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Queering Tradition:
LGBT+ Cultural Production in the Brazilian Northeast

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Queering Tradition:
LGBT+ Cultural Production in the Brazilian Northeast

by

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Dedication

To my Mom and Dad for their unconditional love and support. They have been here since the beginning.
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Abstract

Queering Tradition:
LGBT+ Cultural Production in the Brazilian Northeast

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This dissertation investigates how queerness is expressed through traditional forms of culture in a digital age while critically engaging anti-colonial mobilizations of queer theory. Traditional culture with rural origins is rarely imagined as a site of LGBT+/queer community formation. This is largely due to the ways in which contemporary notions of LGBT+ identity have developed in conjunction with European and North American urbanism. In the Brazilian Northeast, rural representations of the region have always predominated over urban ones, centering the desert-like *sertão* and patriarchal plantation as characteristic of a static, backwards, and closed region. In the context of these conservative visions of the region, I investigate queerness in Northeastern society and culture. I focus on traditional forms of culture that are practiced throughout the region, in rural and urban areas, including *quadrilha* dance performances, *cordel* folk poetry, and the ephemeral spaces of traditional June festivals. Many of them date from the Portuguese colonial era, with ideological messages that echo the dicta of Catholic morality. My field site is the mid-sized capital city of Natal in the state of Rio Grande do Norte and surrounding rural areas. Natal-RN, is part of a transnational contact zone of "imperial formation" (Stoler, McClintock), hosting thousands of U.S. soldiers during World War II. It is also characterized by a

peripheral modernity – unevenly developed, with many vestiges of pre-modern socio-economic relations.

Based in an interdisciplinary, cultural-studies-grounded approach, this project reads physical spaces, artistic performances, historical images, and oral poetry as texts which visibilize queer, racialized Northeastern subjectivities. I draw on feminist, queer, and intersectional traditions to examine what type of LGBT+ representations are present in Northeastern culture and how they work *in*, *on*, and *against* hetero-patriarchal hierarchies imposed by colonialism. I also investigate how subordinated subjects negotiate the cultural order imposed by modern forms of empire. Dialoging with women of color and trans feminisms, this project destabilizes binaries and contributes to the elaboration of an intersectional trans-feminist framework that bridges conversations in Latin America and the United States. It complicates representations of the Brazilian Northeast as rural, or "anti-modern," and therefore unwelcoming of alternative sexualities and gender expressions.

Keywords: *cordel* literature, *quadrilha* dance performance, *festas juninas*, Natal-RN, gender, sexuality, intersectionality, teoria do cu, feminism.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: QUEERING TRADITION: LGBT+ CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS IN THE BRAZILIAN NORTHEAST 1
O Nordeste Nordestino: Race and Ethnicity in the Brazilian Northeast 4
Mobilizing Queer Theory in the Brazilian Northeast: *Antropofagia Queer, Transviadismos e Feminismo Negro* 6
Antropofagia and Queer Theory in Brazil *8*
Black Feminism and a Transnational, Anti-Colonial Queer Theory *15*
An Invitation into Queerness *17*
On Trans Identities in Brazil 21
Chapter Outline 26

CHAPTER ONE: MARIA BOA, WOMEN, PROSTITUTION, AND THE QUEER SUBJECT IN THE BRAZILIAN NORTHEAST 31
"Maria Boa pra todos" 31
Introduction: Maria Boa, A Fluctuating Queer Subject 32
Maria Boa in the *Sertão*: Gender and Sexuality in the Brazilian Northeast 37
Maria Boa in the City: Women of Color and Imperial Formations in Natal 1937-1947 49
"They don't make them like they used to," Sex Work Then and Now 64
Conclusion 71

CHAPTER TWO: QUEER SPACE IN THE FESTAS JUNINAS OF NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL 73
"Quadrilha Junina" 73
Introduction: *As Festas Juninas* 73
Queer Spatialities and (LGBT+) Geographies of Natal 76
The Arraiá do GAMI 83
LGBT+ Women in Queer Space and Time 86
Virtual Networks and Hybrid Flows: Theorizing Women-Centered LGBT+/Queer Space 89
Getting Together: Defining Physical, Auditory, and Visual Space for LGBT+ Women at the *Arraiá do GAMI* 94
Quadrilha Performances Within the Ephemeral Spaces of the *Festas Juninas* 101
A Quadrilha Vice-Versa, Contra o Preconceito *107*
"Maria Boa: Uma historia junina que ninguém contou" 109
Theme and Category: A Marriage in a Brothel *111*
Queer Characters of Maria's Cabaré *115*
Conclusion 119

CHAPTER THREE: QUEERING THE CORDEL, LGBT+ THEMES IN CORDEL LITERATURE 122
NATASHA TRAVA MACHO 122
Introduction: Cordel Literature 123
Context/Literature Review 126
Cordéis Collected in Field Research 130
The Moralizing Cordel 133
LGBT+ Visibilidades 143
The Gay Cordel *143*
"Tricked by a Travesti" *156*
LGBT+ Invisibilidades 167
LGBT+ Women in the Cordel *170*

Taking on Genre: Women Writers and Activist Cordéis: *175*
THE CYBER CORDEL 184
CONCLUSION: PROJETO LAMPIOA 186
CONCLUSION: *UMA TEORIA DO CU* 189
APPENDIX – CORDÉIS INCLUDED IN CHAPTER THREE (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE) 197
BIBLIOGRAPHY 199
VITA 217

List of Figures

Figure 1: The "Heartland of the Folheto" including the Northeastern States of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Ceará (Slater 1982). 4
Figure 2: Luiz Gonzaga, one of the of the most important figures of Northeastern cultural production and musica popular brasileira 5
Figure 3: Meme author found circulating on Facebook which demonstrates an "Invitation into heteronormativity" (July, 2014). 18
Figure 4: (Left) Rebecka de França, president of Antransparência-RN, during a campaign for official recognition of social names, 2015 and 2018. (Right) Post on Rebecka's Facebook wall December, 2012. 23
Figure 5: Author with Joyce Costa and Rebecka da França at an event in solidarity with the victims of the Orlando Shooting (Natal-RN, June 2016). 25
Figure 6: Maria Boa, a fluctuating queer subject 33
Figure 7: Map showing a possible Axis invasion via Natal in the March 2, 1942 edition of Life Magazine 50
Figure 8: F.D. Roosevelt (left) and Gétulio Vargas (back) in Natal (1943) 53
Figure 9: Map of Ribeira (red) and Cidade Alta (gray). The Potenji River meets the Atlantic at the top. 56
Figure 10: The "well-appointed homes" of Cidade Alta and a group of "young Brasileiros out on the town" in the bustling commercial streets of Ribeira (Harrison 2011). 57
Figure 11: Maria's name on a B-25 Bomber (Arquivo da Força Aérea Brasileira) 58
Figure 12: Maria Boa's portrait (Vivane and Farias 2010) 59
Figure 13: Photos of Brazilian Sex Workers preparing for the World Cup (Tama/Getty Images 2014) . 65
Figure 14: Natal's Zones and Neighborhoods (SETUR-RN, 2015) 77
Figure 15: Pontes Igapó (left) and Newton Navarro (right) 78
Figure 16: Facebook cover photo advertising the Arraiá do GAMI 94
Figure 17: Statue of inter-racial lesbian couple by main stage at the 2014 arraiá 97
Figure 18: Religious banner of Mary and baby Jesus at the 2014 Arraiá do GAMI 97
Figure 19: Attendees in the Espaço Nana Banana during the Arraiá do GAMI (2014) 98
Figure 20: Senhoras dancing Carimbó at the Arraiá (2014) 98
Figure 21: Author with Rebecka, Maria, Eduardo and friends at the Arraiá do GAMI (2014). 99
Figure 22: The banner of the Quadrilha Vice-Versa before the performance (Photo by author) 107
Figure 23: Dancers of the Quadrilha Vice-Versa after the performance (Photo by author) 108
Figure 24: Maria Boa atop her stage in the opening scenes of Brilho Potiguar's 2015 performance. .. 109
Figure 25: Stylized costumes of Act I: Cabaré Ladies and Clients: As Belas Meninas de Maria Boa" Militares Americanos, e Homens da Alta Sociedade Natalense. 112
Figure 26: Dancers in "Junine" Costumes during Act II 112
Figure 27: A Wedding in a Brothel: Maria's goddaughter and the U.S. serviceman get married in the cabaré 114
Figure 28: A Queer Couple: Maria Boa and her dance partner pictured next to the married couple and the Dama da Noite 115
Figure 29: The gay fashion aesthetic of the Amigo Gay 116
Figure 30: Elenco Teatral 2015: A Cafetina, A Faxineira, O Amigo Gay, and A Beata 117
Figure 31: Slater's "Heartland of the Folheto" including the Northeastern States of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Ceará (1982) 130
Figure 32: Cover Art O Povo Desembestado (Ramalho 1980) 133
Figure 33: The author with Doutores da Prevenção passing out sexual health information during the Festas Juninas in Campina Grande, 2015 141
Figure 34: Cordel distributed by Doutores da Prevenção, Campina Grande, June 2015 142
Figure 35: Cover of O cangaceiro gay (Abaeté 2009) 145
Figure 36: Cover Art, A Primeira Vez de Um Gay (Abaeté 2010) 149
Figure 37: The two versions and covers of "Alexandre" 157
Figure 38: Cover variation of Mané reacting to the "arma"(Acervo M.A. Amorim) 165
Figure 39: Cover art for Corno (Nawara, 2013) 171

Figure 40: Cover of Julia e Bernadete (Abaeté 2016) 172
Figure 41: Cover art for "Travesti" (Arraes 2015) 177
Figure 42: Cover of Lesbecause (Silva 2008) 181
Figure 43: Online image associated with cordel "Maria, Helena" (2008) on Silva's blog Cordelirando 183
Figure 44: Natal "no cu do elefante" of Rio Grande do Norte state 191
Figure 45: Jota Mombaça, The Feel of a Problem, Berlin Biennale 10 #1 Public Program. Photo: Anthea Schaap 193

Introduction: Queering Tradition: LGBT+ Cultural Productions in the Brazilian Northeast

Traditional culture with rural origins is rarely imagined as a site of LGBT+/queer[1] community formation. This is largely due to the ways in which contemporary notions of LGBT+ identity have developed in conjunction with European and North American urbanism. In the Brazilian Northeast, rural representations of the region have always predominated over urban ones, centering the desert-like *sertão* and patriarchal plantation as characteristic of a static, backwards, and closed region. In the context of these conservative visions of the region, this dissertation investigates queerness in Northeastern society and culture. I focus on traditional forms of culture that are practiced throughout the region, in rural and urban areas, including *quadrilha* dance performances, *cordel* folk poetry, and the ephemeral spaces of traditional June festivals. Many of them date from the Portuguese colonial era, with ideological messages that echo the dicta of Catholic morality. My field site is the mid-sized capital city of Natal in the state of Rio Grande do Norte and surrounding rural areas. Natal is characterized by a peripheral modernity - a form of modernity assumed in spaces of supposed historical backwardness and under-development (WREC 2010). These spaces have been conditioned by their positions on the periphery of the world capitalist system (Rowe and Schelling 1991) and assume different rhythms of modernity from developed areas (Martins 2000). In his exploration of the contradictions of modernity in Brazil, José de Souza Martins describes modernity as consisting of "unequal rhythms of economic and social development, in turn produced by accelerated technological advances and disproportional capital accumulation" (2000; 249). As a capital city,

[1] Here I use the combined terms "LGBT+ and queer" to contribute to the elaboration of intersectional feminist framework that bridges conversations in Latin America and the United States. A discussion of the tensions and complexities surrounding this terminology and its implications follows later in this introduction.

Natal is a modern urban center, yet as part of the Brazilian Northeast, it is also stereotyped as a backward city in an underdeveloped region. Beyond stereotypes, it displays what Martins refers to as the "abnormalities of modernity:" behaviors, gestures, and mentalities where cultural hybridity and dissimulation makes themselves present (261). These include valuing the inauthentic images of modernity over modernity itself, "to look modern, more than actually to be modern" (Martins 2000; 259). This dissimulation is reflected in the success of imitation brands or the prevalence of commodified luxury items such as televisions, perfumes, and watches in poor, shanty neighborhoods of Natal. Compounded by regional underdevelopment, Natal's partial modernity embodies contradictions of modernity in Northeastern Brazil. Natal is also part of a transnational contact zone of "imperial formation,[2]" hosting thousands of soldiers during World War II at the United States airbase at Parnamirim Field. My research examines articulations of queerness in spaces that have been coded as traditional, anti- or only partially modern, and generally unwelcoming of alternative sexualities and gender expressions.

Based in an interdisciplinary, cultural-studies-grounded approach, this project reads physical spaces, artistic performances, historical images, and oral poetry as texts which visibilize queer, racialized Northeastern subjectivities. I draw on feminist, queer, and intersectional traditions to examine what type of LGBT+ representations are present in Northeastern culture and how they work *in*, *on*, and *against* hetero-patriarchal hierarchies imposed by colonialism. I also investigate how subordinated subjects negotiate the cultural order imposed by modern forms of empire associated with heteropatriarchy, nationalism, and capitalist globalization. Dialoging with women of color and trans feminisms this project destabilizes binaries and contributes to the

[2] Scholars of "imperial formations" define these contemporary forms of empire as ongoing practices of expansion, conquest, dominance, and exploitation that are mediated through institutions of power – such as the media, nationalism, and capitalism (Stoler et al (2007), McClintock (1995)).

elaboration of an intersectional trans-feminist framework that bridges conversations in Latin America and the United States.

This research contributes to the fields of LGBTQ studies, Latin American Studies, and cultural studies by researching previously undocumented LGBT+ communities and cultural productions and expanding the limited research on LGBT+ culture outside of Europe and the United States. It upends both popular imaginaries and scholarly thinking on gender and sexuality in Brazil examining how queer communities reinvent tradition and re-claim space in the Brazilian Northeast. This work complicates representations of the region as rural or "anti-modern," and therefore, unwelcoming of alternative sexualities and gender expressions. The primary sources of my study have not been previously researched in academic literature, yet they represent important expressions of LGBT+ culture and socio-political life. This is the first scholarly project to explore queerness within traditional Northeastern culture. Existing literature on LGBT+ culture focuses on the Brazilian (urban) South (Green (1999), Parker (1991)); while scholarship on cultural productions of Northeastern Brazil (Rowe & Schelling (1991), Slater (1982), Costa (2015), Chianca (2007)) highlights only their articulation of heteronormative values. This project also contributes to the fields of intersectional feminism and decolonial queer theory and examines LGBT+ subjectivities as they are expressed through folk traditions, popular artistic performances, and ephemeral spatial practices in Latin America. This work insists on the relevance of popular culture as a site for queer, feminist intervention and maintains that the new worlds imagined within popular cultural productions directly contribute to the transformation of oppression – suggesting alternate social orders, modeling strategies for resistance, and creating community for survival. Thus it helps us to understand the strategies LGBT+ individuals employ in traditional socio-cultural settings to define their own subjectivities and contest

negative/reductionist narratives regarding queerness. By demonstrating how Northeastern culture holds space for marginalized subjectivities and how LGBT+ communities make space for themselves within traditional culture, I suggest that queerness is part of an adaptable culture which is finding new paths and modes of expression through queer, trans, feminist and intersectional voices of the 21st century.

***O Nordeste Nordestino*: Race and Ethnicity in the Brazilian Northeast**

The linguistic, cultural, and political specificities of Brazil provide a complex socio-political terrain for mobilizing queer theory. Analyzing LGBT+ cultural productions of the Brazilian Northeast, this project recognizes that the Northeast is a geo-political construct which relies on a broad cultural/ethnic category of "*nordestino.*" This category subsumes blackness and indigeneity to construct *sertanejo* cultural affinities rather than racial ones. The map in *figure* 1 reappears later in this dissertation as it delineates what Candace Slater refers to as "*the heartland of the folheto*" in her influential book on Northeastern cordel literature. Here it is important as it articulates the geographical space associated with *sertanejo* culture and ethnicity. Despite forming part of the current Northeast region, the state of Bahia is excluded from these constructs. In my own research, I also encountered the states of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Ceará as the "heartland" of the specific cultural productions with which I engage, including the *festas juninas*, *quadrilha* dance competitions, and *cordel* literature.

Figure 1: The "Heartland of the Folheto" including the Northeastern States of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Ceará (Slater 1982).

Historian Courtney Campbell notes that the states of Bahia and Sergipe were not included as part of the Northeast in the first census to split the nation into regions in 1940.[3] It was not until 1970 that Bahia and Sergipe officially joined the region, however there were many who disagreed with the inclusion of Bahia citing its distinct Afro-Brazilian culture as evidence of its difference from the rest of the Northeast (Campbell, 2014; 23). Campbell attributes this exclusion to Salvador's powerful political and economic position as a port city and colonial capital with its own political, social, and cultural figures (301). However, it is also yet another exclusion of blackness as "other." While Northeastern identity is also imagined as "other," Bahia presents a different model. One cannot ignore the white supremacist and colonial frameworks through which the lines and boundaries of the Brazilian nation have been drawn.

Additionally, the popular culture industry has contributed to the absorption of indigeneity and blackness into the broad ethnic/cultural category of "*nordestino.*" In his study of the *festas juninas* in Bahia, ethnomusicologist Jeff Packman reads *sertanejo* culture through the music genre of *forró*, the popular music of the *festas juninas.* He notes, that *forró* is "commonly understood as Brazilian country music rooted in Brazil's rural northeast, well north of Bahia." (2015; 259). While *forró* developed in the hinterlands of states such as Pernambuco, Packman argues that its regional and racial mappings are very much a result of its history as a commercial popular music produced and disseminated in Brazil's urban south (259). Specifically, he cites the famous musician, Luiz Gonzaga - a *caboclo* migrant from the Northeast - as a model image of *sertanejo* culture (*figure 2*). Historian Bryan McCann argues that Gonzaga's success

Figure 2: Luiz Gonzaga, one of the of the most important figures of Northeastern cultural production and musica popular brasileira

[3] This census included Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, and Alagoas as the seven Northeastern states.

depended on the marketing of his own cultural authenticity (2004). A Northeastern migrant in Rio de Janeiro, he "stopped identifying himself as a mulatto" and "stopped trying to pass culturally for a Carioca" (117). Instead, he encouraged an "understanding of *nordestino* as a race unto itself," apparent in the title of his 1974 album, "*Sangue nordestino*" (McCann 2004; 117). While the "heartland" of the Northeast is characterized by significant elements of blackness and indigeneity, it is not scripted as a black or indigenous territory. Geography, politics, demographics, and cultural industries, among other socio-political forces, have located indigeneity in the Amazon, blackness in Bahia, and *sertanejo* culture in the rural spaces of the Northeastern *sertão*. Of course, rural *sertanejo* culture exists in Bahia, blackness exists throughout Brazil, and indigeneity exists outside of the Amazon. Given this complex socio-political terrain, this project discusses queerness in the Brazilian Northeast while acknowledging the hierarchies, processes of power, and socio-political exclusions that have shaped these spaces and cultural forms.

Mobilizing Queer Theory in the Brazilian Northeast: *Antropofagia Queer, Transviadismos e Feminismo Negro*

Nossa drag não é a mesma do capítulo 3 do Problemas de Gênero, de Judith Butler (2003), nem temos exatamente as drag king das oficinas de montaria de Beatriz Preciado, ou sequer podemos falar do homossexual do mesmo modo de David Halperin, ou da aids, como o fez Michel Warner. Nosso armário não tem o mesmo formato daquele de Eve Sedgwick
- Larissa Pelúcio, 2014

"*Jamais serei Judith Butler, mas sendo mais próximo de Nízia Floresta me contento com a tradução cultural que posso fazer da Butler e de suas teorias, numa infidelidade criativa que me surpreende e cria algo novo.*
- Pêdra Costa, 2015

Like most scholars writing from subaltern positionalities, Brazilian theorists[4] such as those cited above approach queer theory as a space of political struggle: an arena in which ideas clash as they attempt to confront the multiple oppressions, including violent histories of slavery and colonization. While Spanish-speaking scholars and activists have re-appropriated and latinoamericanized "*cuir/kuir*" and Brazilian scholars have explored the notion of "queer anthropophagy," the term "queer" has not made its way into public discourse in Brazilian Portuguese. In everyday language Brazilians use more individualized terms such as "*lésbica*," "*gay*," "*travesti*" or "*não-binário*" for self-identification. In the Northeast, it is not uncommon for people to express anti-normative sexuality elliptically in expressions such as "*ela é*," "*ele faz parte do time*," or by conflating sexuality and gender identity[5], "*ele é uma menina*." People will also commonly re-appropriate slang terms such as "*bicha*" "*viado*" (faggot) or "*sapatão*" (dyke) which are otherwise used pejoratively. In activist circles, acronyms are most commonly used to reference the LGBT+ community including *Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Travestis, Transexuais, e Transgêneros*. The acronym(s) are often updated and appear in different iterations, for example sometimes with a double or triple "T."[6] In this dissertation, I utilize the acronym LGBT+ (*lésbica, gay, bi, trans/travesti/transsexual*) to respect the umbrella term most widely used in public, activist discourse in Brazil. As this is an academic space, I also use the term "queer" to contribute to the elaboration of an intersectional feminist framework that bridges conversations in Latin America and the United States. The language and terminology of this dissertation reflect

[4] Brazilians engaging with queerness/queer theory over the past decade include Berenice Bento, Leandro Colling, Pêdra Costa, Guacira Lopes Louro, Richard Miskolci, Jota Mombaça, and Larissa Pelúcio.
[5] Here I note the distinction between sexual and gender minorities. Sexual minorities refer to those who deviate from normative sexual relationships, while gender minorities refer to those who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.
[6] In 2010, the Associação Brasileira de Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Travestis, Transexuais e Intersexos (ABGLT), modified its acronym in favor of "*Travesti e Transexual"* over "*Transgénero*" (Dehesa 2010; xvi). Additionally, the São Paulo Pride parade utilized the acronym LGBTI+ for the first time in June 2018, including a plus sign and an "I" for "Intersex" (Gonzalez 2017).

my own positionality as a queer, non-binary North-American scholar deeply engaged with transnational questions of gender and sexuality in Brazil, the United States, and Latin America.

Antropofagia and Queer Theory in Brazil

While language and geography certainly play a part in the circulation of terms and ideas, the socio-political terrain of Brazil in 1990s also played a large part in early rejections of queer terms and terminology (Dehesa, Pelúcio, Sutherland). In the United States, queer theory developed in response to categorical identity politics which had been dividing gay and lesbian social movements. In Brazil however, queer theory arrived during a process of democratization after over twenty years of military dictatorship. At a time in which identitarian politics were gaining ground in the legislative arena, the anti-identitarian proposal of the queer seemed depoliticizing to LGBT+ activists in Brazil. Here I compare the politicized development of queer theory in the United States to its adaption/appropriation in Mexico and early rejection in Brazil in order to better understand engagements with queerness in language, politics, and identity formation in the Americas.

In the United States, queer theory emerged not only as a critique of identity politics, but also in response to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. This context necessitated a rethinking of identity in terms of affinity rather than essence. It resulted in coalition politics uniting groups across race, gender, and class divides including gay men, lesbians, transsexuals, bisexuals, sex workers, those with HIV/AIDS and the people who cared for them (Saalfield and Navarro 1991). Given the proximity, intersections, overlaps, and political entanglements of the United States in Spanish-speaking Latin America, "queer" has been more readily re-appropriated into Spanish as part of a process of decolonialization. Spanish-speaking scholars and activists have

latinoamericanized the term utilizing "*cuir*" and "*kuir*" to signal non-conformity not only with identity politics, but also with hegemonic geopolitics (Trávez et al (2016), Invasorix[7] (2015)). While some have rejected queer theory as an idealized (neo)colonial/imperialist import (Hija de Perra (2012), Lugones (2012))[8], others have engaged in the work of "translating" or "resintiendo" the queer in the United States, Latin America, and across/beyond/in spite of national borders (Anzaldua, Muñoz, Ruvalcaba, Trávez et al.). For example, literary and cultural studies scholar Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba argues that queerness is, in fact, an "instrument of decolonialization" in which translation plays a key role. To be sure, one of the strategies of queer politics in the United States has been the re-appropriation and re-signification of the term from a derogatory insult to one which indicates a position of radical political activism. Ruvalcaba highlights that Latin American queer studies have always been undertaken in transnational dialogue, implying a constant process and politics of cultural translation (2016). These conversations provide insights into the productive tensions between queer and Latin America, as well as anti-colonial, intersectional, and transnational inquiries into this ever-changing semantic and theoretical field.

In his comparative work on sexual rights movements in emerging democracies, Rafael de la Dehesa provides insights into the political applicability of "queer" in Spanish-speaking

[7] The queer/feminist Mexican art collective Invasorix describes queer theory as it has evolved since the 1990s, "*La teoría queer hace una crítica radical a las convenciones sociales sobre la masculinidad y la feminidad, desnaturalizándolas y buscando una interseccionalidad entre las luchas feministas, LGBTTTI, negras, decoloniales, y en general, reivindicando todas aquellas corporalidades, prácticas e identidades que escapan a las normas sociales, además de que discute las maneras de transgredirlas y transformarlas."* Processes of appropriation and resignification allow them to situate themselves within global geopolitical dialogues, "*Cuir es una desviación fonética del término queer, una apropiación o españolización, que indica una desobediencia a la epistemología anglosajona, señala una condición geopolítica y nos sitúa dentro de las políticas "torcidas-trans-puta-mestisx" en Hispanoamérica. Reconoce el punto de partida epistemológico, mientras que comprende su insuficiencia, para hablar desde el contexto del Sur global. Conservar el queer/cuir es evidenciar un diálogo entre los dos posicionamientos geopolíticos"* (Invasorex 2015).

[8] See Falconí Trávez "La Leyenda Negra Marica" in *Resentir lo queer en América Latina (*2016; 81)

contexts, such as Mexico, as well as an explanation of initial rejections of "queer" in Brazil. Dehesa explains that Mexican activists were initially blocked from the legislative arena and therefore developed a broader, collectivist political frame rather than an identitarian one. They initially focused their efforts on building alliances across the public sphere, especially with feminists. In this way, they organized much like queer movements in the U.S., deploying an expansive frame of sexual diversity that addressed broad questions of gender and sexuality as well as issues that included women's rights, abortion and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS activism, sex work, sex education, and sexual rights. In Brazil, however, queer theory arrived during a process of democratization after over twenty years of military dictatorship. LGBT+ Brazilians were not only threatened by the AIDS crisis, but also targeted by the military regime. Given early success advocating for identity-based rights in the legislative arena, Brazilian LGBT+ activists have tended to adopt identitarian frames to advance their struggle (2010). In contrast to the United States and Mexican contexts, the anti-identitarian proposal of queer theory was rejected by leaders of the *movimento GLBT* as depoliticizing (Pelúcio 2014). Unlike Spanish-speaking Latin America which has engaged with queer studies both politically and theoretically, queer theory has not gained political force in Brazil. As a result, queer theory entered Brazil through the academic and theoretical spaces of the university, not the radical organization of a political movement.

I now turn to Brazilian scholars who propose Brazilian queer theories and terminologies: namely "*transviadismos*" (Bento) and "*antropofagia queer*" (Colling, Neto, Pelúcio). In a special edition of Revista CULT, *Queer: Cultura e Subversões das Identidades,* sociologist Berenice Bento explains her own engagement with queer studies "*o que me parece original nessa perspectiva teórica e politica e a relação que passa a estabelecer com os insultos que*

funcionaram historicamente como dispositivos discursivos que calaram, produziam vergonha e medo entre os gays, as lésbicas, e as pessoas trans" (2015; 23). She notes the power of reappropriating a word meant to silence LGBT+ people as well as the fact that this linguistic context is lost in Portuguese, "*Qual a disputa que se pode fazer com o nome "queer" no contexto brasileiro? Nenhuma*" (Bento 2015; 24). Larissa Pelúcio agrees, "*o desconforto que o termo causa em países de língua inglesa se dissolve aqui na maciez das vogais que nós brasileiros insistimos em colocar por toda parte. De maneira que a intenção inaugural desta vertente teórica norte-americana, de se apropriar de um termo desqualificador para politizá-lo, perdeu-se no Brasil"* (Pelúcio, 2014; 4). When pronounced in Portuguese, especially in an academic environment the word "queer," "*não fere o ouvido de ninguém, ao contrário, soa suave (cuier), quase um afago, nunca uma ofensa* (Pelúcio, 2014; 4). For these reasons Bento has introduced the term "*estudos transviados*" in her work. "*Transviado*" is a word that already exists and has meaning in Portuguese. While "*transviado*" can simply mean "led astray" or "corrupted" in a general sense, the term "*viado*" (faggot) is one of the most common words used to insult someone based on a perceived lack of masculinity. In this way, the (re)appropriation of the term "*transviado*" can symbolically function like "queer" in the United States. While Bento asserts that the word "*transviado*" can signal multiple LGBT+ subjectivities, "*um transviado no Brasil pode ser 'uma bicha louca,' 'um viado,' 'um travesti,' 'um traveco,' 'um sapatão*' (24), I note that it particularly references feminized, gender non-conforming subjects.

Another way in which Brazilian scholars approach queer theory is by reading it through "*antropofagia,*" the cultural and metaphorical cannibalization of outside influences to produce original work and combat Eurocentrism (Colling, Neto, Pelúcio). By adapting concepts originally elaborated in the Brazilian Modernist movement of the 1920s, "*antropofagia queer*"

provides a queer, decolonial methodology for Brazilians engaging with work from Europe and the United States. A movement which claimed a self-conscious stance of absorption (or critical devouring), *antropofagia* blended European avant-garde ideas with Brazilian traditions to create something entirely new. As Beatriz Rezende notes in her essay on Brazilian modernism (2000), "the model for thinking about Brazilian identity and its heterogeneity as a 'constant and partial assimilation of difference' is being refined and questioned by new theoretical advances in the study of race and gender and their advocacy of a 'politics of difference'" (23; 208). While originally elaborated as an aesthetic model, *antropophagia* as a cultural movement has become one of the most important concepts in Brazil in the twentieth century. In his text "Anthropophagic Queer: A Study on Abjected Bodies and Brazilian Queer Theory" (2015) João Nemi Neto insists on anthropophagy's continued relevancy and importance to define local, national practices of reading and producing. He proposes both a queer analysis of the experimental, modernist spirit of *antropofagia* and an anthropophagic reading of queer theory. Neto draws on Silviano Santiago's "space in-between" as well as concepts of the "abject body" to think about how *antropofagia* can help Brazilians "grasp and devour queer theory, drawing our abjected queer bodies into a visible space" (42). He also explains how the Brazilian anthropophagic movement can help reinterpret questions of the relevance of the queer in Brazilian social practices "precisely because it proposes a questioning and re-questioning of the exogenous, assimilating the external while devouring it, and producing, then, a meaningful totemized taboo" (42). Indeed, the anthropophagic project, besides reclaiming Brazil, its popular Northeastern traditions, and indigenous origins, also "tried to bring to light the social advances of some indigenous populations (in Andrade's terms): sexual freedom, liberated bodies and matriarchal societies" (Neto 64). Neto argues that "queer," as a theory invested with colonial

power, "needs to be eaten by Brazilian queer bodies and devoured in ways that would fit their queer needs, thus giving a queer spin on Antropofagia, and creating a continuing dialogue between queer and Antropofagia" (45). The conclusion to this dissertation will explore some of the ways in which queer Brazilians are devouring queer theory.

Queer anthropophagy as a theoretical approach, however, faces some of the same criticisms as modernism in Brazil and queer theory in the United States. While characterized by diverse artists, poets, authors, and thinkers and iterated in phases spanning different decades, anthropophagy circulates more readily in the academy than the streets. As cultural studies scholar Carlos Jáuregui notes, Brazilian modernism was originally elaborated by an urban elite and originated in the mentality created by São Paulo's industrial push for export-oriented capitalism" (2012). In its proposal to consume internal and external cultures to produce an authentically Brazilian aesthetic, it also reinscribed hierarchies of race, ethnicity, gender, geography and knowledge production in Brazil[9]. While individual figures of modernism like Mario de Andrade (who was both gay and mulatto) wrestled with the distance they felt between themselves and working-class racialized Brazilians, Jáuregui argues that modernism as a movement lacked true solidarity with the social and political struggles of Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. He asserts that it was disconnected from any social movement or actual decolonization effort, particularly those of the labor movement and indigenous resistance towards modernization (2012). While queer theory has also been criticized as the development of a white, academic elite[10], it has adapted to changing socio-political contexts over the past twenty

[9] Nelson Pereira dos Santos' 1957 film, *Rio Zona Norte,* links concepts of authentic Brazilian culture and export-oriented capitalism in a cinematic example of how nationalist discourses took up currents of Brazilian modernism as they appropriated subaltern cultures in the name of national unity.
[10] See Farajaje-Jones, Elias. *Ain't I a Queer*. Creating Change Conference of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1995 and Malinowitz, Harriet. "Queer Theory: Whose Theory?" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1993, pp. 168–84.

years. The continued relevancy queer theory can be attributed to its political origins and conceptual fluidity/malleability, but more importantly, its growth is due to the continued investment of scholars, activists, and subaltern subjects situated at different intersections of feminism, indigenous studies, queer of color critique, Latin American studies, disability studies, transfeminisms, and anti-colonial mobilizations of queer theory. A similar investment in queer anthropophagy could create continuing dialogue between queer and *antropofagia*, between Brazil, Latin America, and the United States.

The Brazilian socio-political terrain can only partially explain the absence of "the queer" in Brazilian public discourse in comparison with other Latin American countries. It can be argued that "queer anthropophagy" situates itself towards the colonizers rather than dialoging with others in Latin America. Brazilian scholar Larisa Pelúcio notes a lack of dialogue between Brazil and Latin America, attributing the disconnect to language:

> *Sintomaticamente, dialogamos muito pouco com o resto da América Latina. É como se a língua portuguesa tivesse nos ilhado nesse mar volumoso do idioma espanhol. Tão próximos e tão apartados. De fato, nos conhecemos pouco. Lemo-nos menos ainda* (2014, 7).

While language is certainly a factor, I argue that the lack of a dialogue between Brazil and Latin America in the elaboration of an anti-colonial queer theory is related to the specificities of identitarian political mobilization in Brazil. Given the identitarian frames of LGBT+ activism, political categories of identity and difference have been kept separate. Political mobilization has not incorporated concepts of queerness or intersectionality like in the United States. While in other parts of Latin America there already exists a strong body of knowledge and theoretical

work on *queer mestizaje* (Anzaldua, Arrizón, Barnard, Hendrick, Moraga) and *queer latinidad* (Rivera-Servera, Rodriguez), these dialogues have not crossed over into Brazil. Without political currents of radical coalition organized around intersecting differences, such as those in Mexico, cultural concepts of hybridity in Brazil have been used to flatten or subsume difference, reinscribe margins, and uphold whiteness. As Juana Maria Rodriguez acknowledges in her book *Queer Latinidad,* "cultural identities are very often grounded in hetero-masculinist narratives and highly stratified categories of racialized gender" (2003, 13). As described in the next section, the idea of the Brazilian nation was founded upon racialized regimes of sex. For these reasons, a queer line of inquiry that interrogates race in Brazil would contribute to the elaboration of a transnational, anti-colonial queer framework in the Americas.

Black Feminism and a Transnational, Anti-Colonial Queer Theory

In this dissertation, I utilize a black feminist framework as a point of entry into this line of inquiry in Brazil. Unlike queer theory, black feminism needs no introduction in Brazil. Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first to introduce intersectionality into feminist theory in the United States (1989), but these concepts were already used by women whose lives and forms of resistance were profoundly shaped by multiple oppressions. Around the same time that the Combahee River Collective was articulating its concepts of "simultaneity" in the United States, Afro-Brazilian feminist Leila Gonzalez memorably criticized the lack of intersectional analysis at the National Encounter of Women in 1979 (Swift 2017). Rooted in intersectionality, black feminism interrogates the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality bind together to form multiple axes of oppression. In these ways, black feminism is already queer. By working to destabilize binaries and fixed notions of identity, queerness opposes homonormativity which is

structured around normalized categories of race, class, and gender. Queerness conceptualizes subjectivities as more than one thing at a time, much like intersectionality. A black feminist and intersectional approach is important in Brazil not only because of its political force, but also because of the ways in which the idea of the Brazilian nation was founded upon a racialized regime of sex. Brazilian queer scholars Richard Miskolci and Larrissa Pelúcio note:

> *O ideal de nação que guiou políticas e práticas sociais que orientou nosso desejo de nação foi moldado por fantasias elitistas sobre branquitude que passava necessariamente por um regime erótico específico de racialização do sexo e vinculação entre classe e cor, além da sexualização desprestigiosa dos não-brancos* (Miskolci in Pelúcio 2014).

Black feminism offers a political and theoretical framework which can address these raced, sexed, and gendered "*desejos da nação brasileira*" (Miskolci) while also incorporating queerness.

Furthermore, black feminist scholars and activists have already established a strong dialogue between the United States, Spanish-speaking Latin America, and Brazil seen in the work of Kia Lilly Caldwell, Sueli Carniero, Claudia Lima Costa, Francia Marquez, Tianna Paschel, Keisha-Khan Perry, Dora Santana, Andreia Beatriz dos Santos, Christen Smith, and Erica Williams. The importance and immediacy of these transnational dialogues are expressed in the text "On the Imperative of Transnational Solidarity: A U.S. Black Feminist Statement on the Assassination of Marielle Franco" (2018). In this collective statement, the scholars listed above memorialize Marielle Franco, a "black queer woman, mother, sociologist, socialist, human rights defender, and councilwoman from the favela of Maré" who on the night of her assassination, invoked the words of Audre Lorde "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her

shackles are very different from my own" (1981, "The Uses of Anger"). Centering the lives and experiences of black (queer) women in transnational dialogue, black feminism provides the framework through which queer studies can become relevant, applicable, and accessible in Brazil.

An Invitation into Queerness

Rather than rejecting queer theory as a colonial import, this dissertation mobilizes "queer" as a term with the potential for decolonization and resistance. Here I engage in a close reading of a Brazilian meme which mobilizes normative and binary scripts that separate and other blackness within LGBT+ discourses. Visually represented in a Brazilian context, this "invitation into heteronormativity" is the basis of homonormative scripts I critique in my dissertation. While including wealthy, white, and gender conforming subjects, they exclude those who are poor, black, and gender non-conforming. I utilize this meme to talk about the racial and class implications of homonormativity in Brazil as well as to indicate how the destabilization of queer/heterosexual binaries contributes to my intersectional, queer approach.

I follow the lead of scholars who have positioned queerness as a product of colonization entangled within colonialities of power[11] (Costa (2012), Lugones (2007), Ruvalcaba (2016) Quijano (2000)). I also engage with the work of black feminist scholars who destabilize

[11] In his book *Translating the Queer: Body Politics and Translational Conversations*, Ruvalcaba summarizes the theoretical contributions of "queering of the colonial" including a.) queerness in Latin America is seen as a process of cultural translation whereby the multiplicity of pre-Columbian erotic practices is reduced to a normativized system of sexuality as a political strategy of control of bodies (or a biopolitics); b.) that "colonizers deem nonreproductive sexualities sinful and condemnable/punishable, which in turn enables the emergence of hybrid, underground sexual practices that constitute an archive of the abject; c.) indigenous third-sex theory reveals the conflict between a Western binary gender system and the three-sex system of some Amerindians, exposing homophobia as a colonial strategy; d.) a queer decolonizing proposal would aim not necessarily to reconstruct a native ancestral sex–gender system but rather to dismantle coloniality and disrupt its exclusionary and violent effects (2016; 19).

queer/heterosexual binaries and encourage an intersectional understanding of "queerness" (Cohen (2005), Johnson (2005)). By including those whose race, gender, and class status place them outside of heterosexual privilege, this intersectional framework considers how LGBT+ discourses can become heteronormatized and acquiesce to white supremacy in Brazil. The meme in *figure 3* demonstrates what I call an "invitation into heteronormativity.[12]" It depicts four individuals labeled into different sexual categories: "gay," "faggot," "lesbian," and "dyke." There are several ways in which representations of race, gender, and sexuality are at work in this image. The "gay" and "lesbian" are white; they exemplify traditional masculine and feminine gender norms and elements of each photo suggest wealth. The "*gay*" leans forward, displaying his muscular chest, arms, and abdomen. He wears a watch, gold chain, backwards hat, and black sports shorts. He presses his lips together and looks pleased at his own image reflected back at him through his phone screen. His accessories, the tiled bathroom wall, and the large mirror all suggest wealth as does the fact that he is taking his own photo with his phone. The "*lésbica*" seems to be in a photo shoot on some sort of patio. She plays with her long, straight hair in a feminine gesture as she smiles at the

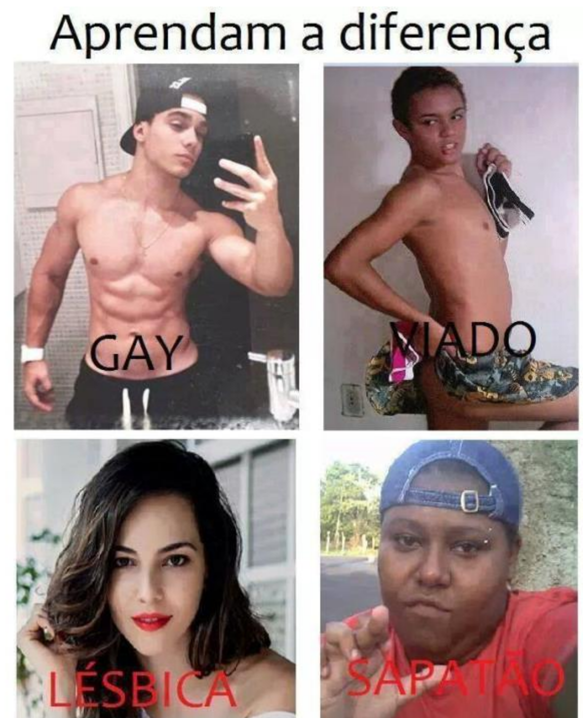

Figure 3: Meme author found circulating on Facebook which demonstrates an "Invitation into heteronormativity" (July, 2014).

