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Queering Political Economy in Neoliberal Ironbound Newark: Subjectivity and Spacemaking among Brazilian Queer Immigrant Men

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*I'm like the ringleader, I call the shots ...
All eyes on me, at the center of the ring
Just like a circus
When I crack that whip, everyone gonna trip
Just like a circus
Don't stand there watching me,
Follow me
Show me what you can do
Everybody let go, we can make a dance floor
Just like a circus
"CIRCUS," BRITNEY SPEARS, 2008*

Abstract: This paper complicates the dominant narrative of Newark's Ironbound community as an exceptional and heteronormative neighborhood by analyzing the non-heteronormative subjectivities and spaces in them. During the period between 2004-2009, subjects were interviewed, in queer minoritarian spaces, to understand how Brazilian gays/queers reified and contested neoliberal ideologies of nationalism, "good" ethnicity, individualism, and "appropriate" sexual mores. This ethnographic account employs textual and spatial-temporal analysis to generate an alternative narrative of gay/queer life and groupings in the Ironbound.

Key Terms: Non-heteronormative; Neoliberalism; Political economy; Gay/Queer; Brazilian nationalism; Spatial-temporalities.

Carlos,¹ an undocumented Brazilian immigrant in his mid-twenties, living in the Ironbound community of Newark, shared that he came to terms with being gay after his arrival from Brazil by socializing with other gay men—Brazilians and non-Brazilians alike—in everyday life in the Ironbound. When I interviewed him in 2008, I asked, "Would you like Ferry Street, the main commercial artery of Newark's immigrant Ironbound neighborhood, to become more like New York's historically gay/LGBTQ Christopher Street?" After a deep pause, he said, "I think [Ferry Street] is good the way it is. To live on a street with only gays is like being on Christopher Street. I would not like it like Christopher Street. You can be gay but not everyone has to know."²

He was talking specifically about how gay subjectivity and space should take a subdued position (unlike

Christopher Street³), and that "not everyone has to know" about one's sexual and gender difference. He believed that while walking around with other queers⁴ to visit the stores, cafés, eateries, and bars⁵ on Ferry Street, it was preferable for him to perform, within this dominant space, according to heteronormative expectations. While Carlos recognized that Christopher Street is a gay minoritarian⁶ space, he preferred his conformity within ambiguity in the dominant space of Ferry Street. I wondered, but didn't ask, about his and others' sense of queer relationality and collectivity across race, ethnicity, and class. What was evident was his and others' preference for the nationalist and homogeneously heteronormative space of Ferry Street, in the Ironbound. This led me to further consider the ways that neoliberal ideology and neoliberal development projects impact his and others'

queer performance, embodiment, and groupings in the Ironbound community.

Prior to the arrival of the Brazilian immigrant community in the Ironbound in the 1980s, the longstanding Portuguese immigrant community of the neighborhood had achieved honorary distinction as good citizens of Newark, making them a model for Brazilians and other racial and ethnic minorities to aspire to within Newark's neoliberal context. In *Performing Folklore: Ranchos Folclóricos from Lisbon to Newark* (2005), Kimberly Da Costa-Holton refers to how Newark's mayor, Sharpe James, addresses in a keynote speech that the Portuguese Ironbound neighborhood and its people are "often singled out" for having the neoliberal qualities that brought about "rebirth" and "growth" for Newark. As she further explains, the mayor justified cultural pluralism to highlight the Portuguese's good efforts and impact on the city's tourist and cultural industry, "boasting low crime rates, carefully maintained residential buildings, and a booming commercial district replete with ethnic restaurants and shops [of] Ironbound's 'Little Portugal.'" (2005, 178). In effect, Mayor James distinguished the Portuguese in Newark, whose character and culture were marketable and perpetuated neoliberal ideology, good citizenship, and economic development. Mayor James' celebration of cultural pluralism as a "rainbow of people and culture" (Da Costa-Holton, 178), I argue, celebrates a nationalist immigrant narrative that places non-heteronormative and queer immigrants at the margin of neoliberal agendas, and even renders them invisible. Brazilians have similarly been depicted as exceptional in Newark's neoliberal economic development.⁷ In her book, *Street Therapists: Race, Affect, and Neoliberal Personhood in Latino Newark* (2012), Ana Ramos-Zayas offers an ethnographic account of the ways Brazilian and other Latino immigrants in the Ironbound demonstrate an affect that reflects good neoliberal citizenship (self-sufficiency, industriousness, progression, individualism, good ethnicity, and middle-class tastes) and positively impacts the development projects of the city. In Da Costa-Holton's example, Mayor James is invoking a heterocentrist and "spinned"⁸ cultural pluralism rhetoric that also instructs Brazilian and other Latino gays or queers living in the Ironbound to downplay their excessive and eccentric embodiments and performances inside a neoliberalized, heteronormative, and developed space.

In light of this ideology, I ask how my participants fit or make space for themselves in nationalist,

hetero-patriarchal, and commodified spaces of neoliberal development. Certain literatures examine how neoliberal economic projects negatively impact gay or queer subjectivities by relegating these subjects to a permanent underclass of racial, immigrant, and economic exclusion vis-à-vis urban gentrification, development, and segregation, because they will not likely fit within a white middle class or "good ethnic" notion of heteronormativity or homonormativity (Duggan, 2003; Ferguson, 2004; Luibhéid, 2008; Handhardt, 2008; Rivera-Servera, 2013; Rodríguez, 2003). Other literatures describe spacemaking and subjectivities that assume a local political economy in their local nationalist/immigrant neighborhood context, usually by living discreetly or in a space that ultimately does not interrupt the hetero-patriarchal context, but still allows them to exist as queer subjects (Decena, 2011; Cantú, Jr., 2009; Márquez, 2007; Rivera-Servera, 2013; Rodríguez, 2003; Manalansan, 2003; Quiroga, 2000). Ultimately, I find that these aforementioned literatures resonate most with the Ironbound context in the lives of my interviewees. And yet other literature shows how queer subjects disrupt the local dominant culture that must accommodate them through means of space and even transculturation (Manalansan, 1997; Muñoz, 1999; Peña, 2003, 2005; La Fountain-Stokes, 2005, 2009; Gray, 2009; Benedicto, 2008).

