

## **The Roots of Black Resistance: Race, Gender and the Struggle for Urban Land Rights in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil**

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*ABSTRACT: In Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, during the past ten years, the city has transformed its historical centre into cultural sites for leisure tourism. This process has included projects of 'slum clearance', negatively impacting black communities who have historically occupied these areas. In this essay, I present an ethnographic account of Gamboa de Baixo, a black coastal community in the centre of Salvador, and its political movement against urban renewal programmes. Specifically, I focus on the articulation of racial and gender politics in black women's grassroots activism against land expulsion and for access to material resources. This case in Salvador unearths one aspect of institutional racism in Brazil and the formation of an anti-black racism resistance movement. Resistance to urban renewal plans in Salvador demonstrates how struggles for urban land rights are a crucial part of engaging in the broader national and international politics of race. In black communities in Brazil and throughout the African diaspora, urban land and territorial rights are the local idioms of black resistance.*

### **Introduction**

Brazil as a nation proclaims herself the only racial democracy in the world, and much of the world views and accepts her as such. But an examination of the historical development of my country reveals the true nature of her social, cultural, political and economic anatomy: it is essentially racist and vitally threatening to Black people. (Nascimento, 1989, p. 59)

I consider preserving cultural values as extremely important, because I don't want a loss of identity, but I also want to increase my range of claims and strategies, so as to make the power and decision-making structures realise that blacks must be trained to occupy all positions (Silva, 1999, p. 185)

On 20 March 1997, women in Gamboa de Baixo prepared in the darkness and silence of early morning. Late the night before, residents had received the shocking news that 14-year-old student Cristiane Conceição Santos had died from head injuries. The fatal car accident on her way to school was one of three

violent incidents at the beginning of that year alone involving Gamboa residents crossing one of Salvador's busiest streets, Avenida Lafaiete Coutinho (Avenida do Contorno). In those accidents, one person had died and another became paralysed. Ironically, the week before, women from their neighbourhood association, Associação Amigos de Gegê Dos Moradores da Gamboa de Baixo, had attended a meeting with the mayor in which they requested that he install traffic lights and a crosswalk. They had insisted on the control of traffic for the safety of pedestrians, including women and young children, who risked their lives on a daily basis just to attend school or to go to work. 'No one respects those of us who try to cross the street', one woman told a newspaper reporter during the protest (*A Tarde*, 21 March 1997). The death of Cristiane was a brutal reminder that they had received no official assurance that safety conditions on the road would change.

As dawn approached, these women hurried together with their children into the street, determined to walk without fear in the Avenida do Contorno that passed above their community. As Maria<sup>1</sup> remembers,

before [the closing of the street] we fought with fear, but the day we closed the Contorno, full of courage to confront the police, I felt that I had a space in this society that's mine. (personal interview, 2000)

Anger intensified as the sun rose. They moved quickly to get the word out to other neighbourhoods, black movement activists, NGOs, and supporters in the local archdiocese. Between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m., the Contorno was the site of one of Gamboa de Baixo's and the city of Salvador's largest and most significant acts of public defiance. Residents held a banner that stated, 'Gamboa de Baixo 'Coveted Paradise' [Paraíso Cobiçado] Demands Help' (*A Tarde*, 21 March 1997). The demonstration disrupted the normal flow of traffic throughout the entire city. They blocked the street with burning tyres, wood, and other debris. The main actors in this manifestation were black women, young and old, who shouted in defence of their families and their communities. The fire department extinguished the fires and removed the debris to open the congested Contorno to transit. The Military Police (in their riot gear) stayed the entire morning to prevent the outbreak of new demonstrations.

In 1998 and 1999, while living in Salvador, I learned about the Gamboa de Baixo's grassroots struggle for permanence, land rights, and social and economic change in the area. I marched alongside these black women of Gamboa de Baixo in the celebration of the Dia Nacional da Consciência Negra on 20 November in the centre of Salvador. Several neighbourhood groups throughout the city participated in the rally promoted by black organisations such as the United Black Movement and the Black Union for Equality [União de Negros pela Igualdade, UNegro].<sup>2</sup> The annual march celebrated black resistance by commemorating the death of Zumbi of the Palmares *quilombo*, a 'symbol of warriors'. The public demonstration focused on black concerns with increased police violence and the unemployment and poverty that disproportionately occurred in their communities. This protest was also a way for black people to claim power and space during times when urban renewal projects were forcibly removing them from these central areas of the city. In fact, I

argue that Gamboa de Baixo's participation in the 20 November events was an expression of a shared understanding of the linkage between the social conditions of poor blacks and structural racism in Bahia and throughout Brazil.

This essay is an analysis of the racial aspects of urbanisation in Salvador and the Gamboa de Baixo community movement against displacement and for access to material resources such as land and housing. This movement emerged because, as residents understood it, they were most certain to become the next Pelourinho, Salvador's Historic Centre [Centro Histórico]. The government removed the poor black population from the Pelourinho during that neighbourhood's 'revitalisation' process. 'We do not want to be a second edition of the Pelourinho', organisers wrote in a neighbourhood communiqué (1995). The government's displacement of local communities galvanised the women activists in Gamboa de Baixo to organise against expulsion. The case of Gamboa de Baixo demonstrates the particularities of Brazilian anti-black racism and black political organisation against institutional racism. Through my ethnography of their narratives and resistance, I argue that discourses and practices of urban renewal are prime examples of anti-black racism in Brazil, that political mobilisation against urban renewal in Salvador illustrates the racial consciousness of Brazilian blacks, and that black communities *do* actively organise around race and gender in political struggles over material resources. To support these claims, I focus on the interrelationship between racial and gender identity politics and struggles over resources, particularly housing and land, in the city centre of Salvador.