[12] A term I began thinking about during a lecture by Dr. Edmund T. Gordon in the course "Black Diaspora and Community Engagement in Brazil" (2014) in which he discussed an "invitation into blackness" within the African Diaspora.

camera. She is wearing bright red lipstick and makeup as well as a shirt which sensually exposes her shoulder. In contrast, the “faggot” and the “dyke” are black; they transgress traditional gender norms, and elements of each photo suggest poverty. The “*viado*” averts his gaze from the camera. He seems to be naked underneath a patterned cloth which he models while holding a pink and black pair of underwear. He does not face the camera, but rather adopts a feminine pose which shows off his thigh and butt. The exposed outlet and plain wall behind him suggest poverty. The “dyke,” like the “gay,” expresses masculinity by pressing her lips together and wearing a backwards hat, but these expressions take on different meaning in combination with her hand signal and location on the street, an unprotected space associated with violence. Unlike the others who display their bodies, she wears a red t-shirt which covers her fat body. She does not wear makeup and her hair is covered by her hat. At the top of all the images, the title reads, “Learn the difference.” The difference is that heteronormativity can include wealthy, white, LGBT subjects who fit gender norms, but necessarily excludes poor, black subjects who cross them. The image relies on a connotative interpretation that is anchored within a specific heteronormative framework. Viewers may interpret the photos differently, however the text places, fixes, and constructs meaning with the assumption that viewers are fluent in the discourses of heteronormativity on which it relies. The juxtaposition of the four images and use of text to establish semantic distinction insists that there is a difference in the photographs and that the categories they represent are fixed. The image works within a binary to solidify white heteronormativity in contrast to black marginality. Here, race rather than homosexuality functions as the organizing principle of the heteronormative/queer binary.

Finally, we cannot take for granted the processes of racial formation at work in this meme. The image is an “extension of racial meaning” to a previously unclassified social group; it

demonstrates the "process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories" (Omi and Winant 1986; 61). Through the racialization of a previously unclassified subgroup of LGBT+ sexualities, the image defines blackness as poverty, as gender non-confirming, as marginal – as queer. Despite assertions that Brazil is a racial democracy in which race is fluid, mixed, and mutable, the image constructs blackness, utilizes blackness as a determining factor of marginality, and separates black subjects as "others." In this way, we can see how all heterosexuals do not have the same access to the power and resources associated with heterosexual privilege (Cohen), and similarly, not all LGBT+ individuals are excluded from the power and resources of heterosexual privilege.

In response to this "invitation into heteronormativity," I suggest an "invitation into queerness" which challenges existing racist, sexist, and heteronormative ideologies associated with colonial and imperialist discourses. In this dissertation, I include as queer subjects those who might be considered heterosexual, such as sex workers. Despite the complexities of applying "queer" in a Brazilian context, it is a useful critical tool with which to theorize issues of gender and sexuality as they intersect with race, ethnicity and class in the Brazilian Northeast[13]. Linked to an intersectional, black feminist framework, queerness can become politically relevant in Brazil. Queer Theory inherently provides space for adaptation, modification, re-appropriation, and dialogue as it theorizes flexible and fluid concepts that move "against the grain[14]" of normativity and dominant paradigms. In a book review which returns to Crenshaw's intersectionality almost thirty years later, Desiree Valentine makes key connections between queerness and intersectionality. She identifies the "unmet challenge of intersectionality" as

[13] In chapter one "Maria Boa: Women, Prostitution and the Queer Subject in northeastern Brazil," I utilize the term "fluctuating queer subject" as a way of negotiating these complexities.
[14] See Maria Lugones's *Pilgrimages/Pereginajes*

thinking through how identity can be "liberatory" (2018; 122). She offers queerness and "identity as movement" frameworks which meet this challenge - thinking of identity not as a stable site but as ongoing practices of coming into being. Queerness destabilizes binaries and fixed notions of identity; it is subversive, ambiguous, and hard to control. As such, queerness and queer politics have the potential to push back against dominant hierarchies of race, region, gender, class, and nationality while disrupting hegemonic mechanisms of power and global imperialist structures. Queerness holds the potential to expand the margins rather than bringing the margins into the center.

On Trans Identities in Brazil

By thinking about gender and sexuality in Brazil through a queer, decolonial, and intersectional framework, this dissertation also visibilizes trans subjectivities. Here I engage briefly with two landmark studies Brazil in order to describe how the trans movement has developed over the past twenty years as well as reiterate how my work intervenes in binary representations of gender and sexuality. Richard Parker's *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil* (1991/2009) and Don Kulick's *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (1999) both present thorough ethnographic studies which investigate the construction of gender, sexuality, and sexual diversity in Brazil. While both authors allude to cross-cultural complexities of sex/gender systems, neither had a developed language of queer theory from which to draw when they conducted their research in the 1980s and 90s. As a result, Parker's book works to understand the constraints surrounding the "Brazilian sexual universe," rather than working to imagine new worlds and new forms of organization. Published at the end of the 1990s when queer theory was taking shape, Kulick's book engages gender beyond the

binary, but it also focuses on one small group at a specific time before the inter-mixings, importations, and inter-connected movements of a (trans)national digital age. My dissertation intervenes to read contemporary LGBT+/queer subjectivities situated within elaborations of queer theory as well as its rejections and re-appropriations. It also situates contemporary sexual and gendered meanings by plotting them into longer historical narratives. For example, Brazilian cordel literature is full of references to gender difference, but they have been explained through sexuality rather than gender difference. My dissertation contributes to the elaboration of trans identities by reading gender difference through global transgender theory and movements.

Kulick's book is among one of the most cited works in English on transgender identities in Brazil. In this intimate and carefully researched ethnography, he presents compelling arguments which situate desire, rather than identity, at the center of sexuality. Following a small group of *travestis* living and working in the Salvador, Bahia, Kulick demonstrates why the signifier "transgender" should be applied cautiously when discussing non-normative gender practices in Brazil. He observes many of the same practices associated with MTF transgender identification in the United States (body modifications, the use of hormones, feminine gender expression etc.), but asserts that "*travestis* think that any male who claims to be a woman is suffering from a psychosis" (191). He argues that *travestis* are simultaneously essentialists and constructionists, adopting feminine names and appearances yet constructing categories of "male" and "female" based on genitalia and sexual roles. He also describes a tension between *travestis* and women which place them in opposition – *travestis* often deal with challenges to their existence by insisting on the superiority of male genitalia and reacting to female genitalia with disgust. This misogynist, transphobic framework leaves little room for coalition between *travestis* and women. It also separates/reinscribes medical sex-gender categories while erasing

travesti desire beyond cisgender men. While it validates the group with which Kulick worked at a specific time, "*travesti* gendered subjectivity" has changed over the past twenty years.

One important change has been the adoption of feminine pronouns as part of a political campaign to affirm *travesti* subjectivities, as I note in my chapter on cordel literature. At the time Kulick conducted his ethnography, the category "*o travesti*" was masculine. Despite their regular use of feminine pronouns (a practice in which gay men engage regularly) the group articulated what Kulick describes as a homosexual male *travesti* subjectivity. However, when I became involved with LGBT+ activism in Brazil in 2010, I worked with *travestis* who taught me that "*a travesti*" was the correct pronoun usage[15]. In fact, this pronoun usage was part of a political campaign which also included the recognition of "*nomes socias,*" (chosen names) on official documents. This change in pronoun usage is an example of the internal dialogues in the Brazilian trans movement and points to important differences in the construction of trans subjectivities across class and generational difference.

Figure 4: (Left) Rebecka de França, president of Antransparência-RN, during a campaign for official recognition of social names, 2015 and 2018. (Right) Post on Rebecka's Facebook wall December, 2012.

In an ethnographic article, "*Travesti", "mulher transexual", "homem trans" e "não binário": interseccionalidades de classe e geração na produção de identidades políticas* (2018),

[15] I also witnessed strong political mobilization of trans organizations across Brazil at an event in Natal on LGBT health and education held at the *Instituto Federal-RN* in 2016. The event included local organizations in Natal, *Atransparência-RN*, *o Grupo Afirmativo de Mulheres Independentes* (GAMI), and national organizations such as *Rede Trans Brasil*, *o Instituto Brasileiro de Transmasculinidade* (IBRAT), and *a Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais* (ANTRA).

Mario Carvalho describes debates within the Brazilian trans movement over the past decade. He cites two debates in particular: the formalization of a "political definition" of the two categories "*travesti*" and "*transsexual*" at the XVI National Meeting of Travestis and Transsexuais (2009) and the questioning of the political identity "trans man" at the First National Meeting of Trans Men (2015) by a group of young people who identify as non-binary. Carvalho traces concepts of gender fixity, fluidity, and ambiguity across generational and class differences explaining how the category "*travesti*" has been applied to lower-class subjectivities who do not fit or who have not had access to the upper-middle class "*transsexual*" identities developed in psychological and medical contexts that replicate a heteronormative gender binary. He compares the ambiguous and fluid gendered subjectivities of *travestis* to more recent articulations of non-binary gendered subjectivities in which fluidity and ambiguity are adopted as a radical political stance:

> *Nesse sentido, a ambiguidade atribuída às categorias "travesti" e "não binário" não segue o mesmo sentido. No primeiro caso, a ambiguidade está inserida num regime de visibilidade que passa por ideias de "truque", "falsidade", "quase mulher", etc; ao mesmo tempo que carrega a pressuposição de uma impossibilidade somática e/ou psíquica de trânsito completo, ou seja, nunca se será uma mulher "de verdade", logo se será sempre "travesti". Já no segundo caso, a ambiguidade se configura como o objetivo político final da construção identitária, seja por uma recusa política e subjetiva à categoria "homem", seja pelo caráter revolucionário atribuído a essa posição a partir das novas literaturas acionadas* (29)

Carvalho also signals the rapidly changing landscape of trans political identities noting that Brazilians from middle-class backgrounds are adapting the radical [and queer] positionality of *travesti* subjectivities. Not unlike the political re-appropriation of "transsexual" by radical

lesbian trans women in the United States, words and meanings change as we adapt to new cultural frames.

The contemporary political landscape of trans movements and identities is more globally connected than any other LGBT+ movement to date. Our identity formation occurs across conventional borders, influenced by global communities on Youtube channels, Facebook chats, and through the visual culture of memes. This dissertation reflects these mobilities and increased access to communication as informed by queer and trans dialogues across global divides. While Kulick's work reveals an important history of *travesti* gendered subjectivity in Brazil, it must be placed within contemporary trans dialogues which account for the dynamic movements of identity and identity politics in an interconnected global context. Outside of these dialogues, the "*travesti"* or *"*Brazilian transgendered prostitute*"* could become solidified as a singular category which reinscribes male/female medical terminology, exalts cismale desire, and creates misogynistic, transphobic divisions between feminine-identified subjectivities.

Figure 5: Author with Joyce Costa and Rebecka da França at an event in solidarity with the victims of the Orlando Shooting (Natal-RN, June 2016).

In the preface to the 2009 edition of his book, Parker indicates limitations to his study including that his analysis focuses on a male-dominated discursive universe which he admits is a result of his own positionality. It could be argued that Kulick's does the same, as do most of the initial landmark studies on LGBT+ cultures which engage with the most visible (gay and trans-feminine) positionalities. As gay men researching gender and sexuality in Brazil, they worked from the spaces to which they had access. Positioned in the Brazilian Northeast, within the inter-mixings of rural and urban cultures in a digital age, this study works to imagine new worlds and

new configurations of gender and sexuality in Brazil through anticolonial, queer, trans, black, and feminist frameworks in order to complement and honor those who have come before.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one, "Maria Boa: Women, Prostitution, and the Queer Subject in the Brazilian Northeast situates Maria Boa, a renowned *cabaré* owner and sex worker in Natal-RN during the World War II era, within regional imaginaries, national myths, and imperial formations in order to investigate articulations of queerness at different sites of identity. Not only is Maria Boa a local folk hero and myth but she is also a central character of many of the LGBT+ cultural productions I examine in this dissertation. The lore surrounding Maria Boa is one example of the complicated and conflicting processes of representation involved in popular culture. This chapter analyses this lore including tales of a U.S. photographer and WWII serviceman, a *cordel* poem recounting Maria's life by a prolific regional author, and blog posts which personally engage with Maria's story even after her death. An analysis of these narratives and iconographies allows a better understanding of the Northeast's complex relationship with modernity as well as its marginalized position within the Brazilian national imaginary.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the Brazilian Northeast as it has been constructed in geographical, historical, literary, and cultural forms as well as an examination of contesting forms of patriarchy in the region. I reference influential literary and cinematic works which have contributed to the elaboration of a Northeastern subjectivity while dialoging with authors who have explored "region" as a constructed category (Albuquerque, Campbell, Rowe and Schelling, Weinstein). The chapter then moves to the peripheral modernity of Natal, exploring the city as a site of imperial formation during the WWII era. I situate Maria Boa as a Northeastern woman within national discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality and link her

to specific myths of origin, racial democracy, and tropical sensuality in Brazil. I link Maria Boa to these myths by reading her through the figure of the mulata, dialoguing with Natasha Pravaz's concept of "strategic hybridity" and José Muñoz's "disidentification" to unpack what I call a "fluctuating queer" subjectivity. The chapter concludes by comparing contemporary sex work, such as that of the 2014 World Cup, with the historical reconstruction of Maria Boa and her *cabaré* in order to examine mechanisms of imperialism in different historical periods.

Understanding how the bodies of women of color are apprehended within imperialist, nationalist, and regional imaginaries allows for a better understanding of Maria Boa as a fluctuating queer subject. In this way, I provide context for Maria Boa's own (raced, classed, gendered, sexualized) Northeastern subjectivity and lay the groundwork for the queer subjectivities I examine throughout this dissertation. I argue that Maria Boa speaks to the queerness present in the Northeast while working "on and against" hegemonic systems of power. She probes a tension in which traditional values co-exist and clash with more modern ones, having negotiated both to make her way in the world. Her political refusals, resentments, and negotiations of traditional hetero-patriarchal structures represent strategies used by women and queer people to contest the hegemonic power structures embedded within the Northeast and within contemporary forms of empire associated with modernity, globalization, nationalism, and capitalism.

Chapter two "Queer Space in the *Festas Juninas* of Northeastern Brazil" introduces the popular June festivals associated with the rural space of the Brazilian Northeast which engage a host of cultural meanings related to the harvest, fertility, sexuality, religion and marriage. The festivals include informal social events which offer seasonal food, drink, and male/female partner dances as well as more formal religious processions and *quadrilha* dance competitions

which interpret a traditional rural wedding and subsequent community celebrations. While the *festas juninas* may seem to be spaces of traditional cultural articulation that replicate conservative, religious, and heteronormative structures, I read them as cultural battlegrounds over which social actors contest cultural meanings. I begin with a geographical introduction to Natal in order to explore and define queer space in the city. I draw on previous work exploring virtual space, queer space, and queer community formation (Anderson, Browne, Castells, Podmore, Rothenburg, Saldaña) as well as with Foucault's concept of "heterotopia of the festival" and J. Halberstam's "queer time" to identify and theorize concepts of queer space in Natal. Through an ethnographical study of a June celebration at the Arraiá do GAMI and an analysis of an LGBT+ *quadrilha* dance performance in homage to Maria Boa, this chapter explores how LGBT+ groups and individuals resignify traditional culture through spatial interventions and cultural practices. Chapter two also examines the contemporary socio-spatial practices LGBT+ people utilize to network and build community. I dialogue with Manuel Castell's "space of flows" to consider the role of digital networks and technologies in LGBT+ community formation. I argue that queer women, like others at the intersections of various marginalized identities, have necessarily developed hybrid community spaces which incorporate physical, virtual, auditory, visual, ephemeral, and geographical dimensions and rely on (online) social networks, rather than permanent physical spaces, as their central unit of community organization. Through these analyses, I explore cultural practices that produce alternate, resistant, and symbolic spaces (queer spaces) which subvert traditional spatial organization. In this way, LGBT+ groups and individuals re-claim space, form affirmative communities, and challenge moralistic values associated with rural Northeastern culture.

Chapter three, "Queering the Cordel: LGBT+ Themes in Cordel Literature," analyzes LGBT+ representation in cordel literature focusing on lexicon, authorship, thematic narratives, and cover art. Originally sung as part of an oral tradition, *cordéis* tell short stories in poetic verse. Printed on inexpensive paper, they are an affordable, popular literary form accessible to rural and urban working-class communities that often reiterate traditional morals and norms while helping readers make sense of their realities. I argue that the use of the cordel to address regional and class inequalities in the mid-to-late-twentieth century as well as its adaptation to modern technologies has shaped it into a medium through which other marginalized groups can increase their visibility and address social inequities. I have collected a corpus of 120 booklets with LGBT+ themes including moral/religious denunciations of marginal and perverse sexual behavior, stories with observations on effeminate "gay" men, and humoristic accounts of men who are tricked into engaging in sexual relations with *travestis.* I closely analyze twenty booklets organized in thematic groups. The sections on "gay" cordéis and "tricked by a travesti" storylines explore LGBT+ *visibilidades* in the cordel while unpacking their inherant "gender trouble[16]" as traditional authors self-consciously approach themes of homosexuality and gender variation. After an analysis of LGBT+ representation in these *cordéis,* the chapter highlights contemporary uses of the *cordel* in LGBT+ activism including sexual health pamphlets on HIV/AIDS, such as those distributed by health and sex professionals at public festival sites during the June festivals. I then examine "LGBT+ *invisibildades*" in the cordel, including representations of LGBT+ women, trans men, and non-binary subjectivities. I highlight the work of two contemporary feminist poets, Jarid Arraes and Salete Maria, to explore the changing themes and mediums of cordel literature including the recent development of the cybercordel in

[16] Butler, Judith

online digital spaces. I conclude by introducing *Projeito Lampioa, a* collectible fanzine-cordel series, which queers traditional Northeastern folk figures such as Lampião, the notorious hyper-masculine social bandit from whom the series derives its name. These uses of the cordel to discuss contemporary themes of sexuality and gender identity subvert stereotypes of Northeastern culture as conservative and resistant to social change.

Chapter One: Maria Boa, Women, Prostitution, and the Queer Subject in the Brazilian Northeast

Tudo que faz é por amor
Está sempre numa boa
Mulher, mãe, Dona de casa
Empregada ou patroa
Todas sabem o que quer
Vou falar desta mulher
A Grande Maria Boa

Seu apelido de boa
Ganhou por sua bondade
Os seus colegas de classe
Batizara sem maldade
Porque ela ajudava
Por ações que praticava
A toda comunidade

Era muito respeitada
No meio da sua gente
E pela família dela
Aquela menina bela
Vivia sempre contente.

Maria de Oliveira Barros
É mulher paraibana
Em Taperoá nasceu
Cidadezinha serrana
Seu povo trabalhador
Terra de agricultor
E de família bacana.

O Pedro Ferreira Barros
Era o seu genitor
A Deolina Ferreira
De Barros lhe tinha amor
Por ser sua mãe querida
Maria era protegida
Por ferrenho defensor.

O pai era homem forte
Conhecido no sertão
Zelava por sua filha
Amavam de coração
Fazendo o que ela quer
Por ser a única mulher
No meio dos dez irmãos

Era um doce de menina
Mais linda taperoense
Dedicada aos estudos
Fez tipografia, pense
Como era a sua vida,
Mas ela foi seduzida
Por um rapaz campinense.

Maria fugiu de casa
Para evitar sofrimento
O seu pai descobre tudo
Exige "separamento"
Mostrando como se faz
Manda chamar o rapaz
Pra fazer o casamento

O rapaz não quis casar
E a Maria abandonou
A vergonha foi bem grande
Toda a família chorou
Mulher solteira não quero
Disse o seu pai severo
E de casa lhe expulsou.

Os amigos lhe largaram
Sem dó e sem piedade
Maria ficou sozinha
Sem perder a dignidade
Sofre no canto calada
A moça foi renegada
Por toda sociedade
…
E Maria novamente
Sem amor e sem tostão
Na capital João Pessoa
Foi dizendo "aqui não"
Vou tentar a minha sorte
Lá no Rio Grande do Norte
Abraça a prostituição

E a grande Maria Boa
Em Natal desembarcou
Foi no 18 de julho
Que por aqui ela chegou
No ano quarenta e dois
Chegou de trem e depois
Na pousada se hospedou.
Teve na estrela e Arpeje
Foi a dama principal
Logo arrumou empréstimo
De forma muito legal
Por um amigo bondoso
Fez cabaré mais famoso
Da cidade do Natal.
…
No salão do seu bordel
Sua dança preferida
Era o tango argentine
Música de sua vida
Ela tinha elegância
Teve grande importância
Por muitos reconhecida.

E na década de quarenta
Sendo homenageada
Por muitos dos coronéis
Da nossa força armada
Dos cabras que têm tutano
Com soldado Americano
Ninguém conta as noitadas.

No ano noventa e sete
A Maria se calou
O seu frágil coração
Não resistiu e parou
Ninguém esquece o dia
Dando adeus à Maria
Toda cidade chorou.

Excerpt from
"Maria Boa pra todos"
Abaeté do Cordel (2011)

Introduction: Maria Boa, A Fluctuating Queer Subject

Born in the rural interior of the Brazilian Northeast in 1920, Maria de Oliveira Barros was in many ways an outcast and an outsider: a disowned daughter, a rejected lover, an unwed but sexually active woman from a poor region that national imaginaries scripted as anti-modern and "backwards." True to her nickname the rhymed verse of the above cordel describes her as a kind and intelligent young woman who was inherently good; she helped her community, dedicated herself to her studies, and came from a good family. However, the circumstances of her life were extremely difficult. She fled the strict rule of her authoritarian father through an unsanctioned romantic relationship with a young man. When the young man rejected their marriage and abandoned her, Maria was left with such severe social shame that she was disowned by her father, ostracized by her friends, and cut off from her community – so much so that she could not return to her job, leaving her without the economic means to support herself. Already located in the social and economic margins of society, Maria "*abraçou a prostituição,*" which further stigmatized her, but also reflected the social space she occupied as a single woman from the interior of the Brazilian Northeast in the 1940s. As an unwed woman in a very conservative social environment, Maria was already rejected for her sexual behavior. In many ways, she was already marked as a "prostitute" before she began working as one.

Despite being pushed in many ways towards prostitution, she also took agency over her future trajectory, leaving behind her rural hometown and traveling to the city in 1942. Known as "Maria Boa," the renowned cabaret owner and sex worker of Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, she became a successful and powerful businesswoman, as well as a local folk hero and myth – her memory evoked in films, history books, *cordéis*, personal blogs, and in many of the LGBT+ cultural productions I examine in this dissertation. Her image is even featured on a B-25 bomber

following the American military tradition of individualizing planes with decorative pin-up graffiti during the World War II era. In many ways she utilized racist, hetero-patriarchal, capitalist, and imperialist structures to establish an elite cabaret that catered to the most influential men in Natal, including the soldiers stationed at the U.S. military airbase at Parnamirim Field from 1943-1945. Yet if Maria Boa simply replicated the structures which oppressed her by making other women's bodies available to men for a price, why is her story so compelling to marginal groups and why is she featured in LGBT+ cultural productions today? Asking why Maria Boa is such a popular figure, this chapter follows her navigation and negotiation of a complex nexus of race, class, gender, and sexual relations in the mid-twentieth century Brazilian Northeast.

Throughout the chapter, I read Maria Boa as queer based on her positionality and marginalization as a sex worker, as well as her representation in local cultural productions. I follow the work of black feminist scholars (Crenshaw, Cohen, Johnson) to encourage an intersectional understanding of "queerness." I read sex workers as queer in line with the work of gender and sexuality scholars who center intersectional mobilizations of queerness around what Gayle Rubin calls "hierarchies of sexual value[17]" which function like other ideological systems of oppression, such as racism, classism, and (hetero)sexism (1984). In her essay "Love for Sale: Queering Heterosexuality," Eva Pendleton links sex work and queerness both academically and politically. She asserts that sex-worker feminism, like queer theory, aims to destabilize heteronormativity: a social system which depends upon the "specter of unchastity" in order to constitute itself.

Figure 6: Maria Boa, a fluctuating queer subject

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[17] The "charmed circle" of heterosexual, married, monogamous, procreative, non-commercial, etc. sex versus the "outer limits" of homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, commercial etc. sex (Rubin 1984).

Othered "unchaste" tropes, such as the prostitute, the black jezebel, the lesbian, or the teenage mother exist to reinforce the norm of white procreative heterosexuality (1997; 73). I mobilize "queer" as a term of resistance that not only references anti-normative, ambiguous, and unsanctioned sexual practices, but also as a subversive term which challenges traditional social and sexual hierarchies rather than solely functioning in opposition to a norm. Despite the complexities involved in mobilizing queer theory in the Brazilian Northeast discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, "queerness" is a useful critical tool with which to theorize issues of sexuality as they intersect with race, ethnicity, gender, and class in the Brazilian Northeast. I utilize the term "fluctuating queer subject" as a way of negotiating these complexities.

As a fluctuating queer subject, Maria Boa was certainly punished and marginalized as she expressed an unsanctioned and independent sexual agency outside of the hetero-patriarchal structures of her time. She was a single, unwed woman from the rural interior of the Brazilian Northeast in the 1940s who earned her living as a sex worker and *cabaré* owner. In this way, she troubles queer/hetero dichotomies from outside of heterosexual privilege. For sociologist and black feminist scholar Cathy Cohen, queer subjects are those who are not situated within the dominant, normalized idea of state sanctioned, heterosexual privilege which favors white, middle/upper-class, male heterosexuality. By thinking of Maria Boa as a fluctuating queer subject, I respond to Cohen's call to consider the true distribution of power, privilege, and access to resources within intersecting sexual subjectivities, rather than relying on essentialist sexual identities when determining political subjects (2005). By "fluctuating" I am alluding to anti-essentialist understandings of identity (Butler, Foucault) as well as the fluidity various authors have identified as an essential element of queerness (Cohen, Halberstam, Sedgwick, Warner). More importantly, the term responds to a problematic queerness insofar as Maria Boa didn't

always subvert traditional social hierarchies, but often mobilized them for her own ends. José Esteban Muñoz's concept of *disidentification* (1999), allows us to think about Maria Boa as a minority subject who in many ways challenged established notions of identity. Muñoz discusses *disidentification* as a performance strategy utilized by queer people of color who are inherently "hailed by more than one minority identity component." It deconstructs the binary of assimilation/resistance by working "on and against" dominant ideologies and using an intimate knowledge of and partial identification with heteronormative paradigms to formulate new worlds (Muñoz 1999). Munoz's word choice, "*on* and against" (rather than "in") signals a symbolic positioning that is not aligned with or confined within the mainstream. Though I have introduced her as "marginal," Maria Boa adroitly managed to negotiate the mainstream in order to establish a successful business.

While it is unclear how Maria Boa identified racially, she was "hailed by more than one minority identity component" and "utilized an intimate knowledge of and partial identification with heteronormative paradigms" to build her business (Muñoz 1999). When she arrived in Natal, Maria Boa capitalized on colonial/imperialist discourses while employing a type of "strategic hybridity" (Pravaz 2003) to negotiate social space to her advantage. She mobilized the tropical, sensual, and exotic ethos of the mulata while also distancing herself and her *cabaré* from blackness as she catered to wealthy Brazilians and American soldiers in the transnational context of Natal during WWII. In this way, Maria embodies the figure of the *mulata*; a figure who gendered national narratives read as black but who also relies on the privileged (white) components of *mulatice,* as I discuss later in the chapter. Finally, Maria Boa is also "fluctuating" because she has been imagined, reimagined, produced, and reproduced in countless forms of cultural expression including the *cordel*, blogs, and historical accounts I analyze in this chapter.

The lore surrounding Maria Boa is one example of the complicated and conflicting processes of representation involved in popular culture.

My first section, "Maria Boa in the *Sertão*," provides a conceptual snapshot of representations of the Northeast in order to situate Maria Boa in the region. I provide context for her own Northeastern subjectivity utilizing canonical literary and cinematic works. I then examine the dynamics of patriarchy in the Northeast, especially alliances between men of different social classes. These dynamics help to better understand conservative codes of behavior regarding gender and sexuality in the region and how the Northeast has been scripted as anti-modern or unwelcoming of alternative sexualities and gender expressions. Through a close reading of the cordel "Maria Boa pra todos" (2011) by regional author Abaeté do Cordel, I analyze Maria's emergence as a queer subject in a story which marks her expulsion from the hetero-patriarchal family and entrance into wider society and public life. My second section, moves with Maria from the *sertão* to the city. It examines Natal (and Brazil) as colonized territories amidst the emerging imperial formations of world war, nationalism, and globalization. To better understand Maria Boa as a queer subject, I also examine the Cabaré Maria Boa as a "fluctuating queer space," a space of deviance in a prominent downtown neighborhood. The chapter concludes by comparing contemporary representations of sex workers such as those of the 2014 World Cup with the historical reconstruction of Maria Boa and her *cabaré*. Following Anne McClintock's argument that marginal identities mark the borders of empire, I explore prostitutes as marginal, queer subjects that point to the dependence of imperialist structures on othered identities, especially during moments of imperial formation. Following complex negotiations of identity, this chapter studies how race, gender, and landscape work to imagine region, nation, and empire. It examines Maria Boa's role in these larger narratives – at times

fitting into them, at times pushing against them, and often revealing their limits. Throughout the chapter, I argue that Maria Boa speaks to articulations of queerness in the region. Her intersectional identity negotiation is at once traditional and subversive and her story paradigmatic of the complexities of queer identity in the Brazilian Northeast. While more attention is often given to violent contestations of power, this chapter reminds readers that there are many ways to push back against dominant ideologies, including those individual forms of struggle, refusal, and negotiation which might seem small or quiet, but contribute to larger, enduring strategies of resistance and survival.

Maria Boa in the *Sertão*: Gender and Sexuality in the Brazilian Northeast

Like many others born in the interior of the Northeast in the early twentieth century, Maria Boa migrated from the *sertão* to the city in search of opportunity and a better life. She also left her small, rural town to confront the patriarchal and heteronormative structures of the Northeast region in which she was raised. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Northeast, as a recognized and delineated geographical category, did not yet exist but was emerging in the national imaginary as a space not only defined by its dry climate and harsh natural environment, but also as an antithesis to modernity and development elsewhere in the nation (Albuquerque 1999). The Great Drought of 1877-1879 resulted in more than 200,000 deaths in the city of Fortaleza due to famine and diseases brought in by a mass migration of people after the harvest failure in 1877 (Marengo et al, 2015). The advent of photo-journalism at the end of the nineteenth century brought images of a Northeast characterized by drought and poverty into the national imaginary. A series of socio-political transformations provoked regional tensions of modernity: the abolition of slavery in 1888, the proclamation of the Republic in 1889, and the

decline of agrarian social structures contributed to an economic and political power shift towards the urban South (Parker 2009). The rural oligarchy in the Northeast began to lose its power on a national level as an educated urban elite emerged in cities which developed as centers of profit, industrial development, foreign culture, and intellectualism. The patriarchal plantation-family structure began to give way to a more impersonal and flexible urban lifestyle which opened new spaces for the reorganization of sexual values as well as new ideologies related to race, gender, and sexuality (Parker 2009).

Beginning in 1919, governmental geographical institutes separated the Northeastern states from the Northern region, considering it a distinct geographical and meteorological unit prone to drought (Albuquerque (1999); Campbell (2014; 23)). Historian Courtney Campbell notes that while climatological, socioeconomic, and political factors contributed to the geographical delineation of the Northeast, Northeastern identity has been expressed in cultural terms and is not limited to strict geographical boundaries (Campbell, 2014; 26). The official states of the region, for example, have been counted differently by national censuses and demonstrate a certain fluidity to Northeastern regional identity. For example, the states of Bahia and Sergipe were not included as part of the Northeast in the 1940 census. This was the first census to split the nation into regions, and it included Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, and Alagoas as the seven Northeastern states. It wasn’t until 1970 that Bahia and Sergipe would officially join the region however there were many who disagreed with the inclusion of Bahia citing its distinct Afro-Brazilian culture as evidence of its difference from the rest of the Northeast (Campbell, 2014; 23). To be sure, contemporary Bahia has a host of other meanings related to sensuality and tropical exuberance, that are evident, for example, in Jorge Amado’s mid-twentieth century novels. Yet the interior of Bahia state is the interior

Euclides da Cunha immortalized in *Os Sertões* (1902) and shares the same discourses of poverty, migration, rebellion and drought that came to characterize the Northeast in the national imaginary.

Euclides da Cunha was not the first to write about drought, yet his seminal work, *Os Sertões,* (1902) established the tradition of drought narratives which linked drought and rebellion in the Northeast (Anderson 2008). At the turn of the century da Cunha revealed this geographical space to his Southern readers describing Northeastern rural life and documenting the infamous *Guerra de Canudos,* a veritable genocide of some fifteen thousand disenfranchised, largely *mestiço* settlers in the interior of Bahia at the hands of the State army. Da Cunha was highly influenced by the ideas of Positivism, Social Darwinism and Naturalism at the end of the ninetieth century in which figures such as Raimundo Nina Rodrigues and Oliveira Vianna utilized racist pseudoscience to differentiate the white South, which they considered superior, from a degenerate, backwards, and black/indigenous North (Dávila (2003); Needell (1995); Skidmore (1990); Telles (2004)). In many ways, the Northeast has been created as different, marginal, and Other in order to distinguish it from the South. At first Da Cunha presented the Northeast as an underdeveloped backland and Northeasterners as a racially degenerate group, an obstacle to modernity and the ideas of the New Republic. A product of their harsh climate, da Cunha describes *sertanejos* as ungovernable, barbaric, and morally questionable – an inferior race and class of people not fit for inclusion in the nation. He distinguishes them from settlers in the South by their inability to conquer their environment. However, after witnessing the State army massacre the poor, disenfranchised, and malnourished settlers, da Cunha's enthusiasm for the Republic wanes. He observes an apparent evolutionary regression of the State soldiers not only in their violent atrocities, but also in their own inability to dominate the hostile *sertão*. *Os*

Sertões ultimately questions notions of civilization, barbarity, and modernity, praising the ability of the *sertanejos* to adapt and survive in such an inhospitable environment and denouncing the barbarism of the State (Anderson (2008), Curry (2004)). However, it also did its part in establishing a deterministic link between the dry, rural environment of the *sertão* and the *nordestino*, an enduring association in national imaginaries. Certainly there is more than one "Northeast," from Euclides da Cunha's arid backland *sertão,* to Gilberto Freyre's patriarchal plantation, to Jorge Amado's popular Bahia embedded in black tradition. While this dissertation focuses on cultural productions in the state of Rio Grande do Norte – more often expressed through *sertanejo* rather than Afro-Brazilian culture – it is important to consider the shifting constructs of Northeastern identity embedded in culture, climate, geography, and politics and situated within fluctuating categories of race, class, and gender.

As a result of early representations of the Northeast as the backwards *sertão*, the urban Northeast – especially capital coastal cities such as Recife or Natal – developed a more complex relationship with modernity than the urban centers of the South and Southeast. While Natal didn't receive much national or international attention until World War II, Recife was a "medical, cultural, and educational mecca" on which the sons of wealthy country landowners descended in the early twentieth century to obtain their degrees, engage in politics, and form what would become a Northeastern block of regional intellectuals (Albuquerque 2004; 47). These intellectuals were educated, urban men who were invested in keeping the old hierarchies on which their families had built their wealth, but that were under threat in a changing socio-cultural environment and modernized national/global economy.

The intellectual elites of the Regionalist Movement in the early twentieth century sought to construct a Northeastern cultural identity beyond drought, poverty, and rebellion and reframe

it as a space of tradition, authenticity, and nostalgia. The movement also played an important role in reframing *mestiçagem* as a unique and exceptional characteristic of a racially mixed Brazil. Such a project meant relying on conventional representations of the rural Northeast (despite its strong urban centers) while defending the region from the outside influences. Gilberto Freyre began to set forth his definition of regionalist and traditional thought in the *Diário de Pernambuco*. His edited book *O Livro do Nordeste* (1925) provided a cultural and artistic context to the region to set the stage for the Regionalist Conference of 1926 which sought to encourage a regional patriotism which would safeguard the Northeast against the corruption of cosmopolitanism which was destroying the "essence" of cities in the South (Albuquerque 2004). In "Brazilian Regionalism" (2003) Barbara Weinstein argues that regionalism and regional autonomy were more pronounced in Brazil than other countries because the emerging capitalist class in the South had its major economic base in export agriculture rather than urban industry. As a result, they allied with traditional agrarian elites in less-developed Northeastern states and ceded political powers such as state-oversight and patronage rights, thus strengthening the power of traditional elites at the regional level. Not only was it difficult for a centralized State to exert control over the most remote regions of a large country, but decentralization benefitted both new and traditional elites across the nation.

While many associate Northeastern regionalism with separatist or socialist movements, Courtney Campbell argues that regionalism was, in fact, another form of nationalism. In "*The Brazilian Northeast, Inside Out: Region, Nation, and Globalization (1926-1968)* she asserts that Northeastern intellectuals, specifically Gilberto Freyre, conceived of regionalism not as a threat to nationalism, but as an ideal form of it (2014; 35). Campbell reads Gilberto Freyre's *Manifesto Regionalista* (1952) within an international perspective to argue that the Regionalist Movement

was a reaction to foreign cultural influence more than an opposition to a centralized state. It represented a pure and authentic Brazilian identity, and regional elites were more concerned with culture and ecology than with imperialism or domination (Campbell, 2014; 33). This follows arguments put forth by Albuquerque (1999) and Weinstein (1982) who demonstrate how Northeastern aristocrats benefited from alliances with Southern capitalist elites. For example, federal subsidies sent to modernize Pernambuco's sugar industry or provide drought relief in Rio Grande do Norte did not modernize industry or improve the standard of living in impoverished areas. Instead, Northeastern elites, who were given a great deal of local power, used these funds to maintain agrarian social structures, consolidate their power, perpetuate paternalistic social structures, and continue their traditional privileges in the face of modernization and urbanization (Albuquerque 2004, 46-47; Weinstein 1982, 270).

This Regionalist Movement perpetuated a specific type of "plantation patriarchy" in the Northeast which kept old hierarchies of power and privilege intact as the nation modernized. To prominent intellectuals, such as Gilberto Freyre and José Lins do Rêgo, understanding regional identity was linked to establishing their own positionality and political identities within the nation. By revisiting their boyhood memories on Northeastern plantations in their writing, they sought to understand the origins and "soul of their native land" (Rêgo in Albuquerque 2004). This Northeast of the plantation was immortalized in Gilberto Freyre's most prominent work, *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933). Freyre understood Northeastern regional identity through the lens of the patriarchal plantation of his boyhood. His iteration of racial democracy picked up later by Gétulio Vargas and the Estado Novo, became a defining element of Brazilian national identity. Jeffrey Needell has explained how Freyre returned from abroad to shed his marginalized subjectivity abroad (the exotic Brazilian) and claim his race and class privilege in the Northeast

(1995). Needell argues that Freyre's embrace of a patriarchal, racial domination as essential to the Brazilian tradition – evident in *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933) – was also a personal identification with seigneurial rights over women of color that allowed him to resolve ambiguities in his own sexual orientation (Needell 1995; 51). Northeastern identity, as conceived of by Northeastern elites, often aligned with and replicated racist hetero-patriarchal hierarchies in the twentieth century. This iteration of the region's culture adhered itself to old world tradition while the South embraced a more globalized form of liberalism, neither group of elites seeking to fundamentally change the established order. As a result, the Northeast developed a complex and nuanced modernity: a semi-rural, or peripheral modernity.

Freyre's Regionalist Movement established many hegemonic understandings of a distinct Northeastern cultural identity, rooted in nostalgia and rural "authenticity," which embraced *mestiçagem* as foundational element of the exceptional Brazilian national family. However, it obscured the strong elements of marginality, rebellion, and resistance intrinsic to Northeastern cultural identity. Unlike the folkloric romanticizing of the Regionalist Movement, the *Cinema Novo* movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s sought to show the misery, suffering, and brutality of racism and poverty in the Northeast without falling into a discourse of victimization. Films such as *Vidas secas* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963), *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (Glauber Rocha, 1964), and *Os Fuzis* (Ruy Guerra, 1964) utilize a "violent" non-commercial aesthetic of overexposure, hand-held camera work, and fragmented narratives to avoid turning misery into folklore (Bentes 2003). They represent the *sertão* as a real and symbolic land, a land in crisis, a land of desperate rebels and revolutionaries, and a sign of failed modernity (Bentes 2003). Glauber Rocha, one of the movement's most influential filmmakers, wrote his manifesto *Estética da Fome* in 1965 proposing a radical twist in cinematic representation of the region,

denouncing humanism's "language of tears," and expressing anger towards European paternalism (Bentes 2003). *Cinema Novo* located the *povo brasileiro* in the symbolic space of the rural Northeast and linked them to resistance and rebellion rather than the patriotic participation in the nation of Freyre's regional elites.

The dynamics of patriarchy in the Northeast help explain conservative codes of behavior regarding gender and sexuality in the region and how the Northeast has been scripted as anti-modern or unwelcoming of alternative sexualities and gender expressions. Patriarchal structures at the end of the nineteenth century included those of the Church and State as they advanced into the region, those of elite landowners seeking cheap labor as slavery was abolished, and violent assertions of authority and dominance by free poor men who no longer controlled their own labor due to drought, war, and shifting socio-economic structures. Dialoging with Martha Santos' concept of *sertanejo* "honorable masculinity" the following close-reading of the cordel "*Maria Boa Pra Todos*" (Abaeté 2011) analyzes patriarchal alliances between men of different social classes in the Northeast. It follows how Maria moves from her status as a protected young girl to emerge into the public sphere as a queer subject.

Developed within a patriarchal tradition, the *cordel* has historically functioned as a heteronormative and male-dominated space which reaffirmed heterosexual practices and promoted traditional values of religious conservatism and patriarchal family structures (Albuquerque (1999); Porto-Diniz (2013); Rowe and Schelling (1991); Slater (1982)). The *cordel* as a male-dominated space can be seen in the lack of female authors (Costa 2015) as well as in *cordel* themes which clearly define acceptable and unacceptable gender roles while

idealizing a traditional past[18]. Typical themes include women who are punished for infidelity, diatribes against prostitution, and adventurous tales of *cangaceiro* bandits and damsels in the Northeastern backlands. "*Maria Boa Pra Todos*" (2011) is not a diatribe against prostitution; in fact, it favorably represents Maria Boa. However, it does define acceptable gender roles in the Northeast and does not critique the hetero-patriarchal structures from which they emerged. While it might seem like Abaeté do Cordel is simply recounting the facts of Maria's life, his version of Maria's story naturalizes conventional gender roles and demonstrates hetero-patriarchal alliances across time; values which still permeate social discourses in Natal.

