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**Female and Queer Performances in
the Context of Funk Brasileiro**

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Abstract: Funk Brasileiro is a culture located in the so-called *favelas* in urban Brazil and is practiced predominantly by the Black and Afro-Brazilian youths. Although often primarily referring to music, Funk Brasileiro is a rich culture with multiple facets. Especially in recent years, its image has been shaped by an increased focus on the female body and sexual relationships, emphasizing movements and dance within the culture. In this thesis, I will discuss how female and queer people use Funk Brasileiro to open up spaces for the (re)negotiation of gender/sexuality. By contextualizing the culture within African diasporas, the importance of corporeal productions for the creation and transmission of knowledge in (post)colonial realities is recognized. This means theoretically taking an intersectional view by relating body, space, and culture as well as gender/sexuality and *race*. Three semi-structured qualitative interviews with dancers provide insights into lived experiences and negotiations regarding gender/sexuality within the Funk scene. The sexual explicitness of Funk Brasileiro allows for the imagining and practice of non-heteronormative sexualities for marginalized people. I conclude that the dancing of Funk Brasileiro creates temporally and spatially limited potential for the diversification of genders/sexualities beyond binary understandings.

Keywords: performance, Funk Brasileiro, Afro-diaspora, Brazil, femininity, intersectionality, queer, gender/sexuality, *race*

Resumo: O Funk Brasileiro é uma cultura localizada nas chamadas *favelas* do Brasil urbano e é praticado predominantemente pelos jovens pretes/negres e afro-brasileiros. Apesar de muitas vezes se referir principalmente à música, o Funk Brasileiro é uma cultura rica com múltiplas facetas. Especialmente nos últimos anos, a imagem tem sido marcada por um foco maior no corpo feminino e nas relações sexuais, enfatizando os movimentos e a dança dentro dessa cultura. Nesta tese, discutirei como pessoas femininas e *queer* usam o Funk Brasileiro para abrir espaços para a (re)negociação de gênero/sexualidade. Ao contextualizar a cultura dentro das diásporas africanas, é reconhecida a importância das produções corporais para a criação e transmissão de conhecimentos nas realidades (pós-)coloniais. Isto implica ter uma visão interseccional em teoria, relacionando corpo, espaço e cultura, assim como gênero/sexualidade e *raça*. Três entrevistas qualitativas semi-estruturadas com dançarines permitem uma compreensão de experiências vividas e negociações sobre gênero/sexualidade dentro da comunidade do funk. A expressividade sexual do Funk Brasileiro permite a imaginação e a prática de sexualidades não heteronormativas para pessoas marginalizadas. Considero que a dança do Funk Brasileiro cria um potencial limitado temporal e espacialmente para a diversificação de gêneros/sexualidades além de sistemas binários.

Palavras-chave: performance, Funk Brasileiro, diásporas africanas, Brasil, feminilidade, interseccionalidade, queer, gênero/sexualidade, *raça*

Zusammenfassung: Funk Brasileiro ist eine Kultur, die in den so genannten *Favelas* im städtischen Brasilien verankert ist und überwiegend von Schwarzen und Afro-Brasilianischen Jugendlichen praktiziert wird. Obgleich sich in erster Linie häufig auf die Musik bezogen wird, ist Funk Brasileiro eine facettenreiche Kultur. Vor allem in den letzten Jahren wurde das Bild durch eine verstärkte Konzentration auf den weiblichen Körper und sexuelle Beziehungen geprägt, wobei Bewegungen und Tanz innerhalb der Kultur betont werden. In dieser Arbeit werde ich erörtern, wie weibliche und queere Menschen Funk Brasileiro nutzen, um Räume für

die (Neu-)Verhandlung von Geschlecht/Sexualität zu öffnen. Durch die Kontextualisierung der Kultur innerhalb afrikanischer Diasporas wird die Bedeutung körperlicher Produktionen für die Schaffung und Weitergabe von Wissen in (post)kolonialen Realitäten anerkannt. Dies impliziert eine intersektionale theoretische Sichtweise auf die Beziehung zwischen Körper, Raum und Kultur sowie zwischen Geschlecht/Sexualität und *race*. Drei halbstrukturierte qualitative Interviews mit Tänzer:innen geben Einblicke in gelebte Erfahrungen und Verhandlungen bezüglich Geschlecht/Sexualität innerhalb der Funkszene. Die sexuelle Offenheit des Funk Brasileiro ermöglicht die Vorstellung und Praxis nicht-heteronormativer Sexualitäten für marginalisierte Menschen. Ich gelange zu dem Schluss, dass das Tanzen von Funk Brasileiro ein zeitlich und räumlich begrenztes Potenzial für die Diversifizierung von Geschlechtern/Sexualitäten jenseits binärer Vorstellungen schafft.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Performance, Funk Brasileiro, Afro-Diaspora, Brasilien, Femininität, Intersektionalität, Queer, Gender/Sexualität, *race*

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My research trip to São Paulo took place at a time when the Covid 19 pandemic was reaching another catastrophic peak in Brazil and particularly in São Paulo. I am more than grateful for the support of my friends during this stay. Amynata and Rodrigo, you have no idea what a great emotional support you have been for me with your openness and warmth!

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1. Introduction

“Eu acho o movimento que você faz e a batida são muito envolventes, assim, se começa a ouvir, não tem uma pessoa que você não vê com a mão no joelho já, sabe? ... O funk é uma batida muito envolvente, tem que se dançar na hora assim.”

“I think the movement you do, and the beat are very involving, in the moment you start listening to the music there won't be a single person that you don't see with a hand on their knee already, you know? ... Funk is a very involving beat, you have to dance the moment it starts.”

With these words, Hannah, one of the interlocutors I spoke with for this study, expressed her passion for listening and dancing to Funk Brasileiro. This music genre – or rather culture – is rooted in the *comunidades*, so-called *favelas*¹, of Rio de Janeiro. Emerged in the 1980s, the Black and Afro-Brazilian² youth living in these neighborhoods created a sound and aesthetic that in today's Brazil is spread all over the country (see Claro, 2015, p. 96). Additionally, Funk Brasileiro is subdivided in multiple genres. On the one hand, it has become one of the most profitable branches of the music industry and the most popular genre among younger generations of all social classes (see Freire Filho and Herschmann, 2003, p. 64 and Lopes, 2011, p. 48, as cited in Moreira, 2014, p. 25), making it an integral part of the Brazilian cultural scene. On the other hand, the people who nurture the culture of Funk Brasileiro, namely the Afro-Brazilians in the *comunidades*, suffer from persistent stigmatization (see Lopes, 2010, p. 57).

Ever since then, the culture has been inevitably linked to its place of origin, the communities, whose emergence, and persistence should be understood as a spatial expression of the postcolonial era in Brazil (see Nascimento, 1982, as cited in Smith, 2016, p. 79). Therefore, the intersection of *race*, class, and locality, as well as their effects are permanently present, and Funk Brasileiro became the voice of the lived intensity and explicitness of everyday experiences in the neighborhoods. Social concerns – particularly racism, social

¹ Even though the term *favela* is used in a self-proclaimed way by residents of the neighborhoods, I will resort to the term *comunidade* (community) also broadly used, since *favela* is still afflicted with stereotyping and stigmatization in the international context.

² The use of categories of *race* must be seen in the light of the Brazilian context. Various developments in (post)colonial Brazil, among them misleading beliefs about Brazil as a racial democracy and politically favored miscegenation, led to several terms referring to ethnicity over time (see Mitchell, 2013, pp. 10–12). Today, people in Brazil predominantly use *preto/preta* or *negro/negra* – depending on the context and the place of speech – to refer to their sociocultural identity and to affirm the political value associated with it. The IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) counts people who identify themselves as *preto/preta* and *pardo/parda* as part of the ethnicity/*race negro*. However, academics and activists argue for the removal of the term *pardo* from the demographic census and statistics, as it renders the Black population invisible. In this thesis, I use the terms Black and Afro-Brazilian to best capture the reality. Black is used capitalized to signalize *race* as a social construct, to express elements of shared history, culture, and identity, and to acknowledge the political value (see Appiah, 2020). However, it is important to keep in mind the various self-descriptions that exist in Brazil.

injustice, crime, luxury consumption, and sex/sexuality – are reflected in the lyrics and rhythms (see Moreira, 2014, p. 23).

Funk Brasileiro, like many other cultural productions, is no exception to the history of heteronormative dominance and the male gaze (see Caetano, 2015, p. 29; Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009, pp. 6, 25). This condition obscures the contribution of women and queer³ people too easily. Still, one is not forced to dig all too deep to recognize the essential position that women occupy in Funk Brasileiro: Lyrics deal with the women's appearances, the female body, and the (sexual) relations with others (see Wolfe Liblong, 2008, pp. 13–14). It should not be played down, that heterosexual male artists predominantly place women in a passive role and exclusively address heterosexual relationships in their song texts (see *ib.*, p. 13). Nevertheless, the fact that women and the female body are so much at the center of attention means that the music genre could not function without these aspects. Women have taken advantage of this constitutional characteristic of Funk Brasileiro to enter the culture, gain more visibility, and perpetuate their participation (see Moreira, 2014, p. 173). Within Funk Brasileiro they use their voices to counteract biased perspectives on women and their relation to men. They integrate discussions about sexual autonomy into the culture. Furthermore, the diversification of ideas about sexuality enabled a space for artists beyond heterosexuality to present their social realities and express them through Funk Brasileiro (see Caetano, 2015, p. 15).

These observations refer primarily to musical aspects. Funk Brasileiro, however, is a complex culture composed of multi-layered components. This is already evident in rhythms and lyrics, as they often put bodily movements into sound and language. Corporeality is present in the song texts, including precise instructions on how to move the body and resulting choreographies (see Moreira, 2014, pp. 114–115). Furthermore, if one considers the steadily growing importance of video platforms (e.g., YouTube) and social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) for the dissemination of music in general and Funk Brasileiro in particular (see Claro, 2017, p. 67), visual aspects become increasingly crucial.

Hence, one might ask the following question: In addition to the potential that music and song lyrics present when it comes to discussing sexuality and gender relations, do other cultural commodities possess the capacity to engage in the negotiation of social structures? Indeed, it is not arbitrary to emphasize the corporeal aspects of cultural productions. This can make visible the contribution of marginalized people who have been neglected by the dominant modality of

³ The term queer does not reflect the social reality in Brazil, as it was developed in a Western context. Queer is rarely used by Brazilians for self-identification, even less by marginalized people. There is no direct translation for the term, but rather a cloud of context-sensitive self-attributions to affirm non-binary values. Examples include *bicha/bixa* or *boyceta*. Therefore, in this thesis queer should be understood only in the sense of a theoretical perspective and category of analysis and less as an identificatory ascription.

knowledge production that favors cognitive skills over corporeality. In this context and building on these introductory remarks, this study is guided by the following research question:

How do female and queer people make use of Funk Brasileiro to open up spaces for the (re)negotiation of gender/sexuality through corporeal performances?

In connection with this question, the following subsidiary research interests arise: (1) How do space and body interrelate for the productions of corporeal performances? How are they constituted? and (2) Do female/queer performances produce alternative imaginations and expressions for the display of gender/sexuality beyond heteronormativity? In the presented context, my epistemic interest lies in the cultural-history-making and possibilities of resistance of people (in spaces) marked by marginalization with a focus on corporeal articulation of women and queer people in Funk Brasileiro.

In order to clarify the research question, I would like to pay attention to stated terms. Funk Brasileiro is an expression that is not predominantly used by Funk musicians and consumers. Rather, people refer to specific musical sub-genres, such as Funk Carioca (Funk from Rio de Janeiro), Funk Ostentação (Funk Ostentation), or Funk Putaria (Dirty Funk). When it comes to the subject of dancing, although there are regional specificities, these are not exclusively tied to a particular Funk genre but can transcend genres. To reflect this characteristic, regarding dance culture, in this study I shall refer to the term Funk Brasileiro, not to generalize, but to illustrate fluidity. It also allows for a better distinction from U.S. Funk.

I have chosen to define the subjects within the research question through female and queer people in order to acknowledge that the adoption and representation of “womanhood” and femininity are not just a capacity of heterosexual, *cis* women. This allows for an alienation from binary gender systems and promotes an understanding of gender and sexuality in their duality. In this context, I use “female” and/or “feminine(-presenting)” as a terminology for gender expressions. The term “feminized” shall reflect an external ascription imposed on people based on hegemonic discourses that define gendered behavior.

It is important to acknowledge that the analysis of the above stated question(s) is only possible because of the already rich literature on Funk Brasileiro. In recent years, there has been a rapidly growing academic interest in Funk Brasileiro, especially in the fields of sociology and anthropology. As such, the socio-spatial configurations are studied and the culture of the music is linked to, for example, social injustice, crime, and urban youth (see Coelho, 2004; Lopes, 2009; Lurie, 2000; Pardue, 2010; Sneed, 2003). In the last decade, with the rise of women’s visibility in Funk Brasileiro, feminist studies also became aware of the field. Consequently, the

researchers involved in this field of studies began discussing the ambivalence of agency in relation to prevailing power relations (see e.g., De Castro Monteiro, 2016; De Oliveira, 2008; Forman, 1994; Lyra, 2016; Moreira, 2014; Moreira, 2017; Moreira, 2020; Wolfe Liblong 2009). In particular, Judith Butler's theoretical reflections and their concept of performativity are widely used to analyze the potentials of resistance. In this context, Raquel Moreira has not only written her dissertation on performances of heterosexual femininity in Rio's Funk movement (see Moreira 2014) but has also published further articles on the subject (see Moreira 2017; 2020; 2021). They provide a solid basis and an important reference point for my work. Even though the participation of queer people is acknowledged, their contribution to Funk Brasileiro has yet not been analyzed profoundly.

A noteworthy number of approaches on Funk Brasileiro follow a very artist-centered study design, highlighting individual success stories and related artistic works, focusing on pieces of music and their discursive level (see e.g., Caetano 2015; Claro 2017). Nevertheless, the analysis of song lyrics provides an important basis for further research that could move from the microlevel to a higher one in order to investigate broader social phenomena. What is still missing is a debate on corporeality in relation to urban spaces as an integral part of Funk Brasileiro.

Looking at the cases dealing with Funk Brasileiro, a geographical focus is placed almost exclusively on Rio de Janeiro (see e.g., Wolfe Liblong, 2008; Lurie, 2000; Lyra, 2016; Moreira, 2014; Bonfim, 2013). Since this is the place of origin, the approach is not surprising. However, the existence of communities is not limited to the metropolis alone. Therefore, the field should be opened accordingly to other urban spaces.

When considering other localities of music production, that share the history of urban communities along the triangle of class, *race*, and locality, such as dancehall (Kingston, Jamaica) or hip-hop (e.g., Bronx, USA) the imagined cultural space of Black diasporas, characterized by shared experiences of discrimination and resistance, is put on the agenda (see e.g., Stanley-Niaah, 2010; Pérez, 2016). So far, Funk Brasileiro has not been sufficiently integrated into the concept of transatlantic thoughts to allow an analysis of the culture in the tradition of African diasporas and the potential of resistance involved.

After having illustrated the topic and the related research interest, this introduction is followed by the methodological design. I will explain the research process as well as the choices made for the conceptualization of this work more generally and in particular regarding the qualitative semi-structured interviews that will guide the analysis. Part of this chapter is a discussion on the implications of so-called transcultural academic work and the dilemmas/limitations

associated with it. Thereafter, Funk Brasileiro will be contextualized within the conception of African diasporas, the significance of urban spaces, and the position of women and queer people. The fourth chapter is dedicated to theoretical assumptions. The phenomena will be theoretically approached through linking the idea of “embodied spaces,” Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, notions of intersectionality, and studies of performance and corporeality. The main part of this thesis consists of the analysis of three semi-structured interviews I conducted with dancers from the Funk scene. My intention is to first give space to the narrations of their lived experiences, ideas, and knowledge in order to merge and discuss the findings with theory in the next chapters. Finally, I shall summarize the work and provide an outlook on further opportunities for scientific engagement in this framework.

2. Methods: On Textualizing Corporeal Performance

Dancing requires technique. This is true for dance choreographies with a set of criteria and strict rules, but also for social dances that seem to have a more “simplistic” routine. In couple and group dance, it is necessary to be able to access a common base of certain skills and abilities in order to function as an ensemble. It is also fruitful for the spectators to be informed about the manner of performance so they may fully understand the creative expressions. Just as the execution of dance depends on the technique, the methodological choices in scientific work must correspond with the research project and its respective context. Indeed, drawing on performance enriches methodological understanding, as D. Soyini Madison (2012) demonstrates. Her insights on critical and performative ethnography provide the foundation for my approach.

Since theory and methods are interdependently related to each other, this chapter shall first define the methodological parameters in more detail. Rather, the research question itself is already shaped by methodological considerations, which derive from the context in which the scientific work is situated. Research which is set in a transcultural context requires an awareness of hierarchically organized power structures so as not to perpetuate and/or reinforce them. Since I have been socialized in a European academic context and because I am, in the context of this paper, dealing with a phenomenon from the Global South, this is a work about “Others,” and “(...) representing Others is always going to be a complicated and continuous undertaking” (Madison, 2012, p. 4). Brazil is a country with a colonial past. Consequently, the “case” must be understood in its postcolonial present (see *ib.*, p. 55). It is necessary to incorporate postcolonial realities not only in terms of content, but also in terms of how to approach the content. Such an approach may seem simple. However, this critical attitude must already be

present in the selection of secondary literature when getting familiar with the research topic. If only Western academic productions are consulted, a distance to the local realities is created. In addition, a process is reinforced, in which those involved are talked about instead of talked with. This leads to their voices being blurred or even silenced (see Spivak, 1988).

This attitude is reflected in the formulation of the research question by prioritizing a subject-oriented perspective. It becomes necessary to choose a qualitative approach that shifts from “information to conversation” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 182) providing access to immediate knowledge, the so-called micro level.

The intention to integrate voices from participants of the Funk scene implies the need to focus on contemporary phenomena. In general, it should be remembered that Funk Brasileiro – as it is known today – is divided into diverse movements and components such as music, clothing style, slang, and dance that vary by region. Moreover, Funk Brasileiro is in a constant process of change, which makes it difficult to define (see Moreira, 2014, p. 181). While a precise categorization follows from the regional music genres in Funk, this does not apply to dance. Dance styles in Funk are also locally rooted. Still, they are literally more flexible in their dissemination and are thus more difficult to distinguish from one another. Nonetheless, the spatial focus of this work is on cities since communities as urban entities are the basis for Funk Brasileiro to be practiced. Most academic works dealing with Funk Brasileiro focus on Rio de Janeiro. One of the goals of this thesis is to contribute to the diversification of the academic discourse on Funk Brasileiro. Therefore, I decided not to focus on Rio de Janeiro, but to broaden the perspective to other urban centers, more precisely São Paulo and Belo Horizonte.