### **Urban Apartheid: Changing the Face (Race) of the City Centre**

The most worrisome aspect of Salvador's decade of urban redevelopment is the violent disappearance of visible black clusters in the centre of this vibrant city. The underlying logic of urban development in Brazilian cities is racial exclusion. In this section of the essay, I examine the racialised urbanisation of Gamboa de Baixo and the city centre to support my claim that urban renewal is a racist practice. As Thomas Sugrue (1996, p. 229) writes, urban space is a 'metaphor for perceived racial difference'. The strategies of redevelopment operate as institutional mechanisms to maintain *de facto* racial and class segregation. The case of Gamboa de Baixo illustrates the ways in which the conceptualisation and implementation of these renewal and revitalisation programmes in Salvador exclude and displace black communities socially, economically, and spatially. City redevelopment programmes exclude blacks and relocate them to the distant periphery of new urban spaces. Growing gentrification 'transforms' cities but also deepens racial and class divisions by spatially demarcating the socio-economic boundaries of racially ordered spaces. This connection between exclusive development and racial order makes explicit the racism propelling this model of exclusion.

In Bahian tourism politics, both the city centre and all areas along the shore of the Baía de Todos os Santos [Bay of All Saints] are strategically important for the development of leisure and cultural sites. Salvador has implemented a series of projects intended to recuperate, restore, and 'revitalise' the environ-

ment of the urban centre. Founded in 1549, the city was Brazil's first capital and still holds some of the country's most historically significant monuments and buildings. In 1981, UNESCO recognised Salvador's historic centre, the Pelourinho, as the 'patrimony of humanity' (Dunn, 1994; Pinho, 1999). Here, officials forcibly removed the poor black population that they consider 'dangerous' and 'criminal', and that occupied some of Brazil's oldest colonial homes. Since the 1990s, the city has spent millions of dollars on revitalisation projects such as the Bahia Municipal Development Project financed by the World Bank (World Bank Group, 1999). In the process, the state has relocated the local black population to other neighbourhoods throughout the city's periphery.

In the recent memory of Salvador, the gentrification of the Pelourinho is a symbolic marker of black experiences with mass displacement and the repressive regimes of urban restructuring. The restoration of the Pelourinho marks the beginning of urban renewal programmes that have usurped the city centre and other parts of Salvador during the past ten years. The revitalisation of areas along the Avenida do Contorno, including Gamboa de Baixo, another poor black neighbourhood in the city centre, constitutes a central objective of subsequent stages of Salvador's urban renewal programme. One of Salvador's coastal communities situated on the shores of the Baía de Todos os Santos, Gamboa de Baixo is located on the land below and underneath the Avenida do Contorno. As in the case of the Pelourinho, the people of Gamboa de Baixo do not fit into the government's plans for the area. It intends to remove the existing population in order to implement cultural tourism projects, leisure sites, and new real estate investments.

The public image of Gamboa de Baixo is that of danger, misery and marginality; yet, the locale existing below the Avenida do Contorno provides the ideal site for the reformation of new urban spaces in Salvador. The government of Bahia began to pay special attention to the neighbourhood chiefly because this predominantly black and working class community occupies some of the most valuable land in the centre of Salvador. However, before there was an urban revitalisation programme for the area, there was a Gamboa de Baixo where people lived and worked for many generations. Formerly known as the Gamboa Port or Porto das Vacas, Gamboa is a fishing colony residents claim to have begun in Salvador's early colonial history as a *quilombo*, a community formed by escaped slaves and indigenous peoples (the first owners of the land). Before there was the World Bank and their Salvador Metropolitan Development Project, there were more than 350 poor families living in this 'privileged'<sup>3</sup> area in the city of Salvador. Though sometimes labelled a recent land 'invasion', this fishing colony for more than a century has had as its visual reference the Baía de Todos os Santos and, in the distance, the island Itaparica.

Gamboa de Baixo lies on the same shoreline as the São Paulo da Gamboa Fortress (built 1722). Originally known as the St Paul Battery, the Bahian navy used the base exclusively during the eighteenth century for military reinforcement and protection of the city (Rebouças and Filho, 1985). The navy abandoned the São Paulo Fort and the surrounding area around the end of the nineteenth century. Some Gamboa de Baixo residents have made their homes

in the ruins of the São Paulo Fortress. However, during the mid-1990s, the Bahia navy reclaimed ownership of the Fort as public land, declaring that the fort was an aspect of the city's history in need of immediate revitalisation in order 'to be remembered forever' (1996). Activists in Gamboa de Baixo have mobilised their community to contest the city's plan to transform the land into a historical site and tourism attraction after removing its inhabitants. Despite the city's efforts, the population of Gamboa de Baixo remains intact as a community and continues to fight against government officials' attempts to remove and relocate them to the periphery of Salvador.

Gamboa de Baixo's location in the centre of Salvador has always been a focus of urban development. One of the primary goals of Bahian urbanisation since the 1950s has been to build a 'modern city' with new infrastructure that accomplishes the following social and environmental goals: sanitation, beautification, and communication (Fernandes *et al.*, 1999, p. 172). Educated in the 'civilisation school' [*escola de civilização*] of urbanism, Bahian scientists (engineers and architects) believed these plans of urban improvement, embellishment and expansion would rupture Bahia's relationship with its colonial past, thereby enabling the city to catch up with a rapidly transforming global world. The vision has been both global and modern, emphasising the notion that 'all important cities of the world have a plan'. According to urban analysts, other Brazilian cities such as Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, Recife and Belém have already become more modern. Salvador, 'the oldest and most traditional in Brazil, cannot remain behind the rest' (p. 175).

A crucial moment in Salvador's modernising history was the construction of the Avenida do Contorno, designed in 1952 and first opened to transit in 1961. It has become one of Salvador's most important roadways. The Avenida do Contorno connects the commercial zone of Cidade Baixa (Lower City) and the affluent neighbourhoods of Canela in Cidade Alta (Upper City) (Fernandes *et al.*, 1999). At the time of its construction, newspapers reported that the new road constituted one of the most beautiful of all Bahian urban streets because of its picturesque view of the Baía de Todos os Santos, which defines the city of Salvador. The Avenida do Contorno represented Bahia's most 'modern dimension' and was the ideal model for basic roadways in Salvador (p. 353). Its construction was the example of two essential processes of achieving the goals of urbanisation in Salvador: 'the technical, displayed in the search for fluidity and healthfulness of physical and social environments', and 'the aesthetic, instrumentalised in a perspective of formation of a new city and a new sociability' (p. 167). A journalist for the local newspaper *A Tarde* wrote in 1959 that

this avenue, besides serving to decongest traffic and stopping Salvador from being just a 'city of only one road', will be more than a tourist attraction to contribute to our capital, endowed with so many natural resources waiting for enjoyment and valorisation.