Specifically, this paper pursues how neoliberal ideologies and discourses that reified (and commodified) nationalism, "Brazilianness," the heterosexual family, and "appropriate" sexual mores, also influenced and subdued queer and non-heteronormative visibility, collectivity and agency, in this case and in this particular neighborhood, of recently arrived gay Brazilian immigrants. An ethnographic account of the lives of these documented and undocumented immigrants⁹ to the Ironbound between 2004-2009 reveals their everyday articulations of queer subjectivity in dominant spaces such as cafés and a Lutheran church, as well as in the private space of the home. This paper offers a queer narrative to counter the neighborhood's dominant one. I also employ textual analysis, and spatial-temporal analysis to disrupt and amplify the dominant narrative of the Brazilian Ironbound's heteronormativity by revealing the queer Brazilian immigrants' everyday strategic silences and invisibility that also at times assumes the city's neoliberal ideologies.¹⁰ The aim of this paper is to put the lives and subjectivities of queer Brazilian immigrants at the center of Ironbound life and society. Therefore, I complicate Newark's local government's dominant Brazilian

Ironbound narrative and offer instead my participants' gay counternarratives within public and private contexts of the neighborhood. While my participants practiced strategic silence in most cases, their subjectivities, everyday lives, and groupings serve as evidence of a lived queer political economy built on activities such as homebuilding¹¹ that at different moments reifies or resists the heteronormative, racial, and ethnic dynamics of the neighborhood's neoliberal projects.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC I

Between 2004-2009, I was an active member of St. Julian's Lutheran Church, which consisted of a non-English, Portuguese-speaking congregation of predominantly Brazilian immigrants, and a small but growing number of Central-American and Ecuadorian immigrants. At the church, I became involved in local Newark immigrant rights activism led by the pastors. I was on two committees, which allowed me to work with active church members on a number of church events. Being involved in this immigrant rights activism exposed me to the struggles that the Ironbound's undocumented immigrants faced; the ICE raids, employment rights, access to health care, and to in-state tuition. Eventually, I organized a circle that brought Brazilian and non-Brazilian Latina/o LGBTQ community together within the church as a safe space, mainly to inform undocumented immigrants about their rights.¹²

In the process of meeting Brazilians at church, I became acquainted with several undocumented Brazilian men who either identified as gay or did not specify their sexual identity/subjectivity, but all had sex with men. They were from the smaller towns of Brazil's Minas Gerais region, such as Governador Valadares, Patos, and Ipatinga. About half of my interlocutors were undocumented, and were between the ages of 25-35 or 45-55. My ability to speak and understand Brazilian Portuguese helped me connect more easily with several informants.

Several of these men gave me the opportunity to be part of their social circles and participate in their outings in the neighborhood or in Newark nightlife, throughout New Jersey, and in New York City. My ethnographic fieldwork is based on these social engagements in public and private spaces. I visited these men in their Newark homes, whether to just meet up and spend time together or to attend parties in someone's home. Often, I went with them to neighborhood cafés and restaurants that also attracted outside consumers. Through my friendships and social

ties, I became aware of other men outside the church. I witnessed many of them develop casual or intimate friendships with men through friends' house parties, online gay dating sites, or at gay bars and clubs. Many also frequented gay clubs like Paradise in Asbury Park¹³ and Feather's in River Edge.¹⁴ Several interviewees were reserved and straight-acting when I first met them, but my engagement with them over time confirmed the fluidity of their sexualities and genders as they explored their effeminacy, eccentricities, and versatile or bottom role play. During 2007, I compiled interview recordings of gay-identified and discreet men who had lived in the Ironbound for at least two years. Among the 15 men I engaged in the Ironbound over a period of two to three years, I interviewed six; two additional men I interviewed were friends of friends. The interview form was semi-structured, informal, and lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours.

My engagement and relationships with my interviewees were impacted by certain privileges including class, citizenship, and education. In certain ways, my interviewees viewed me as privileged because I was a university student and worked in non-physically intense office jobs. Also, many informants preferred to speak English over Portuguese with me because they were ambitious to learn it quickly as aspiring "good" neoliberal subjects. Many had a high school education or less and worked in the labor-intensive informal service industry, as well as construction jobs and domestic cleaning jobs. Having both of my naturalized parents nearby was another circumstance that set me apart from my interviewees, whose families were far away. The fact that my parents were also longtime homeowners outside of the Ironbound suggested my family's privileged positioning, to which Carlos and others aspired, and they expressed strong interest in leaving the Ironbound for a safer and less dense, white American middle-class neighborhood. My immigrant background and brown-skin Latino identity (in comparison to their white friends from middle- to upper-middle-class white suburbs whom they met online, at clubs, or through friends), however, suggested some affinities to them.

Over time, my interviewees found me too anti-consumerist and too overly critical of the gay (white) mainstream scene. Many expected that I should have a better car, an iPhone, property, and designer clothing, given my privileged status. Their ability to purchase these items in the U.S., which they could not as easily do in Brazil, was a personal marker of achievement, as well as a sign of becoming

more assimilated into the U.S. and gay mainstream scene. Thus, such markers were representative of a narrative of progress and self-sufficiency in Newark, and dignified their realities as racialized and undocumented workers in a predominantly working-class, low-income African American majority city. Most of my interlocutors came to this country for economic reasons, though some may also have had legitimate asylum claims.¹⁵ In my exchanges with them, they all suggested that their basic necessities were met while living with their families, but that they came to the U.S. because of limited employment opportunities, hoping for a shot at economic independence, which was difficult to attain in Brazil. All of my interviewees still lived either with their immediate or extended families because they were not economically self-sufficient. While these markers were not shared specifically between me and my participants, the constant referencing of our homelands or diasporic subjectivity established our mutual connection.

COUNTERNARRATIVES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

This section offers moments from my ethnographic interviewing that show how these interlocutors complicate heteronormative and hetero-patriarchal spaces of the greater neighborhood, marketplace, and workplace, through their sexual and gender subjectivities. In two instances, I juxtapose my interviewees' lives with a newspaper or a televisual text that portrays gays/queers and illuminates how my participants' lives complement or resist the dominant neoliberal ideologies in those texts. Whether my interviewees reify or defy dominant ideologies, I argue that these interviews are counternarratives of non-heteronormativity within the majoritarian space of the neighborhood. I center on non-heteronormative gender and sexuality instead of economic, nationalist/hetero-patriarchal/family (networks and reunification) lenses that often become the dominant narratives defining immigrant identity in U.S. immigrant geographic space.