Abaeté relies on the conventional logic of female passivity and male chivalry to characterize Maria Boa, her father, and their relationship while reinscribing hetero-normative and hetero-patriarchal logics. He first describes Maria as content and happy with her life, rather than recognizing the restrictions, regulations, and violence she faced as a single woman in the conservative *sertão*. He then emphasizes Maria's traditionally feminine qualities, such as her goodness, sweetness, and beauty: "*Era um doce de menina/Mais linda taperoense.../Mas ela foi seduzida/Por um rapaz campinense.*" Abaeté uses the passive "seduced by," which re-inscribes the conventional binary of active men and passive women while also erasing Maria's sexual agency. He goes on to describe her father, "*O Pedro Ferreira Barros/Era o seu genitor.../Maria era protegida/ Por ferrenho defensor/O pai era homem forte/Conhecido no sertão/Zelava por sua filha/Amavam de coração.*" Here Maria's father, a strong man of the *sertão*, shows his love and care as her "defender" and "protector." This type of father/daughter relationship can be characterized by what Martha Santos calls "honorable masculinity," a discourse of honor which

[18] Contemporary authors Jarid Arraes and Salete Maria are notable exceptions as women who have not only carved out space for themselves as cordel authors, but who also write *cordéis* exploring socio-cultural themes related to race, gender, sexuality and LGBT+ experiences.

gave *sertanejo* men the perceived right to control the sexuality, mobility, and even speech of women and which naturalized men's use of violence to establish domination over women and inferior men (Santos 2012). As Michael Warner notes, queerness and the queer subject have "the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence" (1993; xxvi). Maria Boa's resistance to "regimes of the normal" falls into the terrains of phobia (fear of women's independence and autonomy) and pleasure (her non-procreative, unwed, uncontrolled sexuality). Her refusal of the naturalization and normalization of gendered, sexual behavior for a young *sertaneja* exposes various sites of violence and marks her "coming-out:" her emergence as a queer subject.

Santos argues that tensions of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century, such as the decline of agrarian social structures, recruitment of men to war, and entry of women into the workforce, intensified anxieties regarding the place of autonomous, unattached women in the *sertão* and resulted in patriarchal alliances among men of different classes (2012). She thus links socio-economic conditions of the region with cultural and gendered concepts of honor among Northeastern rural subjects. She reveals the material circumstances that underwrote culture in the *sertão* just before the time period in which Maria Boa was born. These socio-cultural gender dynamics and patriarchal alliances between men of different classes help explain how and why the Northeast has been scripted as rural, anti-modern, and socially conservative as opposed to regions that did not experience the instability of drought, poverty, State neglect, and declining agrarian economies.

Abaeté reveals similar patriarchal discourses and hetero-normative alliances in contemporary Northeastern cultural production as he describes what happened after Maria was "seduced by" her lover:

Maria fugiu de casa
Para evitar sofrimento
O seu pai descobre tudo
Exige "separamento"
Mostrando como se faz
Manda chamar o rapaz
Pra fazer o casamento.

O rapaz não quis casar
E a Maria abandonou
A vergonha foi bem grande
Toda a família chorou
Mulher solteira não quero
Disse o seu pai severo
E de casa lhe expulsou.

Os amigos lhe largaram
Sem dó e sem piedade
Maria ficou sozinha
Sem perder a dignidade
Sofre no canto calada
A moça foi renegada
Por toda sociedade.

Sozinha e abandonada
No bolso nenhum tostão
Vagando pela cidade
Sem poder comprar um pão
A pobre mulher sofria
Não demora e Maria
Caiu na prostituição

Here Abaeté presents Maria as a victim of an inevitable situation that leads to her "fall into prostitution" rather than critiquing the hetero-patriarchal structures that led to it. He also glosses over the fact that Maria was the only one ultimately held responsible for the social transgression. The phrase "*caiu na prostituição*" once again denies Maria Boa her agency as she confronts an impossible situation. As a woman who had sex outside of marriage and without her Father's permission, Maria was punished while her lover vanishes from the story. In many ways, Maria was already marked as a "prostitute" before she ever became one.

Maria's resistance to hetero-normative values and expulsion from the hetero-patriarchal family mark her emergence as a queer subject – her queerness defined "against the normal, rather than the heterosexual" (Warner 2003). She also upsets conventional hierarchies and reveals the normalization of gendered behavior as a site of violence. While Abaeté does not specifically describe physical violence, Maria is subject to structural and symbolic violence as her father attempts to control and regulate her sexuality; structural and symbolic violence which Abaeté replicates in his *cordel*. Abaeté chooses specific verbs to characterize Maria's father, "*descobre... exige… mostrando… manda… disse... expulsou.*" These are all verbs enacted from a place of power, while "*renegada…abandonada*" and "*fugiu, evitar, ficou sozinha, sofre, vagando,*" are verbs, many in the passive tense, associated with Maria's reactions. Abaeté's choice of words and representation of father/daughter gender roles make the relations of domination between Maria and her father appear natural. By disowning and banishing Maria, a sentiment encapsulated in the stanza "*mulher solteira não quero,*" her father establishes Maria's social

status as an “unattached woman” (Santos 2012). Santos explains how, in the absence of male kin, unrelated *sertanejos* would “invoke a language of legitimate authority” and mobilize violent, public patriarchy to keep these women in check (Santos, 2012; 185-186).

The codes of honorable masculinity opened single, unattached women to socially acceptable forms of physical violence in the *sertão*. The original transgression of Maria’s story might have been sex outside of marriage, but following the values of honorable masculinity, the real social shame lies in her father’s inability to control his only daughter’s sexuality and his failure to remedy the situation by attaching her to another man through marriage. However, his social shame is ultimately displaced onto his daughter. Maria Boa’s story further reveals the weaknesses of honorable masculinity and exposes the continuing social anxieties around the place of autonomous woman in Northeastern society. While the tough masculinity of the *sertão* has occupied visions of the Northeast (Albuquerque 1999), less attention has been paid to forms of contestation that might be less spectacular, especially those utilized by Northeastern women such as the political refusals and negotiations people recognize in the figure of Maria Boa, which might seem small or quiet, but contribute to larger, enduring strategies of resistance and survival. The idealization of *sertanejo* masculinity as representative of Northeastern cultural identity obscures the role of *sertaneja* women as gendered subjects who enacted their own forms socio-political contestation and often bore unequal social burdens.

While her father’s actions were attempts to shore up hetero-patriarchal power, they end up queering Maria Boa: expelling her from the home, with all of the status, protection, and oppression it affords. Abaeté’s cordel demonstrates hetero-patriarchal alliances across time and marks the moment of Maria’s emergence as a queer subject: one in which she moves from protected domestic space into the public sphere – a space in which she is already a transgressive

figure as an unattached woman "*vagando pela cidade*" as Abaeté tells us. Here she is literally a street-walker.

Now occupying the public sphere, Maria takes agency over her future trajectory, leaves behind her rural hometown, and travels to Natal, Rio Grande do Norte in 1942. During the war, she capitalizes on the presence of the soldiers at the U.S. airbase at Parnamirim Field. It is here, in the city, that Maria makes space for herself. Despite the Northeast's characterization in national imaginaries as a closed, backwards, and static region, it developed its own diverse and nuanced modernity. Having migrated from the *sertão* to the city without ever leaving the Northeast, Maria Boa probes a tension in which traditional values co-exist and clash with more modern ones, having negotiated both to make her way in the world. As the following sections will demonstrate, Maria Boa's political refusals, resistances, and negotiations of traditional hetero-patriarchal structures represent strategies used by women and queer(ed) people to contest hegemonic power structures in the Northeast and within contemporary forms of empire associated with modernity, globalization, nationalism, and capitalism.

Maria Boa in the City: Women of Color and Imperial Formations in Natal 1937-1947

In January 1942, following aggressive diplomatic and economic efforts by the United States, Brazil severed its ties with Germany, Japan, and Italy to effectively end its neutrality in World War II. In exchange for military funding and help developing its iron industry, Brazil allowed the United States to build airbases on its Northeastern coast (Vieira de Campos 1998). The city of Natal-RN received over fifteen-thousand American soldiers into its population of forty-thousand as the country joined the Allied Powers (Harrison 2011). The U.S. military presence in Natal resulted in an influx of U.S. dollars into the local economy, intensified internal

migration from the *interior* to urban centers, and modernization projects such as the paving of the road that led from the airbase at Parnamirim Field to downtown. During the war, Natal's geographical position as the closest point in the Americas to Europe and Africa earned it the nickname "*O Trampolim da Vitória*/The Springboard to Victory" in recognition of its strategic military value to the Allied Powers and specifically, the United States. Securing Brazil as an ally in WWII was both an offensive and defensive strategy for the United States. A March 1942 edition of *Life Magazine* features an article entitled "Six Ways to Invade U.S." (16-17) with maps of different scenarios including one in which the Axis Powers cross the Atlantic to Natal and invade the U.S. via the Mississippi Valley (*figure* 7). Natal could have been occupied by the Axis powers if Brazil had maintained a position of neutrality and continued trade with both the Allies and Axis powers. Natal's integral role in Brazil's World War II involvement resulted in unprecedented population growth, rapid urban development, and great national/international attention for the city as well as the rapid commercialization of sex and the emergence of brothels specifically in downtown neighborhoods. In this section, I examine Natal (and Brazil) as colonized territories amidst the emerging imperial formations of world war, nationalism, and globalization. I argue that Natal was a space of "imperial formation" during WWII, one in which the replication of imperialist discourses contributed to the success of Maria's *cabaré*. To better understand Maria Boa as a queer subject, I also examine the Cabaré Maria Boa as a "fluctuating queer space," one which

Plan Four is the much-discussed invasion by way of Gibraltar-Dakar-Natal-Trinidad, which President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy has tried to defend against. It is based on combining the Jap, German, Italian and Vichy navies, freed by the capture of Gibraltar and Suez. They must fight the Allied fleets somewhere. Invasion pours up the Mississippi Valley.

Figure 7: Map showing a possible Axis invasion via Natal in the March 2, 1942 edition of Life Magazine

reorients raced, sexed, and gendered geographies of Natal, but also reproduces white-supremacist and hetero-patriarchal structures inherent to imperial formation.

Scholars of "imperial formations" define contemporary forms of empire as ongoing practices of expansion, conquest, dominance, and exploitation that are mediated through institutions of power – such as the media, nationalism, and capitalism (Stoler et al (2007), McClintock (1995)). The 1940s in Brazil was a time in which the civil rights advances of the 1930s, such as women's suffrage and the establishment of the *Frente Negra Brasileira* were curtailed by president/dictator Getulio Vargas' suspension of democracy in 1937, prohibition of political parties, and opposition to social movements in the name of national unity. Authors who have explored the prominent role of sexuality in nation-building (Molloy (1992), Fiol-Matta (2002), Parker (2009)) draw attention to State uses of sexuality to consolidate the nation, absorb marginal groups, and promote nationalist projects. Despite (or perhaps due to) an ideological investment in unity, dominant groups submerge long histories of sexual violence, coercion, and exploitation beneath enduring myths which frame nation-building from a colonial/imperialist gaze (Costa (2013), McClintock (1995), Needell (1995), Parker (1991), Pravaz (2003) Telles (2004)). In Brazil, for example, these myths characterize the nation as a tropical, sensual, and united racial democracy. The myth of Racial Democracy represents *mestiçagem* as a peaceful, heteronormative process of sexual intermixing of European, Indigenous, and African elements to form a unique Brazilian identity. These representations of *mestiçagem* and corresponding myths of inclusion are also "xenophobic exclusions" which seek to control, conquer, dominate, and physically integrate femininity, indigeneity, and blackness into a white patriarchal Brazil (Sommer 1991). To this end, most foundational narratives culminate with the socio-sexual reproduction of hetero-patriarchal systems in which the feminine (projected onto the land,

indigenous/black people, and women) is naturalized as a thing to be claimed and conquered (McClintock (1995), Sommer (1989, 1991)). For example, one of Brazil's most famous foundational narratives, José Alencar's *Iracema* (1865), sets the scene for the mythological birth of an exceptional miscegenated Brazil through male European conquest and female indigenous sacrifice. After a romantic encounter with a Portuguese colonizer, Iracema gives birth alone in the forest to a son just before she dies. Her son represents the origins of a miscegenated Brazil. Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933) also positively portrays the formation of a miscegenated Brazil through master/slave relationships in planation culture. *Mestiçagem,* as a metaphor of collective racial identity and Brazilian exceptionalism is embodied in the concept of racial democracy and has been a pervasive ideology since Freyre. Those conquered and dominated form part of an affective family in which the other passively occupies its naturalized subordinate place of service within the patriarchal Brazilian family (Pravaz (2003), Needell (1995)).

During the war, the United States sought to unite the hemisphere against the Axis Powers and incorporate Brazil, its southern counterpart, into its own American family (Sommer 1991). The idea of sexual contact, miscegenation, and the American family is resonant of empire and the function of sexuality in the colonial social order. In *Global Capitalism and American Empire* (2003) Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin argue that the United States' particular brand of empire involves a new type of "non-territorial imperialism" maintained through the "induced reproduction of the form of the dominant imperialist power within each national formation and its state" a point reiterated by anthropologist Fernando Coronil as he reflects on "Imperialism from the Américas" (2007). Following a long history of intervention in Latin America the United States did not attempt to directly rule in the Brazilian metropolis nor did it attempt political

subordination of a neo-colonial type. The United States allied with Gétulio Vargas to gain a strategic military positon and by economically investing in Brazilian industrial development. Through a vast network of "strategic alliances with local allies cemented by common economic interests and ultimately backed by armed force," the U.S. sought to protect its interests in Latin America by actively supporting, or helping place suitable rulers, including ruthless dictators, and reproducing political and economic structures of imperial domination (Coronil 2007). The U.S. support of Brazil's president/dictator was symbolically captured in an iconic photograph (*figure 8*) at the 1943 Natal Conference (*Conferência do Potengi*) in which Franklin D. Roosevelt and Gétulio Vargas met at the U.S. airbase at Parnamirim Field (Lima 1999). The presence of both rulers in the city gave Natal a great deal of socio-political capital as an important city in both a national and international context.

Figure 8: F.D. Roosevelt (left) and Gétulio Vargas (back) in Natal (1943)

Scholars of "new imperialisms" have also argued a direct link between economic, political, and social domination asserting that "informal economic control is as effective as the direct political control of old imperialism" (Halavi in Coronil 2007). The strong presence of the United States as an industrial investor, trading partner, and financial center has made Latin American nations, including Brazil, heavily dependent on US industrial and financial capital. Utilizing structuralist perspectives to examine processes of uneven development, scholars writing from Latin America view imperial domination as a two-way process rather than a one-sided external imposition and call attention to the reciprocal formation of centers and peripheries (Coronil 2007). As Coronil asserts, "The scholarship on modern colonial empires makes evident that their fundamental political problem has been the differential incorporation of colonizers and

colonized into a common and yet exclusionary system" (2007). The following categorization of women in Natal, by photographer and U.S. serviceman John Harrison, naturalizes the sexual conquests of "virile young men" without acknowledging the power dynamics within which these relationships exist:

> "Quite naturally when a large group of virile young men find themselves far from home and bereft of the normal contact with and conviviality of female companionship experienced back home, they seek local liaisons. The U.S. Armed Forces medical contingent attempted to indoctrinate service men about the danger of frequenting brothels but the effort was only partially successful. There were 3 distinct types of young girls in Natal. Prostitutes mostly inhabited the Goodyear, Wonderbar and Maria Boa. A second group, mostly waitresses or store workers, sometime could be cajoled into romantic interludes. The third group were from serious families and they were always well-chaperoned and not apt to indulge in any dalliances" (Harrison 1999; 75, 190)

Placed in context with myths of Brazil as a tropical, sensual, and racially democratic nation, here another racially and economically dominant group, American men, represent another type of sexual intermixing in which Brazil is integrated into a white, patriarchal, and heteronormative Pan-American family. Harrison frames these "interludes" within the natural and logical needs of the American servicemen normalized within the imperial context of Natal during WWII. Harrison's text resonates with Freyre's preface to *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933):

> *Vencedores no sentido militar e técnico sobre as populações indígenas; dominadores absolutos dos negros importados da África para o duro trabalho da bagaceira, os europeus e seus descendentes tiveram entretanto de transigir com índios e africanos quanto as relações genéticas e sociais. A escassez de mulheres brancas criou zonas de*

confraternização entre vencedores e vencidos, entre senhores e escravos. Sem deixarem de ser relações - as dos brancos com as mulheres de cor - de "superiores" com "inferiores" e, no maior número de casos, de senhores desabusados e sádicos com escravas passivas, adoçaram-se, entretanto, com a necessidade experimentada por muitos colonos de constituírem família dentro dessas circunstâncias e sobre essa base

While Freyre's text speaks to a broader national ethos, in both cases, the *"escassez de mulheres brancas"* or the lack of "female companionship experienced back home" result in the acceptable and understandable seeking of "local" and available "liaisons," a conviviality which advanced and promoted the socio-political goals of dominant imperial groups framed within constructs of unity, alliance, and family. The imperialist presence of the United States (1941-1947) during Gétulio Vargas' Estado Novo (1937-1945) makes Natal an important site of enquiry regarding imperial relations; this context set the socio-political stage for Maria Boa and her *cabaré*.

Maria Boa established her famous *cabaré* in Cidade Alta – a central, middle-class neighborhood of Natal. By introducing a brothel into an otherwise "respectable" neighborhood, she queered the urban landscape: mixing spaces of "orderly" and "disorderly" sexuality, the residential and the commercial, the "acceptable" and the "immoral." Yet, the literal location of the Cabaré Maria Boa as "not marginal" within the spatial organization of the city presents a complicated relationship with normative discourses of sexuality. As a space in which men paid women for sex, the *cabaré* also rearticulated white, hetero-patriarchal narratives intrinsic to imperial formation and nationalist discourses. Having established Maria Boa as a fluctuating queer subject, here I analyze the Cabaré Maria Boa as a *fluctuating queer space,* a space of raced and sexed interactions which both troubled and relied upon the socio-sexual boundaries of the city.

Most of Natal's brothels were located in Ribeira, a lively commercial district of stores, hotels, dance clubs, public markets, and Natal's first movie theater. Ribeira was a space of transit, commerce, and leisure in which different social groups converged. It also offered easy access from the Potengi river where Navy and Air Force soldiers disembarked at the Rampa (Cascuado (1980) Harrison (2011) Prefeitura (1999)). *Figure 9* shows Ribeira and Cidade Alta along with major icons of Natal including the Rampa, the Grande Hotel (Natal's only large hotel during the war), the popular Wonder Bar brothel, and the Carlos Gomes Theater (now the Teatro Alberto Maranhão). Often assigned peripheral geographic locations, queer, sexed, and marginal spaces are generally relegated to specific areas of the city. They are supposed to know their place.

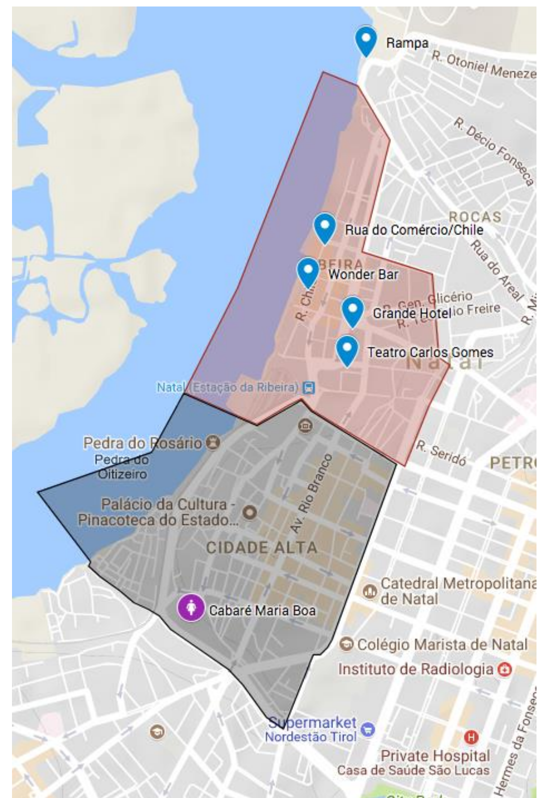


Figure 9: Map of Ribeira (red) and Cidade Alta (gray). The Potenji River meets the Atlantic at the top.

In "Sex and the City: Geographies of Prostitution in the Urban West," Phil Hubbard uses the geography of the city to discuss prostitutes as a sexually and socially marginalized group. He argues that the location of prostitution in red-light or vice districts is part of an ongoing process involving the "exclusion of disorderly prostitution from imagined sites of orderly sexuality," such as that of the suburbs and spaces of the heterosexual family (Hubbard 1999). Hubbard affirms that prostitution – like sex shops, clubs, and bars – is seen as "out of place" in ordered urban spaces. As such, it tends to be distanced from the "wealthier, whiter and more politically-articulate residential neighborhoods" – spaces meant to delineate acceptable forms of sexuality

from the “immoral” other (Hubbard 1999; 56).

This was not the case of the Cabaré Maria Boa. By placing her brothel in Cidade Alta, Maria Boa disturbed sexual-spatial orders of the city and contested the boundary construction of dominant forms of sexual morality. Not only was Cidade Alta a central and visible area of the city, literally sitting atop a hill, but it was also an exclusive area. Brothels, especially those run by women of color, are not generally known for having such a central or prominent geographical locations. Due to its topography, Cidade Alta was harder to reach by foot or street car. In fact, there was only one access road between Cidade Alta and Ribeira until 1935 when the paved Avenida Rio Branco was extended to connect the neighborhoods (Cascudo 1980;129;416). As such, the Cabaré Maria Boa was especially appealing to the wealthy and powerful men of Natal who could visit by car without being seen by or mixing with lower class men who were more likely to frequent riverside brothels, such as Wonder Bar (Harrison 2011).

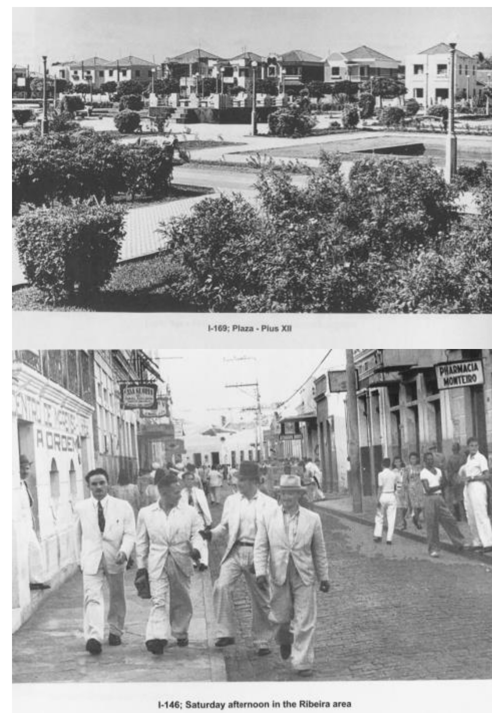


Figure 10: The “well-appointed homes” of Cidade Alta and a group of “young Brasileiros out on the town” in the bustling commercial streets of Ribeira (Harrison 2011).

In his photographs of Natal during the WWII era, U.S. serviceman John Harrison captures the “park-like plaza” and “well-appointed homes” of Cidade Alta as well as a group of “young Brasileiros out on the town” in the bustling, commercial streets of Ribeira (Harrison 2011; 199, 220) (*figure 10*). Introducing a commercial space of sexual deviance into a central and prominent neighborhood outside of the red-light districts, Maria Boa reoriented the geography of the marginal. She also troubled the policing of deviant sexuality, placing her

business outside of Natal's typical spaces of vigilance. In her work on race, geography, and urban space, cultural studies scholar Lorraine Leu conceptualizes "deviant geographies" as both defiant and deviant. The raced, gendered, and sexed space of the Cabaré Maria Boa challenged geographies of socio-sexual domination, and created spatialities that deviated from those sanctioned by dominant groups (Leu 2014; 182). It can be argued that Maria Boa claimed a sexual citizenship generally not afforded prostitutes by geographically contesting and redefining the boundaries of socio-spatial morality. In this way, her *cabaré* queered the urban landscape, enacting a spatialized form of resistance to overarching sexual and moral orders. Speaking to raced and gendered sexual geographies in Brazil anthropologist Erica Williams (2013) has argued that black women and sex workers (and black women sex workers) in Salvador have a "queer relationship with the touristic landscape" due to the fact that they are always already seen as sexually deviant or somehow out of place. She too draws upon Cathy Cohen's argument that some heterosexuals are on the outside of heterosexual privilege because their sexual choices are deemed abnormal or immoral, thus making them a threat to white supremacy, male domination, and capitalism (2005; 39).

Yet the Cabaré Maria Boa presents a problematic queering of space, owing much of its success to the replication of hetero-patriarchal and imperialist structures. Queer geographies, like other marginal geographies, can "contradict, undermine, and also insert themselves into and articulate with traditional geographies that are white, patriarchal, and Eurocentric" (McKittrick (2006), Leu 2014; 182). Maria distinguished her *cabaré* not only by catering to wealthy Brazilians, but also by capitalizing on the presence of the U.S. soldiers and associating her *cabaré* with the U.S. military base. The American soldiers even

Figure 11: Maria's name on a B-25 Bomber (Arquivo da Força Aérea

painted her name on a B-25 bomber, one of the more famous WWII airplanes (*figure 11*). She curated an image of "foreign finery," which was necessarily upper-class and necessarily white. This posed glamour shot (*figure 12*) is one of only a few photographs of Maria Boa and her principal image online and in printed texts. She wears a pearl necklace in a headshot reminiscent of the famous "Pin-Ups" of American actresses and models of the 1940s and 50s like Betty Grable, Bettie Page, and Rita Hayworth (Vivane and Farias 2010). In fact, Maria was known for copying the styles of famous Hollywood actresses and dressing in elegant, hand-sewn clothing. Her *cabaré*, no less elegant, was known for its chic red furniture, immense dance floor, and vitrola music which drew in the "*cadets da aeronaútica flanando pelas ruas de Natal*" (Viviane and Farias 2010). Maria located her house within an imagined space of orderly sexuality. In the caption to his photograph (*figure 10*), John Harrison describes the plaza Pius XII in Cidade Alta, not far from Maria's *cabaré*: "this plaza was a favorite rendezvous spot of American sailors and the nubile young ladies of Natal. There were a few weddings of Natalanese girls and Americans during and at the end of the war" (Harrison 2011; 220). In this space, public expressions of heterosexuality linked to whiteness and marriage were acceptable. They drew upon the same raced, classed, and gendered geographies of Cidade Alta as a "non-marginal" space. The possibility of marriage tempered the transgressive, public display of sexuality of the "nubile young ladies."

Figure 12: Maria Boa's portrait (Vivane and Farias 2010)

Serving as a key site of heterosexual manhood, the Cabaré Maria Boa has endured in the local imaginary and replicated nationalist discourses, such as Freyre's notion of racial democracy and the national Brazilian family (1933). This is clear in online accounts of Maria Boa and her

cabaré such as that of one Walmir Chaves who nostalgically comments in the blog, "*A Maria de Todos os Homens:*"

> *Faz apenas alguns días, falando com um primo de Natal, relembramos a sua iniciação sexual no cabaré de Maria Boa. Foi levado por outro primo mais velho que era un cliente assíduo desse prostíbulo! Todos o primos menores(e são muitos!)foram iniciados ali, algunos con 13 e 14 anos...Maria Boa era um ícone sexual dos Natalenses! O cabaré estava situado na subida para a cidade alta (No Balde) e a casa dos meus primos estava sòmente a uns 200 metros...Eles pernoitavam ali e cedinho corriam para casa, ninguém percebia! Eu estudei em Natal dos 13 aos 16 anos...* (Chaves 2013).

This description of sexual initiation in Maria Boa's *cabaré* brings to mind Gilberto Freyre's descriptions of sexual activities on plantations between white adolescents and black slaves in which boys became men and patriarchal leaders. In essence, prostitutes – as racialized, gendered, sexualized subjects – are necessary to maintaining the patriarchal, white-supremacist structure of the nation because they initiate white male leaders into manhood (Arroyo (2003), Pravaz (2003), Williams (2013)). Here, the blogger understands Maria Boa within discourses of sexual initiation linked to those of slavery and plantation culture.

Direct references to race are omitted from available accounts of Maria and her *cabaré*, yet it permeates popular scripting of sexuality, sexual deviation, and marginality. When she arrived in Natal, Maria Boa employed a type of "strategic hybridity" (Pravaz 2003) to negotiate social space to her advantage. She relied on images of a sensual, exotic, and racially democratic Brazil in the transnational context of Natal during WWII while also distancing herself from blackness. On one hand, Maria associated her brothel with the military base and reproduced the strictly gendered, outwardly heterosexual, and patriarchal patterns of her time within a space she

also constructed as white. On the other hand, the fact that Maria had to consciously disassociate her *cabaré* from common stereotypes of prostitution points to her racialization as “not white.” In this way, Maria embodies the figure of the *mulata*; at times read as black and in others relying on the privileged (white) components of *mulatice*. In her article “Brazilian Mulatice: Performing Race, Gender, and the Nation,” (2003) Natasha Pravaz explains how the category “mulata” is often performed by poor women across racial categories especially within occupations in which they dance samba as a commodified spectacle. She contends that many Brazilian women employ a type of racial “strategic hybridity” which allows them to negotiate social spaces to their advantage. According to Pravaz, both Afro- and white poor Brazilian women become *mulata* as a strategy of upward mobility and social recognition in a socioeconomic context which offers them a limited set of job options. In doing so, they “perform mulatice” – that is, the embodiment of a mulata's “essential” fetishized features such her “tricks of seduction and bewitchment which embody the tropical ethos and national culture.” Further tracing lines between marginalized sexuality and women of color, anthropologist Christen Smith points out how, “popular imagination scripts black women as ‘prostitutes,’ justifying and motivating violence” (2013). Following Smith’s argument that black women are often read as prostitutes, Maria Boa can also be read as a woman of color.

For local men the Cabaré Maria Boa is a fondly remembered and enduring part of Natal’s urban landscape, one which has become a major icon of the city. It contributes, in part, to the persistence of the Cabaré Maria Boa in local and international imaginaries. In his book *Retrato Narrado da Cidade Do Natal* (1999), Marcus Cesar Calvalcanti de Morais locates the *Cabaré Maria Boa* as a “must-see” tourist site:

> *Sem desmerecer os demais, existiu um [cabaré] que mereceu o devido registro para a memória da posteridade. Trata-se do internacional Cabaré de Maria Boa, localizada na Cidade Alta e considerado, naquela época, o melhor cabaré do Brasil. Uma luxosa e bem instalada "casa de negócios sexuais", dispondo de bar, restaurante, e boate, tudo no mais alto padrão de higiene. As "meninas", na verdade, encantadoras mulheres, que periodicamente eram submetidas a revisões médicas, se comportavam como verdadeiras damas e os clientes eram tratados como verdadeiros príncipes. A fama do Cabaré de Maria Boa, que funcionou por cerca de cinquenta anos, se espalhou pelo Brasil e até internacionalmente, tornando-o ponto de visita obrigatória para viajantes em passagem por Natal"* (Morais 1999).

Here Maria's brothel becomes an elegant "*cabaré de prestigio,*" her employees sophisticated "ladies," her clients charming "princes" and Maria, herself, becomes the celebrated and romanticized "*primeira dama de Natal*" in current historical memory and local imaginaries (Morais (1999); Neto (2005)). Sexual encounters with "girls" who were "periodically submitted to medical exams" to verify their health and cleanliness is not only positive but also essential to the maintenance of paternalistic imperial structures. Essential to the sexed and gendered geographies of the city, the Cabaré Maria Boa was a major icon which "imaged the city" (Lynch 1960) in the minds of so many men of the era. As such, it queers the meanings of the iconography of the city, usually oriented around official buildings invested with meanings related to civic or national pride. Seen as a refuge for the men of the city during an era of political and sexual repression, the *cabaré* received national and international attention. Though the Cabaré Maria Boa closed its doors in the 1990s, this brothel has persisted the geographical imaginary of Natal.

As this section has demonstrated, Maria Boa used white, hetero-patriarchal discourses to build and maintain a brothel in a middle-class neighborhood which stayed in business for close to fifty years. Yet, the fact that she had to consciously disassociate her *cabaré* from raced and classed stereotypes of prostitution demonstrates how the brothel is always "out-of-place" in the imagined sites of orderly sexuality in the city. She demonstrated that a poor, single woman could become a successful and powerful businesswoman. In her *cabaré* she reformulated a space which utilized white-supremacist, patriarchal, and imperialist structures directly linked to capitalism, but also complicated these same socio-sexual hierarchies, valuing sex work, a practice which is still unsanctioned, marginal, and a criminalized profession which reflects many of the intersectional elements of queer identity. The very fact that Maria had to "whiten" her space reflects the complex ways in which social and sexual hierarchies are undone and re-done in sex work. Maria Boa's very existence as a single, autonomous woman in the Brazilian Northeast of the 1940s who made space for herself and founded a successful business which bore her name was indeed resistant. She speaks to what Allan Wade refers to as "small acts of living" which exemplify daily strategies of spontaneous and subversive resistance beyond masculinized models of combat which assume equal power between opponents (Wade 1997). It is important to recognize different models of resistance, especially those used to combat sexism, racism and other forms of exploitation, exclusion, and discrimination inherent to systematic oppression and structural inequality (Coates et al (2007), Wade (1997)). Maria Boa utilized strategies of *disidentification*, hybridity, and upward mobility to negotiate a complex nexus of race, class, gender, and sexual relations when offered her limited options. This intersectional identity negotiation is at once traditional and subversive. Not only did she complicate and resist hetero-patriarchal systems during her life, but she speaks to LGBT+ communities in the Northeast who

have taken up her story and made it their own. In the next chapter, I will analyze a *quadrilha* dance performance to argue that Maria Boa is also read as queer by Northeasterners.

"They don't make them like they used to," Sex Work Then and Now

As this chapter has demonstrated, Maria Boa was expelled and obligated to inhabit the "impossible" edges of modernity – a peripheral Northeastern modernity in which she had to commodify her identity in order to survive. As a prostitute, she was pushed even further to the margins, however her apparent replication of imperialist ideologies and social-construction of whiteness in her *cabaré* allowed her to be historically reincorporated into the imperialist national imaginary. On the blog "*A Primeria Dama de Natal,*" Gustavo fondly remembers Maria Boa (though he never lived in her age) lamenting, "they don't make them like they used to:"

> *Que bom ter lembrado desta célebre mulher. Que pena que não vivenciei esta época. Não se faz mais "Marias Boas" como antigamente, posso garantir, mesmo não tendo conhecido seus dotes físicos e provavelmente psíquicos, colo seguro no momento de incertezas e desejos masculinos. Um grande diferencial deste mundo novo, com meninas-mulheres, fantasiadas, sem conversa. Viva Maria Boa!* (Blog do CCRM 2010)

While Maria Boa might have been "endowed with physical and psychological gifts" that allowed her to provide "a safe lap in a moment of uncertainties and masculine desires," we cannot fully rely on these personal gendered imaginings, as Maria Boa now inhabits an anachronistic space in which the sex work of the 1940s is looked upon through the idyllic lens of nostalgia for an age past. Maria Boa's incorporation into historical records and celebration as cultural patrimony points to a certain acceptance of this upper-class, gendered, whitened, and heteronormative prostitution. While it is difficult to compare the sex work at Maria Boa's *cabaré* with

contemporary sex work, an analysis of the historical reconstruction of prostitution at Maria Boa's *cabaré* and a comparison to current prostitution helps to understand the contradiction inherent in contemporary social discourses related to sex work.

For example, to represent sex workers during the 2014 World Cup, Getty Images did not prepare studio glamor portraits, but rather posted 27 photographs entitled "Sex Workers in Rio Anticipate Increased Business During World Cup" (Tama 2014). These photographs (*figure 13*) were reproduced on internet news and social media pages such as Buzzfeed, Pinterest, Facebook, and the Huffington Post.

Figure 13: Photos of Brazilian Sex Workers preparing for the World Cup (Tama/Getty Images 2014)

In contrast to Maria Boa's nostalgic and historical portrait circulated online, these contemporary images of sex workers are real-life colored photographs. They do not portray the whitened, elegant, and "socially acceptable" prostitution of Maria Boa's *cabaré*. The women are pictured in studded shorts, low-cut tops, and lingerie – not pearls. The backgrounds do not reflect the blank, controllable space of a studio but rather the exposed spaces of bars, stairwells, streets and doorways decorated with alcohol bottles, beer crates, chipped paint, and Brazilian flags.

In her book "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment," (2000) sociologist Patricia Hill Collins discusses the idea of controlling images which are "designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life" (Collins 68). Maria Boa's portrait may look very different from

those of the "Sex Workers Preparing for the World Cup," however they all function as controlling images. Maria Boa's represents a socially acceptable form of sex work frozen in the black and white nostalgia of "simpler" times. The Buzzfeed photographs, on the other hand, represent the live, dynamic, and complex prostitution of current times. They reflect oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality but also perpetuate a cognitive link between women of color and prostitutes, a controlling image that Collins refers to as "the jezebel" – a black female sexual deviant. As we have seen, this image is integral to the Brazilian myth of racial democracy in which black women are hypersexual, readily available, and necessary for the socio-sexual reproduction of an imperialist nation. Collins argues that the controlling image of "the jezebel" helps to justify the continued economic exploitation of black women who are "in place" within the sexual service sphere. It is also employed to justify the assault of black women by white men and helps define the borders of (in)acceptable sexuality (Collins 2000; 77). As McClintock points out, "Society demonizes sex workers because they demand more money than women should, for services men expect for free. Where they are not tightly fettered by men, prostitutes interfere with the male control of cash and commodities, and thus constitute a rejection of the 'normal ways of society' (McClintock 1993; 2). While a detailed discussion of sex work during the World Cup is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that it became a topic of national debate in 2014. The government worked to "combat sex tourism" as President Dilma Rouseff affirmed on Twitter (G1 2014), however many of these conversations glossed over the nuances of sex tourism, sexual exploitation, and sex work – demonstrating concern for Brazil's international image rather than the social inequalities that the World Cup reinforced.

The WWII era and the months of the 2014 World Cup may seem to be radically different historical moments; however, I argue that they are points on a continuum of imperial formation.

Natal was a relatively unimportant in national and international imaginaries until it was put on the map by its utility to the United States and Brazil during World War II – a history almost forgotten until 2014, when Natal once again hosted a large number of Americans for several World Cup games (Vertuno 2014). McClintock argues that imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of gender power, which recognizes empires' need for women as boundary markers (McClintock 1995). The expansion, conquest, and exploration associated with the movements of empire into uncharted territory create ambiguous, dangerous, and uncertain moments of transition and flux. This results in what McClintock calls a "liminal crisis" of masculine imperial identity defined by fantasies of unlimited power as well as simultaneous fears of boundary excess and boundary loss (McClintock 1995). At the end of the WWII era Brazil was expanding into uncharted geopolitical territory providing key resources and strategic military points to the Allied Powers and emerging as a dominant economic power on the global stage. Brazil's role in WWII was a landmark historic moment in which Natal played an integral part. It also projected Brazil as a modern, industrial, and developed nation along with other major global players. A similar moment, the 2014 World Cup, perpetuated similar modalities of modernity and masculine imperial power. The spaces of sex work and sex tourism became catalysts of great social anxiety because they pointed to the dependence of masculine imperialism on the feminine as a boundary marker. They also reveal the tenuousness of male imperial power and possession based on this dependence. The simultaneous rejection of and dependence on prostitutes elicits what McClintock describes as the "paradox of abjection," a formative aspect of modern industrial imperialism:

> "Abject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed, and so

on…under imperialism certain groups are expelled and obliged to inhabit the impossible edges of modernity" (McClintock 1995; 72).

The contradiction in contemporary social discourses related to sex work is related to this "paradox of abjection." While prostitutes served to mark the borders of imperialism in both eras, the anachronistic representation of Maria Boa can be more easily incorporated into imperialist discourse because she is no longer around. As a "black and white" historical reproduction of an age past, those engaging with Maria Boa can control her narrative and portray her as a daughter, content with her lot in life, who happened to fall victim to unfortunate life circumstances, or a beautiful, graceful matron who provided a safe space for men to be men and deal with the changing world around them. Current discourses surrounding sex work however are much more nuanced and include the voices of sex workers themselves. Not only are sex workers more available for self-representation[19], but changing social discourses in the Northeast have opened conservative codes of gender and sexuality to scrutiny.

The 1940s was an era in which political activism was curtailed by the Estado Novo, before the achievements of the civil rights, LGBT, and feminist movements, yet it was the "golden age" for Maria Boa and her *cabaré*. The subsequent sexual liberation of the 60's and 70's modernized sexual values and moral codes in the Brazilian Northeast. Yet, historian Eliane Pessoa argues that this resulted in a further stigmatization of sex work. In an interview with Pessoa, Cecília, one of the workers at the *cabaré* Maria Boa, notes a change in sexual behavior across the eras:

[19] As seen in fora such as the *associações de prostitutas* (local sex worker associations), *núcleos de estudos da prostituição* (prostitution research groups), and different *encontros nacionais de prostitutas* (prostitute conferences) as well as the increasing number of publications, articles, books, websites, Facebook groups and documentaries (see Araujo (2008), Blanchette and Silva (2012), Goldstein (2013), Kulick (1998), Leite (2009), Piscitelli (2001), and Williams (2013)).

"Veio aquela onda de motel que quase não tinha em Natal. Então cada homem que tinha a sua namorada, a sua amiga, enfim motel. [...] foi caindo muito por conta disso, lógico. Iam ainda lá. Mas, não era como no início que não tinha motel, não tinha essa facilidade das namoradas chegarem e entrar no carro e, daí mesmo [...] ir pro motel [..."] (Cecília in Pessoa 2004; 34).

