absolute priority to, the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom and family and community coexistence, in addition to guarding them from all forms of neglect, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression."

In the beginning of the 21st century, Brazil, and the larger global community, increasingly expanded their consensus concerning the recognition, and the development of, mechanisms capable of facing and overcoming the racial, gender, socioeconomic inequalities that confer to different groups and individuals different degrees of vulnerability and possibilities for realizing their rights. Over the last several decades, there were advances resulting from the grassroots mobilization of sectors of the Black social movements and Black women's movements. These advances resulted in the development of

affirmative action programs, the creation of the Secretariat for Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality - SEPPIR / PR, of the Secretariat for Policies for Women (SPM) and the National Youth Secretariat (SNJ). Their actions represented an opportunity to face the barriers to equal rights, because the effects of inequality and ethnic-racial segregation continue to be reflected in various economic and social models. It is important to highlight the arduous political struggle of Black women's movements that, since the 1970s, have been gradually demarcating the needs and urgencies of the Black Brazilian population.

Among the set of vulnerabilities experienced by Black women of different age groups and geographic locations, is the intersection of racism and sexism. The existence of racism produces disparities that are reflected in access to rights and in the quality of services provided, as well as, mainly, it produces more intense morbidity and mortality in the Black population, when compared to the situation of white women. Brazil has the second largest black population in the world, being composed mainly of Black women and Black people generally, representing 52.9% of the Brazilian population (IPEA, 2013). Of this amount, 59.4 million are black women, corresponding to 51.8% of the female population and 27.7% of the total Brazilian population (IPEA, 2013). Available in all regions of the country, the North and Northeast Regions have the highest proportion of Black women in their female population, equivalent to 75.2% and 70.7% respectively; the Western Region has 57%, the Southeast Region, 43.9%. The South Region has the lowest proportion, with 21.3% of Black women in the female population. In all regions, Black women reside mainly in urban areas, especially in the peripheries and more precarious regions of cities. Several publications such as the Dossier "The Human Rights Situation of Black Women in Brazil: Violence and Violations" (2016), [1] Dossier "Black Women: portrait of the living conditions of black women in Brazil" (2013), "Portrait of inequalities in gender and race" (2011), present several unfavourable scenarios for Black women in Brazil.

The murders of Black women increased by 54.2% in 10 years (2002-2013). In the same period, there was a 9.3% reduction in murders of white women. Between the years 2011-2013, 16 women were murdered per day, 488 per month, 5,860

per year. Of these, 45% were young women (10 to 29 years old). Of the 56,000 people who were murdered in Brazil in 2012, 30,000 were young people between 15 and 29 years old, and of this total, 77% are black. The majority of homicides are committed by firearms, and less than 8% of cases are even brought to trial. In addition to lethal violence, there is non-lethal violence that ends up affecting thousands of Black women, mostly mothers of murdered girls and boys. Such violence is generally expressed in isolation and loneliness, albeit with intense efforts to protect and try to preserve the lives of young people. Also after their death, there are efforts to recover the dignity of the murdered youth, to recover and bury their bodies, to seek redress and justice.

The curtailing of Black youth lives has directly impacted the structural development of the entire Black population, which is affected and conditioned to live in a constant state of mourning. They are mothers, sisters, wives, grandparents, girlfriends, cousins, aunts, friends, neighbours who have suffered directly from the dismantling of families and the immensity of pain due to losses. They are young men and black women murdered and interrupted directly and indirectly as a result of the loss of their youth. When young women and Black women overcome the barriers imposed on their lives, for example in unemployment, they begin to experience the sexual division of labour, domestic violence, sexual harassment, etc. Young women and Black women are even more discriminated against, and have lived with historical disrespect for their bodies, which are still violated and marginalized, fuelling more and more the rates of assaults, rapes and murders. According to the Applied Research Institute - IPEA, Black women are 62% of the victims of femicide. They live in the service sector, under conditions of underemployment, to guarantee the family's livelihood, even with more school education and study opportunities, and account for most of the heads of household.