As a technical and aesthetic improvement to the capital city, the Avenida do Contorno expanded the commercial centre as well as the social and environmental aspects necessary to increase tourism in a developing urban Salvador.

Most authors wrote about the Avenida do Contorno in terms of natural and technical beauty, progress and economic prosperity. Few mentioned the impact its construction had on the black population that lived in this coastal region. The government did not consider the residents in the planning and the construction phases of the Avenida do Contorno. To complete the project, engineers demolished various homes and under-compensated owners for the huge amounts of land appropriated. The construction of the road laid the groundwork for further problems communities located along the Avenida do Contorno faced in the 1990s with urbanisation programmes. A reporter for *A Tarde* newspaper mentioned briefly in 1961 mentioned briefly that, near the road's opening, 'notwithstanding a house stands intact in the middle of the street, though in precarious situation due to the demolitions of the neighbouring houses'. The engineer directing the construction project informed government officials that 'the proprietor asked for a very elevated price for compensation'.

In 1969, *A Tarde* presented a disparaging report that described the population living literally 'below the asphalt' after the completion of the Avenida do Contorno. The journalist depicted the local community below the Avenida as primarily comprised of thieves, prostitutes, and the 'feeble-minded' who lived in dilapidated and overcrowded housing structures without basic sewer systems, running water or electricity. The more dangerous, he claimed, lived in or near the arcs of the Avenida. In contrast, he wrote of hundreds of other families (including civil servants and students) who lived on small streets closer to the beachfront and in the ruins of the old navy fort. Though his piece displayed a similar dismay with the lack of 'sanitary conditions', he did recognise that in Gamboa de Baixo there existed a small fishing settlement that participated in an active fish-producing economy in Salvador. In general, the article expressed disapproval of what he called a 'favela of marginality' existing in the plain centre of a reviving city. Gamboa de Baixo's social and geographic location, he communicated clearly, was a 'challenge to a civilised city'. The journalist's portrayal is only one example of misinformation and negative stereotypes about Gamboa de Baixo the print media has generated since the days of the Avenida's construction. Disparaging public opinions have lingered from those times. This form of socio-spatial exclusion is the basis of urban renewal programmes attempting to revitalise this coastal region.

On the surface, 'decayed' urban communities such as Gamboa de Baixo remind the rest of Salvador of its undesirable past. Pejorative descriptions of Gamboa de Baixo as an uncivilised element of the city holding back a thriving urban Bahia have had material consequences for local residents. 'Gamboa was one community before the construction of the Avenida do Contorno in the 60s and 70s', one woman explained. Gamboa 'was marginalised by the passage of the Avenida do Contorno, bringing to the residents oblivion and even discrimination in relationship to the rest of the city' (neighbourhood association communiqué, 1996). The Avenida de Contorno divided the Gamboa neighbourhood as Gamboa de Baixo (Lower) and Gamboa de Cima (Upper), a spatial separation that has upheld hierarchies of racial, social, and economic differences between the two neighbourhoods. The construction of the Avenida

constrained the previously unrestricted movement of ideas, labour, and goods. Only in the mid-1990s did the government construct a staircase that provided access from Gamboa de Baixo to the rest of the city. Most residents still remember the difficulty of climbing the shaky wooden stairs to reach the Avenida do Contorno. Infra-structural changes within the city separated and isolated them as 'those below'. Selena, who has always lived 'below the Avenida' pointed out that some women work as domestics in Gamboa de Cima and nearby neighbourhoods such as Vitoria that literally look down on their homes in Gamboa de Baixo. Even today, identifying Gamboa de Baixo as your place of residence might prevent you from getting a job, since as she claims some employers 'still think we're all thieves' (personal communication, 2001). Sentiments of inferiority and superiority have run deep since the Avenida do Contorno's separation of Gamboa de Baixo and Gamboa de Cima, demonstrating that the project had more than symbolic significance. In stark difference from the 'flourishing' city centre above the Avenida, the public relegated the community 'below' to a cluster of undesirables who lingered behind in both space and time.

In the last decade, the threat of displacement and dislocation has plagued Gamboa de Baixo. Less than a five minute walk from Gamboa de Baixo along the Avenida do Contorno, the Bahia Marina yacht club and the Museum of Modern Art Park of Sculptures replaced the local black community of Preguiça in 1995. Today, visitors can sit on benches in the waterfront park admiring displays of Bahian 'modernity' in the form of abstract art without any remnants of the more than 75 families that were relocated to a neighbourhood in the periphery. In addition to the restoration of the São Paulo Fort, the revitalisation of the Avenida do Contorno includes the installation of stores selling nautical products and a park with restaurants, bars and kiosks inside the arcs of the Avenida. Visitors will be able to enjoy the view and the seafood of the Baía de Todos os Santos (Correio da Bahia, 17 August 1995). However, the government does not envision the presence of the people of Gamboa de Baixo in the new environment (as in the case of the Pelourinho and Preguiça), but rather, it intends to remove the existing population.

Urban renewal in Salvador has focused on preserving physical and cultural aspects of Bahia and Brazil, including present-day spatial memories of colonialism and slavery. History has become a commodity for public consumption and tourism in Salvador. However, these revitalised historic buildings and their modern imitations 'symbolise the era of black slavery and white domination', representing a new form of socioeconomic subjugation for black Brazilians (Fagence, 1995, p. 99). Where black people once lived has become commercial sites for the consumption of black experiences and cultures but without the people who have produced that culture. Imported notions of black culture (art, music) displace 'undesirables', those who embody the violent, deviant, and menacing meanings of blackness that previously characterised Salvador's urban landscape (Dunn, 1994; Pinho, 1999). Thus, tourism in Salvador commodifies and consumes black culture as folkloric representations of Bahian and Brazilian identities distant from the everyday concerns of material survival such as employment, housing, and food.