In her monograph, Pessoa argues that this change in sexual behavior contributed to the decline of the *Cabaré Maria Boa* before it went out of business in 1995 concluding:

"*A liberação sexual dos anos sessenta plantaria a sua semente, constituiria o seu legado inspirando toda uma juventude a transcender as barreiras, até então, inflexíveis. O surgimento e a expansão da pílula anticoncepcional iniciaria decisivamente um processo de transformação na vida sexual das mulheres. Com isso, uma série de valores, antes absolutos, iniciaram um processo de decadência gradual e prepararam o terreno para o enfraquecimento das verdades inquestionáveis, abrindo espaço para uma nova mentalidade que colaborará para o declínio das casas de venda da atividade sexual e, assim, da mais famosa boate de Natal: Maria Boa"* (Pessoa 2004; 39)

Not only has sexual behavior changed over time, but also the spaces of prostitution have changed. The presence of the U.S. servicemen in Natal most definitely contributed to a larger market for sex work during an economic "golden age" in Natal (Pessoa (2004); Souza (1999)). While the market still exists, Pessoa argues that contemporary prostitution in Natal assumes a different form which surpasses the limits of the ghettos and extends beyond restricted areas, occupying the streets of the city (Pessoa 2004; 41). As this chapter has demonstrated, the Cabaré Maria Boa already extended beyond the red light districts of the city. However, unlike recent manifestations of sex work during the World Cup, Maria's *cabaré* presented a form of socially acceptable prostitution confined within the physical space of the brothel: four walls marked and delineated a queer space.

According to the U.S. Department of State "2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," self-prostitution of adults in legal in Brazil[20] and has been recognized as a profession by the Federal Ministry of Labor since 2002. However numerous laws attempt to punish and control sex work based on other criminal offences such as pimping and sex trafficking (2008). It is no longer legal to own and operate a brothel as the state has since outlawed any form of 'pimping' – or profiting from the sexual labor of another (2008). As a result, prostitution can no longer occur legally within the stable confines of a specific physical location, such as a brothel. The face of prostitution is not the whitened, elegant, 'house of sexual business,' that Maria occupied. In this sense, sex work has been further queered – occupying ambiguous, unstable, and marginal spaces within the city that are not only threshold zones, but also poor, black, and queer abject zones that are policed with vigor.

Yet current narratives of prostitution are not so easily controlled, neutralized, or assimilated into racial hetero-patriarchal structures due to contemporary activism and social movements. The year 2014 marked the 2nd Annual Inter(national) March Against Black Genocide organized by the *Movimento Negro*, the 16th LGBT Pride Parade in Natal, the *Encontro Regional Nordeste de Travestis e Transexuais,* and the 11th *Seminário da Diversidade Sexual de Natal/RN* along with sex worker rallies and general protests against the ideologies associated with the 2014 World Cup. Sex work in current imaginaries is polemic and threatening precisely

[20] A legal ambiguity of prostitution in Brazil stems from legislation that perpetually perceives all prostitution as sexual exploitation and all prostitutes as victims. This is apparent in the wording of Article 218B of the 1940 Law *nº 2.848* and in the 1990 and 2014 modifications to this law which classify as 'heinous' the crimes of 'prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation of children, adolescents, or those who are vulnerable' (Lei 12978/14, 2014). While the law specifically addresses the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, it leaves those considered 'vulnerable' open to interpretation. Additionally, the phrase 'other forms of sexual exploitation' following the word 'prostitution,' suggests that all prostitution is sexual exploitation. As a result, Brazil's legislation prioritizes the abolition of prostitution, rather than its prohibition or regulation (Bezerra da Silva, 2008). Prostitution is legal in Brazil because there is no law prohibiting the self-prostitution of adults, however, it has not been legalized, decriminalized, or formally regulated.

because it is as Cohen asserts, "an informal, unregulated sexual market which exposes and makes public the interlocking, multilayered systems of oppression on which empires are built," systems which utilize "institutionalized categories and identities to regulate and socialize" (Cohen 22, 43). When prostitution is framed from the perspective of the state, the consumer, the patriarch or the slave owner, it is socially acceptable, as seen in narratives of Maria Boa. When framed as a right by sex workers it is uncomfortable and controversial. When framed as queer, it can form a unifying discursive space for activism that pushes back against contemporary imperial formations.

Conclusion

By commodifying her identity in a contact zone of unequal imperial relations Maria Boa symbolized the negotiation of space and identity during the WWII era. nation. This chapter has investigated queerness in Northeastern society and culture through Maria Boa and her representation in contemporary cultural productions. It has discussed narratives and texts which attempt to assimilate her story into Brazilian national discourses of hetero-patriarchy, racial democracy, and tropical sensuality in which sexually available women of color are necessary to maintain the nation. In many ways, Maria Boa represents elements of femininity, blackness, and rural "authenticity" that have been brought into the mainstream and incorporated into complex national and regional narratives, divesting them of contestational force. On the other hand, Maria Boa's ability to skillfully occupy both margin and mainstream, points to strategies of negotiation, contestation, and survival utilized by women, queer subjects, people of color, and other marginalized communities that can be used to destabilize, challenge and contest established power dynamics and hierarchies. Maria Boa's image and story appeal to LGBT+ groups who

have used her as inspiration for traditional Northeastern cultural productions as the next chapter will demonstrate. Her fame as a folkloric regional hero is also tied to the marginality of the Northeast in the national imaginary. I argue that Northeasterners identify with this marginality thus complicating Maria Boa's legacy and contributing to her incorporation into local history. To quote bell hooks, "Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people" (hooks 2011; 240). Maria Boa and her intersectional identity negotiation are at once traditional and subversive, and her story is paradigmatic of the complexities of queer identity in the Brazilian Northeast. By exploring the queerness of sex work, considering Maria Boa a fluctuating queer subject and considering her cabaré fluctuating queer space, this chapter has demonstrated how race, class, gender and sexuality are intimately implicated in imperial processes as well as how queerness can push back against imperialist ideologies.

Chapter Two: Queer Space in the Festas Juninas of Northeastern Brazil

Meu sonho é que a quadrilha
nunca venha a se acabar,
que haja festival, concursos,
Que todos possam dançar,
Mas com a preocupação
pra não mais adulterar...

os passos, as vestimentas,
a música que é tocada,
pois tradição que se preza
não gosta de ser mudada
e eu acho muito feia
tradição estilizada.

"Quadrilha Junina" by Cordelista Francisco Diniz (2007)

Introduction: *As Festas Juninas*

From the rainbow-draped streets of the world's largest LGBT+[21] Pride Parade in São Paulo, to the wooden church erected at the center of Campina Grande's *Parque do Povo,* to a commercial broadcast across Brazil encouraging consumers to celebrate Valentine's Day with perfume from O Boticário, the month of June is a particularly important month in Brazil in regards to sex, marriage, and romance. Brazilians celebrate *Dia dos Namorados* (Brazilian Valentine's Day) on June 12th, the feast day of Santo Antonio, as part of the *festas juninas* – the popular June festivals associated with the rural space of the Brazilian Northeast. These traditional festivals engage a host of cultural meanings related to the harvest, fertility, sexuality, religion and marriage. They began in Europe as celebrations of fertility during the summer solstice and were appropriated by the Catholic church to venerate three saints whose feast days fall in the month of June. São João is the saint of matrimony, Santo Antonio represents the romantic rituals of dating and engagement, and São Pedro is responsible for the rain that makes possible an abundant harvest. While São Paulo's hosts the world's largest LGBT+ Pride Parade,

[21] The 2018 São Paulo Pride Parade utilized the acronym LGBTI+ for the first time including a plus sign and an "I" for "Intersex" (Gonzalez 2017)

small interior cities of the Northeast gear up to receive close to one million tourists who come for informal street parties, seasonal food and drink, and male/female partner dances, as well as more formal religious processions and *quadrilha* dance competitions. The *quadrilha*, a large group dance, was originally called "*dança de salão*" because it was performed in the elegant, aristocratic space of the court (Chianca (2007), Diniz (2007)). During the early colonial era of the 16th century, the Portuguese brought the European traditions associated with the *festas juninas* to Brazil including the *quadrilha*. Many of the dance movements still have French names, but contemporary *quadrilhas* interpret a traditional rural Brazilian wedding through music, song, complex choreography, and elaborate costumes. Current realizations of the *quadrilha* tell the story of a rural couple whose eventual marriage initiates a dance in celebration of their union. The *festas juninas* became symbolically associated with the rural spaces of the Northeastern *interior* in the early 20th century as colonial traditions of Europe fell out of favor with the new urban bourgeoisie in the South (Chianca 2007). Over time, the *festas juninas* have been re-signified as popular celebrations that have retained characteristics of their syncretic and aristocratic origins while appealing to the masses.

While the *festas juninas* may seem to be spaces of traditional cultural articulation that replicate conservative, religious, and heteronormative structures, I read them as cultural battlegrounds over which social actors contest cultural meanings. Specifically, I examine them as spaces in which marginalized groups have challenged hegemonic representations of their communities. For example, the more traditional form of the *quadrilha* known as the *quadrilha tradicional/caipira/matuta* often presents a pejorative and comical image of rural characters in its reenactment of a "hick" or "redneck" wedding. Luciana Chianca argues in her work that a new form of the dance, the *quadrilha estilizada*, developed in the 1990s as rural migrants modified

the traditional *quadrilha* to represent rural lifestyles in a new light (2007). Most notably, the *quadrilha estilizada* differs from the *quadrilha tradicional* in its flashy colorful costumes, incorporation of modern themes/music, and presentation in large media-driven *quadrilha* competitions. Its representation of rural lifestyles often expresses an urbanized rural culture and incorporates modern elements such as high-tech agricultural machinery (Chianca 2007).

The *festas juninas,* as celebrations directly linked to religion, sexuality, and marriage, have become a fertile ground for queer contestations of heteronormative narratives in the Northeast. For example, many *quadrilha* competitions include LGBT+ groups who present queered versions of the dance, playing with the rules of gender and sexuality in their own versions of the *quadrilha*. While subverting heteronormative themes of the typical wedding story, these groups also contest hegemonic representations of the Northeast as a static, anti-modern space unwelcoming of alternative sexual identities or gender expressions. In this chapter, I argue that the LGBT+ community utilizes the *festas juninas* to produce queer spaces which not only challenge pejorative representations of their subjectivities, but also create community in areas that do not have many LGBT+ venues. In this way, the LGBT+ community utilizes traditional Northeastern culture for personal expression, group visibility, and community formation.

To do this, I begin with a geographical introduction to Natal and an exploration of "queer space" in the city. I then examine two case studies: an *arraiá* party hosted by the *Grupo Afirmativo de Mulheres Independentes* (GAMI) in Natal and a *quadrilha* dance performance, by the group *Brilho Potiguar* in Monte Alegre. GAMI is a non-profit, community organization of LGBT+ women who promote sexual diversity and gender equality in a peripheral neighborhood of Natal. My study includes ethnographic participant observation, an analysis of virtual spaces in

women-centered community building, and a reading of the physical space in which the *arraiá* takes places every year. This chapter then links back to chapter one with an analysis of a *quadrilha*, "*Maria Boa, Uma história junina que ninguém contou!*" performed for the 2015 *Quadrilha* Dance Competitions in Monte Alegre, a municipality just outside of Natal. I consider various elements of the *quadrilha* such as the theme, characters, costumes, sets, and storyline to explore how LGBT+ individuals create, occupy, and utilize the ephemeral spaces of the *festas juninas* to express and celebrate queer identities. Through these analyses, I argue that LGBT+ groups and individuals re-claim space, form affirmative communities, and challenge moralistic values associated with rural Northeastern culture.

Queer Spatialities and (LGBT+) Geographies of Natal

Natal is a capital city located within a region that a national imaginary produces as conservative, religious, and traditional. To most people living in and around Natal, it is a modern, urban center that offers the opportunities and challenges of a big city – one which has drawn international attention as the site of a U.S. airbase during World War II and as the host of several World Cup games in 2014. However, in relation to the large, cosmopolitan centers of the South and Southeast, Natal is subject to regionalist stereotyping that casts the Northeast as an underdeveloped, highly religious, and closed region (Albuquerque (2014), Valladares (2000)). As such, Natal provokes a complex dynamic of an increasingly transnational and commercial urban landscape within a more conservative and traditional social context.

The city is formally divided into four zones: *Norte*, *Sul*, *Leste*, *Oeste* (*figure 14*). These zones are imbued with social meanings for locals who commonly use them to refer to different

locations in the city. The oldest neighborhoods are located just south of the *Potengi*[22] river in *Zona Leste* where Natal was founded on December 25th 1599. The *Forte dos Reis Magos* built by the Portuguese still stands at the tip of the Santos Reis neighborhood. These old riverside neighborhoods once made up a vibrant city center, home to burgeoning administrative, commercial, and social districts up through the 1930s and 40s. However, after the war, the more cramped colonial architecture and layout of these areas contributed to their decline as the city developed a larger and more modern infrastructure. From this old center, Natal expanded south along the coastline in different migratory phases (Chianca 2007; 56). The current *bairros nobres* or upscale neighborhoods of Tirol, Lagoa Nova, Candelaria and Capim Macio are located in the central regions of the city. These neighborhoods are easily accessible and close to the new commercial centers of the city including the largest shopping malls. The new *Arena das Dunas* soccer stadium built for the 2014 World Cup is located in Lagoa Nova, a short distance from Natal's Southern tourist districts. Ponta Negra replaced the beach neighborhoods in *Zona Leste* as Natal's main tourist district after the construction of the *Via Costeira* in 1985 which now

Figure 14: Natal's Zones and Neighborhoods (SETUR-RN, 2015)

[22] The Potengi river was named by the indigenous Potiguar people. Portuguese settlers took over their land and eliminated most of the *potiguares* (Lima 2006). "*Potiguares*" or "shrimp-eaters" is also an informal nickname for people from Natal, a linguistic reference which retains some of this history.

connects *Zonas Leste* and *Sul* along the east side of the *Parque das Dunas,* a State Park created to protect an area of dunes and native vegetation along the coast.

The most distant, peripheral areas of Natal are *Zonas Norte* and *Oeste* which were incorporated into the city during Natal's great migratory phase in the 1970s (Chianca, *Quando*, 56). *Zona Norte* is the most peripheral and marginalized region as it is geographically cut off from the rest of the city by the *Rio Pontegi*. The *Ponte Igapó* was the only land route that connected *Zona Norte* to the city until 2007 when the city constructed the *Ponte Newton Navarro* (*figure 15*). Still considered peripheral, *Zona Norte* is home to Natal's poor migrant population and subject to many negative stereotypes that mark it as a dangerous and violent space. Most of Natal's urban workforce lives in this sector of the city. The *Arraiá do GAMI*, which I analyze later in this chapter, takes place in the *Redinha* neighborhood of *Zona Norte*. In mapping queer geographies in Natal, it is important to consider the ways in which historical patterns of development, social stereotypes, and natural features not only form a mutable urban geography but also impact how people understand, navigate, and locate themselves within the city given multiple and intersecting subjectivities.

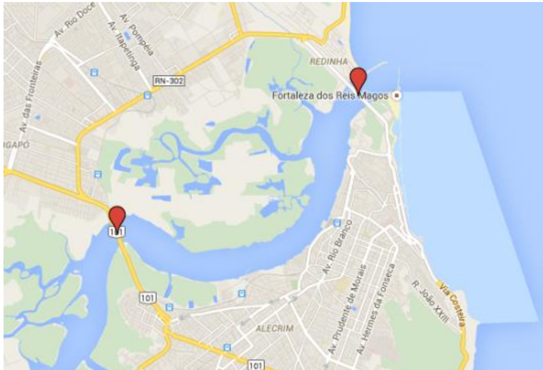


Figure 15: Pontes Igapó (left) and Newton Navarro

Unlike larger cities such as Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, Natal's more conservative social environment has resulted in fewer official LGBT+ venues. Many of Natal's LGBT+ spaces are unofficial, hidden, and ephemeral in nature: such as a certain section of the beach at night, or a plaza on Wednesday evenings, or the temporary spaces of the *festas juninas*. Their relative invisibility may protect these spaces to a certain extent, however, it also marginalizes them and

those who occupy them. In their landmark work, *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (1995), David Bell and Gill Valentine emphasize space as an artefact produced by social actors rather than a pre-existing natural phenomenon. “Space” therefore is not intrinsically heterosexual or homosexual or queer, but the presence of queer bodies or queer spatial acts produces space as queer. Bell and Valentine draw on the work of Judith Butler (1990) to understand the role of performativity in the construction of gendered, sexed, and sexualized space. They adapt Butler’s discussion of “subversive bodily acts,” to think about “subversive spatial acts” which “fracture and rupture a previously seamless space” (16-17). For example, the presence of queer bodies in a particular location (such as a night bus) and the performance of a queer act (such as two men kissing) forces people to realize that “space around them has been produced as (ambiently) heterosexual, heterosexist, and heteronormative.” Queer acts reveal the “heterosexing” of space as a “performative act naturalized through repetition and destabilized by the mere presence of invisiblised sexualities” (Bell and Valentine 1995; 16-17).

In Natal, queer spatial acts are often limited by issues of safety and security. The dossier *A Geografia dos Corpos das Pessoas Trans* (2017) cites Brazil as “*o país que mais mata pessoas trans e gênero-diversas no mundo”* and the Brazilian Northeast as the region with the largest number of murders of trans people. Natal’s social environment can be isolating and dangerous for many LGBT+ people, especially those who navigate the intersections of various marginal identities. Intimate, temporary, and mutable spaces (while they may be harder to find) provide a certain amount of safety and security. These considerations impact the type of LGBT+ spaces in Natal and help explain why there are fewer official LGBT+ business venues in the city.

Vogue Natal is the city’s only official gay club and has been in business for over twenty years. It caters predominantly to young gay men over eighteen. Patrons need to present valid

identification and pay a cover fee to enter, a requirement which limits access for those who cannot afford the cover and/or whose IDs might be questioned. Vogue Natal is an example of the most formal and visible LGBT+ space in the city. Yet, many local patrons still refer to the club euphemistically as “VG,” especially when they may be overheard in public. In 2008, Vogue Natal moved from its longstanding location in the working-class neighborhood of Alecrim in *Zona Oeste* to an upper-middle-class neighborhood, Candelaria, in *Zona* Sul (França 2018). The move highlights some of the ways in which Vogue’s geographical location has impacted its gendered, raced, and classed spatialities. It also demonstrates a distinction between “gay space” and “queer space” in the city. I use the term “queer space” to refer to territories produced, occupied, used, and claimed by queer people. I follow the work of previous scholars who differentiate “queer spatiality” from “gay and lesbian spatiality.” This definition is linked to how I mobilize the term “queer” beyond conventional understandings of LGBT identities to refer to marginal, anti-normative, ambiguous, fluid, and intersectional subjectivities which also resist hegemonic hierarchies and systems of power. Queer spatiality, unlike gay and lesbian spatiality, necessarily transgresses the normative and disrupts normalizing boundaries and binaries (Browne (2006), Nash (2007). Studies in gay and lesbian spatialities often reinscribe these binaries while isolating sexuality from its intersections with raced, classed, and gendered arrangements of space (Oswin (2008), Puar (2002)). I therefore look to queer geographies which position sexuality within “multifaceted constellations of power” (Oswin 2008) including the raced, classed, and gendered ways in which sexuality and power are deployed. In this way, I work to interrogate the multidimensional workings of hetero and homonormativities rather than heterosexuality.

For example, Vogue Natal’s different locations demonstrate the contested nature of this gay/queer space as well as some of the ways in which geography impacts social interactions. The

club is now located in a non-residential area relatively hidden behind a large warehouse off of the expressway in *Zona Sul*. While marginalized as a gay venue, it caters predominantly to white, upper/middle class, male homonormativity. As noted by a patron in her review, Vogue often replicates the social exclusion of women, people of color, and trans individuals:

> *"[Vogue Natal] Não respeita a identidade feminina das TRAVESTIS e TRANSEXUAIS, [é] um ambiente LGBT TRANSFOBICO, não pode dizer que é um lugar que respeite os direitos humanos de seus clientes!"* – Facebook review of Vogue Natal by Rebecka on June 20th, 2014.

Here Rebecka identifies Vogue as an "LGBT" space, but one she has experienced as misogynistic and transphobic. She goes on to attribute this to Vogue's change in location:

> "*Frequentei a VOGUE por muitos anos quando era no ALECRIM e amava, o problema foi depois que foi pra Zona Sul, parece que subiu a cabeça dos administradores, e não sou apenas eu quem diz isso, são todas as pessoas TRANS de Natal e que vem de fora e vão conhecer o ambiente"* – Comment on Facebook review of Vogue Natal by Rebecka on July 17th, 2014.

Yet many Vogue Natal patrons were happy with the move including FOXX who comments that the move from a "*bairro popular*" to a "*bairro de classe media alta*" resulted in a "positive" change in the clientele:

> *"Para os natalenses, gays ou héteros, a Vogue era a boate em que só aconteciam baixarias, era a boate que possuía um dark room, era a boate das bichinhas pão-com-ovo, era a boate de gente feia, era a boate frequentada por drag queens. E tudo mudou. Dava para ver nos novos rostos que víamos por lá...Diferente do antigo espaço, um público mais jovem agora povoa aquele ambiente nebuloso. Alguns casais héteros se*

considerando hype por encontrarem um espaço tão bom em sua cidade, vários musculosos retirando suas camisas, numa mistura estranha entre barbies e moderninhos que cansaram da noite de sempre da cidade." (FOXX 2010).

Here FOXX replicates pejorative class and gender stereotypes referring to the old Vogue as a "lowbrow" space for effeminate, poor, and gender non-conforming gays. He casts these bodies as "ugly" and undesirable in contrast to the younger and more attractive "*barbies*," "*musculosos*" and "*moderinhos*" at the new location. The expression "*bichinhas pão com ovo*" uses the diminutive, in this case depreciative, form of the word "*bicha*" (an effeminate gay) while referencing a simple, cheap food which everyone has eaten. FOXX's class implications and references to white culture from the United States racialize the clientele at the two different locations. For example, the "*barbies*" at the new Vogue are large, hairless, muscular men who present an idealized masculine body type. Like Ken Dolls, they are commonly white and blonde. Finally, to prove his point, FOXX calls upon mainstream heterosexual culture or "*casais héteros*" to give the new location legitimacy.

The new location and its spatial implications allows FOXX to claim Vogue Natal as a "gay space:" a space which melds with white, upper-middle-class, masculine and mainstream culture to exclude those most marginalized within LGBT+ communities. The old Vogue's location in a working-class neighborhood allowed it to hold more space for queer people – those on the outside of hetero and homonormativity who navigate intersections of multiple marginalized identities. As the debate around Vogue Natal demonstrates, queer spaces are raced, gendered, and classed in ways that deviate from mainstream subjectivities. I mobilize the term "queer spaces" to refer to fluid, transgressive, intersectional, and radically inclusive spaces which look more like the old Vogue than the new. As I will explore in the following sections,

queer spaces can be physical, geographical, social, and virtual, and can also refer to the movements, connections, and networks in-between. The next section introduces the informal, non-commercial, and ephemeral space of the *Arraiá do GAMI*.

The Arraiá do GAMI

While the word *arraiá*[23] often refers to a party that occurs throughout Brazil in the month of June, an *arraiá* is actually a place. It is a small temporary territory which hosts the events of the *festas juninas.* Here I examine the contemporary socio-spatial practices LGBT+ women utilize to build community in Natal through an analysis of an *arraiá* party hosted by the Grupo Afirmativo de Mulheres Independentes (GAMI). Held during a time of traditional and religious festivals, this annual event creates space for people who might otherwise be excluded from the celebration. GAMI is a non-profit, community organization of LGBT+ women founded in 2003. As stated on their Facebook page, the group promotes sexual diversity and gender equality in Natal though "*esporte, cultura, educação e lazer*" ("Gami Natal" 2016). The group has approximately 1,322 Facebook followers[24] and identifies their "*publico alvo"* as "*juventude, mulheres, LGBT, e população negra*" (Prosas – GAMI 2017). Located in a peripheral neighborhood of Natal, GAMI is connected to many social justice initiatives, such as *Virando o Jogo*, a sports club project for local girls; *Elas nas Exatas*, a professionalization project for women in science; and multiple political events in solidarity with other feminist, black, working-class and LGBT+ groups in Natal. They hold annual events such as the *Dia Municipal da Visibilidade Lésbica, Seminário Pelo Fim de Violência Domestica,* and the *Arraiá do GAMI.* The *Arraiá do GAMI*, takes place every year in a rented location in the *Redinha* neighborhood of

[23] also *"arraiál"* in Portugal and outside of Northeastern Brazil
[24] As of May, 2018

Zona Norte just north of the Ponte Newton Navarro. As previously mentioned, *Zona Norte* is the most geographically marginalized neighborhood in Natal as it is cut off from the rest of the city by the *Potengi* River. Considering the ways in which class and race intersect with sexuality, *Zona Norte* is in many ways a queer space within the city.

This section explores some of the ways in which GAMI produces alternate, resistant, and symbolic spaces – queer spaces – which subvert traditional spatial organization and re-claim space in a city that does not always welcome LGBT+ subjects. I draw on previous work exploring virtual space, queer space, and queer community formation (Anderson (1983); Browne (2005), Castells (2002); Podmore (2006); Rothenburg (1995); Saldaña (2015) in an ethnographic and geographical study of the *Arraiá do GAMI*, which in 2014 also included a drag *quadrilha* presentation by the group Vice-Versa. I argue that queer women, like others at the intersections of various marginalized identities, have necessarily developed hybrid community spaces which incorporate physical, virtual, auditory, visual, ephemeral, and geographical dimensions and rely on (online) social networks, rather than permanent physical spaces, as their central unit of community organization. Through strategic ephemeral practices, such as the *arraiá*, *quadrilha,* and online community organization, GAMI merges traditional cultural practices with network technologies of the digital age for community organization and political activism.

I begin with a brief discussion of queer women within queer geographies. As Kath Browne (2006) has argued, there is a difference between geographies of sexualities and queer geographies, as queer geographies challenge the very boundaries and binaries of space. I suggest that LGBT+/queer women, as individuals at the intersections of multiple marginal identities, need queer spaces – fluid, ever-changing spaces – which offer possibilities of moving “beyond limited and normal male/female, hetero/homo divides” (Browne 2006). My ethnographic study

looks at spaces and practices of a group generally excluded from typical gay, urban nightlife, such as that of Vogue Natal. I trace how LGBT+ women socialize and form community in Natal specifically looking at ephemeral spaces. My study includes participant observation during the Arraiá do GAMI in 2014 and 2015 as well as a geographical analysis of the physical space in which the *arraiá* takes place every year. These on-site observations are complemented by a virtual observation of the group's Facebook page in order to explore the role of different spaces in women-centered community formation. Other than its geographical location, I argue the *Arraiá do GAMI* is queer is in its ephemeral nature as well as in its inclusion of multiple, intersectional, and marginal sexual subjectivities. As an informal, non-commercial, and temporary space, it resists the reproduction of a dominant hetero/homo-normative paradigms and centers those most marginalized within LGBT+ communities. As we will see, GAMI also subverts many of the symbols, images, and cultural productions of the *festas juninas* to actively construct a space for LGBT+ women. I use Manuel Castells' concept of the "space of flows" to theorize GAMI's hybrid network spaces which create physical and virtual spaces that allow for real-time interactions across multiple physical locations. I also explore the *festas juninas* as temporally queer (Halberstam 2005) and heterotopic (Foucault (1967). As ephemeral festivals that occur once a year, they are "linked to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect" (Foucault 1997; 7). I then analyze the creation of LGBT+/queer space at the Arraiá do GAMI including the confluence of physical, auditory, visual, and virtual spaces. Finally, I conclude with a brief analysis of a drag *quadrilha* performance at the *arraiá* and an exploration of the role of personal relationships and political mobilization in women-centered LGBT+ community formation.

LGBT+ Women in Queer Space and Time

Scholars of queer geographies have widely observed that lesbians and LGBT+ women do not have the same array of social venues as gay men who occupy the bars and clubs of formal gay scenes in most cities[25]. The recent closure of many lesbian bars in the United States has also brought the issue of LGBT+ space for women to popular publications (Gieseking (2014), Marloff (2016)). Some authors suggest that the lack of lesbians in public space is due to the social oppressions lesbians face as women: such as street harassment, gendered income discrepancy, and an inability to pass in male-centered and often isolated/potentially threatening spaces at night. In *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) Manuel Castells posits that the lack of what he calls "lesbian territory" is due to a male tendency to seek spatial domination and a female tendency to network and form relationships based on "solidarity and affection" (1983). Later scholars have challenged this essentialist assertion by demonstrating that lesbians do concentrate residentially (Browne (2007), Rothenberg (1995), Rushbrook (2002)). However, many of these studies still separate gay men and lesbian women while obscuring a whole range of queer sexualities and gender identities[26]. As Paola Saldaña notes, "they have mostly followed heterosexual/homosexual binaries regarding space and have mostly neglected to address issues of class and race within the LGBT community" (2015). As neighborhood-based communities oriented around sexual politics and identity emerged in the United States and Europe in the 60s and 70s, they contributed to the construction of a modern gay identity framed around specific urban neighborhoods such as those in San Francisco or Berlin or Montreal or Sydney. Before the emergence of internet technology and online social networks, many of these early studies on gay

[25] See Bell and Valentine (1995), Browne et al (2007), Casey (2007), Castells (1983), Gieseking (2014), Lauria and Knopp (1985), Morris (2016), Podmore (2006), Rothenburg (1995), Saldaña (2015).
[26] See Castells (1983), Rothenberg (1995), Adler and Brenner (1992), Peake (1993), FitzGerald (1986), and Wolf (1992).

and lesbian geographies focused on geographical neighborhoods in Western cities. These communities also relied on essentialist understandings of gay and lesbian identities before queer theory pushed back against the identity politics of the 60s and 70s (Dehesa (2010), Jagose (1996), Mitchell (2000)). Yet, as geographers have also noted, the concept of "community" cannot be limited to a geographically bound area, especially in the context of the information age in which the internet, new communication technologies, and digital media have revolutionized how we interact, socialize, construct identity, and form community across time and space. LGBT+ communities often function as "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) rather than strictly geographical ones.

Despite their shortcomings, lesbian and gay geographies have identified social networks as an important element of community formation for women. In her work on lesbians creating urban social space, Tamir Rothenburg describes how lesbians create community based on comradeship rather than specific, stable geographical locations while also identifying the social network as an essential element of lesbian community formation in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

> "The very concentration of lesbians has created a recognisable social space – recognisable most importantly to each other, but increasingly to the 'straight' population as well. The concentration can be attributed in large part to lesbian social networking…and the spatial ramifications [of this process]" (Rothenburg 1995).

Given new technologies and spatial practices, here I examine the contemporary socio-spatial practices LGBT+ women utilize in Natal to build hybrid communities which include online social networks as well as physical and ephemeral spaces. Such community building is extremely important for the LGBT+ community, especially within socially conservative cities in which

community spaces are difficult to find, create, and maintain for queer people, people of color, women, and others at the intersections of various marginal identities.

Rather than looking at whether or not lesbians occupy physical territories, I seek to re-conceptualize new forms of spatial arrangements that move beyond the limited physical dimensions of geographical space and community formations. I think of these spatial arrangements as "queer spaces" defined as fluid, transgressive, intersectional, and radically inclusive spaces that blur boundaries of space itself and resist assimilation as sites of consumption and domesticity. Queer spaces are also linked to queer time. J. Halberstam (2005) dialogues with Foucault to think of queer time/space as part of a queer "way of life" which functions in opposition to conventional notions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. Queerness then becomes detached from isolated sexual acts or even sexual identity and linked to "strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices" that do not revolve around a timeline of the heterosexual, reproductive, nuclear family (Halberstam 2005). Queerness has the potential to open alternative relations to time and space and queer people use this time and space in ways that challenge the conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility (Delany in Halberstam 2005; 13). In thinking about queer temporalities, it makes sense that queer space also reflects these alternative relations to time and space.

Foucault's "heterotopia of the festival" helps us to understand the connections between queer time and space within the ephemeral (1984). As real, non-perfect spaces (opposed to non-real, perfect spaces), heterotopias are places and spaces of transgression and otherness that function in non-hegemonic conditions. They also contain the undesirable bodies which make utopian spaces possible. Heterotopias create a space that is of and for the other (Foucault 1984).

Foucault includes fairgrounds and vacation villages as examples of the "heterotopia of the festival" to which I add the ephemeral spaces of the *festas juninas*. The heterotopia of the festival is "absolutely temporal" and as such, it "creates a space of rupture in illusion" (Foucault 1984; 7). Like Bell and Valentine's example of queer spatial acts such as two men kissing on a night bus, the "heterotopia of the festival" reveals space to be ambiently produced as permanent. Queer spatial acts performed within these ephemeral spaces, such as the common practice of cross-dressing during *carnival* or the *festas juninas*, are socially acceptable because of their temporality. They temporarily allow queer acts in public spaces which are otherwise (ambiently) produced heterosexual, heterosexist, and heteronormative (Bell and Valentine 1995; 16-17). Geographer Dereka Rushbrook notes that imagining queer sites as heterotopic allows us to understand queer identities as geographic (2002). It also allows us to imagine geographic space as queer: unfixed, mutable, and open to reinterpretation. Like queerness, heterotopias are in a state of perpetual flux as they are continuously re-drawn, re-configured, re-mapped, re-contested, and re-articulated.

Virtual Networks and Hybrid Flows: Theorizing Women-Centered LGBT+/Queer Space

In theoretical terms, I analyze GAMI's hybrid community spaces through what Manuel Castell's calls the "space of flows" – "material arrangements that allow for simultaneity of social practices without territorial contiguity" (Castells 1999: 295). Within these new models of spatial organization, the central unit is the network. Like many social groups GAMI is a network, existing in connections between participants and in virtual spaces such as GAMI's Facebook page which gathers photos, videos, events, links, and comments in one online space. Whenever the group holds an event, this virtual community manifests itself in a physical form at varying

locations in Natal. While Castells emphasizes electronic space, the "space of flows" is "not purely electronic space," but rather exists in the interaction between "electronic space" and the "space of places." It functions through these "networks and flows." (Castells 1999: 294, 296). As a space, the space of flows can also become a site of mobilization. The new spatial dynamics of the information age offer opportunities for organization, mobilization, community formation, and resistance especially for groups which do not traditionally hold their own physical spaces. Groups can rapidly form across time and space (without members ever meeting in person) and physically manifest themselves in multifaceted locations. Social hierarchies and exclusions still exist; however, the flexible, dynamic space of flows allows for rapid, adaptable, and ever-changing community configurations. The "space of flows" developed around the same time as "queer" emerged as a theoretical concept in the 1990s. The dynamic, fluid, and hybrid characteristics of the "space of flows" makes it a fitting spatial arrangement for the organization and mobilization of queer communities. As the "space of flows" destabilizes fixed notions of space, queerness destabilizes binaries and fixed notions of identity. Both are subversive, ambiguous, and hard to control. As such, they have the potential to push-back against hegemonic mechanisms of power.

In his work Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) critiques dominant understandings of social media and contemporary activism arguing that notions such as Castell's "network" are "disembodied views" that not only diminish the importance of physical geography but also obscure the work of groups and individuals who organize over social media. Far from being spontaneous, instantaneous, or irreducible, Gerbaudo sees social media as a process "responsible for re-cast[ing] the organisation of the spatial and temporal scenes of social life – rather than as involved in the construction of another 'virtual' space bereft of physical geography" (12). He

also argues that Castells' notion of the "network" obscures the work of groups and organizers utilizing social media. Gerbaudo calls this work the "choreography of assembly" in which "influential Facebook admins and activist tweeps become 'soft leaders' or choreographers, involved in setting the scene and constructing an emotional space within which collective action can unfold" (5). To be sure, GAMI's success also relies on the physical and emotional labor of its own "choreographers." Maria and Leninha, a couple who live in the Redinha neighborhood, have been constructing the common identifications that structure the group for over fifteen years. As Gerbaudo notes, this type of "soft leadership" utilizes the personal character of social media and its everyday use as a means of triggering emotional impulses for mobilization and maintaining diverse spheres of friendship and intimacy (14). While GAMI does have a specific geographical location, its members and public do not meet regularly and vary in their group involvement. Social media then, is not just simple channel of information, but a "crucial emotional conduit" (Gerbaudo 14). When collective action is needed, such as an #elenão march against presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro, Maria sends a Whatsapp message or posts Facebook photos to activate the social network: condensing and transforming individual sentiments into community mobilizations. The emotional character of the "choreography of assembly" reflects not only the nature of the media used, but also the popular character of social movements (Gerbaudo 14). In mobilizing Castell's concept of "space of flows," I do so in unison with Gerbaudo's "choreography of assembly" to recognize the physical and emotional labor involved in social networking and mobilization.

Understood though Manuel Castell's concept of the "space of flows," GAMI's hybrid community spaces exist in the links between mediatic spaces, such as Facebook or WhatsApp, and physical spaces, such as GAMI's annual *arraiá* party. The group is constructed through

"networks and flows" which include the social networking of their members (Castells 1999: 296). Castells identifies four key components of the "space of flows" including 1.) A technological infrastructure and networks of interaction 2.) Nodes and hubs which structure connections and key activities 3.) Habitats for the social actors that operate the networks and 4.) Electronic spaces such as websites, spaces of interaction, as well as spaces of one-directional communication (Castells 1999: 295-296).

GAMI utilizes a technological infrastructure and networks of interaction such as those on Facebook and WhatsApp to configure the physical and mediatic spaces of their own space of flows. In his work on global waves of popular mobilization, Paul Mason distinguishes different functionalities between Facebook and Twitter, "Facebook is used to form groups, covert and overt—in order to establish those strong but flexible connections. Twitter is used for real-time organisation and news dissemination bypassing the cumbersome 'newsgathering' operations of the mainstream media (Mason 2012)" To this I add WhatsApp, a messaging app heavily used throughout Brazil to avoid the high text prices of cellular phone plans. WhatsApp is used to form groups as well organize group members in real-time. It is not public like Twitter, and offers back-to-back encryption to keep conversations private. Message threads on WhatsApp function as ephemeral virtual spaces as they are often created to organize an event at a specific moment and are deleted when the job is done. It is important to note that many of GAMI's members cannot easily access certain technologies, such as a personal computer or a reliable internet connection. As such, free and simple apps that do not occupy much storage and which work well on low bandwidths are very important to these network configurations. They allow the group to communicate information, coordinate members, plan activities, and organize political events. As a non-profit organization, the socio-political objectives of GAMI also reinforce group activities

and projects. The group is collectively run, but two of its most active organizers, Maria and Leninha function as *main hubs* structuring the connections and activities: creating Facebook events, initiating WhatsApp message threads, posting photos, calling meetings, and leading various events. While Castell's defines "hubs and nodes" as "communication sites that organize exchanges" such as Wall Street or MIT (1999, 295), here I conceptualize them as people in order to recognize the labor of group leaders and their "choreography of assembly" (Gerbaudo 2012).

In GAMI's "space of flows" group members function as *nodes* of the network, providing additional social connections while consuming output from the hubs and creating their own input. Public and private spaces serve as *habitats* for the social actors in which they access the network via home internet devices or public spaces that host group events. While a physical home base is not necessary for these community formations GAMI utilizes a small house in the *Redinha* neighborhood as a center of operations. The house functions as a meeting spot, workshop location, and project space for youth and adults. GAMI utilizes this space, along with various ephemeral and virtual spaces throughout the city, to give the group cohesion. Some of these ephemeral spaces are configured at street demonstrations, parades, sporting events, schools and at the annual *arraiá* party. The interactive electronic spaces of Facebook and WhatsApp serve as a fundamental frame for decision making, information input, and communication. GAMI is a space of flows that allows for simultaneous social practices and community formation without always relying on a defined, territorial configuration within a specific timeframe. The connection, interaction, and material organization of the community is based on networks and flows, linkages between GAMI's electronic and physical spaces.

The following section takes a closer look at one physical space GAMI configures each year during the *festas juninas*. It looks at the socio-spatial practices LGBT+ women utilize at the

event including auditory and visual techniques as well as the role of geography in defining queer space. Due to their nature as festivals that occur once a year, the *festas juninas* create multiple opportunities for ephemeral spaces, and queer spaces. As I argue, the creation of ephemeral spaces is a necessary and often effective way to also protect LGBT+ people as these spaces cannot be known or mapped in a conventional sense.

Getting Together: Defining Physical, Auditory, and Visual Space for LGBT+ Women at the *Arraiá do GAMI*

Social networking is the medium through which I came to know about the *Arraiá do Gami* in 2014. A friend of a friend, Rebecka, who I met at an LGBT Pride Parade in Rio de Janeiro, told me that a "*quadrilha junina trans"* was going to perform at an "*arraiá de lésbicas na Redinha...no espaço Nana Banana*." After living in Natal for two years, I thought I knew the LGBT+ spaces in the city, but I had never heard of the *Espaço Nana Banana,* and I had never been to any lesbian-specific events. All I had to go by was a cover photo Rebecka sent me on WhatsApp to locate and attend the event (*figure 16*). I realized that there are multiple, interlocking, queer communities within virtual spaces connected to Natal that had previously been invisible to me despite the fact that I had spent over two years interacting in Natal's LGBT+ community.

Figure 16: Facebook cover photo advertising the Arraiá do GAMI

GAMI relies on word of mouth and social networking to create and define ephemeral social spaces for LGBT+ women. Unlike events organized at Vogue Natal, GAMI's events are organized primarily for locals and those within GAMI's social network. "Network capital" (Urry 2006) and "community cultural wealth" (Yosso 2005) explain much of the difficulty I experienced in locating a specific address and arriving at GAMI's annual *arraiá* party when I conducted my ethnographic observation in 2014. "Network capital" involves "the capacity to communicate, travel, find places to meet up, and when things go wrong, compensate and make up for system failure – requiring high levels of network capital" (Urry 2006). Building off of Bourdieu's "cultural capital" (1977), network capital includes knowledge and resources related to one's social network – such as technology or transportation or communication strategies within a network. However, Bourdieu and Urry's concepts do not fully consider what Tara Yosso (2005) describes as "community cultural wealth" which values the knowledges and networks of marginalized groups and communities of color that are not valued in traditional interpretations of cultural capital (Yosso 2005). Contemplating network capital through Yosso's frame of community cultural wealth helps explain the difficulty I experienced in accessing GAMI's networks as an outsider. Though I had lived and worked in Natal for two years and frequented many LGBT+ spaces, I did not have the network capital required to access GAMI until 2014. Once I knew of the group, I found GAMI on Facebook, but, it still proved difficult to locate and arrive at the *arraiá*. Without specific knowledge of the *Redinha* neighborhood or a familiarity with the bus routes to this more peripheral zone of the city, I did not know how to get to GAMI's rented event location, the *Espaço Nana Banana*. Conversely, I found the gay club, Vogue Natal, within my first week in the city. Familiarity with central transportation networks, socio-cultural patterns of gay clubs, and mechanisms of a permanent business made it easier to

plan my night, arrive at my destination, and socialize within the space. When I sought out GAMI, friends in my social circle at the time discouraged me from going to a “dangerous” part of town. As a foreigner, I could not easily assess these stereotypes. In essence, my white, middle-class, North-American cultural/network capital – though highly valued in Natal – did not give me easy access to the queer community I sought.