According to information published by the Articulação de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras-AMNB (2012), Brazil has 8 million domestic workers, mostly young women and Black women who, in the category of domestic workers, do not

have the same regulations as the others urban workers, despite the advancement of Brazilian legislation, is the result of the category's classification in public policy. In the formal job market, they support a 19% difference in remuneration in relation to non-Black women and, compared to non-Black men, this difference rises to 46%, according to data from DIEESE. This time it is correct to say that black women remain at the base of the social pyramid, and at this moment, with the worsening financial difficulties experienced by Brazil, this chasm is widening. This situation determines for young Black women a condition determined by their experience and total insertion in a context of inequality and exclusion.

Public health indicators show that Black women still fall short of the care that should be directed to the Brazilian population as a whole. Black women are the main victims of neglect - both in primary care and in specialized care. An emblematic case of negligence in the health field is that of Alyne Pimentel, the first complaint about maternal mortality received by the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Alyne case has particular aspects that give it the quality of a paradigmatic case, because Alyne was a Black woman, pregnant, young, of low income and, as a result of the lack of adequate medical assistance, she died, for a cause extremely preventable. The case exemplifies the situation elucidated in the SUS Panel of Indicators Magazine nº 10 - Thematic Health of the Black Population (2016) which records that according to the data notification by the Mortality Information System, which for the year 2012 of the total of 1,583 maternal deaths, 60% were Black women and 34% white women.

More than 10 years after the episode, CEDAW forwarded a series of recommendations to the Brazilian government to adopt measures to reduce maternal mortality rates for the country. It is worth mentioning that it was the 5th objective of the Millennium Goals, which proposed to improve the health of pregnant women, which Brazil did not achieve, it did not reach the goal of



reducing the maternal mortality ratio by  $\frac{3}{4}$ , between 1990 and 2015. It is important to emphasize that what promotes the high rate for the country are the data on the maternal death of Black women.

The situation of abortion in Brazil, for as far back the evidence dates, is a serious public health problem that mostly affects Black women, especially young women. Research carried out in Brazil shows that the country's social and racial inequalities, that have existed since colonial times, have also marked the practice of abortion. "The most common characteristics of women who have their first abortion are age up to 19 years, are Black and have children." This is described in an unprecedented scientific article that the anthropologist Débora Diniz, from the University of Brasília (UnB) and the Institute of Bioethics, Human Rights and Gender (Anis) and sociologist Marcelo Medeiros, also from UnB and the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Ipea) published. According to the authors, socio racial differentiation is perceived even in the follow-up during the medical procedure. "Black women report less the presence of partners than white women," write the researchers. Ten women reported having miscarried alone and without assistance, almost all of them were Black, with low education [elementary school]. "The study also reveals that, among women Black women, the rate of induced abortion (3.5% of women) is twice that of white women (1.7% of women).

The document "The epidemic of Zika and Black Women" by Jurema Werneck shows that Black women are more exposed to Zika and other diseases transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, due to living in areas where basic sanitation is lacking and there is a need to store water drinking water, regular water supply and no adequate garbage collection, creating an environment conducive to development in the mosquito, and consequently the diseases transmitted by it. Werneck shows that "Unofficial information indicates that 70% of babies with microcephaly are children of Black women." In addition to the contamination, the impact of the epidemic also brings with it the problem of



abandonment by the children's parents, mainly affecting young women, with unstable relationships and who have had an unwanted pregnancy.

In the field of violence, preliminary studies by the Institute for Applied Economic Research - IPEA, estimate that, between 2009 and 2011, Black women, young people and the poor are the biggest victims of domestic violence. In Brazil, 61% of deaths are of black women, the main victims in all regions of the country, with the exception of the South. The high proportion of deaths of Black women and young people in the Northeast (87%), North (83 %) and Midwest (68%). 2012 data also point out that 63% of women in prison are Black women.

