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AS BONECAS BABADEIRAS:
DRAG SUBCULTURE AND GLOBAL MEDIA IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

by
Logan Baggett

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
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Eu dedico esta dissertação às mulheres maravilhosas que me ensinaram todo o português que eu sei falar. Entre elas são as professoras da língua: Júlia Bussade, Marcella Cascione Cerqueira Neto, Vanessa Freitas da Silva e Maria Cecília Carvalho Egito. Também, seria equivocado não mencionar as professoras da vida. Dou meus agradecimentos a minha querida Brenda, Jú, Jana e Vicky, que me ensinaram não só o português, mas também me deram conhecimento de os pagodes, comidas e abraços brasileiros que são fundamentais à cultura que eu amo tanto. Muito obrigado por tudo.

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ABSTRACT

21st century global queer culture is seeing a major boom. Drag queens are the most indicative symbols of this boom, traditional practitioners of gender-bending performances that blend music, dance, makeup, and fashion to create breathtaking performances. To this end, this thesis asks the following question: How is local drag performance culture generated in Rio de Janeiro in the context of this 21st century gay boom? In this global metropolis, drag queens confront challenges—racism, classism, sprawling urban geography, and scene competition—that color their interpersonal relationships and financial success. They also find community, creating family units in the absence of heteronormative power structures. Despite an explosion in international drag media in recent years, spurred by RuPaul in the United States, this thesis argues that queens maintain their uniqueness, portraying cultural symbols and art with their own twist. In this study, I argue that a transnational drag monoculture is not taking hold in Rio; rather, carioca queens take with them from the American model what works and leave behind what does not, heterogenizing subcultures and creating manifold drag scenes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION: THE PINK FLAMINGO AND TRANSNATIONAL DRAG</i>	1
Key Terms and Concepts.....	2
Question and Significance.....	4
Argument	5
Methodology	5
<i>CHAPTER 1: THEORIZING DRAG IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS</i>	7
Beyond Butler	8
Towards a Brazilian Queer Theory	9
Brazilian and Carioca Drag Imaginaries.....	11
Contextualizing the Global Gay Boom	13
<i>CHAPTER 2: MANUFACTURING COMUNIDADE</i>	14
Drag Scenes and Urban Geography	15
Micro-communities and Collectivity	17
Micro-Conflict and Competition	21
Analysis	24
<i>CHAPTER 3: INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES</i>	26
Race and Blackness	28
Class.....	32
<i>CHAPTER 4: THE DRAG RACE MACHINE</i>	37
Brazil is Different	39
Depictions of Carioca Drag.....	42
Analysis	44
<i>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS</i>	45
<i>WORKS CITED</i>	47
<i>APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL QUOTES IN PORTUGUESE</i>	50

INTRODUCTION: THE PINK FLAMINGO AND TRANSNATIONAL DRAG

Late on a Friday evening, in a hidden corner of Copacabana, is a nondescript building with two neon words emblazoned on it: Pink Flamingo. If you arrive early enough, the Pink Flamingo might be mistaken for a restaurant or just another bar dotting the shores of the most famous beach in the world. It is, however, one of the most visible and vibrant gay hot spots in Rio de Janeiro. Arrive closer to midnight, and its façade is dotted with young gay folks in their best outfits, looking to dance the night away and partake in colorful beverages. Though the crowd often looks like a sea of faces, there are always a select few taller and louder than the rest. Adorned with giant wigs and sky-high heels, the drag queens of the Pink Flamingo are the ringleaders of this chaotic circus, doing everything from scanning tickets to socializing with the international crowd in whatever language necessary.

Though Friday night is undoubtedly when the Pink Flamingo is most filled to its brim, the pomp and circumstance of Rua Rodolfo Dantas occurs every night. It is the only drag bar in the city open seven days a week and is, as a result, the center of gay nightlife in the wealthy Zona Sul (South Zone) of the city. It attracts major names from the national and international circuits, hosting special events with American, British, French, and Brazilian *Drag Race* alums.¹ The cosmopolitan nature of the club is not only limited to its performers; snippets of conversation in Spanish, English, and Portuguese are abundant. As a principal neighborhood hosting many the city's upscale hotels and apartments, Copacabana is always filled to the brim with tourists

¹ *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a reality television competition series that has, since 2009, served to rubber stamp queens for international success. In recent years, the series has expanded internationally, landing in Brazil in late 2023.

looking to enjoy their limited time in Rio. The music of the club, too, reflects this interesting interplay between the global and the national. Nightlife in Rio begins quite late, thus from the time that the doors open to about midnight, gay pop in English is blasted from the speakers for the early arriving gringos, rendering conversation almost impossible.

This is until the main event begins. Sometime shortly after midnight, the music ceases and one of the many local talents takes the microphone to kick off the night. Interestingly, at this juncture, the queens do not care all that much about a language barrier; they spit rapidly into the microphone in Portuguese, speaking to the regulars who support them rather than the tourists just around for a season. Here, one is reminded of the duality of the drag performer. Not only are these artists enjoying themselves by doing what they love, but they are also working girls, reliant on the patronage of Rio's elite to continue buying wigs, costumes, high heels, and makeup. Though the Pink Flamingo is just one node of Rio's drag culture, it is undoubtedly the place that most international drag fans will find themselves in during their first nights in Rio. The bright lights and costumes mask the steps that the queens took to get themselves on the tiny, rickety stage—drag culture in Rio is a cutthroat industry defined by a surplus of artists spurred by a 21st century gay boom. Veteran performers are quick to remind the young crowd of the struggles that they have, and still continue to face, in order to take on this persona in a country with some of the highest recorded rates of violence against queer people in the world (De Souza and Rodrigues Selis 2022). Without Portuguese, however, this reality might be lost on the European tourists filling up the tiny club. Rio, at this moment, seems like a gay utopia busting at the scenes with a vibrant and beautiful culture.

Key Terms and Concepts

This thesis concerns itself with *drag* (en. /dræg/; pt. /dragi/), a term with significant socio-political context in English and Portuguese. The title of this thesis refers to them as

bonecas babadeiras, which literally translates to ‘beautiful dolls’ in an effort to employ the language and dialect that the queens of Rio use to describe themselves. The National Center for Transgender Equality (2017) provides an initial definition: “Drag is a type of entertainment where people dress up and perform, often in highly stylized ways.” It is pertinent to stress that to do *drag* and to be a *drag queen* carry with them very particular identities. Though the characterization that the NCTE provides here seems neutral on its face, it rejects a more traditional definition of drag, which arose from the theatre of the English Elizabethan era (Moore 1994). Other authors argue that the art of drag could be attributed to ancient Greece (Amanajás 2014). Traditional definitions define drag from its historical genesis, whereby only male actors would dress up in hyper-stylized feminine regalia to entertain audiences (Moore 1994).

Use of the word *drag* in Brazilian Portuguese, adapted from English, is a relatively new phenomenon. Discussing the historical role of drag artists in Rio, Trevisan (2021) argues that, “the activities that mixed nightlife and affirmation of queer pride cannot be understood without the presence of drag queens, professional practitioners of *travestismo* different from that of the siliconed *travesti* and closer to the *transformistas* of Carnaval” (351).² Here, three identities are invoked: the *travesti*, the *transformista*, and the anglicized term “drag queen,” which are all related, but not exactly the same. Global contact has blurred the lines between these already porous gendered categories. Understood in this manner, the roles of *transformista*, *travesti*, drag queen, woman, or man are far from mutually exclusive; analysis of drag culture must reckon with all of these overlapping identities to describe what is occurring in the Pink Flamingo.

² “As atividades que misturavam vida noturna e afirmação de orgulho guei não poderiam ser compreendidas sem a presença das drag queens, profissionais praticantes de um travestismo diferente da travesti siliconada e mais próximo das transformistas de Carnaval” (Trevisan 2018, 351).

Though the NCTE's definition for drag queen is sound, its enactment as an identity of performance in Rio is colored by the legacy of the *transformista* and the continued fight of the *travesti*. Kulick (1998) describes the *travesti* as an identity that transcends omnipresent debates concerning essentialism and constructivism, whereby members of the community present as feminine, while maintaining a phallus and testicles. They are both men and women and neither, creating meaning through their own identity. Similarly, *transformista*, a term that refers to Brazilian men who dress up as women during Carnival, illustrates the importance of the cultural moment in the practice of cross-dressing.³ These terms have fallen out of favor in the drag scene in favor of the shortened, simplified, and de-gendered *drag*, which originates from English but is pronounced in Portuguese phonetics.

Question and Significance

This thesis centers itself in Rio de Janeiro as a unique site of contact between the local and the transnational. Brazil's history with colonization and its contributions to decolonial queer thought make it the perfect arena in which to analyze the clash between the subject and the subjugated in international queer theory. Rio's international tourist economy grants it the status of a cosmopolitan cultural metropolis, but it also is a stratified socioeconomic world. It is a unique landscape getting at the tensions between the global and the local in the formation of subculture. To this end, I propose the following question to be addressed in this project: *How is local drag performance culture generated in Rio de Janeiro in the context of a 21st century gay boom?*

³ The term *transformista* also exists in Spanish speaking Latin America, with a variety of different meanings. The identity, despite unique cultural performances in each country in which it is enacted, is transnational and carries with it multiple interpretations.

The 21st century “gay boom” referred to here is epitomized by its zenith, the release of *Drag Race Brasil* in late 2023. *RuPaul’s Drag Race* is an American reality television show that greatly impacts the formation of global drag scenes. It is also brought about by an increase in queer civil rights and visibility seen in the 21st century. Alumni of the show have access to an international list of clubs to perform at and can soundly make drag a profitable career. Since 2019, the American *Drag Race* production company World of Wonder (WoW) has been in an international development phase, with Brazil being the fourteenth country selected to host its own version of the show. It is hosted by a drag queen named, quite ironically, Grag Queen, and consists of 12 episodes. The drag queens of Rio that I spoke with repeatedly noted their excitement for the series, and many expressed to me that they began performing in drag because of the American iteration of the show.

Argument

I argue, however, that despite the influence of international media magnates like WoW, there are multiple carioca scenes present in Rio with unique features found nowhere else in the world.⁴ There is not a drag monoculture taking hold; queens maintain pronounced language, cultural symbols, and performance styles that are unique to their reality. Individual queens portray proudly their identities, leading to divergent artistic expressions. Within Rio, urban geography, prejudice, class, and competition combine to create a litany of venues available to queens, each of which represent a different type of carioca drag performance.

