



The Black city: Modernisation and fugitivities in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

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Abstract

Salvador is a Black city. Besides being a place mainly inhabited by a population which is racialised as Black, any urban phenomenon in Salvador is inseparable from the complexities and violence typical of the sites of racial encounter. In this article we explore two collaborative experiences that brought together the authors and different grassroots movements around two urban struggles in the city. The first experience unpacks the 30-year conflicts surrounding the Programme of Recuperation of the Historic Centre of Salvador, where thousands of people were evicted to turn a stigmatised Black neighbourhood into a scenario for cultural heritage enjoyment and tourism. The second experience uncovers plans underway to replace the *Subúrbio* railway with a monorail, a project which will negatively affect several Black neighbourhoods in Salvador and its metropolitan region and hundreds of thousands of Black daily life practices. These serve as just two examples of urban initiatives cyclically carried out by Salvador’s elites and official spokespeople which, under the discourse of modernisation, always threaten the improvised ways of inhabiting the Black city. We argue that the urban struggles that we analyse in this article trace a continuity with the historical struggles for the affirmation of Black life within sites of racial violence. For this reason, this article establishes a dialogue between urban studies and Black theory, through ideas of Black city and Black fugitivity.

Keywords

Black city; anti-Blackness infrastructures; uncommons; urban collaborations; Salvador, Bahia

Introduction

Sandra¹, a resident in the emblematic neighbourhood of *Pelourinho*, describes the instability that has disrupted the dynamics of her life and home as “Dante’s Inferno” since the Bahia state government began the Recuperation Programme of Salvador’s Historic Centre (Recuperation Programme) in the 1990s. This programme has dragged on for 30 years. In that time, the government has carried out a series of urban and housing interventions in this Black neighbourhood.² Thousands of residents have been expelled and removed to distant neighbourhoods in the name of modernisation. Moreover, the Bahia Regional Development Company (CONDER) has resettled slightly more than 100 families living in precarious temporary accommodations in the neighbourhood. The programme has imposed a reductionist re-functionalisation of this space by instrumentalising the tourist economy with extremely controversial effects. This programme has proved controversial not just because of the violence perpetrated against vulnerable residents, but also to the failure of monocultural tourism.

“Where will we go? (...) I can’t sleep, since the threat of removal. My mother is bedridden, I have no other family nearby... this house is my only inheritance.” This distressed testimony of Ciata (Acervo da Laje et al., 2020), a resident of *Subúrbio Ferroviário*, refers to the uncertainty threatening her daily life since 2014 when the current Bahia government announced its decision to ‘modernise’ the railway, substituting it with a light rail vehicle (LRV). Since then, the plans have changed from an LRV to a dystopian monorail which the government officially announced in mid-2019. This monorail will involve a sizeable urban infrastructure project affecting several Black neighbourhoods in Salvador and its metropolitan region, significantly altering local socio-economic dynamics and lifeways. The negotiations surrounding the viability of the construction of the monorail are still ongoing, in an always imminent accomplishment about which little is made public. This uncertain situation leaves thousands of families who inhabit the railway’s surroundings and depend on it for their economic survival on the brink of ‘Dante’s Inferno’, as Sandra described it.

These vignettes highlight two distinct processes through which the regional Bahia government has introduced notions of development and modernisation, bringing about profound urban transformations in Black neighbourhoods of the city. The first process involves the recuperation of the monumental ruined historic centre of the city, as part of a controversial development strategy which defined Salvador’s role in a service economy centred on heritage tourism, and which was implemented by several state administrations

¹ The names of some of the residents cited in this paper have been changed at their request.

² In this article we use the term Black neighbourhood to facilitate the argument presented here. However, the urban areas that we describe are considerably heterogeneous, both in the terms that are applied to them—favelas, communities, occupations, outskirts, neighbourhoods, etc.—and in their morphology, mechanisms of land access, city location, ways of life and conflicts. Even so, they all have a common dimension. The auto-construction of its houses and common infrastructures, or at least parts of them, are lived and experienced by its residents as a permanent struggle. These spaces are in constant flux, being characterised by the unfinished and, however, their residents always aspire to the horizon of consolidation (Cavalcanti, 2007; Rosa, 2014).

from the 1970s onwards. The second process is a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) between the Bahia government and the Chinese corporation Build Your Dreams (BYD). It was signed in 2019 and the project will be implemented by the Metrogreen Skyrail Concessionária da Bahia S.A., a BYD subsidiary company. The latter is an example of articulation between state infrastructure production and the financialisation of public economies and budgets, a type of alliance on which the so-called neo-developmental programmes of the ‘Lula years’ were based (Paccola & Alves, 2018).

This paper takes a dual approach to these two processes and their so-called modernising interventions. First, we argue that urban interventions, principally infrastructural projects, have been part of a socio-spatial ‘whitening’ strategy which negatively impacts the lives and livelihoods of Salvador’s Black residents. In other words, infrastructure policy in Salvador has historically been, and still is, an anti-Blackness mechanism. Secondly, we consider that these whitening processes are not univocal, since they always become embroiled in conflicts with divergent socio-spatial dynamics embodied by residents who do not subordinate themselves to the supposedly consensual becoming of those interventions. We consider that these disagreements emerge from the meeting of reiterated attempts at interdiction, erasure and normalisation of the Black urban presence in Salvador with the fugitivities—*re-existências*³, inventions and negotiations—which the different modes of Black inhabitation produce in the city.

Blackness and urban studies in Brazil

The themes that emerge in this article make an important connection between the analysis of racial dispossession and histories of ‘slum clearance’ around the Global South. By pointing out the anti-Blackness character of infrastructure production in Salvador, we emphasise the connections between historical practices of racial banishment (Roy, 2017) as a form of institutional, juridical violence, and contemporary modes of financial extractivism (Rolnik, 2015). In other words, the inscription, overlaying and updating of neoliberal circuits of accumulation operate in Salvador above the colonial and racial matrix employing mechanisms of expropriation—rebranding Black lives as unrooted (Chakravartty & Silva, 2012; Silva, 2014). The complex relationality of these processes involves connections between mechanisms of postcolonial dispossession and actions of re-emplacement. These dynamics constantly make and remake the political ecologies of Black geographies.

The city of Salvador, Bahia is emblematic of several processes of colonial expropriation that accompanied the invention of Brazil, in the reiterated tension between modernity and modernisation. In the process, Salvador became one of the principal fields of experimentation in the country for technologies of racial dispossession and the establishment of imperial rights (Byrd et al., 2018). Hence, the historical policies of death on which the

³ *Re-existências*, in English re-existences, is a neologism widely used by urban grassroots movements in Salvador. It problematises and overflows the concept of resistance, emphasising the processes of becoming that take place in the modes of existence of the collectives that lead struggles in the city.

modernising processes were based in the colonial world (Mbembe, 2020) are still evident in Salvador's urban space today.

These processes are historically anchored in the subjection, genocide and enslavement of Indigenous and African peoples. While multiple forms of racial violence shape these experiences, they are also marked by forms of struggle, refusal and fugitivity leading to strategies and tactics for the recreation of life both in the city and in the *quilombos*, understood as a complex political form of Black geographies (Nascimento, 2018). The presence of Black people in the streets of colonial cities, which historians have only recently documented in Brazil, made up a large part of Salvador's population and currently expresses itself in the size and number of its Black geographies and their multiplicity of ways of life.