CARLOS

Carlos was 24 years old when I met him in 2008. He had come to the U.S. through Mexico with the help of a coyote. In Brazil, he lived with his grandmother for years in Governador Valadares while his parents lived in a rural area outside Minas Gerais. Carlos expressed a deeper love and connection for his grandmother than for his mother and father. Unlike other informants who stayed

with their families in Brazil, even while contemplating their sexualities, Carlos moved in with his single grandmother, which allowed him to move away from expected masculinist roles as an older brother or aid to his father's small farming and poultry business. Outside the expected political economy, Carlos had more opportunities to figure out his attraction to other men and his effeminate disposition. Determining that the university was not his calling at the time, Carlos got a USD\$9,000 loan that would enable him to make the trip north. Once in the U.S., he worked very hard in a primarily male-dominated construction job to repay his debt. At first, he lived in an apartment with seven other people to reduce his rental costs so he could put most of his earnings toward his debt. He worked in construction for two years, then switched to a cleaning business under his older gay Brazilian friend Nelson's tutelage. Carlos demonstrated his self-sufficiency by starting his own cleaning business and maintaining the same clients for years in the Union Square area of New York City. However, during the time that I interviewed Carlos (about his construction work), his effeminate demeanor did not work to his advantage in the predominantly heterosexual male and masculinist construction work site.

Up until his first days in the U.S., Carlos was coming to terms with being gay in Brazil, and people around him perceived him as effeminate. His classmates had teased him during elementary school for socializing with the girls too much and having a soft voice. He found solace living with his grandmother, separating him from traditional family roles and the daily engagement and expectations of family roles. After high school, performing as a heterosexual man in Brazil, "I could have had gay relationships but I still really did not know. I was innocent then. I was involved in normal relationships because I lived [there] as a straight [man]. I liked women and had girlfriends."

Carlos reveals that in Brazil he already knew that he was not fully heterosexual but he assumed heterosexuality largely because he felt like he had no other option in the heterosexist community. Later, in the U.S., away from his parents and the ultra-conservative society of Governador Valadares, he eventually opened up because of his supportive gay social networks and friendships with other gay men in the Ironbound. "Gay life in Governador Valadares is very complicated," he says, after mentioning that two *travestis*¹⁶ were brutally murdered in that community, which suppressed his sexual and gender affinities.

Carlos conveys the awareness of his gay subjectivity, which in Governador Valadares he could neither articulate nor embody. He explains in another moment of the interview that, “I had that [homosexuality] issue inside me and it needed to come out.” For Carlos, the Ironbound has proven to be that relatively tolerant place where it is much safer to be oneself, although precautions still have to be taken to avoid anti-gay violence. However, while Carlos has more sexual freedom in the U.S., the “very complicated life” in Valadares alluded to dominant heterocentrist expectations and discourses which are similar to those in the Ironbound. I argue that the presence and openness Carlos suggests is actually a “strategic silence”¹⁷ of gender and sexual transgression that may be evident to others around him, and yet not threatening to the space and norms of the dominant sphere. In effect, he is adhering to the codes of “good” sexual neoliberal citizenship regulated by everyday anti-gay, homophobic, heterocentrist ideologies and discourses. In fact, Carlos’ position is that the tolerance in the Ironbound Brazilian community is one which acknowledges gay and sexual transgressions while being neither adverse nor embracing them, but “tacitly”¹⁸ accepts the existence and cohabitation with an *other* who also adheres to a hetero-patriarchal and nationalist dominant space. As an undocumented gay immigrant, Carlos feels obliged to perform the dramaturgy of exuding good sexual citizenship through patriarchal and nationalist markers of an honorary Brazilianness to preserve his status as a good (aspiring) neoliberal citizen while belonging at the center, in the Ironbound (instead of being marginalized as a non-heteronormative subject).

Carlos shared his feelings about the ambience of cafés and restaurants (visited by other gays) where the owners and clients are not judgmental. He says in Portuguese that he and other gay friends are “well received” as gay or queer subjects, conveying not only being comfortable in those dominant spaces, but also a sense of belonging:

A lot of gays go to Bom Pão.¹⁹ There is a waiter there who is gay. He is my friend. Gays go there [just] like anyone. It is very open-minded there and one is well received. Go to Bom Pão. Go to Bom Pão and other restaurants.

Here Carlos refers to a café located in a central market location where Brazilians hang out and order Brazilian

coffee, *coxinhas*, and *hamburgão* late into the evening. Often, Carlos and his friends go to Bom Pão during the day, or after going out to the nightclubs or bars. He confirms that this café is a space where gays, either individually or collectively, are treated favorably as Brazilian consumers. He is convinced of the venue’s “open-mindedness,” particularly with the hiring of his friend Joilson, a light-skinned Afro-Brazilian who is effeminate and warm-hearted. Carlos explains that “gays go there like anyone [else who] go,” yet their gay presence in Bom Pão is strategically silenced given the acute sense of eavesdropping and surveillance that can occur in the tight spaces between tables of this café. The perpetual programming of TV Globo and flag decorations is a constant reminder of the proud and nationalist sentiment of the neighborhood regarding performance and embodiment of good ethnic qualities. They code-switch and perform their Brazilian patriarchal/nationalist identities, as I have seen often when engaging other non-LGBTQ Brazilians at the café. Carlos and others assume their belonging in this dominant space by making small-talk with others or commenting to each other about what is on the café’s television (usually an O Globo²⁰ program). Yet, he and his friends, and other gays, make their own ephemeral queer space, huddled at the tables, exchanging quiet and discreet conversations about many issues around their everyday gay subjectivity. These moments bring Carlos and other gay Brazilians into the fold of a patriarchal/nationalist space contained by Newark’s heterocentrist cultural pluralism and neoliberal project. In essence, Carlos says he does not feel pressured to perform as a heterosexual man, yet publicly I saw how he monitors his eccentricities. For example, he downplayed his highly pitched gay Brazilian slang²¹ when speaking to non-gays, feigning a lower pitched colloquial Portuguese to sustain the patriarchal and nationalist context. Later I show how Carlos practices homebuilding with his friends in the privacy of his home to articulate and perform their queer subjectivities and eccentricities.