Methodology

I utilize the ethnographic analysis of interviews of queens performing in Rio de Janeiro. I conducted the interviews featured in Chapter 2 (5) in Rio from March to July of 2023.⁵ The

⁴ *Carioca* is the most popular denonym for someone from the city of Rio de Janeiro.

⁵ Notably, each of the interviews took place before the premiere of *Drag Race Brasil*.

Chapter 3 interviews (8) come from a podcasting project called *Arte Queer* funded by the city government of Rio, where queen Hannah Fenty sits down with veterans of the scene.⁶ In addition, it will engage in the thematic analysis of the recently released first season of *Drag Race Brasil* in order to get at drag's portrayal in international gay media. Through the analysis of these three mediums, this thesis will get at the interplay between the global and the local and imagine a new framework with which to theorize their interactions.

This thesis is structured to reflect the multi-leveled, multi-front process of culture generation that is taking place in Rio. This process is not unique to Rio; but the particular configuration of the city's scenes creates a natural laboratory from which to study the interaction of the local and transnational. Chapter 1 will explore existing literature surrounding drag, globalization, and media. Chapter 2 will explore how these individual personas combine to form local scenes. Chapter 3 will analyze the individual identities at play in the construction of a drag persona. Finally, Chapter 4 will analyze the perception of carioca drag from international media enterprises. Chapter 5 will merge these levels of analysis to imagine how the Rio scene and its *bonecas babadeiras* fit into a patchwork of global gay culture.

⁶ Accessible at <https://www.youtube.com/@podcastartequeer/videos>. These interviews were transcribed and coded in NVivo.

CHAPTER 1: THEORIZING DRAG IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

Brazilian drag queens seem to break all the rules that Euro-American norms dictate. English language literature often does not map well onto Rio de Janeiro, the historic center of Brazilian drag culture. Queer scholars, swept up into media-centered globalization studies, view Rio as yet another urban center with a burgeoning drag scene, choosing to focus on the city as a manifestation of a global, cosmopolitan gay culture. However, cultural generation in Rio is a dual front process, whereby the local and transnational fight ideological wars at interpersonal nodes in order to establish the direction of new norms, practices, and expectations in Rio drag scenes.

I argue that *travesti* and *transformista*, as terms with unique significance in the Brazilian and Latin American contexts, cannot be understood solely with the broad brush of global media studies and American-dominated queer theory. Brazilian drag interplays with *travestismo* to reject gender as an absolute while Euro-American notions have, up until quite recently, prioritized the conception of drag as the transition of one gender to another (Bragança 2019; De Souza and De Pádua Carrieri 2015). In the Brazilian context, to be a drag artist is to *ser*⁷ a drag queen; *montaçã*⁸ is not so easily escapable. Given the long-standing presence of such ideas in the Brazilian context, it is time to challenge the traditional notions that posit the development of diverse local drag cultures as the fruits of the Gay Liberation Movement in the Global North.

⁷ *Ser* is the Portuguese verb to be, intransitively. *Estar* means to be, but transitively. Brazilian drag scholars juxtapose the two in this context to distinguish between features of personhood that are always inherent to drag artists versus present transitively, while performing as a drag artist.

⁸ *Montaçao* is the noun form of the Portuguese verb *montar* which means to get in drag.

Beyond Butler

Judith Butler's 1990 seminal work *Gender Trouble* is a favorite amongst scholars looking to study drag from a gender theory perspective (Butler 1999). Butler theorizes gender as a social construction characterized by performance: "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler 1999, 179).⁹ The acts that we do and the ways they are perceived inform our interaction with greater social structures. For Butler, drag is the most obvious example highlighting the hypocrisy of gender essentialism, a strain of feminist theory that imagines the body and genitals as the determining constructors of gender (Butler 1999). As they put it in their 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, "Drag is an example meant to establish that 'reality' is not as generally fixed as we assume it to be" (Butler 1999, xxiii-xxiv). Under this framework, drag highlights the fault in logic inherent in the view that gender is a fixed biological class (Butler 1999). A male drag queen can present in a nightclub and be treated as a woman, being referred to as *she/ela*. Out of drag, *she/ela* is referred to as *he/ele* and is treated as such by the same people that formed part of the crowd in the club the night before.

Despite a collective reverence for the conclusions of *Gender Trouble*, Butler admits themselves that their original approach to drag's interplay with conceptions of gender was likely rushed (Butler 2009). Though the work attempts to "queer" feminist studies, its treatment of drag subtly reaffirms the gender binary, suggesting that drag is made interesting by juxtaposing the phallus with a pretty dress or sparkly jumpsuit. Butler's invocation of drag finds fault in essentialism by highlighting, what in her eyes, is the value of drag to queerness: "The

⁹ Butler's italics.

performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed” (Butler 199, 175). Such a value statement negates more inclusive definitions of what drag as a concept is, as an art that can be practiced by people of whatever anatomy or gender presentation.

Given theoretical difficulties, the current unspoken rule in feminist studies to make Butler an almost obligatory universal citation in every corner of the globe. This fact negates Butler’s own stated motivations to publish (Butler 1999).¹⁰ Butler argues that taking a transnational approach is essential in modern feminism to evade the construction of a “Third World” defined by “barbarism” (Butler 1999, 6). Taking a purely transnational approach, however, and neglecting the reality of a “Third World” constructed outside the bounds of feminist theory is particularly problematic (Herr 2014). Invoking such terminology does not necessarily lead to the creation of a separate “barbarism.” Rather, the “Third World” is already constructed, and looking to local voices helps give non-traditional theorists real agency. This work attempts instead to engage with a feminist framework that prioritizes “activisms in their particular local/national contexts” (Herr 2014, 2), rather than parrot the same Butler quotes for longer than I already have.

Towards a Brazilian Queer Theory

With this in mind, who do we look to in order to understand the carioca drag scene? In order to utilize postmodern queer theory to fit the 21st century context of Brazilian society, João Nemi Neto looks to a 1920s literary movement called the *Movimento Antropofagia* (Anthropophagic Movement) (Neto 2015). This movement, pioneered by Oswald de Andrade in

¹⁰ In their own words: “The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination... That form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a “Third World” or even an “Orient” in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism.” (Butler 2002, p. 6)

his *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928) attempted to “undermine the patriarchal institutions with which the European man had attempted to colonize Brazil” (Neto 2015, 49) via the invocation of a provocative and controversial metaphor:

The *antropófagos* – a collective of writers, painters, architects and artists from all disciplines – provocatively adopted and adapted a term associated with the indigenous practice of cannibalism (“anthropophagy”) to claim a self-consciously transformative stance of cultural and metaphorical *absorption* (swallowing), blending European avant-garde ideas with Brazilian traditions in order to create – in full-fledged modernist fashion something entirely new (Neto 2015, p. 2).¹¹

To the Portuguese colonists, the greatest evidence of indigenous “savagery” (or “barbarism,” as Butler puts it) was cannibalistic ritual (Neto 2015). Neto invokes the symbol as a radical rejection of colonial authority in art, literature, and theory while acknowledging that the hegemonic cultural position of Euro-American thought has produced valuable insights about the world. Neto (2015) contends, as does this thesis, that the foundational theorists of queer theory contain useful diagnoses of the Brazilian queer imaginary; however, consulting them monolithically creates a loss of descriptive nuance in the functioning of individual identities and local cultures.

To apply queer theory via an anthropophagic reading is to prioritize the identity descriptions of the individual over the transnational construction of identity categories. Neto (2015) looks to Flávio de Carvalho, a mid-twentieth century performance artist from São Paulo, as evidence of the individual variability of performance. In a series of three “experiences,” De Carvalho explores gender in urban São Paulo through a series of performative art pieces. In the last of these performances, De Carvalho parades through the streets of 1956 São Paulo in a “tropical gown” and records the reactions he faces. De Carvalho’s *Experiência #3* speaks to, in his words, “unisexualism of an era that will probably be returned to in new forms of

¹¹ Neto’s italics.

bisexualism” (De Carvalho 2010, 299, qtd. In Neto 2015). “Unisexualism” and “bisexualism,” to the extent through which they exist, represent a form of individual presentation without the need for the “*stylized repetition*” standard that Butler imposes at the end of the century. In the context of De Carvalho, the presentation of non-traditional gender performance can be exhibited as a one-off “experience,” challenging the notion that gender performance need be a transnational, universal, repetitive concept.

Using the theory of Neto (2015) and the example of De Carvalho’s 1950s performance art, this thesis argues that modern performances of drag and cross-dressing are not simply nodes that extend out of the global gay boom; rather, they are expressions of local and national queer culture only partially molded by hegemonic supranational enterprises. Rio, and Brazil at large, is heterogeneous in that it takes some aspects of transnational gay ideology and rejects others, imposing an individuality key to performance. In response to the research questions posed by this project, one can argue that the individual presentation of a drag persona plays an outsized role in the creation of new local cultural expressions.

Brazilian and Carioca Drag Imaginaries

Relatively little research has been done concerning culture formation amidst Brazilian drag queens. The most significant of these studies is quite old, published in 2005. Since then, few have explored questions of drag culture in the carioca context. LaGata (2005) compares the *transformistas* and drag queens of Rio de Janeiro with the *Tunten* of Germany, arguing that specifically national identity labels reign supreme over the global ‘drag queen.’ However, much has changed since 2005; traditional terms such as *transformista* coexist with the more modern *drag* or *drag queen*. Queens hold overlapping, and, at times, initially mutually exclusive identities. Most of the existing literature on drag artists in Brazil analyze the development of the artform through historical analysis. Gender bending performance has historically been apart of

the queer liberation movement in some form since its beginnings in Brazil (Trevisan 2021). Amanajás (2014) argues that the existence of self described *drags*, and with it, a drag culture arose in Brazil sometime in the 1970s and gained force in the 1990s. Despite this, there exists a major lack in domestic thinking concerning how drag impacts gender performance, how drag cultures form, and how Brazilian regionalism could condition the identity differently in different regions in Brazil.

The few ethnographic studies of drag queens in the states of Ceará, Rio de Janeiro, and Santa Catarina each use Butler as a starting point to describe gender performance (Bezerra 2018; De Oliveira 2019; Chidiac and Oltramari 2004). Drawing on Butler, Bezerra (2018) describes the practice of performing as a drag queen as “a suitability process that shifts a person’s unexceptional appearance that can translate between the [genders] (male, female, polymorph) and species (animal representations)” (7).¹² Key in this definition is transitivity—the ability to shift between genders or even species via getting in drag. Several Brazilian scholars use the juxtaposition of *ser* and *estar* to challenge the notions of transitivity inherent to drag performance (De Oliveira 2019; Chidiac and Oltramari 2004).¹³ De Oliveira (2019) notes that even as someone male identifying can enter and exit drag performance via *montação*, the vocabulary of drag, distinct from general “gay” language, is omnipresent in that individual’s lexicon. Many queens may shave their eyebrows, choose not to sport facial hair, or get cosmetic procedures to feminize their bodies in and out of drag. These intransitive features of the art fit

¹² *Gênero* was translated by the author as “genre,” but in the context it should be “gender.” The two terms are the same in Portuguese.