Brazilian universities have had a considerable sociological debate over racial relations in Brazil, including the work of Gilberto Freyre, Florestan Fernandes and Carlos Hasenbalg, at least since the middle of the twentieth century. In this context, it is worth highlighting studies in the fields of history and urban geography regarding Black historicity in the formation of *favelas*, such as those of Andreino Campos (2006), but also studies on racial segregation such as those of Donald Pierson (1945) or Raquel Rolnik (1989). We also highlight the formulations of activists and thinkers from the Brazilian Black Movement such as Abdias Nascimento (2016), Lélia Gonzalez (1984), Beatriz Nascimento (2018), Joel Rufino (1998), and Clóvis Moura (2003).⁴

Nevertheless, it is worth noting the fact that a particular school of Brazilian urban studies is anchored in notions of class, thereby subsuming the racial dimension in their analyses. This school of thought, known as Brazilian Social Thinking, is geographically centred in the South East region of Brazil, especially the Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo axis. A large part of the studies of *favelas* and urban outskirts in the country has disregarded racialisation as a structuring element in the socio-spatial inequalities which characterise Brazilian cities (see Valladares, 2005; Kowarick, 1979; Maricato, 1979). The importance of making these urban phenomena socio-politically visible is indisputable because the device of raciality appears as an 'invisible operator' of production and at the same time of urban knowledge and materialities. Moreover, in traditional debates on the political economy of urbanisation as well as in discussions about urban social movements and poverty, the "working class" have clearly been understood as a white body, a universal episteme and a univocal way of life. This tendency, furthermore, is not exclusive to Brazilian urban studies. In the social sciences and in the field of political struggle around the world, race has also been conceived of as an ideological effect distorting reality or has been subsumed into the primacy of class in economic relations (Gilroy, 2002). Thus, the general understanding has been that racial structuring would be imposed by capital and deepened by state regulation in the interests of the former, with Black people reduced to a subclass or a subproletariat.

⁴ Although we will not use the work of all these authors in this article, we feel it is important to mention them since they contextualise an important field of discussion that often goes unmentioned in Brazilian urban and regional studies.

More recently, however, urban studies in Brazil have begun to incorporate the racial dimension into their reflections. Indeed, these movements are part of the so-called decolonial turn which cuts through contemporary urban thinking. It is in this context that urban studies in Brazil have recovered the work of Black Brazilian thinkers who were active in previous decades. Thus, a new generation of urban researchers has reintroduced in their analysis notions such as fugitivity and the self-defence of the *quilombos*, but also reflections on the connections between racial democracy and Black genocide (Nascimento, 2016), and the intersection of racism, sexism and class in Brazilian culture (see Gonzales, 1984). In these renewed discussions, the conventional notion of racism as a unitary event is being challenged by onto-epistemological openings which are re-elaborating negritude in a situated manner. Beyond the re-establishment of the historic character of racism, the emerging body of Black urban studies is distancing Blackness from the mere categories of placelessness and social death. In this manner, research in this field is repopulating itself with a plurality of Black activities and forms of knowledge that have more to do with Black life, in its infinite range of modes of existence. With this article, we aim to insert our work into these debates. To do this, in the next section we deal with two fundamental ideas for this article: the Black city and Black fugitivities.

The Black city and Fugitivities

As may be inferred from many recent studies by Brazilian researchers (Bispo, 2015; Velame, 2015; Pinho, 2017), the Black⁵ question in Brazil is never a simple difference alongside other differences. In dialogue with these authors, we propose to think of it as an irreducible question—ontological— from which we can rethink the very concept of Brazilian cities and their urban policies. For example, Simone (2017) argues that there is a type of city in which the ways of life are always under suspicion; cities which are cyclically threatened by processes of modernisation which dismantle specific modes of existence. To Simone, that city, always under the threat of erasure, is the Black city.

However, if many contemporary urban struggles alert us to scenes of abjection, violence and subjugation typical of contexts of racial violence, many of those same conflicts also tell the story of incessant affirmation and defence of Black life within and beyond deathliness and subjection. In this sense, contemporary approaches to the Black city resonate with the theses on Black fugitivity. Harney and Moten (2013) argue that the concept of fugitivity signals that in situations of violence and subjugation, there are always forms of Black life that resist and escape capture. Thus, far from analysis and theories which tend to totalise

⁵ In North American Black studies, the term Black informs and situates a fundamental vocabulary that gave rise to basic concepts such as Blackness, Black city, Black life, etc. In Brazil, however, *Negro* is the term with which Brazilian Afro-descendant people especially the liberation movements—have built their own vocabulary and conceptual repertoires; i.e., *Negritude*, *Cidade Negra*, *Negro na cidade*, etc. The predominance use of Negro in the Brazilian context, instead of Black, follows a political practice of emptying the original colonising sense of the term Negro. The *Movimento Negro Unificado* (Brazilian Black Movement) played an important role in this decolonising gesture, creating what has been called “semantics of positivity” for the term Negro (Evaristo, quoted in Martins & Cruz, 2020). Bearing this distinction in mind, in this article we use Black as a broader, and multi-referential term, capable of including the specificity of the Brazilian experience.

Blackness in diaspora as the mere experience of violence and social death, the history of domination and colonialism is also punctuated with acts of flight, transgression and evasion. The repertoire of these acts range from Black slaves' experiences escaping from plantations to more contemporary practices rejecting attempts to reduce Black lives to what modernity, the state, public policy, liberal ideas or the prevailing logic of white supremacy may decide for them (McKittrick, 2011; King, 2016; Nascimento, 2018).

In this sense, the work of Tina M. Campt connects ideas of Black fugitivity with a whole creative repertoire of practices of refusal based on the disengagement from normative and state-led projects. Thus, the practices of Black fugitivity would be “defined less by opposition or resistance, and more by a refusal of the very premises that have reduced the lived experience of Blackness to pathology and irreconcilability in the logic of white supremacy” (Campt, 2017: 50).

The forms and terms of the fugitive are not exhausted by the North American authors of the Black Radical Tradition. In Brazil, there is a rich fugitive tradition developed around the experience of the *quilombola*, the Afro-Brazilian maroon societies set up by escaped slaves. These spaces, still enduring and inhabited by descendants of slaves, among other non-white groups, have given rise not only to an extensive range of fugitive and creative practices of refusal but also of wisdom and forms of knowledge widely studied in Brazil. There is a particularly important work in this field: one by the Black feminist Beatriz Nascimento (2018; see also Ratts, 2007 & Smith, 2016). Nascimento studied the *quilombos* from a non-historicist point of view and found in their spaces of flight examples of fugitive modernity in which Black people have been building forms of social organisation of black life outside the state. In her view, the *quilombos* established not only the “physical spaces where enslaved Africans encamped to escape from bondage (...) but also trans-temporal, trans-spatial spaces of Black liberation that Black people in Brazil have articulated in response to the conditions of subjugation” (Smith, 2016: 78). Thus, the *quilombola* has been a fugitive practice which escaped from white supremacy and challenged the technologies of colonial capture. Nascimento also sees contemporary forms of the *quilombo* experience in other Black geographies, such as the *favelas*, the samba schools, the ‘candomblé terreiros’, and other Black movement organisations. In all these places, she finds not only a flight from violence, subjugation and death, but also the search for and invention of other spaces, times and modes of re-existence within and beyond the geographies of subjection: “The *quilombo* is a social condition (...) it is a grouping of Black people, which the Black people undertake, in which Black people accept the Indigenous within this structure, and which has never been accepted within the Brazilian society. (Nascimento, 2018 [1977]: 126).

In a similar vein, McKittrick (2011) has elaborated on Black urban presence in the Americas from the concept of *Black sense of place*. Her reflections are an important counterpoint to conventional research in the field of urban studies, where the Black city usually appears as pure exceptionality —connecting Black ways of life and their geographies, either with pure oppression and abjection, or with its opposite sense of resistance and

Figure 1

Salvador, colonial and quilombola city. **Source:** Prepared by Flora Menezes Tavares (2020), based on Vilhena (1969) and Ultramarino Historical Archive (2016).



celebration. In this sense, McKittrick's Black sense of place understands Black inhabitation of cities "as the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter" (McKittrick, 2011: 949). Therefore, these elaborations help us to think beyond the reification of colonial landmarks and those exceptional (and dichotomous) narratives that unfold from it. The Black urban presence in diaspora configures a daily and eminently relational dynamic that makes the city, despite violence and dispossession.

