

Flipping the City: Space and Subjectivity in the São Paulo Periphery

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Abstract

Like many urban spaces in the Global South, Brazilian cities are renowned for their extreme inequalities, with socio-spatial distinctions generally following a center/periphery divide in which wealth and infrastructure are concentrated in center districts, and social vulnerability increases the farther out one goes. Yet, in the past fifteen years, poverty reduction, planning initiatives, higher education opportunities, and social media networks have transformed many urban periphery communities and residents' aspirations for the future. In this article, I explore some of the visions of what city life in São Paulo is and might be. I begin with an overview of São Paulo's spatial landscape and the polysemic category "the periphery." I then turn to two differently scaled examinations of intentional spatial and cultural transformation in São Paulo's Zona Sul (southern zone). The first is a study through reflection of local sustainable development policy in two environmentally protected areas, the second an auto-ethnographic inflected exploration of the growth in recent years of what I call insurgent cosmopolitan periphery subjectivities. My analysis considers how center-led public policies and periphery-based cultural movements, may, in different ways, simultaneously re-enforce existing social segregation and support the creation of new spatial possibilities, space-based subjectivities, and life ways in urban landscapes.

Keywords: [Urban Planning; Periphery; Socioeconomic Mobility; Cosmopolitanism; Cultural Politics; Queer; Sustainable Development]

On July 31, 2014, then São Paulo mayor and 2018 Brazilian presidential candidate Fernando Haddad signed a new Strategic Master Plan to guide the city's development for the next sixteen years (Secretaria Municipal de Desenvolvimento Urbano, Prefeitura de São Paulo n.d.). According to the Haddad administration's online overview at the time, the plan's primary objective was to "humanize and re-equilibrate São Paulo, bringing together housing and jobs, and confronting socio-spatial inequalities" (Prefeitura da Cidade de São Paulo n.d.). The summary further explained:

To reach these objectives, it is necessary to combat idle land that is not achieving its social function; implement the housing policy we need; value the environment; guide the growth of the city around public transportation; improve urban life at the neighborhood level;

promote economic development; preserve historic patrimony and value cultural initiatives; and strengthen popular participation in determining the direction of the city.

Noble ambitions indeed, particularly for a city renowned for its inequalities and poor livability (Caldeira 2001; Holston 2009; Kowarick 2000; Pardue 2010; Prefeitura de Sao Paulo: Secretaria de Desenvolvimento Urbano 2012; UN-Habitat 2010). In historical perspective, São Paulo's Strategic Master Plan is the outgrowth of decades of political mobilization around housing and urban living conditions (Friendly 2013; Holston 2009; Kohara 2016; Kowarick 2000) that accelerated during Brazil's re-democratization in the 1980s. With the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, an emerging social justice-based urban planning paradigm was solidified into law (República Federativa do Brazil 2015). Article 182 establishes the "social function of land" and the "well-being of inhabitants" as key constitutional principles, and requires all cities with populations over 20,000 to create strategic master plans to direct urban development. In 2001, these constitutional principals were codified in the groundbreaking City Statute (Bassul 2010; República Federativa do Brasil 2001), which delineates a series of urban planning mechanisms to help promote the social functions of land and reaffirms the Constitution's commitment to a Lefebvrian vision of democratic management and the right to the city (Lefebvre 1996).

In fall 2016, the likelihood of the São Paulo Strategic Master Plan helping re-equilibrate the city diminished significantly when João Doria, a business magnet representing the neoliberal-oriented Brazilian Social Democracy Party (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira/PSDB), easily defeated the incumbent Haddad in the first round of the mayoral elections. Curious to see how the Doria administration would approach implementing the 2014 Strategic Master Plan, I regularly visited the city's website, and in early 2017, noticed that the passage on inequalities and the social use of land had vanished. Instead, a new overview emphasized the link between a healthy city and a pro-business environment:

The new municipal administration will enact urban instruments and revisit others currently in operation to make São Paulo adhere more to the actual city that predates that Plan and be more attractive to economic activities that re-enforce its profile as a global city, the third biggest metropolis in the world. (Prefeitura de São Paulo—Urbanismo e Licenciamento n.d.)

Toward this end, early into his mandate, Doria launched the *Cidade Linda* (Beautiful City) program (Prefeitura de São Paulo 2017), which supports not only the removal of trash from dirty streets and open spaces, but also authorizes the painting over of street murals and tagging on public properties. In promoting the program, the mayor stated that “the city is dirty, poorly cared for and covered in spray-paint tags,” and that taggers are “criminals” who “probably steal cell phones” to pay for their paint (*The Guardian* 2017). Given São Paulo’s reputation as a global street art leader and graffiti’s role in vitalizing a city famous for its greyness (Mesquita and Valiengo 2013), it would seem that the “Beautiful City” program may be as much about erasing the presence of (lower-income and black) periphery residents in São Paulo’s wealthier central districts than beautifying the city. Or perhaps for some, this may amount to the same thing.

The 2014 São Paulo Master Plan is just one example of an ongoing struggle—a dissensus (Rancière 2015)—over what life should be in Brazil’s historically unequal urban spaces. In 2013, millions of previously poor urban Brazilians, including many from the so-called “new middle classes,” took to the streets to protest the poor quality of public transportation, housing, and education, and the high levels of corruption endemic throughout Brazilian society (Saad-Filho 2013). About six months later, thousands of mostly black youth from the São Paulo peripheries staged flash mobs in shopping malls in the *rolezinho* movement and unsettled traditional middle class (read white) Brazilians and the mainstream media with their occupation of these private yet public spaces (Pereira 2014). Then in March 2015, a second wave of mass mobilizations swept the country, this time with many “traditional” middle class and elite Brazilians taking to the streets.

