


Fall 2017

Quem Ama Não Mata: Brazilian Femicide and Odara's Black Feminist Luta

Jair Oballe
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Recommended Citation

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Quem Ama Não Mata: Brazilian Femicide and Odara's Black Feminist Luta

Oballe, Jair
Academic Director: Calhoun, Bill
Project Advisor: Nascimento, Valdecir
Brazil, Salvador, Pelorinho
Duke University

SIT Brazil: Social Innovation and Community Development | Fall 2017

Abstract Page

This Community Development Project paper discusses my work with Odara, a black feminist organization within Salvador, Brazil. There, I spent one month studying different forms of gender-based violence, with a particular focus on femicide. I also examined state response such as Lei Maria da Penha and Lei do Femicídio, and how this legislation impacted violence from a qualitative perspective.

My studies are centered around news articles I read on various forms of violence within Bahia, which were then developed into a database that catalogues each incident based on a variety of categories. Additionally, I read a large assortment of books to establish an academic background in black feminist theory and historical violence against women to contextualize my work. I have also included reflections on two interviews of women that have suffered partner-based violence.

A large portion of my paper contains self-reflections of not just my work within Odara, but living within Salvador as a foreigner from the United States. I assess my privileges within the context of my work and daily life, and how these have shaped and informed my worldviews. Finally, I look towards the future, and how as a man, I can inform and work with other men to end the cycles of violence that have affected our women for far too long.

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Acknowledgements

Valdecir Nascimento: After just a brief conversation, you graciously accepted me into your home and the institution you founded. Each day, I lived and learned alongside the foundation you created for all Black women within Salvador, Bahia, and Brazil at large. Watching and listening to your devotion for social justice has been empowering, and I will miss our daily talks as much as our meals. It has been an honor.

Paulinha Rosário: For the early morning hellos, late night singing on busses, and mid-day marches that will always remain in my memory. Your transparency towards every aspect of your life made me feel more welcome and comfortable than I could ever express. From your struggles, pains, your present situation, and even visions for the future. I have been inspired and humbled by all that you are, and am incredibly excited to see where your future takes you.

Naiara Leite: Your book recommendation and talks helped structure my project and conceptualizations of feminism and its relation to gender-based violence immensely. Thank you for your trip invitations, for driving me, and always making me laugh.

Daniele Bitencourt: Your work is the crutch that holds Odara together! Thank you for always checking in on me and showing me around Pelorinho.

Erika Francisca: Despite my bombardment of questions, you never faltered. You always went above and beyond in explanations, ensuring I understood every critical piece of information. Your warm-heartedness was always a stabilizing force.

Alane Reis: For welcoming me right away on our weekend retreat to the island. For your warmth throughout the month, and availability to talk at any time, about any topic.

Maisa Vale: For your patience and expansive knowledge on both domestic violence and the public health system. Listening in on your project with Keisha and your personal anecdotes of life's hardships have given me incredible insight to other forms of discrimination that I would have never learned otherwise.

Odara: For setting an example as to what a non-profit, social justice organization is fully capable of. For giving a voice to women that have been disempowered by far too long, by too many forms of structured oppression. Together, you give others hope. It has been a blessing to call myself part of the team this past month. A luta sempre segue!

Bill Calhoun: For your 27 years of the purest form of passion for education I have ever seen. We always speak about destiny, and I am excited to see where yours takes you. You deserve the world and more my brother. I have nothing but love and respect for everything you do.

Oélito Brandão: Fortaleza may have 2 million people and 1 million motorcycles, but it only has 1 person like you. For the endless laughter, hugs, and insights. Thank you.

Introduction

This past month within Salvador, I worked alongside Odara to learn about different forms of gender-based violence towards women. Femicide is the most extreme expression of these various forms of violence, so I tailored the majority of my study towards this horrific phenomenon. However, these forms of violence are all informed by the same sets of structural oppressions, and must be understood within the contexts of each other. Women of color, and particularly Black women, suffer the highest rates of femicide across all states of Brazil. Therefore, they have always been on the frontlines of grassroots organizing, political activism, and academic theologies to combat these life-threatening issues.

My goals during this time were multifaceted. At the most basic level, I sought to learn and understand the concepts of femicide in general. What it was, how it manifested, and what informed it. I wanted to know who were the aggressors, and who were the victims. How it was carried out, and how frequently. All of this information was made available by those who perceived this issue and studied it long before me, so I looked at who these people and movements were within Brazil, and how they brought issues happening in family homes out into the streets and the limelight. Afterward, how their work contributed to new political policy such as Lei Maria da Penha and the Femicide law of this decade. Finally, I wanted to see the impacts of this legislation on Femicide today, for the legislation is fairly new and consistently under attack after the political “golpe” two years back.

On first glance, this issue has many layers of separation for me. I am a foreigner, male, higher-class, and White within Brazil, even though I am Latinx and low-middle class back home. Additionally, I have never had a personal experience with violence in the forms I have studied. However, I am heavily entangled with this topic because of the people I love. I have friends and family members who have experienced various forms of gender-based violence, and although I have been able to listen and comfort them as a confidant, I have often been left feeling helpless to these issues that have weighed heavily on their emotional health.