Violence against young Black women continues to target those who have multiple sexual orientations, and for that reason, they suffer from specific violence directed at lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. In the scenario presented to young Black lesbians, the “corrective rape,” which is the type of violence that punishes women for not corresponding to a compulsory heterosexuality in force in society, is used as a punishment for what is believed to be the woman's denial of the masculinity of man. It is a cruel face of ‘cure’ through forced sex.

The characteristic of this type of practice is the preaching of the aggressor when violating the victim: oftentimes these “corrective” rapes are undertaken by Church congregations. The victims are mostly young people between 16 and 23 years old, lesbian or bisexual. Some aggressors even encourage “corrective penetration” in groups on social networks and websites. During the 9th edition of the National Seminar on Lesbians and Bisexual Women (Senalesbi), held in Teresina in Piauí state, as well as during the 2nd National Seminar on Black and Bisexual Lesbians, held in the city of Curitiba in Parana state, in a meeting of Black women, young women presented the need for intergenerational dialogue so that the demands of young Black women are presented and that they are in intense dialogue with the agenda of lesbians and bisexuals.

Between 2014 and 2017, 126 women were killed in Brazil for being lesbians. Among these figures, the case of Luana Barbosa, a young Black and non-

feminized lesbian, living in a suburb in the interior of São Paulo, stood out in the Brazilian media. Luana was a victim of police violence when she refused to be searched by a male police officer, demanding a female police officer. According to the *Lesbocídio Dossier - Stories nobody tells* (2017), 55% of murder cases happen to non-feminized lesbians. And in 83% of cases, lesbians are murdered by men. This terrifying data confirms the adverse effects of heterosexual and racist politics ingrained in Brazilian society, which has been making invisible victims until today. Lesbian invisibility makes it difficult to develop other mappings, to collect data and to compile statistics that can support debates and put pressure on the public authorities to guarantee basic rights for this segment of the population that is constantly segregated from society.

There is still a debate about the inclusion of young black women living in rural areas, especially those from the traditional quilombola community. The various complaints point to sexual crimes carried out against Black adolescents and young people living in quilombola communities. In addition to the case of abused girls, there is also the case of sexual exploitation, as well as the threats and reprisals suffered by the families that carry out the denunciations that take place in these and other quilombola communities, rural blacks in the interior of the state. Brazil.

Although affirmative policies have guaranteed access for Black populations, and consequently for young Black women, to rights such as access to higher education, the comparison between different colour and sex groups between the years 2003 and 2009 shows the persistence of inequalities in university space. Despite the increase in schooling rates, the presence of white women and men is still much higher than that of Black women and men, according to the "Black Women Dossier: portrait of the living conditions of Black women in Brazil" (IPEA, 2013).

In the Prison System, the female prison population increased by 567% in 15 years, rising from 5,601 to 37,380 inmates between 2000 and 2014 (INFOPEN MULHERES, 2016). Most cases are due to drug trafficking, which accounts for 68% of arrests. This data is even more relevant when it emerges that the majority of women in prison in the country (68%) are Black, while 31% are white and 1% are classified as “yellow” (INFOPEN MULHERES, 2016). Regarding the age group, about 50% of incarcerated women are between 18 and 29 years old; 18%, between 30 and 34 years; 21%, between 35 and 45 years; 10% are in the age group between 46 and 60%; and 1%, are between 61 and 70 years old, and until June 2014 there were no prisoners aged over 70 years.

In this sense, the great background is in fact an immense patchwork, sewing different identity categories with different actions to confront human rights violations. In the end, all of these statistics were only possible thanks to the collective effort of countless black women's organizations, black movement and other white organizations and people who joined the cause for a more just, dignified and free Brazil of all kinds of oppression. We are far from experiencing an equitable society, however, the country is experiencing its peak in terms of the solidification of black identity, celebrating all African and indigenous ancestry, improving ancestral technologies to combat racism and all oppression. “Our steps come from afar.”