Urry notes that although people organize themselves as “communities” taking advantage of virtual spaces and technological tools, they cannot do so without face-to-face encounters from time to time. As such, the physical spaces that host GAMI events play an essential role in defining women-centered, LGBT+ spaces in Natal. The physical space in which the *Arraiá do GAMI* takes place is a rented location that is more accessible to those living North of the river, away from the tourist centers of the city. In 2014, the entrance fee of five *reais* was inexpensive compared to the twenty *reais* cover charge at Vogue Natal. In subsequent years, GAMI accepted food donations in lieu of an entrance fee and only from those who could afford it. Unlike events at bars and clubs in the South of Natal, the *arraiá* was organized for locals and those within GAMI’s social network – proven by the difficulty I experienced in locating a specific address and arriving at the space. *Espaço Nana Banana* is not a business and does not have a commercial website. I invited a friend with a car to accompany me to the event, but she re-iterated the perceptions of *Zona Norte* as a dangerous area and declined my invitation. I eventually found the *Espaço Nana Banana* by taking a bus to the *Redinha* neighborhood with two friends and walking along the beach boardwalk until we got directions from a group of friends who appeared to be LGBT+-friendly.

The *Espaço Nana Banana* is a large open-air patio/*salão de festas*. It has a stage for performances, a dance floor, and a kitchen area. In 2014, a local vendor sold typical foods

associated with the *festas juninas* such as *pamonha, canjica,* and *bolo de milho*. It is a temporary, multi-use space apparent from the white plastic chairs and tables GAMI arranged under covered areas for guests during the event. The *arraiá* takes place once a year and is GAMI's only group party. As such, it is an essential social space for community-building. Decorations and visual markers serve an important role in delineating an LGBT+ community space. While many of the decorations recreate a

Figure 17: Statue of inter-racial lesbian couple by main stage at the 2014 arraiá

traditional setting for the celebration of the *festas juninas (*checkered flags, straw, religious icons, and images of corn or bonfires), others subvert strong religious themes such as the traditional wedding. For example, at the 2015 *arraiá,* GAMI placed a statue of an interracial lesbian couple next to the stage (*figure 17*), challenging typical representations of marriage at this time of year. A hand-drawn religious banner also depicted a dark-skinned baby Jesus (*figure 18*). As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the forms of "Northeastern" culture celebrated during the *festas juninas* are based on broad ethnic categories, geopolitical constructs, and socio-cultural markers which exclude blackness. However, GAMI, as a group which politically mobilizes around intersectional issues of race, gender, and sexuality, includes blackness in their celebration through decorations and visual markers.

Figure 18: Religious banner of Mary and baby Jesus at the 2014 Arraiá do GAMI

When I arrived at the *arraiá* at 4pm, there were approximately thirty women and a handful of men. This grew to about one-hundred and fifty people over the course of the Sunday evening. The crowd was diverse in its age range including many seniors and middle-aged women as well as teenagers, who are not typically found at gay bars and clubs in Natal. There were also

activities for children such as *pescaria*, a fishing game in which players can win small prizes. Other activities included group dances in which everyone participated, a raffle, and a *quadrilha* presentation by the group *Vice-Versa*. There were several performers including a stage band, a couple of solo singers, and a few dance groups.

Figure 19: Attendees in the Espaço Nana Banana during the Arraiá do GAMI (2014)

To define the functionality of their space, GAMI also utilizes different auditory strategies. Soundscape studies investigate the relationship between people and the sounds of their environment and ask what happens when those sounds change (Schafer 1993). A soundscape is made up of the entire acoustic environment that can be perceived by humans; some elements are naturally occurring such as the sounds of thunder, rain, or wind; some are human elements beyond our control such as voices, while others are elements we choose to add to our environment such as music. While soundscapes incorporate more than simply music playing at an event, music is one of the ways in which GAMI controls and defines space at their events. The *arraiá* in 2014 included a *carimbó* dance performance by a group of *senhoras*. *Carimbó* is a dance and a music genre from Northern Brazil with Indigenous origins mixed with African and Iberian elements (Gabbay 2010). In its original form, it was a sensual dance which often represented social themes such work and class inequality (Gabbay 2010). It was performed in religious rituals, popular festivals, and social reunions. Unlike most *carimbó* performances, the group at the *Arraiá do GAMI* was made up entirely of elders. A couple of the *carimbó* songs that they chose emphasized

Figure 20: Senhoras dancing Carimbó at the Arraiá (2014)

instruments such as the triangle and accordion, characteristic of *forró,* a popular dance of the *festas juninas*. In this way, the initial soundscape of the *arraiá* was heavily influenced by a syncretic musical performance, marking the space of the *arraiá* as Northern/Northeastern. The music marked the space as one of a traditional and popular festival, rather than a nightclub event. In these ways, the music of the *arraiá* was inclusive of older women and children, an uncommon demographic in the bars and clubs that often represent typical LGBT+ spaces.

Most strikingly different from typical LGBT+ spaces, the event drew a majority of women (cis and trans) who seemed to know each other and were seated in groups of friends. GAMI organizer and MC for the evening, Maria walked around welcoming people and taking pictures which she later posted to the group's Facebook page. Unlike the more ephemeral nature of the soundscape, elements of the visual environment were documented and recorded in a virtual space via photos. This strategy allows individuals to virtually participate in events by liking, tagging, or commenting on photos, whether or not they are physically present at the event. In this way, socialization and community formation continue within the virtual space of Facebook well after the event. Finally, the 2014 *Arraiá do GAMI* included a drag *quadrilha* performance by the group "Vice-Versa." This performance was an integral element of the *arraiá* suggested by the main image advertising the event. GAMI used this image (the same image Rebecka sent to me) as its Facebook cover photo around the time of the event. Here GAMI captures the visual imagery of the performance and utilizes it in their mediatic spaces to promote the event. In this way, photography bridges the physical, virtual, and ephemeral spaces and contributes to GAMI's

Figure 21: Author with Rebecka, Maria, Eduardo and friends at the Arraiá do GAMI (2014).

community formation. After a brief introduction to the quadrilha, the next sections will analyze Vice-Versa's drag quadrilha performance.

A group united around political work, GAMI builds community through personal and political connections. They have been working in Natal, since 2003 to promote gender equality and sexual diversity – organizing lesbians, bisexual, transgender women and allies through political activism and social activities. Throughout the course of my ethnographic research, I realized that this work brings this community together in more than just political ways. Maria and Leninha, GAMI's most active organizers, are a couple and group participants function much like a family. The group's success is linked to the personal investment of the organizers as well as their socio-political engagement. To conclude this section, I bring us back to Manuel Castell's quote:

> "Women have rarely had these territorial aspirations: their world attaches more importance to relationships and their networks are ones of solidarity and affection…[Lesbians] tend to create their own rich, inner world and a political relationship with higher, societal levels. Thus they are "placeless" and much more radical in their struggle" (Castells 1983).

Rather than thinking of LGBT+ women as "placeless," this section has identified new spatial configurations, practices, and arrangements for women-centered LGBT+ socialization within virtual spaces and through ephemeral geographical practices. The network, rather than permanent geographical locations, becomes the central organizing unit of hybrid community spaces which connect physical, virtual, ephemeral, imagined, and geographical spaces within the "space of flows." Despite his binary and essentialist assertion regarding gender and territorial space, Castells is not alone in his association of lesbian women with networks of "solidarity and

affection." In her study of the lesbian community in San Francisco, Deborah Wolf thinks about "community" "lesbian community," and "women's community" as "the continuing social networks of lesbians who are committed to a lesbian-feminist lifestyle, who participate in various social activities and projects and who congregate socially (Wolf 1979 in Rothenberg 1995). These early studies have identified the network as the central organizing unit of a women-centered sociability which is often linked to larger (and more radical) socio-political struggles. Contemporarily, the alternative, hybrid spatial configurations possible in a digital age are essential for marginalized groups who have not traditionally held their own physical spaces and who have not been able to easily manifest themselves in physical locations. We can see these same tactics in the emergence of guerilla queer bars around the United States in which LGBTQ people utilize Facebook to coordinate a "take-over" of an otherwise "straight" bar. Similarly, queer youth often seek out virtual communities on YouTube to connect with peers about sex, dating, or coming-out as they become more comfortable with their own sexualities and gender expressions. The "space of flows" offers queer spatial configurations for queer subjectivities. It destabilizes the concept of fixed geographies and allows for rapid, adaptable, and ever-changing community configurations over time and space. The nature of these communities makes them more difficult to suppress and as such, these spaces offer new possibilities for queer socialization, mobilization, and resistance.

Quadrilha **Performances Within the Ephemeral Spaces of the** ***Festas Juninas***

The dancers line up in pre-determined couples to begin an all too familiar choreography. The girls in bows and pig-tails flip their dresses to attract the boys who kneel in patched blue-jeans tipping their straw hats in recognition of their partners. The bride and groom enter, and the

marriage celebration begins. The *quadrilha* dances performed during the *festas juninas* are often spaces of traditional cultural articulation that celebrate marriage, fertility, and normative socio-sexual reproduction. After an introduction to the *quadrilha*, the following sections will explore how Natal's LGBT+ population subverts and re-signifies the *quadrilha* in its different iterations. Specifically, I will analyze an informal *quadrilha* performed by the group *Vice-Versa* for the *Arraiá do GAMI* in 2014 and a formal *quadrilha* performed by the group Brilho Potiguar for the 2015 Monte Alegre Festival de Quadrilhas Juninas.

Quadrilha dances can be improvised at parties, presented informally at events, and performed formally by professional groups in large televised quadrilha competitions. Unlike other Northeastern dance forms, like *forró*, the *quadrilha* is only presented in this season. It is a unique characteristic of the festivities which maintains the seasonal themes of fertility and union in its re-telling of a rural marriage and partner dances. The name "*quadrilha*" comes from the arrangement of partners into a square on the dance floor in the archaic form of the dance (Chianca *Quando* (2007) Rangel (2008)). The contemporary forms include more dancers to form long lines of partners. While it still retains marks of its elite European origins such as the French names given to its movements, the contemporary, popularized *quadrilha* is no longer associated with Europe or the upper-class aristocracy. Anthropologist Luciana Chianca notes that the symbolic meaning of the *quadrilha* was geographically relocated to the rural Northeastern *interior* in the early 20th century when the colonial traditions of Europe fell out of favor with the new urban bourgeoisie in the South:

> *Provavelmente nesse momento a quadrilha teria sido abolida das festas dos citadinos ricos, continuando a ser dançada pela população mais distante dos grandes centros*

urbanos, os interianos – geograficamente e simbolicamente defasados com suas danças já "fora de moda" (Chianca *Quando* 2007).

The *quadrilha* developed along rural/urban, North/South regional hierarchies in Brazil; however, these hierarchies are complicated by migration, the urban Northeast, and articulations of rural culture in urban settings.

Contemporary forms of the *quadrilha* generally fall into three categories: *comédia tradicional,* and *estilizada*. "*Comédia*" is generally the smallest category and is frequently the one in which explicitly "gay" *quadrilhas* compete. It relies on slapstick humor, exaggerated makeup/costumes, and stereotypical caricatures. Comic quadrilhas often employ sexual humor and cross-dressing for humoristic effect. The cross-dressing is almost always men dressing in a poorly arranged high-femme aesthetic – overdone makeup, bad wigs and large breasts – often tripping in their high heels or otherwise awkwardly performing "women." Comic *quadrilhas* are also satirical; they poke fun at other stereotypical characters such as politicians, religious figures, country bumpkins, or famous people.

The *quadrilha tradicional* is also called the *quadrilha caipira*/*matuta*. It typically represents rural culture and prioritizes the reenactment of a "hick" wedding called the "*casamento matuto.*" Dancers in the *quadrilha tradicional* face each other in two long lines while they carry out pre-determined dance steps organized by an animator who calls out the movements. Stereotypical *matuto* clothing reflects a simple country life that is also marked by economic hardship. The *matuto* character often wears checkered shirts and torn pants covered in patches usually accompanied by a straw hat and a bandana. *Matutas* wear modest dresses or skirts that maintain their innocent image as decent, honest country-girls. They often wear their long hair in girlish pigtail braids adorned with ribbons. Both men and women wear open sandals

and makeup to complete the look, often adding physical imperfections such as missing teeth, sun freckles, and scars (Chianca *Quando* 2007). The *matuto* caricature often reflects urban nostalgia for a simpler, traditional past, but more commonly reinforces derogatory images of country-folk who are ugly, uneducated, and poorly adapted for modern city life (Campos 2007).

The "*casamento matuto*" is the most important element of the *quadrilha tradicional*. The dancers tell the story of a "country bumpkin" who, having impregnated his girlfriend outside of wedlock, flees the authority of family, church, and state as he refuses to get married. In addition to the young man and woman, other characters include the parents of the couple, community members who become wedding guests, and various religious and civic authorities such as a priest, judge, and police officers. The Father represents patriarchal power and authority within the family and is generally characterized as a coronel, mayor, or landowning farmer (Chianca *Devoção* 2007). Despite the presence of these various social actors attempting to control and discipline this particular case of sexual deviance, the young man will not submit to their authority until threatened with violence. Once knives, guns, and sometimes even cannons are drawn, the young man gives up and accepts his destiny as a married man and father, thus upholding the honor of the young woman and her family (Chianca *Devoção* 2007). The wedding reestablishes social and moral order in the community and welcomes the couple into state and church-sanctioned sexual activity. After the scene is enacted, the characters become dancers in the *quadrilha* which is part of the wedding celebration.

The highly popular *quadrilha estilizada* emerged in the 1990s just after a great migration phase in the Northeast brought rural immigrants to Northeastern capital cities (Chianca *Quando* 2007). This form dominates the large media-sponsored competitions during the *festas juninas.* These competitions are supported and financed by the local municipalities and broadcast

throughout the Northeastern states. Each *quadrilha* is made up of fifty to eighty participants who have approximately twenty-five minutes to complete their presentation. They evaluated on their entrance, energy, musical repertoire, transitions, choreography, characters, costumes, scenery, make-up, and exit. The winners receive a cash prize.

A capital city within the Brazilian Northeast, Natal is a space that is both central and marginal, one which reflects the convergence of rural and urban cultures. In this space, the *quadrilha estilizada* has served as a site of contestation in which marginalized groups have challenged and complicated derogatory representations of their communities. In her book "*A Festa do Interior"*(2006) Luciana Chianca studies how the migrant population from the *interior* of Rio Grande do Norte has challenged pejorative stereotypes of rural people during the *festas juninas* through the *quadrilha estilizada* which presents new visual images associated with the *quadrilha*. She argues that the *quadrilha tradicional* became an instrument of power through which an urban, socio-economic elite reaffirmed its authority over the *festas juninas* while depreciating and demeaning rural identities (Chianca 2006). The movement of migrants from the *interior* to the city created a shift in power dynamics and within representations of the *festas juninas.* Migrants re-invented the *quadrilha* in the city to affirm a positive rural identity. As Chianca explains,

> *Nas tradições festivas que esses novos atores reinventam, as referencias culturais 'rurais' guardam um sentido social e indenitário extremamente poderoso e útil na definição de um espaço simbólico valorizado na capital*" (Chianca 2006).

The *quadrilha estilizada* replaces the traditional patches, flannel shirts, and straw hats of the *quadrilha tradicional* with expensive fabrics, long brightly colored dresses, and a variety of decorations that follow extravagant themes and complex choreographies that bring to mind

images of Carnival competitions in Rio's *Sambódromo* over those of the country bumpkin (Silva and Filho 2013). Some *quadrilha* groups have even re-signified the *matuto* character as a successful agro-business man, associating rural economies with progress and production (Chianca *Quando 2007).*

Chianca is not the only one who has drawn a connection between the commercialization and spectacularization of *festas juninas* and a re-signifying of traditional rural culture by marginalized communities. In his study of the *festas juninas* in Bahia (2015), ethnomusicologist Jeff Packman argues that locals in Bahia have seized the idea of "carnivalization of São João" in order to incorporate Afro-Bahian culture and Afrocentric activism into festivities which otherwise obscure blackness (258). He notes that musicians, dancers, and entrepreneurs from working-class neighborhoods populated primarily by people of African descent "reinvent" São João traditions through the practice of "*samba junino*," (266). Specifically, they have brought *samba de roda* from Bahia's rural spaces into the city and adapted it into their celebrations. *Samba de roda* is a form of *samba* practiced in *rodas de capoeira*, a martial art/dance form developed by slaves in order to train their minds and bodies without raising suspicion from slave owners.

Adding to Chianca and Packman's observations, I argue that the Arraia do GAMI presents another important intervention in the *festas juninas,* which have also obscured LGBT+ identities. The Arraiá do GAMI takes place in Natal's *Zona Norte*, one of the peripheral neighborhoods of Natal. As such, the event draws a working-class, migrant population. The Arraiá do GAMI provides another space to re-signify traditional cultural practices and define a symbolic space which values marginalized identities, in this case those of the LGBT+ population in *Zona Norte* – individuals who live at the intersections of raced, classed, and gendered LGBT+

identities. These modern traditions are important interventions into an official celebration that has obscured LGBT+ and racialized subjectivities while negatively stereotyping those from the rural interior. GAMI's activities exemplify how marginalized communities create new outlets for expression and inclusion which have been central to their survival. The next section briefly describes the *quadrilha* performed by the group Vice-Versa at the Arraiá do GAMI. Unlike the formal competitions, informal *quadrilha* presentations such as Vice-Versa's often mix and match traditional, stylized, and comic elements of the *quadrilha* to entertain their audience. The highlight is almost always the "*casamento matuto*" which offers an opportunity to play with gendered characters, religious figures, and the socio-sexual symbols of the *festas juninas*.

A Quadrilha Vice-Versa, Contra o Preconceito

The *Quadrilha Vice-Versa* was one of the last performances of the night during the 2014 Arraiá do GAMI. Similar to *quadrilhas* trans/LGBT which perform in the competitions during *São João,* the group *Vice-Versa* presented a queered version of the dance. They began with a banner with their group name behind which the dancers organized for each number of the performance. The banner indicated the gender inversions of the performance (vice-versa) alongside a central image of a *morena* Betty Boop in a Brazilian flag dress. A universal symbol of sexual freedom, Betty's Brazil dress blows in the wind à la Maralynn Monroe. The background of the banner also includes the traditional symbols of the *festas juninas*: a *fogeira*, a church, and three members of a *forró* group carrying musical

Figure 22: The banner of the Quadrilha Vice-Versa before the performance (Photo by author)

instruments and wearing the *chapeu cangaceiro*, a symbolic hat of the Northeast. Among rows of small houses, the bottom left corner reads “Redinha” marking the neighborhood from which the *quadrilha* group hails, also the neighborhood in which the Arraiá do GAMI took place.

As the music began, the traditional characters of the *quadrilha* appeared: the priest, the young couple, and wedding guests along with Northeastern characters such as the outlaw *cangaceiro* Lampião. There were also new characters in what seemed to be creative, personal costume choices that mixed elements of the *matuto* costume (checkered pants, straw hats, high socks), the ornate costumes seen in the *quadrilha estilizada* (brightly colored shirts, silver and gold sequins, fine fabrics) and patriotic themes (green and yellow handkerchiefs, Miss Brazil, a World Cup trophy prop). All of the characters were dressed in some form of drag and incorporated exaggerated masculine and feminine gestures. The first song was not a typical São João dance, but an Arabic belly dance followed by a Copa Mundial theme. In 2014, the World Cup was held in Brazil. Vice-Versa’s performance recognizes Brazil as a champion using the 2004 World Cup theme song presented by Rede Globo. In one number, they also danced around a World Cup trophy. Later the group returned to the characteristic São João couple’s dance in the traditional lines of the *quadrilha* in which each character paired off with another who had a similar themed costume - for example, the *noivo* and *noiva*, the *cangaceiros*, the couple dressed in *verde/amarelo* all danced together for this number while weaving in and out of the choreography of the group dance. Some of the main characters paired off in masculine/feminine dance couples, but the other wedding guests seemed

Figure 23: Dancers of the Quadrilha Vice-Versa after the performance (Photo by author)

to mix and match their partners. Following this number, there were individual dances first by all of the drag kings and then by the drag queens. In the end, the priest performed the wedding ceremony and the group finished the *quadrilha* with a group song and dance. While the characters were similar to the characters of the traditional *quadrilha* many of the elements of the *matuto* marriage story were replaced by comical, funk, carnival, and popular songs all done in drag. The *noiva* was not pregnant, the parents of the couple were not easily recognizable, and the story of sexual deviance followed by the restoration of the moral social order through marriage was lost, or ignored in the *Quadrilha Vice-Versa*. The next section will more deeply analyze a formal *quadrilha* performance by the group Brilho Potiguar presented as part of a *quadrilha* competition in 2015.

"Maria Boa: Uma historia junina que ninguém contou"

Red curtains part, and the scene materializes around her. She spins around, hands on her hips, as a puff of smoke and melodic chimes mark her entrance. Like some sort of ethereal being ready to grant our wishes, Maria Boa stands on stage, a pedestal above a crowd of kneeling soldiers, *cabaré* ladies, and *high-society* clients. She is adorned with flowers; her pink dress falls just above her knees. The high neckline of her dress demurely balances her thick red lipstick and dark eyeliner. She coyly asks, "*Estavam me esperando?* opening her arms wide in a grand embrace, "*Se estavam só me esperando vamos começar a festa! Podemos abrir o cabaré."* She sensually shimmies up through the air reaching her arms behind her head, *"Avisam a todos,"* presenting herself to her admirers: *"Maria Boa chegouuuu*!" And with this her guests lean back

Figure 24: Maria Boa atop her stage in the opening scenes of Brilho Potiguar's 2015 performance.

in a bellowing call and erupt into an impassioned dance: kicking their feet from side to side, fervently clapping to a deep drum beat, accordion melodies flying through the air as fast the *quadrilha* dancers' white handkerchiefs.

This scene, part a *quadrilha* dance performance by the group Briho Potiguar and presented during the 2015 "Festival de Quadrilhas Juninas," was held in Monte Alegre, a small municipality just outside of Natal. Many of Brilho Potiguar's actors and dancers are part of the local LGBT+ community including Maria Boa who is played by a trans actor. The *quadrilha* theme, "*Maria Boa: Uma historia junina que ninguém contou*" tells a fictional story of Maria Boa based on the facts of her life.

This section demonstrates one of the ways in which Maria Boa and her story are apprehended and integrated into traditional cultural spaces. Through an analyses of Brilho Potiguar's *quadrilha* performance, I argue that the group represents Maria Boa as queer and inserts this queerness into a space of traditional Northeastern cultural articulation. I read Brilho Potiguar's 2015 *quadrilha* as an LGBT+ cultural production that not only further queers Maria Boa, but also produces spaces which challenge the notion that rural Northeastern culture is unwelcoming of LGBT+ culture. I utilize ethnographic observations of the 2015 "*Festival de Quadrilhas*" in Monte Alegre, Brilho Potiguar's artistic project proposal, informal interviews, and YouTube video footage to examine elements of the performance such as the theme, category, storyline, characters, and costumes. I argue that through artistic performance Brilho Potiguar confronts moralistic, patriarchal, and heteronormative values typically associated with the Northeast while also affirming traditional Northeastern culture and forming affirmative LGBT+ community spaces. In this way, traditional Northeastern culture provides space for queer cultural articulation, LGBT+ individuals make space for themselves within traditional culture,

and Brilho Potiguar queers Maria Boa in this Northeastern cultural form.

Theme and Category: A Marriage in a Brothel

Unlike other *quadrilha* groups which center their performances around a traditional rural wedding, Brilho Potiguar places their performance in the space of the *cabaré* and centers it around Natal's most famous "*Dama da Noite Natalense... Dona de uma das casas de tolerância mais famosas do país"* (Potiguar 2015). In their artistic project proposal, they explain their choice of this "*tema polêmico*" and recognize Maria Boa as an important historical agent:

> *Justifica-se a escolha desse tema por ser Maria Boa uma importante figura na história da cidade de Natal e por ser encarada como um verdadeiro mito do folclore potiguar assim como da cultura nordestina como um todo.* (Potiguar 2015)

The myth of Maria Boa is equally important to Brilho Potiguar in their creative re-fashioning of her narrative. As stated in their project proposal, Brilho Potiguar's objective is not to present a faithful biography of Maria Boa, but rather artistically re-interpret her story into a genuinely Northeastern "*espetáculo junino*." They cleverly link Maria Boa and the *festas juninas* through a fitting historical coincidence: Maria Boa shares her June 24th birthday with São João, the patron Saint of the *festas juninas*. While not overtly political, Brilho Potiguar states in their proposal that they seek to break free from "*interpretações preconceituosas*" of this history:

> *Em termos de perspectivas, o espetáculo abordará visões diversificadas dessa história, dividindo-se em aspectos românticos, juninos e também cômicos. Essa estratégia justifica-se em tentar fugir de interpretações preconceituosas que trazem consigo elementos como o Cabaré e a figura da profissional da Noite, vulgarmente conhecidas por Quengas, dessa*

maneira, daremos a essa história o máximo de importância cultural que a mesma possui. (Potiguar 2015).

Brilho Potiguar re-writes Maria's story as a stylized history which recasts the space of the *cabaré* and reinterprets its actors in a more diverse light. Another unique characteristic of Brilho Potiguar's 2015 performance is its melding of different *quadrilha* categories which are usually kept separate. There are generally three categories in quadrilha competitions, "*comédia*," "*estilizada*," and "*tradicional*" (G1, Definida ordem 2015). The 2015 Monte Alegre Festival de Quadrilhas Juninas competition included 56 groups, most of which competed in the "*estilizada*" category. The *quadrilhas* are evaluated in different areas such as "*tempo, originalidade, roteiro musical, evolução, casamento matuto, animação, figurino, e tema*" which are defined ahead of time in each competition. These areas can be weighted differently based on the overall category. For example, the "*casamento matuto*" is of utmost importance in the "*tradicional*" category while "*comédia*" might prioritize the creativity and originality of humorous characters (Decreto Nº 9.722, Prefeitura de Natal 2012). Brilho Potiguar incorporates *tradicional* and *estilizada* in the two separate acts of their performance: Act I utilizes stylized costumes of the *cabaré* ladies and high society clients (*figure 25*) followed Act II which features the *matuto* style dress of the June Festival celebration (*figure 26*). Given that the *quadrilha estilizada* has served as a space of contestation in which marginalized groups have

Figure 25: Stylized costumes of Act I: Cabaré Ladies and Clients: As Belas Meninas de Maria Boa" Militares Americanos, e Homens da Alta Sociedade Natalense.

Figure 26: Dancers in "Junine" Costumes during Act II

challenged and complicated derogatory representations of their community (Chianca 2007), it is interesting that Brilho Potiguar competed in the "traditional" category. In fact, it can be difficult to classify Brilho Potiguar's performance as the characters intentionally switch costumes halfway through the performance from the showy, colorful outfits of the *estilizada* to the *matuto* clothing of the *tradicional*. For this reason, quadrilha participants have jokingly referred to this mixing of genres as as "*uma quadrilha matulizada*." While the competition judges did not favorably evaluate this mixing of categories, it is a fitting form for the queer content of this *quadrilha*.

While Brilho Potiguar's performance includes drag and humoristic representations of gay characters, the overall presentation fits the seriousness of the traditional category. At the same time, Brilho Potiguar also modifies the *quadrilha tradicional*: a category which usually includes a *casamento matuto* that must obey official rules established by the city:

> *O ponto máximo… de uma quadrilha junina tradicional…é uma cerimonia religiosa projetada dentro dos festejos juninas. Durante a sua realização, serão observadas: O respeito aos costumes e rituais dentro das tradições juninas; a seriedade; o respeito ao publico; e, a criatividade… A utilização de palavras de baixo escalão e gestos obscenos implicara a DESCLASSIFICACAO da quadrilha junina.* (A Prefeita do Municipio de Natal 2012)

Brilho Potiguar plays with this story of the "*casamento matuto*," subverting and re-signifying the heteronormative symbols, characters, and storyline while still competing in the traditional category. Despite its importance in the *quadrilha tradicional,* Brilho Potiguar does not center their performance around the *casamento matuto*. Instead they reframe the *quadrilha* around Maria Boa's birthday party and a community celebration of the *festas juninas*:

Maria Boa dará uma festa de aniversário em seu cabaré, um aniversário junino onde o ritmo principal será o arrasta-pé, a festa terá muitas comidas típicas, decoração de balões, fogueiras e bandeirinhas coloridas e claro uma animada quadrilha onde as meninas do cabaré dançarão com os clientes da casa (Potiguar 2015).

A wedding still occurs, but it is subsumed into the primary celebration of Maria Boa and held in the space of her *cabaré*. The heteronormative symbolic space of the church is replaced by the queer, deviant space of the brothel. Brilho Potiguar also presents, queered family relations such as Maria Boa's relationship with her *cabaré* daughters. When the Bride reveals she is in love with an American soldier who promises marriage, she calls Maria Boa "*Madrinha.*" Maria is cautious, suspicious, and protective of her goddaughter asking "*será mais um militar Americano que jura aos céus que ama uma das minhas meninas*?" She warns, "*Você não é a primeira nem será a última a ouvir esse tipo de promessa*" before arranging to speak with the young man. While this story shares many similarities with Maria Boa's biography, Brilho Potiguar chose to leave her out of the coupling narrative. Still she plays a pivotal role in the wedding which is not a *matuto* wedding but rather a modern marriage between a U.S. serviceman and a *cabaré* girl. In this way, Brilho Potiguar situates the story historically in the transnational space of Natal during World War II.

Figure 27: A Wedding in a Brothel: Maria's goddaughter and the U.S. serviceman get married in the cabaré

It is in this space that Maria Boa stretches, alters, and disrupts hetero-patriarchal structures of family, church, and state to make a marriage happen on her terms, in her brothel. The patriarch figure strikingly absent from this wedding, Maria Boa takes over the role of the "Father" as she interrogates the young serviceman about her *cabaré*

daughter, "*Eu sei de tudo que se passa nesse cabaré; então o que quer você realmente com ela*? She insists, "*Se você realmente a ama, case com ela agora, aqui*." Coincidently at that moment Maria's friend, the priest, walks into the *cabaré* for her birthday celebration. When Maria asks him to perform the ceremony, he protests the location, "*se alguém souber… neste lugar…*" but Maria convinces him, "*Padre, por favor, me dê esse presente.*" Maria Boa uses her charm and influence, rather than the typical threat of violence the Father figure employs, to convince everyone to immediately go through with the marriage. She ultimately controls all of the patriarchal figures and assumes their authority: persuading the U.S. soldier to marry, convincing the priest to perform the ceremony in the brothel, and taking over the role of "Father." She masterfully stretches the patriarchal structures of family, church, and state to make the marriage happen on her terms. After the ceremony, she addresses the audience with a speech about love, "*Acredito no amor... seja ele proibido, escondido, do jeito que for!" Vamos festejar e namorar… Hoje é o meu aniversário! Hoje é São João*!" Instead of celebrating heterosexual union, Maria Boa's *quadrilha* is a community celebration of love, the *festas juninas*, and her birthday.

Queer Characters of Maria's *Cabaré*

Some of the most obvious queer elements of this *quadrilha* are the characters, many of whom utilize stereotypical costumes, gestures, props, and body language to emphasize their queerness. For example, Maria Boa's dance partner, Zé Bom, is dressed in bright pink flowers (*figure 28*)(Silver). While typical *quadrilhas* mimic the

Figure 28: A Queer Couple: Maria Boa and her dance partner pictured next to the married couple and the Dama da Noite

cishet[27] male/female partnering of the *matuto* marriage in their couples, Brilho Potiguar cleverly queers this pairing while still maintaining the elements of the traditional style. While the couple is a man and a woman, Maria Boa and her partner stand in contrast to other couples: Maria a head taller than him, both dressed in matching pink outfits. In their historical research for the performance, Brilho Potiguar found references to Maria Boa's lovers/partners including Zé Bom (Nascimento). His role in this performance is as Maria Boa's dance partner, but he also has a several backstories, including that he was one of the classy men who frequented Maria's *cabaré* and that they were married and secretly living together (Nascimento, Silver). Here it is a heterosexual marriage that must be kept a secret.

The only queer character specifically designated as such in Brilho Potiguar's project proposal, "O Amigo Gay de Maria Boa" (*figure 29*), is part of the *elenco teatral*. He works a gay fashion aesthetic with sunglasses, flamboyant gestures, and a sassy runway walk. His character is in charge of the *cabaré* agenda and logistics including party planning and event organization (Nascimento). Stereotypically a gossip, he is also one of the characters with the most lines and one who peppers English throughout his speech in phrases like "*claro que sim, baby*" and by calling Maria Boa "Mary." His main prop, a fan, works as an extension of his body as he stops and poses hands on his hips throughout the performance. Two other queer characters in the *Elenco Teatral* are the Cafetina, who organizes the prostitutes and takes care of the *cabaré,* and the religious Beata, who calls into question the morality of the *cabaré's* activities (Nascimento). While not specified in the proposal, they both represent another queer trope as drag performers who do their own voiceovers. Many *quadrilha* groups, especially

Figure 29: The gay fashion aesthetic of the Amigo Gay

[27] Cisgender and heterosexual

those competing in the comical category, rely on these tropes and slapstick humor for comic effect, but often fall into mockery of gay caricatures. Brilho Potiguar, however, brings complexity and nuance to their queer characters who are fun, but not ridiculous. Dominating the *elenco teatral* they are developed , have multiple lines, and advance the plot. They serve purposes beyond comic effect. For example, Brilho Potiguar has more men than women in their group[28]. To complete the man/woman dance pairs in the choreographies, the drag performers, who are almost always gay men, "*brincam de mulheres*" (Nascimento).

Figure 30: Elenco Teatral 2015: A Cafetina, A Faxineira, O Amigo Gay, and A Beata

While Brilho Potiguar incorporates comical and stylized elements, they compete in the traditional category and maintain a serious complexity to the performance. According to their project proposal, Brilho Potiguar wrote in fun characters to "lighten" the brothel theme and engage the typical "*cômico-nordestino*" humor of the June festivals:

> *Os personagens serão definidos de acordo com a proposta do tradicional-romântico e do cômico-nordestino, seus nomes conterão elementos que suavizem o tema Cabaré e harmonizem o tema São João.* (Potiguar 2015)

Subversively utilizing Northeastern humor, Brilho Potiguar connects with "junine" traditions and recasts the space of the brothel while also critiquing specific socio-cultural phenomena in the Northeast. For example, a central scene with the Beata points out hypocritical religious discourses. A moralizing figure, she crashes the wedding ceremony just as the priest agrees to perform the marriage in the *cabaré*. She denounces everyone and threatens the priest: "*Vou falar*

[28] One possible reason for this is that many of the performers are young, and parents in São Paulo do Potengi are more protective of their daughters who they do not want traveling unaccompanied around the state to perform (Nascimento).

tudo pra o bispo!" During her diatribe, the Amigo Gay grabs her disguise to reveal that she is, in fact, JuJu Belinha, one of the "ex-putas" of Maria's *cabaré* (Nascimento). The tables turned, Maria Boa takes control of the scene declaring that JuJu will not denounce the priest, her past will be kept a secret, and the marriage will happen. The scene works with different elements of costume and disguise to queer and unqueer the Beata, who ultimately joins the party to celebrate with Maria Boa. Lightly masked under outward humor, the queer characters are able to make subtle but ultimately biting criticisms of religious and hetero-patriarchal structures at work in Northeastern society.

In chapter one, I read Maria Boa as queer based on her positionality and her marginalization as a sex worker. In this chapter, I have argued that Brilho Potiguar's performance is queer as it centers queer characters and reframes the *quadrilha* narrative around Maria Boa's birthday party and a community celebration of the *festas juninas* in her *cabaré*. Adding another queer layer to the performance, many of the actors and dancers are also part of the LGBT+ community in São Paulo de Potengi, Natal, and surrounding areas. In this way, they have written and represented their own subjectivities in the performance. One of the most important casting choices was that of Maria Boa, interpreted by Kaila Silva. In an interview with TVU featuring Brilho Potiguar's *quadrilha,* Kaila describes Maria Boa as "*uma mulher muito batalhadora, muito guerreira... uma mulher muito boa, inclusive... que com muita luta conquistou seu espaço.*" These are admirable and relatable characteristics not only for the LGBT+ community, but also for Northeasterners who "*lutam pra conquistar o seu espaço*" at the different intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, region, and ethnicity in Brazil. Brilho Potiguar deliberately subverts stereotypical and derogative representations of prostitutes in their performance. Their heroine is strong, independent, kind, generous and respected in the

community. Kaila explains, "*É um privilegio pra mim... é muito bom fazer esse papel. Quando eu estou em quadra eu interajo muito com as pessoas...veem a personagem em mim*." Kaila stood out as an actor and dancer who not only impressed the directors with her energy, spirit, and acrobatic moves, but who was also able to transmit the spirit of Maria Boa to the public. A member of the cast explains, "*A Kaila, ela simplesmente se empolgava muito, inclusive quando ela dançava… a gente dizia 'Kaila como é q tu conseguia rodar daquele jeito, fazia tudo aquele…torcia, fazia aquele acrobacia... É incrível; ela se incorporava mesmo. É como se fosse o espirito de Maria Boa incorporasse no corpo dela"* (Nascimento). In her very physical performance, Kaila memorializes Maria Boa from below – utilizing her body to project a strong feminine energy and spirit. The success of the performance takes on new meaning when performed by a trans actor. Kaila disidentifies with heteronormative scripts which would negatively read her as queer, deviant, and perverse. She works on and against these scripts not only by embracing a performative role as a sex worker, but also by recasting this role to create a powerful, complex, and multifaceted character. Maria Boa is the boss of the *cabaré*, but she is also sweet, kind, and hospitable: she opens her doors to the entire community. She is a respected community member who uses her friendship with the priest to convince him to officiate the marriage. She is also a *cabaré* mother who replaces the patriarch of the traditional *matuto* wedding and makes the marriage happen on her terms and in her space. In this way, Maria Boa subverts and queers the patriarchal power dynamic of the traditional wedding narrative.

Conclusion

Brilho Potiguar inserts their own subjectivities into the Maria Boa narrative not as an overtly political act, but as artistic performance – one which creates community and harmonizes

with traditional rural culture. While GAMI is politically mobilized group, their *arraiá* similarly creates space for LGBT+ people as an intervention into the *festas juninas*. Within *ephemeral* festival spaces, LGBT+ groups and individuals create their own modern traditions through which they not only participate in traditional celebrations, but also contest negative and reductionist narratives around LGBT+ subjectivities in the Northeast. This chapter has explored manifestations of queerness in traditional Northeastern culture as well as how this queerness pushes back against moralistic, hetero-patriarchal ideologies in the Northeast. Through their interventions, these groups also demonstrate how traditional spaces like those of the *festas juninas* are cultural battlegrounds over which social actors contest cultural meanings[29]. Brilho Potiguar's performance caught the attention of the local news channel TVU (TV Universitário) which broadcasts out of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) in Natal. The TVU crew traveled over an hour inland to film in São Paulo do Potengi. The report is festive, fun, and educational. It explains the European origins of the *quadrilhas*, and emphasizes that it is in the Brazilian Northeast that the *quadrilha* "*ganhou brilho e colorido especial*" (TVU). While it features interviews with dancers, musicians, the artistic director and Kaila/Maria Boa herself, the LGBT+/queer elements of Brilho Potiguar's performance are obscured in TVU's report. In his interview, artistic director Estayne Roberto explains Brilho Potiguar's "*homenagem a Maria Boa*" and re-interpretation of her story. However, the reporter follows with a voiceover defining what that story is, "*interpretação e música profunda para contar essa história: a joven que foi tirada de dentro de um cabaré para se tornar uma mulher de família.*" Either TVU is unware of Maria Boa's story (and Brilho Potiguar's re-interpretation) or they purposely misrepresent the

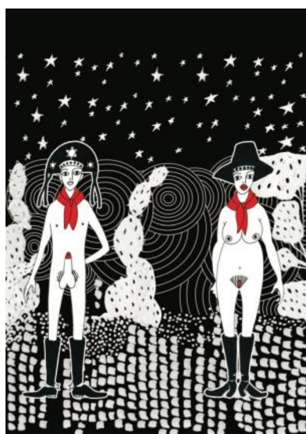
[29] Another example of LGBT+ representation and contestations of space/meaning during the *festas juninas* can be found in the Globo news article "*Travestis ganham espaço nas quadrilhas juninas em Pernambuco"* (2015).

content of her story to “clean-up” the report for television broadcast across the state. While certainly a *mulher* of her own *cabaré* family, she was never “taken out” of the *cabaré* to become a “*mulher de familia,*” a concept that implies a woman within the relational bonds of patriarchal family structures. The “*mulher de família*” is symbolically associated with an honest, correct, and pure woman – an image in contrast to that of the *mulher vadia*, another synonym for “prostitute.” Maria Boa was a prostitute who worked on and against patriarchal structures to become a successful and powerful businesswoman in Natal in the 1940s. Brilho Potiguar’s narrative includes these elements of her myth and story while recasting the space of the *cabaré* and the queer actors within as nuanced and complex people who make up their own families, pushing back against hetero-patriarchal structures. In the process, Brilho Potiguar creates friendships and bonds of affinity between LGBT+ people within their own social context, the rural *interior* of the Brazilian Northeast. While traditional, rural culture of Northeastern Brazil has been coded as backwards, anti-modern and therefore unwelcoming of alternative sexualities and gender expressions, it holds space for LGBT+ identities. LGBT+ individuals and communities have also made space for themselves within traditional Northeastern culture. This space may look different from that of the urban South. It might manifest itself in different ways or prioritize community and family life, but LGBT+ culture in the Northeast continues to exist, adapt, transform, and queer what it means to be traditional.

Chapter Three: Queering the Cordel, LGBT+ Themes in Cordel Literature

NATASHA TRAVA MACHO

O meu nome é Natasha
Trava Macho, Sim, Sinhô!
Pois quem disse que num existe mulhê macho
E cabra macho que é flô?



Das histórias que eu ouvia,
Cada um já vinha com um papel
Fosse menina ia pra cozinha,
Fosse menino ia pro bordel.