These demonstrations centered on governmental corruption, and in particular high-level Worker's Party [*Partido dos Trabalhadores*/PT] involvement in a money-laundering scheme at Petrobras, Brazil's national oil company (Folha de São Paulo 2015). The anti-PT backlash expanded over the next three years, with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the jailing of former PT President Luiz Inácio "Lula" de Silva on corruption charges in 2018, and the election of the far-right populist Jair Bolsonaro as Brazil's president in November 2019.

In this article, I examine some of these competing visions of what urban life in São Paulo—and by extension, other large global cities—is and might be. Rather than concentrating on the macro-level political developments I have outlined above or the well-documented dynamics that support the (re)production of material inequalities and social vulnerabilities in urban contexts,¹ my analysis centers on how differently positioned social actors imagine and construct the city's peripheries as spaces of possibility (Appadurai 1996). These heterogeneous visions of the periphery as a good—and perhaps better—place than "the center" work against the dominant conception of the periphery as the epitome of urbanism gone wrong, be it in terms of violence, aesthetics, or social vulnerability. And while positive periphery identities in Brazil are by no means a new phenomenon (e.g., São Paulo's still strong, periphery-based hip-hop and graffiti movements date back to the late '80s), Lula's election as the country's first Workers Party president in 2002 sparked a period of marked socioeconomic change that impacted public policy and the everyday lives and dreams of periphery residents. These developments included: upward economic mobility for millions of poor and working class Brazilians through rising wages and expanded credit (Souza 2012); redistributive social programs such as the much-lauded Family Grant Program (World Bank 2013); significantly expanded higher education opportunities for lower-income students through

¹ The large body of critical studies of urbanism in São Paulo includes Bonduki and Rolnik 1982; Holston 2009; Kowarick 2000; Marques 2014; and Rolnik 2015.

federal scholarship, loan, and racial/class-based quota admissions programs (Segenreich and Castanheira 2009); and Brazil's growing global influence as one of the BRICS emerging economies.

Befitting the foundations of the São Paulo Strategic Master Plan and Brazil's constitutional urban planning framework, my analysis of the "periphery" and periphery subjectivities builds on Lefebvre's tripartite conceptualization of space as simultaneously a physical location, an ideological construct, and a lived experience (Lefebvre 1991; see also Pardue 2010 on the construction of the "periphery" in São Paulo). My discussion builds on seven, four-to-eight-week long research trips in São Paulo I conducted from 2014 to 2018, including a three-year National Science Foundation-supported project (2016–2018) on the so-called "new middle class." I begin with an overview of São Paulo's spatial landscape and the polysemic category "the periphery." I then turn to two differently scaled examinations of intentional spatial and cultural transformation in São Paulo's Zona Sul (southern zone) peripheries. The first focuses on the Capivari-Monos and Bororé-Colônia Municipal Environmental Protected Areas (*Área de Proteção Ambiental Municipal/APA*), a center-led, local government initiative that reimagines the outer Zona Sul peripheries within a sustainable development framework. The APAs have continued across multiple administrations with significantly different political leanings, making them an enduring if evolving part of the Zona Sul imaginary, and an example of environmental governmentality in a global south setting (Agrawal 2005; Boyd, Ensor, Broto, and Juhola 2014; Rao 2018). The second is an exploration of the growth in recent years of Zona Sul-based cultural movements that assert what I call "insurgent cosmopolitan periphery subjectivities." I argue that both state-led public policies and organic cultural movements simultaneously—and unevenly—re-enforce social segregation and support the creation of new periphery-based subjectivities and life ways. Through highlighting these contested spaces of dreams and reinvention, I seek to contribute to a growing literature on the heterogeneity and possible trajectories of urban socio-spatial transformation in global cities today (Marques 2014; Roberston and Ho 2016; Sassen 2018).

Thinking about São Paulo's Peripheries

With a population of 11.9 million, and over 20.9 million in the thirty-nine municipalities that make up its sprawling metropolitan area, São Paulo is one of the largest cities in the world. Unlike Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo was not an important colonial center, and only with the coffee boom in the late nineteenth century did the city begin to assume a central role in Brazil's economy and political order. By 1930, São Paulo's population reached one million, and the city grew rapidly throughout the first half of the twentieth century as its metropolitan area became Brazil's industrial center. Population in the metro area skyrocketed from 2.5 million in 1950 to 12 million in 1980, largely through the internal migration of millions from Brazil's historically poor and underdeveloped Nordeste (the northeast) to São Paulo and other cities in the more economically developed southeast. By 2010, the metro population reached 20 million, and the region's economy reconfigured with a relative decline in manufacturing and a solidification of São Paulo's current role as Brazil's financial, international business, and technology center.

São Paulo's spatial expansion has occurred in an uneven manner in which wealth has concentrated in central regions with modernist architecture, high levels of infrastructure, and mostly high-density residential areas (Marques 2014). As is the case with other global south urban landscapes, concentric rings of increasingly poorer neighborhoods surround this still-expanding center. Many of these ring communities are self-built (*auto-construído*), and to this day millions of residents have uncertain legal title to their land and homes (Holston 1991; UN-Habitat 2010). Over time, most closer-in, periphery communities have become official neighborhoods with paved streets, sewage, and commercial districts, and more recently malls (*shoppings*) and metro/train stations. In this process, newer—and lower-income—migrants continue to occupy undeveloped areas in the peri-urban and rural fringes of the city and greater metropolitan area (Marques 2014),

as well as abandoned and underutilized buildings in São Paulo's historic center (Kowarick and Frúgoli, Jr. 2016).