NELSON: MENTOR AND FATHER FIGURE

Nelson developed a close friendship with Carlos. Because Carlos was much younger, Nelson was like a mentor or paternal figure,²² instructing him to save money and behave and dress more masculine, like a heterosexual man. Rigidly masculine-acting and very conservatively dressed, Nelson told me several times after shopping with Carlos that his tastes in clothing and accessories were “too

young” and sometimes “too feminine.” Carlos’ Brazilian body waxing²³ and the “Little Miss Kitty” stickers on the dashboard of his midnight-blue Honda Accord were examples of what he found too effeminate: “São coisas de mulheres,”²⁴ he said. Over time, as Carlos began exploring the passive role intimately and sexually while also displaying more feminine forms of behavior and dress, I observed how Nelson, who never changed his dominant role with his partners, persistently (playfully) policed Carlos’ changing sexual and gender tastes and performances.

During the Summer of 2007, Nelson invited Carlos and me over to watch Terça Insana’s “Betina Botox,”²⁵ a parody of a Paulista²⁶ flamboyant gym bunny of middle-class origins. Betina Botox wears gaudy sunglasses and overly gelled, dyed-blond hair with berets and a pearl necklace that all accentuate his effeminacy. While Carlos and Nelson replayed the skit, they repeated Betina’s use of *ninguem merece*, or “no one deserves this much misfortune.” Betina Botox’s use of this expression conveys “her” sense of great social stigma. Yet, given her spatial-temporal and class positioning in São Paulo, Betina Botox can more safely forge the space and exude the eccentricity and gender transgression she does during the day, whereas strategically silent queer Ironbound Brazilians do not have the same spatial-temporal positioning. Despite the laughs between Nelson and Carlos, I found that Nelson was policing Carlos to prevent him from becoming too *louca*²⁷ and falling into Betina’s misfortune, due to his underprivileged, undocumented queer status. Days later, Betina Botox was circulating among Carlos’ friends, who continuously repeated some of her lines in the privacy of their homes or during car rides, demonstrating how this skit was instructional to noticeably gay Brazilian men’s lives, as a warning in the Newark context to not become as stereotypical as Betina Botox. To these men, “she” serves as another dominant ideological tool that polices a heteronormative and nationalist space by relegating queer, sexual, and gender transgressive behaviors, subjectivities, and associations only to the nighttime or to places outside the heteronormative space.

DANIEL

Daniel is the only person in this study who was not interviewed because he passed away.²⁸ He was born in the U.S. and lived with his mother and stepfather in Kearny, New Jersey.²⁹ Sadly, he passed away suddenly

in his late 20s while vacationing with his mother and stepfather in Brazil. The last time I spoke with Daniel at church, he told me of his excitement and plans to attend Essex Community College. Daniel and his family were churchgoers at St. Julian’s Lutheran Church, where a mass was held for him soon after his death became public. He was a darker-skinned transgendered person who stood out due to his long and thickly curled feminine hair. Daniel constantly and shamelessly over-sprayed fruit-scented perfume on himself, which also fell on the congregants. He symbolized subversion and excess and fought to express and defend his individuality within the heteronormative spaces of the Ironbound, such as the church space. Daniel’s mother convinced him to come with her to church on Sundays, and both attended frequently. The pastors and congregation attempted to make him feel welcome; he participated in the intimate hand holding and hugging sessions of Sunday morning masses. Thus, the church space was “queered.” What I mean by “queered” here is that the church space did not always cater to dominant expectations and ideologies because the pastor and congregation made the effort to welcome and incorporate non-heteronormative subjects.³⁰ Daniel and other gays worshipping in the space of the church engendered a congregation of gender and sexual excess through their presence. This is an example of “queering a space,” whether public or private, making it a space that lends itself to the grouping of non-heteronormative subjects and subsequently marginalizes dominant expectations. In one conversation I had with the pastor, he shared that Daniel’s mother told him that Daniel had felt accepted in the church.

During the time I spent at this church, the pastor and congregation’s mission was to organize in collectivistic ways around social justice, leading ultimately to anti-neoliberal local development projects. Such collectivistic measures were reminiscent of ethnic and racial movements that challenged hegemonic, neoliberal projects that privileged and exceptionalized “good,” thriving and whitened heteronormative citizens, while stigmatizing the “failures” of racial, poor, and sexual and gender variant others. Daniel is an example of the non-heteronormative stigmatized subjects the pastor of this church welcomed, wanting to bring them *na roda*, or “into the circle.” The pastors sought to integrate people as they were. In a predominantly Brazilian congregation, one would think that the pastors would be concerned about showing the

community at large the individual achievements and markers of mobility that congregants achieved, reifying dominant (neoliberal) ideologies and expectations. But during my time as an active member of the church, I saw how the pastors, and members of the congregation, worked on issues around workers' rights, legalization of the undocumented, environmental justice, access to medical attention, etc. The pastors and congregation were able to relate with each other not only along lines of "hard work," "individualism," and a narrative of progress, but also through a shared history of racial, ethnic, and immigrant discrimination that brought heterosexuals and gays together as a community.

Similarly, from what Daniel's mother shared with me, he viewed this church as a place where he could be himself without apologies, or experiencing outright discrimination. Daniel's mother knew that going to church was a way for him to experience healthy and positive engagement with others (in comparison to what he dealt with on the street on a daily basis). Several months after his death, she shared with me that "Daniel would pass people on the streets in the Ironbound or in the train station and people would say he was a disgrace and should have never been born."³¹ His mother's account illustrates an example of a non-heteronormative sexual and gender deviant that is greatly stigmatized within the dominant space of the Ironbound and Newark, particularly during the day.

But Daniel's non-heteronormative embodiments were also difficult for many congregants to easily accept. After Sunday mass ended and late morning "café" was served, Daniel often stayed by his mother's side, and few congregants made any genuine effort to talk to him in the in-depth way that the pastors always encouraged among us. Daniel's story helps us to consider not only the stigma of visibly effeminate queer subjects, but also the transphobia within the Brazilian diaspora.