¹³ In Portuguese, the English verb “to be” has two distinct translations. *Ser* indicates being in permanent, intransitive contexts. *Estar* indicates being transitively. For example, *ser triste* (to be sad) indicates a personality attribute, one is sad fundamentally. *Estar triste* (to be sad) indicates sadness on a particular day or era.

into a gender performance framework defined by a “*stylized repetition of acts*,” (Butler 1999, 179) yet they are seldom considered as such.

Contextualizing the Global Gay Boom

This thesis, drawing on the works of Butler and Neto, proposes a new framework with which to imagine the development of local drag cultures amidst a transnational gay boom. The development of new culture is a result of the clash between the subjugated class and the dominant owners of the means of production. In this context, the mis-theorized Brazilian queen is subjugated to the imposition of a universal gay theory and capital structure, molding their presentation and livelihood. The coming chapters will attempt to describe the place of Rio queens in the patchwork of transnational gay culture, giving attention to a set of performances that might help scholars better understand culture generation in communities affected at multiple scalar levels.

As Neto (2015) contends, queer media and theory is eaten in the local context, digested, and spat out to create something entirely new with traces of the global and local all wrapped up into one. The expansion of Euro-American media conglomerates into the Global South and the development of domestic ideology have created an entirely new cannibalism; the subjugated culture, formed by the digestion and mixture of local and supranational norms, is being digested yet again by the dominant class through the expansion of drag reality television. The American production company World of Wonder, responsible for the development of *Drag Race*, molds the Brazilian narrative and chooses which parts of it to broadcast to the world through expanding its series to Brazil.

CHAPTER 2: MANUFACTURING *COMUNIDADE*

How do carioca queens interact with one another? As persecuted individuals in Brazilian society, this thesis fundamentally asks whether there is a *collective consciousness* amongst the queens of Rio de Janeiro. To get at cultural and subcultural dynamics, it is first necessary to establish whether there is a dynamic whatsoever and whether attitudes between queens form a positive or negative perceived culture in the Rio scene. Investigating this question, I consult in this chapter the primary interviews that I conducted with 5 drag queens in Rio from March to July in 2023.¹⁴ Due to scheduling and lingering concerns from the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the interviews occurred virtually while others occurred in person.

In cultural psychology, the concept of *culture* is established as scalable, meaning that the queens of Rio de Janeiro can be (but are not necessarily) part of a global gay and drag culture as well as a local scene culture or subculture (Wan and Chew 2013). This phenomenon occurs in religion, for example, whereby adherents to Islam may be connected to greater, transnational Muslim culture as well as a local culture based in one's mosque (Wan and Chew 2013). Rio's queens can be part of individual neighborhood scenes as well as nationally and transnationally by adopting the cosmopolitan label "drag queen." This thesis argues that drag queens in Rio function in a similar way, perceptions of community follow one of two camps—explicitly negative or inherently positive, largely driven by the social circles and experiences of individual queens.

¹⁴ These interviews were conducted with IRB approval. The project approved by the University of Mississippi IRB is entitled "Comparative Drag in the Americas: Rio de Janeiro, BR, Guadalajara, MX, and Oxford, MS, USA," protocol number 23x-142.

Though any queen can theoretically participate in carioca drag culture, socioeconomic realities and individual identities condition how and where queens can take up space. The city is divided into zones (*zonas*) that are not easily traversable, given urban geography. The legacies of racial and class exclusion in Brazil have also created physical stratifications in the city's landscape. Though drag performers are principally momentary characters, such characters, explored in Chapter 1, are not entirely escapable. Physical and social difference is mapped onto queens, and individual identities map back onto the community as a whole.

Drag Scenes and Urban Geography

The unique urban geography of Rio de Janeiro creates a major division between drag scenes and foments class division. The Tijuca National Park, an expansive gap of dense forest and mountain divides the city into three basic parts, the North Zone (*Zona Norte*), South Zone (*Zona Sul*), and West Zone (*Zona Oeste*), referent to the region's position to the mountains. In this thesis, I will focus on two of these regions within Rio for comparison, the North Zone and the South Zone, as well as the intermediary City Center (*Centro*), where two starkly different

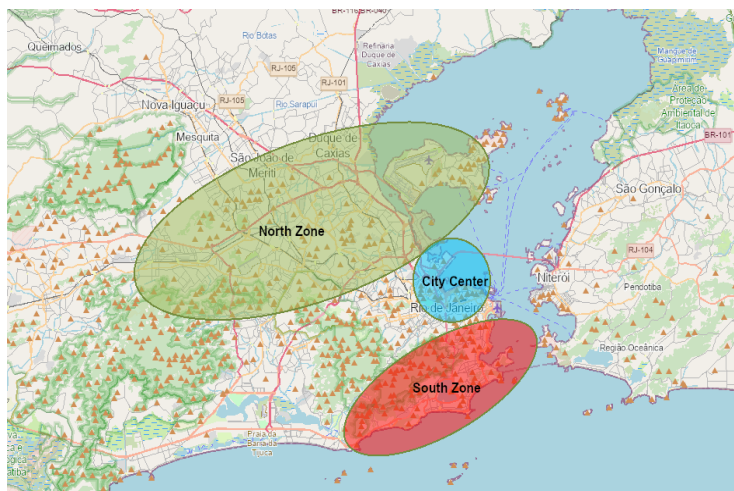


Figure 1 - A map of the zones of Rio de Janeiro. Created using ArcGIS.

drag economies lie. The City Center is the site of neighborhoods such as Lapa which provide a meeting ground for North and South Zone queens and partygoers. The South Zone is home to Copacabana and Ipanema beaches, as well as several queer nightlife venues catering to the city's

international tourist population. Those who live in the South Zone full-time must have financial means, as it is one of the most expensive regions in all of Brazil (Gaffney 2016). Where the

South Zone and Center meet the mountains are the favelas, unincorporated poorer areas characterized by sprawling streets and police conflict (Gaffney 2016; Pereira et al. 2019). The North Zone is home to a mostly working-class population, divided into multiple municipalities and neighborhoods. Between the two is the City Center (Centro) at which the two metro lines serving the North and South Zones of the city connect. It is here where much of the nightlife in the city occurs and the two sets of drag queens have the possibility of intersection. This region is also home to the Turma OK, one of the oldest continuous continually open drag bars in Latin America and the site of queer resistance during the socially conservative military dictatorship of the late 20th century (Figari 2007). Access to the Centro and its opportunities is highly conditional on one's place on a communal hierarchy, meaning that queens are relegated to one of two starkly different socioeconomic realities in the scene. Given the segmentation of the public transport system, it is quite difficult and relatively costly to get from one region to the other (Pereira et al. 2019). Such divisions limit the circles that queens find themselves in and the available venues for profitable work.

One manner in which a queen can cross the line into the wealthy bars of the South Zone is by achieving success in one of the competitions (*concurros*) that occur throughout the year in different zones of the city. These competitions include *Queens* (South Zone) and *Drag Star* (North Zone) which hold major reputational weight. Many of the queens performing at the Pink Flamingo, the club described at the beginning of this project, have several competition titles under their belt. Some, including Chloe V of the Pink Flamingo, have even competed on international *Drag Race* spinoff shows produced by WoW. Without the rubber stamp of one of these competitions or the recommendation of a veteran drag artist, many of the South Zone clubs are inaccessible to those starting their careers. These greater sociocultural dynamics inform the

production of micro-communities and families, in which queens support and recommend each other for gigs.

Micro-communities and Collectivity

To center individuals' perceptions of community (*comunidade*), I analyze the responses of queens in the primary sample to measure: "Do you feel a sense of community or family among the queens here in Rio de Janeiro?"¹⁵ To get at the particular aim of this chapter, which focuses on the construction of local subcultural dynamics, this measure is the best of those asked in the primary sample to get at the collectivization of identity and to theoretically describe the carioca drag subculture that is ingested by international media enterprises. Participant names in this sample are replaced with identifier numbers to maintain confidentiality, given that this data sample was constructed under IRB requirements. Below are excerpts and analyses for each of the (5) queens interviewed for the selected measure.

Queer communities have particularly sensitive configurations given the historical treatment of queer folk by their families. Weston (1997) proposes the term "chosen family," to describe networks of familial-like ties amidst queer people left behind by their biological families. This term has filtered through the international queer community, media, and, importantly, through the *Drag Race* machine. RuPaul is often quoted as saying, "As queer people, we get to choose our families." Especially in ballroom, a scene in which some of Rio's drag communities perform, families dominate, creating an interpersonal intimacy that goes beyond the typical connection between workers in a workplace. These families have been empirically proven to better the lives of its members, creating alternative discourses that

¹⁵ The measure used the following language in Portuguese: "Você se sente uma comunidade ou família entre as queens aqui do Rio?"

encourage regular HIV testing, spread awareness of PREP treatments, and provide socioemotional support to other queer folk (Young et al. 2017).

Two of the five queens (Participants #1 and #3) in the primary sample expressed strong feelings of community (*comunidade*) or family (*familia*) to describe the relationships that they have with other queens. These queens had a generally favorable opinion about interpersonal relations in the Rio drag scene. Such connections are described as cooperative, mutually beneficial, and necessary for obtaining work. Below are the responses of primary sample participants to the selected measure.

Participant #1

Participant #1 has generally favorable opinions concerning the degree of community in Rio. She comments that her drag is a product of support by more experienced queens, and that she is generally well liked:

So, when I started doing drag, I was influenced in my drag by a drag performer who was already old, a drag performer who had been doing drag for a long time. I hung out in the dressing rooms of nightclubs and saunas with old drags. I took a backstage approach with them, like cutting my hair in the dressing room and so on with them. But at the same time, I'm a new drag because I started recently. Not recently, I've been doing it for a while. But I started, I didn't have the same career as them. And I was also welcomed by the girls of my generation, you know? So nowadays, I don't have a family... I don't have a drag family, I have a drag family. There are two drags, four drags in my family. So I talk to everyone, when the drag queens in Rio know someone, but I'm not close to everyone. But I know them from their work and so on. And I'm very well received, I don't think I have any enemies, I think everyone likes me.