Their experiences have left me casting a critical eye on myself and my place within this issue. I am left wondering how as a society, we have socialized men to behave in this form towards the people they supposedly care about the most. I think about the lack of conversations I have had with fellow men on how to treat others. Oftentimes, we leave it as an assumption that we will treat others with respect, without actually discussing what respect is. For the men who identify and understand the issue, we also try to shy away from it; we listen to women's stories and know that we could never do such things, subconsciously patting ourselves on the back for not being part of the statistic. But not being the issue itself does not pardon you from not learning about it, or ways in which you can combat it. In fact, it is an act of complacency, which allows the cycle of violence to perpetuate. I have seen this complacency inform patriarchal microcosms of society all around me, such as the university where I study and live.

Last year, my university conducted an anonymous survey to see the rates of women and men that had experienced any form of sexual misconduct. For women, the final number was 2 in 5. I was horrified when I heard that statistic, especially after noticing that averages rates were slightly higher for women of color. I knew the privileges I had as a male in this context were much greater, but I now grasped why my female friends feel discomfort traveling to parties or walking around at night alone at a place that I perceive as my second home. It made me wonder what levels of ignorance and privilege we have to create such a number, and if offenders are held accountable after the offense takes place.

Additionally, one of my positions at school involves planning orientation week, and training underclassmen students to become counselors for first-year students during that week. One of the most important events the university holds is an open dialogue on sexual misconduct and institutional policy. After the group broke down by gender, I stayed with the boy's group to hear the questions they would ask our presenters. Their questions left me shocked: "how drunk can a girl be before she can't give consent? If we were both drunk and gave consent, can I still be accused of sexual assault? If I see a girl passed out on the side of the street, should I stay with her if I'm alone? Because I don't want strangers passing by to interpret the situation incorrectly." I was left baffled.

I find my fellow classmates at Duke to be some of the brightest intellectual minds I have ever met, but clearly these forms of thinking are not being correctly translated into moments and forms of rational thinking that are much more important. Our students may be book smart,

but when it comes to the potential harm to another person's mental and physical health, we are not as precautionous. And if students are already entering with this type of mindset, do we have the capacity to change their conceptual framework of domination and ownership within four years? What about for the students that decided to skip this talk, and never attend a talk like this again while at school? Will they be provided spaces later in life that could prevent these forms of harassment or violence from continuing?

With this, I came into Brazil interested in the question of gender violence in the university setting. But after a few conversations with Bill Calhoun, my program coordinator, we discussed increased rates of femicide after the passage of Lei Maria da Penha, which sought to combat that very same crime. Although both topics are of high importance, my sense of urgency shifted towards those unable to even receive social services and start anew because they had been murdered. The longer it takes for this issue to be understood, discussed, and combated, the more women will die within their sacred spaces of home at the expense of the partner they trust the most.

My new topic was guided by Jessica, our program assistant, and Jonahina, a lawyer, to visit and contact different organizations that worked on the question of femicide. Our first meeting solidified my topic, which would look at different causes of gender-violence, study state responses, and the effects on these new state services and laws on society. Thankfully, many scholars had already studied the aftereffects of Maria da Penha, their focus on whether the law was successfully combating rates of gender-based violence.

Most organizations within Fortaleza that worked on this topic are housed within women's shelters, and we went to one several times to receive more information. Our first visit was an unannounced visit, and we were stopped right away. A social worker informed us that their shelter's policies do not allow men to enter, so we set a scheduled meeting, requesting special access. After two meetings with their workers, we were provided with many readings, but were informed that the organization was short-staffed, and coupled with their rules towards men within the shelter, would be unable to receive me.

I understood their rules right away; the moments a woman enters a shelter are very vulnerable and they require time before they can legally confront their aggressor or utilize re-integrative services and move on from the incident. My short time within the center taught me that although allyship is important, it is never up to the ally to decide the time and place they serve a community. In some spaces, it is simply better for professionals do their work.

I refused to be deterred my topic, opting to tackle it from a different perspective at a different location. I thought back on our interactions with Decolonial Theory, and the ways in which it intersected with Black Feminism. Both schools of thought combat ontological and teleological conceptions of world systems that require systematic systems of oppression to sustain themselves. These thought processes give voice to subjugated populations and offer alternative visions of living, which could provide me with the framework necessary to deconstruct and comprehend femicide. Therefore, I was connected to an organization such as

Odara, whose incredible work, coupled with my life experiences in Salvador, could help me reach some conclusions and open up even more questions.

Definition of Terms

CPMI: Comissão Parlamentar Mista de inquérito. This commission investigated the effectiveness of Lei Maria da Penha, and determined that it was insufficient in preventing feminicides. Therefore, they conceptualized the framework for Lei 13.104, Lei do Femicídio, and presented it to Congress.