In the *Brazilian Voice* article, "Brazilian Transsexual is Imprisoned for Prostitution" (2008), the journalist portrays a sexual deviant subject reminiscent of hateful, anti-transgender sentiment, and how excessive and transgressive embodiment and behavior is policed and ostracized within the heterosexist spaces of the Brazilian diaspora in the U.S. Although seemingly sympathetic towards the LGBTQ community, the article sustains depictions of the transgendered in criminalizing and unsympathetic ways that maintain their stigma and place them outside a heteronormative space. An extensive article about a

transsexual man arrested in Somerville, Massachusetts after an undercover policeman posing as a potential client for transsexual services found him through an Internet posting emphasizes the social outcast status of the transsexual as a sexual deviant. The journalist quotes a police lieutenant warning others that "this transsexual business in the community is not tolerable." In effect, the officer's neoliberal message is that there is no place for such self-sufficiency inside a policed and heteronormative space within the U.S.-Brazilian diaspora. Even more, this message is relevant to how state officials policed prostitution and human trafficking in immigrant heteronormative contexts, not only of Brazilian women (Margolis, 1994 and Ramos-Zayas, 2012), but of Brazilian transgender and gay male escorts³² as well. Brazilian-American journalists circulated this article to several Brazilian-American communities (other than Newark's Ironbound), revealing policing across the U.S.-Brazilian diaspora³³ that regulates sexual and gender transgressive behavior, and warns Brazilians (closeted, eccentric, and effeminate/transgender-looking gay men) of being caught in the act of prostitution. Based on the content of the article and the visual image of the transgendered individual, the journalists sensationalize and deride him and the feminine qualities that reify him as undesirable within the Ironbound/U.S.-Brazilian diaspora. The word "flagrant" is written above the transgendered individual's photo, which further racializes his brown-skinned body, reinforces the perception of brown bodies as the site of gender and sexual deviance and non-heteronormativity. The article instructs (visibly effeminate) gay and transgender men that the society around them views straying from heteronormative sexual and gender identities as lewd and criminal behavior, which can result in deportation if arrested.

JOILSON

Joilson is an effeminate, yet not eccentric, Afro-Brazilian man. He is soft-spoken, approachable, and yet an individualist, although more of a loner than other gays I have engaged. He seldom hangs out with Carlos' friends and rarely goes to St. Julian's, offering the excuse that he is always working. However, I can see why Joilson is charming to all his clients at Bom Pão. In Brazil, he studied at the university, and his educational level complements his soft skills with people at the café. While Joilson did not have time to strike up long conversations at the café, he always had a warm, pleasant, and seemingly non-judgmental

disposition toward the café's clients. While we talk in his tidy bedroom in a rooming house, he persistently touches his loosened ponytail and lies comfortably on his bed as I sit next to him beside the bed. Bright wallpaper on his computer screen of a single sunflower provides light for us to see each other while I interview him. He explains his experiences of feeling discriminated against at work in Brazil for his effeminate demeanor, and how that changed in the Ironbound.

Joilson came to the U.S. via Mexico. He is originally from Ipatchinga, a town near Governador Valadares that has a visible gay nightlife, in contrast to other interviewees' descriptions of the nightlife in the same region. The gay presence in this town makes Ipatchinga sound less heterosexist. Earlier, Carlos shared that while in a hair salon in a different city, he heard gay stylists talk about a "Miss Gay" pageant in Ipatchinga, which he was unaware of:

In my city, I was not very involved in the gay world. I was very to myself. I never looked for gay groups, quite on the contrary. [...] Ipatchinga is a city that has a lot of gays because of the gay parties that the city has. I never participated.

Despite Ipatchinga apparently having a more vibrant gay nightlife, Joilson's testimony reflects a city that was not very tolerant of sexual minorities: He shared incidents in Ipatchinga where he was stigmatized publicly for being effeminate and gay, and described a more private life within his loving and modest home. His mother and his brother accepted him for who he was, but he was not open with his family about his contemplations about his sexuality and gender. It was not until he was living in the Ironbound that he told his brother about his sexual and gender orientation. Before leaving for the U.S., Joilson worked as a teacher in a private school. In jobs outside of teaching, he explains that his effeminacy was very challenging to cover:

[O]ne had to be masculine, firmly heterosexual, a normal man [...] and that was a great deal of weight on me ... that was a great deal of weight on me. I felt really bad. I had to consciously work the tone of my voice, deepen my voice. That is not normal in my voice.

He described a constant fear of being left unemployed in his native town due to his detectable sexual orientation and innate effeminacy:

I worked for an insurance company and had they known of my sexual orientation, I would not have been able to keep that job nor [any] job in Ipatchinga's market. I believe that there is a kind of false tolerance [there] because people [say] that they don't discriminate but what happens is that the discrimination is concealed. From first sight, the employer knows if you are gay and will say that all spots for the position have been filled. I had a lot of fear about being discriminated [against] due to my sexuality.

In contrast to his feeling vulnerable in Brazil, finding employment in the Ironbound was about diligence and having good references. In the Ironbound, Joilson has achieved the status of a dependable, responsible "good" neoliberal individual who contributes to the café's profits. As such, Carlos explained previously that Joilson's appearance and warm demeanor to other gays in the neighborhood invites other gays (outsiders and tourists) to come, which empowers Joilson to be his effeminate self without having to hide his sexuality, despite strategic silence to not alter the café's heteronormative space.

Even while Joilson's job is a downgrade from his work in Brazil, given his undocumented status, he has achieved a sense of belonging as a "good" neoliberal individual within the heteronormative space of the Ironbound. He explains that his employers are very open with him and gay-friendly, which makes him feel confident as his effeminate self. Joilson shares his observations about his employers in the space of the café:

We had parties here with them where I perceived that they have a lot of friends who are gay. You know, they have a lot. You know, I thought that my boss would be someone with a lot of reservation[s] [about] me because he does have a lot of friends also who do have reservations. They are very,

very nice and very pleasant. They respect me a lot. His wife feels comfortable enough to talk about the subject with me without reservation or in a discriminatory way. She always wants to know ... because, in fact, there is more liberty here than in Brazil.