Participant #1 here uses the word family (*familia*) to describe her closest relationships in the city. Interestingly, though, the strong bonds available to her are markedly less important as she develops in her drag. She notes that merely four drag artists are in her family unit. The language of queer folk and families is notable here as well. RuPaul is often quoted saying that “as queer people, we get to choose our families” and it seems as if Participant #1 has done exactly this. As

the relationship with her born family deteriorated (possibly because she decided to do drag) fellow drag queens of the Rio scene took their place.

The concept of family is intangible and difficult to describe. In many ways, the queer family exists in opposition to the traditional patriarchal family structure. Nicholus (2018) argues that queer identities in the Brazilian Northeast are conditioned by physical and virtual ties that extend beyond the city and the same holds for Rio. Here, Participant #1 expresses the cooperative model that recent literature describes; she indicates that she has a “family” as opposed to “enemies.” While existing approaches have described these family structures in other regions of Brazil, few have focused on the city of Rio de Janeiro as uniquely different in its cultural production (Nicholus 2018).

Participant #3

Participant #3, one of few in the primary sample that started doing drag in Rio before the pandemic, has mixed emotions concerning the state of the scene in the city. However, she notably expresses a sense of support originating from veteran artists. She notes major changes since her beginnings in drag:

There are many drag queens who really like to convey a very optimistic image, like... "Ah, I think if I were to produce one thing, it would be world peace." But no, I really like being truthful with things. So, at the beginning I had a very strong support from the people at Turma OK, as I said, I started there in the drag competitions, which are old school, right? And in the beginning, when I started doing drag, the drag scene was very small. So, there were some who worked in very few nightclubs in the South Zone. There were drag queens and hairdressers who worked at some parties, in all the clubs. There was always a *bate-cabelo* drag show.

Participant #3 notes that there was “always a drag show” before a massive boom of new queens, but the scene seemed to be relatively small. She began doing her drag at the Turma OK, a drag house in Rio that claims to be the oldest queer club in Latin America, open for more than 60 years. This house predates the military dictatorship (1964-1985) and has continually included

drag queens in its festivities (Figari 2007). It is also worth noting that Turma OK represents, in contrast to the Pink Flamingo, a very traditional interpretation of *transformismo* whereby big wigs, heavy makeup, and flashy costumes are the norm. There is too here a reference to *bate-cabelo* a staple of Brazilian drag whereby queens take universally known club hits and perform to them, emphasizing hairgraphy and dynamic dance. Though she is not specific on the matter, it seems that the support from the veterans of Turma OK applied primarily at the start of her career. Family is conditional. Due to her presence at Turma OK, Participant #3 is one of the few queens in the sample that has interactions with the hyper-traditional drag scene in Rio and, thus, can speak at great lengths about the massive boom of queens that the city has seen.

This boom is, according to Participant #3, not necessarily because of *Drag Race*, as media centric scholars such as Castellano and Machado (2017) argue. Instead, Participant #3 points to a local contest, the *Queens* pageant, as responsible for Rio's drag boom:

After the *Queens* pageant, there was a boom and everyone wanted to do drag. The drag came out of the manhole, you took a step, and out of nowhere there was drag by your side. And there we are, where we are today, with this boom. And I had a family, nowadays my family consists of just one drag queen, who streams games.

It is not *Drag Race*, but in fact a local competition, the *Queens* contest, that Participant #3 diagnoses as the primary accelerant of a drag boom in the city. Despite the massive boom around the beginning of *Queens*, it is quite interesting this queen reports a contraction in the size of her drag family. More queens does not necessarily mean greater community on the whole, especially if the scene gets so large that this queen does not feel like she knows everyone. The first *Queens* competition took place in March of 2017, and excerpts from performances are posted publicly on YouTube. Numerous big-name queens from the *Arte Queer* sample, such as Raveena Creole and Conga Bombréia, as well as now alumni of *Drag Race Brazil*, such as Shannon Skarlet, have

performed there. It seems to be the one place in the Zona Sul where newer queens can fight to get into the ranks of the employed and beginning to see return on their drag.

It is also notable the marked contraction in the family structure of Participant #3. Interestingly, she counts one other drag queen as part of her “family,” begging the question of how many queens it takes to collectivize a family unit. As everything about the queer family seems to break with heteronormative notions of how the family is unformed, further work is needed to uncover the power structures inherent in the non-normative queer family. At what point does friendship become family, and when does family devolve into friendship? The positive effects of the collective family are dubious here—it does not appear, at least from the comments of Participants #1 and #3, that the family structure is built to last.

Micro-Conflict and Competition

The drag subcultures of Rio do not occur in a utopic, cooperative vacuum. Rather, the existence of many families and subcultures can, at times, create an inside/outside dynamic that excludes as much as it includes. Three of the five interviewed queens (Participants 2, 4, and 5) primarily expressed a competitive dynamic, by which older queens reserve space in high paying gigs while leaving newer talent out to dry. They shy away from the language of family, focusing on the negative or inauthentic interactions that they have had while performing in Rio.

Participant #2

Participant #2 implies that it is not bar owners, but rather the more experienced queens that hold the keys to the castle; access to the Pink Flamingo, the drag bar described at the top of this thesis, is entirely contingent on approval by drag veterans. If there are power brokering families in Rio, Participant #2’s remarks may give clues to who exactly the matriarchs of families are:

So, it's very complex with the veterans, the older drag queens with the younger ones, because there is a niche...I don't know if you know, which is the gay sauna, that there are drag shows in the sauna, and they do a lot of shows in the sauna and they make a lot of money, the oldest drag queens. So, for us to get there, it's very difficult, they don't open doors for us and they don't help us. There are some who embrace the new queens, who want to be with the new queens, so much so that at Pink Flamingo, the veteran drag queens, the old ones, who are working there, it's because they embraced us, the new ones.

Simultaneously, Participant #2 notes a barring of younger queens into the gay saunas, a feature of the Rio drag scene quite distinct from others. In Rio, there exist saunas which exist to facilitate sexual encounters between men. Though these saunas exist in many parts of the world, the inclusion of drag queens as an act has a particularly long history in Rio (Trevisan 2021). These gigs, from the way queens relayed to me information about them, seem to be the cash cow of the Rio scene, so it is quite telling that such spaces seem to be the hardest to break into for newer queens.

Participant #4

Participant #1 described a sense of family amongst the drag queens in Rio, but Participant #4 is careful to illustrate that this family is not all inclusive:

I had this... this family, and yes, I met other older drags, but there was a bit of prejudice against the younger ones, because... because the type of drag changed, right... with *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Brazilian drag was very Americanized, because we imported what we saw from the drag races, and then the older drags think we're losing what they started doing in Brazil. So some of them gave us support, some of them opened up opportunities for us to perform in theaters, in bigger places like that, and others wanted to avoid it, they wouldn't even talk to you. So, you're sharing a dressing room with them, the older ones would stay in their corner, they wouldn't even talk to you, you'd say good night, they wouldn't answer, and there were others who would welcome you, give you ideas and help, there was this, this division, but the younger ones, it really was a family, everyone helps each other.

There exists a tension expressed between younger and older more traditional queens in the scene, whereby few are willing to help those just starting out. The coldness that Participant #4 comments here is quite prominent; in Brazilian culture, failing to respond to a *boa noite* could be

interpreted as a deliberate act of maliciousness. Whereas the traditional *Paris is Burning* concept of a chosen family might feature a veteran matriarch, drag families in Rio amongst the newer generation of queens tend to occur between members of the same social generation, rather than structured laterally like in a traditional family. It could be that families with more established matriarchs and lineages hold more power to obtain bookings, while families formed between young queens serve as a form of friendly collectivization. It is interesting too here to note that while Participant #3 views *Queens* as the catalyst to the modern Rio drag boom, Participant #4 diagnoses the situation differently—with *Drag Race*, carioca drag was “Americanized.” Absent here are examples of such Americanization. Participant #4 deemed this claim so obvious that it did not warrant evidence. Nonetheless, the evidence provided in the quote seems to disprove such claims—chosen family structures do not follow those presented in American media enterprises. While there is unarguably influence from the United States in Rio, as evidenced by the widespread proliferation of English, for example, it is not plainly clear that such influence is responsible for generational conflict.

Participant #5

Rather than discuss the feeling of community amongst the queens, Participant #5 chose to use the measure to outline a perceived lack of cultural authenticity between the queens of Rio de Janeiro. Implicitly, using this question as a mechanism to express her attitudes about Rio gives clues to a sense of uniqueness or even loneliness in the work she does. To this participant there are the carioca queens, and there are others that simply do drag in Rio. She sees herself as one of few that represent carioca culture openly in her drag:

I think my drag is completely carioca. I think there are even very few drags here in Rio de Janeiro that I can say are from Rio. You can't even say a number like that, because I think there's me and one other, because we're, like, very carioca. And that's not to detract from the work of... No, I'm going to say three, now I've remembered another one, which

[REDACTED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY]. Because I think that when I talk about not belittling the work, it's about really having a clinical aesthetic, the carioca culture. Yes, this more or less southern peripheral thing, it's social confrontation, it's racial confrontation, it's carnal confrontation, elegant, illustrious, poverty, beach, mountain, that's Rio de Janeiro.

Absent here are descriptions of why other queens fail to represent carioca culture. There are examples of what carioca culture is—“carnal confrontation, elegant, illustrious, poverty, beach, mountain”—but little discussion of what it is not. This response gets at the question of *authenticity*, that underpins the comments of other queens that find Rio’s scene “Americanized.” Participant #5 fails to relate to other queens because of a perceived lack of this authenticity, looking instead to beyond Rio for inspirations in her drag. She spends much more time discussing the community found with São Paulo and Belem queens, which, while fascinating, are outside the local scope of this chapter. Such commentary validates the focus on the individual as a unit of culture, as drag culture and communities do not, in the view of this queen, reflect the other social concepts at the core of existing as an artist in Rio. Failure to encounter these concepts in drag has led this queen to be more isolated in the city, choosing instead to focus on relationships in other regions.