As a large portion of critical urban studies literature demonstrates, this pattern of development is the direct result of an economic model of capital accumulation in which workers have not received sufficient wages to participate in the formal housing market and have assumed the production of their own housing (Bonduki and Rolnik 1982; Kowarick 2000; Rolnik 2015). Today, nearly 15 percent of Paulistanos—or 1.5 million people—live in favelas, even though the process of favelaization in São Paulo only began in earnest in the 1980s (Kowarick and Frúgoli, Jr. 2016, 10). Many of these residents continue to experience substantial social vulnerability, including inadequate sewage, transportation, schools, health care, and leisure spaces, a conjuncture that Kowarick (2000) describes as under-citizenship (*subcidadania*). Yet, notwithstanding the empirical realities of higher levels of wealth in the center regions and increasing socioeconomic vulnerability as one moves out, São Paulo's peripheries contain significant socioeconomic heterogeneity, including millions of working and lower-middle-class populations concentrated in the city's inner and middle periphery rings (Marques 2014).

In policy and everyday life, most Paulistanos use a binary center/periphery conceptual framework to describe these socio-spatial realities. The *Centro Expandido* (the greater center) contains São Paulo's three principal business districts—the historic Centro, Avenida Paulista, and the newer Berrini region along the Rio Pinheiros—and many elite and middle-class residential neighborhoods. Surrounding the Centro Expandido are regions designated by their geographical direction in relation to the center: the Zona Oeste (western zone), Zona Norte (northern zone), Zona Sul (southern zone), and Zona Leste (eastern zone), which together constitute "*a periferia*" (the periphery). In addition to capturing physical spatial divisions, the center/periphery dyad expresses a series of oppositions that define residents by attributed social characteristics such as: rich::poor,

white::black, non-Nordestina/o::Nordestina/o, educated::uneducated, good citizen::marginal; modern::traditional, and cosmopolitan::non-cosmopolitan.

If the center/periphery dyad plays a central role in structuring how Paulistanos conceive of and experience the urban landscape (Carmo 2017; Moutinho, Alves, and Mateuzi 2016; Pardue 2010), my interactions with many Zona Sul residents highlight the polysemic—and at times contested—nature of the category *periferia* and its associated attributes. For many, socioeconomic class parallels the center/periphery spatial divide, as in this description by Marcos, a longtime community and environmental activist in the outer Zona Sul.

The divide we usually talk about is the other side of the bridge.² That is, the Tiête River is the dividing line that marks the division of social classes. The people on the other side of the river have a different vision of things, and they look upon those on the other side [the periphery] with distrust.

He further links these differences in habitus to unequal educational capital and infrastructure levels.

And where do you have the manual laborers? They live in Grajaú, Parelheiros, Jardim Ângela [Zona Sul periphery neighborhoods in which I have conducted fieldwork], which all have precarious transportation, schools and health-care.

² The importance of the river and bridge as dividing lines between the Zona Sul and the Center is captured in the classic rap “Da Ponte Pra Cá”/“From This Side of the Bridge” by the nationally renowned, Zona Sul-based Racionais MCs.

Yet, in response to my same question of “what is the periphery,” a group of young adult activists who run a cultural organization in another outer Zona Sul neighborhood expressed conflicting ideas on the physical, ideological, and social boundaries of the periphery. Echoing Lefebvre’s “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1996) and Holston’s “insurgent citizenship” (Holston 2009), for most of these youth, access to urban space and amenities is the key element distinguishing the center from the periphery. As Jaime explains:

I think the center begins in Grajaú, because that’s where you catch the train. From here you have to go an hour and a half by bus to get to the closest train station, which is Grajaú. From there, you can go many places and connect with the yellow, blue and green metro lines. Everything is more accessible, and it’s faster to get there. From the moment you get to Grajaú, you have arrived in the Republic.

The youth activists in turn expressed markedly different opinions on whether such physical/infrastructure divides necessarily translate into social difference. Like Marcos, Guilherme thinks that the culture and habitus of residents of the periphery and center are totally different, so much so that they constitute distinct species.

In the Center, there are museums, theater. In the periphery, we have *saraus* (open-mike poetry readings) and community events with authors. The demeanor (*jeito*) of a person from the center is different from a person from the community. The person from the community is simpler, and the people who come to the sarau are doormen, bricklayers, people who work in these kinds of job, and the people from the center are bankers, businessmen, that kind of thing. The way they speak is totally different. It is literally like they are extraterrestrials.

In reply, Vanessa countered,

I think that it is us who put this idea forward—it's us who make this division. I don't think that they speak differently. I think that it comes from culture. I know many people there that are businesspeople and all that, and they talk the same as me. So I don't agree with you.

And if Vanessa feels mostly comfortable in social spaces in the center, Alessandra describes how middle-class individuals from the center disrespect them because they are from the periphery.

I think a little differently on this question of youth [from the center] and their vision [of us]. Just yesterday, at the event [a book reading in the Center], I don't know what you felt. We were talking together when another group of youth came in, and I felt a distancing, each of them moving away from us. . . . And later we sat on a sofa, where there were backpacks, and some women came and said "excuse me," took the bags, and went to another sofa and put the bags there.