Joilson explains that his employers actually create a welcoming atmosphere for gays, revealing the sense of closeness he feels to his employers, partly due to being from Ipatchinga, the same town as they are. He adds how he is able to talk with his employer's wife about being gay but in ways that are familiar to her. As a gay Afro-Brazilian in the context of a majority African-American city, Joilson maintains his nationalist, Ipatchinga(n) Brazilian identity to address his Brazilian employer. In our time together, I ask Joilson how he might identify with a U.S. racialized blackness, but he does not articulate anything. While he talks about going to Essex County College for English courses, I wonder if he is in touch with other Newark African-American and Latino/a students and how being in an area outside Ironbound in an urban context of an African-American mainstream informs his own subjectivity. Joilson potentially chooses when to perform and embody his changing diasporic black immigrant identity or not, in order to continue belonging among other Brazilians within the white(ned) neoliberal context of the Brazilian Ironbound. In effect, Joilson's queer and effeminate black sexuality is the epitome of non-heteronormativity and subversion, and can become a threat to the nationalist and hetero-patriarchal space if he performs and embodies certain codes (Ferguson, 2004; Allen in Battle and Barnes, 2009). Therefore, he must work harder than non-black Brazilians to perform good ethnicity in this context.

HOMEBUILDING IN THE IRONBOUND

In light of bringing LGBTQ and heterosexuals together in counter-hegemonic and collectivistic ways, the pastors at St. Julian's allowed me to organize a space for gays to socialize and come together over immigration concerns, including applying for asylum. Furthermore, in two of our meetings, we discussed how we could use the church as a recreational space. In the end, most LGBTQ did not pursue the church as a space to form community because many were not interested in building a visible

grouping within the context of a heterocentrist cultural pluralism, especially in a context where no gay community organization existed.

Within the church, gays did not partake in many of the hetero-patriarchal immigrant empowerment agendas, except for the meetings I organized on gay immigrant issues, which were directly related to them. Even though these gays were not active with immigration issues, they came back because they knew that the pastors and congregation were gay-affirming in ways that most Brazilian spaces in the neighborhood were not. Recently, in conversation with Carlos, who was attending the gay social and immigration meetings, he said, "I promised myself that when I get married [to my future husband], I am going to ask the pastors to marry me at the church." Carlos related this from the context of his one-family home in a quiet, middle-class neighborhood of a town fifteen miles outside of Newark. Even in his new spatial-temporality and demonstrated positive narrative of progress, Carlos imagines getting married in that space that had been affirming of his excess sexual and gender variance.

Like Carlos, several of these gays showed more interest in eventually leaving the Ironbound for a white, mainstream community, a sign of seeking "good" citizenship and mobility that accentuated individualism, instead of prioritizing a community of shared histories and grassroots agendas of social justice. Essentially, leaving the Ironbound for a white middle-class neighborhood equates to achieving whiteness and a successful narrative of progress that detaches my participants from community building with other immigrants. They complained about how congested and unsafe the Ironbound was getting. Carlos often expressed disgust about people getting mugged on the street and cars getting broken into. Nelson and others expressed a strong desire to move away from other Brazilians. The fact is that many of my informants viewed the Ironbound only as a temporary residence. Staying there and remaining with old and newly-arrived Brazilian and Hispanic immigrants instead of moving out to middle class neighborhoods meant falling behind and not achieving a narrative of progress.

CARLOS AS "RINGLEADER OF THE CIRCUS"

Carlos frequently has friends over, for barbecues and birthday parties (his or his brother's). He rented a basement apartment not far from Ferry Street. These parties were held during the weekend and usually meant a break

from gay bar and club hopping between Newark, New York City, and other New Jersey cities. These lasted from the afternoon until the early morning. Over time, I began seeing how Carlos' circle of friends grew and diversified by ethnicity, race, class, and gender. His parties were not "boys only"—Brazilian heterosexual girls from the neighborhood also came. Eventually, Carlos developed a friendship with Maira, a twenty-something, native Jersey City, second-generation Boricua. Maira, a chubby, slightly butch, modestly dressed girl, was different from the thin, femininely dressed, and salon-styled Brazilian immigrant girls who came. Other non-Brazilians, whites, African Americans, and other ethnic Latinos, including Colombians and Peruvians, attended Carlos' get-togethers, which in the context of the Ironbound became a kind of diasporic and disidentificatory³⁴ third space³⁵ outside a gay mainstream where a queer Brazilianness was the dominant culture that brought the men together. At these gatherings, while some choices were Brazilian music, many of the song selections were commercial top-forty and popular gay club songs from artists like Britney Spears, Beyoncé, Cher, and Justin Timberlake.

In that space, I experienced competing tensions between and among ethnic groups. In one instance, I felt a sense of mistrust with another Colombian when comparing our social capital within the New Jersey Colombian community, which placed us in that nationalist context. In another, Carlos reminded me of a time when his Peruvian friend and I began battling each other about who knew (Brazilian) Portuguese better. According to this rationale, the one who articulated better belonged more than the other, a belonging based in upscale materials like a BMW car and designer clothing. But I remember Carlos saying in front of other Brazilian peers, "Guys, stop trying to speak Portuguese, we can all speak English." By telling us to stop, he was commanding us, as the "ringleader" from the center of this space. I persistently felt a tension from the Peruvian, which reflected the competition and rivalry between Latino ethnic groups in my upbringing. Carlos' attempt to bring us all together, even while he was not cognizant of prior tensions among older ethnic Latino groups, was an anti-neoliberal attempt to create gay and queer relationality within a heteronormative, individualist, nationalist context. When Carlos told the Peruvian friend and me "to stop battling it out," he encouraged us to move past our ethnic and racial tensions in light of our queer relationality.

The fact that Carlos' get-togethers became more racially and ethnically plural suggested a queer relationality and queer collectivity representing social intimacy and friendship that transcended race, ethnicity, and class, in the white, hetero-patriarchal and Brazilian space of the Ironbound. This grouping was a circus of racial and ethnic collectivity where performative acts did not have bounds and exuded excess (class, sexua, and gender variant) against a tamed heteronormative environment of Ironbound's neoliberalized public sphere.