Lei Maria da Penha; Lei 11.340: This law was created after decades of feminist activism, and four years of intensive public policy meetings to create legislation that combated violence against women. Definition (redacted):

Esta Lei cria mecanismos para coibir e prevenir a violência doméstica e familiar contra a mulher. Dispõe sobre a criação dos Juizados de Violência Doméstica e Familiar contra a Mulher; e estabelece medidas de assistência e proteção às mulheres em situação de violência doméstica e familiar. Toda mulher, independentemente de classe, raça, etnia, orientação sexual, renda, cultura, nível educacional, idade e religião, goza dos direitos fundamentais inerentes à pessoa humana.

Femicide: The act of femicide is something as old as humanity itself, though the term and its implications have only been circulating for 50 years. The first mention of femicide comes from Diana Russel in Belgium, published in the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women (green 52). Naming this pattern of female homicides gives visibility to the issue, and contextualizes it within society's systematic oppression of women. Since then, femicide has been carefully studied and monitored by various social organizations and governments at national and international levels.

Femicide's definition is contested and changed depending on its use. While all feminicides are homicides, not all female homicides are classified as feminicides. Within Brazil, the feminist movement presented Congress with the following definition (redacted):

[...] forma extrema de violência de gênero que resulta na morte da mulher quando ha uma ou mais das seguites circunstancias: I – relação íntima de afeto ou parantesco II - prática de qualquer tipo de violência sexual contra a vítima III – mutilação ou desfiguração.

However, the approval period of Congress led to modifications, resulting in this definition of the **Lei do Femicídio** (redacted):

Morte da mulher por razões da condição de sexo feminino. Considera-se que há razões de condição de sexo feminino quando o crime envolve: violência doméstica e familiar; menosprezo ou discriminação à condição de mulher.

Gender-based Violence: violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.

Black Feminism: A school of thought stating that sexism, class oppression, gender identity and racism are inextricably bound together.

Literature Review

Domestic Violence at the intersection Race, Class, and Gender

Natalie Sokoloff, Ida Dupont

This reading talks about the intersectional analysis and framework that is required when understanding and addressing the question of gender-based violence. The article is in reference to the United States, but the overarching ideas are highly applicable to Brazil. Sokoloff and Dupont attempt to understand the ways in which racism, ethnocentrism, class privilege, and heterosexism intersect with gender violence and oppression. This work is highly important because in the past, what the authors refer to as 'woman battering' was highly universalized, affecting the ways in which treatment was administered. Additionally, the antiviolenence feminist movement was highly dominated by middle-class women, which caused a large failure in addressing the multiple oppressions a woman can face based on her other identity factors.

Additionally, the ways in which women define gender violence itself differs based on their cultural values. For example, in many Asian cultures the act of throwing water on a woman is incredibly harmful to their mental psyche, for it indicates that they are unholy and require cleansing. Stereotypes may also play into a lack of desire in reporting abuse. Black women often fear perpetuating the idea of Black men as aggressors, which couples with the statistic that Black women are also abused and murdered at higher rates. (However, the authors show that socio-economic factors play a huge role in this statistic; when socio-economic status is fixed in place, racial differences in rates of abuse and violence disappear.)

Clearly, there's no one-size-fits-all way of understanding violence, and therefore forms of intervention and services for women must also reflect their intersectional identities. Special considerations for joblessness, homelessness, illiteracy, bilingual services, and LGBTQ acceptance are some of the different ways shelters and legal help must adapt to ensure the continued protection of a battered woman. Additionally, we need to consider root causes of gender-based violence outside of the home, such as forms of violence directed at entire communities in the forms of racialized surveillance and heightened prison sentencing for POC women, police brutality, and classist housing discrimination. These factors are especially important considering the system's over-reliance on law enforcement in dealing with cases of domestic violence. The increase in force and mass incarceration may do more to harm the community than help it.

Finally, we must reject the association with battered women and helplessness. Though these women are in a vulnerable emotional and physical state, if we provide them with sufficient resources, they have sufficient agency to better their lives in whatever means they deem necessary.

Geographies of Power: Black Women Mobilizing Intersectionality in Brazil
Keisha-Khan Y. Perry

Perry's article articulates the complexities of Black woman's politics within Gamboa de Baixo. The city's demographics are mainly comprised of poor Black communities that are fighting urban developers from highly coveted coastal lands. Although opposition to gentrified development is often in the hands of Black women, who lead the majority of social movements,

the majority of state institutions disregard and illegitimize the contributions of these women towards social justice initiatives.

The article starts out with a woman named Dona Telma, who found that her housing rights were being contested by a company. After refusing to give up her home, the company called the police and a local construction crew to tear down the home. The man behind the bulldozer became so upset at the idea of destroying her home, that he ultimately went against orders and let the house standing. He became a local hero for his actions, while Dona Telma's initial resistance was left unacknowledged. Other media incidents such as these also portray Gamboa's social movements as spontaneous uprisings; an upsetting incident occurs in the community, and suddenly community members rally and react.

Illustrations such as these indicate the erasure of Black mass activism, especially when the activism is spearheaded by poor Black women within local communities outside of government structures such as NGOs. The lack of media recognition leads to the idea that community resistance is spontaneous and unusual, even though it has been carefully calculated and coordinated in response to police violence or illegal land claims by coastal lands within Salvador.