This comment generated a passionate discussion of how people from the center generally associate periphery youth, and especially those who are Afro-Brazilian, with crime and violence. Here, all the activists came together and positioned themselves as *periféricas/os* in opposition to racist and classist youth from the center. This practice of flipping a commonly held perception on its head (e.g., the periphery as dangerous) is a dynamic shared by many periphery cultural political movements, which simultaneously present a positive black, periphery cultural identity and identify economic structures, the State, racism, and sexism as key forces behind violence and inequality in the periphery. As in Harms' analysis argues of "social edginess" in the rural outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City, for Zona Sul residents, "edge" and "periphery" denote not only physical locations but also an "ethos, a set of actions and attitudes . . . that people deploy to achieve material gain, construct meaningful identities, and carve a space for themselves in society" (Harms 2010, 4). In the two case studies that follow, I discuss how center-based urban planners and periphery-based cultural activists have consciously mobilized different versions of positive periphery space-based identities,

and in the process partially destabilized “the center” as the key reference point in the São Paulo urban landscape.

What Can We Do? Sustainable Development in the Outer Zona Sul

“Those people from the Jardins [a wealthy neighborhood in the center] come here because they discover that there are flowers and forest, but they don’t stop here and see us, the dirty people (povo sujo). Clown performance, Annual APA-Capivari-Monos Festival, Parelheiros, August 2014

As the population of São Paulo increased from 2 million to 8.5 million from 1950 to 1990, huge swaths of formerly forested and largely unpopulated watershed areas became “the periphery.” By the 1970s, the urban expansion had reached the edges of the city’s three main water sources, including the Guarapiranga and Billings reservoirs, both located in the Zona Sul. In response, the State of São Paulo enacted the Land Use for Watershed Protection Law (Lei 898). As a longtime municipal urban planner explained to me in a 2014 interview, the law sought to “protect these watersheds and hinder population growth in these areas.” She paused for a beat and added, “Then look what happened,” referring to the fact that since the enactment of the Watershed Law, hundreds of thousands of families have occupied and continue to live in areas that technically should not have human residents. These tensions continue until today:

The state law for Guarapiranga was approved in 2006, and for Billings in 2009. These statutes, along with other federal and municipal laws, create mechanisms to regularize unauthorized housing. So, we have this contradiction because the government is investing in consolidating occupations at the same time that it doesn’t recognize them.

It is within this context of contradictory land use legislation, social policies, and everyday practices that the city of São Paulo established two Municipal Protected Environmental Areas (APAs) in the outer Zona Sul: the APA Capivari-Monos (2001) and the APA Bororé-Colônia (2006),

which together account for nearly 25 percent of the city's physical territory. The stated purpose of the APAs is to "unite the conservation of nature with socioeconomic development for community residents through regulating [*disciplinando*] natural resources utilization, land use and occupation processes" (Secretaria Municipal do Verde e do Meio Ambiente, Prefeitura de São Paulo n.d.). Each APA is directed by an approximately twenty-member deliberative council, half from civil society and half from governmental agencies. The APAs' goal of simultaneously achieving environmental protection and sustainable development through ecotourism and urban agriculture mirrors the 2014 Strategic Master Plan's blueprint for the region, which officially designates the city's southernmost borough of Parelheiros a "rural area with urban centers."

Seeking to promote this vision of the outer Zona Sul as an agricultural region and ecotourism destination, the municipal government, urban agriculturalists, and environmental activists have produced several glossy publications that highlight the uniqueness and environmental richness of the region. These include the 12" x 17" coffee table book format APA Capivari-Monos Management Plan Notebook (*Caderno do Plano de Manejo da Área de Proteção Ambiental Municipal*) (Bellenzani 2012) and the pocket-sized *Ecotourism and Agro-ecology in the Extreme South of São Paulo City* tour book (Reiter, Ascar, Baptista, and Bellenzani 2012; available in Portuguese, English, and Spanish). Both publications present São Paulo's unexpected natural wonders through photographs of uninhabited forested areas along the Represa Billings, waterfalls, stunning vistas, unusual plants and animals, and expansive agricultural fields. Less evident in either volume are non-indigenous human residents of the APAs' urbanized areas, other than two positive comments in the tourist guide about the rich cultural fusion produced through "mixing the rural with urbanity" (Reiter et al. 2012, 51). Instead, the authors display a curated cultural landscape (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) of historical patrimony (e.g., churches, early twentieth-century railways, German and Japanese settlements dating to the late nineteenth century), mid-scale urban agriculture, spiritual retreat centers (Solo Sagrado and Templo Quan-Inn), and Guaraní

communities within a largely non-human natural environment.

If the city and the APA councils have attempted to engage residents in creating a more sustainable outer Zona Sul, as Rolnik has argued in her discussion of urban planning initiatives in metropolitan São Paulo, these participatory democratic processes are simultaneously a source of tension and cultural innovation (Rolnik 2011, 240). Based on my interactions in the outer Zona Sul, it is my impression that most residents who do not work in urban agriculture or ecotourism see the APAs—and city planning more generally—as restricting rather than enabling their lives. This critique is captured in the *bandeira de luta* (rallying cry) “*não pode*” (you can’t do that), which residents consistently voice when talking about the APAs. For example, at a February 2016 APA Capivari-Monos community forum with the head of the city’s Green and Environment Department, four of the first eight public commentators invoked the *não pode* mantra, each time generating resounding applause from the audience of several hundred people. While not directly challenging the need for environmental protection and sustainable development, the speakers used a social and economic justice discourse to insert themselves as key actors in APA policies, and to question whom the APA benefits. As one public commentator explained,

We are here looking for justice. Where will we find it? I came here, my father came here, because it was the least expensive area in the city. We have accomplished a lot, but we can’t continue to better our lives, because we live in a protected area. This is a special place, but for whom? For people who don’t live here, who have money.