Monica Lacarrieu (2000) writes that this paradoxical relationship in Salvador characterises urban reconstruction practices throughout almost all Brazilian cities. An important preoccupation in State urbanisation practices is history and local sites of memory such as old forts, churches and other monuments. A modernist vision of the city, she argues, tends to include the aesthetic revival of 'ugly, dirty, and mistreated' historical sites into 'clean, pure, and distinct' remnants of the past. History becomes a viable product for public consumption in modern cities. The underlying logic is that appropriating these urban spaces gives new 'hygienic' meanings to the past, representing the city as 'healthy', less dangerous, and '*mais gostosa*' (p. iii), for those living in it. Revalorising the past, Lacarrieu further asserts, translates into urban 'nostalgic desire', or the desire to escape modernity without abandoning it at the same time; reconstructing the essential 'good old days' to improve present and future socio-economic conditions of the city (p. iii). From this perspective, the Northeastern city of Salvador is an ideal site for the revitalisation of history. The Secretary of Planning, Science, and Technology writes the following:

The vision of tourism for Salvador is centred on leisure tourism with the fantastic content of culture and history, involving beaches, ecology, festivals, music, and an exceptional architectonic patrimony ... Having been the first capital of Brazil and centre of the beginning of Portuguese colonisation, with their political and economic displays, and more markedly, the sedimentation of the slave regime, Salvador develops the most rich historic and cultural values '*sui generis*' of the country, that are preserved in the form of an exceptional physical patrimony and customs. (1996, p. 28)

The government of Bahia wants to 'recuperate' local and national history in Salvador to boost the tourism industry, including significant investments in sites such as the Pelourinho, Teatro Castro Alves, and the Igreja do São Francisco. Once considered dangerous, the Pelourinho, for example, is now one of Brazil's examples of a revived neighbourhood, but more importantly, a renewed space in the national identity. The revitalisation of the centre of Salvador means 'rescuing the identity of the city of Salvador — the city which generated the nation of Brazil, the culture of Brazil ... The restoration showed the city that it has a culture which is just as valuable as any other. This is our heritage and we have to value what we have' (Institute of Artistic and Cultural Patrimony, quoted in Dunn, 1994, p. 2).

As Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes, 'the value of the historical product cannot be debated without taking into account both the context of its production and the context of its consumption' (1995, p. 146). However, urban development around the celebration of a colonial heritage excludes descendants of enslaved Africans whose labour, traditions and customs constitute essential elements of that colonial past. Development in Bahia represents the renewal of a colonial past for both 'the colonialist visitor' and the 'colonised host', reflecting the physical and spatial remnants of racial oppression. Ultimately, transforming historical sites in black urban communities into exclusive areas for white middle-class leisure and recreation offers little benefit for the local population

that has produced that culture, moreover, causing alienation, exploitation, and marginalisation. The general focus on leisure and tourism involves race, class, and gender-specific audiences; for example, those who desire and can afford to enjoy those urban spaces.

The institutionalisation of urban renewal is one aspect of Brazil's racial ideology that reminds blacks of 'their place' in society. The case of Salvador illustrates the institutional strategies by local city officials to construct economically and racially 'exclusive' spaces.<sup>4</sup> Urban redevelopment in Salvador involves the transformation of public spaces such as parks, street bars, and even beaches into private areas with 'exclusive' access. Exclusive development of urban areas in Brazil has characterised 'a forceful maintenance of the racial order' (Fontaine, 1983, p. 159). In cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, studies show that urban restructuring projects operate to increase racial spatial segregation (Ribeiro and Telles, 2000, pp. 92–93). Within the context of city redevelopment and gentrification policies, segregation reinforces racial hierarchies and inequalities.

Urban blacks in Salvador have difficulty accessing resources (including natural ones) like affordable housing or informal jobs in open street markets as the city undergoes restructuring. Black Bahians are oftentimes 'out of place' (Wright, 1997) in new urban spaces. Given this understanding of segregation, urban renewal is a racist project of 'whitening' the urban landscape in Brazil. In terms of access and control of its resources, the urban economy becomes an area of white and bourgeois dominance. Urban development in Salvador is an institution of white supremacy and social dominance. Furthermore, this process is an essential reminder for black communities that racial segregation is *not* a 'forgotten factor'<sup>5</sup> of Brazilian race relations and racial injustice. As the Gamboa de Baixo neighbourhood association exclaims in a press release,

the dissemination of this culture of exclusion, principally towards the black and poor population, distances it farther and farther from the so-called 'privileged' areas in our city. (1996)

Paradoxically, prior to recent revitalisation programmes, the coastal region and some parts of the city centre were Salvador's 'margins' occupied primarily by black and poor people. Urban displacement practices have created 'new margins' for poor blacks, which include housing projects such as Cajazeiras 10 and 11 distant from the coast and the city centre.

In Salvador, Gamboa has spatial significance within the city. It is known as a place where blacks live, which also connotes a local 'focus of marginality' and an 'area of misery'. The equation of blackness with marginality in urban spaces is a fundamental hidden source of high levels of racial segregation. Gamboa de Baixo's black population, like most poor black communities in Salvador, has struggled to transform prevailing negative images of the places where they live (Butler, 1998). The reformulation of black identity has been one underlying objective of their movement towards social change. They are poor, black, and hard working. They do not accept categorisations that identify them as thieves and prostitutes. Changing racial politics in Salvador requires that black people challenge harmful representations that fortify hierarchical relationships and 'keep blacks in their place'.

The removal of communities such as Gamboa de Baixo is political and strategic. As stated earlier, urban renewal projects construct 'the excluded ghetto' because the profitability of the new urban spaces necessarily depends on black spatial and economic marginalisation. In Salvador, silencing Gamboa de Baixo's participation is one integral aspect of the government's approach to imposing urban renewal programmes on local communities. Their expulsion from the area of interest is one pre-determined aspect for the completion of the project. For aesthetic and social purposes, the State government prevents the permanence of local communities. In fact, the population is disregarded in the project. The revitalised coastal area in the centre of Salvador has no space for 'a band of *marginais*'.