Additionally, there seems to be little outside empathy for resistance created by poor Black women to aid other poor Black women. Their collective memory and legal documentation of the land in which they live is often ignored by large businesses looking for the next capital

gain. Rather than being seen as fellow activists, Perry notes that society places them in the roles of domestic worker, and the preserver of Afro-Brazilian culture and religious tradition. Since their societal roles and jobs are undervalued, so are their political voices. Despite this, Perry emphasizes the pushback that these women are giving, because they know radical social change is necessary, and none of them are passively waiting for it to happen.

The final point I started considering does not match with the rest of this literature section, but it has helped me understand the way the state capitalizes on ambiguities within identity. We have an overly cited concept that racial identity within Brazil is difficult to define, with about 135 different categories of identity. Yet when we look at statistics within police brutality, for example, the state can easily identify which populations are Black. By accepting the ambiguous categorization of race, we drive ourselves further away from unification against a state apparatus that specifically targets Black people in projects or deterritorialization and genocide, regardless of what race they perceive themselves to be.

Understanding Gender-based Violence

Michele Decker, Elizabeth Miller, Samantha Illangasekare, Jay G Silverman

This article provided a general overview of gender-based violence. The data utilized on perpetrators is mainly confined to Africa, though the reasons for this are not explicitly stated. Based on findings, one in three women experience gender-based violence, and a third of female homicides are committed by male partners. Historically, this epidemic has largely focused on victim for obvious reasons, considering they're experiences require a wide range of support in terms of mental and physical health, and logistical planning in terms of housing changes, work

changes, etc. However, this does not eliminate the risk factor that men in the household pose, so we need to look at the perpetrator's behavior and mentalities to eliminate the root cause of gender-based violence.

From the UN Multi-country Cross-sectional Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific presented in *The Lancet Global Health*, we see that over half of non-partner rape perpetrators first do so during adolescence, closely tied to youth exposure to violence in the perpetrator's own household. Other factors include substance abuse and depression as links that help us understand that reasons why perpetrators rape. Partner violence and non-partner rape often coincided with risky sexual behavior, such as having several sex partners. The sexual entitlement and dominance that men exhibit through social normalization are cited as possible reasoning.

To reduce and prevent gender-based violence perpetration, we need to culturally and socially reinforce understanding, respect, and safety. Youth programs that address gender norms and inequities need to be implemented as well. Because this violence is so widespread, support services must still be in place for survivors.

Information about Project and Organization

Odara Institute of Black Women is a black feminist organization that aims to raise the collective well-being of marginalized Brazilian populations by combating discrimination. They seek increased inclusion in discussions on politics and socio-economic status, because Brazilian society has been structured through racism and sexism, leading to a series of inequalities such as: diminished salaries, limited access to higher education, sexual and reproductive rights abuses, and large rates of unemployment.

These social issues disproportionately affect Black women, leading to the inception of an organization founded and run by Black women, for Black women. At the core, their single mission aims to resolve the violence that Black women face. This mission is divided into four large working groups: Healthcare and sexual rights, Violence, Communication, and Education and Political Formation. Although programs have interconnections, compartmentalizing and tackling these social issues from a multitude of angles provides more tangible solutions.

Odara members are well versed in all aspects of the organization's work, providing additional support to working group's efforts when needed. Most members also attend every event created by Odara, and make a concerted effort to support partner groups in the surrounding geographic area. They are part of an expansive network of nonprofit organizations and grassroots movements, and will frequently host visitors from all parts of the state and the country.

In my time there, I attended a UN-funded lecture on the reproductive ramifications of Brazil's zika virus outbreak, and attended a meeting of social activists and psychologists developing strategies to attend to women and families that have lost their children from police violence through the project *Minha Mãe Não Dorme Enquanto Eu Não Chegar* (my mother does not sleep until I arrive [home]). The program has been implemented over the past two years in four periphery neighborhoods to re-think policies and actions towards security and drug trafficking, and how they have related to mass-killings of Black youth. It also seeks to dialogue with other psychologists, universities, community centers and clinics on the impacts that race and racism has on the vulnerable social conditions that mothers and their children face not only in their everyday lives, but within the very same services that were created to aid and protect them.

This working group offers an example on how Odara operates; their expansive social networks allow them to connect with professionals and academics in various disciplines to think through the various forms of violence affecting the Black community. They work through historic forms of oppression, acknowledging how they were created, how they persist, and how they affect individuals to this very day. Then, they look at what social programs could address these issues. In the case of *Minha Mãe*, creating spaces where mothers of children murdered through the drug trade can discuss their issues in solidarity, and how cultural and religious practices can aid their healing processes.

Odara doesn't just work with local projects. Starting in 2012, the idea of a nationwide protest and march of Black women was proposed to Valdecir. By the end of the following area, groups throughout the North and Northeast of Brazil had begun organizing and marching to gain traction and attention from other regions. By November 18th of 2015, 50,000 women met in Brasilia to protest racism, and gender and social inequality. At the end of the march, the group was met by President Dilma Rousseff, who received a document highlighting the issues these groups had discussed at length for the last several years.