In this article, we want to take up the constitutive and paradoxical relationality that we argue to be specific to Salvador as a Black city. This study is not only an abstract theoretical reflection. It is mainly a situated analysis which brings together methodological and epistemic processes experienced by the authors in partnership with urban grassroots movements. We begin from the presumption of interknowledge (Santos, 2007) as a possibility for reflective confrontation with the complexity inherent to Salvador and its historical and violent interdictions. Therefore, as we discuss in the following section, this article is not the result of research *stricto sensu*, like most research undertaken in different areas, which have treated Salvador as a "field of studies". We conceive this research as ontological because, in some way, we are part of an urban struggle movement in which researches are not a mere critical analysis. They are rather political and epistemic artefacts by means of we seek to add a new reality to the city, in order to change it.

Urban Collaborations in Salvador

The reflections presented here arise from a set of collaborative initiatives at the intersection of urban struggle, teaching, research, outreach projects, and popular advisory.

Over the past decade these collaborations have been building new forms of articulation between the university—an institution, historically linked to the white privileges in the city, within which different research groups have been introducing new decolonial practices—and Black neighbourhoods. Before going any further, we want to make an important clarification.

The institution of modern universities in Brazil, as in Latin America as a whole, is part of the colonial enlightenment and, therefore, it is inseparable from the processes of racial and colonial expropriation. Indeed, the contemporary Brazilian public university remains dominated by white elites. Its knowledge production policies, historically converging with the ideas of colonial modernisation, cooperated in the enactment of a racialised city. However, in the last two decades, during the ‘Lula government’, this hegemony has been strongly contested by the rise of new bodies and subjectivities in the university—mainly Black and Indigenous peoples—whose presence is democratising the institution. In this sense, the Brazilian Black Movement has fulfilled important institutional achievements, namely the 2003 adoption of the so-called ‘racial quota’ system to increase Black access to public universities. Although racism persists structurally, these affirmative actions have Blackened the white-centric composition of public universities like *Universidade Federal da Bahia* (UFBA).

We argue that the Blackening of the university enhances a sense of epistemic justice that challenges the colonial bias of modern learning and research practices. In the field of urban studies, these transformations have allowed for a greater recognition of the heterogeneity of the city and enabled new connections between the university and Black urban outskirts. We situate ourselves in this emerging space of encounters and decolonial practices that today crosses Brazilian universities. We are not just the sum of a Black woman from Bahia, a white woman from São Paulo and a white Galician man, but an instantiation of the aforementioned space. Therefore, the spaces of urban collaboration that sustain the discussions that we bring to this text are also part of that anti-racist and democratising overflows that the Brazilian university is currently experiencing.

In this section we reflect from our distinct participation during five years of collaborative experiences related to the two modernising urban interventions previously mentioned: the Historical Centre Recuperation Programme and the substitution of the railway in the *Subúrbio Ferroviário* with a monorail. By way of reaction to such interventions, urban grassroots movements and urban researchers like us gave rise to unusual political spaces and new repertoires of collective action. In both cases, our experiences of collaboration continue to develop in other ongoing activities in which some of us are involved. It is worth noting that the people we meet in these spaces we rarely meet in our daily lives in Salvador. This is a city crossed by a brutal border that cannot be explained only by appealing to class: the border of anti-Black racism.

In 2016, the authors of this article became involved in the organisation of the ‘Community and Society Curricular Activity’ outreach course at the Faculty of Architecture of the *Universidade Federal da Bahia* (UFBA). This proposal arose from earlier requests from the *Associação de Moradores e Amigos do Centro Histórico de Salvador*— ‘Association of Residents

and Friends of the Historic Centre of Salvador’(AMACH)—and took advantage of certain specific institutional dimensions of the UFBA. This urban collaboration involved students, teachers, researchers and residents conducting a collective evaluation of the living conditions of a group of residents of the historic centre of Salvador. The process built on urban struggles triggered in 2002, when the Bahia government-led Programme of Recuperation of the Historic Centre of Salvador threatened to evict most of its residents, mostly low-income Black people. In 2005, after three years of citizen protests, a group of 108 families obtained government recognition of their right to live in the historic centre. An adjustment of conduct agreement (TAC, according to its acronym in Portuguese) enshrined this right, whereby one party recognises an irregularity or a violation of another’s rights and commits to take measures to revert the situation. However, eleven years after the formal agreement, those residents still found themselves unprotected and in a precarious housing situation.

In the case of the *Subúrbio Ferroviário*, a heterogeneity of urban collectives—including residents from different areas, local workers, students and academics from various fields and institutional representatives—were provoked by Gilson, a resident who is also a local leader of the *Sociedade Trem de Ferro* (Railway Movement), to collaborate and organise response actions to the imminent monorail project. As Gilson warned, this large-scale infrastructure project would have destabilizing effects on the forms of life of all the neighbourhoods in the *Subúrbio*. However, nobody knew anything about this project, beyond minimal information published in the media. Therefore, this collaboration took the form of the ‘Monorail in Dispute Summer School’, held in early 2020. It was a space of encounter and collective research that brought together people from the university, including the authors of this article, and people from grassroots organisations of the *Subúrbio*. We held lectures and debates, collected data, exchanged information and produced communication material to guide and focus on the ongoing process. We also provoked the Public Prosecutor’s Office (MP, according to its acronym in Portuguese) to hold public hearings on the problems demanded by the residents and to discuss actions to be taken by the MP to address these issues. In some manner, the people and collectives involved in that collaboration were able to bring into existence very valuable information for the struggle that shed light on an infrastructural proposal that until then was a diffuse threat.

In these collaborations, we put in practice an ‘undisciplined methodological’ sensibility, establishing an immanent relation with the urban struggles with which we get involved (Haber, 2011). Tenets such as the dismantling of previous hierarchies, collective involvement and reflection, common praxis and transforming actions were inseparable. Despite this, in both cases of collaboration the shared spaces created to elaborate urban knowledge and fight against anti-Blackness policies were neither homogeneous nor pacific.

Indeed, if confronting infrastructure interventions with the aim of publicly declaring the conflict with the government was a common mobilising factor in the collaborative spaces, that did not mean that internally they operated in a harmonious way. On the contrary, the main challenge that arose in these spaces had to do with the articulation of differences. Using the words of Marisol de la Cadena (2018: 105), the challenge was about sustaining spaces of “unexpected alliances of a wide range of collectives with heterogeneous demands”, which

may constitute, even through negotiation and translations, a “public which doesn’t yet exist”, going beyond a univocal notion of the “common good.”

That is, by taking these processes in a single moment of eminently collective action and reflection, it is about accepting the inexorable fact that beyond the overlap of knowledge and language, or the possible existence of common interests, there will always be something that exceeds such alliances (de la Cadena, 2018). Something that cannot be reduced to a single point: an irreducible difference which according to Glissant (1990), does not make the relationship unviable, on the contrary, it enhances it.

In this context, the place we occupy as academics has not fully crystallised in any of these processes. On the one hand, we take part in the construction of these shared fields of action without readily accepting the role of “specialists” or someone who can, by way of assistance, provide solutions to urban questions hard to solve. On the other hand, we are not mere “researchers”, wrapped in the ever more perverse logic of the political economy of knowledge. This work cannot be done without continuous negotiation, tightening and re-orientation, involving different feelings, and certainly not with neutrality. Therefore, we invoke the implied dimension of reflection, constructed from the fragments collected throughout these two collaborative experiences and the multiple and unstable positions we adopted from them over five years. In the following sections, we present some of these reflections, based on such experiences and fragments.

Infrastructure policies in Salvador: when the anti-Blackness agenda meets the Black city

The infrastructural turn in the social sciences during the last decade (Amin, 2014) allowed urban studies to engage with a question that until recently appeared to be the exclusive domain of technicians and political spokespersons. Indeed, this turn introduced two significant changes that we address in this section. One of them was ontological and emphasised the heterogeneous condition of infrastructure and the difficulty of establishing a clear line between the technical and the social. The other one was political and multiplied the range of actors, phenomena involved and possible articulations of infrastructures. As a result of this conceptual turn, traditional approaches which understood infrastructure as inherently factual and exclusively technical and expert-led devices lost their leading roles in favour of more open and widely distributed conceptualisations.