Initial concepts included an intention to do ethnographic field research and participatory observations in order to do justice to the importance of corporeality. However, methodological consequences resulted from the Covid 19 pandemic required appropriate changes.⁴ Without minimizing the manifold negative aspects of the pandemic – in terms of research – it forced me to evaluate more closely how the methodology should work for my research project. I decided to rely on qualitative interviews and maintain a critical ethnographic mindset in developing the research design. Thus, a primary question was apparent: Is it possible to experience performance through dialogue? Dwight Conquergood (1991), known for his extensive work on

⁴ My three-month study trip to São Paulo was between March and June 2021, at a time when the Covid 19 pandemic was reaching another catastrophic peak in Brazil and particularly in São Paulo. At that time, hospitals were at high-capacity utilization and the vaccination campaign had just begun. Given my position as an outsider, participatory observations would have been incompatible with my understanding of the principles of responsible research. The people related to my research live in *comunidades*, are more vulnerable to crises, and suffer more directly from the consequences of Covid 19. It might be the case that *bailes funk* and *fluxos* also took place during the pandemic situation, but I would have been irresponsible if I had taken advantage of my privileged position to participate and thus possibly caused someone to be in risk.

the connection between ethnography and performance, answers this question by recognizing dialogue itself as performance. Clearly, performance is understood here in a broader sense, namely in the sense that social behavior becomes conceptualized as performance (see Madison, 2012, pp. 168–183). Therefore, dialogue is more than the mere exchange of words. It comprises a whole range of expressions, experiences, and representations (of identity). This notion also draws attention to listening and not just seeing. In ethnography “[t]he traditional focus on seeing in the absence of profound listening is to *gaze out* at the Other as spectator, thereby risking a more dialogical meeting of *receiving in*” (ib., p. 186). The nature of scientific work lies in its textualization. Regardless of the method chosen, the study of corporeal performance is ultimately translated into a text. Even if I decided to use a dialogical method also out of necessity, interviews allow to bring this process of verbalization one level closer to the participants as well as strengthen their perspectives and attitudes. In addition, it opens up the possibility of learning how corporeal, verbal, oral, and textual domains of knowledge can be interconnected – with an attempt to overcome the separations.

I took the opportunity of a three-month stay in São Paulo in the spring of 2021 to get in touch with people from the Funk scene and to realize interviews. Being present also allowed me to talk to friends and experts who are not directly involved in the Funk scene but who still helped me gain a deeper understanding in terms of the wider context and to strengthen my focus.⁵ Now, in order to explicitly learn about the performances in Funk Brasileiro, I turned to people who are involved with Funk dance.

During previous stays in the city, I had already made friends who were involved in the Funk scene themselves or who had recommended people for me to talk to. This modality of a snowball system allowed me to meet people from different levels with different realities. It also limited the accessibility to potential participants. Moreover, being an outsider implicates also to be realistic about the access to informants. In addition, I only contacted people via social media, which limited the group of participants to those who had access to the internet. This effect was reinforced by the Covid 19 pandemic. Besides in-person meetings, I wanted to offer each participant the possibility to talk online so that those who did not want to take the risk of

⁵ I spoke with Bebel Nepomuceno, a professor of Cultural Studies about African Diasporas who works on Black festivities, performance, bodies, and memory. I had a great conversation with Danila Bustamante, a filmmaker who taught me about the configuration of queer spaces in São Paulo through the voguing and waacking community. I had the opportunity to speak with Lunna Rabetti. She is the president of the Brazilian National Front of Women in hip hop, a rapper and cultural producer. And I spoke twice to Maýara Efe, a creative producer and video maker, who directed the fantastic documentary “Beat é Protesto – O Funk pela Ótica Feminina” (2019). I am very grateful for their time and expertise, which, although not directly involved in this work, deeply contributed to the development of this study.

being affected by and/or transmitting the virus could still participate.⁶ On the one hand, this allowed me to conduct interviews after my research trip to São Paulo. On the other hand, talking about corporeal performances without experiencing them already entails a certain alienation. The shift to digital spaces, the distances involved, and potential technical problems could intensify this effect. However, given the external circumstances, semi-structured interviews (whether in-person or online) were still the best way to gain insights. Ultimately, I limited myself to three conversations with two people from São Paulo and one from Belo Horizonte. Two of these conversations were conducted online. One took place in-person.

Real or constructed conversations – such as interviews – allowed to capture the reality of the interlocutors through their perspective (see England, 1994, p. 82). Semi-structured interviews permitted such an access. The aim was to create a casual dialogue situation in which a reciprocal dynamic might be established. Here, the intention was to simply provide impulses and then be guided by the interlocutor's topics, interests, vocabulary, and knowledge. This allowed for aspects that I had not directly associated with female, feminine, and queer performances. It ensured that I was able to constantly question the knowledge I had previously gained through literature research as well as to adjust and expand my own limited perspective (see Moreira, 2014, p. 179). Only basic theory-based guidelines have been developed to ensure different insights. In accordance with D. Soyini Madison's *Critical Ethnography* (2012) I followed the Patton Model in the formulation of questions, making aspects of demographics, behaviors, opinions, feelings, knowledge, and sensory my key interests (see pp. 29–31). Consequently, the guidelines were adapted for each interview partner. The semi-structured conversations with the interlocutors lasted between one and two hours. During that time, we talked about their connection to Funk Brasileiro and dance, their role as women and queer people in the culture, the Brazilian society, and the importance of the spaces in which they live. It was important to me not to enter the conversation by reproducing hegemonic discourses. Therefore, I did not ask about stereotypes and stigmatization. Instead, I took note of the discussions when interlocutors brought them up. The same was true for discourses of romanticization.

A consent form⁷, which included information about me, the research project, and how the data would be processed, was designed to ensure transparency. This allowed participants to be involved throughout the process if they wished. I also explained to my interlocutors the possibility of anonymity. However, all agreed to be quoted by name, or even expressed the wish

⁶ Before each in-person meeting, I was tested and ensured that either the participant or myself avoided public transportation by taking a cab instead. Any costs incurred were covered by me.

⁷ If interested, the consent form can be requested by mail.

to be referred to by either their first name or their artistic name, in order to get some means of actual visibility. Although many scholars use pseudonyms to protect their informants, I decided to respect the wishes of my interlocutors. By making these methodological decisions, I intended to reduce the hierarchies between the researcher and the interviewees. Still, due to the different backgrounds and the diverging roles exercised during the interviews, power structures are still inherent. This fact must be kept in mind throughout the research process.

In terms of the methodological procedure, the identification of the “field” and the realization of the interviews are followed by “technical aspects” of the analysis. Whilst coding and analyzing the data collected in the interviews, I followed Madison’s approach and divided the material into domains, clusters, and themes (see Madison, 2012, p. 20).

The small number of three participants not only allowed me to gain deeper insights, but also fulfilled the requirement to include these voices to a great extent in the work. Although representativeness is neither the goal nor possible for this work, no impression should arise that the voices included in the work are isolated cases that represent exceptional phenomena. On the contrary: Funk Brasileiro should be recognized as relevant to a wide spectrum of urban youth (see Caetano, 2015, p. 28). I strongly recommend reading other works by Brazilian authors and members of the Funk community, as they offer different locations of speech and enable perspectives as well as thematic focuses that this thesis cannot provide due to my socialization. I am in the position of an outsider: I am neither Brazilian, nor part of the Funk community and Brazilian Portuguese is not my native language, which means that my access is limited. In fact, any scholarly work is a limited perspective on very complex phenomena. This is the case not only because of the chosen research question, theoretical lens, and methodological approach, but at least as much because of the social, temporal, and local determinacy of who we are in the reality in which we live.

However, doing research in postcolonial contexts as an outsider, raises specific implications. This constellation of knowledge exchange is infused by historically grown manifestations of hierarchies, conflicts, inequalities, injustices, and violence, making positionality and self-reflexivity a constitutive component of this research process. To reflect on my own position does not mean to make myself and my story a central concern. What it does mean is that I am aware that my socialization and academic background affects the interactions, my perspectives, theoretical and methodological decisions, possible access, and limitations (see Huffs Schmid, Wildner, 2009). In addition, the reflection process incorporates the awareness of “our own power, privilege, and biases” (Madison, 2012, p. 8) and the possibility to do harm with the decisions made throughout the research process and reveals the researcher’s “vulnerabilities

and vicissitudes” (Moreira, 2014, p. 95). It is my own expectation to be transparent about such factors instead of ignoring them.

A further step of the methodological considerations is the transformation of the qualitative material into the written work. While the chapter on theory and contextualization also already builds on the knowledge of my interlocutors and serve to inform the qualitative research, the analysis will be guided by the voices of the participants. This does not mean that I claim to “authentically give voice.” Rather, I understand this work as a merging of the subject’s reality with my own reality and therefore acknowledge processes of alienation as well as “promising to open up subtext and discreet elements of signification so that we may realize the depth of their inferences, their overreaching consequences, and their political nuances (...)” (Madison, 2012, p. 36).

However, transcultural work must be particularly aware of the translational aspects at different levels. It is not possible to reproduce the full, original meaning of what is said by an informant. The information obtained is inevitably filtered through the researcher’s involvement. In addition to the social position, the accompanying (technical) decisions also matter. Transferring orality into a text, coding and logging data, embedding interviews in theory and context, and finally translating into another language implies that parts of the original meaning get lost and/or modified. Either way, translation is by no means neutral (see Lincoln and González y González, 2008, pp. 787–788). I will reproduce longer quotations in the analysis first in Portuguese and translate them into English afterwards, so that people who understand Portuguese have access to the original wording. The expected audience of this work is also in the position of an outsider, which makes it necessary to offer contextual knowledge that might not be necessary in a Brazilian setting. To promote cultural sensitivity and to raise awareness of linguistic subtleties, terms with specific cultural meanings remain in Brazilian Portuguese and are explained in detail even when an English translation exists (see *ib.*, pp. 792, 797).

Through this work, I hope to illustrate the opportunities that confronting complicated, sometimes contradictory realities through the perspective of an outsider offers to connect knowledges rather than cause division. I want to emphasize “(...) boundaries not simply as barriers but as bridges and membranes” (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 217, as cited in Conquergood, 1991, p. 184). I do not claim to contribute to the academic discourse on performances in Funk Brasileiro in the same way that local scholars and insiders can. This work “(...) proposes no generalization and holds no truths, it only places signposts for the next traveler on the research route” (Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. xix). My goal is to contribute to a transcultural dialogue on the potential of corporeal performances and to offer my learning experiences to an audience

unfamiliar with the complexities of Funk Brasileiro. I take responsibility for the choices I have made and remain open to critique.

3. Contextualizing Funk Brasileiro: The Stories Told Through and About Dance

There are ways to collectively consume dance without “actively” participating by attending a show. This show would include performers, a stage, and an audience. The potential audience would obtain information about the performance, such as the title, the start (and end) time, perhaps the performers are known. Often, there is an admission fee to pay. In this constellation the audience receives entertainment, a story told through the bodies on stage by means of dance, accompanied by music and possibly stage effects. In this theater-like scenario, no one would question a dance’s ability to have meaning, to tell a story. However: If we leave out the constructed elements, more precisely the stage, the title, the time, the payment, and the stage effects, do we still recognize the stories that are told through dance?

In this chapter, I will trace the histories of Funk Brasileiro in order to grasp the historically embedded potential for resistance. Therefore, I will read the corporeality of Funk Brasileiro as a hybrid continuum of African diasporas. In the process of this historicization, I will draw parallels to other kinesthetics in the “Americas”⁸ to recognize the broader history of corporeality in colonial and postcolonial realities that transcends national boundaries (see Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. 25). In a next step, I shall summarize the development of Funk Brasileiro in the *comunidades* of Rio de Janeiro as its birthplace and the relevance of urban spaces. In this work, it is neither possible nor is it my goal to examine the entire history and diversity of Funk Brasileiro as a culture. Although corporeality is closely related to music, I will focus on the aspects of dance and performance here. Based on this, I will examine the position of women and queer people in this culture.

3.1. Telling the Stories about African Diasporas

As academic discussions of transnationalism and transmigration become increasingly diversified, a common ground for understanding diaspora, on which I draw here, is necessary. Paul Gilroy became known for his book *The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness* (1993). Therein, he introduced the term Black Atlantic, as an imagined cultural space composed of processes of dissemination and reconstruction of “Black cultures” (not in

⁸ The term “Americas” is set in inverted commas to demonstrate its word origin as a European invention (see Mignolo, 2005).

an essentialist sense) that accompanies the movement of African diasporas. Although Gilroy has given prominence to the importance of thinking transatlantic contexts, significant critiques of his approach have emerged in recent decades, with concerns about his simplistic, a-historical approach that privileges the Anglophone world through androcentric perspectives⁹ (see Zeleza, 2005, pp. 36–37). Especially given that the largest African diaspora is in Brazil (see *ib.*, p. 37), it is naive and fatal not to include Afro-Brazilian experiences in the context of transatlantic cultural spaces. Therefore, a more nuanced understanding is needed. Here, I want to build on Paul Tiyambe Zeleza who starts describing diasporas generally as being “a process, a condition, a space and a discourse” (*ib.*, p. 41). He goes on to explain that

“[i]n a broad sense, a diasporic identity implies a form of group consciousness constituted historically through expressive culture, politics, thought and tradition, in which experiential and representational resources are mobilized from the imaginaries of both the old and the new worlds. Diasporas are complex social and cultural communities created out of real and imagined genealogies and geographies (cultural, racial, ethnic, national, continental, transnational) of belonging, displacement, and recreation, constructed and conceived at multiple temporal and spatial scales, at different moments and distances from the putative homeland. A diaspora is fashioned as much in the fluid contexts of social experience, differentiation and struggle, and through the transnational circuits of exchange of diasporic resources and repertoires of power, as in the discourses of intellectuals and political elites” (*ib.*, pp. 41–42).

At this point, it is worth emphasizing the character of diasporic cultural productions. As enslaved people were denied access to social life and its related material resources, their strategy for preserving, (re)inventing, and creating culture was to draw on immaterial forms. This especially applies to music. In slavery, drums were banned, so instead they used the movement of their bodies, clapping and stomping, to imitate the sound of the drums (see Irobi, 2007, pp. 897–898). “In other words, most non-Western cultures express themselves through kinaesthetic, proxemic, sonic, calligraphic, iconographic, olfactory, linguistic, tactile, and other literacies (...)” (*ib.*, 2007, p. 910). And it is the body that serves as the unifying element, a collective memory, with the ability to connect and express the manyfold facets of emotions and to provide plasticity to the cultural productions (see *ib.*, pp. 900–901, 907).

These explanations provide a general understanding for intellectual exchange within diasporas. However, I would follow Zeleza with his suggestion to distinguish between historic diasporas and contemporary diasporas. While the former describes diasporic productions before the establishment of colonial states, the latter refers to developments since the late nineteenth century. This also means that, unlike the historic diaspora, the contemporary one engages with

⁹ For a critical reflection on Paul Gilroy in the “Latin American” context, see, for example, Costa, Domingues, Knöbl, da Silva 2008, Costa 2012.

both its historical “African heritage” as well as its socio-spatial environment and connections to other places, including the implicit interdependencies of political, gender, class, and other relations (see Zeleza, 2005, p. 56). Thus, contemporary diasporas are characterized by their hybridity and Funk Brasileiro is to be recognized in this sense. In any case, it is worth reproducing its traces in the diasporic history of Brazil.

Through the transatlantic slave trades millions of people from West and West-Central Africa were displaced to Brazil. Already hybridized cultural expressions (e.g., Bantu nations) from West-Central, and South Africa, and especially the Yorùbá culture located in the West of the African continent, have paved their way to Brazil (see Matory, 2005, p. 43–44). Afro-Brazilian Candomblé shows similarities with the Yorùbá religion. For example, they share characteristics of rites, temples and vocabulary (see *ib.*, p. 41–43). From this brief account of the interrelations, the traces in Brazil’s diasporic history can be recognized.

Beatriz Nascimento, an Afro-Brazilian intellectual and activist, has elaborated the continuation of the creation of material and symbolic spaces for Black resistance in Brazil. She was born in 1942 in Aracaju, the capital of the northeastern state Sergipe and was murdered in 1995 by her friend’s husband during a dispute. Besides Nascimento’s influential role in the Black Movement of Brazil she intellectually and artistically engaged with embodiments of Black resistance, especially with *quilombos*. Escaping from plantations, the mining industry, or urban practices of slavery Black people created physical places of refuge known as *quilombos*. “Quilombo can be a place of joy and creative work that escapes from the imposed Eurocentric aesthetic and literary models to reconnect with Afro-diasporic rhythm and imaginary” (Santana, 2019, p. 216). Nascimento acknowledges the entanglement of gender and *race* by emphasizing the particular position of Black women even before the concept of intersectionality entered the academic stage. In her conceptualization, Black women in the diaspora occupy an in-between space. Through their lived experiences, they enable shifts in the conglomeration of time, space, and identity (see Smith, Davies & Gomes, 2021, p. 281) “Black women’s flesh is memory: an archive of violence, and a space of potential internal escape, unique possibilities for freedom that are anchored in Black women’s transnational experiences of unfreedom” (*ib.*, p. 287).

One of Nascimento’s last productions is the film *Ori*¹⁰, which she produced with Raquel Gerber. It was released posthumously in 2008. In this work, she has drawn attention to the lineages between the historic and contemporary diasporas by highlighting the continuity of *quilombos* in the spatial practices of so-called *favelas*. For example, enslaved people from the plantations in São Paulo fled to Santos and founded the *quilombo* of Jabaquara, which is now a *comunidade*

¹⁰ *Ori*, meaning “head,” is a Yorùbá metaphysical concept and represents human consciousness.