### **Situating this Special Issue within the Field Lesbian & Sapatão Studies in Brazil**

Despite some efforts at theorizing lesbian existences in the 1980s and 1990s, it was only after the 2000s that we begin to see increasing publications about the lesbian existence in Brazil. As in the current Special issue, the production of knowledge about lesbians has been carried out, mainly, by academic and/or activists who speak from their positionality. They promote not only political and theoretical visibility of the lesbian issue, but how, in an intersectional manner, erasures and resistance to normative and oppressive power systems are also constituted. Oppressive systems of power like compulsory heterosexuality (Rich

2010; Curiel 2017), racism and patriarchy, which were structured in Brazil as a constituent part of the colonial epistemological project, has its centrality in the hegemonic figure of the heterosexual white, bourgeois and Christian man (Saunders 2017).

The production of a Brazilian lesbian epistemology, or a *sapatão* epistemology (Saunders, 2017), reveals the construction of critical and emancipatory thinking because it constitutes a transgression of the heteronormative system and compulsory heterosexuality which is racist and imbued with coloniality. Saunders (2017) argues for the production of Black lesbian epistemologies at the intersections in suggesting that the construction of a Black lesbian epistemology is one of many possibilities of praxis that can contribute to processes of decolonization. This approach constitutes an anti-colonial strategy to face racism and lesbophobia.

In this context, lesbian theoretical production has been generated in Brazil, primarily in the last decade. MH/Sam Bouncier and Judith Butler, Tanya Saunders, Jules Falquet Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde and Cheryl Clarke are theorists who have greatly influenced the lesbian epistemology that is being built in Brazil. Especially influential are the theoretical contributions of Caribbean decolonial feminists Ochy Curiel, Yuderkis Espinosa and Mayan writer Dorotéa Gomez Grijalva (2012). Writing from a decolonial perspective; they have brought the understanding of the lesbian body as a political territory, endowed with memory and knowledge, which becomes an instrument of patriarchal decolonization.

In Brazil, Cassandra Rios, considered the first Brazilian lesbian writer to address love and sexuality among women through fictional novels in the 1940s to 1990s, was censored and her work confiscated during the military dictatorship in Brazil. However, her work sought to build a positive representation of lesbians and played an important role in structuring a narrative to confront the heteronormative discourse of the time that strongly reinforced the conservative

gender role for women as being destined for marriage and motherhood. Leila Míccolis, also a Brazilian writer and poet in the 1970s and 1980s, wrote poems about the lesbian universe and published in 1983, in co-authorship with Herbert Daniel, one of the first books to deal theoretically with lesbianity: “Jacarés e Lobisomens - two essays on homosexuality.” She also contributed to literature in this area, since the 1970s, with articles for the extinct newspaper “Lampião de Esquina,” an independent production of the homosexual movement in Rio de Janeiro. The newspaper had distribution throughout Brazil and was read not only by intellectual writers from different states in the country, but also abroad.

The “Lampião de Esquina” newspaper, which was part of the first wave of publications by the homosexual movement in Brazil (Facchini, 2010), was an important tool for building the autonomy of the lesbian movement in the country and therefore for the structuring of a Brazilian lesbian epistemology. Her collaborators were not only members of the lesbian movement, but also of the feminist movement, among them Maria Luiza Heilborn and world renown Black feminist Lélia Gonzales, who contributed a lot with their reflections in the fields of sexuality and race, respectively.

Denise Portinari, an intellectual from Rio de Janeiro, also collaborated in the production of lesbian thought in Brazil, through the publication of her book, in 1989, “The Discourse of Female Homosexuality,” in which she performed an analysis of the various discourses on lesbianity, whether in music and in institutional documents among other sources. Nowadays, Conceição Evaristo, a world renowned Black writer and formative figure in contemporary Brazilian literature, has used this methodology to produce visibility for the experiences of Black women, including lesbians, in what she calls *Escrevivências*: a writing of their own experiences or ways of survival which have become powerful for confronting women's intersectional oppressions. Still in the field of literature, Ryane Leão, writer and Black lesbian poet, has also produced reflections for the construction of a lesbian thought through poetry. Additionally, there are also formative contemporary poets and literary figures such as Cidinha da Silva,

Louise Queiroz, Luciene Aparecida, Márcia Aires, Angélica Freitas, Natália Polesso.

