From Necropolis to Blackpolis: Necropolitical Governance and Black Spatial Praxis in São Paulo, Brazil

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Abstract: Based on ethnographic work on police-linked death squads and with black women's organizations, this article analyzes current urban governance policies and the spatial politics of resistance embraced by communities under siege in Brazil. Space matters not only in terms of defining one's access to the polis, but also as a deadly tool through which police killings, economic marginalization, and mass incarceration produce the very geographies (here referred to as "the black necropolis") that the state aims to counteract in its war against the black urban poor. Yet, within the context of necropolitical governance, blackness appears as a spatially grounded praxis that enables victims of state terror to reclaim their placeless location as a political resource for redefining themselves and the polis.

Keywords: necropolitical governance, blackness, spatial praxis, necropolis

Introduction

The calling cards left by the Slaughters, a police-linked death squad in São Paulo, are the dismembered bodies of their victims. After dismembering the bodies, the killers scatter them and hide them from sight. They are burned, buried in clandestine cemeteries, or disposed of in the garbage. During the course of my research, the dismembered bodies of 13 young men and one woman were discovered on street corners and among bushes in slum settlements on the south side of the city, where the Slaughters operate. Far from being isolated events, targeted assassinations and disappearances have become part of the increasingly sophisticated policing practices in São Paulo's *favela*.[1] This strategy is effective for two reasons: first, without the evidence of a dead body, police officers are rarely held accountable for these deaths; second, by destroying the bodies, the state keeps victims' families and their entire communities in a permanent state of terror.

This paper is based on both personal experience as a former *favela* resident and ethnographic fieldwork conducted from May 2009 to December 2010 in a hyper-impoverished, predominately black slum community on the south side of São Paulo, Brazil. For 18 months, I made weekly visits to a local detention center, participated in monthly meetings of the state-sponsored community security council, and hung out with young black men engaged in the underground drug economy. I also interviewed the mothers of young black men killed by the police. Among these women was Dona Maria, with whom I journeyed across the city searching for the

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remains of her dead son, Betinho, and processing endless streams of paperwork to claim his body for a proper burial.

In this paper, I build upon and move beyond recent works in political and urban geography (McIntyre and Nast 2011; McKittrick 2006; Samara 2010; Wright 2006, 2011) to offer a reading of the city of São Paulo as a black necropolis.[2] I situate the political context in which deaths such as Betinho's and black women's spatial practices of resistance take place within the racialized regime of citizenship in which black lives are dehumanized and devalued: black bodies are exploited in low-paid jobs, segregated in *favelas*, incarcerated, beaten, killed, dismembered, disposed in trash cans, burned and discarded to later resurface as bones in what I name *macabre spatialities*. The concept entails three further considerations that guide my theoretical proposition: the city's necropolitical governance strategy is produced at the intersections of racialized bodies, criminalized geographies, and police killing practices; while state violence in general, and police killing in particular, is obviously an expression of sovereign power's right over life and death, as the open paragraph above illustrates, the specificity of their "spatial practices" (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]) in Brazil's *favelas* rely on the uncanny capacity of the state to draw racial lines and inscribe domination over bodies and geographies through and in death while at the same time celebrating racial difference; these necropolitical practices not only produce the very topographies of violence the state aims to control, but they also illustrate the limits of the rule of Law in dealing with certain zones and bodies seen inherently as outlawed. If Carl Schmitt's (2005:5) definition of the sovereign is correct—"*he who decides* on the *exception*"—in Brazil it is in the pained/dead black body that the sovereign exercises its power.

In this sense, my use of the word "necropolitical"—understood in Achille Mbembe's definition as "the work of death" (2003:16), or the relation between politics and death in places where the Law cannot go—is not just a label for police-linked death squads in São Paulo. The term demarcates my political position in relation to the state, and a frustration with current scholarship on urban violence[3] that quite often renders black victimization by the police as accidental, rather than a central dimension of the racial state (for a critique, see James and Vargas 2012; Martinot and Sexton 2003). At stake here is how to conceive black urban life within spatial formations precisely constituted by black disposability. As I elaborate below, within São Paulo's racialized topographies, black agency takes the form of black spatial praxis.

From Spatial Discipline to Spatial Necropolitics

It may seem counter-intuitive to argue that the city of São Paulo is a black necropolis, when considering that over the last two decades the state has presented itself as a progressive and democratic state of rights and has developed a multi-pronged approach to addressing urban violence. Indeed, the perverse logic of racialized governance included importing community policing strategies from the UK, Canada and Japan, enhancing popular participation in neighborhood security councils, and

training police officers under the human rights and rule of law approach (Caldeira 2000; Galdeano 2009; Mesquita Neto 1999).