Not knowing the fate of their coastal community and relegated to the social status of 'the marginal', Gamboa de Baixo find themselves in the path of massive 'slum clearance' throughout the city centre. Translated to mean 'black clearance',<sup>6</sup> the new culture developed in the coastal lands of the Avenida do Contorno is officially exclusive in all stages of its implementation.

Residents of Gamboa de Baixo see the changing conditions of the Avenida do Contorno as a threat to their own existence and the loss of resources and livelihood. The experiences of Preguiça's expulsion further increased awareness of the definite expansion of such urban development planning. To relocate to a distant neighbourhood is a threat to Gamboa residents primarily because of the material reality of access to the resources of the urban centre, including the basic concerns such as food (fishing), transportation, jobs, health care, and education. One Gamboan activist, Selena, stated that if her child is hurt, she does not have to worry about finding the money to take the bus because the hospital is within walking distance of her home. Dona Marla, another resident activist, works as a domestic worker in an apartment building in Upper Gamboa, allowing her to reach home quickly if there is an emergency with her children. In Gamboa de Baixo, a major question for residents is 'What will we do someplace else, someplace we do not know?' This suggests that their ability to 'survive' in an already socially and economically unequal city diminishes tremendously when dislocated physically from the centre of urban resources. At the city's periphery, the status of blacks as being 'out of place' in the city is even further exacerbated. In Gamboa de Baixo, displacement from their land and dislocation to the periphery continues to be a threat even today.

Poor blacks are 'out of place' in the construction of these new urban spaces, representing one of Brazil's most ugly forms of institutional racism. Urbanisation programmes in Salvador, Bahia are processes of racial and class exclusion. Within the context of gentrification and revitalisation, changes in the urban landscape are especially oppressive to blacks since they are the ones who face spatial displacement and expulsion. As I have shown in the example of Gamboa de Baixo, racist images of black people and spaces as 'dangerous' and 'criminal' directly influence social policies that marginalise and exclude their presence and participation in city planning. Moreover, urban renewal propelled by displacement causes the collective loss of resources such as jobs and housing for blacks further exacerbating their experiences with structural inequality in Salvador. While this process of urban change is considered a necessary step towards 'modernity' and greater capital accumulation, black

communities like Gamboa de Baixo suffer as they are transformed into profit-making tourist sites without them.

**'This Struggle is of all of us [*de todos nós*]'**

As I described in the introduction, direct action protest such as the closing of the Avenida do Contorno is the most effective tactic of political struggle for Gamboa de Baixo community activists. At public meetings and street protests, black women have gone directly for the 'real clash', thereby engaging in confrontational politics. Another such moment of 'craziness' occurred at the end of 1997 during a meeting with city officials about construction projects in their neighbourhood. An engineer and a social worker from the government agency Conder went to Gamboa de Baixo after residents stopped construction. After Gamboa residents achieved the temporary right to land ownership, they disagreed with the progress of the new housing development. While destroying construction materials, a water bucket fell on a teenage girl and broke her leg. At the time of the meeting with city officials, approximately ten hours after the girl had checked into the hospital, she was in critical condition and doctors had not treated her leg. Community leaders took both the engineer and the social worker hostage and threatened to release them only after they were certain the girl had been attended to and had received the necessary operation. In direct confrontation with city officials, community activists forced the local government to guarantee poor blacks' access to vital resources such as health care (Cristina, personal interview, 2000).

The Gamboa de Baixo protests transform the ways in which we conceptualise black mobilisation and resistance, particularly our understanding of black anti-racism struggles in Brazil. 'Getting things done' for poor black women in Gamboa de Baixo has meant that, when necessary, they must collectively 'get in the face' of the powerful and demystify their power and control. This political approach is unlike the culturalist tendencies that Michael Hanchard argues are the definitive characteristics of black activism. Hanchard (1994, pp. 21, 139) observes that where black activists focus exclusively on the politics of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices (Candomblé, Samba, Feijoada), they have been unable to organise a mass political movement aimed at transforming institutionalised forms of racial inequality. He also writes that there exists 'no Afro-Brazilian versions of boycotting, sit-ins, civil disobedience, and armed struggle in its stead' (1994, p. 139). However, Gamboa de Baixo protests illustrate that black activists *do* engage in acts of civil disobedience and violent struggle. Black women's leadership in Gamboa de Baixo's political organisation reveals the ways in which they use race and gender to mobilise their community. What is clear is that black women's experiences with marginality and exclusion are one source of political mobilisation. Blacks in Salvador make use of their awareness of racism and fight to transform racial and class hierarchies.

The Gamboa de Baixo neighbourhood association, Associação Amigos de Gegê dos Moradores da Gamboa, was founded on 7 October 1992. Black women started the organisation to establish collective governance and representation for the community in their demands for vital resources such as clean

running water and improved sewer systems. Fear of possible expulsion from the coastal area was a factor in pushing forward the grassroots struggle against spatial expulsion. More importantly, it was because 'there were women, a dozen or so women, that began to cause alarm, to shout 'look what's happening'' (Alicia, personal interview 2000). The participation of women in the community-based struggle has always been greater than that of men. Indeed, women were often the *only* organisers. As Maria claims, 'our association fought without fear' and responds to the typical questions about the relative absence of men in their organisation that 'it is our women who are going to fight and achieve these greater objectives' for the entire community. Women claims that this is because they were more conscious of the short and long-term impact that land expulsion and relocation to the periphery would have on their families. The centrality of women's participation and their gender consciousness fuel the community movement. Cristina states that:

The women believed more, women have *this thing* ... the woman has a mother's spirit, and a mother dies for her child, you know. So, we women just believed that this place was right for our children. And it was as if, this is my home, and no one invades it, no one enters to take anything, to take me out of it, to take my children. So, I think that the women, they had this thing. They believed that they would remove us. And the men, I think they didn't, because the men thought, and some still think that, that no, living outside is simple. That they were going to be able to return, to come, the boat stays here, to fish, but the women had a broader vision, more clear about what it was to leave Gamboa to live in whatever other part of Salvador. So, like that, it is as if the women were defending their territory, you know, the woman has more of this thing. So, the participation was more of women. It is not because as they say, there are men who say 'meeting is a woman's little thing [*coisinha de mulher*]' but we did not see it that way. We see it like this, that women are able to reach a lot farther than the men ... look, this broader preoccupation of the women was just this preoccupation with the future. Why? It's like I was saying, Gamboa has its own culture, its way of life. Gamboa is one family, and we know, and we think, leaving Gamboa to go somewhere else means being in another environment with another family, being in a place where we don't, people don't know each other, then, new relationships ... to see that in Gamboa we had, and we have to survive. We have the sea that when we don't have bread in the house, you go there to the beach and you throw your line, you fish your little fish for your child to eat, to go to school walking because you don't have money for transport. And your child wouldn't be able to go? Or drop out of school, or stay hungry mid-day, you know, or turn into a marginal of some kind, you know? I think that the woman got to see that Gamboa and the environment is a way of surviving. It is the natural environment of Gamboeiros. We need this here. (Cristina, personal interview, 2000)

Several of the women I spoke with in Gamboa de Baixo associate their political

awareness in this situation with the recognition of their own differential knowledge as women, and for some, as mothers. From this perspective, *this thing* that empowers black women in grassroots movements around issues of survival is exactly what they know about life and their position in the world. For instance, what women in Gamboa de Baixo describe as a 'broader preoccupation' with 'their territory' is a complex understanding of the depth of everyday social and economic conditions that define their existence in a poor neighbourhood in the centre of Salvador. As stated above, they claim territorial rights and 'know' the essentials of living and surviving in difficult conditions, including disease and land expulsion.

Consequently, the centrality of black women's participation in this grassroots struggle promotes the articulation of racial knowledge, consciousness and resistance. The political organisation brings to the attention of Gamboa de Baixo the practices of institutional racism in the processes of land expulsion. In addition to working with other local neighbourhood associations fighting against urban removal, Gamboa de Baixo's neighbourhood association finds political support from NGOs and race-based organisations such as United Black Movement and the Black Union for Racial Equality. Though revitalisation programmes are never discussed publicly by the state in terms of being racial projects, black women confirm their racial and class claims when they link their struggle with other targeted black communities, identifying blackness as a pattern in urbanisation programmes. Through working with other communities around similar issues of social and economic rights, women acquire a broader consciousness of shared experiences with racial injustice as black and poor people.

Residents, we need to stay mobilised and alert for the violent and arbitrary actions that are being taken by the mayor and the state government ... When they announced the cleansing, before the elections, it was not just trash that they want to remove from the centre of the city, but also the blacks, the poor people, the beggars, the street vendors, the street children and everything that they think dirties the city. We are not going to let them treat us like trash. We are working people and we have rights. (Gamboa de Baixo community bulletin, 1997)

Racial and gender solidarity is a crucial approach to strengthening their community movement. In Salvador, women activists in Gamboa working in alliances with similar organisations speak out against the 'cleansing' of poor blacks from the centre of the city and associated 'slum-clearance' with 'black clearance'.<sup>7</sup> Their struggle reflects the racialised circumstances in which they organise and the racialised conditions against which they fight.

France Winddance Twine writes that black Brazilians' failure to recognise institutional racism is one primary explanation for the paucity of anti-racist movements (1998, p. 63). Twine (p. 9) claims that Afro-Brazilian movements have been unsuccessful because most Afro-Brazilians tend to reject a bi-polar racial model and continue to accept the ideology of racial democracy. Black political mobilisation throughout the city of Salvador against racist practices of spatial displacement of black communities challenges this view. Gamboa de

Baixo is an example of black Brazilian's recognition, as blacks, that they bear the impact of urban revitalisation. Black women realise that they are 'capable of changing history' and voice concerns against the clearance of urban land. They organise politically against the displacement of thousands of poor blacks to the periphery of Salvador that worsen their already difficult economic situations. During these moments when even city officials have said in public forums 'they didn't think that 'those black women were going to speak' (Dona Ladi, personal interview 2000), the black women of Gamboa de Baixo actively speak out against 'slum clearance' programmes targeting black communities. Black women's participation in this social movement is an important assertion of their voice in urban space discourses that previously had silenced them.

For blacks, contesting racial domination has meant reclaiming collective power through redefinitions of blackness. Reconstructing political identities based on their own understanding of themselves as black is a source of black women's empowerment necessary for political action. As Alicia explains,

I thought it was really important to speak about our pride in our skin, in our color, in our race. What I liked more was to look in his [any city official] eyes, and say it like this, that 'I am black, with pride'. We didn't go to beg them for anything. We wanted our rights. It's important for us to arrive there and say, I am black, but I am black with pride. I am proud of who I am. I didn't come here to beg from you. I want my rights. The rights are mine. (personal interview, 2000)

To be taken seriously as poor blacks is an important task for the Gamboa de Baixo community and political organisation. Women often explain that their participation in this movement transforms their previous sense of powerlessness as poor black women within the racist structures of urban governance. Alicia also mentions that,

if they slammed their hands on the table, we slammed loudly too, looking at them in their faces, things I would not have done before and today I do them ... I learned that we can't hold our heads down because we're poor, because we're black women. (personal interview, 2000)

Despite their experiences with disrespectful treatment in their interactions with city officials and police violence, these women find power in the public assertion of their racial and gender identities. In consideration of black women's position at the absolute bottom of the social strata, their actions during meetings and protests mark the struggle to counter their everyday indignant experiences with racism and sexism in the public sphere. More significantly, black women's actions 'in the face' of the government seek to bring attention to the racist core of urban displacement and resistance.

Asserting political power and reconstructing the image of this black community in the centre of Salvador is one important aspect of the social movement for permanence in the area. Gamboa de Baixo's resistance is primarily in defence of citizenship rights for use and control of urban land by the inhabitants. However, Gamboa de Baixo's political organisation has fought to prove their legal ownership of the land. Only a few residents have documentation of

their ownership. Claiming 'native' rights to the land, they rejected official discourses that the community is merely an 'invasion' of marginality or an illegal 'squatter settlement' estimated to be less than 30 years old. A Gamboa de Baixo activist, Vânia, contests this term as inaccurate, considering the history of the population.