We take these discussions as a starting point, emphasising two issues. Firstly, infrastructure is not merely a passive technical intermediary, or a neutral project administered by politicians and technicians. Instead, it integrates complex processes which affect the daily existence of the city and enact specific forms of life to the detriment of others. As such, we argue that infrastructure needs to be a collective issue for public discussion.

The conflicts in the *Pelourinho* and *Subúrbio Ferroviário* show how the modernising interventions carried out by the Bahia government in Salvador impact complex urban spaces, often endowed with precarious balances, but also characterised by a “highly urbanised social

infrastructure” (Simone, 2004: 407). It is worth observing that these socially complex spaces involve diverse forms of inhabitation and that Black people make this possible using a variety of technologies of infrastructure invention, maintenance and repair directly linked to the possibilities which emanate from networks of social relations. Indeed, this refers to the long history of Black inhabitation of the cities, as Simone (ibid.) and McKittrick (2011) argue.

When we affirm that official infrastructure projects in Bahia are anti-Blackness, we mean that they are planned and implemented without any care for the modes of existence of the Black people whom they claim to serve. In other words, the postcolonial abstractions which foster the geographic imaginaries of urban modernisation, Black presence in the city—its ways of inhabiting, economic circuits, politics of infrastructures, and forms of sociality—have no material or symbolic value.

In the tension between modernisation and modernity, there are often echoes of some topics usually dealt with in Black studies which we consider important to raise. As Paul Gilroy stated, “one of the definitive characteristics of contemporary racism is its capacity first to define Blacks in the problem/victim couplet and then expel them from historical being altogether” (Gilroy, 2002: 18). In this sense, it is worth noting the axiomatic identification that the narratives of colonial modernity make of Black peoples as incomplete human beings, and by extension Black geographies as incomplete and even lifeless spaces “in terms of emerging norms and values of the ‘modern city’” (Simone, 2017). Black scholars have studied how these same positions historically associate Blackness “with a certain sense of decay” (Moten, 2008: 177) and, more concretely, with “sites of environmental, social, and infrastructural decay” (McKittrick, 2011: 951).

As we argue in this article, things in the Black cities are always more complex than the dominant view assumes. The so-called modernising perspectives operate from anti-Blackness systems of knowledge, which historically place Black people and Black geographies outside modernity—and in a certain way, even outside humanity. However, despite the efforts of colonial modernity to hide its other versions, Black studies scholars have shown how Blackness and modernity never were strangers to one another, neither during slavery nor in the afterlife of slavery. In her book *Fugitive Modernities*, Krug (2018) elaborates on the practices, narratives and institutions produced by the Black diasporas within slavery. In turn, McKittrick noted how slavery “did not foreclose Black geographies, but rather incited alternative mapping practices (...) many of which were/are produced outside the official tenets of cartography” (McKittrick, 2011: 949). Also, Denise Ferreira da Silva emphasises the importance of designing and recognising practices that break with the neoliberal circuit of expropriation superimposed on our colonial and racial matrix: “to break the circuit of dispossession and to design mechanisms for redressing the total value expropriated” (Silva, 2014: 284).

Both the attempts to normalise the Black city through anti-Blackness infrastructures, as much as the reactions and confrontations which hinder the total success of these interdictions, can be thought from the two experiences we discuss in this text. The Recuperation Programme and the *Subúrbio* monorail interventions have different timeframes and they are driven by different public administrations in association with the interests of

tourism, the infrastructure policies and the real estate sector. The Recuperation Programme began in 1992 and concerns a restructuring of the space around the foundational core of Salvador—the area called the *Pelourinho*. This intervention was based on postcolonial and developmental heritage policies (Collins, 2015), whereby heritage becomes a subsidiary economic resource to the tourist economy.

The monorail project started in 2019 through a PPP contract and proposed the replacement of a nineteenth century section of the railway system. With the excuse of modernisation, this intervention—following the logic of financialisation and public-private partnership—will redefine mobility flows on a metropolitan scale and will make public transport more expensive and inaccessible. Furthermore, the execution of the project may well result in intra-urban disarticulation for the inhabitants of the *Subúrbio Ferroviário*.

We argue that the neoliberal agendas driving these processes of space-time transformation act upon earlier forms of racial and colonial subjugation (Chakravartty & Silva, 2012). The government and corporate agents that trigger these interventions—in which accumulation by expropriation resonates—operate on a colonial and racial matrix that sees Black lives as uprooted. Thus, infrastructure production, as much in the new tourist ecology of the Recuperation Programme, as in the substitution of the *Subúrbio* railway with a monorail, create a racial difference giving way to specific standards of subordination, resistance and negotiation (Gilroy et al., 2019). From this perspective, the asymmetric and selective distribution of infrastructure is racial violence just as much as urban dispossession.

At the same time that we recognise and denounce the anti-Blackness character of this state-corporate urbanistic activity, we also reaffirm the heterogeneous and performative condition of infrastructures. We understand them as objects of dispute and issues open to public discussion. For this reason, it is important to us to pay attention to the conflicts running through the execution of the Recuperation Programme and the implantation of the monorail. Beyond the conflicts themselves, these disputed areas are also spaces of interaction, where the diverse and asymmetric fields which make up the city of Salvador meet. These divergences are understood here in dialogue with the recent work of Blaser & de la Cadena (2019): the differences that emerge in collectives are not fossilised, but they rather get involved in a continuous, open and negotiated process of change.

“Daqui não saio, daqui ninguém me tira!”⁶:

Asserting Black life in the city within the Programme of Recuperation of the Historic Centre of Salvador

The *Pelourinho* is the nucleus of the space listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1984, thereafter known as the Historic Centre of Salvador (HCS). Following its listing, in 1992 the Bahia government, under the presidency of the powerful right-wing politician Antônio Carlos Magalhães, created the Recuperation Programme. In carrying out this

⁶ “I’m not leaving this place, nobody is moving me out of here”, this slogan was AMACH’s main watchword in their mobilisations and struggles for the right to stay and live in Salvador’s historic centre.

process, the government implemented policies of cultural heritage which conceive heritage as a subsidiary economic resource to the tourist economy. Furthermore, the intervention in the 1990s updated the alliance between tourism and heritage in Bahia, which specifies a place for the HCS in the service economy designated to Salvador by industrial development policy since the 1970s (Sant'Anna, 2017).

Through the Recuperation Program, the Bahia government intended to create new tourism products and destinations. The axis of this operation was the conversion of the *Pelourinho* into an “open-air shopping centre” (Sant'Anna, op. Cit.). To execute this project, the technicians implementing the programme divided it into seven phases. The first six phases, carried out from 1992 to 1999, were an enormous economic failure and included a violent policy of removal that mainly affected the Afro-descendant population. That violence gave rise to a protest movement led by an alliance of residents, who did not passively accept the evictions, together with solidarity sectors of the Bahian civil society. That protest did not fall on deaf ears, and the neighbourhood claims forced technicians to agree to introduce housing uses in the seventh phase. This phase began in 2000 and remains unfinished.

The Recuperation Programme began in 1992 in part of the HCS listed space, including the *Maciel*, *Pelourinho*, *Passo*, *Saldanha*, *Barroquinha* and *Carmo* areas—a lively place, physically in ruins, but densely inhabited by different forms of Black life which produced a worrying *opacity* for the elites (see Glissant, 1990). Despite everything, at that moment, the old houses and the colonial ruins were inhabited by numerous families, women, children, networks of sex workers, drug dealers, street vendors, recyclers, domestic workers, hairdressers, craftspeople, and tailors, as well as a few people in the formal job sector. The majority of these inhabitants had been born in the area or had lived there for decades.

The old colonial houses, many of them in ruinous states and with insufficient sanitation, were densely populated. Despite the ideological narrative of removal that equated the area with a mere ruin, the presence of large numbers of children indicated the area's vitality and generational renovation. Each house was divided into numerous rooms and lodged tens of families (AMACH & FAUFBA, 2017).