Finally, it is crucial to recognize the work of Tatiana Nascimento, who has become a reference in the production of Brazilian Black lesbian theory, not only for her writing-resistance that erases the literary norm, but for her role as editor and founder of an editorial enterprise that has been publishing works by Black women and/or lesbians and other race/gender/sexual dissidents. Her work: *cuir lombismo literário* has been translated for this special issue.

In the last five years, there are some very specific productions about lesbianities that have been made in Brazil, contributing in an effective and significant way to the construction of contemporary lesbian epistemology in Brazil. In chronological order, in 2015, Tânia Pinafi published the book “History of the Lesbian Movement in Brazil: Lesbians Against Invisibility and Prejudice,” an important historical record of the struggle of lesbian women who sought to guarantee rights, to confront prejudice and wove the autonomy of the lesbian movement. In the Dossier “Sapatão é revolution! Lesbian Existences and Resistances at Subordinate Crossroads,” launched in 2017, through the Revista Periódicus (NUCUS / UFBA), lesbian researchers Simone Brandão Souza, Ana Cristina C. Santos and Thais Faria organized this publication, which they sought to focus on the articles of women, mostly lesbians, that centred on reflections of their existence and lesbian resistance based on the intersecting differences experienced by them.

In the following year, researchers Ana Carla da Silva Lemos and Nathalia Christina Cordeiro organized, through the magazine Cadernos de Gênero e Diversidade (Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), the Dossier “Feminist Lesbian Thoughts and Resistances, Dialoguing with Classical, Contemporary Theorists and Lesbian Movements,” which brings lesbian resistance as a central theme, and is the result of the 1st Day on Lesbian Thought and product of the 1st Extension Course on Contemporary Lesbian Thought, organized by the

Lesbibahia Collective, Maria Quitéria Studies and Research Center and the Feminist Studies Group in Politics and Education (GIRA) at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA).

The course, held in 2017, was coordinated by Bárbara Alves (LesbiBahia Collective), Valéria Noronha (Maria Quitéria / UFBA) and Felipe Bruno Martins Fernandes (GIRA / UFBA) and aimed to discuss the thoughts of lesbian authors from all over the world, since the 1970s, until contemporary times, still articulating UFBA with the lesbian social movements in Bahia.

Also in 2018, the books “Plural Lesbianities, sneaky approaches and epistemologies” were launched - and “Plural Lesbianities, other productions of knowledge and affections”-, both organized by lesbian researchers Simone Brandão Souza, Mayana Rocha Soares and Thais Faria. The two volumes sought to create a space of theoretical and political visibility for Brazilian lesbian productions, in order to produce new knowledge about the lesbian universe in the country. All these initiatives and products, coupled with the growing increase in the completion of courses, dissertations and theses produced on the existence of lesbians, show the structuring of a powerful and ongoing lesbian epistemology in Brazil.

We have noticed until now that the construction of the Brazilian lesbian epistemology, although embodied in different theoretical perspectives of lesbians already recognized worldwide, has also been based on the narratives produced from the experiences lived by a plurality of lesbian women in Brazil. We consider it important, however, that this Brazilian lesbian theory is also constructed by women who are on the sidelines, like transgender women who are lesbians and Black lesbian women in incarceration who also resist the power of erasure. Each resist based on their narratives and actions, in struggle for daily survival in medical and criminal justice systems and institutions; women who are directly dealing with disciplinary power mechanisms that uses authoritarian practices anchored in male, white, heterosexual and Christocentric culture to

guarantee the obedience of all women, non-binary people, feminine subjects and sexual and gender dissidents more broadly.

### **Summary of Articles in the Special Issue and Concluding Thoughts**

In the essay, “Black *Sapatão* Translation Practices: Healing Ourselves a Word Choice at a Time,” Bruna Barros and Jess Oliveira discuss the epistemology of translating lesbian and *sapatão* texts from Brazilian Portuguese into English. They theorise about, what they call, the black *sapatão* translation strategies they applied while translating, proofreading and copyediting the texts – articles, essays and a poem – for the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies’ Special Issue on gender and sexuality in contemporary Brazil. They point out the huge gap between the amount – and the production conditions (when, how and by whom) – of texts that are produced in Brazil by LGBTQI+ and/or black authors and the amount that actually gets translated into English.