(see *ib.*, pp. 302–303). In addition to this territorialization, the practice of the Candomblé religion, festivals, and dance events are also recognized as places of resistance (see Nascimento, 1982, as cited in Smith, 2016, p. 79). In reference to dance parties in the *comunidades*, Nascimento refers to *baile blacks*. They emerged in the 1970s in various urban centers playing Black music from the United States. Even though they developed in parallel with *bailes funk* (see Claro, 2017, p. 26), Nascimento did not refer specifically to *bailes funk*. However, her approach interacts with a diasporic understanding that does not view modes of production as strictly separate, which in turn allows them to be related across time and space. Thus, the possibility of transcending the national context and the common history of the political body in different aesthetics are also apparent. To highlight this, I will draw attention to other corporeal performances. The dances I shall refer to in the following share the history of African diasporas. They are therefore all characterized by a peripheral urban environment that has an influence on the corporeality. All these dances, in their interdependence and independence from one another, end up emphasizing hip movements and thereby giving prominence to the female/feminine body. “Dances in this tradition, have been regarded as transgressive and shocking because of their explicit sexual display” (Stanley Niaah 2010, p. 188).

Twerving, a hip and buttock centered dance that is performed to hip-hop, RnB, and rap music, is based in the US-American context. Elizabeth Pérez (2016) notes similarities with other dances from the “Americas” and the Caribbean. First, she makes clear that twerk is linked to Black communities in the United States by foregrounding its connection to the period of colonialism and the fact that dance practiced by enslaved Africans in the United States was banned because of its undesirable aesthetics (see Pérez, 2016, p. 20). Second, twerk shares corporeal movements with other diasporic dances as well as a thematic focus on the realization of female sexuality, economic independence, and gaining a political voice (see *ib.*, p. 16).

Another example can be found in Jamaica. Dancehall, to be understood as music and dance, is practiced predominantly in the shantytowns of Kingston, and is now perceived as part of the national identity (see Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. 16). In order to understand dancehall culture, which deals with issues such as sexuality, criminality, and violence, Stanley Niaah establishes a link between dance halls and plantation activities, recalling the origins of dances on slave ships “to locate the history of dancehall in the ancient practice of free Africans and, later, the enslaved peoples. (...) As dancing became a sign of spiritual strategy and liberation for the enslaved” (*ib.*, pp. 18–20). The continuation of this corporeality, which led to dancehall as it is known today despite state sanctions, discrimination, and marginalization, was able to sustain itself precisely because of its hybrid creativity (see *ib.*, p. 16). Another analogy to other

diasporas comes from the ongoing controversy over misogyny within dancehall culture (see *ib.*, p. 180). Compared to other pop cultures, dancehall, twerk, and other diasporic dances suffer disproportionately from this discourse (see Campbell 2004 and Baskerville 2014, as cited in Pérez, 2016, p. 18). Without intending to romanticize, this reveals persistent stigmatizations and inhibits attention to female empowerment, which is also an integral part.

I could continue by considering kwaito rooted in South Africa or reggaetón with its emergence in Panama, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. However, I would like to turn to a final example regarding this matter, by including samba, which already brings us closer to Funk Brasileiro as both share the same socio-spatial context of origin: Rio de Janeiro.

The term “samba” was initially used to refer to various dance styles that made their way to Brazil from West-Central Africa (see Lopes and Simas, 2015, p. 306–307). Original performances were characterized by drumbeats, called *batuques*, and a circular arrangement, the *roda de samba*. Samba, as it is known today, is closely associated with the Rio de Janeiro of the twentieth century. During this period, the city, which only lost its status as capital in 1960, was marked by an intense cultural stimulation. Whether choro, maxixe, or the internationally very famous samba, all these dances originated from an Afro-Brazilian kinesthetic and are practiced by the population living in the marginalized neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro (see Coelho, 2004, pp. 87–88, 93). They also share the fact that although they are popular among all social classes, they went through stigmatization and criminalization. Samba has been prohibited and banned in public spaces for a long time before it got incorporated as a symbol of Brazil’s national identity. While samba has been functioned as a corporeal analogy for the social realities until the 1980s, the change in urban conditions was also mirrored in a changing rhythm: Funk Brasileiro (see *ib.*, p. 85).

3.2. Telling the Stories about Funk Brasileiro’s Birthplace

Apart from Brazil, on a global scale, Funk is – in all probability – primarily associated with the North American music genre. The appearance of Funk Brasileiro as it is known today seems to have little in common with the musical genre from the United States. In fact, U.S. American Funk itself draws from the collision of Black music in urban centers such as RnB, rock, and soul, which emerged as a succession of blues (see Claro, 2017, pp. 26–27). In the context of the Black diaspora’s need to constantly migrate and the ability to exchange and communicate across (national) borders, Funk Brasileiro’s roots can actually be traced back to its namesake from the United States. Rio de Janeiro proved to be a center for the dissemination of Black music from the United States that got implemented via the previously mentioned *baile blacks*

(see *ib.*, p. 29). These parties were characterized by the mixing of various Black music genres, labelled as Funk (regardless of the sub-genre), that were always intended to enable dancing. Therefore, it was not surprising that, in addition to rap, the Miami Bass found huge resonance in the urban Black communities of Rio de Janeiro. Recognizable by its name, this music, rooted in Miami and is known for its intense deep electronic beats, in the Brazilian context better known as *tamborzão*. Accompanied by the lyrics, sexuality was thematized and carried out through dance. Like other Black music styles before, the Miami Bass arrived in the *comunidades* of Rio de Janeiro under the term of Funk and stayed there to be transformed into its own version (see *ib.*, p. 31). Funk Carioca was born and – influenced by other Afro Brazilian cultures, such as capoeira, samba and Candomblé religion – soon developed into various accents and differentiated into diverse subgenres (see Bonfim, 2013, pp. 3–4; Claro, 2017, p. 96). Therefore, the Funk Brasileiro is rooted in the so-called *favelas* and has been inextricably linked to its place of origin ever since.

There is a romanticizing narrative that dates the emergence of the first so-called *favela* back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when soldiers from Bahia settled in the hills around Rio de Janeiro and named the place after a climbing plant (see O'Connor, 2010, pp. 60–61). However, this story obscures the fact that it was primarily freed enslaved people who inhabited this form of settlement, not out of choice but because there was no other option due to the lack of civil rights (see Lopes, 2009, pp. 376–377). In Brazil, the abolition of slavery was legally implemented in 1888 by the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law). However, other than the status of “free,” people previously imprisoned by slavery did not receive further rights (see Claro, 2017, p. 34). Without formal education, political rights and financial resources, people migrated from the countryside to the economic centers, especially to Rio de Janeiro, the capital at the time. Although the city needed workers, it had no interest in investing in adequate living conditions for the Afro-Brazilian and Black migrants (see Perlman, 1979, p. 223). As a result, they were left alone in almost all aspects of life, be it housing, health care, schooling, or infrastructure. Ultimately, the city hall did not even recognize land rights to the people, turning the fear of continued displacements into a reality of many. Moreover, work permission was often tied to birth certificates, which were almost impossible to obtain. Citizens without papers were often arrested (see *ib.*, p. 158). Thus, obtaining better work and subsequently better living conditions became a desperate struggle. On the discursive level, the poor physical living conditions were used as an equivalent for the social behavior of people in the communities to justify police violence and the lack of state support (see *ib.*, pp. 248, 259).

Although this excerpt is only a small insight into the historical revision, it can show the pervasive racism and classism in Brazilian society that persists to the present and manifests itself in stigmatization and the criminalization of entire socio-spatial arrangements. State presence was and is given in the sense of control. State absence was and is given in the sense of the denial of civil rights. This constellation influences the infrastructure and shaping of public spaces and turns the streets into a profound space for the *comunidades*. On the one hand, this is to be understood in terms of economy. Due to various social mechanisms, including the absence of state support, drug trafficking has been able to gain a presence on the streets of the communities (see Perlman, 2010, p. 175; Sneed, 2003, pp. 62–63). On the other hand, this must also be considered in terms of cultural developments. The streets substitute the missing space of the simple and space-saving houses and the lack of public buildings. In the open air, music is played, walls are painted, poems are read, and people dance, giving the street not only physical value but also symbolic value for Black culture (see Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. 69).

Funk Brasileiro has developed in this socio-spatial setting, and its reality is reflected in the culture. Focusing on the corporeal aspects of Funk Brasileiro dance parties, called *bailes funk*, are significant as they offer a space to practice the culture. These events emerged in the streets of the communities. Within this context, dance battles called *baile de corredor* developed from the confrontation of (rival) groups from different areas of Rio de Janeiro. Each group lined up and formed a corridor with the other group. They danced against each other but there were also fights. As they became more violent over time, women acted as calming forces, enabling the transition from violence to distraction and pleasure through their presence (see Claro, 2017, p. 33).

In addition to the dance battles, dance groups called *bondes* started to develop. At first, they only accompanied the MCs (Master of Ceremonies). Over time, they became more and more popular and eventually turned into a spectacle on their own. The *bondes* dedicated themselves to certain dance moves and created new ones. One of the most famous movements that has evolved in Funk Brasileiro is the *passinho* (small step). This dance step can be interpreted individually. A minimal definition would be to stand on one foot, the other foot takes a step forward and then backward while rotating the hips. Originally, the *bondes* were composed only of male dancers. In synergy with new subgenres in the late 1990s and early 2000s that emphasized the role of women, the latter seized the opportunity to participate in Funk Brasileiro through dance. Female dance groups were created and entered the stage, contributing to a changing image of Funk Brasileiro (see *ib.*, p. 35).

Mainly because of the increasing participation of young women, the media accused Funk Brasileiro of being highly pornographic and sexually immoral. In the 1990s and 2000s, it was propagated that *bailes funk* would lead to an increase in teenage pregnancies due to the explicit lyrics, revealing clothing, and especially because of sensual dancing (see Caetano, 2017, pp. 64–66). Sadly, it was already almost predictable that Funk Brasileiro could not escape the ongoing discourse of stigmatization of Black cultures, which previously applied to samba, for example. Funk was always inextricably linked to the so-called *favelas*. The already afflicted term *favelado*, referring to the people living there, was used synonymously with people from the Funk scene, called *funkeiros/funkeiras*. In the 1990s, the media directly equated the activities of thieves on the beaches of the southern region of Rio de Janeiro with people from the Funk scene (see Claro, 2017, pp. 33–34). This provided a discourse that related crime to Black music, personified it in the figure of the *funkeiro/funkeira*, and located it in the communities. Yet, the ban and police brutality against *bailes funk* are still ongoing (see Santiago, 2020); the massacre in Paraisópolis (Baile da 17) is only the latest tragedy to receive national attention. On the 1st of December 2019, military police raided the Baile da 17 in the southern region of Paraisópolis, one of the most famous *bailes funk* in São Paulo. Police spent several hours cornering the youths in the streets of the community with rubber bullets, resulting in nine young people being trampled to death (see Salvadori, Arroyo & Guimarães, 2019). However, this condition is almost exclusively suffered by people whose reality is composed by the intersection of living in the so-called *favelas* and being Black/Afro-Brazilian (see Zaccone, 2008, p. 24, as cited in Lopes, 2010, p. 57). In fact, Funk Brasileiro is widely consumed by the middle and upper classes but compared to the lower social classes. Yet, they enjoy the privilege of consuming the music and dancing to it without being stigmatized or fearing violence (see Moreira, 2020, p. 5). As a result, Funk Brasileiro has become one of the most profitable branches of the Brazilian music industry and the most popular genre among younger generations of all social classes (see Simmer, 2021). However, the people who nurture the culture of Funk Brasileiro, namely the Afro-Brazilian youth in the communities, suffer from ongoing stigmatization and are excluded from economic opportunities. Instead, a process of cultural appropriation and *embranquecimento* (*whitening*) has begun to please an elitist, *white*¹¹ audience and to profit from the culture (see Claro, 2017, pp. 36–38). This takes shape through the musical work, by censoring the lyrics or modifying them into a light version that would not

¹¹ The term *white* is written in italics to reflect the social construction of this category and to ensure that it is not misunderstood as “the norm.” However, the term is not capitalized to distinguish it from the resistance value of shared Black identities (see Appiah, 2020).

be sexually explicit, and through the artist as such, by promoting a European appearance (e.g., straight hair, light skin color) (see Moreira, 2020, p.4).

The ongoing modifications of Funk Brasileiro into subgenres should therefore be seen not only in terms of different cultural influences but also in terms of the need to keep up with popularity and demand in order to survive and maintain itself in popular culture (see Claro, 2017, pp. 36–37). Another important aspect of Funk Brasileiro’s diversification is the spread of the culture to other urban centers in Brazil. The socio-spatial arrangements of the *comunidades* are not limited to Rio de Janeiro. Thus, Funk Brasileiro found fertile ground in other urban areas throughout the country. The existing social and cultural structures in each city allowed for the creation of either local expressions (e.g., Funk Gaúcho in Porto Alegre) or distinct identities (see Claro, 2017, p. 37). The best-known examples of local Funk identities are São Paulo with Funk Ostentação and Belo Horizonte with Funk Consciente. In addition to a different focus in terms of content, differences in fashion, slang, the organization of Funk parties and dance styles can also be observed. Both manifestations will be the subject of the substantive discussion.

3.3. Telling the Stories about the Female and Queer

Funk Brasileiro, like many other cultural productions, is characterized by a narrative that portrays male protagonists as the inventors of the culture (see Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009, p. 25). Thus, female contributions are often overshadowed by male dominance. Women, however, have been part of Funk Brasileiro from the beginning (see Moreira, 2014, p. 144). In the 2000s, with the thematic shift to sexual relationships and the female body, women in the Funk scene gained more (media) attention (see Caetano, 2015, p. 14).

This is especially true for the sub-genre Funk Putaria, whose main theme is sexuality and explicit sex. Initially, men dominated the scene and expressed their sexual desires, including the conquest of women, the description of desirable women, and the preferential practice of sex. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, women entered the discourse as MCs with the same intensity and explicitness to challenge the one-sided representation of female sexuality (see Moreira, 2017, pp. 179–180). This does not mean that performances by women are free of hegemonic discourses. They too reproduce heteronormative notions of gender. Nevertheless, the location of speech makes a difference. Developments should be seen in terms of a continuous process that is as much about female pleasure as it is about challenging male dominance (see Claro, 2017, pp. 36, 86). Deize Tigrona, MC Cacau, MC Carol, MC Tati Quebra-Barraco, MC Dandara, Valesca Popozuda, MC Pink, Ludmilla, and Pocah are only some of the numerous female singers that are part of the Funk scene.

Even though women gained more visibility and helped diversify and complicate perceptions of women's perspectives and roles, this did not automatically reflect a sense of equality with their male counterparts. While it is socially acceptable for men to speak openly about sexual desire and demonstrate sexuality, female artists get punished by society if they portray themselves as sexual protagonists (see Moreira, 2017, p. 181). Funk Brasileiro is generally stigmatized as immoral. However, for women, who are more controlled by society regarding their sexuality, the burden is even greater. *Funkeiras* are sanctioned for claiming attention and taking up space. They are criticized for the way they look, the way they dance, dress, and sing (see *ib.*, pp. 179-180), which puts these women in the position of constantly having to assert themselves, constantly having to face criticism, and thus being in a state of ongoing struggle. This is even more true for Black women who do not correspond to the "preferred" European image (see Moreira, 2017, p. 181).

Nevertheless, Funk Brasileiro's popularity has been increasing precisely because of the thematization of sex and the participation of women (see Moreira, 2014, p. 25). In fact, Funk Putaria is one of the most popular Funk genres (see Caetano, 2015, p. 14). In this female dominated genre visual aspects and dance play an important role. This can best be explained by conditions that are mutually dependent on each other. On the one hand, before becoming MCs, many women performed as dancers, combining their dancing skills with their new position as MCs as an advantage in the competitive music industry. On the other hand, the fact that women get primarily framed by their bodies should not be underestimated. Compared to men, singing alone does not seem to be enough, and women literally need to use their bodies to guarantee their success (see Caetano, 2015, p. 111). However, most media attention for Funk Brasileiro is generated by women (see Moreira, 2020, p. 1), who help promote its popularity and thus manifest their position as a constitutive part of the culture.

Women were no longer recognized as subordinate to men in Funk Brasileiro. They actively participate in destabilizing this same discourse. By making gender the central concern, women enabled access to Funk Brasileiro for people beyond heterosexual norms who, despite sharing social markers of difference such as *race* and class, had not been represented in the culture for a long time. One of the first transgender¹² artists to become popular in Funk Brasileiro on a national level was Lacreia. The dancer became best known for the joint performances with MC Serginho between 2002 and 2011. That year, Lacreia died at the age of 34 as a result of pneumonia. Lacreia was perceived as an artist in a contradictory way: being simultaneously

¹² Female-presented trans people in Brazil use predominantly *travesti* to self-define and to acknowledge their non-binary femininity. The term is separated from medical terminologies such as "transsexuality" and "transvestite" (see Moreira, 2021, p. 308).

celebrated and disrespected, taken seriously and laughed at. Lacraia has occupied an in-between space, claiming presence in society, and demonstrating the struggle trans people face. For trans people the reality in Brazil is characterized by ongoing criminalization and violence. In Brazil the number of trans people who get murdered is the highest worldwide (see Benevides and Nogueira, 2021, p. 7). Through an intersectional lens one can see that the most affected are feminine-presenting Afro-Brazilians from less privileged classes (see *ib.*, p. 48). Under the current far-right government, with Jair Bolsonaro as president, pushing the agenda of trans people in the political arena is becoming more complicated. It is, in addition, literally being suppressed (see *ib.*, p. 128). In the Brazilian context, then, popular culture can serve to promote social discussions.

Queer people in Funk Brasileiro still represent a small but growing amount. They can be recognized as a community and can claim huge media visibility for themselves. Especially in queer performances it appears that artists use their personal background, namely growing up in *comunidades* with a corresponding relation to Funk Brasileiro, to combine the music genre with other styles like pop or electronic music. Linn da Quebrada, a multimedia artist from São Paulo and “a self-identified Black *bicha*¹³ *travesti* from the favela” (Moreira, 2019, p. 304), became known for producing and performing Funk music, then evolved in different artistic directions. However, she still incorporates elements of Funk Brasileiro. Another artist that should be mentioned is Pabllo Vittar. Although the drag queen is perceived more as a pop artist, Funk elements are constantly present in her music. But what is even more evident here is the use of dance moves that originate from Funk Brasileiro. Therefore, especially through queer artists, Funk Brasileiro transcends its own universe and is represented throughout Brazilian culture.