In the midst of testing new law-enforcement policies, São Paulo imported New York City's Zero Tolerance Program. The implementation of this program was celebrated as a great accomplishment that considerably reduced crime, "exceeding the percentage achieved by New York during Rudolph W. Giuliani's term (1993 to 2000)". [4] The political architecture of the Zero Tolerance Program has been well documented by US scholars and I do not intend to be conclusive here. Built on a rhetoric of fear and moral panic, the program combines a hyper-punitive approach to minor urban crimes with a moral campaign of self-discipline, spatial revitalization, and popular participation in state-incited surveillance programs. In New York, Zero Tolerance energized the national war on drugs, which selectively targeted racial minorities and youth in US metropolitan areas, resulting in astonishing levels of incarceration and prompting critics to describe it as the new Jim Crow (Alexander 2010; Parenti 1999).

As São Paulo replicated Giuliani's tough approach and attempted to control the troubled geographies of the *favelas*, the city saw a disturbing increase in incarceration rates, the emergence of new police-linked death squads, and the birth of a self-entitled criminal organization—*Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC)—that fought for territorial control of the *favelas*. The *favela* became a contested terrain. On one side, the state sought to reinforce its sovereignty by mobilizing a moral rhetoric about appropriate behavior, cooperation, and respectability (Alves forthcoming; Galdeano 2009). On the other side, new actors—the PCC, the Black Movement, and the *favelados* (slum residents)—challenged the government's fantasies of security and peace through alternative narratives of space and order.

While doing fieldwork in south São Paulo, I found myself challenged by conflicting narratives regarding the state's combined strategies—racialized police brutality and human right promotion—to control the *favelas*. While state authorities sold an image of popular support for their policing practices, my interlocutors expressed deep frustration with the state's concerted efforts to get them to participate in state-led initiatives. I did not anticipate this ideological battle until I interviewed Mr Pontarelli, a top military police commander, about police-linked death squads. In my backpack, I had brought with me newspapers that covered the recent discovery of 13 mutilated bodies in clandestine cemeteries in the region. Mr Pontarelli and his assistants countered me with a PowerPoint presentation, maps of the hotspot areas for crime in the *favelas*, and statistics on the "success of the community police". They refused to respond to my questions about death squad activities, arguing that my research was biased. They also rejected my suggestion that there was a relationship between the notorious death squad, the Slaughters, and the Military Police: "When they did that crap, they were not using military uniforms and were not on the clock. Do you understand the difference? The Military Police has nothing to do with this."

The conversation then shifted to a celebratory account of the *favelas*—once considered by the United Nations to be among the most violent in the world—as peaceful territories. This transformation, according to one of the police officers, was credited to the collaboration between the police and the *pessoas de bem*

(men of good will, good people), meaning those individuals who participate in the local security councils and "help the police to do its job". On the opposite side were what they called the "pig spirit", or the spirited ones—"those that mess things up, and are there only to destroy the community".

After attending monthly meetings of a neighborhood security council, I came to understand that "*pessoas de bem*" was a thinly veiled reference to a very select group of individuals—mainly white businessmen concerned with the security of their businesses in the areas surrounding the *favela*, along with NGO staffers. Very few black individuals participated in those meetings. However, their participation would increase when a state representative other than the police was scheduled to be present. Then, black residents would disrupt the security-centered discussion with urgent concerns about other issues, such as the lack of doctors in the public health clinic, a mudslide, or the lack of public transportation. In general, *favela* residents—referred to as the ones from the *fundão* (the backward areas)—did not participate in the councils and also expressed deep frustration that the councils did not address their most pressing problems.

Skeptical about human rights discourses, *favela* residents like Dona Maria—the mother of Betinho, the 20-year-old black man who had been killed by the police—kept themselves apart from the state's concerted efforts to mobilize the community, which they considered a "waste of time". Instead, they participated in politics on their own terms, or engaged in alternative forms of spatial discipline imposed by the local branch of PCC, São Paulo's famous criminal organization. I do not aim to unravel the complex and intertwined configurations of contesting sovereignties in São Paulo's *favelas*—PCC, the police, death squads, churches, and NGOs all stake a claim to these areas (see Feltran 2010; Denyer Willis 2009)—but the persistence of police killing as part of racialized urban governance in Brazil makes it clear that the disciplinary regime finds its limits in blackened geographies and in black bodies. Here the necropolitical comes into play as a signifier of the juridical order that renders blacks as outlawed subjects. The legalist/human rights approach, therefore, fails to protect the *favelados*, for as the place inhabited by "no-bodies", the favela is *a political region with/out law in which* the state's right to kill is always-already legitimate" (Silva 2009:231).