Analysis

The urban geography of division that creates different scenes with access to different socioeconomic opportunities. Via the quotes and discussion provided in this chapter, the subcultural dynamics of Rio queens are marked by opposite forces of division and cohesion, conflict and cooperation. Intergenerational competition emerges as a dominant theme; queens in the sample were more likely to characterize negatively drag veterans than they were to praise them. There is not one scene of drag queens in the city. Following the tradition of queer communities of the twentieth century, Rio queens often create chosen families with a select few

others while sometimes viewing negatively those outside of their units. Given vast urban geography, inequality, individual performance norms, and generational divides, it makes sense to argue that there is not one Rio scene but many. Drag queens simply do not spit out pieces of the culture that they are a part of; rather, the “carnal contact” between cariocas that Participant #5 so eloquently describes creates a heterogenous patchwork of drag scenes that, in turn, impose lateral pressure on the individual. The individual and the communities they form, then, exist in a positive feedback loop whereby the individual molds subcultures and the subcultures mold the individual. There is no one Rio culture, and there is no one drag culture there as a result.

CHAPTER 3: INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES

The most fundamental unit of carioca drag culture is the individual queen, the subjugated human that uses her body as a canvas. She drives the formation of culture and, without her consent, there is no greater collectivization. In a sociological study of the cultural dynamics of Key West drag queens, (Rupp and Taylor 2015) argue the following:

Collective identity, or a sense of “we-ness,” is activated through interactions among members of marginalized groups in networks and free spaces outside the surveillance of dominant groups. Performance studies scholars demonstrate that cultural forms have the potential to construct and affirm collective identity and solidarity at two levels: *internally* through articulation of boundaries and community among those engaged in the performance; and *externally* through the formation of transcendent collective identities that redefine the meaning of community. (219)

This chapter concerns itself with the *internal* construction of drag identity necessary to externalize subculture. Given the artistic nature of the work that drag artists do and the relatively small size of the scene until recently, the individual has had an outsized role in the driving of new enterprises and norms. This chapter argues that identities, namely race and class, are personalized, consumed, and expressed via performance art. They also contribute to the dynamics of cohesion and divergence as expressed in the previous chapter.

Cultural homogenization is a misnomer; two members of the same group do not necessarily behave in the same way that a generalized cultural studies approach might describe (Appadurai 1990). This individualism is especially pronounced in drag scenes—some focus on comedy, others on burlesque, and still others on live singing. Even to the extent that this thesis can create generalizations of cultural norms, there will always be outlier cases. Rather than discard the outliers, building upon Neto’s (2015) conception of new theory generation, it might be better to view the differential experiences of diverse performers as indicators of future

directions in the scene. The urban geography of Rio augments this phenomenon as well; physical barriers further the creation of not just one scene, but multiple, occurring and growing in different zones of the city at the same time. Differences in racial identity, income, family support, and a variety of other unique, personal factors are important aspects conditioning scene creation. In this chapter, I will highlight intersecting identities that Rio queens indicated as determinative to their experience performing in the city, and analyze how such identities independently shape new cultural generation. As will be illustrated through the data, these identities are not understood in the same manner in all drag venues. The data consulted reveals that overlapping intersectional identities are key determinants how the individual performer imagines their drag.

In order to inform this approach, I consult the series *Arte Queer*, an online, publicly available series of interviews hosted by Rio queen Fenty Hannah and partially funded by the City of Rio's culture fund (Hannah 2023). This podcast features eight secondary interviews between queens that perform in eight diverse neighborhoods of the city. These neighborhoods are

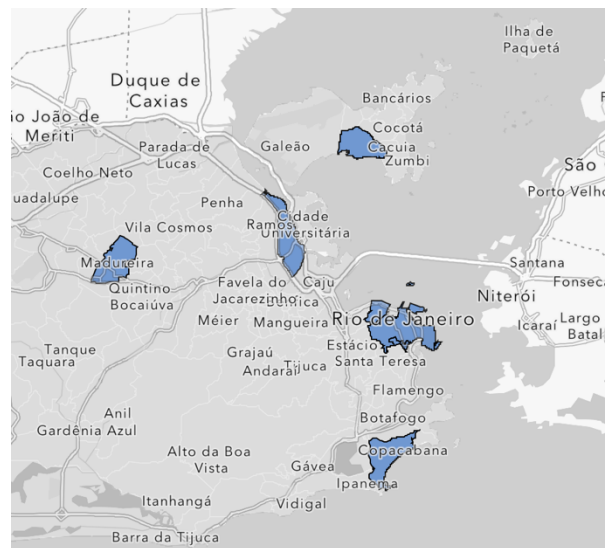


Figure 2 - A map of the neighborhoods with queens in the *Arte Queer* sample.

highlighted in blue in the figure above. Rio contains a geographically diverse multitude of realities, combining in their perception from the outside, necessitating a non-random sampling strategy that brings to light diverse interactions with the Rio scene at different sites of performance. In addition, I will examine pieces of primary interviews that I conducted in Rio.

These interviews were electronically transcribed and qualitatively coded using NVivo. Codes were generated based on recurring themes that reflected each queen's interaction with the Rio scene. In this chapter, the results of two codes—race and class—will be reported and analyzed, illustrating that drag culture in Rio is not homogenous and does not treat all drag artists equally.

Race and Blackness

To dialogue with race in the Brazilian context is inherently political. As Telles (2006) argues in his seminal work *Race in Another America*, sociologists have only recently begun to counter historical narratives that due to its diversity, Brazil is a post-racial society. Traditional sociological analysis to this effect has been put into question, and the twenty-first century political scene has marked the move to a deliberate policy of affirmative action in the public sphere (Telles 2006). To study racial identity in Brazil in 2024 means to place oneself squarely on one side of this debate—does Brazil's diversity make it a post-racial society or is “racial discrimination persistent and structural” (Telles 2006)? Race is constructed differently in Brazil than the United States, as it is greatly morphed by Brazil's dark history with the enslavement of Africans, whereby more enslaved humans were forcibly brought to Brazil than any other country (Telles 2006; Fausto 2008).

Though entire theses could be written concerning the significance of race in the Brazilian context, I present here the foundational concepts of racial formation theory in Brazil to theoretically base the comments to follow by queens in the Rio scene. It is also important to reiterate that race is *socially constructed* and *context variant*. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IGBE) has, since the late 1990s, employed a self-report race measure on the national census that allows respondents to elect their personal racial identity in an open-ended format (Telles 2006). The result is a patchwork of racial ideologies based primarily on pigment (Telles 2006). Given the urban geography discussed in the previous chapter, separation,

on different urban bounds than in the United States, occurs. Three of the eight queens in the *Arte Queer* sample—Conga Bombréia, Preta QueenB Rull, and Raveena Creole—self-identify as Black (*negro/a/e*). Four of the eight queens significantly acknowledged racial dynamics in the Rio drag scene, the three previously mentioned queens plus Samantha Rios. Below are essential excerpts from their commentary.

Conga Bombréia on Racism in the Zona Sul

As Conga Bombréia, a queen that typically performs in the peripheral region of Governor’s Island (Ilha do Governador), puts it: “I have a huge problem doing shows in the South Zone, because I still think that people from the South Zone have the preconception that good drag is skinny drag, good drag is White drag.” Such dynamics certainly are not unique to the Rio scene, but their manifestations have particular consequences in the creation of a drag culture. Capital is centered in the South Zone of the city, and is home to the greatest concentration of queer clubs aimed at hosting tourists. Despite this, Conga Bombréia describes the racial dynamic in some venues in the region as tense: “There’s a venue in the South Zone that I, honestly, stopped frequenting because I don’t feel good when I go there in any way.” If the clubs with the highest covers, greatest access to the tourist population, and most famous performers are less welcoming to queens of color, it is that much more difficult for them in Rio to make a living as a performer.

Samantha Rios on Inclusion in Competition Judging

Samantha Rios, as a veteran of the Rio scene, is a major player in the ascension (or failure) of new queens on the scene. She hosts *The Queen*, a theater exhibition similar to reality television competitions. She discusses the race in the context of the panel of judges.

We have to understand our errors and take from them a lesson. I understand this, so much so that one of the errors that I committed, well, not that I committed, more that I didn’t

realize... I realized in this third season of *The Queen*, it wasn't, it's not nothing, many times many people asked me if I took Miami Pink off of the jury. We changed the jurors. It wasn't anything against Miami, I love Miami, I am so thankful for Drag Star and what she did in *The Queen* in the two seasons we had, but I looked at that panel and I felt the fault of a Black queen there.

Here, Samantha Rios, a sort of drag veteran on the Rio scene, describes the adoption of affirmative action, common among progressive Brazilian politics. Though changing the judging panel is far from the massive changes brought about by reconciliatory national policy, the two seem to be intimately related. Rather than reject the imagined "racial democracy" as a farse, Samantha Rios intends to enact a more representative jury, signaling the need for continual uplifting of subjugated voices.

Raveena Creole on Blackface in Media

Raveena Creole, a veteran of the scene and Rio's sole representative to the domestic reality television show *Caravana das Drags*, is asked about an incident involving blackface that involved another queen on her season.

We [Black folk] think that we are prepared to live these moments because from the moment that one understands they are Black, they study this. We study about this precisely to be prepared to experience moments in which we know that our society is structurally racist, but we're never really prepared really. We think we are but we're not. And when it happens, we don't even have the ability to react.

Drag always involves transformation and often necessitates transition. Referring back to (Bezerra 2018) definition of drag, acceptable transition can occur across gender or species, but notably these queens note that race is not transmutable. Keeping this in mind, Fenty Hannah asks Raveena Creole what the limit to drag's transformative power is: "I think that we, as people, not just drag queens, have to know what point we can go to without passing the limit." The vagueness inherent in this response indicates that, at its most basic level, there is not a uniform defined limit to drag's borders; they are personal and open for discourse. Queens like Preta QueenB Rull can travel about different subcultures and physical scenes, but cannot acceptably

morph their personal racial identity, illustrating that there are limits to the transitive nature of carioca drag.

Preta QueenB Rull on Ballroom in Maré

Where possible, some queens choose rather than to minimize their Blackness to appease Zona Sul tourists and locals, to create new spaces for up-and-coming talent. As was the case in New York in the late 20th century, Rio is home to a budding ballroom culture, centered in the neighborhood of Maré, far from the exclusionary environment of the Zona Sul that Conga Bombreia describes. Ballroom, a queer subculture depicted in the famous documentary *Paris is Burning*, features primarily urban queer folk of color competing in voguing, runway, and talent categories. Preta QueenB Rull, an artist in Rio's ballroom scene, succinctly describes the history of the art:

The culture was born in the sixties, attempting to start dance events aimed at exalting Black and Latino people in the United States, starting with Crystal Labeja, who was a *travesti*, who was indignant seeing the events occurring in the era. The dance competitions didn't award prizes to Black folk, so she decided to create her own events that would be able to award Black people. From there starts all of ballroom.