The access to accommodation and other collective use of the buildings was generally conditional on the payment of rent to the few remaining descendants of the original owners, but principally to the *posseiros*, people who had informally taken possession and control of the abandoned property. These people collected rent and even sold properties to the occupants who needed to live in or otherwise make use of the space: “it was a building that caught fire, the traditional Catharino family were owners, you know? Then a man took this building (...) and rented a part of it to my mother” (Laudelina, interview by authors, December 13, 2016). In some cases, tenants were able to purchase these buildings informally, assume control of them and thereafter began to rent space to new tenants.

Despite the existence of informal market mechanisms giving access to urban land (Abramo, 2012), the mode of possession in the historic centre was based on the collective use of the houses, with few of the inhabitants having access to the formal economy or the sphere of public rights. It is worth noting that the socio-spatial dynamics in Black

neighbourhoods of Latin American cities cannot be understood only as being derived from mechanisms of the informal land market. These spaces are heterogeneous, the effect of mercantile and non-mercantile forms of the city's consumption and production co-exist and overlap within them (Pirez, 2016). In the case of the *Pelourinho*, the informal market giving access to urban land was linked to precarious forms of urbanisation. However, there was also an incessant 'undercommunal' production of infrastructures, goods, services, values and sociability which sustained collective life (see Harney & Moten, 2013). That is, in addition to dilapidated spaces that were relatively easy to inhabit, there were *restaurantes populares* with modest prices, boarding houses, care networks for children and support for women and prostitutes, Afro-Brazilian cultural organisations and religious activity. It was above all a kind of sociability and mutual aid, operating in parallel, inside and outside capitalist logics, which constituted the existence of this place. We argue that this non-binary coexistence of economic assemblages is what allowed the reproduction of daily life in the area. The inhabitants lived with certain dimensions of the market mainly via non-modern circuits (Santos, 2008).

The Government used the Recuperation Programme to dismantle and reconfigure the pre-existing socio-territorial dynamics of this Black neighbourhood. Paradoxically, HCS carried out its functional redefinition in the name of preserving heritage and culture. However, it involved the state taking possession of more than 700 buildings by the eviction and dispossession of hundreds of families, and the annulment of residents' social and property rights. Government actions implemented this expropriation largely in the first six phases of the Recuperation Programme. They promoted a coordinated mercantilisation by directing the possession of the recovered buildings practically without burden to private commercial activities and services linked to the heritage tourism economy.

By 2005, at least four thousand residents, about 46% of the population of the Historical Centre, had been evicted and dispersed, to nearby neighbourhoods and far away ones like *São Caetano*, *Pau da Lima*, *Valéria*, *Cajazeiras* and *Subúrbio Ferroviário*. In addition, this state-led process triggered a racialised and sexualised operation of inequality, mobilising practices of violence and enclosure associated with moralising attitudes. We want to highlight the ban on prostitution networks in the *Maciel* area, a transgender community of sex workers including cis-women and trans* peoples. This enclosure was just one example of the politics of interdiction that cultural heritage regulations brought into being in the historic centre. Indeed, a securitising police infrastructure, aimed at regulating the recognised ways of life in the historic centre, could only be tested through strict repression (Collins, 2015).

This massive biopolitical operation repressed the Black modes of inhabiting the *Pelourinho*. In line with the "whitening ideology" (Nascimento, 2016) under which such operations have been taking place, the government decided to normalise this Black urban presence and tolerate only the subordinated forms of life to the new terms proposed by the tourist economy. Although the repressed ways of life also embodied the celebrated the African roots on which the Afro-Bahian narrative underlying the heritage policies in the *Pelourinho* was based, for the representatives of the white supremacy those ways of life also carried the stigma of Blackness as an opaque threat. We argue that this is reminiscent of the

risks of intertwining racism and nationalism, against which Abdias Nascimento (2016) and Paul Gilroy (2002) warned. The notion of a multicultural national democracy is compatible with the emptying of Black diaspora cultures that become national. These urban operations reveal how the ideology of racial democracy that drove the Recuperation Programme can reify Afro-Brazilian heritage and, at the same time, commit the genocidal destruction of Blackness (Nascimento, 2016).

However, the absolutist modernising logic of the Recuperation Programme was not univocal. In 2002, a group of residents mainly composed of Black women created the AMACH, a neighbourhood association to fight against the policy of evictions in the *Pelourinho*. In 2005, amidst the struggles against the implementation of the Recuperation Programme, the AMACH reached an adjustment of conduct agreement (TAC) intermediated by the Bahia State Department. In the TAC, the Bahia government and its Urban Development Company (CONDER) recognised the right of 108 families to stay in Salvador's historic centre. The government committed to the recuperation of buildings for housing and their concession to these residents in the seventh phase of the programme. Moreover, the agreement entailed the creation of a management committee with the participation of AMACH representatives, those of the Bahia government and other institutions of civil society. This committee was charged with ensuring the rights recognised in the TAC, namely the recuperation of the buildings for residents to develop income-generating commercial activities, premises to house the AMACH headquarters and collective facilities such as a nursery.

With this formal recognition of rights, the government reformulated the seventh phase of the project, incorporating the neighbourhood demands litigated by the AMACH. It is worth noting here that the same anti-Black racism that had driven the eviction of thousands of residents also permeated the negotiation space between CONDER bureaucrats and the neighbours of the seventh phase. Far from being a harmonious process, the living conditions of the residents suffered the frequent destabilising action of CONDER's technicians and

Figure 2

Popular Audit in the Historical Centre of Salvador. **Source:** Prepared by Flora Menezes Tavares (2020), based on Amach & FAUFBA (2017).



managers. They repeatedly acted to undermine the residents' possession rights through repeated removals and forced relocations. On the one hand, CONDER created a circuit of accumulation by expropriating the heritage tourism economy over the colonial and racial matrix, uprooting the residents (Chakravartty & Silva, 2012; Silva, 2014), but on the other hand, the residents responded with constant movement, adaptations and improvisations to rearticulate their living conditions and confront the repression.

Some of the families included in the 2005 TAC were relocated to temporary accommodation within the HCS itself with rent and charges paid for by CONDER. They lived in these houses while the seventh phase was undertaken, until they received their permanent residences in recuperated buildings. While the plan should have been completed in two years, today, 15 years later, it remains incomplete. As Jecilda, the president of AMACH rightly said, "The *Fonte Nova* (Salvador's football stadium) was finished, the Metro is going to be finished, but not the seventh phase." (AMACH & FAUFBA, 2017). These families lived in precarious temporary accommodation for almost 12 years before finally receiving their recuperated houses. "A provisional situation which became permanent", as Sandra, a resident and member of AMACH described it (AMACH & FAUFBA, 2017).

The implementation of the Recuperation Programme reassembled the articulation between property, work, and inhabitation with specific racialised effects (Gilroy, 2002; Roy & Rolnik, 2020). The regime of possession in the seventh phase of the Programme—now under the stewardship of the government—assumed the subordinated integration of Black residents in the tourist economy. But it is not only about subordination but about the elimination of the historical ways of living and working of Black people in the HCS. In many cases, the residents' relocation to temporary accommodation meant a dissociation between home and existing means of work, disrupting the traditional ways in which many residents obtained their sources of income. Nowadays, many of the residents of the so-called seventh phase occupy themselves in the informal commercialisation of food and drinks in some of the shows that take place in the *Pelourinho*. However, those precarious positions in the tourist economy do not support everyone. The re-functionalisation of the neighbourhood dismantled the immanent economic circuits of the area, and much of the residents had to fend for themselves, once again inventing their ways of working.