No other phenomenon can better illustrate the paradigmatic position of blackness in relation to Law than the macabre spatiality produced by the police's targeted assassination and mass incarceration of black youth in São Paulo's *favelas*. Although the statistics on police violence hardly disclose the racial makeup of the victims, and georeferencial analyses of policing practices are still rare in Brazil (see Alves 2011; Musumeci *et al.* 2006; Vargas and Alves 2010), scholars generally agree that marginalized urban communities are the main targets of the police (Cano 1997; Cardia 1997; Pinheiro et al. 1991; Silva 1998). In addition to the astonishing number of killings perpetrated by undercover death squads, the state legally justifies killings by on-duty police officers as "deaths caused by resisting arrest", or "resistance killings". Human Rights Watch (2009) reveals that, between 2006 and 2010, the military police killed more people in the state of São Paulo (2262) than all police forces in the entire USA combined (1963). In 2011, one out of five murders in the city of São Paulo was committed by the police. The profile of the victims is consistent: male, 15–24 years old, and black.[5]

While it is quite obvious that the police exercise sovereign power in "dictating who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 2003:11) in urban Brazil, my understanding of state violence goes beyond police killings, and considers also the "letting die" of black Brazilians, as expressed by their disproportionate rate of premature death.[6] This "letting die" policy as a form of state violence may explain the 272,422 black homicides—an annual average of over 27,000—in the last 10 years. It may also account for the fact that, over the last decade, blacks in São Paulo suffered violent deaths at a 70% higher rate than whites (Waiselfisz 2012).

São Paulo's necropolitical governance also entails a *favela*-prison pipeline, in which marginalized black youth have increasingly become the targeted population of the racialized penal system. Known as the "Brazilian Texas", the state of São Paulo alone accounts for as much as 35% of the Brazilian prison population.[7] In 2010, there were half a million people living behind bars in Brazil; 170,916 of them were in São Paulo. From 1994 to 2010, the prison population of São Paulo state increased by 210%, while São Paulo's overall population growth was only 2.89%. While blacks make up 31% of the state's population, according to the 2010 National Census, black young men constitute 50.86% of São Paulo's prison inmates.[8] Likewise, although the female prison population has historically been low—women represent 4.77% of São Paulo's prison population—black women account for 53.17% of female inmates. São Paulo is home to 41% of the nation's female prisoners.[9]

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the interconnections between neoliberalism, punitive urbanism and racism (see Gilmore 2007; Herbert and Brown 2006; Roberts and Mahtani 2010; Samara 2010; Wacquant 2004), the "deadly symbiosis" between racialized incarceration and economic shifting in São Paulo's economy illustrates the dynamics of neoliberal apartheid in the so-called racially democratic society: as the city underwent a transition from an industrial economy to a service- and finance-driven economy in the 1990s, the black urban poor found themselves facing chronic unemployment, low-skill jobs, and declining wages. In 2000, the service sector represented 69% of the job market, while industrial activity accounted for as little as 19.9% of employment in the metropolitan region (Araujo 2001; Montali 2003; Pochmann 2001). Unemployment among blacks in the metropolitan region was 41% higher than among whites in 1998. Among blacks who were employed, 42.2% had low-paid jobs, and their incomes were half that of whites. Black women had an unemployment rate of 25%, the highest among any social group, and their average monthly wage was R$ 399 compared with the R$ 1188 earned by white men (DIEESE 1998). In 2008, the proportion of blacks unemployed in the metropolitan region was 43.7%, the same as it had been 10 years earlier. Even after Brazil's sustained economic growth during the 2000s, the average income of black Brazilians remained only 50% of their white counterparts.[10]

These statistics, in conjunction with astonishing levels of police killings and mass incarceration, confirm the neoliberal necropolis not only as the site of hyper-exploitation and disposability (McIntyre and Nast 2011) but also as a spatiality produced in/by *black* subjugation to death. Having provided this context, I turn now to the role that the dismemberment and scattering of bodies plays in asserting and reproducing state sovereignty and racialized/gendered geographies of opportunity and exclusion.

Dismembering Bodies and Drawing Racial Boundaries

On 5 May 2008, the body of a young black man was found in the bushes alongside a remote road, far from his house in one of Zona Sul's hundreds of slums. The mutilated body had burn scars, bullet holes in the legs, and was headless. The last time Dona Maria had seen Betinho he was leaving their house to visit his pregnant girlfriend, Geilsa, after a full day working at a carwash. Two years later, Dona Maria was still consumed with the struggle to bring legal claims against the police-linked death squad that had been investigated for her son's killing.

Navigating a morass of paperwork and bureaucratic obstruction to push the case forward required Dona Maria to make endless trips between the Public Notary, the Medical Forensic Institute, and the Police Department. All the while, Betinho's remains were kept in a plastic bag at a local cemetery, waiting for the state's official recognition of his death. Without even his death certificate, Dona Maria could not provide her son with a proper burial. Nor could she apply for monthly stipends that would ameliorate her desperate economic condition, which had left her distraught:

> Beto was the one that used to put food on the table. I don't work, and even worse, now I live taking heavy medication ... depression, my spine, I do treatment. I have tons of medical prescriptions [she opened a box above an old refrigerator and showed me a stack of papers]. So I don't know how my life is gonna be from here on out. Beto is the one who used to pay my rent, and now you ask me, "What is my life gonna look like?"