De pequena eu já sentia,
Boa coisa isso não era,
Como é que pode alguém decidir por mim
Se sou ele ou se sou ela?

De perguntar morreu o burro
E de apanhar, que num obedecia.
Como podia eu ser feliz,
Se a enxada era minha sina?

Sebo nas canela, pra que te quero
Vou-me embora daqui!
Quero fita no cabelo,
Ser bunita como as atriz.

Do bréu do sertão
Pro bréu da cidade,
Do cascalho, pro asfalto.
João foi sumindo…
E Natasha subiu no salto…

Da minha terra só saudade
Dessa cidade, só temor.
Aqui tive que aprender a ser trava
Trava macho, sim, sinhô!

From: *Projeto Lampioa* (2014)
Texto: Mariano Mattos Martins
Arte: Juliana Vomero, Márcio Diegues, Ronaldo Fraga

Introduction: Cordel Literature

Originally sung as part of an oral tradition and later printed and published on inexpensive paper, *cordéis* have always been an affordable popular literary form accessible to rural and urban working-class communities. Also called *folhetos*, these booklets have recently made their way into other mediums such as online archives, videos, zines, and cyber communities. While traditional *cordéis* usually tell short stories that reiterate conventional morals and norms, this chapter will analyze how contemporary *cordéis* represent LGBT+ and queer subjects[30] while helping readers make sense of their changing social realities.

The *cordel* has often rearticulated traditional values of religious conservatism, white hegemony, and dominant masculinity (Albuquerque (1999), Diniz (2013), Slater (1982), Rowe and Schelling (1991). Many *cordéis* comment on changing social norms while idealizing a traditional past. We can see the cordel as a male-dominated space in the lack of women authors (Costa 2015), but also in the themes of traditional *cordéis*, such as those which represent women in stereotypical roles as maidens, mothers, or whores. Those who transgress established boundaries are punished through bitter satire, social marginalization, or even through supernatural phenomenon, such as being transformed into an animal (Rowe and Schelling 1991). Not only did *literatura de cordel* emerge within a patriarchal and colonial society, but was also part of the elaboration of a conservative Northeastern identity. Many *cordéis* criticize "modern values" especially those which seem to threaten agrarian social structures, such as women entering the urban workforce (Albuquerque (1999), Rowe and Schelling (1991)).

Yet many *cordéis* also criticize the prevalent social order without idealizing the past, especially in regards to class relations. Cordel literature is linked to Northeastern regional

[30] Here I use the combined terms "LGBT+ and queer" to contribute to the elaboration of intersectional feminist framework that bridges conversations in Latin America and the United States.

identity and the struggles the Northeast faced as the nation's economy shifted away from agrarian and feudalistic structures. Previous research has found a surge of interest in the cordel whenever the nation or region is faced with an identity crisis – whether from changes due to modernization (Albuquerque 2014) or post WWII industrialization (Slater 1982).

While national imaginaries cast the Brazilian Northeast as a backwards, anti-modern, and closed space, my research demonstrates ways in which traditional Northeastern culture challenges the dominant social order. In this chapter, I examine how cordel literature articulates LGBT+ identities and contributes to the formation of queer communities. Despite its emergence within heteronormative and patriarchal social structures, I argue that the use of the cordel to address regional and class inequalities in the mid-to-late-twentieth century as well as its adaptation to modern technologies has shaped it into a medium through which other marginalized groups can increase their visibility and address social inequities. Rowe and Schelling suggest that one of the functions of the cordel might be relieving tensions created by social inequality but without fundamentally challenging established relationships and institutions (1991; 92). My analysis suggests that while some cordel literature does reinforce traditional hierarchies, its social function goes beyond relieving social tensions. By analyzing LGBT+ representation in contemporary *cordéis* and comparing them to older representations, or lack thereof, I trace changing social and cultural paradigms in the Northeast while analyzing how and why the cordel is being used by LGBT+ and activist groups to enact social change. This chapter contributes to discussions of LGBT+ representation in cordel literature and highlights the contemporary use of the *cordel* in LGBT+ activism.

The chapter begins by familiarizing the reader with *literatura de cordel* including its historical development, common themes, authors and public, and its social functions as discussed

by Melo (2010), Rowe and Schelling (1991) and Slater (1982). I explore how and why the cordel has successfully denounced class injustices while reinforcing other social inequities as industrialization and modernization changed socio-economic structures in the Northeast. This section explores the role the cordel has played in the mediation of social relations, the maintenance of conventional norms, and the formation of Northeastern subjectivities. It also analyzes the contradictory yet coexistent themes of rebellion, submission, moralism, social criticism, and authoritarianism that previous authors have identified within the cordel (Rowe and Schelling (1991), Slater (1982)).

The next section analyzes LGBT+ representation in a collection of *cordéis* I acquired during my 2016 field research in Natal, Rio Grande do Norte. It looks at what type of LGBT+ representation surfaces in traditional cordel literature and how the cordel has maintained often pejorative stereotypes of LGBT+ people. I have organized my corpus into four thematic groups: the Moralizing Cordel, the Gay Cordel, "Tricked by a *Travesti*," and LGBT+ Women in the Cordel. I also draw attention to the underrepresentation of women *cordelistas* in the genre to then highlight the work of Salete Maria and Jarid Arraes, two feminist authors who bring new perspectives to the genre. I examine how these authors challenge sexist, racist, and homophobic representations of LGBT+ subjects while providing new protagonists in their stories.

Both Salete Maria and Jarid Arraes utilize digital mediums to disseminate their work. The next section looks at the emergence of different types of online *cordéis* and as the *cibercordel*. This genre allows for constant exchange and communication within interactive, simultaneous, deterritorialized, and increasingly accessible spaces. Following concepts laid out in chapter two, I argue that LGBT+ subjects and those at the intersections of various marginalized identities

have developed hybrid, digital, and in this case, genre-bending mediums to connect to a wider community.

The chapter concludes by highlighting the use of the cordel in LGBT+ art activism. I argue that the use of the cordel to discuss contemporary themes of sexual health, sexuality, and gender identity indicates a paradigm shift which subverts regionalist stereotyping of the Northeast as a space rooted in nostalgia and tradition. It suggests that Northeastern culture is open and adaptable to changing social norms. Here the cordel has endured as an effective and relevant medium through which Northeasterners not only discuss their changing social realities but also generate new cultural paradigms accessible to a global audience.

Context/Literature Review

In her influential work, *Stories in a String: The Brazilian Literatura de Cordel* (1982), Candace Slater notes that European stories retold by Brazilian cordel authors have gained new meanings and influences in the New World. She cites stories which draw directly on Afro-Brazilian and native sources. Yet she also notes that most cordel literature rearticulates the colonial discourses from which it came:

> "Indians and blacks tend to be pictured negatively within the *folhetos*. Those few heroes and heroines whom the poet allows to die are almost always black. When black *repentistas* compete against whites in cordel *pelejas*, they inevitably lose." (1982; 16-17)

Not only does cordel literature rearticulate colonial/plantation discourses, but also it reinforces mechanisms of patriarchy. An intersectional framework allows us to see how these different forms of patriarchy intersect within cordel literature to exclude, repress, and misrepresent queer/LGBT+ subjectivities. Women have always been a part of the production of cordel

literature, traditionally helping their husbands and fathers write down, revise, and print stories. Yet Slater affirms “virtually all professional poets are men” citing literacy, education, and “women’s traditional duties in the home and fields” as contributing factors (Slater 1982; 23). To be sure, author demographics is a large factor when considering representation and the socio-cultural perspectives of cordel stories. Yet representation does not simply translate to a diversity of perspectives. Slater affirms, “while a number of popular poets have always been recognizably mulatto, mestizo, or black, *folhetos* remain full of racist slurs” (1982; 16-17).

It can be argued that Northeastern society has become more egalitarian since Slater conducted her research. Over the past forty years, many of the social changes begun in the sixties and seventies have taken root. Education, especially in the Northeast, significantly improved as the Brazilian government supported literacy campaigns in the 1960s, most notably those of Paulo Freire (Kirkendall 2010). The 1960s trade union movement in the Northeast defended rural laborers and called for a liberation of the poor through social change. As William Rowe and Vivian Schelling demonstrate, the cordel became more subversive and politically engaged in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1960s, Northeastern workers utilized the cordel to organize and speak about class-inequity (1991; 92). During the military dictatorship (1964-85), poets were often arrested for “propagating 'subversive' thoughts” (1991; 92). The cordel went through a critical phase in the 1970s due to the rising cost of paper and the emergence of radio and television (1991; 92). Yet these growing pains molded it into a medium which more directly addressed politics, hegemony, and relations of power. For example, revolutionary *cordéis* describe Popular Movements in Latin America and introduce their audiences to revolutionaries such as Olga Benário, Zumbi dos Palmares, Che Guevera, and Emiliano Zapata. One can even find the Communist Manifesto while flipping through contemporary cordel titles. As rural

workers migrate to cities, the cordel has followed, adapting to new environments, technology, and mediums.

Cordel literature has certainly changed over time and adopted modern themes, but it has not addressed social inequities related to race, gender, or sexuality as it has class. Slater points to a disavowal of the "other" as one explanation:

> "The poets' choice of blacks or Indians as villains provides a convenient scapegoat for the majority of *folheto* buyers, who, though few are wholly white, do not think of themselves as "other" (1982; 16-17).

The cordel author often sees himself as an "extension of a community which looks to him for guidance, insight, and the humor which makes a hard life easier to bear" (1982; 186). A popular poet, his primary goal is to please his audience in order to sell his work. Despite his personal beliefs, Slater affirms "he only says what people are ready to hear" (1982; 157). As such, cordel literature follows national and regional trends which position traditional authors and buyers as part of a community of naturalized hierarchies.

Another explanation is Brazil's national myth of racial democracy which denied racism in a miscegenated country and insisted that it was "class, not race, that created social barriers between whites and nonwhites" (Telles 2004; 35). The epitome of the racial democracy, Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e* Senzala (1933), consolidated and naturalized hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality in a celebration of plantation patriarchy as an ideal model for the Brazilian family. Freyre's account gave president/dictator Getúlio Vargas a narrative of race and nation which was inclusive of the masses and substituted the white supremacist ideology of whitening (Telles 2004). From the Northeast himself, Freyre also played a large part in recovering and elevating Northeastern regional traditions, such as the cordel, as truly and authentically Brazilian.

Racist and heterosexist themes in cordel literature are not only issues of representation, but they are also related to "the invention of tradition:" a concept articulated by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in 1984. In his text "A Invenção da Cultura Popular" (2003) historian Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior points out that Brazilian intellectuals such as Camara Cascudo [and Gilberto Freyre] created the notion of "Brazilian popular culture" linked to a hierarchal and stratified vision of traditional Northeastern culture rooted in the past. As popular poetry, the cordel draws on this same "invention of tradition" that naturalizes unequal social structures in the Northeast.

However traditional Northeastern culture is not limited, restricted, or bound to this vision of "tradition." A close analysis reveals that cordel literature is filled with ambiguities and contradictions. Some read the stories as a repository of values or a reflection of dominant ideologies, while others read them as the voice of an oppressed people (Slater 1982; 43; 206). Cordel historian and anthropologist Rosilene Alves Melo sees the cordel as a liminal and hybrid genre – one that has the capacity to both break and maintain traditions (Melo 2010; 99). Its social legitimacy depends upon a varied and ever-changing group of poets, consumers, and researchers who incorporate their individual and collective subjectivities (Melo 2010). The cordel survives through its ability to relate to the socio-cultural themes and practices of its time. As Melo affirms, "the cordel is always in a process of becoming" (2010; 99). It is a medium through which people process their changing social realities – whether from early-twentieth-century modernization, post WWII industrialization, or the opening of public discourses on gender and sexuality. The cordel has always aligned itself with the people, the masses, the margin and those seen as different by dominant social groups. In an increasingly technological and literate society, the cordel reaches a wider demographic of authors and readers. It continues to question dominant

ideologies, prodding definitions of morality, sexuality, and tradition as we see late 20th and early 21st century values become an integral part of the simultaneously traditional/modern Northeast[31].

The next section will take the reader through the corpus of cordel literature I acquired during my field research to analyze its representation of LGBT+ subjects. The corpus spans some thirty-five years from the 1980s to 2016 and includes authors from Paraiba, Pernambuco, and Rio Grande do Norte States.

Cordéis Collected in Field Research

During the summer of 2016, I collected a corpus of approximately one hundred and twenty *cordéis* from what Candace Slater calls "the heartland of the *folheto*" (*figure 31*). While cordel literature can be found all over Brazil, it developed in the Northeast – specifically within the cultural milieu of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte States. In the past, cordel authors would print and publish their stories in one of three ways: selling their work to an Editora, paying for the edition themselves, or acquiring a printing press (Slater 1982). Today it is common for authors to design their *cordéis* on computers and reproduce them on ink-jet printers.

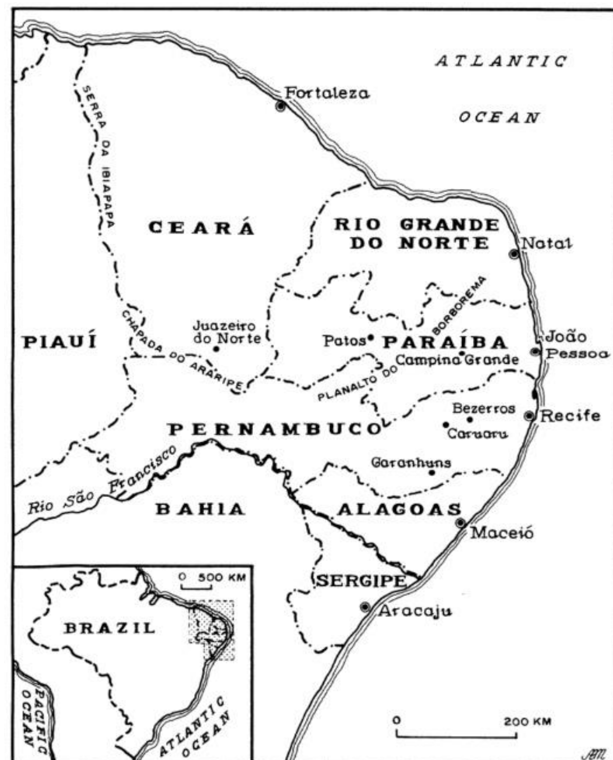


Figure 31: Slater's "Heartland of the Folheto" including the Northeastern States of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Ceará (1982)

[31] See José de Souza Matin's essay "The Hesitations of the Modern and the Contradictions of Modernity in Brazil" in *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, edited by Vivian Schelling, Verso, 2000, pp. 248–74 on the co-existence of the modern/traditional in Brazil, especially in relation to the peripheral modernities in the Northeast.

For larger printing orders, they send the job out to a printing house. As personal computers and printers become more affordable and available, *cordelistas* do not need to rely on Editoras like they did in the past.

Many of the cordéis I acquired were printed at the Casa do Cordel-RN, some bore the name of older Editoras, and others were printed by educational institutions such as the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte. While based in Natal, I acquired *folhetos* from five main sources: 1.) bought at the Casa do Cordel in Natal, RN 2.) bought at local *sebos*, used book stores 3.) given to me by the family of Josefa Nazaré Alves, a prolific author from Currais Novos, a small town in the interior of Rio Grande do Norte 4.) given to me by friends who knew of my research and 5.) given to me by a High School teacher whose students authored *cordéis* in class.

Founded in 2007, the Casa do Cordel is a literary and cultural space dedicated to the cordel. During my frequent visits, I informally interviewed a number of cordel authors to better understand cordel production and the socio-cultural significance of their stories. *Cordelistas* often choose themes based on current trends, marketability, and what they believe their public wants to read. It is also increasingly common for specific groups or individuals to request personalized *folhetos de encomenda* which they use for political campaigns, religious propaganda, or personal events such as weddings or anniversaries. Erivaldo Leite de Lima, better known as the poet Abaeté do Cordel, is the founder of the Casa do Cordel and one of Natal's most active and prolific poets. Many of the folhetos I acquired were of his authorship and printed from the Casa do Cordel. I also learned about cordel cover art and the printing process of *xilogravura:* artists cut images onto wood blocks, cover the block with ink, and print the image

onto cordel covers. These are important elements of analysis as the images associated with each cordel are what initially draw attention to each booklet and captivate potential readers.

Of the one hundred and twenty cordéis I collected, twenty contain LGBT+ content: loosely defined as any mention of an LGBT+ subjectivity. When I bought *cordéis,* I selected them primarily based on their incorporation of themes related to gender and sexuality. I could ascertain the general theme of each cordel after looking at the title, cover art, and by scanning the text for words that refer to LGBT+ characters, such as *"gay," "viado," "bicha," "homossexual," " travesti," "lésbica," "sapatão,"* or *"sapa"*[32]. Most were published within the past decade, but some are from the 1980s. The *cordéis* I collected generally fall under the genre "*folhetos de época"* which inform and comment on everyday life, past and present social events, natural phenomena, and important personages in an often corrosive and satirical manner (Rowe and Schelling 1991; 89). In his book *Retrato do Brasil em Cordel* (2011), Mark Curran explains that beginning in the 1960s, cordel authors not only experimented with new themes, but also experienced a "change in attitude" (275). Rather than re-telling 64-page medieval romances of love, chivalry, and adventure in which the hero always wins, these contemporary *cordéis* began to deal much more with problems in the real world. In shorter 8-10 page *folhetos*, they discuss quality of life and changes occurring at the end of the twentieth century (276). The cordel becomes a response to these changes and demonstrates thoughts and debates throughout Brazil on modern social issues such as women's rights, abortion, addiction, marriage, divorce, violence, and social marginalization. Here we see LGBT+ subjects appear – often within condemnations of immorality or written from the safety of parody and satire – but it is here LGBT+ subjectivities enter the pages of the cordel. I originally organized my LGBT+ cordéis into four thematic

[32] A description and analysis of these terms in their contexts follows later in the chapter.

groups: the Moralizing Cordel, the Gay Cordel, "Tricked by a *Travesti*," and LGBT+ Women in the Cordel in order to demonstrate different types of LGBT+ representation. However, I subsequently arranged these into "LGBT+ visibilities" and "LGBT+ invisibilities" in order to leave space for the fluctuating contradictions of identity and allow for a nuanced analysis of (messy) LGBT+ representation.

The Moralizing Cordel

Moralizing *Cordéis* include moral/religious denunciations of aberrant sexual behaviors. In this way they also maintain conventional socio-sexual hierarchies and derogatorily stereotype LGBT+ people. *O Povo Desembestado* (Ramalho 1980) and *A Desobediência da Juventude e o Efeito do Anti-Concepcional* (Alves 1980s[33]) are two examples of this type of *cordel* which mention LGBT+ people in passing as part of a group of degenerates. They are also the oldest *folhetos* I encountered that mention queer subjects, both published in the 1980s.

An ironic cover for a cordel denouncing a host of sinners including loose women, "*O Povo Desembestado*" contains rather descriptive stanzas of sexual interactions while simultaneously condemning sexual liberation. Author Chico Ramalho (Francisco das Chagas dos Santos) warns that divine retribution will wipe out a corrupt Earth. He begins with the requisite mention of Sodom before listing a number of actions and behaviors that will end in destruction. In line with traditional

Figure 32: Cover Art O Povo Desembestado (Ramalho 1980)

[33] While this particular *folheto* does not include a publication date it was most likely published in the 1980s. The author's biography included in the online archive *Cordelteca* states that she began writing cordéis in 1982 and according to her family, she stopped writing in 1991/1992 when her brother Celestino Alves, who edited her work, died.

cordel nostalgia he begins with a "then" and "now" comparison blaming moral corruption on modern media such as television and film:

Filhos respeitavam os pais
Irmão respeitava irmã
Respeitavam até os velhos
Tornavam até a bênção
Hoje estão dando valor
A revista e televisão.

Escola de caratê
Ensina o povo a brigar
A televisão ensina
Até a criança a furtar
Mulher deixa a igreja
O marido abandona o lar.

Vai ouvir filmes impróprios
Nos domingos no cinema
Vai tomar banho na praia
Marca o passo da ema
Nos clubes sem respeito
Ou no changô da Jurema (3)

Here the modern influences of media and foreign cultures are teaching people to fight, children to steal, women to leave the church, and men to abandon the home. The final stanza laments the loss of *sertanejo* culture as people are now "marking the step of the ema" (a large bird of the *sertão*) in dance clubs or Umbanda *terreiros*. Like references to Sodom are universal condemnations of homosexuality, "changô da Jurema" is a reference with racist undertones as Xangô and Jurema are two syncretic religious traditions of the African and Indigenous matrix in the States of Pernambuco, Alagoas, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Ceará (Freitas, 2018). The line allows the author to conflate his homophobia with racism as Candomblê ("Xangô" in Paraíba) is known for its gender-bending elements. Not only can worshipers can be possessed by different gendered spirits, but the religion also offers various *orixás* with ambiguous genders (Port 2005).

While anyone can be corrupted by "anger, envy and ambition/ hatred, rancor and lies" the author focuses seven stanzas (almost a third of the cordel) on the clothing and behavior of girls, and then four stanzas on gender non-conformity. In fact, the reader is privy to a whole fashion vocabulary of what women should not wear:

Sai a moça na calçada
Com saia transparente
Sem a calça só de biquíni
O malando experiente
Da esquina não sai
Pra ver o que está na frente.

...Moça de calças ligadas
Os quartos como uma bola
As sobrancelhas raspadas
Duma banda uma sacola
Ou anda caçando macho
Sai toda se remechendo
Como um macaco de angola.

Moça usa mini-blusa
Costa nua e mini-saia
O chorte ou roupa de banho
Usa tomara-que-caia
Os malandros da esquina
Assobiam dando vaia (5-6).

Transparent skirts, bikinis, tight pants, shorts, swimsuits, tube tops, or anything mini will inevitably make a girl an easy target for the *malandro's* stares, whistles, and hoots. While the author's explicit use of naked women on the cover of his cordel certainly was an effective means of selling copies, here it is the girl's clothing that is to blame for the sexual harassment she receives on the street, rather than the behaviour of men. In the last sentence of the second stanza the author further denigrates the girl with a very racialized slur, breaking the *sextilha* to compare her to a "monkey from Angola."

In this cordel, entitled "*O Povo Desembestado,*" meaning unrestrained, unruly, or out of control people, the word "*moça*" or "*menina*" appears five times as the acting subject of a sentence. "*Moço*" or "*menino*" never appear. Similarly, "*mulher*" appears six times as an acting subject and "*homem*" only three times, all in reference to a man acting feminine. This particular cordel mostly avoids overt LGBT+ references but targets gender non-conformity by focusing on clothing. Once again the author frames these evils as part of modernity through reference to television:

Na televisão tem homem
De volta e medalhão
Que usa brinco de mulher
Cabelos arapução
De ruge, báton e sombra
É a figura do cão.

Mulher veste roupa de homem
Homem veste a de mulher
Menina de doze anos
Bebendo não vai quem quer
Porém ir para a igreja
Repare se ela quer (6).

Mulher com roupa de homem
Nosso tempo está mudando
Homem usa de mulher
Bem pouco é diferenciado
Dizem que em Pernambuco
Um com outro foi casado (7).

While all of the stanzas repetitively reference "cross-dressing," the first specifically calls out "men dressing as women" by detailing one person's jewelry, hair, and makeup and then declaring her to be "*a figura do cão,*" another term for the devil. While the author refers to this person as a "*homem*" it is likely that he is referencing a *travesti* (or trans woman) without explicitly using the word. Juxtaposed with the following stanzas, the author sets up a dichotomy in which all the people he describes are directly opposed to anything to do with the (Christian) church. There are certainly trans people or "women dressed as men" going to church, but the

cordel separates them into binary categories of "good" and "evil," "church-goers" and "cross-dressers."

Throughout the cordel, the author avoids naming LGBT+ subjects by utilizing allusions – from the first mention of Sodom, to the cross-dressing, to the final stanzas in which he alludes to homosexual men. He laments "*bem pouco é diferenciado*" in regards to gender these days and reveals that "one got married to another" in Pernambuco. The author deliberately leaves some doubt as to who got married to whom, and once again avoids a direct reference to LGBT+ people. Instead of saying "*um homem se casou com um homem,*" the "*um com outro*" could be in reference to the previous gender non-conforming subjects. Part of the author's reluctance or difficulty to name the people could be related to hegemonic gender classifications. As Richard Parker (2009) has detailed, sexual classification in a Brazilian system is based upon (seemingly) clear divisions and distinctions between active (masculine) and passive (feminine) social roles. Therefore, a "*homem*" could have sex with another man and still maintain his social status as "man" if he performs masculine social roles: specifically, an active role during sex. Yet if a man marries another man, it is unclear who is performing the "dominant" role. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, Northeasterners often refer to queerness elliptically. While expressions such as "*ele é*" or "*ela faz parte do time*" could be read as avoiding taboo terms in everyday speech, they also demonstrate a refusal or unwillingness to name: a strategy in which language is (or is made to be) unequal to the task of apprehending or encompassing these identities. This refusal to name reflects an inability of the speaker to translate into language cognitive dissonances surrounding sexualized understandings of desire. At the same time, it maintains a queer ambiguity which avoids fixed identitarian definitions which could be used to target or enact violence upon queer subjects.

The term “*veado*” appears in the last stanzas of the cordel while the author lists people for whom there is a special place reserved in hell:

> *Falador da vida alheia*
> *Caboeta e pirangueiro*
> *Mulher casada e chifreira*
> *Como o veado galheiro*
> *No inferno tem um canto*
> *Somente pra marreteiro* (9)

Gossips, cheapskates, cheaters, swindlers, and women who betray their husbands are all going to hell. The term “*viado*” or “*veado*” is literally a deer, but is also a slang term for a gay man. It serves as a contrast to the classification “*homem*” or “*homem de verdade*.” “*Viado*” refers more to effeminate behavior than one’s choice of sexual partner, but here the “*veado galheiro*” (deer with big horns) is also a synonym of “*corno*” or a man who is betrayed by his wife. “*Chifreira*” is a woman who *botou chifre no marido* or put horns on her husband (betrayed him). Here the author likens a man betrayed by his wife to a “*viado,*” they both have horns and have lost their masculinity. The author does not directly name gay men, but he leaves little doubt that men who cross gender lines form part of the condemned “*povo desembestado*.”

A Desobediência da Juventude e o Efeito do Anti-Concepcional (Alves 1980s) incorporates similar themes as *O Povo Desembestado*, but focuses more specifically on the “immoral and dangerous” sexual behavior of today’s youth and the futility of birth control. While Author Josefa Nazaré Alves begins speaking generally about “*a mocidade de hoje*” and “*a juventude*,” by page two she is already using the feminine personal pronoun “*ela*” and focusing mainly on girls’ actions and responsibilities, with little mention of boys or men. One of only a handful of women *cordelistas*, Alves’ replicates patriarchal expectations about women’s behaviour in public and private. While providing a window into a different subjectivity - that of a

worried Mother – she demonstrates an internalized misogyny which strikes at girls with even more vigour than the verses written by men:

Quando a mãe dá um conselho	*Só gostam de vaidade*
Ela não quer aceitar	*De assistir televisão*
Passa o dia amuada	*Ler revista imoral*
Nem a bênção quer tomar	*Não gostam da oração*
Sai toda se rebolando	*Quando ver uma rezando*
E a pobre mãe chorando	*Fica de fora olhando*
Fica sempre a lamentar...	*Com crítica e mangação* (02)

Like Chico Ramalho, Josefa Alves creates a dichotomy between moral and immoral, church-goers and "*meninas rebolando*." She also notes the bad influence of modern media: *A moça virou sedutora/ Pois tem uma professora/ Chamada televisão* (08). Alves moves from general descriptions of disrespectful, sexually active girls to a case of Dona Maria and her pregnant daughter. She even dedicates two separate stanzas to reiterate the futility of contraception before associating LGBT+ people with AIDS:

Porque o mundo de hoje
Está todo revirado
Tem moça que é sapatão
Tem rapaz que é viado
Nem é preciso de slaid
É daí que nasce a aids
O caldo fica entornado (09).

Unlike Chico Ramalho, Alves directly mentions LGBT+ people as part of modern depravity. This time, the term "*viado*" (faggot) is accompanied by "*sapatão*" (dyke). While both terms are generally understood to describe sexual orientation, they are also symbolic figures which mark gender non-conformity, "*viado*" referring to an effeminate man and "*sapatão,*" a masculine woman. It is through the frame of gender, often transposed onto sexual relations, that these figures blur the boundaries between the masculine and feminine domains. As Parker explains,

figures, such as “*viado*,” “*sapatão*,” or “*puta*” function symbolically to both “mark off” and “open up” the masculine and feminine domains as a semantic field (2009; 55). While Alves’ mention of these terms directly associates LGBT+ figures with moral depravity and “*um mundo revirado*,” she simultaneously acknowledges a degree of nuance in the cultural configurations of masculinity and femininity and draws attention to possibilities of deviation from sanctioned gender patterns and their inherent contradictions. In his book, Parker divides the “Brazilian sexual universe” into “masculine” and “feminine” domains (2009), however the “refusal to name” previously mentioned does not allow for a “marking off” or “opening up” of anything. It is un-named and un-namable. Depending on the speaker and speech act, refusals to name can be used as queer strategies of “disidentification”[34] which reject the masculine and feminine binaries Parker mentions.

Alves’ stanzas also reflect the fear and foreboding surrounding the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and reflect a confluence of erroneous information, religious ideologies, and scapegoating of marginalized populations in times of crisis. In his chapter on *Direitos dos Marginalizados,* Mark Curran identifies “Gay Brazil and AIDS” as a significant theme in cordel literature. He notes several *cordéis* which not only link AIDS to homosexuality, but also attribute the disease to moral depravity and go so far as to say that God created AIDS to punish homosexuals. The associations reach beyond the LGBT+ population to anyone seen as deviant or immoral including “prostitutes and pederasts” (292). One cordel attributes AIDS transmission to “*macacos da África*” suggesting the disease originated on the African content. While Curran recognizes the homophobic content of these cordéis, he does not reflect on the impact such *cordéis* have had on LGBT+ representation:

[34] See Muñoz (1999)

Como era de esperar, a AIDS e o homossexualismo também se manifestam por uma atitude homofóbica em alguns poucos poemas, na verdade casos isolados que podem ou não indicar a visão da população masculina do Brasil (293-294).

While they may seem to be "*casos isolados*" to Curran, these *cordéis* form part of a very limited set of poems which mention LGBT+ subjects. They most certainly indicate hegemonic perceptions of homosexuality, especially as linked to narratives of disease and moral depravity. Not only do they conflate a host of sexual behaviors and subjectivities, but they also frame AIDS as a "homosexual disease" rarely contracted by "normal" men, adding that women do not run any real risks, except for "unhygienic" and "foolish" prostitutes (Curran, 2011; 292).[35]

These categories of "man" and "woman" rely on specific socio-sexual behaviors filtered through hegemonic constructions of gender. As Parker explains, Brazilian understandings of "*homem*" are constructed "not merely in opposition to the *mulher*, but at the same time, through his relations to figures such as the *machão* (macho or he-man), the corno (cuckold), and the *bicha* or *viado* (queer or faggot)" (49). The same is true of "woman," understood not merely in opposition to the "*homem*" but "through figures such as the *virgem* (virgin), the *piranha* or *puta* (whore), and the *sapatão* (literally, "big shoes," but best translated into English as "dyke")" (49). They articulate both positive and negative aspects of socially constructed gender roles. Therefore "woman" can be defined as "virgin," in dialectical opposition to "whore." Following this logic, "women" cannot contract AIDS because, as virgins, they are not having sex. Similarly, the disease is "rare in 'normal' men" because "*homem*" can be constructed as "*machão*" in

[35] The traditional subject position of traditional authors (and researchers) results in narratives that misrepresent, simplify, and stereotype LGBT+ subjectivities. In his book, Curran consults thousands of cordéis, yet only includes two small sections with LGBT+ themes "*O Brasil Gay e A AIDS*" and "*O Caso de Roberta Close*." These sections reinscribe links between homosexuality and AIDS and present *cordéis* about Roberta Close (a trans woman who won the title as Brazil's most beautiful woman in 1984) as examples of "*atitudes abertas pra os tempos modernos* (Curran, 2011; 297)."

opposition to "*viado*." "Normal" men are not on the receiving end of anal sex and so, following this logic, would rarely contract AIDS. In this way, Alves' stanzas reflect commonly held beliefs that not only further stereotype marginalized communities, but also reiterate grave misunderstandings regarding AIDS transmission.

Cordel literature has certainly played a part in disseminating erroneous information; however, it has also been adopted as an educational tool across the Northeast. Not only have teachers, doctors, and NGOs used the cordel in classrooms, literacy projects, and public health campaigns, but LGBT+ activist groups have also adopted the cordel to educate about sexuality. *Doutores da Prevenção* is one such group which I encountered during the 2015 *Festas Juninas* in Campina Grande, Paraíba.

Figure 33: The author with Doutores da Prevenção passing out sexual health information during the Festas Juninas in Campina Grande, 2015

Displaying a large rainbow flag in front of the festivities at the *Parque do Povo*, this group of doctors, teachers, sex workers, and LGBT+ activists was offering free condoms, HIV tests, and sexual health information to the thousands of people who attend "*O Maior São João do Mundo*." The initiative was led by a local NGO and supported by the *Secretaria Municipal de Saúde* in Campina Grande with help from several anti-AIDS organizations, the *Associação dos Homossexuais de Campina Grande* (AHCG), and the *Centro Informativo de Prevenção e Acolhimento aos Profissionais de Sexo de Campina Grande* (CIPMAC). The cordel *Xamêgo Bom, Só Com Camisinha* (Brito 2013) addresses various groups: *turistas, amigos, forrozeiros, moças donzelas, grupos de quadrilha, pessoas de maior idade* etc... repeating its message at the end of every stanza:

No maior São João do Mundo
Na Cidade de Campina Grande
Você não para um segundo
Forrozando bem elegante
Sem Nunca sair do Tom
Leve no bolso sua amiguinha
Xamêgo Bom
Só com camisinha

Vamos muito forrozar
No Parque do Povo com os amigos
Vamos muito namorar
Fugindo de alguns inimigos
Como Sífilis e Hepatites Virais
Bem na hora certinha
Xamêgo bom
Só com camisinha

Vamos aproveitar o presente
Saber como namorar
E de forma inteligente
A camisinha não deixar de usar
Mesmo que seja uma rapidinha
Xamêgo bom
Só com camisinha (1-3).

Xamêgo (*chamego*) means "*namorar*" or even more innocently, any expression of love or affection. Euphemistically referring to sex in Northeastern slang (spelled as it sounds rather than how it is written) the cordel reduces stigma around sex and includes everyone in its message. It acknowledges that men, women, young people, old people… everyone can benefit from this sexual health information. While the cordel does not directly reference LGBT+ people, it dispels old ideas that STDs and AIDS are "gay problems." It also provides contact information for different "*grupos de apoio*" and further information on where and how to get tested. The group even offered an on-site HIV test, administered orally, which took less than ten minutes. Created and distributed by an LGBT+ group, the initiative demonstrates that traditional Northeastern culture not only holds space for LGBT+ people, but it is adaptable and ever-changing. Here Northeastern cultural spaces (whether the pages of a cordel or the plazas of the *festas juninas*) serve as a site of LGBT+ community, visibility, and sexual health awareness.

Figure 34: Cordel distributed by Doutores da Prevenção, Campina Grande, June 2015

The next section begins to look at "LGBT+ *Visibilidades*" with an analysis of "Gay *Cordéis."* These narratives move beyond passing mentions of homosexuality to center gay characters and subjectivities. The section will continue to examine the internal contradictions of binary gender constructions while demonstrating complexities of naming and identity in the Brazilian Northeast.

LGBT+ Visibilidades
The Gay Cordel

Here I use the term "Gay Cordel" because the term "gay" appears in the title of these cordéis or is a major theme in these texts which center "gay" characters. Unlike the moralizing cordel, these stories develop their characters, offering opportunities for more complex analyses. Given the objective of cordel literature to educate and entertain a traditional (viz. heteronormative, masculine) audience, one might assume gay cordéis would mainly poke fun at the effeminate mannerisms of homosexual men through parody or satire. In more liberal contexts, they might offer lessons on diversity and tolerance while privileging or reinscribing heteronormativity. However, upon closer analysis, it is clear that these cordéis have their own "gender trouble[36]." They demonstrate how authors (and their traditional readers) use the cordel to work out their feelings about queerness. They often provide self-conscious narratives and incoherent classifications as they approach themes of homosexuality and gender variation. Often written from the subject position of a cisgender/heterosexual man, they do not differentiate between effeminate, trans, or gay characters, or even men in drag; these *cordeis* reflect social mores which position the feminine as inferior, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The cordel *Corno Bicha e Sapatão, Os Sacanas de Hoje em Dia* (Borges 2008) reflects this conflation of feminine gay identities:

Deixo agora a sapatão
Para falar de viado
Bicha, frango ou boiola
Que é homem transviado
Só anda se requebrando
Pra arranjar um namorado.

Isso hoje virou moda
Tem até operação
Cresce os peitos e a bunda
Para chamar atenção
E quando vira fole
Enfrenta qualquer machão (7).

[36] Butler, Judith

Borges lists a series of synonyms for "gay" including "*viado*," "*bicha*," and "*boiola*" and proceeds to designate all of these subjects as "*homem transviado*." Like "*viado*," "*bicha*" and "*boiola*" also mean "faggot:" "*bicha*" is a feminine animal and "*boiola*" refers to a gentle, tender, or sensitive man. The term "*transviado*" is derived from the verb "*transviar"* which is to stray from the right path. It is synonymous with "*perdido*," "*desviado*," or "*errante*" and can refer to someone who has been led astray, perverted, or corrupted[37]. Here it has a double meaning as a neologism which combines the derogatory "*viado*" (faggot) with "*trans*" and is followed by a stanza describing MTF transitional surgery and heteronormative feminine/masculine relations. In her article "*Queer o Que? Ativismo e Estudos Transviados*" sociologist Berenice Bento reclaims the term "*transviado*" as Portuguese word akin to "queer":

> *Em alguns textos eu tenho trabalhado com a expressão "estudos transviados". A minha língua tem que fazer muita ginástica para dizer queer e não sei se quem está me escutando compartilha os mesmos sentidos. Ser um transviado no Brasil pode ser "uma bicha louca", "um viado", "um travesti", "um traveco", "um sapatão"* (Bento 2016; 24).

Bento explains how "queer" does not have cultural meaning in Brazil while "*transviado*" conveys the appropriate sense of political activism and re-appropriation of a term meant to hurt, insult, and dehumanize LGBT+ people. In the context of his cordel, Borges certainly means "*transviado*" as a term of classification of all those who are inferior, abnormal, feminine, and submissive. They stand in contrast to the "normal" heterosexual behaviour of the "*homem homem"* and the "*mulher bem mulher*." Within my corpus, I have selected three contemporary examples of the "gay cordel" *O Cangaceiro Gay* (Abaeté 2009), *Um Professor do Babado*

[37] Interestingly, the film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) is translated into Portuguese as "*Juventude Transviada,*" invoking its more general associations with social rebellion and transgression.

(Souza 2013) and *A Primeira Vez de um Gay* (Abaeté 2010) in order to examine representations of "gay" subjectivities in cordel literature. As we will see, these subjectivities blend and merge with Bento's "*transviado*," and with "queer" subjectivities as understood in the United States.

O Cangaceiro Gay (Abaeté 2009) tells the story of Roldão Brandão , "*um macho valente, forte, e de sangue quente"* who gains fame as a *vaqueiro* in the *interior*. Showing no interest in the affections of the women who throw themselves at his feet, Roldão joins Lampião and his band of *cangaceiro*s before he can be outed. By joining these rough, tough, and violent backland outlaws, Roldão maintains his honor and validates his masculinity. The plot thickens when the gang heads to a local brothel, and surprisingly, Roldão sleeps with one of the *prostitutas*. Lampião remarks, "*Esse cabra, ai novato/Gosta de sexo bizarro (8)*" before two of the *cangaceiros* invade Roldão's room to catch him "*chupando cana.*" They shout out, "*tu nao gosta de mulé*" and run to Lampião to expel Roldão from the group because he is not a "*cangaceiro*," but a "*cangaceira*." In this case, a single sexual act permanently feminizes Roldão, despite his other masculine qualities. The cordel ends with the line, "*Se nenhuma mulé existia/Roldão teve serventia/Virou feliz cozinheira*" (8). Not many women lived the life of banditry, and this line is an example of how men would often perform feminine social roles from cooking to dancing. The *xaxada,* for example, involved men dancing with men for practical reasons. Interestingly enough, a "lack of women" was also how one of the dancers in the *quadrilha* performance described in chapter two explained cross-dressing in Brilho Potiguar's performance. The *cangaço* symbolizes the rough

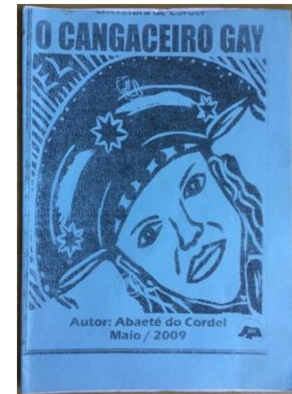


Figure 35: Cover of O cangaceiro gay (Abaeté 2009)

and violent masculinity which has come to characterize the Brazilian Northeast, but it is also a space rife with homoerotic possibilities.[38]

This cordel demonstrates a trend in *folhetos* which equate gay men with women. Despite all of his traditional masculinity, Roldão is ultimately shamed, ridiculed, and demoted to the feminized social role of *cozinheira* in the *cangaço*. The fact that he was "*chupando cana*" or performing a sexual role supposedly reserved for women makes Roldão a woman in the eyes of his comrades. Strangely, the author suggests in the cordel that all gays should come out so they do not end up like Roldão:

Tem gay não assumido
Metido a namorador
Dizendo sou um machão
Mas no fundo é uma flor
Querendo desabrochar
Todos sabem que tu dar
Solta a franga hó doutor.

Sai do armário dondoca
Vai te assumir ligeiro
Pra não viver revoltado
E contra o mundo inteiro
Com sua língua afiada
Bichona desesperada
Como Roldão cangaceiro (1-2).

While we do not know what would have happened had Roldão stayed in his town, one would expect his coming-out to be met with the same ridicule and disdain as that which the author expresses in these stanzas. Abaeté presents "*gays não assumidos*" as a joke. Everyone knows their secret, so they might as well come out so that they do not have to live "rebellious" or "against the whole world." Here gays, whether they come out or not, are understood through a binary frame which places them squarely in the (inferior) feminine realm.