Furthermore, in 2017 CONDER altered the policy of temporary accommodation. Without discussing this issue with the residents, they terminated the rental contracts for these spaces and instead offered them an accommodation grant. From then on, the residents were to receive a 450 BRL monthly benefit (approximately 79 USD) to pay rent. This amount was insufficient to meet the rental values then charged in the HCS, and so none of the families occupying the temporary accommodation left. The families refused to leave the temporary accommodation and be subjected to further displacement other than to their definitively recuperated homes. Faced with this resistance, CONDER brought repossession actions against at least seven residents (AMACH & FAUFBA, 2017), to force these families out, despite not guaranteeing to hand over all of the houses recuperated in the seventh phase.

The slowness of the work and the return to the recuperated homes, the weakening of possession, relocations and forced removals, situations of risk, the dissociation of collective

practices, the dissolution of forms of work and precarious accommodation were all inflicted on the residents by CONDER. The residents also continually denounced the problems regarding the quality of both the temporary accommodation and from 2007 onward, the recuperated homes: lousy design and construction, poor infrastructure, inadequate maintenance, leaks, damp and lack of ventilation, structural problems, difficulties connecting homes to the water supply and sewage systems, insalubrious conditions associated with health problems. Some of the homes were smaller than the ones previously occupied or did not match households' needs, as some families had grown during the long interval since the beginning of the work on the seventh phase. Sandra described her family's living conditions in the temporary accommodation like "Dante's inferno" (AMACH & FAUFBA, 2017). When they encountered any of these various problems, they either looked to CONDER for solutions or tried to resolve them through individual or collective actions.

The formalisation of the residents' situation and inclusion in the seventh phase did not mean substantial improvements in the quality of their living conditions, but rather revealed a reconfiguration of their precarious conditions. These conditions were intensified by state action paired with the residents' subjection to positions of urban inequality. This precariousness has only increased by CONDER's concession of use of the recuperated buildings to the residents. In the seventh phase of the Recuperation Programme, CONDER conceded a Land Regularisation Permit to these residents. This permit is a regulating instrument by which an owner transfers the use of his land to an interested third party, constituting a genuine right in that person's favour. The Land Regularisation Permits given to the residents are valid for a maximum of 10 years, a short period considering that the majority of these residents have lived in the HCS for many decades. They, therefore, expected a lasting secure possession, which is by no means assured. This situation is accentuated by the community facilities promised in the agreement which have never been implemented. There is still the problem of the mechanisms of participation and social control of the Recuperation Programme which CONDER arbitrarily interrupted eight years ago. This anti-democratic action on the part of the Bahia government has prevented the participation of the residents in decisions concerning the Recuperation Programme.

However, *negritudes's* relational and generative ways of life have refused every attempt to enclose their resources and forms of life. In this sense, the permanent movement of rearticulation of the Black collective life in the *Pelourinho* challenges these enclosures, but also reinvents its alliances and forms of struggle. Internally, a slightly expanded sphere of struggle for permanence and insertion in the area has emerged from this movement, as evidenced by the presence of ever bigger groups than the holders of the formal individualising concession titles to the recuperated homes. Furthermore, different generations of the same family share the usufruct of these homes and the access they give to the centre of Salvador in different ways. Residents have rebuilt networks of inter-parental and neighbourly care, taking collective advantage of their proximity and activating territorial solidarity. These include childcare, paths away from drug trafficking, home improvements and educational and employment opportunities. Externally, the coexistence with other territorialities neighbouring the *Pelourinho*, open the way to rearticulations of collective defence in the face

of threats to the different forms of life which inhabit the centre of Salvador. In a *Pelourinho* devastated by heritage-tourism policies, collective arrangements also transform themselves and continue to confront both old and new conditions of subalternity.

"Temos uma relação com o lugar que o capital e a modernidade não consideram"⁷: the Subúrbio Monorail as a dispute in act

Salvador's *Subúrbio Ferroviário* is located in the northern part of the city on the shores of the *Baía de Todos os Santos*. It was forged as an urban area disconnected from the colonial city. Selective and unequal urban production concentrated investments in areas frequently associated with the urban elite, notably the traditional centre of the colonial city and new locations in the expanded Salvador of the twentieth century, to the detriment of the *Subúrbio* and other urban outskirts. This differential urban attribution carried out under various municipal and state administrations, and their many institutional arrangements, have prioritised those elite spaces with urban interventions to establish an image of modernity for Salvador.

The *Subúrbio Ferroviário* was first developed as a summer retreat for the elite and later as an industrial area. Other visible layers in the production of this space imbricate it to the modernising processes that we examine in this article. These include the indigenous villages of the *Tupinambá* tribe, Portuguese sugar mills, the Dutch invasion, *quilombos*, Brazil's first oil well and the construction of the railway. We highlight the fact that with the implantation of the Bahia and *São Francisco* Railway, a more markedly urban occupation began. It is also in this context that this urban area came to be known by its current name of the *Subúrbio Ferroviário*.

An ever-denser population increased from the 1940s onwards. It was linked to both the railway itself—which was inaugurated in 1860 by the English owned Bahia and *São Francisco* Railway Company and later became part of the national railway system—and henceforth industrial activity started in this vast urban area. This tendency grew especially after the discovery of oil in 1939, in the current neighbourhood of *Lobato*. Add to this the fact that the *Subúrbio* would become one of the destinations for the mainly Black populations forcibly displaced from other parts of the city, notably the HCS. These expulsions were associated with various modernisation projects carried out in Salvador over the twentieth century, as shown previously in the case of the *Pelourinho*.

The implantation of the *Aratu* Industrial Complex and the *Camaçari* Petrochemical Complex in the 1970s intensified migration to Salvador and led to a relocation of industrial activity from the *Subúrbio* in the direction of Salvador's metropolitan region. *Avenida Afrânio Peixoto*, better known as *Avenida Suburbana*, was also built in this period and was opened in

⁷ "We have a relationship with the place that capital and modernity do not consider" (Gilson, a resident of the *Subúrbio Ferroviário*, a member of the National Railway Society and one of the organisers of the Monorail in Dispute Summer School held in February 2020).

1971. Local residents remember this intervention as the big infrastructure project which vectorised and expanded urbanisation towards the *Subúrbio*.

The construction of the *Avenida Suburbana* itself was responsible for the removal of numerous Black families in the name of modernisation. This unofficial story remains alive in the memory of the residents whose relocation to other places within the vast urban area of the *Subúrbio* added to its further extension and densification. At the same time, the Bahia government removed the *palafitas*—houses built on stilts over the *Baía de Todos os Santos*—in *Alagados* neighbourhood. Both phenomena took place during the military dictatorship (1964–1984) and, added to the construction of some initiatives of public housing, confirmed the interventionism of the state in an attempt to contain the rapid process of Black peoples’ access to housing by means of auto-construction. However, the destruction of vernacular forms of inhabiting such as stilt houses over the sea and the construction of public housing did not control auto-construction but rather boosted it. Indeed, the auto-construction made the *Subúrbio* become the possibility of access to the city and housing to a whole generation of Afro-descendants in Salvador.

This urban area currently includes around twenty continuous Black neighbourhoods, the majority of them auto-constructed by their residents during the twentieth century, a process which continues until today. Despite its reiterated homogenisation in academic discussion as well as the urban policies applied there, it is an extremely complex and heterogeneous urban space. As Santos (2016: 275) claims, it is an urban area that condenses “histories of struggle and mobilisations, affirming their identities with new urbanistic and cultural elaborations”. A myriad of residents’ associations, cultural groups, ‘*candomblé terreiros*’ (Afro-Brazilian places of religious practice), small football teams, community schools, libraries and radio stations are capillarised throughout the *Subúrbio* and coexist with Pentecostal churches, bars and organised drug trafficking groups.

In the last decade, the *Subúrbio Ferroviário* has been the target of many municipal- and state-led urban interventions. One of them is the monorail project, announced by the Bahia government as the substitute for the existing railway, which has provoked an on-going conflict. Although the government declared its intention to “modernise” the railway by replacing it with an LRV in 2014, it was formalised in 2018. In 2019, the local media finally announced that the construction would be carried out through a public-private partnership (PPP) between the Bahia government and Chinese corporation Build Your Dreams (BYD). Without publicly clarifying the modal difference, the consortium took responsibility to implement a monorail and not an LRV.