The expansion of ballroom into Rio has much of the same goals as were espoused in the United States—to create spaces for marginalized bodies to thrive.

This scene's emergence is, in Preta QueenB Rull's eyes, aimed at precisely the communities marginalized by dominant discourse:

The culture and scene here in Rio de Janeiro is very new. We're doing work that's really beautiful... and it's arriving in the *favelas*, you know? It's arriving for Black people. I see many Black friends of mine that I see doing this or that and I say, wow, I want to execute this move, I want to do that, because this comes from us, you know? In a few years from now, my love, I can see ballroom culture dominating the *favelas*. Black folk that still haven't seen it will in the future.

Interestingly, unlike the reality of ballroom in places like Mexico, Preta QueenB Rull considers ballroom as squarely part of the drag scene rather than a reactionary movement moving against

it. In the imagination of a drag queen, ballroom and alternative scenes are, at least from the point of view of one of its performers, considered inseparable from dominant drag discourses. Given that queens like Preta QueenB Rull participate in spaces like the Pink Flamingo and the peripheral balls of Maré, there is not a significant separation of the two imagined identities.

Analysis

Given the large influx of tourists that this part of the city receives each year, it is quite telling that Conga Bombréia and other performers write off the public in the region as especially discriminatory. This is what led Conga Bombréia to found *Drag Star*, a competition that occurs on the Ilha do Governador, and at least partially motivates Preta QueenB Rull to continue expanding the ballroom scene. Raveena Creole comments that she felt shocked and without words when encountering blackface by another on *Caravana das Drags*, feeling as though she should have a response for having ‘studied’ this. Samantha Rios employs affirmative action on the judging panel of *Queens* to make the jury more representative of contestants.

Navigation of race, as is present in Brazilian society at large, is especially reckoned with in queer spaces. This is not to implicate that queer Brazilian debates about race are more progressive or effective than in the United States, but it is interesting to note that these comments fit more closely with (Telles 2006) description of the general racial climate in Brazil rather than mimicking those of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* or social media in the United States.

Class

Whereas scholarly conversations acknowledging the reality of racism in Brazil are relatively new, class has been the proxy for inequality most persistent in Brazilian society. João Goulart’s proposed *reformas de base* (base reforms) in 1961 significantly acknowledged the reality of Brazilian inequality (Fausto 2008). These proposed reforms would have enacted mild wealth and land distributions in order to promote equality, but were halted by a military coup

d'état in 1964 (Fausto 2008). From 1964 to 1985, Brazil suffered a brutal military dictatorship that valued economic progress, as evidenced by the rapid development of cities like São Paulo, and concentrated wealth among the few (Fausto 2008). One could argue that the very existence of the military dictatorship at the end of the twentieth century is related to discourses around class.

Ending with the establishment of a democratic constitution, the military dictatorship failed to reckon with inequality and spurred development at all costs (Fausto 2008). The result is a modern Brazilian society that is profoundly unequal. Despite this, since the end of the military dictatorship in 1988 and the establishment of a new constitution, the GINI coefficient of Brazil has fallen from a peak of 63.3 (1989) to 52.9 (2021), making the country considerably more unequal than the United States and its South American neighbors, save Colombia and Suriname (World Bank 2024). The result is that the drag queens of Rio de Janeiro, who partake in an unregulated and underpaid career, often have to make sacrifices to perform their art. Below are excerpts from four *Arte Queer* interviewees discussing the costs and sacrifices necessary to doing drag in Rio.

Gui Mauad on the Financial Cost of Doing Drag

To maintain one's reputation depends on the material upgrading of ones costumes, dresses, and makeup. Though drag has been continually shifted by the *Drag Race* model in the United States to a full time job, this is not always possible in Rio. Often, queens report just scraping by. As Gui Mauad puts it:

I think my drag has grown along with the opportunities. So, to see what you see in *Queens*, in the first season that I took part in, I, like, didn't have money to make clothes, I couldn't afford these things. Even... today I have to say, it's an illusion to tell you that this here, that I break even, I don't. Like, most of the time I spend more than I receive, and like, this is something I do deliberately because I think it's an investment and it's taken me to many other places, you know?

Gui Mauad seems perfectly content with spending more money than she makes. Long term, however, this is not sustainable and can result in putting queens in debt. More than 70% of Brazilian families have significant credit card debt (Granjeiro and Santos 2016). If the level of artistry expected of queens is set to increase, so too should wages for a relatively expensive artform. There too exists a lack of tipping culture in Brazil that can help to make up the difference for drag queens in the United States. It is overall quite troubling that a queen, at the level of local fame that would warrant being interviewed in this series, cannot make a living off of their drag persona.

Samantha Rios on the American Finance Model

The price of drag is only on the climb. Why might this be occurring? One queen Samantha Rios, diagnoses the reason behind this quite succinctly:

When you compare a Brazilian drag queen with an American drag queen, think about the amount she is spending in Brazil and the other is spending much more abroad. I think that art has to be respected, regardless of the level of costumes and production, you know? It has to depend on the art being delivered. I think that's my vision.

Here, Samantha Rios makes an unprompted comparison with the drag of American queens versus Brazilian queens. In a city like Rio, where so much of the drag public are foreign tourists, what is expected of carioca queens is often of a higher standard, or at least Samantha Rios perceives it that way. There seems too here a supposition that there is an intangible “art” or artistic taste that money cannot buy; Samantha Rios implores drag fans in Brazil to appreciate the artistic intent of drag artists more than the complexity of their presentation.

However, it is important to note that Samantha Rios’ conception of an “American drag queen” must be highly shaped by media. There are drag queens, alumni of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* that spend a lot of money on their drag, choosing to dress themselves in designer labels.

Nonetheless, there also exists many more local queens just scraping by as some of the Rio

queens express. It seems here that there may be a touch of antagonism toward her American counterparts for raising the bar, so to speak, but there exists a multitude of scenes and cheap drag, thus it is interesting to see here what this is what Samantha Rios thinks of. She sees herself as not competing with the average American drag queen, but with those that have reached the peak of her careers.

Meme dos Brilhos on Multiple Sources of Income

Those in the early to middle stages of their career have an especially difficult time making ends meet. While the luster of *Drag Race* leads young queens to believe that their art can be easily turned into a career, many queens must maintain second jobs just to be able to buy clothing for their character. Meme dos Brilhos comments on working multiple jobs to support her drag:

I don't leave my profession. Sometimes I work late, I run, it sucks, but do my job, keep my job. Now, nowadays, do you want to make a living from shows? Ah, my friend. It does not work. There won't be any way. It won't be possible because it's very expensive here. For me it is very expensive. Everything is very expensive. I like changing, storing clothes. I have a room in my house just for Meme, which is smaller... bigger than Luz Stadell's room, who is my horse.

Meme dos Brilhos seems to view it impossible to make a living only off shows, running from a day job to the club to express her artwork. Noticeably absent here is a discussion of what exactly is so expensive that it makes drag an unprofitable career. There are likely multiple factors at play—rising prices due to inflation or the unregulated gig economy characteristic of drag in the city could be driving up prices. Nonetheless, a forty hour work week at a day job plus hours performing and working at the club is undoubtedly not an easy life to live.

Analysis

Gui Mauad and Meme dos Brilhos seem to imply that it is impossible to make money as a full time drag queen in Rio de Janeiro, but Samantha Rios is the example of a queen doing

exactly that. Notably, she has had quite long career and is considered one of the most famous queens in the Rio scene. This is not to say that Gui Mauad and Meme dos Brilhos employ some type of low-impact drag; all of the queens included in the *Arte Queer* sample are undoubtedly experts in their fields and were selected to fill one of eight spots on the interview series. In all, drag is an expensive profession with little material award; most queens must work two jobs or more in order to constantly evolve as drag artists and entertain the public.

The Construction of the Carioca Drag Queen

The queens of the *Arte Queer* sample are certainly better off than the majority of the queens that I spoke to in Rio. They are celebrities in their own right, and thus the peaks and valleys of their careers ought to be taken with this caveat. However, it is clear from the data presented that being a drag queen in Rio de Janeiro is certainly not easy, and comes with it exposure to inherently racist and classist systems. Such divisive and exclusionary forces help to drive a wedge between scenes and queens, though actions such as the judging panel reforms of Samantha Rios are attempting to ameliorate structural division. On the individual level there is, despite such challenges, an aura of change amongst Rio queens, that implement affirmative and progressive practices such as inclusion on competition juries, and a sense of manufactured community that persists despite challenges.

CHAPTER 4: THE *DRAG RACE* MACHINE

Although it is clear from the testimony of queens that there is not, in fact, a monoculture forming amongst the drag queens of Rio de Janeiro, it is also true that American media enterprises have a major effect on the way that cariocas understand drag. With the introduction of *Drag Race Brazil* to the international media markets, there now in theory exists a fast lane for Brazilian queens to participate in the global drag gigs, becoming known outside of city or national borders.

Despite the extreme difficulty in accessing the *RuPaul's Drag Race* for much of its early years, massive Brazilian fandoms of the show formed via illegal downloads (Castellano and Machado 2017). These illegally downloaded episodes were then fansubbed, a process by which bilingual drag fans created unauthorized Portuguese subtitles due to a lack of commercial availability (Sarfati and Dos Santos 2022). There is a hunger in the Brazilian queer community to form part of the global queer debate, and the lengths gone to in bringing *Drag Race* to Brazil are quite compelling evidence of this. When *Drag Race* entered its international expansion era in 2019, World of Wonder, the production company behind the show, chose to prioritize the creation of international franchises in Asia, Europe, and Oceania. World of Wonder left Latin America alone until 2023, when it produced *Drag Race Mexico* and *Drag Race Brazil*.¹⁶ Brazil has some of the most vibrant and storied drag cultures in the world that hold historical legitimacy in the queer liberation movement and a relatively large media market (Trevisan 2021; Figari

¹⁶ The only foray into Latin American domestic markets before 2023 was a short-lived Chilean spinoff show called *The Switch* which did not stay true to the *Drag Race* format. Amongst *Drag Race* fans, it has largely been forgotten.

2007). It is quite surprising, then, that WoW waited four years to break into a scene with a massive existing drag fanbase.