Echoing a growing literature on ecotourism and economic development (Horton 2018; Stronza and Gordillo 2008), many of the Zona Sul cultural and environmental activists I have spoken to recognize this friction between preserving the environment and the spatialized hierarchies involved in the production and consumption of ecotourism, and in particular, the possibility that ecotourism serves (wealthier) outsiders rather than local residents. Seeking to

explore these tensions with policymakers, in 2015 I interviewed the then sub-mayor of Parelheiros, who before assuming this position worked as a teacher in Vargem Grande, a 40,000-resident urban nucleus within the Capivari-Monos APA. He asked one of his young aides who works as an ecotourism guide to join our conversation, and the three of us had a free-form, forty-five-minute discussion about the challenges of balancing economic development and environmental protection given scant resources, a massive housing deficit, and continued land occupations. In conclusion, and echoing Lefebvre's trialectic of the production of space, the sub-mayor offered this assessment of the current situation.

The Ecotourism law provides financial incentives, like not paying municipal taxes for 30 years, if you create hospitality businesses like restaurants, hostels, extreme sports, a 500-meter zip line. These are income-generating activities that we can easily do here in Parelheiros. I can see that people are starting slowly, but if not through love and pain, then how? Because I doubt anyone would rather get in a bus and travel two hours in the morning and two more to return home, who could have the conditions to work and live here. Do you understand? When policies begin to support these conditions, to facilitate life, I believe that this will support the dreams of people who live in Parelheiros and want to live here.

In this argument, the sub-mayor offers sustainable development in the outer Zona Sul as an antidote to the mobility issues that have profound human and financial costs for periphery residents in São Paulo and other large global south cities. At the same time, Oliveira affirms the importance of the State in helping residents achieve their life aspirations, a path that for many is centered on their living in or relocating to outer São Paulo peripheries. Yet, as discussed above, São Paulo's socio-spatial development is directly linked to an economic system that necessitates that many workers occupy environmentally protected land and (illegally) construct their own homes.

And as in the case of self-built housing in the peripheries, the APA's emphasis on micro-businesses transfers the risks of economic sustenance onto the shoulders of working Brazilians rather than facilitating their participation in the mandated—if decreasing—benefits associated with formal sector jobs. Nor, I would argue, are ecotourism, urban agriculture, and sustainable development likely to make much of a dent in breaking down the spatial concentration of jobs in the Centro Expandido and meeting the pressing employment needs of outer Zona Sul residents.

So at least for now, the APA and Strategic Master Plan's vision of a sustainable Zona Sul appears to be at best aspirational, environmental governmentality (Agrawal 2005; Sadana 2018) that presents São Paulo as a green-friendly global city while not significantly transforming its longstanding structural inequalities. Nonetheless, many insurgent cultural activists in the Zona Sul are also increasingly incorporating land-based imaginary into their work and explicitly valorizing the *mata* (forest), *barra* (clay soil) and *margens* (edges) that distinguish the Zona Sul from other regions of the city. Examples include the Cia Humalada de Teatro, a Grajaú-based theater group whose work is a kaleidoscope of Afro-Brazilian culture, feminism, queer culture, and life on the margins of the Represa Billings (Cia Humalada de Teatro 2015), and the Instituto Favela da Paz (Instituto Favela da Paz n.d.), which combines musical production (the Poesia Samba Soul band and a community recording studio), anti-violence activities, and environmental education in the Jardim Nakamura neighborhood of Jardim Ângela. In contrast to the APA publications discussed above, these groups directly position Zona Sul residents within an environment that is simultaneously intensely urban and natural, and whose margins offer the opportunity to reinvent new urban lifeways. In my second case study, I examine some of these multifaceted, insurgent subjectivities that have been shaped by a younger generation's experiences of having come of age in an era of rising incomes, expanded higher education access, and the growth of the Internet and social media.

Insurgent Cosmopolitan Subjectivities in the Zona Sul

I could live in France, no, I could live in Japan. Fabiana, six years old, Parque Regina, Zona Sul

In early 2016, I participated in a free guitar and ukulele course for young teens in Parque Regina, a working-class neighborhood in the Campo Limpo district. The workshops, supported through a grant from the city government, were organized by a longtime resident and taught by a professional samba musician. For six consecutive Saturday mornings I attended the class, which was held in the park in front of my second-story studio apartment. If instruments were available, I played along, and I always chatted (*batendo papo*) with the youths and adults who hung out before, during, and after the sixty-minute lessons. On one of these mornings, three junior high-aged girls came up to me and started a conversation. After pleasantries, they explained to me, “It’s important to know about the world and ask questions. Like that guy [Galileo] who got into trouble for saying the Earth goes around the Sun.” Our conversation shifted to English words (the colors), whether I had been to Disneyland, and Oregon’s climate—all standard topics when I talk to youths. Then one of them shifted conversational gears and asked me, “Isn’t it a crime in the US to say things against gays and *negros*?” I answered yes, and said that these were called “hate crimes” in English, and that a person could pay a fine or even be jailed for saying aggressive and deprecating things against women, blacks, gays, and people of different religions. She responded, “That’s a good idea—in Brazil, people will say these things right to your face.” I was a bit taken aback, as I would not have expected three public school seventh graders in Campo Limpo to know about hate crime laws in the United States or directly connect them to the violence experienced by gays and blacks in both countries.