I do not see Gamboa as an 'invasion' ... There are already six, seven generations of the same family in Gamboa. That is a lot of time to say that it was invaded, that we invaded. Logically, there were other people who came from the outside, but those are few ... the great majority live here since their grandfathers, grandmothers came here or their grandparents were born here ... That's why when they say it is an invasion, I fight with them [eu brigo] ... Of course, there weren't this many people here, but it is not an invasion. (personal communication, 2000)

Emphasising an extensive history of residence on the land, Vânia defends their cultural difference and historical particularities. The residents involved in political mobilisation against urbanisation projects consider families historically rooted on the land, a land they themselves have developed. They have fought to show that Gamboa de Baixo has its own culture that has developed on the coast and in the fort.

Dona Ritinha (aged 72) recounts in a recent conversation that she came to Gamboa at age ten to live with her father, an officer in the Bahian navy which gave him a house on the land to live in. She stresses the changes that the community has undergone with the expansion of the population, including the fact that her teenage granddaughters are 'so fresh these days' unlike when she was a child. She also defends wholeheartedly the similarity between Gamboa de Baixo and other poor black neighbourhoods in the city of Salvador where the police 'comes down every minute' [*desce toda hora*]. Throughout Bahian history, blacks formed several other fishing communities like Gamboa de Baixo along the coast of the Baía de Todos os Santos. The most notable difference is the presence of the fort — the area of Gamboa de Baixo in which her family still lives. While they had permission to live in the fort area for several decades, her family faces the possibility of removal if the government restores the area. A previously disinterested government who 'abandoned' the fort and the land that 'they've taken care of' showed interest when they perceived the profitability of the site for Bahian cultural tourism (Dona Ritinha, personal interview, 2000).

Using history to claim land rights is a common political strategy for urban black communities of resistance such as Gamboa de Baixo. Collective memory of ownership is a useful way for black Brazilians to contest racial hegemony, to use history as an interpretive tool of collective defiance, empowerment, and solidarity (Hanchard, 1994, pp. 150–53). Hanchard writes,

'other' memories must compete with a 'public past' that is itself the result of the ability of a dominant social group to preserve certain recollections, *deemphasise* or otherwise *exclude* others. (1994, p. 151, author's emphasis).

History that has been cultivated from a position of marginality operates in opposition to singular notions of history as cultural dominance. Activists such as black women in Gamboa have produced their own collective memory to question constructions of local and national memories articulated by those in power. Yet, as Hanchard argues, while these memories are necessary to critique dominant constructions of the past, they are insufficient to 'overrule' contemporary practices of discrimination.

While I recognise some of the limitations Michael Hanchard describes, collective memory *is* the principal means of defining Gamboa de Baixo's identity in relation to this urban space. Historical knowledge functions as an alternative myth-making process that rearticulates the experiences of subalterns. This approach in black urban communities such as Gamboa de Baixo is a significant form of social activism in contemporary Brazil. In fact, they use social memory, a necessary basis of counterhegemony, not just to further culturalist politics but as a basis for engagement in 'real clash' politics. In particular, a radical revision of Brazilian local and national history is crucial for Afro-Brazilian collective racial claims to land in urban communities.

Making historical claims, Gamboa de Baixo activists demand the legalisation of individual and collective land ownership and the authorisation of its permanent use and control. They also demand the cancellation of revitalisation programmes for the coastal areas that involve the removal of the local inhabitants. This demand of land ownership considers urbanisation a necessary part of permanence, but urbanisation defined as their 'citizenship right to better conditions for survival' (Selena, personal interview, 2000). The Gamboa de Baixo neighbourhood association offer re-interpretations of urbanisation projects in the following terms:

the improvement of the quality of the urban environment and the quality of the lives of the low-income populations of big cities, have as the premise the participation of communities ... the interests of the communities in question. (neighbourhood association communiqué, 1997)

Residents redefine urbanisation as the 'greater integration with other neighbourhoods of the city' and not 'slum clearance' or black land expulsion. Urbanisation, as the Gamboa de Baixo political organisation defines it, requires that black and poor people participate as actors in the development of the material conditions of their communities. Decision-making includes issues such as the expansion of housing, sanitation, electricity and water. Urbanisation in Gamboa de Baixo is not about aesthetic changes for future tourism but for black residents who envision healthier futures on the land. Changes in social conditions are for everyone, and not just for a few (neighbourhood association communiqué, 1997). Providing alternative proposals for urbanisation, Gamboa de Baixo attempts to transform the view of how Brazilian society works in ways that positively transforms poor black communities.

The struggle in Gamboa de Baixo is effective in delaying plans of relocation to the periphery and for the improving of material conditions and resources within the community. Black women activists understand these resources as

elements of citizenship rights for black communities. The struggle to gain access to additional resources such as employment has been unsuccessful and the government has failed to issue documentation of legal land ownership. However, activists understand their political efforts to be part of a continued struggle for greater participation in the urban public sphere. Today, there is relative political tranquility. Over the past two years, their forms of social activism have changed since the threat and fear of relocation has become less immediate. They organise fewer protests outside of the community and meet within the community primarily around issues of improvement in infrastructure.