Betinho's death at the hands of the Slaughters, and his mother's social position as a black *favelada*, illuminate the entanglements of race and gender in the production of "no-bodies" (Silva 2009) and outlawed territories. By the time police bullets meet those individuals who have been pushed out of the city, they are already dead; their bodies exist only as sites, points of intersection, where multiple forms of state violence are produced and normalized. One way to understand the work of necropower in São Paulo's *favelas*, therefore, is to look at the gendering/racializing strategies that conflate *favela*, blackness, and (social) death. In this sense, it becomes absolutely irrelevant if Dona Maria or Betinho self-identify as blacks or whites, because their bodies are already inscribed in a racial register that entitles the racial state to interpellate them as blacks.[11]

The theoretical perspective I embrace here goes beyond the supposed indeterminacy of who is and who is not black in Brazil (eg Fry 1995; Marcos and Maggie 2007; Sansone 2003), and points to "racialization as the product of embodied experiences" (McCallum 2005:100) of those subjected to racial injustices. By understanding bodies and places as the sites of racial alterity, as suggested by McCallum, we can account for the mundane work of race in organizing social relations even when it is not articulated as such (see Goldstein 2003; Sheriff 2001; Vargas 2004). Here, one can evoke police brutality as a prime example of the dialectical (and macabre) process of identity-making in urban Brazil. The Brazilian ambivalence to identify one's race is called into question in the *favelas* by the police's ability to not only locate racial difference, but also to reaffirm that difference through and in death. When I caught my interlocutors in the black movement saying, "If you want to know who is black and who is not in Brazil, just ask the police", it was obvious to me that they were referring to this

simultaneous process of denying racism and producing race through mundane (deadly) interpellations.[12]

In that sense, the "work of death" has a well defined political purpose—it is not an anti-economy in the sense of merely transforming bodies into corpses. In the case of São Paulo's death squads, the practice of dismembering and scattering bodies throughout the *favelas* is a "spatial practice" that not only produces and reproduces spatial cohesion (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]:33), but also as a racial formation the city itself comes into being through this macabre engineering. That is to say, the very essence of the city (and civil society) as a white "imagined community" depends on black subjection to death (Martinot and Sexton 2003; Wilderson 2003). Thus, the political purpose encapsulated by the dismembered body, as suggested by the Slaughters' killing practices, is to enforce the racial order in the body and in the topographies that make up São Paulo. In the following section, I attempt to understand the spatial practices of resistance of those individuals racially and spatially interpellated as blacks, *favelados*, and criminals. In doing so, I return to my opening question: how might we imagine resistance within a necropolitical regime that produces placelessness and spatial captivities as strategies of racial dominance?

From Black Placelessness to Black Spatial Praxis

Within the context of urban Brazil, the dialectics of life and death, violence and resistance, territorial captivity and placelessness produce the *favela* not only as a zone of death, but also as an alternative spatiality in which a black "spatial praxis" (Soja 1980) and a black (painfully and deadly constituted) subjectivity come into being. That is to say, because the cargo ship, the plantation, the *favela*, and the prison were/are geographic technologies of domination, black survival depends (ed) on spatial strategies of resistance that challenge not only the racial spatial order but also the very equation blackness = placelessness (Brown 2005; McKittrick 2006; Spillers 1984).

The contemporary Brazilian city clearly illustrates this historical process of black spatial subjugation and resistance. The urban renewal programs undertaken in the wake of the Republic period, at the turn of twentieth century, used the European aesthetic as the paradigm to turn major Brazilian cities into white, modern, civilized centers (Carvalho 1999; Costa 2003; Rolnik 1989). That this effort required the displacement, sanitization, and incarceration of the black urban population is indicative of the racial project that replaced slavery. The urban black population was an obstacle to the nation's modernizing project and therefore a problem to be swept away from public spaces.

São Paulo is a case in point. At the turn of the twentieth century, the city was divided into two parts: the elite's "New City"—Campos Eliseos, Boulevard Alto Caguacu, Jardim da Aclimacao, and Higienopolis—and the proletarian areas on the outskirts (Costa 2003). Fueled by income from the coffee boom, urban development intensified, and a growing real estate market served white European working-class immigrants, while further displacing the black population from traditional territories such as Bexiga, Bras, and Barra Funda (Oliveira 2008; Rolnik 1989; Costa 2003).

Scholars Maura Véras (2000) and Teresa Caldeira (2000) divide the history of residential segregation in the city into three eras. From 1890 to 1940, working-class villages and *cortiços* (tenements) shared space with São Paulo's elite, providing the city with some degree of spatial heterogeneity. The period between the 1940s and 1980s, however, was marked by the mass relocation of the poor to more peripheral areas, creating a spatial pattern of segregation and intra-area homogeneity. During the 1980s and 1990s, heterogeneity resurfaced, with new *favelas* surrounding elite neighborhoods. Contemporary São Paulo has been substantially shaped by a "peripheric pattern of spatial occupation", in which black and brown migrants from northeast Brazil have been pushed into racialized territories marked by police violence, lack of public infrastructure, and overwhelming poverty (Carril 2006:85).