This cordel also demonstrates a trend in which *folhetos* present trans-feminine individuals as objects of sexual desire and punchlines. They constrain and objectify trans identities while

[38] Historians and biographers have researched homoeroticism in this context including Luiz Mott and more recently, Pedro de Morias in the unauthorized biography "*Lampião, O Mata Sete*" which was censored in 2011 due to complaints from Lampião's family. In 2014, the ban was lifted, but the book is not easily obtained (Fontenele and Soares (2014), Redação (2014), Rolemberg (2011)).

framing cis/trans desire as "*sexo bizzaro*." By controlling the representation of trans-feminine individuals as either male or female (depending on the punchline) these texts use trans identities to reinscribe heterosexuality. In *O Cangaceiro Gay*, the sexual scene emphases the prostitute's "male" genitalia in order to prove that Roldão is gay (ie. essentially a woman because he is "*chupando cana*"). Despite being a "gay cordel," the story maintains the male/female heterosexual binary. As we will see, other texts designate trans identities as "female" in order to maintain male/female binaries. This trend in cordel literature reflects the difficulty of cishet/masculine subjects (and the heterosexual binary to which they subscribe) to process their own attractions to gender-variant/feminine individuals.

Um Professor do Babado (Souza 2013) clearly demonstrates the self-reflective nature of these *cordéis* in which authors (and readers) use the cordel to work out their own feelings about queerness. In this cordel, a High School student introduces the reader to his "froofy" teacher while scrutinizing the reactions of his classmates. He describes his teacher as "*um cara muito legal e muito sério*," but also as someone who loves to "*brincar*" with "*ambiguidades.*" The students curiously observe the teacher's "*jeito alegre*" and exaggerated mannerisms, but he never gives them the satisfaction of divulging any personal information.

The narrator affirms he is an "*ótimo professor*" with "innovative methods" that makes classes so much fun that almost everyone learns. The student finds conjugating verbs with sexual connotations particularly entertaining. Throughout the cordel, the student-author himself uses words with double (sexual) meanings. For example, he explains that his teacher likes to "*labutar*" – a verb meaning "to work hard" – but this can also be understood as "*lá botar*" or that his teacher enjoys "putting it there" in reference to anal sex. A characteristic of the cordel genre, these sexual wordplays are especially entertaining to an audience hearing them read aloud.

About a third of the way through the cordel, the student explains that his teacher is very caring and affectionate. He treats all the students like his own children, calling them his "*filhotinhos*" (3). However, the author insists he likes one student in particular:

> *Ele ama mais um aluno*
> *Taygor enfim vou citar*
> *Garoto mais cortejado*
> *Pois chega até a babar*
> *Quando avista ele ali*
> *No corredor a passar* (03)

While this student/teacher interaction might make certain audiences nervous, an observant reader notes that "Taygor" is in fact the name of the author. Told in his own voice, the story allows the author to express an innocent (and not necessarily sexual) crush on his teacher. Taygor admires the ways in which his *professor* deals with inappropriate questions:

> *Certo aluno então ousou*
> *Grande pergunta fazer*
> *"O senhor então é gay?*
> *Estou querendo saber"*
> *O professor se virou*
> *Começou a responder…*

The professor tells the student to "*tire suas conclusões*" and mind his own business. Taygor narrates:

> *O coitado do menino*
> *A sala toda vaiou*
> *Depois daquela conversa*
> *Ele jamais perguntou*
> *Outra leseira daquela*
> *Nunca mais ele ousou.*

> *Milson tem experiência*
> *Se chegou tenha cuidado*
> *Na arte da malandragem*
> *Ela já tem doutorado*
> *Se for pra falar besteira*
> *É melhor ficar calado* (05)

In the end, everyone has their own opinions, but nobody knows what to think about Professor Milson and his "ambiguities:" "*uma hora ele é machão/outrora ele é delicado* (06)." Taygor concludes:

Depois de algum tempo	*Se por acaso ele for*
Esqueci dessa lorota	*Para mim não muda nada*
Não importa pra ninguém	*Eu não tenho nada a ver*
Para qual lado ele corta	*Se ele gosta de outro cara*
Se ele brinca de espada	*Vai ser sempre meu docente*
Ou se de charque ele gosta	*Um professor muito mara* (07).

While many cordéis include authors' reflections on their own identities, attractions, and desires, few do so as clearly and consciously as this sixteen-year-old. A student writing from the classroom, Taygor represents a younger generation of cordel authors. He includes a different message and writes humorously about gender and sexuality without relying on humor which further marginalizes LGBT+ people.

The same cannot be said for *A Primeira Vez de um Gay* (Abaeté 2010). The cover utilizes the "man in a dress" trope juxtaposed with a title that suggests that this figure is the "gay" subject of the story. While this particular mixture of masculine and feminine social markers could represent a wide variety of gender expressions, the bearded person in high heels and a dress is linked to a long history of (male-to-female) cross-dressing for comedic effect. This socially accepted misogyny states that femaleness and femininity are weak and inferior to maleness and masculinity. Therefore, a man wearing women's clothing is lowering himself and should not be taken seriously. Women in drag are not seen as funny or used for comic relief in this way. Given the title of the cordel, we can assume that the author means to tell us a story about a gay man, however it is important to note that in a society that does not distinguish between "men in dresses" and trans women, this trope also reinforces transphobia.

Figure 36: Cover Art, A Primeira Vez de Um Gay (Abaeté 2010)

Like many *cordelistas*, Abaeté do Cordel opens his poem in the first-person. Rather than an invocation or call for inspiration however, he utilizes these first lines as a personal framing

device to tell a story within a story. His first story is one in which he encounters a woman at a fair who asks for his help to tell her story. This sets up the second story in which Abaeté relates her experiences, also in the first person. By utilizing this framing device, Abaeté initially distances himself from the topic while also assuming the authority to relate the story as a "*cordelista*" and "*homem de grande memoria*" (2). At the same time, his choice of first person narration associates him with the protagonist, especially within an oral/performative tradition such as cordel literature.

Given the cordel cover art and title, one might expect Abaeté to use masculine gender pronouns to refer to his gay protagonist. However, Abaeté introduces this person through a situation of "mistaken gender identity" and utilizes a variety of gendered terms throughout the story:

Certa vez eu trabalhava
Numa feira do interior
Vendendo literatura
No papel de locutor
Defendendo minha grana
Quando chegou uma fulana
Me chamando de amor

Todo mundo ficou rindo
Fazendo insinuação
Dizendo poeta tem
Um amor no Riachão
Para vadiar na cama
Percebi logo que a dama
Na verdade era um João (1)

Here Abaeté uses a generic first name (João) to gender the protagonist and seemingly resolve his initial confusion. Yet, the other people at the *feira* do not calm down; they "whistle, boo, and push" obscenely yelling "*pega a bicha mete o pau*" (1) before the police arrive and the *feira* ends. The term "*bicha*" (faggot) is synonymous with "gay" or "homosexual," but as the crowd's reaction confirms, it carries an emphasis on sexualized femininity. Richard Parker notes that a "*bicha*" or "*viado*" is defined in terms of his sexual behavior: "his apparently passive role during sexual intercourse with another male" (2009; 60). While homosexuality and femininity are both defining characteristics of "*bicha,*" it is the emphasis on the feminine sexual role that

distinguishes him from a "*homem de verdade*." While the English language distinguishes between sexual orientation and gender identity, here it seems that "gay" is a marker of both gender and sexual orientation due to Abaeté's use of feminine and masculine terms to refer to his protagonist. Even after he states that the "*dama na verdade era um João,*" Abaeté proceeds to refer to the protagonist as "*meu camarada*" and "*ela,"* using both a masculine possessive pronoun and a feminine personal pronoun:

Eu disse meu camarada
Discriminar não faz bem
Eu respeito todo mundo
Mas lhe digo, um porém
Dois não briga se um não quer
Não troco minha mulher
Pelo corpo de ninguém

Ela disse está bem
De Pompeu eu virei Glória
Desculpe seu cordelista
Homem de grande memória
Que ideias tem um monte
Eu só quero que tu conte
Nos versos a minha história (2)

Up until this point, the story appears to be one that will tell us about the first sexual experience of a "gay," who the author initially confuses for a "*dama*" because of his feminine style. However, there is more going on here. It is doubtful that the author would accept the person pictured on the cover of the cordel as a "*dama.*" In the above lines this person explains, "*de Pompeu eu virei Glória."* Once again, Abaeté uses first names to gender the protagonist, this time using "*virar*," a verb implying some sort of change, transformation, or becoming. In her "Trans-misogyny Primer" (2007) Julia Serano explains how demeaning representations of gender-variant people primarily focus on trans feminine individuals whose desire to be feminine is not only ridiculed, but also highly sexualized. As a result, representations of trans feminine people primarily portray them as "sex workers, sexual deceivers…or male 'perverts'" thus reflecting a "cultural assumption that a woman's power and worth stems primarily from her ability to be sexualized by others" (Serano 2007). Written from Abaeté's perspective, the cordel follows in the same vein –

from the initial “deception” (or confusion), to sexualized motives for approaching the author, to comedic devices for cis consumption.

It is also interesting to see how gender variance is explained and understood through sexuality. Hegemonic discourses understand sexual orientation as sexual behavior; one can engage in a lot of sex, abstain from sex, or even choose different partners with which to have (or not have) sex. These same discourses understand gender as identity. Everyone supposedly has a gender and this gender is an intrinsic, integral, and fixed part of who they are. Given these hegemonic understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity, we can gain insight on the logics which explain gender variance through sexuality. Sexual behavior seems easy to change, modify, or bring into the fold; gender does not.

While Abaeté relies on the sexual comedic effect of the “man in a dress” trope, his role in the story is more complex than cishet objectification or ridicule of LGBT+ people. He essentially flirts with queerness while validating cisheteronormativity throughout the story. His first flirtation is with the protagonist herself. He assumes that she is approaching him for sexual motives, not only sexualizing her, but also validating heterosexuality. Given the uneasy relationship hegemonic society has with (intrinsic, fixed) gender categories, trans people are inherently seen as heterosexual: if a trans woman is with a man, she is a heterosexual woman. If she is with a woman, she is a heterosexual man. Her gender variance is mapped onto and (in)validated through heterosexuality. Abaeté declines the protagonist’s assumed offer invoking his “*mulher*.” He does not say that he is not interested. His use of the term “*mulher*,” synonymous with “wife,” also validates heteronormativity.

Abaeté also flirts with queerness by telling the story as a first person narrative. Rather than telling a story about a cis woman, he speaks as an LGBT+ person. His initial framing device

allows him to take on two personas. He validates cisheteropatriarchy by assuming the authority to tell the story, but then speaks as a trans woman. The distance between him and his subject disappears. Yet, his framing device also gives Abaté a means to control the distance between him and his subject as needed. Starting on page two, the audience no longer knows which parts of the story are Pompeu/Glória's words and which parts are Abaeté's. The author does this right after deliberately declaring, *"Discriminar não faz bem/Eu respeito todo mundo"* (2). If his words are taken as homophobic or transmisogynistic, he has said that he "respects everyone" and "discrimination is bad" so we should trust his good intentions. If he is ridiculed for being queer or telling a queer story – it is her story, not his.

The rest of the cordel tells Pompeu/Glória's struggles with discrimination as a child, her journey from the *interior* to the capital city of Natal, and her coming out as part of her first sexual experience. Abaeté uses different gendered terms throughout the story: mostly masculine nouns and adjectives while describing Pompeu's childhood and feminine ones after she comes out. Abaeté also reinforces assumptions about queer childhoods by describing Pompeu in solely feminine ways, relying on the "trapped in the wrong body" discourse. He describes Pompeu as pampered and timid: a boy who cried often, did not like sports, played dolls with the girls, and never "*deixou de chupar a chupeta*" – a line which both infantilizes a feminine Pompeu and alludes to sucking as Abaeté builds up to what the cordel promised: the first sexual experience of a gay. The gendered words shift again in the last two stanzas of page five:

Chorava por qualquer coisa
Era um menino dengoso
Brincava com as meninas
Um garotinho bondoso
Todos falavam Pompeu
Com os meninos era eu
Era bastante amoroso

Só que no fundo no fundo
Eu queria ser amorosa
Desabrochar para a vida
Como um botão de rosa
Soltar a franga de vez
Do ramo ser um freguês
Sem ser motivo de prosa (5).

Having come out to himself, Pompeu flees his Father's wrath, runs away to the city, and meets a man. This part of the story shifts between the masculine and feminine and returns back to "gay" terminology:

Fui trabalhar de garçom
Num restaurante famoso
Eu era um gay virgem
Bonitin muito jeitoso
Feito uma rolinha vou
Um criente me chamou
Vamos ali meu gostoso

Eu logo tomei coragem
E saí com o rapaz
Ele tinha experiência
Me ensinou como se faz
Afinei logo minha voz
Rolou tudo entre nós
De tudo que for capaz

Foi a noite mais feliz
Que tive na minha vida
Vi estreias com cometa
Vi luzinhas coloridas
Com nós dois ali bebendo
Com o cabra me mordendo
Me chamando de querida(7)

After this life-changing experience, the protagonist returns to feminine adjectives but not completely:

Hoje estou realizada
E muito feliz também
Eu estou livre, leve e solta
Cuidando do meu harém
Feliz como passarinho
Nunca mais fiquei sozinho
E não preciso de ninguém (8)

While one may wonder if Abaeté uses the different word endings to complete his rhymes, he continues his flirtation with queerness while still validating heterosexuality, this time through marriage:

O meu pai não teve jeito
Nunca quis me aceitar
Embora ele não gostando
Não deixei de lhe amar
Mesmo ele sendo medonho
Vou realizar meu sonho
Logo logo vou casar

Casar e ser bem feliz
Junto com o meu amado
Sou mulher independente
Um homem realizado
Fugindo de toda hedra
Atire a primeira pedra
Se você não tem pecado (8).

Glória does not need anyone, but her dream is to get married to her "*amado*." Not her "*amada.*" Again trans people are inherently seen as heterosexual. Ironically, in a cordel that promises us a story about the first time of a "gay," Gloria's gender variance is explained and understood

through her heterosexuality. The final stanza gives us everything: queerness and a bible verse: "*Sou mulher independente/Um homem realizado… Atire a perneira pedra/Se você não tem pecado.*" Abaeté does not re-enter with his own voice, but he leaves us with the notion that we are all sinners. While these stanzas accept Glória as both a woman and a man, they also equate this with sin - a sin just like everybody else's sins. But it is not the same, as we learned by the crowd's reaction to Gloria's presence at the *feira* on page two of the cordel. Liars, cohabiters, those who covet their neighbors' wives or take the name of the Lord in vein are not threatened with sexual violence. Glória was. Abaeté's story, though one which admits the existence of LGBT+ people and even includes sympathetic lessons about discrimination and respect, does not do much more than flirt.

In her research, Roseane Porto Diniz concluded that it is five times more likely to find a cordel written about gay men than lesbian women (2013). However, my analysis of "gay" cordéis demonstrates a high level of ambiguity in these designations, especially as gay cordéis often misgender trans women, *travestis*, and transfeminine individuals in order to understand them as gay men. Beyond cordel literature, this misconstruction has serious consequences for trans women who are disproportionately victims of gender violence, yet are not represented in the statistics. In the dossier, *A Geografia dos Corpos das Pessoas Trans* (Nogueira et al. 2017), Thatiane Araújo, the President of *Rede Trans Brasil*, explains how trans communities cannot rely on crime reports or even previous studies which present the deaths of trans women and *travestis* as homosexual (cis-male) deaths (48)[39]. While I have included trans-feminine subjectivities as

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[39] "*Quando chega nas mãos dos gestores, eles falam sem olhar profundamente: 'quem está morrendo mais é o gênero masculino, é o gay cis', porque o homem trans é contabilizado como gênero feminino. E nem cogita que a travesti está no meio, porque elas se reivindicam do gênero feminino. E ninguém se atenta que a travesti está morrendo. A gente não pode esperar que o outro vá pensar na nossa dor, esperar que o outro vá procurar a verdade de uma matéria para não invisibilizar as pessoas trans. A gente está fazendo o nosso dever de casa* (Tathiane Araújo, apud Lucon, 2016).

"visible" in my study of cordel literature, it is important to note the effects of misgendering on trans visibility and representation.

"Tricked by a *Travesti*"

The most common genre of LGBT+ cordel literature I have encountered are accounts of men who are "tricked" into engaging in sexual relations with *travestis*[40]. In these stories, non-trans authors present trans characters as villains, objects of desire, and/or punchlines. They utilize a variety of transphobic tropes which perpetuate the idea that trans women exist to deceive men. In her video, "Unfunny Transmisogynistic Tropes + Trans Comedy," Kat Blaque describes these tropes including, "the idea of a trans woman who is attractive, yet anatomically flawed." Blaque explains, "this trope is centered around how absolutely repulsive it is that any man could be "fooled" enough to have an experience with a trans woman" (2015). The fact that this was the most widely represented theme I encountered points to an interest in this type of story and these type of sexual situations, especially for traditional cordel audiences. These narratives not only represent cis/trans attraction as inherently binary and heterosexual, but also frame these attractions as strange or abnormal.

Alexandre Quase Casou Enganado (Abaeté, nd), *O padre e o boiola* (Soares 2003/2008[41]), *Férias que Bin Laden Passou em Natal* (Assis 2010), and *O garanhão que se lascou com um travesti* (Filho, nd) are examples of this theme. They all include four

[40] "*Travesti"* is a Brazilian term used to refer to individuals assigned "male" at birth but who do not identify as men and who surgically and/or hormonally modify their bodies to develop a traditionally female appearance. The *Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais* defines "*travestis*" as "*pessoas que vivem uma construção de gênero feminino, oposta à designação de sexo atribuída no nascimento, seguida de uma construção física, de caráter permanente, que se identifica na vida social, familiar, cultural e interpessoal, através dessa identidade*" (Accessed September, 2018).

[41] The text on the printed copy either reads "2003" or "2008."

components: 1.) the (supposedly) heterosexual man as protagonist 2.) the deception 3.) the reveal and 4.) the reaction. The protagonists of these stories are a regular guy (Alexandre), a priest (O Padre), a terrorist (Bin Laden), and a stud (O garanhão) who are tricked through love, temptation, the internet, and ego in combination with the feminine allures of their objects of desire. Only two of the stories name the women characters. All four cordéis describe physical anatomy which first enchants and then disgusts or even threatens the men, and in all but one, the reveal is done through genitalia. All four narratives include varying degrees of violence from breaking down a door to blowing someone up, and they are all meant to entertain. Using *travestis*/trans women as a comedic device for cis consumption is not only dehumanizing, but also promotes violence. Blaque reiterates "while a lot of the violence against trans women comes from the fear that they were trying to mislead a man into a sexual situation, a lot of it also comes from men who simply couldn't cope with the fact that they had an attraction to them" (2015). None of these narratives can cope with the cis/trans attraction, though the last story presents an interesting gender-role reversal.

Alexandre, O Rapaz que Casou Enganado/Alexandre Quase Casou Enganado (Abaeté, nd), was so popular that Abaeté wrote two different versions. These *cordéis* use the same verses and tell the same story with minimal differences. Like the ambiguity of "*A Primeira Vez de um Gay*," Abaeté continues his mixing of author, narrator, and characters. The most notable difference between the versions is that the first is told by a third person narrator and the second, by Alexandre. The woman's name also changes: first she is "Danusa" and then "Geruza." The story follows a typical

Figure 37: The two versions and covers of "Alexandre"

pattern of dramatic irony in which the narrator/audience know a "secret" which the character discovers: "*São coisas do coração/Que ninguém pode explicar/A galega tem um defeito/Mas eu não posso falar*" (Abaeté, nd; v1; 01). Of course, the "secret" is that the heterosexual man has "unwittingly" fallen for a *travesti* – always presented as someone with a "*defeito*." The story exemplifies several transphobic/heterosexist tropes including the "bizarre cis/trans attraction," and the "attractive, yet atomically flawed trans woman," while producing a cognitive dissonance in which trans people are always heterosexual.

Throughout most of the story, Alexandre professes his love for Danusa/Geruza. At first, he is the joke because he is "blinded by love" and does not see what everyone else knows. *"Eu sou doido por Geruza/Por favor ninguém se meta/Adoro aquele corpinho/Principalmente, as tetas*" (v2; 04). Alexandre values Geruza for her sexualized body, but also for her admirable "*comportamento.*" Her virginity becomes another joke in the story as she refuses to have sex before marriage, but tells Alexandre, "*Enquanto a gente não casa/Vá usando o meu traseiro*" (v1; 05). Alexandre ultimately suspects something and pressures her to "*libere a chuchuca*" insisting, "*Geruza bonita bunda/Mas eu prefiro a gruta*" (07). The story's understanding of gender, sexuality, and love is so strongly bound by anatomy that it cannot continue past the punchline/reveal. While Alexandre is humorously "tricked" throughout the story, it is ultimately Danusa/Geruza who is the punchline. She breaks down and tells Alexandre she cannot have children and that their love is "*prohibido*." He cannot process the information, asserts they can adopt, and insists "*me dê a periquita*" (v1; 07). The story crudely ends with anger and violence: a "*desesperado*, *infeliz*, and *revoltado*" Alexandre calls Geruza "disgusting," invades her home, and breaks down the bathroom door to discover her "secret." The last lines, "*Alexandre viu a noiva cagando/Com a peia fora do vaso"* (v2, 08) are supposed to be funny – especially with the

use of scatological toilet humor, but they reproduce discourses of violence against trans women and reduce trans people to anatomical parts. "*Peia*" is not only a slang term for genitalia, but is also used to refer to an obstacle or impediment. The line reinforces the idea that certain genitalia are the insurmountable obstacle in their relationship (not homophobia or transphobia) and the story ends.

The Padre's story is one of succumbing to temptation, told by a woman author. It starts with a very attractive woman confessing that she wants "*uma noite de prazer*" with the priest: "*Numa tentação danada/A confissão começou* (02)" With little resistance, the priest capitulates and meets her at her house where she seduces him. Author Neusa Romão Soares describes the woman in her story with feminine identifiers that go beyond the physical (sexualized) characteristics of the other stories to include beauty, elegance, "*um olhar sensual*," high heels, perfume, and a mini-skirt. The priest's weakness is only surpassed by the woman's cunning as she intentionally gets him drunk in order to seduce him. When he wakes up and sees her "*cobra,*" he hits her "*na cabeça da bicha*" with her own high heel before chasing her off:

> *O vigário enfurecido*
> *Pegou da dona um tamanco*
> *E na cabeça da bicha*
> *Acertou num só arranco*
> *O boiola deu um grito*
> *De tanta dor ficou branco* (7)

The narrative displays the typical misgendering and use of offensive terms like "*o boiola*" (another term for faggot), but what is interesting here is the particular violence enacted with a feminized object on a masculinized body part. This author is no less sexist than the others. Here she displays a strong hostility against these particular genitalia. Rather than showing care or sympathy, Soares defends womanhood with more vigor than any of the other authors. Not only

does she refer to the other woman with masculine terms, but also calls her "*uma mulher falsa*" in the violent scene:

O cabra pulou gritando
Gemendo numa agonia
O padre disse: -Safado
Comi porque não sabia
Você é um travesti...
E saiu em disparada
Deixando a falsa mulher
Com a bicha ensanguentada (8)

The story ends with the author inserting her own thoughts and her actual name into the final stanzas. Like Alves in *A Disobediencia da Juventude*, Soares reproduces sexist, hetero-patriarchal discourses from a unique subject position for cordel literature. She speaks in first person, presenting the transmisogynistic violence as a righteous act. She says she never knew if the padre "fixed" the "*dona da tamancada*," or if the woman finally "*se ajeitou*" and adapted herself properly. The last stanza reads:

N*a verdade o tal boiola*
E*ra um vadio e vulgar*
U*sava daquele charme*
Z*ebrento a se amostrar*
A*trevido e afoito para*
Os homens se enganar (8)

The use of bold lettering calls attention to the author's own name in a final identifying acrostic as a kind of copyright. Slater explains that cordel authors use this technique as a precaution against literary pirates (1982; 26). Here the author inserts her own voice to reiterate her "truth" – that the "faggot" was a "vulgar degenerate" who used charm and daring to trick men. With the final stanza, she protects not only her literary property, but also her gender "property," boldly declaring that she cannot be copied.

Férias que Bin Laden passou em Natal (Assis 2010), tells an absurd story of how Bin Laden is corrupted by all of the pleasures Natal has to offer. The story jumps around Natal and Rio Grande do Norte state taking the reader on Bin Laden's bender of queer sexual experiences. It relies on absurdist Islamaphobic and transphobic comedy by placing an Arab terrorist in highly sexualized situations.

In the first pages, author Izaías Gomes de Assis presents technology as a perverting force. Bin Laden is seduced by a Brazilian woman on the Internet, the "*grande mal do Ocidente/que corrompe lentamente*" (1). The first reveal, that this woman is a *travesti*, is one of many transphobic, misogynist, and racist representations of LGBT+ people in the cordel:

> *Mas essa tal Marinete,*
> *Era um caboclo gilete,*
> *A bicha era uma perua.*
> *Ela era um travesti*
> *Desses que roda a bolsinha*
> *Na Estrada de Ponta Negra*
> *Ou às vezes na Redinha*
> *Se fazendo de odalisca*
> *Marinete, essa bisca*
> *Era um marmanjo flozinha.* (4)

Like Abaeté and Soares, Assis fluctuates between masculine and feminine terms, suggesting that they are all the same to him. "*Essa tal Marinete*" goes from feminine to masculine with "*era um caboclo gilete*." "*Caboclo*" is a mixed race indigenous Brazilian here presented in the masculine to discredit Marinete's womanhood. "Gilete" physically references a razor and is slang for a bisexual or someone who "cuts both ways." Given the binary heterosexual logics of these cordéis, Marinete is "bisexual" because she is trans. Interestingly enough, these binary heterosexual logics also make trans identities fluid in these *cordéis*. In order to maintain heterosexual "male/female" relationships, the authors must fluctuate back and forth in their representations of trans characters as (heterosexual) men or (heterosexual) women. Trans

subjectivities consistently trouble the gender binary – so much so that it is hard to find the appropriate feminine articles "*a*" or "*uma*" modifying "*travesti,*" though authors will say "*ela*."

Assis directly says, "*Ela era um travesti*" at first using a feminine personal pronoun "*ela*," followed by "*um travesti*" in the masculine. This is a common misuse of the masculine article to describe *travestis* who use feminine pronouns (Jesus 2012). In the third line, Assis conflates "gay", "travesti," and "prostitute" while dehumanizing Marinete with animal references. "*A bicha*" is an effeminate gay man, but also general term for "animal." Assis specifies she is "a female turkey" also a slang term for prostitute, a reference he continues to the end of the stanza with "*odalisca*" a female slave or concubine in the Arab world.

After rejecting Marinete, a "horrified" Bin Laden continues his binge outside of the "damned" capital: drinking, smoking, and partying at nightclubs or brothels with his gang in the beach town of Pipa. Interestingly enough, this is the only story in the series that does not present a cis/trans sexual scene, but rather, the story takes a turn when Bin Laden "accidently" sleeps with a "*viado*". Bin Laden exclaims in local Northeastern dialect, "*Eita gota jabá!/ Só com gay tenho topado/Veja só que desengano/ Vou executar um plano/Pra acabar com esse estado*" (6) He suggests the local people took advantage of him and begins looking for revenge. Here we see how the author uses obscene and absurd comedy to "soften" his bigotry. Bin Laden's terrorism is supposedly in the name of Islamic religious and moral values which the cordel debases. Assis consistently associates Arab culture with violence, listing all of the weaponry Bin Laden brought with him on his vacation including his gang of "*quinze homens bombas/Pra arrasar os corações* (3). Assis also sends Bin Laden on violent mission in Natal. While Bin Laden tours the entire city looking for a place to bomb, he ultimately blows up a different *travesti* with a suicide vest. This time Assis refers to this person with only masculine terms: "*um garoto de programa*" (male

prostitute), "*esse travesti*," "*o traveco*" (tranny), and "*o gay*." No longer represented in a sexual situation with a cishet man, this *travesti* is completely stripped of feminine identifiers and literally blown up. Assis describes her "*correndo se requebrando*" through the forest (like an animal) to ridicule her feminine mannerisms one last time. The final stanza on this page attempts to make fun of the situation with a play on words using the term "*bomba*" meaning both "bomb" and "an attractive person:"

O gay foi pro paraíso,
Pra ele foi grande vitória,
Morrendo pela fé árabe,
Essa morte lhe deu glória,
Tornando-se o primeiro,
E talvez o derradeiro,
Viado-bomba da história (07).

Assis asserts this was the best possible death for a "gay" who otherwise would not be welcome in heaven. Written as "comedy," this absurd cordel depicts queer people as punchlines, villains, and objects of desire… deceivers, terrorists, and feminized animals. It uses race/ethnicity to queer and queerness to pervert. In her book *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007), Jasbir Puar argues that the tenuous inclusion of some queer subjects depends on the production of perversely sexualized and racialized "Orientalized terrorist bodies." For Puar, this includes Sikhs, Muslims, and Arabs within the U.S. nation-state. "Homonationalism" replicates narrow racial, class, gender, and national ideals of heteronormative scripts. In the cordel, Bin Laden is queered through his sexual experiences, but also through his ethnicity. He enacts violence upon other queered (trans) subjects who are also read as "deceivers." He ultimately disappears into the *sertão* with his gang – morphing into some sort of *cangaço* on their way to Mossoró, the city which Lampião famously attacked. Placed in a Brazilian context, the author ultimately translates

these men as *cangaceiros*, who fit his understanding of them as violent, masculine, ethnically marginalized, and ultimately queered characters.

Finally, in *O garanhão que se lascou com um travesti* (Filho, nd) author Vicente Campos Filho uses the "story within a story" framing device to demonstrate another common trend in these cordéis. The audience is curious to know how this type of sexual scenario works, but almost all of these stories simply reinforce active/passive dichotomies in which the man is active and the woman is passive. Here, a third person narrator tells the first story in which a stud, Mané Quebela, is approached by an attractive woman in a plaza. He notes her "*encantos naturais*" aloud and his friend asks him, "*Mané, você endoidou/ou tá ficando veado?*" (02). Mané misunderstands his friend's reasoning and responds, "*Só porque eu não dei bola?*" explaining he does not sleep with married women. When she returns alone, he concludes, "*Essa mulher não é casada/E ela agora vai ser minha"* (03). He takes her off to show her "*como se ama*." This first story ends the next day when Mané arrives in the plaza "*acabrunhando/Andando de perna aberta/Como quem está cagando*" (4). His friends ask him what happened, and the second story starts as Mané recounts the mysterious events of the night before in a first person narrative.

Unlike the other cordéis, the first person narrative of this *folheto* peaks with a gender-role reversal in the reveal scene. Mané tells his friends about his sexual encounter:

Eu fiz do mesmo jeitinho
Que a danada pediu
Tirei a roupa ligeiro
ela também se despiu
Aí foi que eu percebi…
No meio das lindas coxas
Tinha um palmo e meio de trouxa…
Quando arregalei os olhos
Ela falou sem meiguice: - agora vou lhe torar" (6).

Figure 38: Cover variation of Mané reacting to the "arma"(Acervo M.A. Amorim)

In disbelief Mané exclaims:

É o que rapaz?!
Ela falou: - é isso mesmo
Vou comer o anel de traz,
O boga, o escapamento,
O fresado e fedorento
E um colega meu serás (7).

Unlike the other *folheteos*, here Mané becomes the butt of the joke, literally. With more scatological humor, the author lists more than ten creative synonyms for "anus." The final line of the stanza reinforces the idea that by engaging in this (passive) sexual act, Mané loses his manhood.

The author uses feminine terms throughout the story to refer to the woman, except in the above stanza and when she threatens Mané with her "*arma*." While this could be another phallic euphemism, Mané insists that "he" had an actual, very large gun, "*um treisoitão,*" which "he" used to threaten Mané, "*vai dar ou querer morrer?*" (7). When a friend asks what happened in the end, Mané responds, "*Será que você não entendeu?!/Eu não vejo nisso glória/Mas, não vê que a história/Quem tá contando sou eu?!"* (8). Apparently Mané took the threat very seriously, but the author leaves enough ambiguity for the audience to suspect the encounter went differently. If the weaponized phallus is not clear enough, variations of the cover make it obvious (*figure 38*). Regardless of what exactly happened, the final stanzas emphasize that Mané (the stud) "lost his virginity" in the encounter. He "collided with" a "*veado*," and he no longer

"passes the test" referring to a physical examination supposedly performed in the military to weed out homosexuals.

The gender-role reversal in this story provides a different characterization of (trans) women: one in which the woman is dominant and assertive. However, it does so by invalidating trans identities, maintaining binary gender roles, and reinforcing misogyny. She is "he" when she holds the "gun." While the woman might not be the punchline, she is the villain. The story still relies on the same tropes of trans women as deceitful and in this case, equates anatomy with sexual violence. Based on his ambiguous use of the term "*arma,*" the audience might disbelieve elements of Mané's story. The use of humor and ambiguity gloss over transphobia and misrepresents Mané's fears. His unlikely story suggests he might have wanted to engage in this type of sexual encounter, but is unable to express this desire in his social context. The story misplaces the social/sexual violence, suggesting that it is trans women who are dangerous, when in fact they are overwhelmingly the victims of sexual violence.

The subject-position of traditional cordel authors results in stories which self-consciously describe cishet men's encounters with queerness. They are limited by socially acceptable modes of relating to gender and queerness as Northeastern men. Even when authored by women, these cordéis relate the same encounters. This lens explains the overwhelming focus of LGBT+ cordéis on *travesti's* and prostitutes. In line with the "regional figure" of the virile, masculine Northeasterner (Albuquerque 1999), these stories approach queerness though a man's sexual experience with a woman. The next section will explore invisibilized LGBT+ subjectivities in cordel literature including those of queer women.

LGBT+ Invisibilidades

In contrast to the hypervisibility of gay/*transviado*/transfeminine subjectivities in LGBT+ cordel literature, LGBT+ invisibilities in the *folheto* include lesbians, LGBT+ women, trans-masculinities, bisexualities, intersex and non-binary identities. Serano notes that trans-masculine subjectivities do not receive the same amount of "societal fascination, consternation, or demonization" as trans-feminine ones; those on the female-to-male (FTM) or trans male/masculine (TM) spectrum have until very recently remained largely invisible and under-theorized (2007). Serano attributes this "disparity in attention" to transmisogyny[42], but even more simply, it is a form of sexism. A product of misogyny, transphobia, and binary hetero-sexism, this invisibility strikes a variety of intersectionalities. Invisibility is its own form of marginalization. While LGBT+ invisibilities do not appear significantly in my physical corpus of LGBT+ cordel literature, other writers and researchers have written about LGBT+ women, lesbians (Diniz 2017), bisexuals (Arraes 2017), trans-masculinities (Silva 2013), intersex/non-binary[43] (Neto (2015), and gender non-conforming (Slater 1982) subjectivities.

In his work on the *"reinvenção do corpo queer"* (2013) Antonio de Pádua Dias da Silva sets out to analyze four "*personagens queer (versão travesti*)" in literary productions. He includes three cordéis: *O Homem que virou mulher* (Cavalcante, sd), *A Mulher que virou homem no sertão da Paraíba* (Silva JS, 1970), and "*O padre que virou mulher* (Mensezes (1988). While citing the only example of a trans-masculine character I have encountered, Silva designates all of

[42] "This disparity in attention suggests that individuals on the trans female/feminine spectrum are culturally marked, not for failing to conform to gender norms per se, but because of the specific direction of their gender transgression—that is, because of their feminine gender expression and/or their female gender identities. Thus, the marginalization of trans female/feminine spectrum people is not merely a result of transphobia, but is better described as trans-misogyny" (Serano 2007).

[43] While some stories might represent non-binary subjectivities, they are never presented as trans identities. Furthermore, these subjectivities are generally presented independently. For example, trans people are never represented as homosexual.

these subjectivities "*personagens queer (versão travesti*)." This indicates that *homens trans*/trans men are subject to both invisibility and misgendering as "*travestis.*" Still, Silva includes an apt observation noting that the desire expressed in the cordel does not culminate in a lesbian affair based on the fact that "*desde pequena, a personagem performatiza um homem* (Silva 40)." Instead, the cordel's solution to what the character has "longed for and felt since childhood" is "sexual reassignment surgery" (Silva 40). It isn't quite clear what Silva means for a child to "perform man" versus "a masculine caricature, like that adopted by women labeled 'dykes,'" (40). The cordel only mentions the character "admiring masculine games as a child.[44]" Yet Silva affirms that this solution allows the character to "vent his desire" – which "marks a [specific heterosexual, male] subjectivity" (40). By framing gender and desire through (hetero)sexuality, the cordel constructs a trans character which fits within and reinforces heteronormativity. Again, trans people are always understood as heterosexual. Queer, homosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. trans subjectivities trigger a cognitive dissonance within overarching social constructions of gender and sexuality: a cognitive dissonance reflected in the elliptical use of language and the "refusal to name." Not only do trans subjectivities trouble an essentialist gender binary, but trans desires trouble sexualized understandings of desire. In her essay "On Liking Women," Andrea long Chu writes:

> "It must be underscored how unpopular it is on the left today to countenance the notion that transition expresses not the truth of an identity but the force of a desire. This would require understanding transness as a matter not of who one is, but of what one wants. The primary function of gender identity as a political concept – and, increasingly,

[44] Neto (2015) notes that this character is based off of a person who really lived in the *sertão* of Paraíba and who was later discovered to be intersex. The cordel presents the story as one of heterosexual trans-masculinity.

a legal one – is to bracket, if not to totally deny, the role of desire in the thing we call gender" (Chu 2017).

We rarely frame gender through desire, yet this cordel ultimately expresses gender desire rationalized through gendered behavior and sexual desire.

Queer women almost never appear as central characters in these stories and the vast majority of *folhetos* are written by men. In his book *A Presença Feminina na Litratura de Cordel do Rio Grande do Norte* (2015), Gutenburg Costa highlights the work of women authors who address themes such as domestic abuse and political rights. Yet none of these authors approach LGBT+ themes. In *Stories on a String* (1982), Slater notes the inversion of sex roles with the gender non-conforming figure of the "Warrior Maiden" in cordel literature, yet these narratives ultimately reinforce traditional gender roles through heterosexual marriage (152). In her work *Do "Amor" que Dizem o Nome: As Representações Lesbianidades no Cordel* (2017), Rozeane Porto-Diniz searched a digital archive of forty-two thousand cordéis to find stories which "*visibilizam as lesbianidades de forma intensa*" and center lesbian protagonists (26), yet she only found one cordel written in the twentieth century which matched these criteria. Published in 1984, *Chica Bananinha, a Sapatão Barbuda de lá da Paraíba* (Machado 1984 in Diniz 2017) reflects the social perspective of its author, "*um cordelista tradicional que vem de um lugar social conservador*" (26).

Even if women were writing on LGBT+ themes, it is unlikely that their work would have been recognized or published in past decades. Many cordel authors, not just women, have used pseudonyms to combat sexism and censure. The use of pseudonyms was not only widespread during the military dictatorship, but is also common in *cordéis* which approach political or "pornographic" themes (Costa 2015). Given overarching systems of representation in which

women are maidens, mothers or whores – women writing about any sexual content, let alone LGBT+ themes, could be considered pornographic and subject to censure. More recently, women authors have found freedom on the internet where authors such as Salete Maria da Silva and Jarid Arraes have written and promoted their work.

LGBT+ Women in the Cordel

In my physical corpus of cordel literature, lesbians and LGBT+ women do not appear significantly. By "significantly" I mean they are not featured as protagonists (if at all) and it is difficult to find a developed character. In her study, Rozeane Porto Diniz selected a corpus of fifty *folhetos* that contributed to her study of lesbian representation in cordel literature. Similar to my own use of generalized criteria, it was necessary for Diniz to include *folhetos* which utilized any term or expression that alluded to lesbian identities, even if it meant including ones in which lesbians were not protagonists. Statistically speaking, only 0.11190% of the cordéis Diniz searched were relevant to her research (Diniz 2017; 24). While these numbers might seem insignificant, they also speak to the importance of this work. Diniz insists that the very presence of lesbian subjectivities in canonical cordel literature is productive, especially within a literary/cultural tradition such as the cordel. She argues that naming is necessary in order to "*tirar do limbo*" the "people and practices that have otherwise been neutralized" (2017; 21).

Naming is essential for LGBT+ representation. However, naming also disproportionally favors those who control the story, as we have seen in the misgendering of trans people. Naming can also be counter-productive, as we have seen in the Moralizing Cordel and the Gay Cordel, producing limited narratives and narrow perspectives which often misrepresent LGBT+ subjectivities. The cordel *O Corno Consolado por um Robô-Bonequinha Depois da Mulher*

Arranjar uma Outra Sapatão (Nawara 2013) is told from the perspective of a man who is shamed because his wife leaves him for the "*vinzinha feminista.*" With an advisory warning "not recommended for minors under 18," the cover of this cordel continues representations of LGBT+ people as immoral or obscene. It is a story expressing a man's fears about the "modern" woman who "no longer wants to have sex with him" and upsets their "*lar dolce lar*" (3) Sympathetic to Dirceu, the husband who is not getting his sexual needs met, the story blames books and feminism for "*arruinando a cabeça*" of his wife, Dorinha, and turning her into a lesbian. It revolves around sexual objects: primarily the robot Dirceu buys proving that he does not need his wife to satisfy his sexual needs like she does not need him.

Figure 39: Cover art for Corno (Nawara, 2013)

Aside from the obvious sexism, the end of cordel presents an interesting take on alternative relationships. Dirceu is content with his robot-wife and the two couples live together*: Hoje vivam na tranquilidade/Eles criam seus filhinhos/Procurando a liberdade/Cada um na sua vida/Sem negaram a verdade* (Nawara 10). Heard by a traditional audience, the story could be read as a sarcastic, obscene, or satirical critique of "modern relationships," yet it also engages contemporary themes. Interestingly enough, this cordel is by the same author who wrote *Chica Bananinha* more three decades before. Franklin Machado used his own name for *Chica Bananinha,* but here employs his obscene/humorous pseudonym: K. Gay Nawara (*caguei na vara*). The first words to appear on the cover, Machado sets the tone of the cordel with a reference to "gay sex." As we have seen in the Gay Cordel, many authors approach LGBT+ themes from the safety of parody and satire. By not taking it seriously, they are able to discuss

topics that otherwise would be inaccessible. Still, explicitly sexual *cordéis* rely on obscene humour and maintain stereotypical representations of LGBT+ subjectivities.