Apart from being racially and ethnically plural, Carlos' parties were also filled with gender transgressions and eccentricities among the boys that attended. In particular, Carlos used the home space of his parties to perform his effeminate and cross-dressing affinities. Everyone knew that Britney Spears was Carlos' star-crush. At one party, Carlos continuously played her songs and several of his friends sang and danced with him. After a couple of drinks, Carlos impersonated Britney by putting on sparkling majestic-red stilettos that Nelson (of all people) had given him. He sashayed and stomped into his kitchen and around his friends to Britney's "Circus." They cheered on Carlos' show of flamboyance and effeminacy. The stilettos reminded me of Circus' overall glittery quality and Britney's sequined attire and jeweled collarbone in the music video production. After Carlos took them off, other friends put them on and proceeded to catwalk, sing and romp to the lines of the song that go, "Don't stand there, watch me, follow me/Show me what you can do/[...] Everybody let go, we can make a dance floor." Carlos was the ringleader, the center of the party and eccentricity, like Britney's song. He invited the "self" and the untamed excess of his friends to emerge in the safe space of his home and exude what a heteronormative audience views as show or spectacle, as in a circus. We gathered in a circle in his kitchen, where we celebrated our openness and subversion, as though in an actual queered "dance floor" and nightclub within the context of the Ironbound. The stiletto exchange ensued between the boys, but in the context of the home, this was not really just a show. The "kinesthetic energy," emotions, and (queer) desires we shared with each other in our grouping, as if on a dance floor,³⁶ are an example of Jill Dolan's utopian performative or "a moment of utopia [that ...] gestures toward a potentially better future" (2005, 8) amidst the stiletto exchange, dancing, drinking, singing, and romping that transcended dominant space, time, and social order. This was an intimate act of gender

transgression, revealing how Carlos' and his friends' home-building allowed them to explore and articulate their complex sexual and gender identities while letting go of ethnic/racial tensions in the heteronormative space of the Ironbound and our everyday lives.

This final section examines two spaces where queer collectivity can thrive within the dominant heterocentrist space of the Ironbound. The pastors at St. Julian's were open to and encouraging of queer groupings in relation to anti-neoliberal projects of social justice, yet, to my participants, the concept of building social and political visibility for their sexual and gender subjectivity was new, foreign, and dangerous. These men preferred to live their identities strategically silently. But in the depoliticized space of the home, among friends and friends of friends, these men were far more comfortable in opening up and claiming their eccentricities.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have presented an alternative narrative of queer subjectivity and groupings that exist in the Ironbound, to counter the dominant nationalist and heterocentrist narratives which leave out or marginalize non-heteronormative sexual and gender variant subjects. I showed that the ways my informants articulate, navigate, and perform their subjectivities, particularly in the café and at church, often reified neoliberal ideologies. In particular, the strategic silence evident in the café and church show these queers comply with local development projects that promote the neighborhood's depoliticization and public enactment of "good" ethnicity. As such, my participants are complicit overall with the safe, white(ned) and nationalist cultural market that is advertised to weekend tourists and potential buyers of gentrified real estate in the neighborhood.

And yet, I show that these queers both resist and comply with the neoliberal project of the Ironbound by embracing queer collectivity and eccentricity in some moments and a narrative of progress and individualism in other moments. In either case, this alternative narrative brings to light my informant subjects' positioning outside expectations of "good" heteronormative citizenship.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 I have changed the names of participants and places in this project to keep identities private.
- 2 During my interview with Carlos, he identifies as gay. I describe my informants as gay when they refer to themselves as such. Some participants that self-define as gay are exploring their sexual orientation along the U.S. identificatory model. However, I have observed that while many Brazilian men identify in some way with a U.S. vision of gay identity, they still embody and perform their queer or homeland sexualities and genders. And they consume Brazilian music and media representations in the U.S. in a manner that aligns them with their homeland's sexual and gender variant subculture (see Betina Botox). Ultimately, I claim here that the majority of my participants are more queer (as I define here) than gay because of their U.S.-Brazilian hybridity, which places them outside a U.S. gay mainstream model.
- 3 Working-class and low-income NY/NJ African-American and Latino youth hang out on Christopher Street. See Christina Handhart's article (see bibliography) and the same author's book, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, for example, for a discussion of how their non-heteronormative groupings are often policed under neoliberal discourse/ideology in the Christopher Street area.
- 4 I am defining "queer" men as continuing their homeland Brazilian gender, sexual and social codes, and practices with men. They do not refer to themselves as queer, but scholars have used the term to denote a diasporic and non-assimilationist way of existing among gay immigrant men. I heard my participants refer to themselves

- and each other as “gay” to note their sexual attraction and intimacy with men, and not to express an assimilatory attitude with U.S. notions of gayness. Among my Brazilian participants, I heard several of them refer to others as “louca,” “bicha,” or “passiva,” to denote their gender. These terms refer to effeminate-acting and bottom role men in man-to-man sex. Such use of these terms suggests an adherence to this gender/behavioral model that signals their sexual subjectivity as diasporic or outside-the-U.S. identification model.
- 5 This article focuses on how my subjects perform and embody their queer subjectivities during the day. I would argue that there is gay nightlife in the Ironbound, though this article does not focus on this aspect of queer Brazilian life (that is a separate article).
 - 6 As opposed to majoritarian spaces. This concept can be found in José E. Muñoz’s *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (see bibliography); Michael Hames-García’s and Ernesto Javier Martínez’s *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print; and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera’s *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics* (see Works Cited).
 - 7 However, I must mention that Brazilian immigrants, especially during the earlier period of their arrival into Newark’s Ironbound in the 1980s-1990s, were racialized and sexualized differently from the Portuguese; this at a time when Brazilian immigration began to make an impact on Portuguese life and society (the dominant immigrant culture) in the Ironbound. Mary Jo Patterson’s article, “Cultures Collide in Ironbound: City’s Portuguese and Brazilians Find Life is a Lesson in Tolerance,” in *The New Jersey Star Ledger* (14 May 2000), demonstrates the era’s discourses of racial and cultural differences between Portuguese and Brazilians. In effect, the Portuguese were viewed as (sexually) reserved, modest, provincial, and clean, while the Brazilians were viewed as the opposite, suggesting that Brazilians were transforming Ironbound for the worse. Brazilians, in turn, perceived the Portuguese as antiquated. Over time, this binary has changed, especially with respect to how “good” Brazilians have proven themselves and contributed to the Ironbound’s (re)development projects.
 - 8 According to Arlene Dávila’s use of “spinned” (*Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Space*. New York: New York UP, 2008), commodifiable, depoliticized, and dehistoricized images of Latinidad under neoliberal ideology, which exude belonging in the national community.
 - 9 Most of my informants were first-generation immigrants; there were also a couple of second-generation Brazilians and Latinos. Daniel was a second-generation Brazilian-American.
 - 10 This paper does not include my ethnographic fieldwork with participants on Ironbound’s nightlife. Instead, it focuses on my participants’ subjectivity in public and private spaces during the day.
 - 11 Rivera-Servera, in *Performing Queer Latinidad* (2012), defines homebuilding in Chapter 2. In my view, homebuilding in the Ironbound is a space where Brazilian queers willingly come together to be open and share their sexual and gender transgressions.
 - 12 As a queer second-generation Colombian American, I felt at times either more culturally tied to Colombia or more like someone “from below” than part of the U.S. (gay) mainstream. I identify as queer because my gender and sexual subjectivity is also informed by my diasporic connection with Colombia and ties with gay men there. Because I came of age in the nearby city of Elizabeth, NJ, home to one of the largest Colombian-American communities within a uniquely diverse and diasporic Latino population in the U.S., I felt connected to these Brazilians due to how they portrayed their cultural and diasporic subjectivities as queer immigrant men, in ways similar to my own life experience in Colombia and the Colombian-Latino Elizabeth context.
 - 13 Located in Monmouth County, New Jersey. The city has one of New Jersey’s gay-friendly beaches and is home to a largely white middle-class gay community. The boardwalk includes the gay nightclub, Paradise.
 - 14 Located in Bergen County, New Jersey.
 - 15 Among my participants, one had entered the U.S. as an economic immigrant but filed an asylum claim and won his case based on sexual and gender persecution in Brazil.
 - 16 Richard Parker defines *travesti* in *Beneath the Equator: Cultures of Desire, Male Homosexuality, and Emerging Gay Communities in Brazil* (1999). See p. 46.
 - 17 Certain authors explore strategic silences; in particular, see Márquez and Decena. Another example of this can be found in Rivera-Servera’s *Performing Queer Latinidad* (2012), in an autoethnographic segment where he describes walking around as a gay man in his neighborhood (pp. 137-138).