The essay, “literary *cuírlombism*: black lgbtqi poetry exorbitating the paradigm of pain,” tatiana nascimento asks the following questions: why does the intelligibility of the literature produced by black and/or lgbtqi people seem to be related to the thematic presence of the pain/resistance/denouncement triad? in which ways does this triped approach meet the expectations of the whiteist colonial cisheteronormative gaze’s typical sadism? is it possible, really possible, to reconjure a concept founded on two brazilian contemporary black thought pillars – beatriz nascimento and abdias nascimento, in their respective propositions on *quilombos* [maroon societies] and *quilombismo* –, that still engage with a heterocentered perspective on blackness, to create a basis for the notion of ~~queerlombism~~ *cuírlombism* as one in which the notions of black diaspora and sexual dissidence are settled in the same ancestral ground?

In their essay entitled “Towards a Transnational Black Feminist Theory of The Political Life of Marielle Franco” S. Tay Glover and Flavia Meireles undertake a study of Franco’s life, in which they theorise the stakes, successes, and the limits



of visibility and invisibility of a Black lesbian woman *favelada* mobilising an intersectional Black lesbian coalitional politics within Brazil's established necropolitical infrastructure during a distinct conservative political turn. They consider Franco's agenda and theory-in-praxis – as she did – within a genealogy of diasporic Black (lesbian) intersectional struggles against (neo) colonialism, and look to Franco's case to illuminate survival strategies, and limitations, of Black lesbian existence, in an environment of annihilation, for questions about our futures.

Cuban psychologist Norma Rita Guillard Limonta, in her essay “The Social Representation of Afro-Descendant Lesbians in Cuba: Lesbian Resistances,” draws from Brazilian, Cuban and Caribbean Black Feminist scholars, activists and artists to theorize about how Black lesbian and gender non-conforming people throughout the African Diaspora offers us a framework in which to theorize decoloniality and liberation. Norma's essay was a surprise for us to receive: we sent out the call for paper to our networks in Brazil, and we received a scholarly article from a widely respected Cuban Afro-Feminist, who placed Black feminist scholarship produced in Cuba, Brazil, the U.S. and the larger Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora in conversation with each other. In many ways, for us, this particular essay reflects the type of work we are attempting to undertake with this Special Issue in which we speak to each other through our colonial languages, and across the geographical and geopolitical boundaries imposed on us.

In the poem “afro-latina,” formiga writes about her diasporic experience and existence as a *kuir afro-latina*. In “Existence Narratives and the Small Everyday Deaths: Notes of a Black *Sapatão* in Santa Catarina” Aline Dias dos Santos reflects on the lesbophobia aimed at the bodies of *sapatonas* in academia, and how these aggressions occur similarly in different hierarchical spaces. It also discusses the bathroom paradigm as a gender barrier, as a part of the white gaze regime which operates as a locus of structural advantage, imprisoning and eliminating bodies considered unsuitable for the male-female, white-black

binary. She focuses on the experiences of black *sapatonas*, from the south of Brazil, in order to destabilize the official narrative that popularises the south of Brazil as a legitimate European colony, i.e. white and heterosexual, while the North and North East are racialised as Indigenous and Black.

The essay entitled, “*Ocupação Sapatão* in Salvador: A Decolonial Counter-Narrative on the Geographic Urban Space and its Restrictions of the Right to the City” by Aline P. do Nascimento and Sheyla dos S. Trindade analyses the socio-spatial invisibilities of Black *sapatonas* in the cultural dimension of the centre of Salvador. It seeks to provoke and debate the occupation of urban spaces from the perspective of entertainment not only for Black *sapatonas*, but also for bisexual and trans women (LBT), who have their existence erased due to institutional racism and LGBTphobia.