Odara's mission appears singular on the surface, but their goals and solutions are multifaceted in nature. By combining resources and knowledge with groups and individuals throughout the country, Odara is able to tackle a variety of social issues affecting Black women and the Black population at large.

Engagement and Methods

Database [Appendix 1]

The largest project I worked on was a database that compiles news articles on incidents of gender-based violence within the country. When the idea was presented to me, Paulinha showed me an excel spreadsheet of 60 articles from Bahia and over 1000 articles from all 27 states. I decided to focus on the articles from Bahia, since the information discovered in a local context could be addressed more directly by Odara. One by one, I read through each article, taking note of reoccurring information between articles and publication companies. From there, I created categories based on demographic and geographic information. In total, there are 8 categories, aside from the state, news company, and publication date. They are: Weapon/Method (utilized to commit the crime), Neighborhood, generation of victim (child, teenager, adult etc.), age of aggressor, age of victim, date of crime, relation between aggressor and victim, and additional information.

After plugging this information into respective cells, I set up filters for each category. Therefore, you can go down the row limiting selections to pinpoint articles that aid your individual interests. For example, a stabbing of a child in Liberdade by their father in December. The categories were a mixture of broad and specific criteria, to ensure you could end up with as many or as little articles as you desired. Finally, the additional information category included snippets of the news article, behaving as an abstract to limit reading by the researcher. I also came across several articles that did not cover specific incidents, but rates of violence over the year, which I placed into a different tab within the excel sheet.

The database was a fantastic project to work on; it's an ongoing effort to which anyone can contribute, and the more expansive it becomes, the more powerful your searches can be. Additionally, Excel's versatility could lead to graphs or charts based on the data collected, giving visual representations of what neighborhoods harbor the most crimes, or what generation of individual is the most vulnerable to sexual assault.

This project was also immensely helpful in gaining important background knowledge based on real-world events in the communities around me, while strengthening my overall comprehension of the Portuguese language and expanding my vocabulary in legal terms and other terms associated with this line of study. The information held in these articles was disgusting, shocking, and disturbing. What was nearly just as shocking, however, was the information excluded from every article I read: any mention of race. I will develop these ideas further in my self-reflection section.

Interviews

Within my time in Salvador, I conducted two interviews. The first was of a founder of the organization Calafate, Marta Liero. The organization is made up of low-income, periphery neighborhood women that host weekly and monthly meetings, focusing on the heightened levels of gender-based violence that exist within their own communities. Their social network is well-known by those that live around them, and their office offers a communal space where women can voice their individual complaints, and seek emotional support from executive and

community members that have faced the same types of issues themselves. This service is critical, because the actual government services that were created by legislation such as Maria de Penha, are often situated in larger sections of the city rather than the periphery, supposedly to give access to more people.

This proves to be very difficult, because the women's shelter, hospital, legal services, and psychological services are not housed within the same building, but scattered at different parts of the city. Therefore, it requires a large amount of time and effort to reach these places, taking critical time off work and spending money on transportation. These are luxuries that many of these women cannot afford. Additionally, even if they manage to utilize these services, there have been continuous reports of mistreatment from service workers due to differences in racial and social classes. Therefore, although professional help is encouraged, Calafate can provide a space for women that need immediate help, with the eyes and ears of women that understand their local contexts and how those informs their struggles and situations of violence.

My other interview was with Kalini^{*}. She grew up in a poor, periphery community within Salvador, and by 11 years old was involved within the drug trade to earn money for her family. At 14, she fell in love with a drug trafficker, who was ten years older than her. Despite proper treatment at first, K began suffering different forms of abuse at 15 years old, to the point where the relationship had to end. She notes that this is common within trafficking relationships,

* Kalini's name has been edited for privacy and security.

because the men are socialized to exert dominance and authority within all aspects of their lives. Attempts at burning her childhood home and several death threats with firearms ensued, forcing K to seek sheltering and rehabilitative services.

Her partner was well known in the community, so her services had to take her far away from her family and life, finally accepted into the system in March, three months after her latest death threat. Her protection program, which will go unnamed for security reasons, forced her to throw away all of her old clothing and take no possessions with her. She vividly remembers receiving a 200-page entrance packet of rules, disabling any access to internet, cell phones, or even the ability to leave the physical boundaries of the shelter. It was there that she realized that it was her, the person who nearly lost her life, that was now losing all of her liberty in the name of protection. Her new housing situated her with complete strangers, all going through different forms of trauma. And while the professionals were properly trained within academia, they lacked awareness in the racial and socio-economic dynamics of the populations they were trying to help. They made her feel burdensome and unwelcome, and she witnessed many women attempt to flee from the shelter. Meanwhile, she was unable to contact any family members and friends about the things she was going through for the first 6 months.

If you break the shelter's rules three times, you will be sent back home, the very place she received her threats. The question then becomes one of life or death, and while she did not want to be there, it was her only option. While other families have the financial capacity to pick

up and move to another location, her own financial status offered no other recourse but to stay in hiding for 4 years.