This chapter aimed to show that a simple definition of Funk Brasileiro is not able to unify all the different levels: the historical and contemporary value of African diasporas, the inherent significance of the city as well as the positioning and contribution of different actors that give women and queer people a particular status within Funk Brasileiro. Funk Brasileiro is often discussed in terms of its musical character, pushing dance and corporeality into the background. However, dance in Funk Brasileiro has never been a “side effect” but always a constitutive part of the culture.

¹³ *Bicha* has several meanings. In this context, *bicha* is understood as a term that refers to male homosexuals. Outside of queer communities, *bicha* is used pejoratively, but within the community, *bicha* is subverted into a positive self-identification.

4. Theoretical Framework: Bodies and Performances as a Site of Cultural Identity

When rehearsing choreography, dancers first take their positions and then often count *five, six, seven, eight* before they begin to dance. This counting represents the second beat of the most common musical rhythm and helps the dancers to harmonize their movements from the beginning. Transferring this metaphor to the process of academic work, this chapter serves to situate and then reconcile the various theoretical strands. Or rather, I will link the idea of “embodied spaces,” Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, notions of intersectionality, and studies of performance and corporeality.

To gain theoretical access, it is worth taking a step back from the case to be analyzed and abstracting the research interest to its inner core. Thus, the moving body and the question of its potential to actively participate in the shaping of social structures become the focus. These aspects serve as a starting point from which further layers can be added. By emphasizing the triad of body, space, and culture, best described as embodied spaces understood as “the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form” (Low, 2003, p. 10), it is possible to recognize the body as a site of identity inscription and construction that is situated both temporally and spatially. Thereby, and in accordance with the research question, I will examine the relationship between the body, gender/sexuality, and the construction of femininity by women and queer people. Here it is important to emphasize the intersection with *race*. Just as a reminder: Funk Brasileiro is nourished and practiced by the lived experiences of the Black and Afro-Brazilian youth in *comunidades*. Thus, an intersectional perspective is needed “to describe the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1265).

Finally, I will use these assumptions about the dual character of the body as a social construct (product and producer) to position the meaning of performance practices by discussing the linkages of corporeality and dance. More precisely, it is about focusing on the transformative potential of dance in terms of gender/sexuality.

4.1. The Triad of Body, Space, and Culture

In Western academic tradition, the body has long been considered only in its biological dimensions and has therefore been neglected in the social sciences. Moreover, the body has often been constructed as the opposite of the mind, from which one must distance oneself in order to fully embrace the intellect (see McWilliam, 2003, p. 214). In the Global North, this dualism of mind and body prevailed for a long time. It was not until the beginning of the second

half of the last century that particularly feminists began to critically examine the significance of the body. They did this by unmasking the gendered aspects of the mind-body dichotomy that assigns men the intellectual part in Western society, while women's "function" of giving birth seems to tie them to the body (see Grosz, 1994, p. 14). New ground was established to engage critically with the body as a social and political commodity, ultimately liberating the body from the discourse of being a passive shell and recognizing its productive quality in shaping society. From then on, in various disciplines, be it geography and urban studies or anthropology and cultural studies, the body gained more and more importance. In the course of a growing interest and need in interdisciplinary approaches, concepts were developed that managed to connect the different spheres of body, space, and culture (see Low, 2003, p. 16). In the following, I will interweave theoretical implications from different academic locations and backgrounds that provide the perspective and framework for the analysis.

Let's take a step back. What does it mean to talk about the body? While previously there was criticism of reducing the body to its physical and biological nature, it is now useful to emphasize its consequent materiality. It seems obvious that we occupy space with our bodies. At the same time this realization also means that we can put two mutually dependent aspects in relation with one another: the body as being in space and the body as being space (see Simonsen, 2005, p. 4).

In the Western academic hemisphere, this understanding was especially introduced by Henri Lefebvre who has conceptualized "everyday life" as inseparable from space and body (see *ib.*, pp. 2, 9). Also starting from a critique of the privileged position of discourse, understood as linguistic practice, Lefebvre argued in *The Production of Space* (1991) that space is both producer and product, thus becoming a social construct. While his line of thought focused more on space, he also succeeded in identifying this dual character of the body. "It [the body] produces itself in space at the same time as it produces that space. Theoretically, then, the body serves both as point of departure and as destination. It is an intrinsic part of the 'lived experience'" (Simonsen, 2005, p. 4). In other words, the body functions as both the source and the result of social practices. This puts emphasis on the body as an active part in the formulation of social constellations and therefore acknowledges the potential of contesting and transforming social structures.

To illustrate these considerations, one can think of demonstrations, for example. If the goal of protests is to achieve political change by generating as much visibility as possible and trying to get the attention of decision-makers, the use of online platforms and social media seems to be the best option nowadays. Though, street demonstrations are still common. Of course, this can

also be explained by a continuation of already known practices. However, demonstrations characterized for example by blockades, or the collective usage of specific postures (e.g., Black Lives Matter demonstrations) particularly use the materiality and hence vulnerability of the body to articulate political demands. This leads us directly to the latter part: the body as socially produced. It also implies recognizing the body as historically constructed (see *ib.*, p. 10). The body literally incorporates its environment. Therefore, bodies are not only spatially located but also temporally situated, thus resulting in variations across time and space. For example, what is socially considered attractive changes over time and by region, or gestures are used and interpreted differently depending on the specific context.

On the one hand, it is important to remember the Western academic contributions to this realm because they continue to shape hegemonic discourses in the social sciences and thus our understanding of the meaning of the body. On the other hand, if we broaden the perspective, one thing becomes clear: While Western academics seemed to “discover” the importance of the body only in the late twentieth century, in societies in the Global South the body as a site of knowledge was valued long before. For this work, which deals with a postcolonial phenomenon or, in other words, with the history of colonialism and its contemporary consequences, this aspect is even more important.

Sonjah Stanley Niaah’s work *Dancehall. From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (2010) on the spatiality of dancehall discusses Omofolabo Ajayi’s concept of “disembodied bodies” in relation to the West African ethnic group Yorùbá in Benin, Ghana, and Nigeria. This concept does not place the body in a binary system competing with the mind, but rather recognizes the body “as one such system of communication, [that] is valued, or even regarded as sacred” (Ajayi, 1998, p. 2–4, as cited in Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. 136).

When connecting the body with space, Stanley Niaah underpins the active role of space. Additionally, she draws focus to the various formulations of space in interaction with bodies as (simultaneously) real, imagined, and/or symbolic (see Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. 30). As such, the body is a crucial site for understanding social configurations. Here, especially the socio-spatial arrangements of marginalized bodies in marginalized spaces have the power to create fundamental change, as they are constantly in conflict with the positions assigned to them (*ib.*, p. 34), giving *comunidades* a critical position.

These considerations lead me directly to Beatriz Nascimento and her work on embodiments of Black resistance, with a focus on *quilombos* as a “Black political praxis of resistance and self-determination (...) that is enacted and re-enacted through time and space” (Smith, Davies & Gomes, 2021, p. 288). Nascimento recognizes the value of the body in West and West-Central

African societies, the point of origin of the majority of people who were enslaved and trafficked to Brazil. Given this fact and the brutal conditions that limited the dislocated and enslaved people to their bodies as their only means of expression and communication (see Costa, 2012, p. 157–158), she recognizes that memories, traditions, and culture could only be sustained through the Black body (see Smith, 2016, p. 80). Therefore, the body has a distinctive position in the resistance strategies of marginalized people. By crossing the boundaries of physical territory, the body transcends space and time (see Smith, Davies & Gomes, 2021, p. 287). In other words:

“(…) the quest for Black autonomous space is located first in the corporeality of the body (...) The body is also, equally, the space of memory. It symbolically extends its limits, mixing itself with the landscape. The body is the territorialization of memory. It is a space of physical and corporeal realization” (ib., pp. 83–84).

Having examined the relations between body and space (and time, which is inseparable from space) (see Lefebvre, 2013, pp. 128–129), what has been implicitly thematized must now be explicitly included: the position of culture within the triangle. Although it is nearly impossible to reproduce the extensive academic debate on the epistemology of culture, a general understanding of culture as hierarchically organized “patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems” (Kroeber and Parsons, 1958, p. 583) should guide the following assumptions. What enters this definition are social and discursive practices of social markers of difference that position individuals and groups as members of society by forming identities. The categories that inform identities range widely and are composed of gender, sexuality, *race*, ethnicity, class, nationality, age, religion, and others¹⁴. At this point, intersectionality teaches us that these “categories of analysis are best understood in relational terms rather than in isolation from one another” (Collins, 2015, p. 14). Furthermore, intersectionality emphasizes the power relations and social inequalities involved. In this regard, the body serves as a fundamental site where the different spheres of power relations converge (see Bru, 2006, p. 465, cited in Villagrán, 2004, p. 188). Categories of identity function not only on a symbolic level, in that they are socially ascribed and discursively produced. They have tangible and experiential effects that are manifested in the body (see Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296; Wolff, 1997, p. 96). In other words, the body, as the site of cultural inscription, is a performative effect of discursive practices, established in temporal and spatial processes of social regulations (see Silva, 2010, pp. 44–45).

¹⁴ There is legitimate criticism of merely listing the various categories and using “etc.” without examining the mutual intersections of all the terms mentioned. Here, there is the danger that intersectionality ends up as devoid of meaning. Therefore, in the following I will only mention categories that I will examine, even though other categories might also have significance.

This understanding of bodies being materialized through performativity has been used by Judith Butler to discuss the construction of sex and gender. Butler's influential work *Bodies That Matter* (2011) begins with the question, "Is there a way to link the question of the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender?" (p. xii). This is followed by the theoretical discussion that aims to unmask the hegemonic discourse on heteronormativity and the body as constructed by sex. Gender as identity is composed on different levels. The term sex is used to describe "biological" gender, which is usually determined by a person's hormones and genitalia and is categorized into the binary system of woman and man. Gender refers to socially constructed behaviors and characteristics that are read in terms of femininity and masculinity. Drawing on speech act theory, Butler argues that "biological" sex is also a social construct because we, as social actors, create systems of norms and then translate them into reality (see Butler 2011, p. xxi). More specifically, hormones and genitalia as criteria for defining "biological" sex must be discursively produced, practiced, and shared in order to gain validity. "It is not biology/psychology that produces gendered body spaces and their representations but the inscription of sociopolitical and cultural relations on the body" (Low, 2003, p. 11). What is important now is to emphasize that the need for constant materialization and reproduction opens up spaces for new (re)articulations that have the potential to destabilize hegemonic regimes (see Butler 2011, p. xxi). "Just as performativity is an internalized repetition of hegemonic stylized acts inherited from the status quo, it can also be an internalized repetition of subversive stylized acts inherited by contested identities" (Madison, 2012, p. 181). Although Butler clearly emphasizes discourse, they relativize it in order not to run the risk of claiming that everything is discursive (see Witz, 2000, p. 8), by arguing that "language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified" (Butler, 2011, p. 38). In this line of argument, "biological" sex dissolves into the fact that it is also socially constructed, hence its apparent primordality is denied. The importance of performativity as the repeating nature of processes of social materialization is emphasized (see Winker and Degele 2009, p. 21). Thus, gender and sex are interconnected and embedded in reciprocally reinforcing power structures characterized by the hegemony (dominant value system) of heteronormativity and a binary system, known as the heterosexual matrix (see Butler, 1999). This also entails the connection with sexuality, which once again stresses the need for intersectionality (see Winkler and Degele, 2009, p. 45). Consequently, in this work the pair of gender/sexuality, understood in its duality, helps to go beyond strict separations. First, this allows to devise, in tandem, analogous articulations of the

lived experiences of feminine-presenting women and queer people. Second, this enables the intersection with other categories.

In this approach, which centers the body as the site of identity inscription and construction, in addition to gender/sexuality, *race* as a socially constructed marker of difference is historically linked to the body. European colonialists invented the category of *race* as a (of course false) justification for the practice of slavery, various forms of exploitation, raiding, and murder (see Habermann, 2012, p. 23, as cited in Hall, 1989, p. 159). In their pseudo-scientific fantasy, the seemingly privileged position of Europeans derived from physical differences which were also supposed to determine differences in behavior and intelligence (see Metzler, 2018). What was installed was racism, a system of binarity and “Othering” that, in interaction with patriarchy (and classism), organizes societies worldwide in hierarchical and discriminatory ways to these days. Therefore, bodies must be recognized as both gendered and racialized¹⁵ in order to understand the lived experiences of Black female and queer people (see Santana, 2019, p. 218). While female, feminine-presenting, and feminized bodies are generally objectified by the male gaze (see Wolff, 1997, p. 82), Black female and feminine-presenting bodies are additionally regulated by heteronomy and are labeled as non-normative (see *ibid.*, p. 219) and hypersexual. What Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) has argued for the North American context also applies to Brazil: “(...) [S]exualized images of race intersect with norms of women’s sexuality, norms that are used to distinguish good women from bad, the madonnas from the whores” (p. 1271), with Black women being assigned the latter role.

In sum, the body is not just a mirror that reflects external practices of knowledge production. In its temporality and spatiality, it also produces the reality in which we live. Therefore, it is embedded in power structures shaped by identity construction and ascription. Bodies are gendered/sexualized and racialized. They also produce gender/sexuality and *race*. By ascribing this active role to the body, possibilities for transformation, resistance, subversion, and replacement of norms emerge.

4.2. Performance Practices: The Transformative Potential of Dance

While the first part set the pre-conditions of the meaning of the body, in a next step, I will deepen these understandings by shifting from the representational aspects of the body towards

¹⁵ In the context of the ideology of a “racial democracy” in Brazil, the sociologist Gilberto Freyre created a founding myth of the Brazilian nation in 1933. In the book “*Casa-grande e Senzala*,” women took on a central function in his idea of a harmonious unification of society. He described the figure of the *mulata* as an erotic and seductive female character – a construction that influences the image of Brazilian women to this day (see Neuhauser, 2014, p. 295).

the significance of dance as “a performance of cultural identity” (Desmond, 1997, p. 31). In terms of performance, I would like to highlight Stanley Niaah’s explanations. She argues that the understanding of what can be considered a performance varies according to cultural context. The idea that performances per se must be staged within a certain framework is an elitist assumption of the 1960s (see Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. 29). Hence, the hierarchizing distinction between so-called “high art as a profession” and “popular art as a leisure activity” is also a construct that obscures the potential of performances that take place in marginalized contexts.

The most basic components of dance, as one form of performance, are the body and movement. Once these elements get consolidated, dance quickly becomes very differentiated, through the addition of kinesthetic systems and choreographies, accompanying music, the number and forms of interaction of the dancers, or clothing styles. In addition, differences in time and space expand the complexity of dance. Just to give an example: In salsa, at least seven different styles are known, most of which are named after their region and can vary in the previously mentioned elements. They build on each other and are constantly being developed. However, there are limits to the migration and translation of different dance styles depending on skills and corporal capabilities (see Foster, 1997, p. 241). While this could be solved through training, dance, understood “(...) as a vehicle for communicating its thoughts and feelings” (ibid.), considers expressions of individuals and/or collectives that cannot be freely transferred due to situated lived experiences. Consequently, movements incorporate and reflect identities. Jane Desmond further explains in her compilation, *Meaning in Motion* (1997), that:

“[b]y looking at dance we can see enacted on a broad scale, and in codified fashion, socially constituted and historically specific attitudes toward the body in general, toward specific social groups’ usage of the body in particular, and about the relationships among variously marked bodies, as well as social attitudes toward the use of space and time” (p. 32).

Thus, the empirical study of dance is a way to demonstrate the enactment of social realities shaped by gender/sexuality and *race*, among other factors. In accordance with the reciprocal effects of bodies examined earlier, this would also mean that dance has political potentials. Indeed, “[t]hrough cultural performances many people both construct and participate in ‘public’ life. Particularly for poor and marginalized people denied access to middle class ‘public’ forms, cultural performance becomes (...) an arena for gaining visibility and staging their identity” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 189). In Western societies, the position of the body as a carrier of knowledge has been and continues to be neglected. Therefore, dance, as the presence of moving bodies, could already mean challenging these premises (see Wolff, 1997, p. 94). This ability is even more significant when acknowledging the characteristic of dance to be difficult to control, especially when it serves as a means of leisure (see McRobbie, 1997, pp. 211–212). This gains

even more relevance when it comes to the female body and sexuality, which in Western culture is particularly repressed, controlled, and objectified by the male gaze (see Wolff, 1997, p. 82). The opportunity to explore, demonstrate, and act out one's desire is not an evenly distributed good (see Keane, 1994, p. 16, as cited in McWilliam, 2003, p. 2016). For (Black) female, feminine-presenting, and feminized people within and beyond the binary system, this often means that their sexuality is denied, portrayed as abnormal, or is hypersexualized (see Wolff, 1997, p. 86; Santana, 2019, p. 219). Drawing from this, dance as a form of experiencing one's own body and other bodies can offer women and feminine-presenting queer people the opportunity to negotiate gender and sexuality, and to demonstrate different formulations of female pleasure and desire.

Nevertheless, the ubiquity of both patriarchy and racism should not be overlooked at this point. Janet Wolff (1997) reminds us that two risks are involved:

“(…) first, that these images can be reappropriated by the dominant culture and read against the grain of their intended meaning (...); and second, that they may collude with a kind of sexist thinking which identifies woman with the body and assumes an unchanging, pre-given essence of the female” (p. 96).

This is even more devastating because Black women and queer people suffer from the combination of sexualization and racialization. Part of European colonial rule was the devaluation of Black women's bodies. While Black traditional dances and rituals emphasized body regions relevant to female pleasure (waist, hips, the buttocks, and genitals) (see Pérez, 2016, pp. 23–24), European ideology stigmatized them. This also caused Black female sexualities to be denounced as illegitimate, dangerous, and uncivilized (see *ibid.*). And this stigma is still present. In dance, this continues to be expressed in the stereotype that Black, Latinx people in the “Americas” are framed as overly rhythmic and therefore hyper-sexual (see Desmond, 1997, pp. 40–41). Consequently, “dance can only be subversive when it questions and exposes the construction of the body in culture” (Wolff, 1997, p. 96).

The concepts of the *carnavalesque* and the *grotesque*, which in the Western hemisphere have been influenced primarily by Mary Russo, incorporate these requirements. Dealing with the arrangements of potential subversions, the *carnavalesque* or *grotesque* body is defined as disruptive, transformative, and counterproductive at the same time. This allows for a constantly changing imagination and realization of femininity for women and feminine-presenting queer people (see McWilliam, 2003, p. 219). Nevertheless, this approach to resistance takes place within the boundaries of hegemonic discourses. Hence, the deliberative function regarding patriarchy and racism is limited in space and time (see *ib.*, p. 220).