That same day, over *feijoada* and beer, I found out that one of the adults associated with the music class had gone on a short trip to Europe in the early 2000s as part of an intra-firm soccer tournament staged by the multinational corporation where a friend of his worked. Two weeks later, I learned that two outer Zona Sul youth activists were about to go to Berlin—a German couple had visited their organization and decided to sponsor an all-expense paid trip for them to share their

experiences and learn about community organizing in Europe. A few months later, several thousand of their Facebook friends (myself included) read about their trip, a highlight of which was a meeting with the German Foreign Relations Minister. Later that year, a collective of Afro-feminist activists from the Zona Sul, including a member of our São Paulo “new middle class” project team, went on a self-financed trip to Mexico and Colombia to participate in several international political organizing events. The collective shared these experiences of pan-Latin American solidarity in the 174-page “*Luta, Resistência, Memória em América Latina*” (“Struggle, Resistance, Memory in Latin America”) edition of their *Fala Guerreira* (*Speak Warrior*) magazine (Projeto Fala Guerreira! 2017). On the higher education front, another Afro-Brazilian member of our São Paulo team told me that her sister had recently returned from being an exchange student in Australia for a year and half. And while implementing a household survey on an unimposing street in Jardim Nakamura, the poorest of the four communities in the new middle-class project, we discovered that a resident had visited Europe multiple times and had a son studying in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Over the past year, I have come across many similar stories of Zona Sul periphery residents, often Afro-Brazilians in their twenties and thirties, graduating from college and/or traveling to international destinations, possibilities that would have been extremely unlikely in the pre-Lula years and outside of the realm of possibility for their parents. These experiences are continuously shared via interconnected social media networks and contribute to the construction of what I call “cosmopolitan periphery subjectivities.” My use of the term cosmopolitan follows a growing body of work on vernacular (Werbner 2006), subaltern (Schielke 2012; Zeng 2014), and everyday (Datta 2009) cosmopolitanisms. These approaches identify cosmopolitanism’s key defining feature as an openness to difference, rather than particular preferences, practices, or class subjectivities, such as the distinction-centered (Bourdieu 1984) cosmopolitanism of traditional middle class and elite Brazilians. Seen in this light, cosmopolitan periphery subjectivities among young adults in the Zona Sul represent a departure from the worldviews of their parents, most of whom came to the city as

migrants and to a substantial degree re-created the small-town atmosphere of their communities of origin. At the same time, these cosmopolitan periphery subjectivities are a self-conscious assertion that “the center” does not have a monopoly on access to—or participation in—knowledge exchange, personal development, and political engagement, all of which have been greatly facilitated among lower-income Brazilians through the use of social media (Nemer 2016).

A vibrant example of Zona Sul cosmopolitan periphery subjectivities is the Cia Humbalada de Teatro,³ located a few blocks from the last stop on the 9#/Emerald train in Grajaú. Established in 2004, the group “seeks to be a center [*ponto*] of cultural resistance in the periphery” and consists of “women, fags [*bichas*], monsters, savages [*povos da mata*], mothers and Blacks doing theater” (Cia Humbalada de Teatro 2017). Over the years, the Cia Humbalada has offered its diverse publics a safe space in Grajaú and produced original theater pieces, a carnival bloco, cultural events, and parties (Cia Humbalada de Teatro n.d.; Cia Humbalada n.d.), including *Grajaú Conta Dandaras*, *Grajaú Conta Zumbi*, a 2016, three-hour theatrical tour de force that presents life in Grajaú as a form of resistance paralleling the seventeenth quilombo of Palmares.⁴ I attended the show during its two-week February 2017 run at the SESC-Belenzini, a popular cultural and leisure center located in the Zona Leste periphery.

The play begins with the cast, dressed in African costumes, guiding the audience on a musical procession into the performance space. In its first half, skits address the rush hour commute on the #9/Emerald train, homo-affectivity (three macho men drinking beer at a boteca, two of whom end up exchanging an unexpected passionate kiss after their friend leaves), and a rap

³ The group’s name derives from a McDonalds’ brochure that used the term “humbaladíssimo” to signify *bagunça organizada* (an organized mess). When the group needed to make a banner, this word was too long, so they shortened it to “Humbalada.”

⁴ Palmares was established by the fugitive slaves Zumbi and Dandaras and existed outside of Portuguese control for nearly 100 years

about homophobia. In the second half, the tone shifts from comedic to intense drama, and in the play's longest scene, six women recount their painful stories of motherhood (e.g., being a single mother, having a child taken away by the State, abortion, the death of a child by gun violence), all told while they chop onions. After an expressionist nude dance in which the cast bathes together, the exploration of gender/sexual oppression and liberation continues with a monologue in which a *travesti* shares the abuses she suffered in school and her dreams of flying away. In the penultimate scene, the show shifts gears again with a *gira* (an, Afro-Brazilian religious ritual) in which women from the audience join an ecstatic dance with the incorporated *pomba giras*. The piece concludes with the cast back in African costumes singing the play's theme song.