Now, she sees herself as someone trying to take ownership of her life, as someone that works hard and aims of entering a University. Yet other days, the weight of all those years still greatly impacts her personal health; after all, it has only been two years since she left the shelter, and was placed within a role of adulthood, paying bills and looking after herself. And just as in all other spaces within society, she still navigates the world as a young, Black, periphery woman, who fights through daily forms of discrimination.

During the course of her interview, K always explained her story with a looking forward perspective, acknowledging despite her immense struggles, she has received certain blessings as well, for having access to these services and making it through the program, living independently in her own home instead of a room with four strangers. Her next steps involve advancing her education, and prioritizing her personal mental health with the help of others instead of diving headfirst into other activities to keep her mind preoccupied. After the interview, I couldn't help but give K an enormous hug, thanking her and wishing her the best of luck anywhere her life takes her.

Ethical Considerations

Positionality was an incredibly large component of my entire CDP project, as I chose a geographic location and topic that were separate levels of separation from the ways in which I identify myself. Early on in Brazil, I learned that society views me as White, while in the United States I have always given myself and been given the ethnicity of Latinx. The skin color and physical characteristics that define me back home did not apply here in Brazil. At first, I tried explaining my case, but after a while, I decided that it was best to accept what society prescribed to me; if I had actually lived and navigated these past 20 years in Brazil, I would have received all of the privileges of whiteness. Refuting this for my month-long project would have greatly inhibited my capacity to learn.

Race was the identity factor I grappled with the most, but was certainly not the only difference between myself and the community I wished to learn from. I am also male, heterosexual, from a stable economic background, a future college graduate, and do not practice a persecuted religion. While these factors exist in other cities and states, Salvador contains one of the largest Black populations in the entirety of Brazil, at 80 percent. An impressive amount of these individuals practice Candomble, and live in favela communities. In essentially every space I inhabited, I knew I would find few other individuals such as myself, and that my behaviors and attitudes in those spaces would be reflective upon not just myself, but other privileged foreigners. I imagine that the majority of foreigners that Bahians encounter are tourists, opposed to students studying and working for marginalized populations. I always carried myself with the most respect I could, treating each space as a generous invitation.

White men in Brazil, just as the United States, are not burdened by a plethora of social stereotypes that typecast them in any forms of negative light. They are always held at the top of society in terms of beauty and education, and hardly ever find themselves in positions where they are defending for their lives on the grounds of identities because of national politics and policies. Sitting in on the Miha Mãe meeting quickly showed me that this was not the case for Black women. Black periphery women are often casted as: domestic workers, economic resource drainers, and producers of criminality. They are blamed for inadequately raising their children towards a life of trafficking, and perpetuating the violence and poverty that exists within favela communities. Hardly ever are these women's situations understood as a result of structural injustices and government inadequacy. The power dynamics that exist between these two identity groups were always in my mind during my interactions, and I tried to display in both actions and words that I did not subscribe to the narratives placed upon Black women.

In the events and talks attended focused on women's health and violence, I was the only (visibly perceived) male in the room, and the only White individual of any gender expression. In these spaces, I knew the best option was to remain extremely attentive and quiet, for I would never be able to fully understand and experience the lived experiences of these individuals, no matter how long I dedicated myself to learning about their lived realities. There are things that texts and academia cannot teach, so I pushed myself to listen to their truths as attentively as I could, for their stories and information would greatly inform my personal study.

This brings me to another large ethical dilemma: studying another individual and population's history of cyclical violence for a personal project and course credit. What does it mean to take these stories and information, these moments of intense vulnerability, and re-create it for another's consumption? Would everything I take with me be even close to the personal contributions I have made for Odara?

On the contrary, had I not been a part of this program, I would have never ended up at Odara and Salvador in the first place. And Odara does aim, after all, to increase public awareness, strengthening political voice, and promoting allyship. I wondered why I had been accepted into not just the personal workspace and activities of Odara, but Valdecir's home as well. What did it mean for this organization to take a chance on an American foreigner they had not met, and help guide him through a question as charged and heavy as femicide? These are all questions I am still seeking answers to.

Critical Self-Reflection

Initial Meetings

The night before our final day in Salvador, I sat next to Bill and expressed my sadness. I was incredibly grateful for the chance to ferry out to an island and meet up with Valdecir and Odara staff, but it meant losing a day with the rest of my group, who I would not see for nearly a month as they returned to Fortaleza for their CDPs. Bill remained calm throughout my explanation, and offered me a new perspective on the situation. To think about what it meant to be invited within the personal space of Valdecir's island home, and the opportunities I could unlock by having more time with people in the organization. "Think about how comfortable and established you have become in this setting, and how little time you will receive with the Odara women," he explained. I knew he was right.

The next morning took me through a series of ubers, taxis, and a ferry, finally ending in front of Val's home. We had a quick moment to catch up before I changed clothes for the beach. I mainly sat back and watched the interactions between the members. Even on their retreat, their conversations were heavily centered on contemporary issues affecting Black women; I quickly realized that for them, work within this realm isn't just work, it is reality. Regardless of whether they were in Odara or not, their personal lives include these daily struggles. They had simply chosen to dedicate their 9 to 5's to combat it. After a casual day out, we returned home and the Odara women began to prepare a dinner for everyone.