In this sense, *Ocupação Sapatão Bahia* is a cultural activity in response to the hegemonic and cisheteronormative spaces of public and private entertainment. By boosting the presence of Black and female bodies in Salvador's centre, the event seeks to promote the visibility of the Black LBT women's community. This essay is followed by the work of the featured visual artist Ani Ganzala who is an independent watercolour and graffiti artist based in Salvador, Bahia. Ani started her artistic training in the streets of Salvador as a graffiti artist, and after experimenting with other mediums, she was struck by how paper absorbs the colours of watercolour paint, and moved to watercolour as her primary medium although she still is a very active graffiti artist. She has exhibited her work throughout the Americas, Europe and Africa.

In “Lesbocide in the Brazilian Context,” Suane Felipe Soares presents a partial overview of the book “*Dossiê sobre lesbocídio no Brasil: entre 2014 e 2017*” [Dossier on the Killing of Lesbians in Brazil: from 2014 to 2017], launched by Milena Cristina Carneiro Peres, Suane Felipe Soares (the article's author) and Maria Clara Marques Dias, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on March 7th, 2018. The *Dossiê* was a groundbreaking document and had tremendous repercussion

among academic, activist and civil groups even though the primary focus was on the lesbian public.

The Dossier drew widespread national and international attention and sparked much national debate. The main goal of the paper is to analyse the possible impacts of studying lesbocide on the transformation of paradigms concerning violence against lesbians. In the following article, “Main Questions from Brazilian Family Physicians on Lesbians and Bisexual Women’s Healthcare,” Renata Carneiro Vieira and Rita Helena Borret show how, in Brazil, being a lesbian or a bisexual woman represents an important social determinant of health. An important aspect of the health-sickness process is the non-recognition by lesbians and bisexual women of the healthcare system as a possible safe environment. This is due both to the LGBTphobia they face in health units and to the lack of knowledge and training skills by health professionals on the specificities of this population. The article aims to systematise the main doubts and questions of family physicians, medical residents and students from Brazil, concerning the care of LGBT people in the Primary Healthcare level. The goal is to promote and guide training activities with this theme both in undergraduate and postgraduate courses, as well as in continuing education courses for health professionals.

In “The Siriricando Block and the Lesbians and Bisexual Women at São Paulo’s Carnival” Barbara Falcão and Milena Fonseca Fontes share their experiences as a part of a carnival block of lesbian and bisexual women who that have been out on the streets of downtown São Paulo, Brazil, making noise and challenging patriarchy since 2016. Founded by a group of lesbians and bisexual women, Siriricando seeks to promote spaces for socializing and strengthening of lesbian and bisexual identities and sexual freedom. The work to increase awareness of the reproduction of prejudices existing in the sexist, and patriarchal, Brazilian society.

The essay “Deborah Learned How to Play Sword with the “*Cabras*”: Lesbianism and Activism in the *Guerreiro*, a Brazilian Popular Cultural Event” by Ribamar José de Oliveira Junior and Lore Fortes, presents a study on the activism of sexual and gender dissidents, in Brazilian popular culture, through a focus on the performative production of the *Guerreiro* tradition in the city of Juazeiro do Norte, in the countryside of Ceará, Brazil. The Northeastern part of Brazil is considered to be among the most traditional, impoverished rural areas of the country. By taking analysing the subversive performative politics of a sole lesbian performer, Deborah Bomfins, who is a member of the group “*Guerreiras de Joana D'arc*,” coordinated by Mestra Margarida Guerreira, the authors consider the way in which sexuality permeates the activism of the Northeastern regional traditions. This is done by distorting the “*cabra macho*” [macho man] ideal in popular culture, and even more intensely so in local Northeastern culture, through visibility and resistance in a scenic dance performance.<sup>13</sup> The author argues that the *Guerreiro* tradition arises as a way of life for Deborah's lesbian existence, mainly because, as a *brincante* [player], she faces prejudices by standing between her lesbian identity and heteronormativity.