Increased attention to the possibilities of corporeal productions and dance can help recognizing social phenomena shaped by the intersection of gender/sexuality and *race*. The shift in

perspective toward corporeality also makes it possible to acknowledge the agenda of people who have not been heard in Eurocentric understandings of knowledge production, which privileges the spoken word over the moving body to a degree that denies the latter to carry and produce knowledge, or of corporeality to be considered knowledge. Looking at the agency of people marginalized by social markers of difference through the lens of corporeality can expose the fallacy of privileging certain forms of knowledge. Moreover, it can assert the value of the body as a site of knowledge production and can reveal its resistance potential.

In sum, this chapter built on theoretical assumptions that interrelate the body with space and culture to stress the active participation of bodies in the formation of social structures. By doing so, the intersection of gender/sexuality and *race* got to be recognized as inscribed in and produced by the body. In a further step, I have examined corporeal performance and dance as a potential modality by which the body operates in social realities. With the contextualization of Funk Brasileiro and the theoretical assumptions, a basis for the analysis is established. The next chapter focuses on three conversations I conducted with dancers from the Funk scene, giving different insights in the performance of gender/sexuality within Funk Brasileiro.

5. Analysis: Negotiation through Corporeality in Funk Brasileiro

Although forms of same-sex pair dancing exist (e.g., queer tango), it is common that in pair dances the man leads and the woman follows, a symbolization of heteronormativity. In fact, gendered behavior can also be found in the movements. In tango, for example, dance movements intended for women are described as light-footed, soft, but also sensual and sexy, men adopt harder postures that are concerned with stability (see Hartmann, 2008, pp. 49–50). Dance is thus invaded by one of the most robust historically grown classification systems for our societies: heteronormativity. This chapter analyzes the possibility for women and queer people to negotiate and reconstruct their gender identity through dance. Based on three conducted interviews, the individual realities within Funk Brasileiro will be outlined and the correlation between the aspects of space, movement, gender/sexuality, and *race* will be examined. The analysis is structured in such a way that the focus is first on the respective experiences, ideas, and knowledge of the interlocutors, in order to conclude and discuss the insights within the theoretical framework in the following chapter.

5.1. Maiwsi Ayana: Sexuality as a Natural Expression of Corporeality

My time in São Paulo was already over and I was sitting in Berlin, with my laptop opened, waiting for Maiwsi Ayana to join our meeting. We made contact through a friend whom I told

about my research topic and who recommended me to have a look at the dance project Turmalinas Negras from São Paulo. The dance group is composed of Black women who interrelate diverse dances with African and Afro-diasporic origins. I got in touch with the producer of the project, Aline Constantino. Since she herself does not study Funk Brasileiro as a dance, she forwarded me Maiwsi Ayana's number. And after exchanging a few messages, I then had the opportunity to speak with Maiwsi via videocall on a Friday evening with five hours of time difference.¹⁶

Maiwsi Ayana was raised with dance as something ever present. Her family is composed of dancers. She grew up and still lives in the East Zone of São Paulo, in Cidade Tiradentes, the neighborhood known as São Paulo's birthplace of Funk Brasileiro. Maiwsi is surrounded by the cultre because of where she lives. Yet, when she was a teenager, she was forbidden by her parents to listen to Funk Brasileiro at home because of the stigma of Funk Brasileiro as being criminal, precarious, and immoral. Instead, she realized her passion for dance in hip-hop. The latter, despite the similarities with Funk Brasileiro, has not experienced comparable stigmatization in Brazil. Maiwsi began practicing urban dances, going to hip-hop parties and battles. The community, however, was strongly dominated by men, which fostered a macho culture. She noticed that her corporeality, which she expresses in dance is characterized by perceived feminine, sensual movements. It was not accepted in hip-hop, so she distanced herself from this urban dance style. Growing up with samba, a dance that openly exposes and celebrates the physicality of the body, gave Maiwsi a natural appreciation for the embodiment of lust and desire, and then brought her closer to Funk Brasileiro. The culture has always been part of her life. To incorporate it also as her own identity was a process that was initially denied to her and that she accessed by herself as an adult.

“Eu sempre tive dentro da minha dança e da minha corporeidade o sensual. Então isso é algo que é muito natural enquanto eu danço, que é algo que também é muito negado pelo hip-hop, né, onde você não pode mostrar seu corpo, não pode rebolar e tudo mais, e aí isso me afastou. Porém eu sou muito festeira né, eu gosto muito de ir em festas ... Tipo os meus movimentos sensuais, eles sempre eram vistos com maus olhos por mais que eu tivesse um respeito dentro e eu sempre coloquei isso como algo natural, né. Eu vim do samba também, então a exposição de corpos para mim é muito natural ... E quando eu vi que eu tava novamente num lugar de lazer, novamente sendo censurada. No outro lugar era o contrário: a minha liberdade corporal era exaltada. Lá era assim: quanto mais liberdade corporal eu tinha, mais à vontade eu ficava comigo mesma. Então quando eu percebi que o espaço do funk me daria isso, que eu não necessariamente seria sexualizada por aquilo, que eu não seria discriminada, eu entendi que ‘aqui é um lugar seguro’, né. Um lugar onde eu posso ser quem eu quero ser e que eu sou, né, é algo que

¹⁶ My online interview with Maiwsi Ayana took place on the 16 June 2021. Its total duration was 01:12:20.

faz parte das minhas origens também. Então eu tive essa mudança e eu falei assim ‘vou me entregar a isso’.”¹⁷

“I always had within my dance, inside my corporeality the sensual. So, this is something that is very natural to me while I dance which is also something that is very much denied by hip-hop that you can’t show your body you can’t rebolar and everything else and then this drove me away. But I am very a partygoer you know, I like to go to parties ... Like my sensual movements, they were always looked down on even though I had a respect inside and I always put this as something natural, you know. I came from Samba as well, so the exposure of bodies for me is very natural ... And when I realized that I was again in a place that I should be seeing as leisure, again being censored and at the other space it was the opposite, my corporeal freedom there was celebrated. It was like that, the more corporeal freedom I had the more satisfied I was with myself. So when I recognized that in the other space and what Funk gave me, which necessarily wasn’t true for the other space in that moment, where I was sexualized for the same, where I was discriminated, I understood, ‘No, this is a safe space’ you know, a space where I can be who I wanted to be and what I am, you know, it is something that is also part of my heritage. So, I had this change, and I was like ‘I will devote myself to this’.”

In Funk Brasileiro she identified the importance of connecting body and dance but also became even more aware of the marginalized position of Funk Brasileiro as dance. Unlike hip-hop, dancehall, or waaking, Funk Brasileiro was not acknowledged as part of urban dances. Maiwsi dedicated herself to the history of the Afro-diasporic relations of Funk Brasileiro. As an activist she works to transmit this knowledge through her performances – also, to give the dance the recognition it deserves. Maiwsi perceives that the stigmatization that Funk Brasileiro experiences as a musical genre also extends to the dance aspects of the culture. For a long time, it was associated only with the well-known dance step *passinho*, which obscured the variety of movements. Moreover, she recognizes that funk dance still is dismissed as simply “ass shaking” and is stigmatized to this day due to its explicit nature.

“Tá, o funk, que acho que a principal questão dele ser tão censurado, é porque além de ser uma dança sensual, ele é uma dança sexual, né. Então a dança lá incorpora posições sexuais, por isso a gente ouve, por exemplo, na música: ‘Ah porque que o funk fala tanta putaria?’ Tipo, faz parte do que é o funk, né. O funk fala abertamente sobre qualquer coisa e principalmente sobre o que a gente deseja né. Então ele é uma dança sexual. Pra as mulheres, principalmente tem a questão do bumbum, do rebolado, né, as pernas são flexionadas e tudo mais. Tudo isso é para trazer realmente uma sensualidade. Em movimentos corporais a parte da bacia, do quadril e da vagina são os nossos pontos de prazer também, né, então o funk ele traz tanto a questão do se tocar, né, como a gente não ter o pudor de tocar as partes do corpo como e o imaginário de uma relação sexual, só que através da dança. Outras danças também fazem isso, só que acho que não é de uma maneira tão explícita, por isso que elas não são tão censuradas como o funk. Mas

¹⁷ While transferring orality to textuality, I made minor adjustments to facilitate the understanding, including punctuation and the reduction of filler words.

acho que tem um pouco disso. Já o homem, tem a questão do membro, né, do órgão sexual como um grande destaque ... Tem a sarrada, o que a gente conhece muito, é popular o contato de duas pessoas, então existe o encaixe, qualquer forma de movimento que faz nos expressar essa questão sexual ela é bem-vinda pro funk né. Então a gente tem a sarrada, tem a quicada, tem a sentada, né. Tudo isso são coisas que a gente faz no sexo, mas que a gente também incorpora para a dança.”

“Yeah, I think the main reason Funk is so censored is because besides being a sensual dance it is a sexual dance, right. So, the dance incorporates sexual positions, this is what we hear in the music, for example: ‘Ah, why does Funk talk so much about putaria?’ Like, it’s part of what Funk is. Funk, it talks openly about anything and especially about what we desire, about desire. So, it’s a sexual dance. So, for women especially, there’s the issue of the buttocks, so the rebolado, the legs are more flexed and everything. All this is to really bring a sensuality. In terms of the corporeal aspects, the pelvis, the hips, and the vagina are our pleasure points too, so the funk brings the issue of touching oneself, right, we are not ashamed to touch the parts of the body as the imaginary of a sexual relationship. all through dance. I think that other dances also do this, but not in such an explicit way, that’s why they are not so censored as Funk. But I think there is a little of this as well. As the factor of men, there is also the issue of the member, you know, the sexual organ as a main feature ... So, we have the sarrada right, that’s what we know very well, which is more popular, it is very about the contact of two people, so there is the encaixe, so any form of movement that makes us express this sexual question is welcome in funk. So, we have the sarrada, we have the quicada, we have the sentada. All these are things that we do in sex but what we also embody in dance.”

Sarrada (engl. bump) refers to the movement in which the hands are brought to the hips while the hips are bumped forward. It is used in a playful context, especially in its version with jump, the “*sarrada no ar*” (bump in the air). *Encaixe/desencaixe* implies a tilting movement of the hips. The term *quicada* derives from the verb *quicar* and means the bouncing of a ball. In funk, it refers to a dance movement in which the buttocks are set in rapid upward and downward motions. *Sentada* literally means to sit down. The knees are completely bent sideways, almost touching the floor. In this context, the term “*até o chão*” (until the floor) is also often used.

The fact that Funk Brasileiro combines many elements of sensual movements that imitate sexual encounters in its dance is also evident from its context of origin. The buildings in *comunidades* are often built with little space and allow hardly any privacy. The lack of space in the house is one reason why various activities are shifted to the street. Other reasons lie in the nexus of economic vulnerability and racial discrimination that causes the exclusion of marginalized groups from commercial leisure spaces (see Stanley-Niaah, 2010, pp. 68–70). Thus, the street represents a crucial space of necessity for the inhabitants of the *comunidades*. Accordingly, parties, so-called *bailes funk* also take place on the street. In this context, there is

the possibility to meet people, spend leisure time and make first physical approximations through the dance.

However, this also exposes the youth to ongoing police violence. *Bailes funk* have been legally banned at various regions across time. They are repeatedly brutally suppressed by police and paramilitary forces, resulting in the deaths of young people (see Santiago, 2020). Maiwsi explained to me that the shape of Funk parties adapts to the socio-spatial conditions. Although *baile funk* is used as a general term for Funk parties in *comunidades*, it primarily refers to the formation as it is known from Rio de Janeiro. *Bailes funk* here are dominated by the drug trade. This fact, combined with the location of the *comunidades* on the hills of the city – which is why the term *morro* (hill) is also used to refer to communities in Rio de Janeiro – provides obstacles for the police to enter the *comunidades* and to end the street parties. This allows *bailes funk* to establish themselves as permanent places with economic commerce, such as bars and food stalls. Maiwsi lives in São Paulo. She also regularly frequents *bailes funk* in Rio de Janeiro. The structure of *bailes funk* has an impact on Maiwsi’s dancing. The fact that the parties are under the auspices of the drug trade means, on the one hand, that she does not go to *bailes* of different *comandos*¹⁸ and, on the other hand, that she, as an outsider, demonstrates respect for the territory by keeping her dancing modest.

„Eu gosto muito de baile funk, né. Então existe uma condenação também dentro disso porque eu estou num local dominado pelo tráfico. Se eu frequento baile, eu vou ver as coisas acontecendo, mas eu entendo que isso faz parte do que também compõe o funk, de como ele nasceu e isso não é um problema do funk, é o problema do estado, né, então pode ser dita como errada, né, mas é uma forma de manifestação cultural e também de sobrevivência. Eu gosto muito de música de comando, por exemplo, que são os funks que são feitos para esses caras. O Rio de Janeiro é dividido né, por alguns comandos ao contrário de São Paulo. São Paulo é comandado por um apenas ... Então eu tô mais próxima dessa realidade do funk e é o funk que eu mais gosto, assim, eu não consigo descrever, eu não sei se por conta de tudo que eu já passei na vida. Já passei por poucas e boas coisas, então eu não me amedronto tanto pelo crime em si, então eu consigo estar naquele lugar e curtir realmente o lazer como se eu fosse de lá, como se fosse algo normal para mim. Então você tá no lugar onde você só ouve aquilo, assim, que a estrutura de som também é muito grande, né. Existem paredões de caixa de som espalhados, então o som não tem como você não ouvir... Sabe quando você vai num lugar que tá tão alto que você sente você vibrar?“

“I really like baile funk you know. There’s also a conviction within this because I’m close to drug trafficking. If I go to baile you know, I’ll see the guns and I’ll see things happening, but I understand that this is part of what Funk is, also of how it was born and that it’s not only Funk’s problem, it’s the state’s problem, you know, it can be said

¹⁸ The *comandos* are community-based organizations structured through diverse criminal mechanisms, such as drug and gun trafficking (see Sneed, 2003).

that it's wrong, right, but it's a form of cultural manifestation and survival. I really like music of the comando, for example, the Funks that are made for these guys. Rio de Janeiro is divided by a few comandos unlike São Paulo, São Paulo has only one crime comando ... So, I'm closer to this reality of Funk and it's the Funk that I like the most, so I am not so good at describing it to people, I don't know if this is because of everything I've been through in my life. I've already been through a lot of things I don't get so frightened by crime itself so I can be in that place and really enjoy the leisure as if I were from there as if it were something more normal for me. So, you're in a place where you only hear that, so the sound structure is also very huge. There are walls of speakers scattered around, so the sound, there's no way you can't hear it... Do you know when you go to a place that is so loud that you feel yourself vibrating?"

For São Paulo, other spatial conditions apply. Here, the *comunidades* do not form the semi-enclosed structures that are conditioned by the hills in Rio de Janeiro but extend in such a way that there are fewer central locations. The police have easier access to the *comunidades*, so that the permanent fear of being cancelled by the police effects that no permanent *bailes* can be established. As a reaction to this, temporary parties are formed in São Paulo, which can be dissolved quickly and easily. So-called *fluxos* (rivers) are characterized by cars that transport the jukeboxes and are permanently on the move. The sale of food and drinks also takes place on an ambulatory basis. Nevertheless, the participants of *fluxos* are exposed to great danger by the arrival of the police, because by running away, many accidents (with fatal consequences) can occur (see Santiago, 2020). More recently, the most tragic case that occurred in São Paulo became known in the media as the “Massacre do Baile Funk” (see Salvadori et. al., 2019).

„Em São Paulo é proibido, não que no Rio não seja, né, mas no Rio a polícia não sobe o morro e em São Paulo a gente não tem essa característica de favela de morro em todos os lugares, então a gente faz na rua. Por que que é fluxo de rua? Porque a gente não pode montar a mesma estrutura fixa onde ela fique permanente no mesmo lugar porque se a polícia vem não tem como desmontar isso a tempo. O exemplo do caso que teve do massacre do Baile da 17, né. Lá já é algo que é estruturado da comunidade, então não tinha como todo mundo sair, desmontar antes que a polícia chegasse até por isso aconteceu o que aconteceu. Então em São Paulo, o que acontece normalmente: a gente tem uma rua e nessa rua os carros ficam em constante fluxo, né, eles não ficam parados. Então os carros ficam andando, esse carro normalmente têm a aparelhagem de som que é o que movimentar o lugar e os ambulantes vão aonde está o fluxo, não é algo que é acordado necessariamente. Em alguns bairros existe já semanalmente aonde vai ser normalmente os lugares e tudo mais. Aqui onde eu moro, por exemplo, tem um lugar que tem fluxo, só que a gente tem três bases de fluxo onde a gente sabe que rolará. Normalmente tem no final da minha rua, e em outros três pontos do bairro, um em cada um ponto do bairro. Então às vezes você tem que acompanhar pelas redes pra saber aonde que tá o fluxo acontecendo.”

“In São Paulo it's forbidden, not that this isn't true for Rio, but in Rio the police don't go up the morro and in São Paulo we don't have this favela, this morro characteristic in all places, so we do it in the street. Why is it called fluxo of the street? Because we

can't set up the same fixed structure where it's permanent in the same place because if the police come, we can't dismantle it in time. An example of this is the case of the massacre at Baile da 17. There it is already part of the structure of the community so there was no way everyone could dismantle it before the police arrived and that's why what happened happened. So, in São Paulo what normally happens is that we have a street and on this street the cars are in a constant flow, they don't stay still. So, the cars keep moving, this car normally has a sound system that is what moves the place, and the vendors go where the fluxo is, it's not something that is necessarily agreed, In some neighborhoods there is already a weekly schedule of where the fluxo will be, normally the places and everything else. Here where I live for example there is a place that has a fluxo, but we have three fluxo bases where we know there is a fluxo. Normally at the end of my street and at three other points in the neighborhood. So sometimes you must follow the social networks to know where the fluxo is happening."

The fact that dancing people – despite stigmatization, systematic oppression, and the permanent threat and exercise of violence – unite in the form of parties and establish themselves spatially already signifies an act of resistance. Maiwsi states that in Brazil, as in other (post)colonial realities, an ongoing history of defeating the assembly of Black people exists. At the same time, a continuity of resistance movements is also found in the Brazilian context. In the form of *quilombos* but also in the form of *bailes funk*, people confront the ongoing marginalization that is fed by the interplay of class, *race*, and locality. However, for people outside heteronormative ideas, another level interferes, namely gender/sexuality.