The meal went without any issues, and after eating everything off my plate, I stood up to cut up a mango over the sink. Alane followed me into the kitchen after a minute, and asked me if I would be returning to the table. I informed her that I was, and she nodded, reminding me that after people finish eating, they should take their dishes to wash in the sink. I felt immediate anger, but kept my facial expression calm. I felt as if I had been treated as a child who didn't know how to clean up after themselves, as if I had never been taught how to respectfully behave in someone's home. I saw it as an attack on my personal character.

But then I took a step back and re-assessed, thinking about the historic interactions between people of color and White men, and the centuries of forced subservience informing present-day interactions, such as the one that occurred at that first dinner. I thought back to what Bill said; they don't know me, and it is a privilege to be there. I made sure to think more critically of every decision I made, even those as small as holding onto my plate.

These very same dynamics manifested in a different way when we went to visit a Candomble house. When I arrived, I trailed behind the others, observing the way in which individuals would greet each other and doing the same. Soon enough, I was called over by one of the members of the house, a woman named Bárbara. She was seated right next to the table of food, and invited me to grab a plate. I served myself a bite of farinha and a banana, careful to take small amounts despite the amount of food available, unsure how many others would be eating from the selection after me. Bárbara insisted I take more, playfully joking around, and so I did. Yet when I finished my second plate, she told me to take even more, which I declined. She

then asked me to have some juice, and when we noticed there was none at the table, she started calling out for someone to serve and bring me juice, and to take away my plate. I declined and thanked her, but she insisted I have some, and then asked another member of the house why she had only brought a cup instead of the entire jar.

I started to feel very flustered and embarrassed; too much attention was being called to me and I didn't want to others to perceive me as some White man that needed to be served a whole meal while seated at their table. Nobody else made any comment towards the incident, so I wondered if this behavior was customary towards any house guest. Some heightened Brazilian hospitality that I was interpreting incorrectly. Once we left the house hours later, Naiara and Alane began to talk about the interaction; they said they were quite surprised by Bárbara's behavior as well.

The Odara women had taken other people as guests in the past, but had never seen Bárbara react towards them in that way. They said that the other guests they had invited were Black women, and that was the reason I had received differential treatment. Alane equated it to the same situation that had occurred between the two of us weeks prior, although I never ended up addressing it with her. Her explanation was that Black women have been socialized and normalized to serve the needs of White men. However, I have learned that Candomble houses are spaces of survival and community, where members discuss their historical persecution and the ways in which their spirituality and religion heal and fix the world's ills. I

refused to believe that the socialization of servitude even permeated within these sacred spaces, though I could never know for sure.

The Bus Stop

My tensest moment during my entire stay in Salvador came during one of my morning commutes. I took the bus nearly every day, and had become incredibly familiar with the route, putting in headphones and relaxing until my stop. However, one day we hit a huge stop in traffic, due to some partial blockade of the road by the military Police. Once the bus arrived at the front of the line, an officer flagged the bus over to the side. Two officers boarded at the front and back, wishing us a good morning and calling all men to exit the bus, having the women stay put in their seats. I was the last one to disembark, and joined the others, pressed up against the bus with my hands up. Either five or six officers were watching another frisk and search the group one by one, as they waited with rifles in hand.

Once the officer reached me, he asked me to put my hands up over my head. Then, he told me to take off my backpack. “Vire as mãos,” he ordered, but I did not understand what he wanted me to do with those instructions. He repeated it again, and another officer that was watching on began saying the same thing. I was concerned, so I slowly swiveled my head back and informed them that I was a foreigner learning Portuguese, so I was having trouble understanding what they wanted. The officer grew much calmer after this, and made a halfhearted effort at checking my backpack, taking a small peek in before he let me go. We all boarded the bus a minute later, and were on our way.

I brought this up to the Odara women upon arrival, and they told me that I had just gone through a bus stop set up between the government and the Military Police in order to apprehend drug and arms traffickers that take public transport. I was quite shocked, not because the stops existed, but because what I had just experienced was in fact one of the stops. I looked back at the various news articles and videos I had included in the database on these stops. In one of the videos, a man was slammed against the bus and handcuffed, and another woman was dragged by her hair and slapped by two officers for yelling. I knew that a stop such as this would not have happened on my bus; it was picking up and dropping off in wealthier parts of the city, and the majority of passengers were White, and dressed in business outfits. The videos I had found all involved periphery neighborhoods with Black communities. Once I they learned I was a foreigner, I was no longer perceived as a possible threat. My privileges were at play once again.

The Parade

November 20th in Brazil is *Día da Consciencia Negra*, and is celebrated as a holiday in many states. Bahia is not included, due to the large number of Christian holidays already included in the work calendar. Regardless, many neighborhoods have Black populations of 90 percent or higher, and simply shut down the city anyways to celebrate their heritage. I traveled to Liberdade with Paulinha, and met up with two other students working at *Ilê Aiyê*. We marched from 15 hours until 19 hours, dancing and chanting with the drums and singers all around us. It was a beautiful display of culture, with the largest avenue in the neighborhood

closing down and making way for the main parade truck, showcasing singers and chanters on top of a podium.