In the final article, entitled, “The Colonization of Non-feminine Lesbian Experiences as a Mechanism for Controlling Bodies and Compulsory Reproduction of Masculinity” Dayana Brunetto and Léo Ribas argue that while there is an investment of some groups in proposing, whenever possible, the inclusion of non-feminine lesbians into various definitions of transmasculinities, this actually runs the risk of (re)producing deterministic regulations on the bodies and practices of non-feminine lesbians. One example of this is when the gaze on a body identifies it as “a ‘*transmacho*’, but an inadequate one, because it has boobs.”<sup>3</sup> Considering the empirical data, it is reasonable to ask what are the historical conditions of possibilities that have contributed to this move to frame the body with this level of determinism.

The call to compose the special issue received more than one hundred articles and it took several stages of reading, dialogue between the editors and re-

reading to finally reach the selected texts. We consider this an important fact in how we curated this Special Issue, with the hope of highlighting how diverse these experiences are and how there is increasing need for more academic production in this area. In this way, what we have presented here was an effort to cover as widely as possible the diverse experiences of being and perspectives, while producing and thinking the epistemology of *sapatão* in Brazil as we present this field to an international audience who may be unfamiliar with the intellectual production happening in Brazil in this area. For example, as co-editors we seek to present the theory about the experience of a single lesbian and her agency in the local culture in Cariri in the extremely rural northeast of the country, as well as the experience of an entire carnival block in the largest city in Latin America, São Paulo.

As we attested earlier, this special issue has a political commitment to decolonization and to the epistemology *sapatão* and in this sense, we purposely chose to leave the “flow of writing” present in the translation from Portuguese to English by respecting the form as representative of the political choices of each author. Additionally, through these translation politics in this special issue, we seek to defy colonial languages. For English-speaking readers, sometimes the text may seem a bit far-fetched or even grammatically incorrect, such as the choice of using “k” instead of “c” or “y” instead of “and” or the use of “i” in lowercase instead of “I.” Those political choices and strategies are theorized and presented in the article “Black *Sapatão* Translation Practices: Healing Ourselves a Word Choice at a Time,” and as the authors, we believe this also creates an epistemology *sapatão*.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/black-feminism-brazil#B> Last Accessed on Saturday, May 16<sup>th</sup> at 8:23 pm.

<sup>2</sup> The first stage of Brazil's independence was a move by Pedro I, the prince of Portugal, to create the Empire of Brazil in which he presided over as a monarch. Thus, Brazilian independence occurred after the crown returned to Portugal leaving some of the royal family and establishment behind. Brazil was the last country in the hemisphere to abolish enslavement and did so by decree without a war

<sup>3</sup> Parker, Richard G. *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil, Second Edition*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009. [muse.jhu.edu/book/10355](http://muse.jhu.edu/book/10355); Parker, R.G. 1989. "Bodies and Pleasures: On the Construction of Erotic Meanings in Contemporary Brazil." *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly*, 14: 58-64. doi:10.1525/anh.1989.14.2.58

<sup>4</sup> Cathryn J. Merla-Watson, "Staging Darker Desires: BDSM and the Coloniality of Affect in Latina Feminisms and Lorna Dee Cervantes's *Ciento*," *MELUS*, Volume 41, Issue 1, Spring 2016, Pages 193–217, <https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlv087>

<sup>5</sup> Rodríguez, Juana María. *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> (Merla-Watson 195)

<sup>7</sup> (Merla-Watson 196)

<sup>8</sup> (Parker 151)

<sup>9</sup> (Green 1999, Detsi de Andrade Santos 2004, Parker 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Detsi de Andrade Santos 168.

<sup>11</sup> That is, the process by which the State allows the rule of law to be dismissed for a specific cause.

<sup>12</sup> Ministério da Mulher, da Família e dos Direitos Humanos <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/lgbt/biblioteca/relatorios-de-violencia-lgbtfobica>

<sup>13</sup> The term "cabra" [goat] is used to name men who are legitimized by male virility in north eastern Brazil; see more about *Guerreiro* at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCACdFV6lB8&gt;>



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>