The reality of queer people in the *comunidades* is also intensely shaped by Funk Brasileiro. Thus, they have been part of the culture from the beginning. Still, they experience more pervasive stigmatization because of their gender identity and/or sexuality. Maiwsi knows that the Funk movement is also not exempt from overall ideologies that structure the dominant society, such as sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. The explicit addressing of sexuality as a defining feature of Funk Brasileiro, as well as the fact that Funk Brasileiro compared to other pop cultures is disproportionately labeled as misogynistic and patriarchal, creates a field of tension and, in response, the creation of safe spaces for queer people within Funk culture. It is in this context that *bailes funk* emerged that explicitly address a queer audience. Batekoo is a collective from Salvador that is also based in São Paulo. It is one of the largest, if not the largest, Black LGBTQIA+ platforms that celebrate Black peripheral cultures. As such, *bailes funk* are at the center of their agenda. A friend of Maiwsi was already part of the Batekoo collective and invited her to their first party in 2016. Today she is an ambassador and performer at the parties herself.

As a Black, heterosexual woman, Maiwsi is aware that the safe space is primarily for LGBTQIA+ people. She sees her responsibility as supporting a discourse of normalization of diverse gender identities, sexualities, and bodies. One of the principles of Batekoo is to ensure

that the shaping function rests exclusively with Black LGBTQIA+ people. The collective uses the strategy of occupying public spaces to create visibility and respect for marginalized groups. Batekoo intentionally situates its events in the center of São Paulo. On the one hand, this pursues equal access for people from all parts of the city. On the other hand, it also demonstrates the right to the city for people living in *comunidades*. Thus, celebration as spatial occupation seeks the discourse for external acceptance. Corporeality and dance moreover create an inner acceptance.

“Ele é democrático, isso é o que é o principal sim, tipo por ter sido criado por pessoas que sempre são consideradas nada, então qualquer pessoa pode estar ali que ela vai ser bem-vinda, vai ser incluída, vai poder dançar, cantar, tocar. Então, por exemplo, eu dou aula de dança né, e tipo a gente sempre fala isso: o funk é democrático, qualquer pessoa pode dançar funk, desde uma criança à um idoso, magro, gordo, gay, trans, hétero, preto, branco, asiático, qualquer pessoa ... E acho que entra a questão do respeito, você respeitando como é, você não discriminando aquilo, você não sexualizando, você não usando aquilo de um modo negativo.”

“The dance is very democratic, I think this is the principal, yes, because it has been created by people who always have been considered nothing, so any person can be there, and will be received welcoming, will be included, doing whatever, dancing, singing, playing an instrument. Well for example I give dancing courses, you know, we always say this: ‘Funk is democratic, every person can dance Funk, from children to the elderly, thin, big, gay, trans, hetero, Black, white, Asian, every kind of person’ ... And I think there is the issue with respect, you respect it for what it is, you do not discriminate that, you do not sexualize it, you do not use it in a negative way.”

When Maiwsi talks about her personal meaning of Funk Brasileiro, she emphasizes the connection of the acceptance she gained towards her own body, the self-confidence that follows from it, and the strength she draws from being able to live out her own sexuality (in relation to others) through dance.

“Então eu sempre fui muito magra e sempre fui muito discriminada pelo meu corpo por ser um corpo muito magro. Quando eu comecei a dançar funk de fato, eu entendi que em alguns espaços e alguns trabalhos eu não teria por conta de como meu corpo é. Mas ao mesmo tempo tem certas movimentações que só eu consigo fazer, né, e que essas mulheres ou as outras dançarinas de corpos mais maiores não conseguem. Quando eu entendi isso, foi um processo dentro da Batekoo também, de aceitação do meu próprio corpo, de que: ‘tudo bem que eu não tenho um bundão, tudo bem eu não ter um peitão e tudo mais’ e de que o meu corpo por ser como ele é, se movimentar do jeito que ele se movimenta, ele também é capaz de atingir outras pessoas profundamente enquanto dança, enquanto conexão. E isso me ajudou na conexão com meu próprio corpo. Antes eu só aceitava, eu só aceitei o fato de que eu tinha esse corpo, né. O funk ele me ajudou muito nessa construção da autoestima ... por exemplo, eu sou uma piranha né [rindo]. Eu sou uma piranha, então eu sou uma grande gostosa independente de como meu corpo seja ou não ... Eu só vou tá satisfeita com o que eu faço, com quem eu vivo, como quem

eu danço se eu estiver satisfeita comigo mesma e eu estando satisfeita comigo mesma também diz sobre eu gostar de como meu corpo é, de como ele se movimenta, de como eu faço sexo com o outro, de como eu faço sexo comigo mesma, de eu ter essa liberdade, de fazer o que eu quiser, de dançar como eu quiser e de estar aonde eu quiser. Então por mais que às vezes soa promiscuo ou ofensivo para algumas pessoas, eu consigo me comunicar com outra mulher falando que ela é uma grande gostosa também, então se eu sou uma grande gostosa, ‘você também é uma grande gostosa’, então tem uma conexão e é uma conexão de empoderamento, existe um poder. Eu sei que quando eu estou em cima do palco, eu tenho esse poder, eu tenho o poder de fazer as pessoas olharem para mim, eu tenho o poder de fazer as pessoas dançarem comigo, eu tenho poder de abrir espaço, né, eu tenho poder de controlar muitas coisas e eu faço isso dançando ... Sou paga para fazer isso, porque eu faço isso com muita confiança e essa confiança é algo que o funk me trouxe. Eu sou uma piranha, eu sou uma grande gostosa e as pessoas têm que me respeitar por isso né [rindo]. É, e acho que essa mensagem ela é meio universal de todas as mulheres que estão no funk, porque a gente precisa ter respeito para se manter nesse espaço. Então eu preciso ser muito confiante de mim para eu continuar ali, porque senão eu vou estar engolida, senão vou ser só mais uma mulher né. Que acho que ainda tem isso também, eu vou ser só um objeto, vou ser só um pedaço de corpo. Se o funk não traz essa confiança para você, eu não sei o que mais vai te trazer sabe? Assim, então eu acho que o principal fator de empoderamento do funk é isso, é de você ter confiança, mas essa confiança ela vem junto com a liberdade. Você entende a confiança através da sua liberdade.”

“So, I always was very thin, and always have been discriminated because of my body, for being a very thin body. In fact, I started dancing Funk, working with this, I understood that some spaces, some jobs I would not get because the way my body is. But at the same time there are specific movements that only I can do right, which these women or the other dancers and so on can’t do. When I understood this, and this was also a process within Batekoo, the acceptance of my very own body, that ‘It’s alright not having a big butt, it’s alright not having big breasts and so on’, that my body for being the way it is, it moves, the way it moves it is also capable to connect with other people in a profound way, be it dancing, be it connection. And this helped me a lot to connect myself with my proper body. Before, I just accepted the fact that I have this body, you know. Funk helped me in this construction of self-esteem ... for example I’m a piranha right [laughing]. I am a piranha, so I am hell of an independent beauty, the way my body is or not ... I will only be satisfied with the one I’m doing it, I’m living with, I’m dancing with when I’m satisfied with myself, and I believe to be satisfied with my very self because of the fact that I like my body, the way my body moves, the way I have sex with the other, the way I have sex with myself, for having the freedom, right, to do whatever I want to do, to dance how I want to, to be wherever I want to be. So even though sometimes being promiscuous or offensive to some people I manage to communicate with other women, saying that she is also hell of a beauty, so if I am a hell of a beauty, ‘You are also a hell of a beauty’, so there is a connection and it is a connection of empowerment, there is power. I know that when I am on the stage I have this power, I have the power to make the people look at me, I have the power to make the people dance with me and I have the power to open spaces, you know, I have the power to control a lot of things, and I do this while dancing ... I get paid to do this because I do this with a lot of confidence and this confidence is something which Funk brought to me, you know. I am a piranha. I am hell of a beauty, and the people must

respect me to stay in that space [laughing]. And I think that this message is kind of universal to all women in Funk, because we need to be respected to remain in this space. Therefore, I must be very confident to continue there, because if not I go under, right, if not I would be only another woman, you know. I think that this is also another factor, I will only be an object, I will only be a piece of body. So, if Funk doesn't bring you this confidence, I don't know what else could bring it to you. So, I think that this is the principal factor of empowerment within Funk, it is you having confidence, but this confidence comes together with freedom. You understand the confidence beyond your freedom."

Maiwsi uses the space offered to her by *baile funk* in general and in particular when it comes to the stage. She is aware of the power that the stage provides. It allows for a greater presence and control over how she wants to move her body and how she wants to be seen and interact with the spectators. She uses the confidence gained through dance to connect with others, especially women, and show them that they too have the right and ability to feel sexually empowered. In this way, Maiwsi creates alliances and solidarity within her community.

5.2. Hannah: The Constant Fight of Expressing Female Sexuality

I remember meeting Hannah back in 2015 through a common friend. At that time, he took me to a house party, better known as HP. I had just started learning Portuguese and didn't actively engage with others. Instead, I rather joined conversations and listened to the words, hoping to soak up as much as possible. That evening, I did not speak to Hannah. She and I also ran into each other a few times during my subsequent stays in São Paulo. Still, I probably "learned" more about her through her social media than through those glimpsed interactions. That is also how I noticed that Hannah had started posting regular videos of her dancing to Funk Brasileiro on Instagram in 2019/2020. The camera angle was always vertically oriented so that the upper body and torso were in focus. Hannah's back was to the camera, giving viewers a look at the body parts emphasized in Funk Brasileiro, namely the hips and buttocks. Hannah synchronized her hips to the beat of the Funk music, which sometimes meant slower circular movements and sometimes fast vibrations. Her lower torso seemed detached from the otherwise motionless body, thereby making her movements even more dynamic.

Knowing Hannah's social media activities, she was one of the first people to contact. I was more than happy when she confirmed that she remembered me. After explaining my research project, she agreed to talk with me. After a couple of messages, she came through the door of my accommodation in São Paulo on a Friday afternoon. With a cup of coffee in hand and

accompanied by the everyday traffic noise of the metropolitan center, I started the recording device.¹⁹

“Mh sou Hannah, tenho 26 anos, brasileira, nasci em São Paulo, atualmente faço faculdade, faço um curso e sou modelo, acho que são o principal. Você quer saber os impactos mais em relação Brasil? ... Eu cresci na zona leste ... aqui no Brasil é muito dividido a zonas, e a zona leste seria como se fosse uma zona um pouco mais pobre se a gente compara seria como os bailes funk que mostram nos vídeos. O funk era muito presente basicamente na zona leste inteira, assim, temos dois bairros que são mais alto padrão, mas no geral é bem presente, então você cresce ouvindo funk, os bairros são muito presentes. Então eu cresci nesse contexto, com 12, 13 anos já ouvia bastante funk e já dançava bastante funk ...”

“Mh I'm Hannah Simões, I'm 26 years old, Brazilian, born in São Paulo, currently I'm in college, doing a course and I work as a model, I think these are the main things. Do you want to know about impacts that have more to do regarding Brazil? ... I grew up in the East Zone, we... here in Brazil it is very divided into zones, and the East Zone would be like a poorer zone, if we compare it would be like the bailes funk that they show in the videos. Funk was very present in the East Zone, basically the whole East Zone, we have two neighborhoods that are more like high standard, but in general it is very present, so you grow up listening to Funk, the neighborhoods are very present, so I grew up in this context, at the age of 12, 13 I was already listening to a lot of Funk and dancing a lot of Funk...”

Hannah was already one step ahead of me by linking my open-ended question about how she identifies with her personal connection to Funk Brasileiro. Hannah started listening to Funk Brasileiro around 2007, just as the culture was beginning to form its own creative outgrowth in São Paulo, precisely in the region where Hannah grew up: the East Zone of São Paulo. The industrialization of the nineteenth century and the related immigration of workers from the northeast of Brazil but also from Spain, Italy, Japan, and Syria, made São Paulo grow rapidly (see Fontes, 2016, p. 34). Since the city did not invest in the infrastructure to cope with the immigration, working-class neighborhoods were pushed to the outskirts of the city. Citizens had to build their homes in areas lacking water and electricity. Under these conditions, the East Zone was constituted (see Caldeira, 2008, p. 104). Especially in the Eastern Region 1 with the districts Itaim Paulista, Guaianases, São Miguel Paulista, and Cidade Tiradentes the *comunidades* were formed. It is therefore no coincidence that it was here in particular that Funk culture began to grow in São Paulo (see Pereira, 2014).

From the coast, Funk Brasileiro reached the city of São Paulo in the beginning of the 2000s. In this era, the urban centers of Brazil have been shaped by economic growth and the increasing consumption of luxury goods (see *ibid.*). This reality was especially reflected in the Funk

¹⁹ My in-person interview with Hannah took place in São Paulo (Santa Cecília) on the 23 April 2021. Its total duration was 00:57:13.

culture of São Paulo. Here, Funk Ostentação developed as a sub-genre and focused on the consumption of luxury goods. Technological progress contributed to the popularization, too (see *ibid.*). Now it was no longer financially impossible to acquire recording equipment and computers. Funk music could be produced more easily and professionally. With KondZilla, one of the most well-known Funk production companies, which originated in São Paulo during this era, the first music videos were produced to show the cars, jewelry, fashion brands, and women mentioned in the songs. With the help of YouTube, the music videos found a wide audience, among which was Hannah. In fact, Hannah's first contact with Funk Brasileiro was at school.

„Lembro, foi na escola e os meninos ... eu moro num bairro ok, não é bom nem ruim, mas muito próximo do bairro onde eu moro é uma comunidade que se chama Cangaíba e lá baile dia inteiro, todo o dia, toda a noite, é um caos. É muito ligado inclusive com essa cena, a facção que todo mundo conhece aqui, uma facção criminosa e sempre tinha e aí eu vi os meninos ouvindo eu fiquei tipo ... porque na época eu gostava de um rockyzinho eu era toda emcore assim ... eu fui 'nossa que batidão gostozinho' e tal e eu comecei a dançar em casa sozinha e aí já era, tive sucesso total, [saudades rindo].”

“I remember, it was at school the boys ... I live in a neighborhood ok it's not good or bad but very close to the neighborhood where I live is a comunidade that is called Cangaíba there is baile all day, all day, all night it is a chaos. In addition, it is very connected with the scene, the faction that everyone knows about criminality, it was always present, and I have seen the boys listening and I was like ... because at that time I liked a bit of rock, I was all about emo ... I was like, 'wow, what a nice beat' and so on and I started dancing at home by myself and that it was, I had total success, I miss it [laughing].”

Hannah grew up in a socio-spatial environment in which Funk Brasileiro was omnipresent. This made it the culture she had the most contact with and which she wanted to experience by herself through dancing. At the same time Hannah also witnessed how Funk Brasileiro was criminalized. When she was a teenager, Funk Brasileiro was considered “bandit music.” She was looked at strangely on the street when she listened to the music. While people within the Funk scene suffer from criminalization through increased policing and prosecution (see Lopes, 2010, p. 131), Hannah was confronted with a different stigma that plagues the culture: the sexualization of women through dance.

The corporeality of Funk Brasileiro is characterized by dance movements that focus on the hips and buttocks. It is therefore not only sensual but imitates sexual movements. For example, one of the basic movements is the *rebolado*, which literally means hip shaking. Here, the legs are at least shoulder-width open. The knees are bent. The buttocks are accentuated by adopting a hollow back position. The hands are placed on the knees. While the hips move in circles, the knees are flexed according to the side on which the weight is placed. At the same time, the

upper body hardly moves. Another example is a sequence of movements which is called *empinar* and *desempinar*. Here, the buttocks are first shifted far backward before being abruptly contracted forward. In other movements, the gluteal muscle alone is set into small vibrations. All movements can be diversified via different intensity and speed, up and down movements, as well as steps to the side. In addition to the dance, the visuality of Funk Brasileiro is characterized by a certain style. For women, shorts are especially characteristic. On the one hand, this underlines the sensual dance. On the other hand, numerous dance steps can only be practiced because of the freedom of movement that tight clothing allows. It was especially this freedom that was the first association that came to Hannah's mind when she told me why she likes to dance Funk Brasileiro.

“Eu acho que pela liberdade o funk dá, você sente muito livre, eu acho o movimento que você faz, a batida é muito envolvente, assim, se começa ouvir, não tem uma pessoa que você não vê com a mão no joelho já, sabe? Além de ser muito envolvente você sente muito livre, cê dança de qualquer jeito sabe? Pula, senta no chão, faz passinho, o que eu acho que outros estilos de música não trazem ... que o funk é uma batida muito envolvente se tem que dançar na hora assim então eu acho que a liberdade que o funk traz, me dá ... é uma liberdade e uma prisão ao mesmo tempo, mas a liberdade que me dá, traz uma coisa muito gostosa assim.”

“I think that because of the freedom that Funk gives, you feel very free, I think the movement that you do, the beat is very involving, so if you start listening there isn't a person that you don't see with their hand on their knee, you know? Besides being very involving you feel very free, you can dance any way you want, you know? Jump, go down to the floor, do passinho, what I think other styles of music do not offer ... because Funk is a very involving beat, you must dance immediately, so I think the freedom that Funk brings, gives me ... it's a freedom and a prison at the same time, but the freedom it gives me, brings a very enjoyable thing with it.”

During our conversation it became clear that for Hannah the positive meaning of dancing is always negatively overshadowed by sexism. On the one hand, Hannah speaks of freedom. On the other hand, she feels limitations, too. On a personal level, Funk Brasileiro offers Hannah freedom and fun. However, as soon as she interacted with the social environment through her dance, she entered a field of persistent tensions between the desire to express herself through dance and the misogynistic judgement of others.

“(...) eu amo dançar, eu adoro dançar só que essas restrições que a sociedade coloca sobre o corpo da mulher num todo é muito complicado especificamente quando você dança um funk que é uma dança sensual, dança de shorts né, a pessoa acha que você é puta, é verdade as pessoas acham que você só quer é ... [Hannah levantou as sobrancelhas, parecia que estava imitando palavras que não deveriam ser pronunciadas, minha associação estava 'transar'].”

“I love dancing, I really love dancing, but the restrictions which the society implies over the women’s body in general is very difficult especially when dancing Funk which is a sensual dance, a dance in shorts, people think you are a slut, that’s right the people think that the only thing you want is ... [Hannah raised her eyebrows, she seemed to be imitating words that should not be spoken, my association was ‘having sex’].”