This is partly because of a patchwork in the ownership of rights to the Brazilian series. Endemol Shine Brasil, a domestic media company, bought the rights to produce a Brazilian series of drag race in 2017, but allowed the contract to expire in 2020, citing a rise in conservative backlash to drag (Adelino 2017; 2020). It has been widely speculated, though never confirmed via official publication, that *Drag Race Brasil*, *Drag Race Mexico*, and *Drag Race Germany* were filmed in the same studio in Colombia, due to a Paramount partnership for these series. Thus, the first season of *Drag Race Brasil* was likely filmed by a largely Colombian crew, in a foreign nation with a different language. Though these rumors were never officially confirmed by WoW or Paramount, if true, they offer interesting questions concerning cultural authenticity, domestic queer participation, and the status of queer media in Brazil.

To describe how WoW interprets, digests, and portrays Brazilian and carioca culture via its new international franchise, I engage in this chapter an analysis of the first season of *Drag Race Brasil*, which premiered in August of 2023. The show is judged by a panel headed by Grag Queen, a Brazilian drag music artist and winner of WoW's *Queen of The Universe* Season 1. Tracing the development of storylines and personas throughout the season, this thesis specifically focuses on the depiction of carioca queens inside greater drag culture. I focus on the creation of cultural communities on three levels: within Rio de Janeiro, within Brazil, and internationally. Of the 12 queens featured in the season, 3 were cariocas, all of whom appeared in the final 4. The winner of Season 1, Organzza, is from Rio and represents boldly carioca culture in her art. I trace here through each episode of the season depictions of Brazilian and

carioca culture to reveal where appropriations occur and how the American *Drag Race* model is mapped onto Brazilian queens.

Brazil is Different

Despite closely following the formula of a drag race series, *Drag Race Brasil* is insistent from the beginning of the series that “Brazilian drag is different” (Ep. 1, 42:46). By analyzing the few places in which the Brazilian franchise adapts and changes *Drag Race*-isms, it is clear to see how Brazilian queens see their drag as different and what the purpose behind it may be. One of the most visible manners in which the patchwork of cultures manifests in the creation of *Drag Race Brasil* lies in the language used to describe the events of the scene. *Drag Race* has a well-followed flow that is internalized by fans. For the most part, this pattern is followed in international productions. *Drag Race Brasil* is no different. RuPaul's characteristic call to queens before a lip sync is always “Good luck, and don’t fuck it up.” *Drag Race Brasil* adapts the translation, repeated each episode: “Boa sorte, e não façam cagada.” The phrase “shantay, you stay” becomes “shantay, você fica.” Structurally, *Drag Race Brasil* is indistinguishable in format when compared to each of the other series. English also persists, queens describe themselves with the terms “Black excellence” (Ep. 3, 43:20) and interchangeably use *lip-sync* and the Portuguese term *dublar*.

Beyond the surface of a well-practiced format of challenges and sayings, there exists unique features of Brazilian language that is lost in the captions. In addition to pieces in English, the text of *Drag Race Brasil* is rich in Pajubá, a dialect of Brazilian Portuguese traditionally used by queer folk, especially in the *travesti* community (Rodrigues 2022). Pajubá arose from mixtures of Portuguese and West African languages brought by the enslaved to Brazilian shores. Considered an unofficial street dialect for some time, movements in the late 2010s have drawn attention to Pajubá as a legitimate and reproducible dialect of Portuguese actively used by

speakers (Dos Anjos, Ramos, and Tabayara 2024). Common vocabulary words of the dialect are used throughout the show, specifically with ample context to express the meaning of the word to all, even those unfamiliar with Pajubá.

The purposeful inclusion of Pajubá in *Drag Race* language represents an intentional decision to place Brazilian culture at the front of the *Drag Race* format. Nonetheless, as an international entry to the existing *Drag Race* universe, familiarity with English queer language is a must. Some of the lip-syncs, which close each episode of *Drag Race*, are performed to songs with English lyrics. The final challenge, a music video to series host Grag Queen, is to a song with sections in English and Portuguese, “Party Everyday.” The bilingualism of *Drag Race Brasil* mirrors interpersonal interactions that I had in Rio with queens of the scene; many queens in the South Zone of Rio can code switch and have proficiency in English. Dialogues in the series do not occur in English, but terms are appropriated and transformed to describe events on the show. Grag Queen, for example, opens each episode, walking into the Werk Room and asking “what’s up, lindas?” Proficiency in English is necessary to participate in *Drag Race* culture outside of Brazil, should the queens of the series wish work internationally. Grag Queen herself won season 1 of the English *Drag Race* spinoff *Queen of the Universe*, which required active fluency in English. Opportunities for queens to compete in front of RuPaul herself require an excellent fluency in English, and queens are faulted for comic timing and naturalness despite language barriers. RuPaul is technically an Executive Producer on all series of *Drag Race*, and the infusion of the English language comes from the top. Even the term used to describe the queens, *drag queen*, is an anglicized term with political context. This term is selected often times over more traditional Portuguese terms for the art, such as *travesti* or *transformista*.

In addition to English and Pajubá, the language of *Drag Race Brasil* is even affected by select, but very few, terms in Spanish. The final lip-sync of the series occurs to Brazilian pop star Anitta's Spanish hit "Envolver," which had a ton of success in both Brazil and Spanish speaking Latin America. At least a precursory knowledge of Spanish is necessary for the queens of the Pink Flamingo, as Chilean and Argentinian tourists abound. Knowing how to lip-sync in Spanish, regardless of conversational ability, is essential in Rio; "Latin" nights necessitate knowing the words to Shakira and Nathy Peluso songs.

To the untrained eye, it may appear that English and Spanish are taking over from Pajubá as the gay lexicon in the nightclubs of Rio. *Drag Race Brasil*, however, provides a counter to such arguments. Pajubá is already a dialect that draws on a variety of languages, including West African tongues like Yoruba as well as French and English (Rodrigues 2022; Dos Anjos, Ramos, and Tabayara 2024). While English may be emergent as the lingua franca between queer folk on the ground in Rio, its domestic inclusion in the scene is accompanied by traditional Pajubá terms that originate from Yoruba. While Pajubá is not necessarily a dialect used separately from general normative Brazilian Portuguese, the inclusion of terms and sayings helps to form microcultures between queer folk (Dos Anjos, Ramos, and Tabayara 2024). For example, the queens of *Drag Race Brasil* continually tease one queen, Naza, for the presence of her *chuchu*, a Pajubá term meaning "beard" in a derogatory way. To comport oneself with a beard in drag is not necessarily a sin—Tristan Soledade does so on the season without comment. However, the interjection of the word *chuchu* into a joke about a queen serves as an amplifier. Its slightly derogatory implication facilitates a closeness between queens and an extra expressiveness to speech not similarly available in English-speaking franchises.

Depictions of Carioca Drag

Of the final four in *Drag Race Brasil* Season 1, all were born in Rio de Janeiro and three of the four maintain drag careers there. Carioca drag is elevated as the best that Brazil has to offer, and queens are deliberate in the expression of carioca cultural features, principally on the runway. The three self-described carioca queens of *Drag Race Brasil* season 1 are Miranda Lebrão, Betina Polaroid, and the season's winner Organzza. Each of the queens brings a distinct version of carioca culture with different symbols and references. Many of these references are shown on the runway, in each episode's fashion catwalk (*pasarela*).



Figure 3 - Organzza's look for the "Minhas Raizes" runway on *Drag Race Brasil*, Episode 2, 30:47.

Pictured to the left are the inaugural looks of Organzza who describes herself here as the “Queen of the Favela” (*Rainha da Favela*). The cape includes the classic colorful painting stylization of Rio’s favelas sold by street vendors in the city. Organzza is from the North Zone and represents the beauty of her origins by combining streetwear and iconic carioca art. Participant #5 of the primary sample described Organzza as one of the most prominent queens representing the carioca identity in the city’s scene. Given the sprawling urban geography of Rio and the constant contact between the working and upper classes, there exist multiple possible depictions of Rio that all are arguably authentic in their representations of the city.

Betina Polaroid, by contrast represents the famed Ipanema sidewalk design of Roberto Burle Marx. Her cape, pictured here, shows the view of Christ the Redeemer from the point of view of the South Zone. This too fulfills the runway category of “My Origins.” Betina Polaroid’s depiction of Rio represents an upper class vision; Rio is not defined by its sprawling urban inequality and symbols of division.



Figure 4 - Betina Polaroid's look for the "Minhas Raizes" runway on Drag Race Brasil, Episode 1, 38:56.

It is best represented, according to this artistic expression, with the characteristic sidewalks that follow the sea in the wealthy South Zone. Given that drag queens form a community based on the commonality of artistic expression, it makes sense that divergent individual identities mark the production of cultural symbols.

While the two previous runway looks explicitly feature parts of carioca urban geography, it is also important to note that “carioca drag” does not necessarily have to contain explicit reference to the city. Given that drag expression originates from the individual, personal identities such as race can be utilized to make social commentary and represent Black culture. In Episode 7 of *Drag Race Brasil*, Organzza dedicates a look to Iemanjá, the goddess of the sea in the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé. Though the goddess and religion are



Figure 5 - Organzza's white look from Drag Race Brasil, Episode 7, 37:46.

explicitly African in nature, the symbol has been appropriated on New Years Eve, an event where coastal Brazilians put offerings on the sea to the goddess to bring in a new year. Such a performance is evidence of a very particular carioca culture; had some of the other queens chosen to represent Iemanjá for this runway, there would be questions of appropriation and authenticity. Here, Organzza portrays a carioca event that fits with her self-described Blackness. She describes her look succinctly: “I’m from Rio de Janeiro, and I’m always in Lapa. And we will always run into these energies from Maria Padilha, Maria Mulambo, and Pombajiras.” These references to Maria Padilha and Maria Mulambo represent the particular contact that Afro-Brazilian religions had with Portuguese Catholicism; these “Marias” combine Catholic theology and African tradition (Vianna 2022).

Analysis

Drag in Brazil and Rio is not only conditioned by the local and international forces pushing on the queens, but personally based on identity, experience, and representation. There is not one Rio. There exists the Rio of Ipanema and luxury, as well as the Rio of failed statehood, precarity, and struggle. There exists, too, a historical memory of Rio portrayed via religious resistance and Black excellence. While *Drag Race Brasil* adapts the format of its American predecessors, uniquely Brazilian language, culture, and expression allow the carioca queens to express their artwork, projecting earnest portrayals of cultural capital to an international audience.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I aimed to describe processes of *cultural generation* amongst the queens of Rio de Janeiro. This process is not uniform and is reliant on several factors. Urban geography and inter-queen competition play a major role in shaping what queens get in the same room with each other. Individual identities such as race and class impact how queens are treated by others and by society at large. External international factors, epitomized by the expansion of WoW, undoubtedly play a role, but queens find ways to exhibit their local cultures and personal brands despite homogenizing media formats.