Gamboia de Baixo continues to face the possibility of spatial displacement even with recent state investment in their everyday living conditions such as the construction of hundreds of new homes. As Alicia says about their grassroots movement, 'the truth is that the struggle never ended. It's just a little calm right now, but we'll have to start all over again' as the government follows through with plans for waterfront development (personal interview, 2000). Another activist, Maria, states that future mobilisation in the city will be even more complex and painful than past actions. By complicated, she means,

Although you live for thirty years in a wooden shack and you love that shack, people have this thing, this sentiment for the material good ... then, the government comes and says, 'no, I give you a brick house in another place', and you leave, they call them 'shanties', 'leave these 'shanties' and living with rats'. And when you are in a brick house, again the government says it will give you a better one in another place. You say, 'no, but mine is also made of stone and I like it here, here is where I want to stay'. Then, if before you had feelings of love for that place, that house, now, that multiplied, doubled, you know. Because you live in place that you like and that has a certain comfort that works for you, you know, to live, to live well. Then, it's going to be more complex. A lot more. The struggle is going to be more *assirrada* [arduous], much more difficult, and I hope that we are well prepared because that nautical [development] project makes promises, and it promises a lot. The government does not plan to give up because of Gamboia. And Gamboia does not plan to give up because of the nautical project. (personal interview, 2000)

Activists continue to participate in solidarity with other communities around issues of urbanisation and land rights. Everyday struggles revolve around efforts to maintain and increase improved conditions in the community. Nevertheless, as Alicia states above, the future development of Salvador's urban waterfront is still probable, and urban renewal for tourism promises the exclusion of Gamboia de Baixo residents. She predicts that their exclusion will again produce fear and stir powerful sentiments of mass mobilisation in defense of their territorial rights. The black struggle for collective permanence and land rights is ongoing.

## Conclusion

Urban spaces are terrains of constant struggle for black and poor people. The Gamboa de Baixo cultural tourism project and the exclusion of its black population demonstrate the discursive and material realities of systemic racial inequality. Official accounts assert that some measure of success has been achieved in the implementation of urban economic and social reform. However, an alternative assessment leads to the conclusion that urban renewal often has been far less than a panacea to economic and social ills. As multinational investors fund urban renewal projects designed to alleviate 'visible' poverty and facilitate rapid economic growth around cultural tourism, the government has increasingly expelled '*o negro pobre do centro da cidade*' [the black poor from the centre of the city] to its margins.

Specifically, I illustrated that urban development projects are oftentimes institutionalised racial projects of spatial exclusion. For Salvador's leaders, aesthetic and economic development depends on the exclusion of blacks and their subsequent relocation to the city's geographical periphery. Paradoxically, the presence of blacks is not just an obstacle to urban modernisation. Their presence is necessary insofar as they contribute to the reification of Brazilian national identity through commodified minstrelisation, folklorisation, and fetishisation of black culture and history. However, without inclusion of the communities which traditionally produce that culture. There is no space for black people themselves.

Political movements have emerged in response to unequal socioeconomic and racial segregation in city planning. Gamboa de Baixo's political organisation is just one example of a black community actively engaged in protest against the racist politics of exclusion underlying urban revitalisation programmes. Organising as blacks, they have led the attack against 'slum clearance' or the 'cleansing' of blacks and poor people from economically profitable spaces.

This ethnographic analysis of the grassroots organisation in Gamboa de Baixo illustrates how blacks *have* mobilised politically on the basis of black identity and in pursuit of concrete political objectives centred on their rights to land. In the Bahian urban centre, permanent territorial rights constitute a local idiom for the affirmation of black consciousness and cultural insurgency. Contrary to France Winddance Twine's and at least in degree to Michael Hanchard's analyses of black politics, the reformulation and reinterpretation of black cultural identities in contemporary Northeastern Brazil *do* translate into social and economic projects that resist institutional racism embedded in projects of urbanisation. Black grassroots organisations such as the neighbourhood movement of Gamboa de Baixo have identified racism as an aspect of social inequality in Brazilian urban communities. The fact that blacks feel that they are disproportionately subjected to urban removal and land expulsion is a central issue in black political organisation. These urban communities conceptualise their experiences with marginalisation as a facet of black racialisation. As a result, blacks use their racial, gender, and class identities to protest against institutional mechanisms of racial inequality that utilise spatial displacement as an acceptable form of urban transformation.

In sum, urban revitalisation programs in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil are racist social policies against poor blacks. I showed the ways in which the centrality of black women's participation in grassroots organising has influenced the articulation of racial and gender identity politics in urban struggles against spatial displacement and relocation. Focusing on activists' narratives and actions of contestation, I establish the idea that black social activism in Brazil has emerged, primarily led by women at the community level in struggles for access to material resources in urban spaces such as land and housing. Again, grassroots activism in Gamboa de Baixo forces us to rethink black resistance as well as to reconsider the ways in which blacks offer alternative views on the way Brazilian society operates and should operate.

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### Notes

1. This and all other names used to represent Gamboa de Baixo women are pseudonyms. I conducted ethnographic interviews with women activists (Cristina, Nana, Dona Ladi, Alicia, Vânia, Selena, Maria, Dona Ritinha) in July and August of 2000.
2. Like the MNU, UNegro organises around issues of race in Salvador and engages in grassroots activism against racist practices such as police brutality and homelessness. It also promotes black pride and racial consciousness in cultural activities, but has organised heavily around black participation in Salvador's municipal government.
3. The term 'privileged' is a direct translation from the Portuguese word '*privilegiado*'. It appears ironic and confusing that the government and the neighbourhood itself refers to the Gamboa community as 'privileged', but they are not referring to racial or class status. They refer to the actual dollar value of the land Gamboa de Baixo occupies, beachfront and ocean view real estate in the city centre of Salvador.
4. In his study of homeless populations in Chicago, Talmadge Wright (1997) concludes, 'the consequence of city redevelopment for the very poor and homeless is dispersion to the city periphery or to the interstices between developed city locations' (1997, p. 89). Wright's text defends the idea that exclusion is perceived as a 'natural' by-product' (p. 89) of city development and gentrification as the government tries to restructure the economic profitability of urban spaces. Economically profitable spaces depend on the exclusion of certain segments of the population or what other authors including Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen (2000) call the inevitable creation of the 'excluded ghetto' (p. 19) by urban renewal programmes. By this, they mean the establishment of 'new ghettos' where '*race or ethnicity is combined with class in spatially concentrated area whose residents are excluded from the economic life of the surrounding society, which does not profit from its existence*' (author's emphasis, p. 19).

5. Massey and Denton (1993) identify spatial segregation as one 'forgotten factor' in documenting anti-black racism.
6. Both Gregory (1998) and Sugrue (1996) discuss the link between 'slum clearance' and 'black clearance' in urban renewal programmes.
7. Lúcio Kowarick and Clara Ant (1994), examining the case of São Paulo, write that 'the idea of cleansing the city' of its 'slums' with increased economic development is an old one'.

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