This consortium allows BYD to take part in the implementation and operation of an important piece of public transport infrastructure in Salvador. The participation of this large corporation in the monorail project has reinforced the perception of the growing influence of China and its state capitalism in Latin America. It also gives us the outlines of how global modernity impacts Salvador based on multidirectional international relations in which China has gained importance and (de)centrality concerning traditional Euro-American poles (Dirlik, 2007). In the case of Brazil, in the last five years there has been an expansion of Chinese corporate investment in different infrastructure sectors, negotiated with sub-

national governments such as those of Bahia and São Paulo, consolidating a tendency towards the management of public assets by way of PPP arrangements. The Chinese presence in Brazil became stronger after the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff (Workers Party) in 2016. Chinese investors gained prominence in an economic space that to some extent was in a state of shock due to the incessant cases of corruption looming over the main Brazilian civil construction companies, such as Oderebrecht. Right-wing forces used the climate of corruption to drive impeachment against the President Rousseff.

The political, institutional, and financial arrangement which is being constructed under the tutelage of the state government around this intervention connects Salvador—and the *Subúrbio Ferroviário*—to a whole transnational and international economy, which appears to have in infrastructure an investment currency in a large part of the Global South (Anand et al., 2018). Turning attention on the corporate state production involved in the implantation of the monorail and its forms of expropriation makes the nexus between raciality, coloniality and the global circuits of financialisation even more evident (Chakravartty & Silva, 2012; Roy & Rolnik, 2020). As we now detail, the monorail project will trigger transformations producing specific configurations of articulation between property, work, residence, and conditions of (im)mobility and implying equally specific racialised effects (Gilroy, 2002).

The proposed substitution of the *Subúrbio* railway with a monorail is intended to reconfigure the space with the presence of new real estate and business interests in the *Subúrbio*. Before the intervention has even started, new projects have been launched in several neighbourhoods in the monorail's area of influence. The majority of these are in the real estate and civil engineering sectors or involve large supermarket chains. Public works and community initiatives, on the other hand, have less weight. In other words, the speculative urban processes unfolding alongside the monorail intervention is further exposing the population to the effect of market logic and to the processes of privatisation which make the Black city vulnerable and threaten the permanence of their inhabitants.

The possible impacts of implementing the monorail include serious violations of social rights, as it threatens to remove or relocate hundreds of families who have settled in that urban area for decades. These inhabitants have in their auto-constructed houses their greatest asset, and the legacy of family struggles mixed with the production of the local landscape itself. We also highlight massive effects on mobility associated with radical processes of radical vulnerability. Recent research estimates that around 10,000 people (including street vendors, the self-employed, people who fish and collect seafood, recyclers and students) use the railway every day to go to work or reach school, commerce or services in sub-centres of the *Subúrbio* and in the traditional centre of Salvador (Acervo da Laje et al., 2020). If the State and the concessionaire linked to BYD de-activate the *Subúrbio* railway in the function of the monorail, thousands of people and their families will be directly affected in their daily lives and subsistence strategies. A probable fare rise estimated at 740% as a result of this change of transport mode will directly impact these groups and inhabitants, the majority of whom will not be able to use the monorail either because they will not be able to afford it or because they won't be permitted to transport goods. By significantly increasing fares, this intervention

will impact not only their day-to-day mobility between neighbourhoods or to the centre of the city but also their labour and economy which depend on the subsidised railway.

In this case of the monorail, we want to emphasise that despite this collection of threats and everything that is needed to confront them, the very existence of the *Subúrbio* as a heterogeneous set of Black neighbourhoods gives tension to the destructive character of this modernising intervention. The uncommon worlds (Blaser & de la Cadena, 2018) which embody the *Subúrbio* in its long-term daily production are marked by practices of mutual support and arrangements which go beyond the regular market to give many people access to a home. For the last fifty years, at least, the daily production of this vast and complex urban space has been anchored to these Black lives and the dynamics of auto-construction of houses, infrastructures, economic circuits, institutions, policies and sets of rules. They continually articulate permanence and rupture, dislocation and fixedness, destiny and project, blurring the lines between legality and illegality, regularity and irregularity, legitimacy and illegitimacy, visibility and invisibility. These dynamics, commonly read as informal, institute forms—of life, of the production of space, of housing, of political action, and of legal, economic, and cultural plurality—as yet barely readable by the theoretical standards which inform reflections, practices and policies regarding the urban environment in Brazil.

Over decades, residents of the *Subúrbio* have made different territorialisation efforts. They constructed multiple overlaid territorialities (Hasbaert, 2004), anchoring themselves to the logic of habitation guided by notions of the extended family and neighbourhood networks (Marcelin, 1999). They perpetuated ways of life anchored in the close relationship with the sea, either through fishing and the collection of seafood or through Afro-Brazilian religions, such as candomblé, informing historical permanence and modes of relationship with the natural urban environment. They instituted forms of work and income generation activities, which range from the construction of a point of sale with an established clientele to the possibilities of transit in which the railway plays a fundamental role. These historic urban dynamics are linked to the continuous processes of auto-construction—lived as a daily struggle—and the performance of a future to come that practices of auto-construction entail. In this sense, it is worth briefly revisiting an idea already discussed in this text. The so-called ‘consolidated houses and neighbourhoods’ are those which manage to overcome the barriers to inhabitation, such as the removal logic itself, and reach some consolidation horizon in time, symbolising an individual and collective achievement, of material and social improvement. Therefore, the current intervention in the *Subúrbio* allows us to capture the very moment at which these territorialities, ways of life and uncommon urban worlds are about to suffer its impact. It is a renewed process of modernisation in full course, announcing significant material and symbolic transformations of this complex urban area which consolidated itself with great difficulty and struggle, but has constructed among its residents a feeling of belonging and anchorage. At this moment, in which the conflict is imminent, the visibility of these heterogeneous worlds and their alternative logics have been useful in raising not only a policy of (re)cognition, but above all one of care, able to strengthen the collective assemblages which sustain Black life.

Figure 3

Monorail Summer School in Conflict.
Source: Prepared by Flora Menezes Tavares (2020), based on Acervo da Laje et al., 2020.



Many of these attempts at fixation and consolidation that instituted this urban area, as we seek to highlight briefly, are directly linked to previous dispossessions and the incidence of anti-Blackness processes of modernisation in the old centre of the city, as in the case of the Recuperation Programme. The production of infrastructures associated with circuits of global financialisation, such as the Recuperation Programme and the monorail project update, deepen the colonial racial matrix which historically forged this continuous state of transitivity and the uprooting of Black lives (Chakravartty & Silva, 2012; Roy & Rolnik, 2020). By opening a dialogue about infrastructure produced at different times and in different spaces, we aim to highlight that property, work, residence and conditions of mobility are common dimensions conditioned by such interventions. We consider that the policies of infrastructures evidence the racial asymmetries that permeate every urban process in Salvador. In the face of the interdictions and the anti-Blackness threats of the hegemonic versions of these infrastructures, the activities of (re)emplacement of Black life are rearticulated, continually redefining new territorialities, political ecologies and confrontations of subalternities.

Overflowing interdictions

Turning our attention to the conflicts surrounding the Recuperation Programme and the monorail project allows us to see that certain activities of Black life interrupt the circuit of expropriation by making the racialised subjects unavailable to the submission of a total extraction of value (Silva, 2014). Understanding this movement implies a change of thinking, breaking with the naturalisation of the univocity of the circuit of expropriation, which reproduces the geographical, conceptual and racial spaces of global capital (ibid.).

In the *Pelourinho*, the so-called modernising redefinition of the Black city obliterated the incremental and adaptive infrastructures historically built by the residents of the ruined old houses—the basis of the multiplicity of collective life in that neighbourhood. Thus, when the gradual execution of the seventh phase allowed the return of some residents to their houses, they received buildings recuperated exclusively for residential use, formalising a type of house that not only disassociated but dissolved their previous means of work and income generation activities, among other vital uses. Architecturally, these buildings were barely adequate for the residents' peripheral insertion into the tourist economy. For example, there was nowhere to keep their carts and other street vending equipment despite the majority of residents being engaged in this activity in the *Pelourinho's* squares.