With more than 600 *favelas*, the city's current landscape is unmistakably divided along racial lines: the well-off territories are homogeneously white zones, while the *favelas* are predominantly black (Carrill 2006; Oliveira 2008; Vargas and Alves 2010). Although there is a tradition in the Brazilian social sciences of privileging class-based analyses and denying the role of race in the making of marginalized urban spaces (Caldeira 2000; Valladares 2005; Zaluar 1994), the "Brazilian apartheid", as João Costa Vargas (2005) has described it, begs an alternative reading of how class is lived through racial inequalities inscribed in the urban landscape. While it is certainly true that not all *favela* residents are black, blacks are disproportionally concentrated in *favelas* (understood here as marginalized urban communities). A purely class-based argument fails to acknowledge the fact that, although some whites live in hyper-poverty neighborhoods, the inverse is not true for black and brown populations, who are hardly found in elite areas of Brazilian major cities (Telles 1992; Vargas and Alves 2010).

In the racialized polis, police killings, economic marginalization, and residential segregation are political tools to the spatial arrangement of difference which can be explained through a traditional Brazilian saying: *cada macaco no seu galho* (each monkey in his branch). Such assertiveness can be enforced through day-to-day issues such as finding a job, discrimination based on one's zip code, or selective targeting of police incursion in *favelas*. To know one's place also becomes a strategy of urban survival and resistance. Such "spatial consciousness" (Soja 1980) can be located into alternative spatial practices ranging from outlawed behaviors (such as selling drugs on street corners and burgling the houses of the city's elite), to expressive forms such as graffiti and hip hop, or yet to organized protests against police violence. My fieldwork with black youth engaged in the drug trade, with black grassroots organizations, and with black women searching for the remains of their loved ones suggests a "black sense of place" (McKittrick 2011) , and a re-territorialization of identity in response to the dominant, pathologizing narratives of the *favela* as a place of disorganized and apolitical individuals.[13]

The most incisive—yet perhaps least-explored—strategies of resistance are those practiced by women like Dona Maria, Betinho's mother. Their experiences as *faveladas* searching for their sons' bodies caused me to consider the black gendered spatial praxis forged in a context of death, trauma, and spatial confinement. I now turn to the specific practices embraced by Mães de Maio (Mothers of May), a group of predominantly black women whose sons have been arrested or killed by the

Military Police. My analytical approach is based on the premise that one cannot understand the black response to state terror without considering both the limited options for resistance within the framework of civil society (Sexton 2011; Wilderson 2003), and how black subjectivity has historically been shaped by the intersection of space and gender (Brown 2005; McKittrick 2006; Spillers 1984). In the same ways that the state's necropractices produce different outcomes along gender lines, particular attention to black women's organizing reveals a particular strategy of resistance. So, the questions become: How do black women overcome their placeless location in the anti-black city? How might we imagine black agency in the black necropolis?

Gendered Geographies of Resistance

It was 13 May 2010—Slavery Abolition Day. We gathered in the Praca do Patriarca (Patriarch's Square) to remember the fourth anniversary of the May Crimes, the name given to the police massacre that resulted in hundreds of deaths and dozens of disappearances during the São Paulo urban riots of May 2006. We gathered at the square at around 5:00 pm on a Friday, disturbing the pedestrian flow and the city's already-busy traffic. Police patrols quickly surrounded the area, and a Military Police helicopter incessantly flew over our heads, creating an atmosphere of apprehension and fear. We were about 200 individuals, from different *favelas* throughout the city carrying banners, candles, the Brazilian and the State of São Paulo's flags with stains resembling blood, and photos of those killed in the massacre. Our purpose was to politicize black death and to reclaim the public image of those whose assassination by the police had been seen in the mainstream news media as a legitimate law enforcement action against bloody criminals endangering white civil society. The protest was convened under the motto, "From grieving to fighting" and it aimed to charge the Brazilian state with "the genocide of black youth", and to keep the memory of the dead ones alive. Indeed, the massacre was vivid in our memory.

What started on 12 May 2006, as a mega-rebellion in 74 state prisons against guards' abuses of prisoners and police killings of *favela* residents ended with a brutal massacre followed by popular riots that paralyzed São Paulo. The *salve* (communiqué) released by PCC—the self-described criminal organization—to all its members within the prisons quickly spread throughout the city, and young "soldiers" from the PCC started burning buses, breaking into state facilities, and attacking police stations. Between 12 and 20 May, the city was under siege. Military Police forces invaded *favelas*; they beat residents, and arrested or killed those who were considered suspects. There is no consensus as to the number of victims, but official numbers report that 493 civilians and 43 police officers were killed; at least 90% of the killings were perpetrated by the police (Condepe 2006; Justiça Global 2006).