The Cia Humbalada displayed this seamless mixing of gender/sexual, race, class, and periphery-centric politics a few weeks later in its annual "O Grajaú Vem Tomar no Copo"⁵ bloco on the Saturday of Carnaval. Here, several hundred revelers, nearly all from the Zona Sul, the majority Afro-Brazilian, perhaps half LGBTQ and many in drag, romped through the streets of Grajaú—the neighborhood that youth cultural activist Jaime described above as "the entrance to the Republic." To the smiles, cheers and occasional incredulous looks of residents along our route, we danced behind the sound truck to the bloco's nontraditional, Carnaval theme song. From its opening "No more silence, I am going to rub my butt in the face of the ignorant" (*Chega de silêncio, eu vou gritar, eu vou esfregar minha bunda na cara do Jumêncio*) first stanza, the song shamelessly flaunts its resistance, a *pode* (we can) that will not accept the *não pode* (you can't) that structures social and political inequalities in Brazil. The rap continues in the second stanza with a critique of masculinist politics ("The dirty Fatherland, untrustworthy scrotums/O Pátrica imunda, machistas escrotos") and an affirmation of Black female sexuality in the third ("My body, my rules – I have sex, I have

color/Meu corpo, minhas regras –tenho sexo, tenho cor”) before invoking liquid modernity sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in a “Don’t touch me” (*Não meter a mão*) call to take to the streets and get down.

As Grajaú Conta Dandaras, Grajaú Conta Zumbi and the “O Grajaú Vem Tomar no Copo” bloco strikingly demonstrate, the Zona Sul cosmopolitanism displayed here is simultaneously an assertion of a positive view of the periphery and a form of resistance to the multiple axes of oppression periphery residents face. This reinvention is situated within a cultural political landscape that includes thriving rap (Bertelli and Feltran 2017; Pardue 2008), graffiti (Caldeira 2012; Mesquita and Valiengo 2013), and *sarau* (open mic poetry readings) (D’Andrea 2013; Pardue 2012; Vaz 2008)⁶ movements. Rather than fighting for a pre-determined future or using a pre-defined political strategy, these “citizen artists” (Vaz 2008) operate according to an insurgent logic that “destabilizes the present and renders it fragile, defamiliarizing the coherence with which it usually presents itself” (Holston 2009, 34). In the case of Afro-feminist and queer activists like the Cia Humbalada group, this destabilization includes not only a reimagining of the periphery but also an explicit rejection of the masculinist performative style and gender ideologies that typically characterize the better known rap and graffiti movements (Bertelli and Feltran 2017; Caldeira 2012).

A second characteristic of insurgent periphery cultural movements in Zona Sul is their complex positioning vis-à-vis the state, political parties, and longstanding social movements. On the one hand, the insurgent citizen artist networks with whom I have interacted generally characterize

⁶ Sarau artists in São Paulo include Débora Garcia (“literaturaperiferica.com/DeboraGarcia” n.d.) , Zinho Trindade (“Zinho Trindade—Home” n.d.), Rodrigo Ciríaco (“Rodrigo Ciríaco—Home” n.d.) , Jencyfr Nascimento (2014) and the TRANSarau Collective (“TRANSarau” n.d.). See also Nascimento (2011) and de Oliveira (2017) for scholarly examinations of periphery-based cultural movements in São Paulo.

their political engagement as a form of resistance to experiences of intersectionalities (Moutinho, Alves, and Mateuzi 2016). In this *luta* (struggle), the State is seen as a significant source of material and symbolic violence (Carmo 2017) rather than a privileged avenue through which to redress concerns, as was the case for the “right to the city” neighborhood activists described by Holston (2009). Yet, many cultural activist organizations, including the Cia Humalada de Teatro and the guitar/ukulele class described above, have relied to varying degrees on financial support from governmental agencies for their survival, and it is common for activists to work in governmental jobs and (partially) state-supported non-governmental organizations. These dynamics are similar to those presented in Pardue’s (2007) analysis of hip-hop popular education programs in São Paulo’s Zona Leste, where he argues that these activities constitute neither co-optation by the State nor a unified social or political movement. At the same time, like many Brazilians today, most Zona Sul cultural activists and insurgent cosmopolitans I know express a profound disenchantment—and indeed disgust—with the current state of Brazilian electoral and institutional politics.

It is important to highlight that such positioning on the margins of the State and political parties does not indicate political disengagement, but a critical recognition of the need for new political strategies. As Jane, a Zona Sul citizen artist who has worked in several state-supported community programs and NGOs, explained to me in 2017,

The PT was always that party that I voted for. And then the party began to split, and there were often left-oriented parties, and I always voted for parties of the left. And now I will not vote for anyone not given how things are today—whether it’s Lula, or Bolsonaro—only to save my neck I’d vote for Lula. But I am not interested in voting for the less bad . . . we need to create new possibilities.

Yet, despite this profound skepticism about electoral politics and the PT more specifically, Jane nonetheless participated in several demonstrations protesting the impeachment of President Dilma

Rousseff. But her political engagement remains centered on periphery-centric, insurgent cultural production.

I like the chaos that is Grajaú, the cultural scene that we have today, which we didn't use to have. Today, we produce culture, and this is new. We have had a boom in the past four years across the peripheries, not just Grajaú, but the scene in M'Boi Mirim (another Zona Sul neighborhood), and the folks at Cooperifa.⁷

In this way, like other recent multi-nodal, insurgent São Paulo political movements (e.g., the 2013 street protests and the 2014 *rolezinho* movements described in the introduction), the social and political transformations that Jane works toward remain in a process of becoming (Biehl and Locke 2017), sometimes bursting in activity, then receding into the background, and reconfiguring (or not) in the fluxes through which we assemble our lives.

Conclusion: Flipping the City?