In fact, the issue of the sexualization of women in Funk Brasileiro took up a crucial part of our conversation because of Hannah’s experiences. Hannah pointed out to me the overarching sexism with which Brazilian society is infused. As an active woman in the Funk scene, she considers the discriminatory consequences to be even greater due to society’s stigmatization of Funk Brasileiro as sexually deviant. In her experience, however, this does not only apply to people outside of the Funk scene, but also within the culture. Hannah was taught patriarchal ideas that she initially adopted. She believes that this is also true for many other people growing up in a *comunidade*.

“(...) eu não sei como chegou em você [feminismo], em mim chegou na internet, eu fui casada há três anos com um cara machista, um relacionamento bem cara abusivo, tóxico e eu tinha a ideia de que era normal, mesmo tendo feito um colégio particular, tipo tendo uma condição individual, porque meu pai me criou assim, então eu tive esse contato nos fóruns e discussões da internet. As meninas na comunidade não têm esse acesso então elas crescem achando que isso é normal (...).”

“(...) I don’t know how you learned about this [feminism], I have learned about those issues through the internet, I was married for three years with a huge macho, a very abusive, toxic relationship, I thought that this is normal, even though I went to a private school like I have an individual condition because my father raised me like this, well I had this contact in the forums and internet discussions, the girls in the community don’t have this access, so they grow up thinking that this is normal (...).”

Within this relationship, Hannah was severely restricted in the way she wanted to express herself and was controlled by her ex-husband. After the divorce, she returned to her passion for dancing Funk Brasileiro. Being able to go to parties again and to dance helped Hannah regain her strength and brought back her self-confidence.

“Eu tive esse relacionamento e nesse relacionamento eu só pude usar saia longa, calça só, não podia nada de shorts, nada de nada, e aí eu saí desse relacionamento, eu comecei nas baladas na Augusta, eu já ouvia funk adolescente, né, eu me casei com 17 anos, então era novinha, separei com 21. Quando, separei, eu voltei às origens, assim né, eu ia para as baladas e ouvia funk e tal e aí eu comecei a dançar um pouquinho, dançar um pouquinho e isso de dançar foi trazendo a minha confiança de novo. A princípio até hoje eu tô fazendo qualquer coisa que eu tô, assim, é porque me traz essa confiança, então para mim foi necessário. O empoderamento, assim, eu utilizei muito o fato de dançar comigo empoderar de novo para lembrar de quem não era, sabe?”

“I had this relationship, and in this relationship, I could only wear long skirts, pants, I couldn’t wear shorts, nothing at all, and then I left this relationship and started to go to the clubs at Augusta and I already listened to Funk as a teenager, right? I started to dance a little bit and this dancing brought my confidence back just as before, even today I am doing anything I am doing because it brings me this confidence, so for me it was necessary, this empowerment, I used a lot of dancing to empower myself to remember that that wasn’t me, you know?”

Subsequently, Hannah started posting dance videos on Instagram. After Tati Zaqui, a well-known Funk singer, reposted videos of her, her follower numbers increased rapidly. More than 10,000 followers watched the videos. While her social media presence offered her invitations from artists to be a dancer in their music videos, she also suffered direct hostility, sexist harassment, and questioning of her sexuality.

“Bem, então, eu tive um problema quando comecei a dançar em clipe porque eu já era uma mulher lésbica assumida e eles não entendiam, eles ficavam pedindo a três, jogando como se aquilo, a minha sexualidade, fosse invalidada por estar no clipe dançando com caras, então era sempre uma situação ‘ah não, acha que você é bi então, se acha que não é lésbica, você é bi’, aí eu parei de fazer.”

“Well, I had a problem when I started dancing in video clips, I already came out as being lesbian but they did not understand and did not stop to ask for a threesome, like if my sexuality has no validity because I was dancing with guys in the video clip, there were always situations like ‘I don’t believe you, you are bisexual, you are not lesbian, you are bisexual’ and therefore I stopped doing video clips.”

In dancing Funk Brasileiro, Hannah was always confronted with her sexuality. In her personal experience, dancing Funk Brasileiro meant the possibility to feel sensually in her own body, to have self-respect, and to strengthen her self-confidence. Still, Hannah also explained to me that it is precisely because of the sensual corporeality of Funk Brasileiro that her personal boundaries were disrespected. People believed that through public expressiveness they would have “a right to her body.” Moreover, they have also negated her sexuality because of her appearance.

“Eu acho que sim, a sensualidade sim, com certeza porque por dois lados, um é que você se sente muito sexy quando dança, e o outro é que o outro se acha muito sexy e ele acha que tem direito sobre seu corpo, acho que essa é a primeira questão. A segunda é que ninguém acredita que eu sou lésbica, sabe até?! Eu acho que pela aparência e tal e essa ideia de que pra ser uma mulher lésbica tem sempre cabelo curtinho, você tem que ser masculina, mas sabe?”

“I think yes, the sensuality yes, for sure because for two sides, one you feel very sexy when you dance and the other is that the other thinks you are very sexy and he thinks he has a right over your body, I think that’s the first issue. The second is that nobody believes that I’m a lesbian you know even I think by the way I look and so on and this

idea that to be a lesbian woman you always have short hair you have to be masculine, but you know?"

Thus, for Hannah, there was an ongoing conflict between dance as a personal quality and the sexism she was exposed to. Therefore, when Hannah decided to post dance videos, she checked every detail in the video first, so that neither her face was visible nor that she appeared too revealing. She has always been attentive, disciplined and in control of herself. The fact that as a woman in Funk Brasileiro one enters an ongoing struggle was something Hannah no longer wanted to accept. The social stigma of Funk Brasileiro is mainly the reason for this. Hannah lost her last job because a colleague shared photos of her in the office. The modeling agency she is contracted with has also been clear that the image of a *funkeira* is not desirable. This has caused Hannah to stop dancing in music videos. She also very rarely posts dance videos on Instagram.

5.3. Negona Dance: Forging Identity and Embracing Femininity

Like Maiwsi Ayana, I met Negona²⁰ Dance through a series of contacts. Our conversation also took place online²¹ and began with a question that instantly introduced the research subject. Negona Dance's profile description on Instagram also lists the name Welleton. At the beginning of our conversation, I wanted to know what the preferred way to address was. Although I was assured that it didn't matter, during our conversation I discovered that the artist's name Negona Dance has particular importance in the context of Funk Brasileiro. Thus, this is taken into account by naming accordingly.

Negona Dance was born in São Paulo but grew up in Belo Horizonte (BH) and therefore considers himself a *mineiro* (someone from Minas Gerais). He currently lives in the Aglomerado da Serra in the South Zone of Belo Horizonte. In Minas Gerais, this is the largest *comunidade* or, as Negona Dance prefers to say, *quebrada* (broken). The Funk scene in Minas Gerais has long been influenced by the subgenre Funk Consciente (Conscious Funk), which is concerned with remembering its roots of origin. But it has also been involved in Miami Bass and more recently has developed a more minimalist, slower version (see Albuquerque, 2017). These changes over time are also visible in its spatial distribution. In Belo Horizonte, it was initially the northern region that was predominantly known for the practice of Funk Brasileiro. The southern region, which consists of both the wealthiest neighborhoods and the largest

²⁰ *Negona* is the superlative of the word *nega*, which derives from the word *negra*, meaning Black woman. Depending on the context and the person using the term, it can have either pejorative or subversive meanings. Here *negona* is used as a self-expression; the superlative indicates greatness.

²¹ My online interview with Negona Dance took place on the 19.08.2021. Its total duration was 01:14:17.

comunidades in BH, did not enter the Funk scene until the turn of the century. People here used to prefer pagode, samba, and forró before embracing Funk Brasileiro (see *ibid.*).

In his teenage years, Negona Dance could observe *bailes funk* through his window. For a long time, he maintained this perspective from the outside. He was not forbidden to consume Funk Brasileiro by his parents, but as for dance, Negona Dance initially devoted himself to ballet, jazz, and contemporary dance. However, by visiting clubs, he gradually got interested in other musical influences as well. Regarding Funk Brasileiro, however, there was a striking experience.

Negona Dance, then still primarily referred to as Welleton, went with friends to a festival of the cultural center Lá da Favelinha (from the little *favela*), where a dance battle took place, the so-called Disputa Nervosa (nervous dispute). His friends tried to encourage him to sign up for it. He didn't dare to do so. Only when he was called on stage, he found out that his friends had secretly signed him up. After all, he went on stage and won one battle after another until he reached the finale, which he also won. In our conversation, he described to me that he had never performed in front of so many people before and that it was a great feeling, something he had never experienced previously. Until then, Welleton was also known by the nickname Negão²², which he had received within the hip-hop scene. However, his friend Kdu, the founder of Lá da Favelinha questioned the name and suggested to change it to Negona because of his feminine dancing movements. Thus, in the context of Funk Brasileiro, the name Negona, and subsequently Negona Dance, got established – the artist's name that Welleton adopted for himself and through which he is mostly addressed nowadays. In this context, doubts intensified regarding traditional gender relations embodied in dance.

“Eu não tinha me aproximado do funk como aquele dia quando eu me aproximei e aí eu comecei ... Já tinha muitos questionamentos, né, sobre o balé, sobre a dança contemporânea, porque a gente tá falando do Brasil e vai para um sistema totalmente europeu. ‘Pera aí você tem que ser homem, não vale, você tem que ser homem, você não pode ser um pouquinho afeminado’. Então o balé e ali vai te podendo à várias coisas assim, e no Jazz também. Mas o Jazz te dá mais liberdade, num certo momento cê tem essa liberdade, mas o balé não, balé o tempo inteiro falando ‘você tem que dançar com uma menina, você vai carregar uma menina, você tem que se mostrar másculo’ e, ô velho, eu já me sentindo muito, muito incomodado com essa situação. E nesse mesmo momento eu era da Igreja Evangélica aqui no Brasil, então mais pressões, que tipo assim, eu tinha muito medo de me assumir gay por conta da minha família e aí a partir desse dia, desse palco que eu falei, ‘velho, eu preciso viver, eu preciso né, eu preciso ser feliz de verdade’. Eu acho que o funk naquele momento ali, tanto enquanto musicalidade para mim tanto enquanto cultura, ele me dá desta arte sabe? ‘Velho, é isso,

²² Negão is the superlative of the word *nego*, which derives from the word *negro*, meaning Black man or dude, but eventually also the self-designated N-word. The superlative is often used in reference to potency.

é esse palco para esse estilo aqui'. Não que eu não danço os outros, mas é aquilo ali que eu queria, assim, que eu queria viver daquilo. Então fui me aproximando muito dos meninos do funk, das batalhas, conhecendo os meninos que batalhavam e aí surgiu uma oportunidade.”

“I hadn’t approached Funk as I had that day and there, I started ... I already had many concerns regarding ballet and contemporary dance because we are talking about Brazil, and we are dealing with a totally European system. ‘Wait, you have to be a man, you have to be a man, you can’t be a little bit effeminate.’ So, ballet and there it limits you to many things, so it is the same with jazz. But jazz gives you more freedom at a certain moment, but ballet doesn’t, ballet always tells you, ‘You have to dance with a girl, you are going to carry a girl, you have to be masculine.’ and, oh man, I have already felt very, very uncomfortable with this situation. In that same moment, yes, I was part of the Evangelical Church here in Brazil so more pressure which made me feel very afraid of assuming myself as being gay because of my family and then from that day on, from being on that stage I said, ‘Man, I need to live, I really need to be happy.’ I think that Funk, at that moment, both as a musicality for me and as culture, it’s giving me this art, you know? ‘Man, that’s it and this stage for this style here.’ Not that I don’t dance the others, but that’s what I wanted, that’s what I wanted to experience. So, I was getting very close to the boys of Funk, the battles, getting to know the boys who battled, and then an opportunity arose.”

For Negona Dance, Funk dance has an identity-forming effect. This can best be seen in the creation and adoption of the name Negona Dance. Beyond this, Funk dance also allowed for aspects of gender identity to be performed. Being on stage and receiving acceptance from the audience encouraged him to come out as gay, something he had been afraid to do before because of his family and his affiliation with the Evangelical Church. In Funk, a space opened up to embody his feminine corporeality in relation to his sexuality. In the Western dance styles in which Negona Dance is also trained, this has not been possible for him due to heteronormative conceptions of gender. Because of this opportunity to express himself Negona Dance has become more and more devoted to Funk Brasileiro. He has joined a dance collective and is part of the Observatório das Quebradas. This board provides an interface between politics and the *bailes funk* to create the conditions for the events to take place legally. In our conversation, Negona Dance emphasizes the importance of the *bailes funk*, as one of the few leisure and relaxation opportunities for the Black, peripheral population, which at the same time reflects their own culture. On the one hand, mechanisms of exclusion on behalf of the dominant society operate in the lack of recognition and stigmatization of Black, peripheral culture. On the other hand, this happens through the lack of integration into dominant structures.

In Brazilian cities, the social separation of privileged and socially vulnerable groups is spatially visible and expressed linguistically by the dichotomy *favela/asfalto* (see Navarro-Sertich, 2011, p. 178). Negona Dance has already been taught at school by his teachers that he seemed to be

“less worthy” because of his origin and appearance, more precisely being located in a community and being Black, and that his place in society is already predetermined. His teachers did not believe that he would be able to study, pursue a career, or hold a management position. Thus, certain professions are structurally denied to people from the *comunidades*. This social segregation is also noticeable in the use of the city. Long journeys, which are also linked to costs, make it difficult for people from the *comunidades* to reach the city center. The integration of *comunidade* residents into the city is not desired by the people who live there. For many, as a consequence, the center merely means a transit zone to get to the place of work.

Negona Dance demands the right to the city for people from the *comunidades*. Occupying the city center through *bailes funk* creates visibility for diverse people, opening a temporary space for pleasure and leisure that was previously only characterized by divergence. An example of this is the organization of a *baile funk* as part of the Virada Cultural de Belo Horizonte. This 24-hour festival is held annually and brings together diverse art and cultural activities presented in the streets and on the stages of Belo Horizonte.

“Ocupação, a gente precisa ocupar esses lugares. O centro da cidade também é nosso por direito, sabe? O centro da cidade não tem que ser só para gente atravessar, para poder ir trabalhar no centro da cidade, a gente pode sentar no barzinho, a gente pode sentar no cinema, a gente pode ir ao teatro porque são espaços que a gente também pode ocupar, são espaços que também fazem parte e acho que a gente não tem muita das vezes dentro da quebrada e que a gente tem fora e que é nosso também, sabe? E aí quando a gente leva, por exemplo, esse baile para o centro da cidade, e pela primeira vez na história da Virada Cultural de Belo Horizonte, uma e meia da tarde debaixo do sol quente já tem por volta de 50 mil pessoas na praça. E aí isso, a gente começa a baile uma hora da tarde, termina o baile as cinco e meia, seis horas. E aí quando dá mais de tardezinha, por volta de quatro horas, acontece o inesperado: já tava fechando a avenida também, uma avenida principal que passa do lado da praça, já tiveram que fechar uma parte dela ... Na praça cabem 100 mil pessoas e já tinha ultrapassado nesse número. E o mais legal de tudo é que nesse dia – e aí, quando eu falo do funk, de pessoas que realmente fazem funk, entendem como que faz, a gente começa para além de muita coisa, né, que a gente passou assim para poder fazer esse baile – não existe briga, arrastão nem nada. Não teve nem sequer uma queixa policial durante o baile funk que, geralmente, para o estado seria um dos rolês que mais ia dar confusão, que mais ia dar arrastão, que ia colocar a vida das pessoas em perigo. Então quando a gente vem pra baile funk real né, no centro da cidade, a galera faz ‘esse território aqui é meu, eu estou me sentindo bem aqui, eu vou curtir para caramba hoje’, sabe? E aí curtiu role de boa, de role tranquilo e aí vem para esse lugar talvez que não é pensado, mas é executado dessa forma que é esse espaço aqui também é meu, sabe? O centro da cidade não é só para mim um lugar de passagem de ir e vir, não! Esse lugar aqui é meu também pra eu vir com meu copão de whisky com energético e também beber aqui, sabe? E ver isso também é muito bonito, sabe? Ver o que a cultura funk proporciona pra galera assim.”

“Occupation, we need to occupy these places. The city center is also ours by right, you know? The city center doesn’t have to be just for us to cross to go to work downtown, we can sit at the bar, we can sit in the theaters because they are spaces that we can also occupy, they are spaces that are also part of us and I think that we don’t have this so much inside the quebrada as we have outside and that should also be ours, you know? And then, for example, when we take a look at this baile which we brought to the center of the city and for the first time in the history of the Virada Cultural in Belo Horizonte, at one thirty in the afternoon under the hot sun, there are already around 50 thousand people in the square and then we start the baile at one o’clock in the afternoon and the baile ends at five thirty, six o’clock and then, when it got late in the afternoon, around four o’clock the unexpected happens, the avenue was already closed, a main avenue that runs alongside the square, they had to close part of it because the square can hold 100 thousand people and it had already exceeded that number. The coolest thing of all is that happen on this day – and when I talk about Funk, I talk about people who really do Funk, who understand how it’s done, we start to go beyond many things that we went through to be able to do this baile – there were no fights, mass robbery, or anything else. There wasn’t even a police complaint during the baile funk, which generally for the state would be one of the parties that would cause the most confusion, that would cause mass robbery, that would put people’s lives in danger. So, when we come to a real baile funk in the center of the city the people go ‘This is my territory, I feel good here, I am going to enjoy today’, you know? And then you enjoy a little party, a peaceful party and then you come to this place that maybe is not thought of but is executed this way, this space here is also mine, you know? The city center is not only for me a place of transit to come and go, no, this place here is also mine, for me to come with my cup of whiskey and energy drink and drink here, you know? And to see this is also very beautiful, you know? To see what Funk culture provides for the people.”

Negona Dance emphasized that Funk Brasileiro as a culture and therefore the dance is a mirror of the lived experiences of marginalized people. The everyday life of the *comunidade* manifests itself in the physiology and movements of the people. Dance, with its capacity as a physical and cultural occupation of space, challenges the marginalized position of Black, peripheral bodies. The gathering of moving bodies allows for visibility. It forms a temporary shelter in which lived experiences manifested in dance can be remembered, produced, imagined, and recreated by the community.