In the aftermath of the massacre, black women from São Paulo's *favelas*, and beyond, began organizing themselves under the label Mães de Maio (Mothers of May). They created a taskforce to search for the remains of their deceased loved ones, organized demonstrations, and carried out their own investigations into the police-linked

death squads. The name Mães de Maio became a political identity, strategically forged under conditions in which they were interpellated as "mothers of criminals" and had no other choice but to organize themselves from that ascribed position.

Far from reproducing heteronormative equations of women as caretakers and mothers, Mães de Maio's practices suggest not a natural condition but a political practice of reclaiming agency through a strategic identity as *favelada* black mothers. Their identities as mothers can be situated within what Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2007) called the "dialectic of black motherhood": at the same time that the patriarchal state produces pathological narratives of black mothering, black women have developed "efforts to retain power over motherhood so that it serves the legitimate needs of their communities" (Collins 2007:377). Likewise, the term *favelada* is important here because it is the black women's spatial identities—their placeless location—as black women living in the marginal spaces of the city that are highlighted in discourses of gender, race and crime in urban Brazil (see Rocha 2012).[14]

What makes the Patriarch's Square particularly relevant is that it is named for José Bonifacio de Andrada e Silva, who is considered the father of the movement for national independence at the turn of the nineteenth century. The protesters decided to challenge this narrative of a heroic founding father by renaming (baptizing) the square after Dandara, a forgotten black heroine said to be a leader of Palmares, the famous Maroon community in the seventeenth century. The demonstrators also decided to make the state's necropractices, confined to the *favelas*, visible in the city center by displaying photographs of their deceased loved ones, along with statistics demonstrating the magnitude of the state-perpetrated terror. The square was repurposed as a symbolic site where counter-representations of nation, space and time came into play through occupying and renaming it as a black space. As illustrated below, the performance of space, gender and blackness created a "differential space" (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]:52) to politicize black death in the necropolis.

A group of young women crossed the crowd, and two of them climbed a ladder to cover the Patriarch statue with a flag from the black movement. "From now on", one of the women shouted to the crowd, "this is the square of our leader, the Matriarch Dandara—the square for fighting for liberation, the square for denouncing the genocide of our people and our history". Then, one of the mothers led us though a collective performance. As candles and photos of the dead were distributed to the demonstrators, she asked us to light the candles while she cried out the names of dozens killed in the May Massacre, along with the names of the *favelas* where the deaths had taken place. She concluded by explaining why we were in the square that evening: "The death of our children cannot be in vain. We are here for the ones killed yesterday, the ones killed today, and for the ones that will be killed tomorrow. Crimes of May, crimes of June, crimes of always." Another young black woman sang a sorrowful song, while a group of mothers placed crosses over the banners that displayed photographs of their sons.

By disrupting mainstream representations of state patriarchy, nationalism, and black resistance, the protesters dislocated historic symbols and figures (eg the covering of the Patriarch Statue), denounced patriarchal domination, and unveiled the nation as a white "imagined community" (Anderson 1994). The social and political critique inherent in these actions is significant at a theoretical level, but more

so because of its practical implications for black urban politics. Aside from the reappropriation of public space, the protestors had seen no other channels available for exposing the ugly face of the state and denouncing the nation as an anti-black project. Relying on human rights NGOs, for example, was seen as untenable. Such organizations were unable to sufficiently racialize their analysis and rhetoric, since they based their politics on the universality of humanity, rights, and justice. If we consider that not all deaths qualify as "grievable", nor all lives as "livable" (Butler 2006), the movement's challenge was not simply to denounce state violence, but to reclaim the very humanity of the victims, and at the same time highlight the historic position of blacks in the national imaginary.

Blackening the square with black bodies, music, and the pictures of the dead may also be read as a gendered strategy to denounce the polis as a white spatial formation. I read the Patriarch's Square as a representation of the white public sphere because it has long been a privileged place where São Paulo's white civil society—the middle class, NGOs, social movements—come together to exercise the rights of personhood and citizenry. That São Paulo's civility is mutually constituted through whiteness as a normative and blackness as an endangering element is illustrated by the characterization of black protesters as vandals and criminals.[15] Quite often, the police respond with violence to the black movement's attempts to occupy the city's streets, while white protests are seen as legitimate democratic expressions. How might this exclusion from mainstream civic life influence black spatial praxis? I participated in several meetings for planning the Patriarch's Square protest, and a consensus among the organizers was that disturbing the city's order was central to the protest's success. Their political calculus was that, because the black agenda was neither a priority for the government nor compelling for the news channels, in order to be noticed the protest would have to slow down traffic in the surrounding area, block pedestrian pathways, and disrupt commerce.