The cordel *Júlia e Bernadete* (Abaeté 2016) came about as a result of one of my visits to the Casa do Cordel-RN. There I asked author Abaeté if he knew of any *folhetos* which feature LGBT+ women. At the time he admitted that he did not, and a few days later he wrote and presented me with this story. The cover depicts two women in a passionate embrace. While not obscene, this narrative pivots around the same theme of a woman leaving her husband. The cordel tells a modern love story between two women, but also demonstrates some of the limitations of the author. Not only does representation matter, but authorial representation matters; it is difficult for traditional authors to tell representative LGBT+ stories, even when they are trying.

Figure 40: Cover of Julia e Bernadete (Abaeté 2016)

Throughout the cordel, Abaeté both breaks with gendered stereotypes and affirms them. He begins the story with a question:

A sociedade cobra
Pra todos andar na linha
O homem ser um machão
E a mulher seguir certinha
O que fazer com a Júlia
Que está amando a vizinha.

Uma paixão fulminante
De duas mulheres maduras
A Júlia e a Bernadete
Excelentes criaturas
Bernadete uma coroa
Dessas que causa loucuras.

One might read Abaeté's lines as positive representations as he describes attractive, mature women in a loving relationship. However, he consistently relies on the male gaze to validate both women throughout the story. He immediately establishes their desirability, not only through his own opinion (they are "*excelentes criaturas*") but also based on the reactions of other men. He attests to Bernadette's attractiveness by describing typical construction-site street harassment, "*Assobios de serventes/Motoristas de caminhão/De pedreiros, carpinteiros/Encarregado e o*

patrão/Bernadete de mini saia/Para qualquer construção" (1). Though intentionally noted, Bernadette's clothing is insignificant. Julia's body (and sexuality) are also subjects of conversation for the *padeiro*, *vendedor*, *faxineiro,* and narrator himself who observe her everyday movements:

A Júlia moça educada *Terminou filosofia* *De casa para o trabalho* *Farmácia e a padaria* *Seu corpo sempre coberto* *Suas coxas ninguém via.*	*O padeiro cochichava* *Ao vendedor do balcão* *Bem debaixo desses panos* *Deve haver um mulherão* *Mais ela nunca namora* *Será que ela é sapatão?*

Here the absence of a man indicates homosexuality and gender non-conformity. Thus far the story only presents the perspectives of local men as they try to make sense of Júlia and Bernadete. Abaeté himself can only rationalize Bernadette's homosexuality through the (sexual) absence of a man. He explains that she was a "*mulher mal-amada,*" describing her as "sexually repressed" because she was married to a man who, as Abaeté can attest, did not know how to please her:

Reprimida de desejos *E dos prazeres carnais* *O discurso do marido* *Que detestava banais* *E dizia ser frescura* *Os problemas sexuais.*	*Só depende dos casais* *Vocês podem ter certeza* *Entre eu e Bernadete* *Funciona com beleza* *Mas tem gente que confunde* *Fazer amor com safadeza.*

By inserting himself here in the first person, Abaeté uses a cordel about LGBT+ women to affirm and assert his own heterosexuality. He separates himself (and perhaps other male readers) from this particular man who caused his wife's homosexuality.

Aside from the two protagonists, the only other woman in the story is a "*cliente no caixa*" who overhears the men gossiping and calls them out:

...Gente como é que pode
Quanta discriminação
O fulaninho é viado
A fulana sapatão

Deixe a vida dos outros
Nenhum de nós é perfeito
Cada um faz o que quer
Não suporto preconceito
O importante é o amor
Vale apena de qualquer jeito (4).

Like the disclaimer in "*A Primeira Vez de um Gay,"* Abaeté self-consciously uses this character to absolve himself of his own complicity in reproducing sexist discourses. This unnamed woman generically addresses the men for five stanzas in a lesson on prejudice, equal rights, and respect. In a story about LGBT+ women, the women never speak to each other. The cordel would not pass a Bechdel Test[45]. Once again homosexuality and gender non-conformity are framed negatively, this time as "imperfections" rather than "sins." Ultimately Abaeté opts for a gender-blind "love is love" discourse.

Yet, in the final pages of the cordel we see an interesting shift in gender representation. Abaeté previously described Bernadate's husband as a "*sujeito valente/respeitado na cidade…no passado matou gente*." He is bold, brave, and respected in the community, but he is also crude and violent. When Bernadette confronts her husband at the end of the story, she calls him a "*grosseirão*" and "*Don-juan de meia tigela*" who does not know how to satisfy a woman. She focuses particularly on his sexual failures with women, "*Não é só subir encima dela/Vulco-vulco e depois sair/Tem que dá prazer pra ela* (6). Unlike other *cordéis* which equate sexual failure

[45] The Bechdel test was first featured in the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1985) by Alison Bechdel. It evaluates the portrayal of women in fiction using three criteria: that the work includes at least two women, who talk to each other, about something other than a man.

with femininity and *cornos* with *viados*, here it is the husband's excess of "macho" masculinity which results in his betrayal and apparently, her homosexuality. When he accuses her of infidelity, Bernadete stands up to him, takes control, and declares, "*machão só merece ser chifrado…para lá com teu preconceito/A vida pertence a mim/Faço dela o que quiser…O amor ele não tem sexo/É com homem ou com mulher*" (7). Here the gender roles which were set out at the beginning of the cordel are destabilized. The community turns against the "*machão*" and restrains him as Bernadete puts him in his place. Certainly not the "*certinha*" of this story, Bernadete follows her own path and ultimately lives happily ever after with Júlia. The cordel ends with slightly more convincing advice from the author on coming out of the closet:

A Bernadete e Júlia
Duas mulheres assumidas
Com atitudes corretas
Melhoraram suas vidas
E com certeza as duas
Pelas famílias queridas.

A vida de seu ninguém
Não interessa a terceiro
Não progride todos que
Vai escutar fofoqueiro
Enfrente tudo e todos
Mostre que você é guerreiro.

Faça tudo mais não deixe
A vida ficar vazia
Pule fora do armário
Vá viver com alegria
Realize os seus sonhos
Não perca mais nenhum dia.

Unlike "*O Cangaceiro Gay*" this gender transgression earned Bernadete respect and admiration. Instead of ending up like Roldão, a demoted and depreciated *cozinheira* of the *cangaço*, Bernadete is a "*guerreiro*". She is accepted by her family and the community, and imbued with the "masculine" traits of honor and bravery, while Roldão is shamed. In these stories, it is indeed the particular direction of the gender transgression that results in acceptance or shame thus re-inscribing misogyny into LGBT+ stories and characters.

Taking on Genre: Women Writers and Activist Cordéis:

While *Júlia e Bernadete* was the only physical cordel featuring LGBT+ women I found during my field research, the online work of Salete Maria da Silva and Jarid Arraes features LGBT+ and feminist themes in what Brazilian researchers refer to as "*cordéis militantes*" or activist *cordéis* (Neto (2015), Diniz (2017)). In their work, *Transgressão e Memória: Análise de*

Cordéis Carirenses Enquanto Mídia Radical (2015), Costa et al cite Silva and Arraes as authors utilizing the cordel as site of communication and social resistance. On her website *Cordelirando*, Salete Maria describes herself as a "*cordelista feminista brasileira*;" her work is housed mainly on this site which also functions as a blog. Silva is a professor of Gender and Diversity Studies at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA) and previously worked for over a decade as a lawyer. She writes about gender, feminism, and human rights among other political themes and is a founding member of the *Sociedade dos Cordelistas Mauditos.*[46] This subversive movement of young poets, founded in Juazeiro da Norte Ceará in 2000, works to dismantle the binaries and boundaries of cordel literature, placing themselves in the "*entre-lugar*" between the erudite and popular (Contival 2012). Silva includes ten cordéis under the category "LGBT" on her site, including *Outras Pessoas (2014), Dia do Orgulho Gay* (2008), *Lesbecause* (2008), *Maria, Helena* (2008), and *A Historia de Joca e Juarez* (2008).

A young poet herself, Jarid Arraes grew up among Northeastern *cordelistas* in Juazeiro do Norte, namely her Father and Grandfather who influenced her work. Noting an absence of women in cordel literature and history, she began researching and developing her cordel series *Heroinas Negras Brasileiras*. In 2013, she wrote for two collaborative online blogs: *Blogueiras Feministas* and *Blogueiras Negras*. She also hosts a website to promote her work which she also prints in the traditional booklet form. Arraes writes on themes such as Human Rights, feminism, and "*movimentos de luta contra o racismo*" and "*direitos LGBT*" (Arraes). Arraes has written

[46] Their Manifesto reads, "A nossa comunicação se dá através da poesia de cordel — Traço de nossa identidade nordestina. Somos contra o lugar comum, combatemos a globalização que impõe signos massificantes e uniformiza os comportamentos e estéticas: Nosso movimento pretende, sob unia ótica intertextual, utilizando vários códigos estéticos, redimensionar a literatura de cordel para um campo onde as linguagens sejam possíveis. Não somos nem erudito nem popular: somos língua-gens. Entramos na obra porque ela está aberta e é plural. Somos poetas e guerreiros do presente. A poesia escreverá enfim outra história. Salve! Patativa de Assaré e Oswald de Andrade!" (Contival 2012)

four *cordéis* with LGBT themes including *Travesti Não é Bagunça* (2015) and *Chica Gosta é de Mulher* (2014).

Stuart Hall's work on contesting regimes of representation (1997) is useful to think through how the work of Silva and Arraes subverts dominant regimes of representation – both in addressing negative stereotypes of LGBT+ subjects as well as regionalist stereotypes which present the Northeast as a space closed to social change. Hall presents three different "trans-coding strategies" or ways of "taking existing meaning and appropriating them for new meanings" including 1.) reversing the stereotypes 2.) substituting negative images 3.) unsettling the fixity of representation (270). In *Travesti Não é Bagunça* (2015) Arraes addresses transphobia in Brazil by reversing stereotypes and presenting positive images to substitute the negative. The cover presents a peaceful image of a woman with long, braided hair looking at the stars. This is one of the only cordéis I encountered which utilizes the correct feminine pronouns for "*as travestis:*"

Figure 41: Cover art for "Travesti" (Arraes 2015)

Quase todo mundo sabe
O que é uma travesti
Mas se faz de ignorante
Pra xingar e pra agredir
Porque sente intolerância
Por quem sabe transgredir.

Travesti não é uma coisa
Nem um bicho anormal
É somente uma pessoa
Com força fenomenal
Que se assume como é
E que vive tal e qual.

In the title of the cordel, Arraes directly contests the idea that *travestis* are "a mess." In her text, she rejects words that objectify and reduce people who have a "*força fenomenal.*" She values their ability to transgress social norms and live their lives as who they are, affirming that "*travestis são talentosas/Alegres e inteligentes/Criativas e esforçadas/Com espírito insurgente/Sabem vencer a batalha/Contra o ódio incoerente.*" Along with substituting negative images for positive ones, Arraes draws attention to how social stigma excludes *travestis* from

family support, education, and the formal work force. She even engages the topic of prostitution "*não que isso seja errado/mas não há muita opção*." The cordel advocates for education and includes a call to action in support of *travestis*. Finally, Arraes draws attention to the importance of *travestis* in cordel literature and ends with Northeastern slang to seal her argument:

Pra acabar o meu cordel
Uso uma chave de ouro
Pois nessa literatura
Travesti é um tesouro
Pra nossa diversidade
Trazem muito bom agouro.

Se não concordar comigo
Deixe logo de furdunça
Pois não tenho paciência
Pra trepeça, nem jagunça
O recado é muito claro:
Travesti não é bagunça!

The term "*furdunça*" is a synonym of "*bagunça,*" and Arraes employs it here to reverse the idea of social mess or disorder on those who would disagree with her. She asserts she does not have patience for "*trepeça,*" someone with a bad character, or "*jagunça*," a brute, also a synonym for *cangaceiro*. Her use of Northeastern slang in a cordel that supports *travestis* incorporates this theme into Northeastern cultural production. In this way, she subverts the idea that Northeastern culture is rigid, closed, or an unaccepting space for LGBT+ subjectivities.

Diniz (2017) argues that these cordéis present a "*higienização*" of lesbian identities, inscribing state sanctioned and morally "acceptable" LGBT+ subjectivities into normative discourses. While the covers and titles of these works are not obviously queer or sexually explicit, their content presents complex and multifaceted subjectivities inclusive of those most marginalized within LGBT+ movements. For example, "*A Historia de Joca e Juarez*" (Silva 2008) is the only example of a gay cordel I have encountered which breaks the stereotypical representation of trans people as heterosexual. The character "Meretriz" is a lesbian and a *travesti* who advocates successfully for Joca and Juarez and their prohibited love.

In *Outras Pessoas* (2014), Salete Maria da Silva demonstrates one of the ways in which her cordel literature unsettles the fixity of representation and locates itself within the

"complexities and ambivalences of representation itself" (Hall, 1997; 274). These verses are less concerned with introducing new content (such as positive imagery) and instead focuses on form: questioning the hierarchy of values which places people within different social planes. Beginning with a list, Silva aligns herself with the marginalized and acknowledges the existence of the "other:"

Negros, pobres, nordestinos
Deficientes, romeiros
Crentes, ateus, peregrinos
Camelôs e macumbeiros
Putas, loucos e viados
Viúvas e amancebados
Militantes, sem-dinheiro…

Not only does she include all those who fall under the LGBT+ umbrella (*lésbicas, assexuados, bissexuais* etc.) but she also includes in her list others impacted by the social regulation of bodies and sexuality including "*gordos, celibatários, aposentados, sem filhos*" as well as those marginalized by race, class, disability, religion, etc. The list continues for the entirety of the cordel, except the final two stanzas:

Outras pessoas existem
- fora da Caras (de pau) -
Que, a seu modo insistem
Em consumir o jornal:
Seja dormindo com ele
Ou cagando em cima dele
Vão gerando outro know how

Outras pessoas existem
- fora do reality show -
Que, a seu modo, persistem
Em fazer seu próprio gol
Ganhando algumas partidas
- Perdendo tantas na vida -
Assim como elas, soul.

An interesting characteristic of her work, Silva incorporates English words and references into her stanzas, but does not lose the popular humor of Northeastern verse. She nods to transnational histories, while placing her work within its *lugar social:* the *interior* of Ceará[47].

[47] In *Dia de Orgulho Gay* (2008) Silva recounts the history of the Stonewall Riots in New York, noting the role of "*travestis*" in standing up to the police and fighting civil rights. She then returns to her metropolitan area, Cariri, in the Brazilian Northeast: "*Por isto no Cariri/o gay tem que se afirmar/organizando, lutar/contra a morte como sina/ É dever de toda gente/Combater o preconceito.*" Silva ends with a local reference, invoking the name of Jonatan

Instead of treating new technology and media as a threat, Silva embraces it; these days "*consumir o jornal*" is something everyone does. Here the newspaper is a symbolic object that serves to horizontalize and flatten social hierarchies, valuing different types of practical knowledge or "know how" including reading, sleeping, and shitting. By humanizing her subjects and placing everyone on the same horizontal plane Silva deliberately contests dominant definitions of "otherness" by working on and against representations of success and failure. In her final stanza, Silva unfolds a *fútbol* metaphor admitting the human art of failure: we will all "*perder tantas partidas na vida;*" and win just a few. The last line plays with the word "soul," both the spiritual/immaterial part of human beings and heard aloud: "sou" – "I am." With her extensive list, Silva plays with the category "*outra*," making it strange, only to ultimately familiarize it. She makes explicit what is hidden. "*Assim como elas, sou*" concludes the cordel asserting that the author and a collective "we" all are "*outras pessoas.*"

Another way in which Silva unsettles the fixity of representation is through repetition and re-appropriation. In an analysis of Silva's work, Francisca Pereira dos Santos highlights the use of repetition as a common technique in oral poetry. She cites Lumaire, who emphasizes, "*Civilizações da oralidade valorizam o recurso estilístico, ou figura retórica da repetição/ reiteração para exprimir, acentuar e reforçar conhecimentos tradicionais*" (Lumaire in Santos, 2006; 187). In her poems, Silva uses repetition to contest "*conhecimentos tradicionais"* which exclude women from this literary tradition. While Santos speaks to the presence of women in cordel literature, her observation remains true for the queer subjectivities expressed in the following cordéis: "*a prática da repetição é trazida à tona, como estratégia, para dar ênfase a*

Kiss, a victim of LGBT-phobia in Novo Juazeiro who was murdered in 2000. "*Jonatan Kiss foi assim/Amou e viveu, enfim/Conquistou nosso respeito*."

um assunto pouco convencional no cordel (Santos, 2006; 187).

In *Maria, Helena* (2008) and *Lesbecause* (2008) Silva uses repetition to instate her subjects into the genre, focusing specifically on LGBT+ women. *Lesbecause* repeats the phrase "*por causa das lesbianas*" at the beginning of thirteen out of fifteen stanzas while engaging in linguistic word play:

Let me see se apre(e)ndi
A língua da mulher *gay*
Deixe-me ver se (ab)sorvi
O tal do verbo to *say*:
Seio you, seio me, seio we
Lesbecause let me see
Em junho tem *happy day*

Por causa das lesbianas
Agora sou poliglota
Lésbicas ou pubianas
Já não as acho idiotas
Os lábios roçam as bocas
As bocas parecem loucas
Sedentas, mudam de rotas

She goes on to cite various *conquistas* which she attributes to "*lesbianas*" including visibility, diversity, equality, and feminism without losing intended sexual innuendo, which she introduces via "*linguas*" and "*linguagens*:"

Por causa das lesbianas
As línguas se entrelaçam
As bocas se chamam xanas
As xanas se chamam rachas
As rachas se chamam *girls*
Garotas chupam *freegels*
Free girls chupam *muchachas*...

Por causa das lesbianas
Nem só a cultura é oral
Abaixo as falas tiranas
"Pedra é pedra, pau é pau"
Não "é o fim do caminho"
Lesco-lesco e roçadinho
Sugerem outro final.

Not only does Silva begin with an English reference to international LGBT+ Pride, "happy day," but she also includes inter(actions) between "*garotas*," "*free girls*" and "*muchachas*." She rebukes homophobic "*falas tiranas*" which reject these erotic possibilities while slipping in sly descriptions of these sexual encounters such as, "*nem só a cultura é oral,*" and "*lesco-lesco* [let's go-let's go]," and *"roçadinho*" which refers to the ever-popular lesbian act of "scissoring." The line "*pedra é pedra, pau é pau…*" is in quotes as it elicits the

Figure 42: Cover of Lesbecause (Silva 2008)

romantic themes of bossa nova in a reference to the famous song “Águas de Março” composed by António Carlos Jobim.

Unlike traditional *cordéis* which regard outside influences as sources of corruption, Silva’s work consistently incorporates foreign words, a diasporic vision, and genre-bending styles. “*Por causa das lesbianas/Minh’arte usa outro tom.*” Her content fits her medium as she writes almost entirely online, posting her cordéis on her blog. Skipping long processes of printing and publication, Silva’s poems are able to spread farther and faster than traditional *cordéis*. Indeed, her work is commonly cited and widely recognized; in 2005 she was awarded second place in the *Premio Nacional de Literatura de Cordel* promoted by the *Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia* (Santos 2006).

In *Maria, Helena*, (2008) Silva takes on patriarchy, religion, homophobia, and stereotypes of the Northeast – obsessively repeating her lines, and (coincidentally?) incorporating her name into the cordel. Silva repeats her first stanza eight times:

> *Maria ama Helena*
> *Helena ama Maria*
> *Maria ama Helena*
> *Helena ama Maria*
> *Maria ama Helena*
> *Assim dizia a novena*
> *Que meus ouvidos ouvia*

The lines recall Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s poem “*Quadrilha*,” which also includes a Maria, but with six other characters involved. Here there are only two women. Silva repeats the three words expressing love between these women in almost every stanza: as statements, as questions, as verbs, as adjectives, as nouns… until her subjects fuse in the final stanza:

Sei que Maria é Helena
E que Helena é Maria
E se Maria ama Helena
Também Helena a Maria
Mais uma vez a novena
E tudo se concatena
Pão nosso de cada dia!

Figure 43: Online image associated with cordel "Maria, Helena" (2008) on Silva's blog Cordelirando

The obsessive repetition fills the gaps left for decades and names the relationship that connects these two women. In this way, Silva contests patriarchal and homophobic discourses that have excluded LGBT+ women from cordel literature and misrepresented these subjectivities.

Silva's cordel can also be read as a prayer, addressing religious discourses which are thought to exclude women and condemn homosexuality. In her repeated stanzas, "*novena*" refers to the nine days of devoted prayer in the Roman Catholic tradition and her prayer (*Maria ama Helena*), becomes the "*pão nosso de cada dia*" in the final line of the cordel. The "*pedido do pão*" is part of the "Our Father," a prayer asking God for the "everyday bread" that not only physically sustains man (human beings), but also spiritually enriches, referring symbolically to the Eucharist. Re-appropriated into a feminist cordel, the physical and spiritual bread which sustains the women is their love. Instead of creating a divide between religion and her characters, Silva combines them within her cultural context.

Throughout the cordel, Silva references religion from Roman Catholic traditions to traditional/spiritual healers to indigenous Tupi practices. She places her cordel in the *interior*, describing Maria as a "*devota*" of Padre Cicero (Padim Ciço Romão), an influential spiritual leader in the Brazilian Northeast and a Roman Catholic priest who was accused of heresy and died in Juazeiro do Norte. Read along descriptions of Maria and Helena as "*benzedieras, devotas, Nordestinas, brasileiras,"* Silva re-appropriates religion (and the Northeast) as spaces which include her characters:

Maria e sua Helena
Nasceram neste lugar
Na Baixa da Siriema
Perto do Rio Quicuncá
Os mais velhos dizem delas:
"São duas moças donzelas,
Fale quem quiser falar" …

Maria é meio calada
Vive da agricultura
Helena tange a boiada
E também faz escultura
As duas são benzedeiras
Nordestinas, brasileiras
Força, fé e formosura

Silva is proud of the Northeast. She does not admit it as a patriarchal, homophobic space, but rather replaces these discourses with her own. Her Northeast, her story (*Helena ama Maria/Maria ama Helena*), "*Não é Mundo de Sofia/Nem é novela chilena/É romance sub-urbano/Latino-americano/Folk-love em quarentena.* Unusual for a cordel, Silva utilizes parenthesis to modify her repeated phrase towards the end of the cordel, "*Maria que é (de) Helena/Helena que é (de) Maria/Ninguém aqui as condena.*" As she exemplifies acceptance, Silva begins to fuse her subjects. The ultimate result is a feminist re-appropriation of religion, cordel literature, and Northeastern culture which contests the premise that the *interior* does not admit this type of LGBT+ relationship.

The Cyber Cordel

Along with providing new perspectives, the work of Silva and Arraes brings a more serious political commitment to the genre. They engage feminist, anti-racist, intersectional, and LGBT+ themes without relying on the obscenities or offensive humor which otherwise characterize the LGBT+ cordel genre. Their work modifies the discourses around LGBT+ issues in cordel literature, including the language used to describe these subjectivities as well as the medium through which these stories are told. In her article *Mulheres Fazem…* (2006) Francisca Pereira dos Santos emphasizes how the work of women *cordelistas* has resignified the genre: "*questionando um imaginário social marcadamente masculino*" and "*inaugurando novos*

espaços de veiculação do cordel (186).” Other than the *feira tradicional*, these new spaces include schools, streets, universities, and online/virtual spaces that offer new possibilities for access and dissemination.

Both Salete Maria da Silva and Jarid Arraes utilize digital mediums to disseminate their work. More traditional in her production, Arraes sells her printed cordéis through her webpage as well as her other literary works. Each cordel includes the traditional cover with a xilogravura-style image. Silva’s blog is less organized, but her entire body of work is available for free online. She includes images with each cordel, but few include the traditional xilogravura of printed folhetos.

As oral poetry, *cordéis* have always traveled, but technologies of the information age have provided new spaces, contexts, and mobilities for the genre. The *ciber-cordel* is a new sub-genre of cordel literature contained entirely online. It combines the communicative potential of popular verse with the horizontal, simultaneous interaction offered in cyberspace. It merges traditional culture with digital technology, effectively challenging established methods of literary production and traditional methods of communication while opening the cordel to new voices, innovative themes, and a wider audience (Sousa 2007). Scholars such as Amorim (2009), Gaudêncio (2014), and Sousa (2007) have studied the *cibercordel* in detail distinguishing it from online archives of cordel literature:

> *[O ciber-cordel] constitui-se como a sinergia entre as formas de narrar do cordel com a interatividade e conectividade desterritorializada e simultânea do ciberespaço. É, dessa forma, um cordel produzido em rede, impondo a autoria coletiva como forma de produção da obra. O ciber-cordel não é, portanto, a simples transposição do cordel feito off-line para o nível on-line* (Souza 2007).

In this way, Salete Maria da Silva's work is an example of the cyber-cordel genre as readers can comment on her cordéis and interact with the verses on her blog. Cyber-cordel scholars stress the collective production and fluid nature of these poems, which often include multiple authors in dialogue through their poetry. While cordéis written in the past and digitalized online are clearly not a part of the cyber-cordel genre, contemporary cordéis available and disseminated online, such as those of Arraes, take part in these digital dialogues and high-speed forms of communication. The *cibercordel* as well as cordéis produced and disseminated online, merge traditional culture with digital technology, effectively challenging established methods of literary production and traditional methods of communication. The genre allows for constant exchange and communication within interactive, simultaneous, de-territorialized, and increasingly accessible spaces. As I argued in chapter two, LGBT+ women those at the intersections of various marginalized identities have developed hybrid, digital, and in this case, genre-bending mediums to connect to a wider community. The cordel in online culture provides new spaces for LGBT+ socialization, expression, and community organization within virtual spaces. The internet has opened the cordel to new voices, innovative themes, and a wider audience.

Conclusion: Projeto Lampioa

The cordel has endured as an effective and relevant medium through which to discuss social realities. Its representation of LGBT+ subjectivities points to an important cultural paradigm shift in which the LGBT+ community has become more visible and positively represented within this traditional literary form. In 2014, a collective of over forty artists, writers, and illustrators including Tom Zé, Laerte, and Ronaldo Fraga launched *Projeto*

Lampioa: an art initiative which uses the format and esthetics of cordel literature to combat homophobia. In four collectable fanzines of poems, rhymed verse, and printed images, the project presents different perspectives on gender and sexuality. It touches on themes of prohibited love, gender identity, prejudice, and social stigma with sensualized *xilogravuras* and scenes of homo-affective romance. The collection was featured in an art exhibit in São Paulo in 2015 and is also available online.

The name "Lampioa" feminizes "Lampiao" the famous backland bandit and "*Rei dos Cangaceiros"* who symbolizes the rough violent masculinity which has come to characterize the Brazilian Northeast. In an interview with the *Estadão de São Paulo*, project organizers Bruno Casto and João Zambom explain that they did not choose the name ironically, but rather, were inspired by Lampião as a marginalized anti-hero. Zambom affirms, "*Queríamos feminizar o símbolo do 'cabra-macho'. Essa é a essência do projeto. Lampioa não tem gênero. É aberta e mutável como todo ser humano*" (Filho 2014). Zambom and Castro wish to bring these realities and dilemmas to a wider audience outside of the LGBT+ community. Castro explains, "*Queríamos abrir um novo meio de comunicação sobre a causa para expandir a discussão para outros espaços e públicos. E foi justamente por isso que unimos o cordel com a fanzine e o universo LGBT*" (Filho 2014). Cordel literature does more than just relieve tensions created by social inequity. It provides a creative universe which patterns and gives meaning to lived experience. As authors with different socio-cultural positionalities take up the genre, it communicates new experiences and perspectives. The use of the cordel by the LGBT+ community to discuss contemporary themes of sexuality and gender identity in Brazil is

fundamentally challenging stereotypes of a people and region. It gives voice and visibility to LGBT+ communities and demonstrates the resilience, durability, and adaptability of the genre and the culture from which it came.

Conclusion: *Uma Teoria do Cu*

My engagement with queerness in Brazil began long before I arrived at the University of Texas in Austin to commence a PhD program in the Department of Spanish in Portuguese. When I received my Fulbright placement in Natal, Rio Grande do Norte I remember searching online to get an idea of what to expect. In the Fall of 2009, my search mainly brought up images of beaches. At the time, Natal didn't even have a Wikipedia site in English, and I didn't speak Portuguese. As I prepared to take three different flights from Chicago to Natal, I remember wondering if I could be out in this place. I wondered if I would find other LGBT+ people with whom I could connect. I generally understood that Natal was more conservative than other places I had lived, but I had no idea what was waiting for me. Almost ten years later, I have written a dissertation on LGBT+ culture in Brazil; I speak Portuguese with a Northeastern accent, and I have an entire LGBT+/queer community in Natal which has helped me along on this journey. This dissertation has been a part of my own journey with gender and sexuality across borders. The cultural productions I examine form part of my personal engagement in a transnational queer community. My inquiries reflect my initial worries that I would have to be in the closet while living in a traditional Latin American city as well as my growth as a scholar of gender, sexuality, and cultural studies in Latin America.

This dissertation has investigated articulations of queerness at different sites of identity in the Brazilian Northeast, including raced, classed, and gendered subjectivities. It has upended both popular imaginaries and scholarly thinking on gender and sexuality in Brazil in the first study of its kind that examined how LGBT+ communities reinvent tradition and re-claim space in the Brazilian Northeast. Through an analysis of different LGBT+ cultural productions, I complicated hegemonic representations of the Northeast region as conservative, static, or "anti-

modern," and therefore unwelcoming of alternative sexualities and gender expressions. Not only have I demonstrated how Northeastern culture holds space for marginalized subjectivities, but also how LGBT+ communities make space for themselves within traditional Northeastern culture.

In this dissertation, I have also critiqued homonormative scripts which demonstrate how LGBT+ discourses can become heteronormatized and acquiesce to white supremacy. My analysis of Maria Boa as a "fluctuating queer subject" also functioned to destabilize queer/heterosexual binaries and formulate an intersectional analysis which speaks to the multiple axes around which sex and gender oppression operate. My analysis of Natal as a space of imperial formation in the World War II era contextualized Natal within geo-political hierarchies which have contributed to the formation of peripheral modernities. I identified white supremacist and hetero-patriarchal structures inherent to imperial formation and provided a better understanding of how queer subjects navigate the margins of modernity. I then highlighted LGBT+ spatial and cultural interventions, such the fluctuating queer space of the *Cabaré Maria Boa*, the Arraiá do GAMI, and Brilho Potiguar's *quadrilla* dance performance, which revives and rewrites the myth of Maria Boa. Finally my analysis of LGBT+ representations in cordel literature identified deviant sexuality as the prism through which traditional authors have read gender non-conformity. I situated the cordel within hetero-patriarchal structures and highlighted the ways in which traditional authors self-consciously flirt with queerness. I then exemplified queer and feminist interventions into cordel literature in the work of Jarid Arraes and Salete Maria and through the online medium of the cyber cordel. This project not only contributed to the limited academic research on LGBT+ culture outside of European/North American urban spaces, but also is the first to focus specifically on traditional cultural productions and

Northeastern Brazil. I have applied queer theory across multiple disciplines, engaging with women of color and trans feminisms to destabilize binaries, reclaim the body, and theorize intersectionally. In this way, I have contributed elaboration of an intersectional trans-feminist framework that bridges conversations on gender and sexuality in Latin America and the United States. I conclude this dissertation by pointing to future lines of inquiry and evolutions of queer theory in Brazil as well as indicating future directions of my research.

Uma Teoria do Cu

When talking to outsiders, people from Natal often joke that Natal is located "*no cu do elefante"* explaining that the state of Rio Grande do Norte is curiously shaped like an elephant. I have also heard these anatomical references used to signal regional and geographical hierarchies. For example, people might explain discontent with public services or bureaucracy with a "here" versus "there" comparison ie. (unlike cities in Southern Brazil, the United States, or more developed places) In Natal, the streets are flooded, the schools are without electricity, the lines are long, the buses are full… because we live "*no cu do mundo*." Reflecting this sentiment, Brazilian and Latin American artists, activists, and scholars have proposed a "*teoria do cu*" as a more subversive and universal alternative to queer theory which better represents the spaces from which they write, think, work, create, and perform.

Figure 44: Natal "no cu do elefante" of Rio Grande do Norte state

A word that not only references "ass" but specifically the "ass hole," "*cu*" is not an appropriate word to utter in the respectable and formal spaces of the academy. It does "*ferir o*

ouvido" (Pelúcio 2015). A word of the streets, "*cu*" challenges assumptions that theory belongs to scholars or develops within the language of the ivory tower. It embraces and centers the abject. It also provides an excellent point of departure for future inquiries into queerness not only geographically located in Brazil, but also in the unbounded spaces of a digital world and on the increasingly mobile spaces of the body.

Teoria do cu mobilizes a geography of the body to destabilize fixed notions of space, knowledge, and identity. It enacts a physical (bodily) and geographical (directional) reversal of knowledge production. Pelúcio explains how "geopolitics of knowledge" create an anatomical binary related to knowledge production:

> *Na geografia anatomizada do mundo, nós nos referimos muitas vezes ao nosso lugar de origem como sendo "cu do mundo", ou fomos sistematicamente sendo localizados nesses confins periféricos e, de certa forma, acabamos reconhecendo essa geografia como legítima. E se o mundo tem cu é porque tem também uma cabeça. Uma cabeça pensante, que fica acima, ao norte, como convêm às cabeças* (10) …. *Assumir que falamos a partir das margens, das beiras pouco assépticas, dos orifícios e dos interditos fica muito mais constrangedor quando, ao invés de usarmos o polidamente sonoro queer, nos assumimos como teóricas e teóricos cu* (2014; 4).

This bodily metaphor highlights a political order which situates Europe, the United States, and other developed countries as the "head" from which knowledge is produced. In this model, Brazil is a place about which theories are made. A *teoria do cu*, proposes the margins, the other, the abject, the asshole, as a place of knowledge production and *um lugar de fala*. In an interview with euroalter, "*Transnational Dialogues | Marginal Bodies*" (2016) Jota Mombaça further complicates geopolitical theoretical positionings by evoking the body. Mombaça locates global

margins not only within specific geographical areas, but also as they are embodied by people of color. A "non binary *bicha,*" writer and performer from Natal-RN, Mombaça situates *teoria do cu* within colonized and enslaved bodies. Unlike geographic or territorial margins, these "*margens incarnadas/incorporadas*" are mobile; the body perforates the borders between geopolitical centers and peripheries, bringing "the margin to the center and the margin beyond the margin to other margins" (2016). Speaking to bodies and borders, diaspora and immigration, the margin located on the body demonstrates a porous relationship between margins and centers.

Figure 45: Jota Mombaça, The Feel of a Problem, Berlin Biennale 10 #1 Public Program. Photo: Anthea Schaap

As margins map onto to bodies, systems of oppression also territorialize the body. In their text, "*Pode um cú mestiço falar*" (2015) Mobaça dialogues with Grada Kilomba's "The Mask" to link systems of slavery and compulsory heterosexuality as they arbitrarily territorialize the body. Here Mombaça visibilizes and subverts racialized regimes of heterosexuality utilizing the bodily metaphors of *teoria do cu*:

> *O regime escravocrata produziu uma territorialização da boca como lugar de tortura e não-fala, a norma da heterossexualidade compulsória produziu o cu como lugar de excreção e não-prazer… Duas extremidades de um mesmo tubo, o cu e a boca como órgãos interditados revelam a dimensão corpo-política da construção da realidade* (13).

Mombaça links hegemonic discourses of slavery and heterosexuality as they restrain the body and drastically reduce the possibilities of experimentation with the mouth and the asshole. To reterritorialize the body and locate the "*cu*" as a place of speech is to open, reorganize, and reclaim the body. This framework also speaks to a reclaiming of the body from the binding

impositions of cisheteronormativity:

> *Nesse campo politicamente regulado, o cu é a parte fora do cálculo: a contra-genitália que desinforma o gênero, porque atravessa a diferença sexual binária* (Mombaça 2015).

Taken up by artists, performers, and theorists across subaltern borders[48], *a teoria do cu* subverts the clean binaries of north/south, center/periphery, knowledge/excretion, normal/abject, high/low academic/popular.

One of the most important Brazilian academic journals engaging with Queer Studies, "*Revista Periódicus*," signals this theoretical positioning by incorporating "cu" into its name. Its objectives include creating "*um local de produção, divulgação e fomento de textos que tenham como objetivo pensar uma perspectiva queer a partir da América Latina*" as well as producing a journal that also welcomes, "*outras linguagens e modos de criação de textos acadêmicos, de forma a também estranhar as metodologias e as formas canônicas de produzir conhecimento na universidade*." Periodicus is an open access journal available to those without institutional affiliations or paid subscriptions. It is a biannual publication of the Culture and Sexuality Research Group (CUS) created in 2007 and linked to the Universidade Federal da Bahia. Its form and content reflect the engagements, translations, provocations and theoretical inquiries of a *teoria do cu,* or a Brazilian queer theory. Periodicus often translates seminal works on queer theory from English or Spanish into Portuguese; one of my future goals is to publish in Portuguese in Periodicus in order traverse linguistic borders and facilitate dialogue with those in Latin America.

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[48] Pelúcio notes the work of argentine anthropologist Néstor Perlonger as one of the early marks for an elaboration of *teoria do cu* in Latin America. She cites Perlonger's book, *O negócio do michê: prostituição viril em São Paulo* (1987) as an example of knowledge production outside of the phallocentric and heteronormative regimes of canonic science.

Contemporarily, *teoria do cu* traverses academic/popular borders within queer performance art. I have also seen its geographical mobility connecting people across cities and countries as diverse as Natal, Brazil; Colombia; Austin, Texas; and Berlin, Germany. In a piece for Outsiderfest 2018 (a queer trans media festival in Austin, Texas) Colombian artist Nadia Granados/*La Fluminante* plays with obscene language and sexual material to condemn machismo in Latin America. Using a cabaret aesthetic, she literally speaks from her asshole: bent over with a mouth projected onto her ass. She denounces political corruption, gender violence, and chauvinism in an invented language as translations in English and Spanish flash across a screen. Pêdra Costa, a Brazilian immigrant in Germany, speaks about their own queer identity in an interview with a multi-media social justice project. The interview includes an audio overlay of Costa's words as they display their body in different positions from the bottom up. The effect is *uma fala do cu*. Costa also plays with these concepts in a Soundcloud album entitled "Solange Tó Aberta!" exemplifying a subversive *teoria do cu* in musical tracks. "*Fuder Freud*" utilizes a simple baile funk drum beat accompanied by a ukulele and a suave voice repeating "*Eu vou comer o cu de Freud. Ele pensa. Ele analisa. Ele sonha com a pica.*" "*Cuceta*" (AssPussy) on the other hand, utilizes a heavy *baile funk* beat interwoven with Zé Pintos's pastoral refrain used in popular women's rights movements, "*Pra mudar a sociedade do jeito que a gente quer/ Participando sem medo de ser mulher."* Returning to the heavy *baile funk* beat, the song universally announces, "*O cu é um buraco que todo mundo tem/ O cu é um buraco que todo mundo tem/Eu tenho uma cuceta e você uma buceta/ai meu amor não vem com por favor/deix-eu te dar minha cuceta sem dor.*" #QueerBaileFunk. As Mombaça describes the "*cu*" as a "*contra-genetalia… que atravessa a diferencia sexual binária*," Costa's work puts this theory into music elaborating a queer, trans, feminist, and anti-colonial *teoria do cu* outside of the academy.

In my dissertation, I wrestled with the limits of queer theory in Latin American and within the peripheral modernity of Northeastern Brazil. However, more recent thinking reconceptualizes these borders to consider the bodies that traverse them. Performance artists, like Costa, are taking up *teoria do cu* as pop spectacle with an explicit intersectional engagement. They mark a point of departure for future research which extends my interest in digital activism and social media studies to explore how LGBT+/queer people utilize social media for representational, activist, and community-building purposes. I am interested in the ways in which queer identities emerge and develop within the virtual, visual, aural, and performance spaces of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Soundcloud as well as how they manifest themselves physically across/between/beyond/in spite of borders. My future project examines virtual representations of queer *latinidad* in popular digital culture by following local cultural producers and global networks of queer communities. It uses utilizes a cloud-based text and social networks analyzer to explore and understand interactions of online LGBT+/queer communities, including those on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. In this way, I will engage with various iterations of queerness at different sites of knowledge production. After all, as Costa reminds us, "*o cu é um buraco que tudo mundo tem*."

Appendix – Cordéis Included in Chapter Three (in order of appearance)

O povo desembestado Chico Ramalho 1980	*A desobediência da juventude e o efeito do anti-concepcional* Josefa Nazaré Alves 1980s	*Xamêgo bom, só com camisinha* Lúcia de Fátima Leite Brito 2013	*A história do GAV contada em cordel* Silas Silva da Paraíba 2012	*Corno bicha e sapatão: os sacanas de hoje em dia* José Francisco Borges 2008
O cangaceiro gay Abaeté do Cordel 2009	*Um professor do babado* Taygor Enrico 2013	*A primeira vez de um gay* Abaeté do Cordel 2010	*Alexandre, o rapaz que casou enganado* Abaeté do Cordel (1) ND	*Alexandre, o rapaz que casou enganado* Abaeté do Cordel (2) ND
O padre e o boiola Neuza Romão Soares 2003/2008	*Férias que Bin Laden passou em Natal* Izaias Gomes de Assis 2010	*O garanhão que se lascou com um travesti* Vicente Campos Filho ND	*O corno consolado por robô-bonequinha depois da mulher arranjar uma outra sapatão* K. Gay Nawara 2013	*Júlia e Bernadete* Abaeté do Cordel 2016

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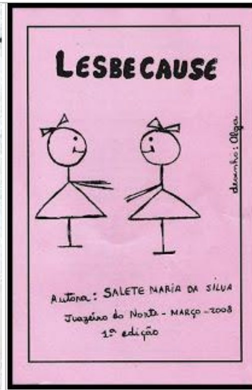
<td>
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Salete Maria e Fanka
2008</td>
<td>Outras pessoas
Salete Maria da Silva
2014</td>
<td>Lesbecause
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Salete Maria da Silva
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Vita

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