Butler's (1999) argument that gender is a “stylized repetition of acts” (179) means that the art produced by carioca queens is gender representation. Gender is highly personal and politicized not only in Brazil, but in the world over, that view consume and comment on carioca drag. To be a drag queen in Brazil, or anywhere for that matter, is not an easy endeavor. The personal nature of gendered art creates a sense of fragility. Queens perceive attacks on their drag as an affront to their personhood, largely because being a drag queen is an intransitive state. Queens escape drag, but they do not escape the commentary or cynicism when they are not *montada*. To appear on a show like *Drag Race Brasil*, one must curate an excellent drag aesthetic as well as an intriguing personhood that transcends dresses, makeup, and high heels.

The queens of Rio de Janeiro put (Neto 2015) thesis into action. In existing at the Pink Flamingo and regaling tourists, queens are anthropophagizing and digesting external cultures and incorporating them into their personal art. Such performances are repeated in Rio, leaving with other queens traces of foreign influences. In addition, carioca cultural symbols are projected again and again, allowing the city of Rio to serve as a laboratory in which to view the

development of new caricatures of queens. Cultural distribution is far from egalitarian; separations due to family ties, geography, or personal identity abound.

This study was limited in its scope, and hopefully, future researchers might build upon its shortcomings. Ethnographic interviewing was invaluable, but a lack of funding made the primary interviews few and with relatively new talents. A greater sample of Rio queens could yield even more insights. In addition, the measures asked of queens ought to be applied to other Latin American metropolises where research on drag cultures is sparse. Mexico particularly deserves attention, as it was included in the *Drag Race* universe during the same year as Brazil. In addition, future researchers ought to employ more questions getting at the tension revealed in Chapter 2 between cooperation and competition; it would be interesting to see how this dynamic plays out in different environments.

Drag queens are not monolithic and are staunch in their individuality. Despite international forces that portray all drag as comparable and judgable, queens persist, and the great 21st century drag boom continues. Subcultures are created, careers are made, and crowns are snatched, continually creating a positive feedback loop that projects the image of the drag queen to every corner of the world.

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APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL QUOTES IN PORTUGUESE

Chapter 2

Participant 1:

“Então, quando comecei a fazer drag, eu tive influência na minha drag, numa drag que já era antiga, uma drag que já faz drag há muito tempo. Então, eu convivi nos camarins de boates, de sauna com drags antiga. Então, eu tomei uma conduta de backstage com elas, como se cortar no camarim e tal com elas. Só que ao mesmo tempo, eu sou uma drag nova porque comecei recentemente. Não recentemente, já tenho tempo. Mas eu comecei, eu não tinha mesmo tempo de carreira que elas. E eu fui acolhida também pelas meninas da minha geração, entendeu? Então, hoje em dia, eu não tenho uma família... Não tenho uma família drag, tenho uma família drag. Tem duas drags, quatro drags na minha família. Então, eu falo com todo mundo, quando as drags do Rio conhecem algum, mas não sou íntimo de todos. Mas eu conheço de trabalhos e tal. E eu sou muito bem acolhido, eu creio que eu não tenho nenhum inimigo, acho que todo mundo gosta de mim.”

Participant 3:

“Tem muitas drags que gostam muito de passar uma imagem muito otimista, tipo... ‘Ah, eu acho que se fosse produzir uma coisa, seria a paz mundial.’ Mas não, eu gosto muito de ser verdadeiro com as coisas. Então, assim, no começo eu tive sim um abraço muito forte. Do pessoal lá da Turma OK, como eu falei, comecei lá nesse meio dos concursos drag, que são da antiga, né? E no começo, quando eu comecei a fazer drag, a cena drag era muito pequenininha. Então, assim, tinha algumas que trabalhavam em boate muito poucas na zona sul. Tinha as drag e bate-cabelo que trabalhavam em algumas festas, em todas as boates. Sempre tinha show de drag de bate-cabelo, né?”

“Então, aí depois do *Queens* concurso, fez um boom que todo mundo queria fazer drag. A drag saía do bueiro, assim, você dava um passo, tinha uma drag do seu lado. E aí estamos, onde estamos hoje, desse boom aí. E eu tive uma família, hoje em dia minha família está resumida a uma drag, que faz streaming de jogos.”

Participant 2:

“Então, é muito complexo isso das veteranas, as drags mais antigas com as mais novas, porque existe um nicho, não sei se você sabe, que é o da sauna gay, que existe show drag na sauna, e elas fazem muito show na sauna e elas ganham muito dinheiro, as drags mais antigas. Então, para a gente chegar lá, é muito difícil, elas não abrem as portas para a gente e não ajudam a gente. São umas ou outras que abraçam as novas, que querem estar com as novas, tanto é que no Pink Flamingo, as drags veteranas, as antigas, que estão trabalhando lá, é porque elas abraçaram a gente as novas.”

Participant 4:

“Tinha essa, essa família e sim, eu conheci outras drags mais velhas, mas rolava um pouco de preconceito com as mais jovens, por as, porque mudou o tipo de drag, né, com o group of drag

race, é, a drag brasileira foi muito americanizada, porque a gente importou o que a gente via group of drag race, e aí as drags mais velhas, acham que a gente está perdendo o que elas começaram a fazer no Brasil. Então algumas davam força, algumas abriam oportunidades para a gente se apresentar em teatros, em lugares assim maiores e outras queriam evitar, nem falavam. Assim, você está dividindo um camarim com elas, essas mais velhas ficavam no canto delas, nem falavam com você, você falava uma boa noite, não respondiam, e tinha outras que acolhiam, davam ideia e ajudavam, tinha essa, essa divisão, mas as mais jovens assim, era realmente uma família, todo mundo se ajuda.”

Participant 5:

“Eu acho que a minha drag é completamente carioca. Eu acho que existem inclusive poucas drags aqui no Rio de Janeiro, que eu posso dizer, elas são cariocas. Você nem só não consegue dizer um número assim, porque eu penso que tem eu e uma outra, porque nós somos, tipo, muito figura carioca. E não é desmerecendo o trabalho da... Não, vou dizer três, agora lembrei de uma outra, que é [REDIGIDO PARA CONFIDENCIALIDADE]. Porque eu acho que a gente, quando eu falo de não é desmerecendo o trabalho, é sobre realmente ter uma estética clínica, a cultura carioca. É, essa coisa periférica mais ou menos sul, é confruta social, é confruta racial, é confruta carnalval, elegante, ilustre, pobreza, praia, montanha, no Rio de Janeiro é isso.”

Chapter 3

Conga Bombréia:

“Eu tenho um grande problema em fazer show na zona sul, porque eu ainda acho que as pessoas da zona sul têm aquela coisa do drag boa é drag magra, drag boa é drag branca, sabe?”

Samantha Rios:

“A gente tem que entender o erro e tirar desse erro um aprendizado. E assim, entendo, tanto é que um dos erros que eu cometi, assim, não é que eu cometi, que eu não percebi e eu percebi nessa terceira temporada do *The Queen*, não era, não é nada, assim, muitas vezes me perguntavam se tirou a Miami Pink da bancada dos jurados, né? Que a gente trocou os jurados. Mas não era nada contra a Miami, eu adoro Miami, eu sou grato pelo *Drag Star*, o que ela fez no *The Queen*, nas duas temporadas a gente teve, mas eu olhava naquela bancada e eu sentia faltos na pessoa preta ali.”

Raveena Creole:

“A gente acha que a gente está preparada para viver esses momentos, porque é a partir do momento que a gente se entende quando a pessoa é preta e a gente vai estudando sobre isso, a gente vai estudando justamente para a gente estar preparada para receber alguns momentos que a gente sabe a nossa sociedade é, estruturalmente, assim, racista, mas a gente nunca está preparada realmente. A gente acha que está, mas não está. E quando acontece, a gente não consegue nem reagir.”

Preta QueenB Rull:

“A cultura ela nasce lá nos anos 60, em que ela tenta, onde de fato, né, se começou os bailes a exaltar as pessoas pretas, as pessoas latinas lá nos Estados Unidos, a partir da Cristal Abéja, que foi uma travesti, que ela ficava indignada em ver os bailes acontecendo naquela época. E assim,

os bailes não premiavam as pessoas pretas. Então, ela decidiu de fato criar um baile para poder premiar as pessoas pretas. E daí, que começa toda a Ballroom.”

“A cultura, a cena aqui no Rio de Janeiro é muito novinha, entendeu? Então, a gente está fazendo um trabalho muito bonito e, assim... Isso está chegando nas favelas, sabe? Está chegando para as pessoas pretas, eu vejo várias amigas pretas minhas, que olha aquilo ali e fala, caramba, eu quero executar esse movimento, eu quero fazer isso, porque isso vem de nós, sabe, amiga? Então, eu creio que daqui a alguns anos, meu amor, eu já vejo a cultura Ballroom dominando as favelas, pessoas pretas, que ainda não conheceu isso, ainda vai conhecer.”

Gui Mauad:

“Então, assim, eu acho que a minha drag foi crescendo junto com as oportunidades. Então, pra você ver lá no Queens, na primeira temporada que eu participei, eu, tipo, não tinha dinheiro pra fazer roupa, eu não tinha como bancar essas coisas, e inclusive assim, hoje eu preciso dizer, é uma ilusão eu te dizer que isso aqui, a conta fecha, que não fecha. Tipo, na maioria das vezes eu gasto mais do que o recebo, e tipo, isso é uma coisa que eu faço deliberadamente porque eu acho que é um investimento e que já me levou pra muitos outros lugares, sabe?”

Samantha Rios:

“Então assim, então quando você vai comparar uma drag brasileira com uma drag americana, pense no valor que ela está se gastando no Brasil e a outra que dá gastão no exterior. Então acho que a arte tem que ser respeitada, independente do nível de figurino, de produção, sabe? Tem que depender da arte que está sendo entregue. Eu acho que a minha visão é essa.”

Meme dos Brilhos:

“Não deixei minha profissão. Não deixe minha profissão. Aí, vezes eu trabalho até tarde, corro, puxou, mas faça o meu trabalho, mantém meu trabalho. Agora, hoje em dia, você querer viver de show? Ah, meu colega. Não dá certo. Não vai ter como. Não vai ter como porque isso aqui é muito caro. Pra mim é muito caro. Tudo é muito caro. Eu gosto de mudar, de guardar roupa. Eu tenho lá em minha casa um quarto só de meme, que é menor, maior do que o quarto do Luz Stadell, que é o meu cavalo.”