Interdictions of modernised spaces such as these by the heritage-tourism machine are contested by residents everyday, either through collective action led by the AMACH, and directed towards the agents of the Bahia government, or through transformations, subtle negotiations, day-to-day transgressions, and the new incremental adaptive practices by which they readjust the state-owned property to their ways of life.

One example of the political expression by which Black people in Salvador assert their lives in the face of anti-Blackness urban policies would be the case of the community kitchen in the *Pelourinho*. AMACH set up the kitchen in partnership with the state in order to energise the community's economic activity, given the new dynamics that the urban renewal operation should have brought to the neighbourhood. However, this urban process did not develop as the Bahia government had imagined it would and the restaurant run by AMACH, where the people of the association intended to serve food to new dwellers in the area and employ some of its members, was unable to stabilise its activities. The community kitchen closed one year after it had opened. A few months afterwards, in a meeting with CONDER which the authors attended, state employed technicians accused AMACH of management malpractice. However, by that time and unknown to them, AMACH had already converted the community kitchen—a state-owned infrastructure—into a collective workshop for alternative neighbourhood policies.

A second example comes from the *Subúrbio Ferroviário* where the government warning of imminent deactivation of the existing railway threatens the residents' ways of inhabiting and living which the railway historically helped to compose. A vigorous circuit of traditional fishing can be seen from the intense use of the train to transport seafood, fish, fruit and other goods. The people who work in fishing and seafood collection in the *Subúrbio*—70% of them women—produce at least 30 tonnes of fish per week, mostly sardines. Many people use the railway to reach the port from various locations within the *Subúrbio* to buy fish and seafood. Because of its accessible price, this is often the only guarantee of a meal for some families. As Mero, a fisherman affirms: “The day there are no sardines, there is panic because many families are not going to eat” (Acervo da Laje et al., 2020). The networks and circuits collectively enabled by the use of the railway have a metropolitan reach since residents of other towns in the region also use this means of transport. As Raimundo, Director-President of the *Simões Filho* Association of Fishermen and Seafood Collectors, pointed out in the Summer School, the unemployed, informal workers, people who fish and collect seafood,

rural workers and those who forage for medicinal leaves or discarded food at the market depend on the railway and buses to transport their products and create alternatives for work and income.

Despite the fact that the Bahia government closed spaces that would have allowed residents to participate in the formulation and implementation of this intervention, some groups and associations active in the *Subúrbio*, together with academics and independent institutional agents such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, have sought to force public discussion. In this sense, the aforementioned actors created autonomous spaces, both to jointly study the effects of substituting the train for the monorail, and to build a fighting agenda that defends the ways of life of the affected residents. Thus, the Monorail Summer School in Conflict and the investigation carried out by the Office of Housing and Urbanism of the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office —on the irregularities and illegalities of this intervention— are the main initiatives that have tried to pierce the post-political consensus (Beveridge & Koch, 2016) through which the Bahia government reduces urban policy in Salvador to law and order. We argue that this collective assemblage brings into being a mode of engagement with urban struggles that moves beyond the rigid limits of criticism and complaint about the neo-liberal urban policies of death. Rather than seeking the mere recognition of threatened ways of life, delegating their protection to the Bahia government, these modes of collective engagement enact policies of care in the city. Therefore, they improve political imaginations, seeking to intervene in the city from, within, outside and, beyond the situated relations of power and the existent urban policies.

The questions presented in this article derive from these different experiences of collaboration and political action built between some grassroots movements from Black neighbourhoods and some scholars from UFBA. We understand these experiences and their potential for transforming both (and mutually) the city and the collectives involved and producing interknowledge about Black urbanism in Salvador. We consider that the critical reflection produced from these collective experiences and actions is increasingly significant since, despite the enormous interest awakened in Salvador decades ago as a place for urban research, the city continues to defy notions and theories in the field of urban studies and above all of urbanism.

Openings towards collaborative and Blackened urbanisms

This text analysed two urban struggles in Salvador, in the course of which some Black neighbourhoods, threatened by state-led modernising interventions, emerged as harassed geographies. In the course of this research, we verified how the official spokespersons of the city use normalising technologies, and forms of governmental visibility, as dimensions of state whiteness which harasses these Black geographies. However, we also identified an irreducible singularity in the Black neighbourhoods: a political drive which Black people in diaspora have historically deployed to resist the attempts at containment, enclosure and regulation.

Furthermore, we consider that the urban dynamics analysed in this article can be thought through the notion of “uncommons”. In other words, we understand the struggles carried out to affirm Black urban life in Salvador as a form of urban dissensus “that disrupt the idea of ‘the world’ as a shared ground” (Blaser & de la Cadena, 2017: 186). Thus, we argue that there is a divergence—always in the target of the technologies of normalisation, but also in the motor of different modes of life—through which we consider the urban divergence of Blackness in Salvador. In a certain way, it is an historic dissent which cuts through and (dis)assembles the day-to-day life of the city and intensifies with each top-down urbanistic operation.

In this article we think, in dialogue with Mbembé’s (2020) reflections, about the updating of the historically established relations between the colonial technologies of expropriation and the Black technologies of preservation of life in common. As we have previously described, the litigation surrounding the Recuperation Programme and the *Subúrbio* monorail, make explicit the threats of destruction, weakening or erasure of these Black neighbourhoods, but they also make them more visible when a public discussion erupts in the public sphere.

The interaction of these Black neighbourhoods with the projects of modernisation promoted by the state can activate both conflict and cooperation. This occurs as Black inhabitants react, confront, resist or transgress the processes of subalternation—established or accentuated by such projects—at the same time as they update their strategies for making life viable with improvisations, partial/incomplete integrations in formal regimes, reinventions and adaptations, permanently renovated in the midst of constant instability and threats.

From this perspective, the networks of daily relations which constitute an infrastructure subjacent to the uncommon worlds of Salvador and which such modernising interventions seek to suppress, become systematically more evident. These networks of relations, which make Black forms of inhabiting the city viable, reveal themselves ready to give birth to political dimensions beyond what was usually read into them by urban studies. Such networks continually configure tentative alliances moving between opacity and visibility. Opacity as a strategy of daily maintenance and historical preservation of Black life in the city. Visibility as an effect of the collective action created in the heat of urban struggles, but also mobilised through heterogeneous relationships that sustain fewer spectacular forms of collective action. It is in this sense that we highlight the experiences of collaboration between urban grassroots from Black neighbourhoods and collectives of students, researchers and professors from the universities of Salvador which drive this article. These collaborative experiences are not limited to the tradition of outreach projects as mere assistance, nor to the instrumental research that nurtures the neoliberal university

We consider these collaborative spaces and these collective actions as “‘uncommonalities’: interests in common that are not the same interest” (de la Cadena, 2019: 53). What do these uncommonalities make visible in their alliances and disputes? Drawing inspiration once again from de la Cadena, we argue that modernising urban policies and the anti-Blackness infrastructure in Salvador carry with them the violence of “ontological

similarity”. Faced with this violence, the urban conflicts analysed here would reveal the dissent of the ways of inhabiting the city: a divergence. This dissent becomes explicit in the way of confronting the forms of Black inhabitation with the modes and official logic of the formal city, with its aim of whitening—namely its proposals for normalisation, visibility, suppression and capture. We think that it is in the antagonism between the ways of making the city that the alliances between the public university and Black grassroots movements became possible and powerful. As shown in each of the urban collaborations in which we became entangled, it is not necessary that the participants be the same, or even that we have the same interests. What has brought us together, strengthening us in heterogeneous ways, is an interest in common. For example, understanding that a shared future for Salvador may have to do with an engagement with that which—like the infinity of fugitive practices historically persecuted in the city—is not common to everybody, but could lead us to other ways of making cities and life in common.

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