In this article, I have described some of the ways in which policy makers and cultural activists are attempting to reinvent São Paulo's Zona Sul peripheries and counter, if in different ways, the dominant images of the periphery as a place of violence, insufficient infrastructure, and urbanism gone wrong. In both cases, the Zona Sul emerges as a unique physical location (from the bridge on, an environmentally protected area with urban nuclei) and ethos (of insurgent cosmopolitanism, of sustainable development) that is largely distinct from the "center" and its lifeways. Yet, as I navigate the often-jarring contours of São Paulo's socio-spatial and political landscapes, I find myself wondering how residents of the peripheries and the centers might come together—in whatever forms—to work toward transforming the city and achieving (at least some

⁷ Cooperifa, founded by Sérgio Vaz, is one of the first and best known saraus in the Zona Sul (see Pardue 2008, Vaz 2008).

of) the goals outlined in São Paulo's Strategic Master Plan. During the first Lula administration in the mid-2000s, it appeared that such a shared vision of the future existed, and many—if not most—Brazilians believed that their lives were improving and that the country was on a path toward greater economic and social equality (French and Fortes 2012). Today, in the face of continuous political upheaval and the divisive election of the far-right populist Jair Bolsonaro as president, such optimism seems a relic of a bygone era.

Given these macro-political realities, I find myself looking more closely at the micro-cultural terrain of periphery-center interactions to see if there might be zones of friction (Tsing 2011) conducive to progressive social change in an increasingly polarized domestic and global political landscape. Such an analysis involves not only considering periphery-based citizen artists, but also the ways in which insurgent periphery subjectivities might be (re)shaping the center and its middle class and elite residents. For example, in August 2017 I visited the Livraria Cultura on Avenida Paulista, which has perhaps the largest selection of social science, fiction, and arts-related books in São Paulo. My goal was to buy some Brazilian-produced publications on saraus, graffiti, and hip-hop. Finding nothing on saraus in the poetry section, I asked the staff person if they carried anything related to saraus or local poetry. He said no and explained that because most saraus publish independently, they do not produce sufficient quantities to support their distribution through the Livraria Cultura chain. I could not help commenting that I found it strange that there were no books from or about one of São Paulo's most vibrant cultural movements in a self-proclaimed culture-focused bookstore. He smiled and asked me if I was looking for anything else. I said graffiti, and he directed me upstairs to the visual arts section. Here I encountered a wide selection of art books, many in English, featuring the modernist canons of European and North America modern art, as well as Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, who, dare I say, has a penchant for grey cement. Once again, I found a salesperson and asked if there might be any publications on graffiti or tagging. She directed me to one US-produced, English language book on global graffiti

that included some examples from São Paulo. I could not help but think that the insurgent cosmopolitanism of the Zona Sul seem much more open and vibrant than the distinction- and Euro-American-oriented cosmopolitanism displayed so vividly at Livraria Cultura.

That same day, several friends of mine from the center and I had dinner at a crowded tapas restaurant in the bustling Baixo Augusta neighborhood. Looking around and seeing only one table with Afro-Brazilian diners, I commented to my friends that I wondered what our mostly Afro-Brazilian, culturally savvy São Paulo NSF project research team would make of the restaurant, and if they might enjoy joining us, given that they too like good food and drink and talking about politics, music, and travel. They were intrigued by the idea, but said that the odds of us all dining together were quite low. I asked why, and they said, not surprisingly, that there are marked cultural and economic barriers that keep different social groups in São Paulo from interacting. And indeed, all of the NSF project team similarly describe São Paulo as consisting of two separate worlds. Only for them, the periphery is the preferred—and more vital, friendly, and creative—of the two.

I find myself mostly agreeing with our research team's assessments and wondering if perhaps part of the rightward turn in Brazilian politics reflects a (subconscious) recognition on the part of middle class/elite Paulistanos that their city has flipped. Like other contemporary right-wing cultural movements, including Trumpism in the US and the "Leave" camp in the United Kingdom, the tone of the Bolsonaro and his supporters is one of nationalism and protecting national interests, as dramatically demonstrated by the new Brazilian foreign minister calling climate change a "Marxist hoax" created to benefit China at the expense of western democracies (Daily Sabah Americas 2018). This anti-intellectual and staunch nationalism contrasts sharply with both the Global South-focused foreign policy of BRICS Brazil under the Lula and Dilma PT administrations (da Motta Veiga 2016; Dauvergne and Farias 2012) and the periphery-grounded

yet globally engaged Zona Sul insurgent cosmopolitan insurgent artists I have highlighted in this article.

Exactly what the future holds for São Paulo's Zona Sul remains to be seen. Perhaps the energy expressed by groups like the Cia Humbalada de Teatro will generate another round of mass demonstrations, like the 2013 street protests or the 2014 rolezinho movements. Or perhaps the land-based imaginary of Zona Sul insurgent citizen art will help address the tensions between urban planning visions of a sustainable São Paulo and the harsh realities of life at ground zero in the Zona Sul. Or perhaps Brazilian politics will continue on its rightward drift. But rather than offer a definitive prognosis, I conclude with an excerpt from the *Grajaú Conta Dandaras, Grajaú Conta Zumbis* program (Cia Humbalada de Teatro 2017) that I think powerfully captures the resilience and aspirations of many urban periphery communities in Brazil and beyond.

Maybe this will be our last production of our 13-year trajectory of struggle, resistance, joys, abysses, and immensities. It is the drawing of a utopia, the end of a 13-year cycle. Who knows what other cycles will be born tomorrow. What we propose now is that we will rise up and fly. And one thing we know—Grajaú will go on, and it cannot bleed anymore.

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