Ruth Gilmore´s (2007) account of black mothers organizing in California and Diana Taylor's (1997) analysis of the Madres de La Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires provide further insight into spatial gender politics. Gilmore documents the efforts of the organization Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (ROC) as it seeks to organize marginalized communities in the face of mass incarceration and racialized police brutality in California. Their precarious position in the world of work as hyper-exploited female laborers is the political resources from which Mothers ROC re-signifies "reproductive labor" and carries out its "maternal activism". The broad alliance along black, brown and other marginalized communities enabled ROC to organize statewide, while employing effective critique against state violence. These strategies entailed demonstrations at prisons and police stations, organizing public forums with relatives and parents of incarcerated youth, attending trials, and intervening in public debates through alternative media. In reclaiming all of their children, regardless of their alleged crimes, they also challenged hegemonic conceptions of justice that further criminalize marginalized communities (Gilmore 2007:181–196).

Likewise, Taylor provides an account of the Madres de La Plaza de Mayo, an organization led by mothers in Buenos Aires who continue to seek the return of their children, "disappeared" by the state during Argentina's dictatorship. The regime ruled through a theatricality of violence, in which what was "given-to-be-seen"

(the narrative of nation, for instance) and what was invisibilized (torture, death, disappearance) was part of a macabre political calculus. By bringing pictures of the disappeared to the square and demanding their return, the Madres have been able to recreate a public sphere where they could bring to the surface the hidden terror of the regime (see Taylor 1997).

The tactics of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo certainly inspired the Brazilian movement by "making visible what is not allowed to be seen" (Taylor 1997:27). In the case of black women in Brazil, however, the struggle has not been to reclaim the "lost" political space of civil society, since such a space never existed for them. As was the case for ROC's members in California, the Brazilian women's struggle has been to denounce a permanent state of terror, to challenge the hegemonic narratives that deem their children to be criminals, and to build a political community around their experiences of oppression as working-class black women. In doing so, they critique the taken-for-granted public sphere, and bring about a transformative "politics of caring" (Collins 1990; Gilmore 2007) that enlarges the horizon of politics beyond white-normative accounts of justice, and beyond male-centric strategies of resistance historically embraced by the black movement in Brazil. By identifying these women's practices as black spatial praxis, we can affirm their spatial agency and account for the politics of space embraced by individuals encountering state terror.

Furthermore, in doing so we can desmistify narratives of oppression that render their suffering as mere secondary victimization, resulting from the loss of their loved ones. To understand women's victimization in this way is to reify the notion that the black man is the main victim of racial injustice (for a critique, see Carbado 1999; Rocha 2012). On the contrary, black women's practices should be understood not only as a response to police killings, but also to quotidian forms of violence that devalue their lives. While the scale and severity of the May Massacre engendered a concerted response from São Paulo's black movement, that event must be understood as part of a broader system of violence that makes "black intimacy with death" (Vargas, personal communication) an enduring and daily reality. Black women are acutely affected by this racialized system. They are concentrated in low-paid jobs as domestic servants, have the highest unemployment rate of any social group, and are disproportionately likely to suffer from diseases and violent death (Barbosa 1998; Basthi 2003; Carneiro 1995; Flauzina 2008; Lovell 2006; Romio 2009).

Black women's organizing not only dislocates masculinist constructions of racial injustice, but it also helps us unveil new possibilities for resistance within and against the black necropolis. As Katherine McKittrick has it, "racism and sexism are not simply bodily or identity based; racism and sexism are also *spatial acts* and illustrate black women's geographic experiences and knowledges as they are made possible through domination" (2006:xviii). Within the context of black resistance to state violence in São Paulo, this geographic experience informs a gendered spatial praxis through which black women re-signify the meanings of space, bodies and motherhood. The words of Debora, one of the leaders of Mães de Maio, point to this spatial dialectic of race and gender at work in the production of the *Blackpolis*:

> Unfortunately, I only came out of my kitchen and started caring about police violence when my son was taken from my life. It is not just for my son that I am here today. It is also for the youth that are out there, and some of them could be your son. If I was not struggling, I would already be dead. They took a part of me and the other part is just for the struggle. It is the struggle that keeps us alive.

As their organizing strategies reveal, in a society in which blackness has been constituted through pathological narratives of bodies and spaces, black women have refused the place reserved for them and have resituated themselves as political-spatial subjects. Literally and symbolically, they have gone down the hillside, crossed the city, and confronted state power with their own bodies. If the black necropolis can only become a "Black polis" to the extent that an alternative "representation of space" (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]:33) and an alternative spatiality can be imagined, then by occupying white public space (eg the square) and reclaiming and grieving the "ungrievable" (Butler 2006), these black women produce a *spatial praxis* that challenges the bodily and geographic boundaries of the polis. This alternative spatiality—expressed through speeches, weeping, poems, singing, mourning, performance, and occupation of strategic locations in São Paulo—appears to be an effective means of challenging the state's fantasies of urban security and granting black women's spatial mobility. In the context of the anti-black city, these practices are a means of bringing the dead home and re-imagining black urban life.