- 18 “Tacit,” as used by Carlos Decena in his work, is similar to strategic silence. Decena shows how Dominican immigrant men employ strategic silence in the context of NYC’s heterocentrist/nationalist (Dominican) immigrant neighborhoods.
- 19 A fictional name of the actual café to preserve the identities of my informants. Literally means “good bread” in Portuguese.
- 20 A major Brazilian television channel. In my daily fieldwork in the Ironbound, the cafés and restaurants usually had this television channel tuned. Overseas media further sustained the nationalist and neoliberalized context of the Brazilian Ironbound.
- 21 This gay slang among my participants reminds me of Manalansan’s discussion of how queer Filipinos speak swardspeak, in *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (2003), that preserve homeland notions of gay gender and sexuality.
- 22 Another way to consider queer political economy is that Nelson was like a father to Carlos in a way that suggests a queer family, and thus a queer political economy.
- 23 Carlos often sought body waxing. There are several Brazilian body waxing salons in the Ironbound, used by both Brazilian and non-Brazilian clients. These salons are part of the Ironbound’s commodified ethnic market.
- 24 Translated from Portuguese to English, “those are womanly things.”
- 25 A clip of Betina Botox: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_r3OyI3t6KA> [10/3/2014]. Terça Insana is a comic production of parodies about Brazilian personalities. See <<http://tercainsana.virgula.uol.com.br/>> [10/5/2014].
- 26 Someone is called a Paulista when they are from São Paulo, Brazil.
- 27 “Too louca,” or exuding an effeminacy that is emblematic of the passive in role-play or sex between men. Literally translates as “too crazy.”
- 28 However, I did engage him in church and I interviewed his mother after he passed away.
- 29 A town that borders Newark, Jersey City, and Belleville. Kearny borders the side of Newark where the Ironbound is located, and both towns have significant Portuguese and Brazilian populations.
- 30 By non-heteronormative subjects, including my queer participants, I am also referring to recently-arrived and long-term undocumented and documented immigrants facing poverty, unemployment, and isolation. Many of them were older male and female immigrants I met at the church. Further, this queering of space is the moment when their subjectivities, desires, and agency are at the center.
- 31 Sakia Gunn was a victim of a hate crime. She was a 15-year-old African-American lesbian who was stabbed for being gay at a Newark bus stop. The harassment Daniel faced on Newark streets, which his mother described to me, reminded me of the hate crime that took Sakia Gunn’s life. See <<http://www.twn.org/catalog/pages/cpage.aspx?rec=1193>> [10/5/2014].
- 32 From my recollection, these ads for Brazilian gay male escorts found in gay magazines were for escorts living in New York City or advertising themselves as being in New York and not in New Jersey. For example, they had contact numbers with New York City area codes.
- 33 Some cities included in coverage/circulation areas of these newspapers, in the Northeast U.S. corridor, include: Newark, Elizabeth, Hillside, Union (NJ); New York City and Astoria (NY); Framingham and Somerville (MA); Danbury (CT); and Providence (RI).
- 34 Using José Muñoz’s concept of disidentifications, dis-identificatory space would mean a context that gathers gay and queer subjects that celebrate their performances and embodiments that emulate mainstream culture to a certain extent, yet also incorporate their own self-articulations from racial, class, ethnic, and/or gender, and sexual variant positionings.
- 35 By “third space,” I am referring to a space that has undergone transculturation between dominant and diasporic cultures. This space offers agency and representation to subjects in that third space in ways in which they are not necessarily represented in dominant or homeland cultures and society. One form of agency that a third space provides is the opportunity to create pan-ethnic and pan-racial groupings. One example of the third space comes from Deborah R. Vargas, “Bidi Bidi Bom Bom: Selena and Tejano Music in the Making of Tejas.” *Latino/a Popular Culture*. Eds. Michelle Habell-Pallan and Mary Romero (pp. 117-126). New York: New York University Press, 2002.
- 36 The following authors explore how kinesthetic energy on the dance floor reflects queer individual and/or queer collective resistance of queer subjects’ everyday lives: Ramon H. Rivera-Servera’s “Choreographies of Resistance: Latino Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative.” *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*. Eds.

Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez (pp. 259-280). Durham: Duke UP, 2011; and Fiona Buckland's "The Ordering of Play: Choreographing Queer Politics." *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World Making* (pp. 86-110). Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2002.

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