Despite the enormous amount of people that showed up, the parade was incredibly peaceful; everyone was there to have a good time, and the camaraderie was highly evident. It seems that past parades have also gone quite smoothly, for I only counted 6 Military Police during the entire walk, resting against a wall at ease. I thought about the narratives of violence I had heard from locals in Salvador. The uber drivers that would not drop me off across the avenue from my apartment building, because they worried what would happen in the 3 minutes it would take for me to walk inside. Yet my personal research has included places such as Liberdade, and these narratives of danger and criminality existed in these locations because the drug trade exists, and affects many of the people with whom I marched. I knew there were truths to each side, that the Liberdade I was seeing contained both beauty and heartbreak, celebration and grief. On this day, however, I was simply happy to be there. “Isto é uma festa,” the speaker announced, “mas é uma festa da resistência!” And together, we resisted.

Daily Life

Living with Valdecir day by day was an incredible experience. Every day I would wake up, unsure of where Val’s activities would bring her next. A lecture at a local university, a meeting in another city, a series of errands before work, or our final goodbye before her conference in Rio de Janeiro. We would wake up and then end each day making meals together, and talk about life in the United States and Brazil, and where our projects were heading.

I tried helping around the home wherever possible by cleaning, cooking, and shopping with Val. We reached a point of comfort where I'd forget that my stay was temporary; coming home to our apartment after a long day's work became a huge relief. There were moments, however, where I'd be reminded that was a visitor. Whenever we went grocery shopping, onlookers would be confused with our relationship. Val asking me to grab bags and vegetables as I pushed around our cart caused quite a few heads to turn. When workers would come to leave water jugs at her home, or other apartment residents stopped by, I could see the momentary shock on their faces. One woman even called Val to notify her that there was some man in her home, even though I already explained to her who I was and why I was there.

My Personal Project

My most critical moments of self-reflection occurred as I learned about my topic. Some of the stories I read left me angered, bitter, and disgusted. I also felt ashamed to see similarities between myself and these aggressors. How my fellow men can subscribe to ideas of absolute dominance and control, and extend their jealousy or anger or mental issues in the forms of physical violence laid out before me in articles and texts. How their actions could create the statistics that leave Brazil with the 5th highest rate of femicide: 4.8 deaths for every 100,000 people. I felt helpless as I read about the decade of feminist protests and marches finally create legislation targeting gender-based violence, only to see that the rates of Black women dying have increased over a ten-year period. That the very laws combating violence re-victimized some women because professionals were not trained to interact with certain populations. That

the services that did work were seeing enormous budget cuts and reductions under the new presidency, with little hope for change under the new candidates in the upcoming cycle.

To be honest, I wondered how women could still put so much trust and love into their partners, how more people did not live in paranoia. I choked up at the story of a girl who was raped over the course of two years by her father after his wife passed away, only stopping once he found a new partner. Once the girl ran away and reported the incident, the man was not sentenced to prison, because the jury ruled that the father “posed no risk” towards his daughter since she had changed her living space. Or a firefighter walking into a school where his wife worked and shooting her down in between classes. They had a 1-year-old daughter together. Or Amanda Bueno, whose past as a nightclub dancer received more attention by the media than her own murder. The defense’s story reflected upon her low moral character, and how her fiancé had simply acted in a single moment of jealousy and rage when he had discovered her work history. A moment that somehow involved 12 blows to the head, and shots to the head and back utilizing a variety of firearms, all captured on camera through their security system. He received only 40 years in prison for the murder of his 29-year-old fiancé (Déborah and Sanematsu 25).

Sometimes, the text in front of me was incredibly difficult to work with. I would finish it and silently process what I had just read. But I chose this topic to be emotionally and intellectually challenged, to understand a concept that needs to be solved. I looked back at my own past, and thought about any moments in which I had made women feel uncomfortable in

any way. I looked at the future, and how we could educate generations of men on what respect and love looks like, and how to seek services that could analyze their propensity towards violence. At the end of all this, I learned ways in which society's construction of manhood have been tainted with machismo and other patriarchal ideas, but also how learning about its effects could be so sobering, and so effective in self-critiquing one's actions. Looking forward, I will always seek to dialogue and inform my fellow men about everything I have learned, and what steps we can take as a collective to show women the respect that they deserve.

Conclusions

Undergoing this Community Development Project was a transformative experience for myself. It allowed me to reflect on my positionality, and what it meant to be myself in the context of my organization and project. Treating my work not as research, but an auto-ethnography and 'convivencia' shifted my studies from the usual pitfalls of academia, where communities are treated as subjects within a neocolonial framework. Despite this heightened awareness, mistakes are always made throughout the experience. I feel grateful knowing that I could produce multiple contributions for my organization, and they in turn have sent me on a journey I will continue, whether in my studies or my daily life. My worldviews have been shifted and re-arranged for the better.

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