Conclusion

Homicidal policing practices, economic marginalization, mass incarceration, and spatial segregation constitute a form of necropolitical governance in urban Brazil. These practices are both racialized and gendered, as illustrated by the struggles of black women like Dona Maria to survive in the neoliberal city while searching for the remains of their children. Nonetheless, my pessimism about black urban life in the anti-black necropolis does not prevent me from locating tenacious threads of resistance in São Paulo. As the Mães de Maio demonstrate, death and social suffering can be transformed into political resources from which black people come together as a community. These deadly interpellations also produce a painfully articulated (and perhaps explosive) black identity. Black women's embrace of the square as a site of spatial political struggle is a case in point here. These women have also played a remarkably active role in organizing the black movement around urgent needs, and have refuted gendered spatial narratives that render them as politically disorganized *faveladas* mothers of criminals. Let us consider the *favela* and the black gendered body, therefore, as political spatialities that challenge the polis as a white imagined community and create new avenues to rethink blackness and spatial resistance.

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Endnotes

[1] See Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (http://www.redecontraviolencia.org/Documentos/263.html).

[2] While these authors bring to the forefront the capitalist logic of disposability that informs contemporaneous geographies of domination my use of the term refers to the inherently anti-black disposition of the city, and its dialectically produced spatial strategies of black resistance.

[3] Generally, this scholarship subscribes to the universal paradigm of human rights to explain state violence as a dysfunctional aberration, characteristic of partial/low-intensity democracies (Cardia 1997; Chevigny 1995; Hinton 2005; Holston and Caldeira 1999; O'Donnell 1998).

[4] See http://www.ssp.sp.gov.br/noticia/lenoticia.aspx?id=12059

[5] See http://www.diariosp.com.br/noticia/detalhe/49039/Policia+Militar+mata+mais+pardos+e+negros and http://www.istoe.com.br/reportagens/232384_A+PM+MATADORA

[6] Here, I am consistent with Ruth Gilmore's definition of racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (2007:247).

[7] The state has 22% of the Brazilian population, according to the 2010 official Census.

[8] I use "blacks" and "whites" as official categories of racial identification employed by IBGE. The social proximity and shared vulnerabilities of Afro-Brazilians authorizes the uses of "negros" and "pardos" as blacks.

[9] See Departamento Penitenciário Nacional *Censo Penitenciário 2010* (http://www.mj.gov.br).

[10] See Instituto de Pesquisa Economica Aplicada (http://www.ipea.gov.br/agencia/images/stories/PDFs/políticas_sociais/bps_19_completo.pdf).

[11] Although she was phenotypically "black", Dona Maria barely spoke with me about her identity as a black woman; my fieldwork with other *favela* residents was marked by a similar silence about the topic of racial identity (on the politics of racial identification in Brazil, see Fernandes 1972; Goldstein 2003; Sheriff 2001; Vargas 2004).

[12] This argument may be counterintuitive since the police force in Brazil has become increasingly racially diverse (see Ramos and Musumeci 2005; Sansone 2002). Regardless of the color of those "just doing their job", however, police practices in Brazil and elsewhere should be situated within the larger racialized regime of control that informs conceptions of crime, space and order (see Amar 2009; Hebert and Brown 2006; Samara 2010).

[13] Elsewhere, I address Black youth's outlawed practices as strategies of urban survival beyond the normative accounts of resistance within so-called civil society (Alves).

[14] Consider, for example, the following statement from Sergio Cabral, the current governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro: "I am in favor of women interrupting an undesired pregnancy. You look at the number of children born at Lagoa Tijuca, Méier and in Copacabana. Now, you look at Rocinha, Vidigal, Alemao (*favela*s in Rio). Zambia, Gabon standards. That is a criminal factory." The areas pointed out by Cabral as African standard have been under military operations by the National Army and Rio's Special Unity (BOPE) as the city prepares to host international sports events in the upcoming years. In the same vein, in São Paulo the feared ROTA, a special unit of the Military Police, has the following mantra: "God gives life, the ROTA takes it" ["*Deus da a vida, a ROTA tira*"]. While the mantra may suggest that ROTA can kill anyone, this is not the case. Rota's killing practices are unmistakably concentrated in *favelas* and against black young men. São Paulo's ROTA and Rio's BOPE operate under a racial register that associates *favela* and black women's bodies as the source of violence (as for the "controlling image" of black women in Rio, as well as their "culpability" in mainstream discourses pertaining urban violence, see Rocha 2012: 64; also Santos 2008; Carby 1992).

[15] Current demonstrations in São Paulo are illustrative of this double standard: even as the beating of white middle-class students by the police has become a national outrage, my own experience as a black activist shows that similar police repression, when practiced against black demonstrations, is hardly condemned.

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