Taking into account the category of gender/sexuality in relation with *race* and locality, it appears that LGBTQIA+ people who are part of Funk Brasileiro as consumers and/or producers are exposed to further mechanisms of invisibilization and stigmatization. Negona Dance recounted his experiences within the Funk scene. He explains the chauvinistic traits reflected in song lyrics of Funk Brasileiro as a result of a sexist-influenced education that runs through generations both consciously and subconsciously, thus perpetuating itself to this day. For Negona Dance, it was a growing process to first cope with the mocking remarks, to gain recognition and respect through dialogue, and thereby create a space in which he could move

freely without suffering insults and violence. He told me that this applies to certain places where queer people have done this work before or where he did on his own and where he is known. Negona Dance identifies the stage as a particularly influential space for such awareness. Here, numerous people watch and pay attention to the people on stage. From the perspective of the stage, one has certain formative power and control over what one wants to present. Together with his dance collective Lá da Favelinha, they consciously use this space to make different body shapes and expressions visible and to speak particularly about queer issues.

“Quando, por exemplo, uma pessoa LGBTQIA+ que está ocupando diversos palcos da cidade, em diversos espaços da cidade trazendo esse diálogo, é um peso muito grande. Eu não tô falando só de mim, eu tô trazendo uma galera comigo, né. Tá no lugar ali de representatividade, principalmente da população LGBTQIA+ que também curte funk, que a gente vai ter problemática. A gente costuma falar aqui que é uma mão no joelho e outra na consciência, porque a gente precisa pensar algumas letras, pensar algumas situações, mas que a gente também precisa dialogar com essa cena do funk que já tá ali sabe? Que já está aí fazendo funk e, querendo ou não, para gente mudar a realidade dos usos e costumes dos funkeiros, dos preconceitos que existiam, a gente precisa quebrar e a gente precisa dialogar. Então acredito muito que existe sim esse diálogo existe sim. O funk é assim essa potência é de quebrar esse estigma né e de todo esse preconceito. Querendo ou não, o funk ajuda e potencializa.”

“When for example an LGBTQIA+ person that is occupying various stages in various spaces in the city bringing this dialogue; this is a very big deal. I’m not just talking about myself, I’m bringing a group of people with me, right? There in the place of representation, especially of the LGBTQIA+ population that also likes Funk, that we’re going to have a problem, we usually say here that it’s one hand on our knees and the other on our conscience, because we need to think about some lyrics, we need to think about some situations, but we also need to dialogue with this Funk scene that is already there, you know? The ones that are already making Funk, and whether we want it or not, to change the reality, of the uses, and customs of funkeiros, of the prejudices that exist, we need to overpower and we need to dialogue. So, I really believe that this dialogue does exist. Funk is powerful enough to break this stigma, right, and all this prejudice, and whether we want it or not, Funk helps and empowers.”

The stage as a site creates legitimacy for the visibility of marginalized groups of people. It has the potential to humanize and diversify “the Other.” Negona Dance’s favorite movement is *rebolar*, a movement that is perceived as feminine through the accentuation of the pelvis and buttocks. By practicing these movements, he resists heteronormative notions of gender and counteracts the assumption of binarity as well as the ideology that gender is tied to certain behaviors.

“É um lugar libertador, sabe? Esse estilo, esse tipo de movimentação é algo que se reprime durante tanto tempo e quando você chega no baile, por exemplo, você quer saltar então esse lugar de rebolar, dos homens sarrar, quando está permitido também,

né. Dos gays também comecem a se jogar e tal, que é um lugar e uma liberdade que muitos não têm dentro de casa de fazer ... De um momento de descontração, de zoação, de liberdade, de se sentir à vontade. Então, ‘pera aí vou colocar minha mãozinha aqui no joelho e vou mexer meu quadril até eu não querendo mais, até minha coluna doer. E tem vezes que a coluna nem dói porque você está curtindo tanto o momento tão prazeroso.’ E aí a gente vai fazer essa relação com o sexo quando a gente tá falando de prazer. E aí quando a gente fala de prazer sexual e prazer de dançar o funk, a gente tá falando quase uma mesma sensação sabe? Que é uma sensação gostosa também ali de você tá se jogando, você tá livre, tá solto, sabe? Acho que é isso assim. Ah, e aí vem muito desse lugar também o jeito de se fazer, é muito parecido com várias danças um jeito, uma corporeidade brasileira, mas que tem muito a ver com várias danças africanas de países africanos que têm muita semelhança. Principalmente no rebolado assim, o jeito feminino do dancehall por exemplo, é um estilo da Jamaica que é um estilo muito bom, e que o jeito das mulheres dançar é isso mesmo que a gente fala de bunda grande, de bundão grandão, de jogar para cima.”

“It’s a liberating place, you know? This style, this type of movement is something that has been repressed for so long and when you get to the baile for example, you want to let loose, so this place of rebolado, of the men sarrar, only when it is allowed, right. The gays will also start to play and so on, it’s a place, it’s a kind of freedom that many don’t have inside the house to do ... A moment of relaxation, of fun, of freedom, of feeling at ease, so ‘wait, I’m going to put my hand on my knee and I’m going to move my hips until I don’t want to anymore, even my back hurts. Sometimes my back doesn’t even hurt because you are enjoying such a pleasurable moment.’ And then we will make this relation with sex when we are talking about pleasure. And when we talk about sexual pleasure and the pleasure of dancing Funk, we are talking about almost the same sensation, you know? It is also a great sensation moving around, you are free, you are loose, you know? I think that’s it. Ah and that’s where the way of doing it comes from, it’s very similar to several other dances, a Brazilian way and corporeality, but it has a lot to do with several African dances from African countries, there is a lot of similarity. Especially in the rebolado, the female way of dancehall, for example, it’s a Jamaican style, a very good style, it’s the way women dance, that’s what we talk about, we talk about a big ass, a big ass, throwing yourself up.”

For Negona Dance Funk Brasileiro combines various aspects of freedom. Firstly, dance offers a distraction from everyday life and an escape from the domestic environment. Secondly, it provides freedom to develop and bodily express one’s own sexuality. Dance acts as a vehicle to counter multiple oppressions. In this context, Negona Dance also recalls the historical importance of dance as an instrument of resistance by pointing to the African elements of Funk Brasileiro and the similarity to other types of diasporic corporeality.

6. Discussion: “One Hand on Your Knee and One Hand on Your Conscience”

Through the conversations, Maiwsi Ayana, Hannah, and Negona Dance narrated about their lived experiences within the realm of Funk Brasileiro. While listening to them, it became apparent that the potential of corporeal performances to negotiate gender/sexuality involves multilayered components. At the beginning of each conversation, the *comunidade* appeared as a constitutive space for the practice of Funk dance. The *comunidades* carry postcolonial traces, they were established and are primarily inhabited by the Afro-Brazilian and Black populations and their culture (see Lopes, 2009, pp. 376–377). This fact makes this space intrinsically diasporic. At the same time, the postcolonial regime continues in the form of racist structures that marginalize, stigmatize, and criminalize *comunidades* as well as their inhabitants.

Each of my interlocutors reported the experience that Funk Brasileiro in connection with the living environment – and thus including themselves as residents – suffers devaluation by the dominant society, which among other things resulted in their consumption of Western(ized) cultural goods. To practice Funk Brasileiro means to value Afro-diasporic culture and its space of existence and at the same time reveals the body as historically constructed and spatially located. Only in this interplay of body, space, and time it is possible to recognize the potential to shape social structures, such as the negotiation of gender/sexuality (see Low, 2003, p. 16).

It is dancing, spatially materialized through *bailes funk*, that allows the body to be produced in space, and the body to produce space. The streets in the communities as a venue for the *bailes funk* have arisen primarily out of necessity (see Lurie, 2000, p. 646). Thereby, they have spatially located the Black, peripheral body in public space (see Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. 70). *Bailes funk* are created by marginalized people in marginalized spaces. Via the dancing body, Afro-diasporic and peripheral knowledge that is suppressed by the dominant society obtains public space and therefore contests hegemonic structures of devaluation. It allows for the Black peripheral communities to enjoy themselves in their leisure time and celebrate their own culture. Hence, it may be seen in the tradition of the recreational function of *quilombos*; “a territory as becoming” (Smith, Davies & Gomes, 2021, p. 281).

However, people frequenting *bailes funk* remain in a position of constant conflict by discourses of stigmatization and police violence (see Lopes, 2010, p. 40). Thus, the occupation of streets through dancing gains the value of resistance. In the conversations with Maiwsi and Negona Dance, it became clear that in addition to *bailes funk* in the *comunidades*, central spaces in the city are strategically used to organize parties. The objective is to create visibility, to demand

social and cultural participation in the urban environment that is historically denied to Black, peripheral people.

The fact that the socio-spatial characteristics of *comunidades*, with their postcolonial significance, played a relevant part in the conversations points to the connection between (post)colonialism and patriarchy. Part of the colonial regime was the justification of the violent colonial rule and its values by propagating an alleged moral superiority through a system of hierarchization and classification, and by devaluing indigenous and enslaved societies as “the Other” (see Metzler, 2018). The allegedly “civilized” European was contrasted with the “savage,” that had to be disciplined. This also related to ideas of gender/sexuality (see Wolff, 1997, p. 94). A binary understanding of gender as either male or female, monogamy, gendered behavior, and the domestication of female sexuality was installed in the colonies (see Metzler, 2018). Anything that deviates from this *white*, heteronormative ideology was, and still is, censored and demonized as abnormal. Patriarchy and colonialism are thus not only interrelated but mutually dependent (see Santana, 2019, p. 218), making the intersection of gender and *race* apparent: Gender/sexuality is racialized. *Race* is gendered/sexualized.

Thus, the LGBTQIA+ collective Batekoo is to be seen not only as a space of occupation to gain visibility and to demand the right to the city. It also seeks to establish spaces that can exist beyond heteronormative discourses. This is accomplished by creating a shared respect for the people who participate in Funk Brasileiro and by avoiding the judgment of the cultural performances in the light of a heterosexist gaze. Therefore, Funk Brasileiro creates spaces that enable the expression of marginalized sexualities.

Indeed, Funk Brasileiro occupies a space for the discourse on gender/sexuality due to its characteristics. All three interlocutors described the dance not only as sensual but also as the imagination of sexual relations. Thus, by dancing Funk Brasileiro, sexualities shift from the seemingly private to the public sphere. The dance movements inherent in Funk Brasileiro provide space for the embodiment of the dancer’s own sexuality. The body parts responsible for a woman’s corporeal pleasure are emphasized in the dance of Funk Brasileiro. This active representation and enactment of female pleasure in Funk dance breaks with the binary conception of the man as active and the woman as passive.

Hannah, Maiwsi, and Negona Dance experienced a state of oppression regarding their expressions of sexuality. Hannah was restricted by the toxic relationship with her then-husband, Maiwsi could not develop her sensuality the way she wanted due to a macho environment in hip-hop, and Negona Dance’s femininity found no place in Western-influenced dance genres. These experiences can be understood in the context of the historically developed control over

the female/feminine body as well as the associated restriction for women and queer people to formulate their sexualities in public and apart from the male gaze (see Wolff, 1997, pp. 82–83). The interlocutors articulate possibilities to confront the control over their femininity when dancing Funk Brasileiro. Having a space (*baile funk*) and a modality (dance) to explore and act out their sexuality enabled different modes of empowerment. Among these are the acceptance of one's own body, feeling self-confident, gaining strength and respect, or feeling liberated. Indeed, it is the demonstration of sexual power (see Stanley Niaah, 2010, p. 165). For Negona Dance, Funk Brasileiro acts as a platform to express his femininity. In this context, he adopted a feminine name with which he identifies himself. He appropriates and reinterprets gendered dance movements such as the *rebolado*. Following Judith Butler's notions of performativity, this "citation" represents a re-articulation in the process of ongoing materialization that destabilizes hegemonic forms of performing gender identities (see Butler, 2011, p. 176).

The socio-spatial environment of the *comunidades* and *bailes funk* are conceived as a space of possibility to create realities beyond *white*, heteronormative practices. Dance within Funk Brasileiro allows sexualities to be imagined and acted out through the moving body. People whose sexualities are marginalized in the dominant discourse take advantage of this interplay of space and body, creating a *corpo-reality*²³. Women and queer people use corporeal performances in Funk Brasileiro to negotiate gender/sexuality by using public space to display their desire, appropriating gendered movements. They thus diversify sexualities beyond binary understandings (see Fradenburg and Freccero, 1996, p. viii, as cited in McWilliam, 2003, p. 219).

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that these acts of negotiation are always within the framework of hegemonic structures that cannot completely escape sexism and racism (see Stäheli, 2001, p. 199). This becomes especially clear when looking at Hannah's experiences. She was constantly confronted with sexism through her performances and lost her employment due to her representation on social media. Hannah decided against maintaining the ongoing fight against social stigmatization that comes with Funk Brasileiro and eventually quit dancing on social platforms. Negona Dance also reported that he can only dance freely in spaces explicitly conceived for queer people or where conditions of acceptance have been created first. The risk lies in the fact that the dance and the dancers, outside of protected spaces, are judged with heteronormative standards and thus experience sexualization.

Funk Brasileiro as a space to negotiate gender identities is thus temporally and spatially limited. It is important to keep in mind that corporeal performances can only operate as subversive when

²³ The translation for the Portuguese word *corpo* is body.

they actively question the construction of gender/sexuality (see Wolff, 1997, p. 96). Therefore, combining different means of knowledge production, more precisely corporeal performances, and linguistic discourses, works in a mutually supportive manner. In this sense, Maiwsi and Negona Dance occupy stages, actively initiate dialogue about queer realities, teach the Afro-diasporic value of Funk Brasileiro and create solidarity among LGBTQIA+ communities.

I remember a lot of inspirational phrases from my conversations with Hannah, Maiwsi Ayana, and Negona Dance. For that reason, I decided to name this chapter after a quote from Negona Dance that grasps the potential of the people's use of corporeal performances within Funk Brasileiro and that also breaks with the mind-body dualism: "*Uma mão no joelho e outra na consciência*" – "One Hand on Your Knee and One Hand on Your Conscience".

7. Summary and Outlook

This work was concerned with the potential of dance, an aspect of culture that has traditionally been neglected and even devalued in Western societies in direct comparison with cognitive productions. Yet, dance plays a crucial role as a means of communication and mediator of knowledge, especially in postcolonial realities (see Irobi, 2007, pp. 900–901).

Funk Brasileiro, a culture from the *comunidades* in the urban areas of Brazil, is highly diverse, despite its primary reduction to music and song lyrics. Besides clothing style and slang, this especially includes dance. The culture processes the lived experiences of its socio-spatial environment. Within this framework sexuality as a theme is a decisive factor in the genre's growing popularity. As in many other areas of society, male dominance obscures the essential participation of women and queer people. Consequently, it fabricates the impression that the representation of sexuality in Funk culture is guided only by heteronormative ideas. This thesis asked about the possibility of Funk Brasileiro dance to confront the notions of gender/sexuality which place women and queer people in a marginalized position in society. In other words, I wanted to know how female and queer people make use of Funk Brasileiro to open up spaces for the (re)negotiation of gender/sexuality through corporeal performance.

By contextualizing Funk Brasileiro, I demonstrated its characteristic as a hybrid continuum of African diasporas and the historically embedded potential for resistance. To recognize the broader history of corporeality in colonial and postcolonial realities parallels to other kinesthetics in the "Americas" were acknowledged. Following the emergence of Funk Brasileiro in the *comunidades* of Rio de Janeiro, the relevance of urban spaces and the position of women and queer people in this culture have been examined.

Subsequently, the theory corresponded with the contextualization. It was grounded on different strands. The approach of “embodied spaces” helped to recognize the intertwining of space, body, and culture. Accordingly, it laid bare the subsequent potential of corporeal productions to participate in the (re)formulation of social structures. Through Butler’s concept of performativity, the characteristic of gender/sexuality to be constantly materialized allowed for the understanding of possible subversions of hegemonic discourses. For the purpose of coping with the research question, it was crucial to include intersectionality in order to recognize the intertwining of social markers of difference as well as to identify the intersection of gender/sexuality and *race*. Ultimately, studies of performance and corporeality helped to perceive dance’s capacity to (re)negotiate social realities informed by gender/sexuality and *race*.

It was important to me to methodologically construct this thesis in a way that the people and their lived experiences were located at the center. Thus, a qualitative approach was chosen that prioritized a subject-oriented perspective. Theoretically guided semi-structured interviews followed the Patton Model. They constituted the basis to engage with the interlocutors and to listen to their experiences, ideas, and knowledge. To ensure profound insights, I decided to use a small number of participants. However, this decision has also been influenced by external circumstances (being an outsider, Covid 19 pandemic). Representativeness was neither possible nor the goal of this study and should be considered when evaluating the results.

Without undermining their individuality, the analysis revealed that female and feminine-presenting queer people use corporeal performances in Funk Brasileiro to (re)negotiate gender/sexuality on a personal and collective level. Even though temporally and spatially limited, the kinesthetics of Funk Brasileiro allow for the public demonstration of feminine desire and the appropriation and resignification of gendered movements. The specific constellation of space and body allows for diversifying genders/sexualities beyond binary understandings and *white*, heteronormative dominance.

Even if the nature of texts follows a chronology, it is important for me to emphasize that the process of acquiring knowledge has been constituted in a circular way. I studied literature in preparation for the talks. However, thematic complexes emerged from the interviews, which in turn influenced the contextualization and theoretical grounding. Finally, the research topic became more multilayered through the conversations – a characteristic that the research question seems incapable of grasping at first glance. This only becomes apparent through an understanding of the intersectional entanglements.

This work has focused on the interrelations between gender/sexuality, *race* (and locality/space). Due to the methodological difficulty of analyzing the intersection of more than three categories of social markers (see McCall, 2005, p. 1772), this scholarly work could not consider other intersections. More consideration of the category class would allow for a more complex understanding.

With reference to the focus on dance chosen here, from a methodological perspective, further research can be justified. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, I was limited in my choice of methodology. Work based on participant observation can lead to more in-depth findings. From a theoretical point of view, it would also be enriching to consider this study in the light of other approaches that have been unable to find a place in this work, such as W. E. B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness." It would also be interesting to integrate different means, such as music videos and social media content. This work has intentionally focused on dance to emphasize the importance of corporeal knowledge production. Nevertheless, further studies that relate this aspect of Funk Brasileiro to its diverse facets – namely music, song lyrics, clothing style, and slang – are worth exploring. Regarding the participants, it would also be beneficial to increase and diversify the number of informants, for example including *cis* men and their display of gender/sexuality within Funk Brasileiro. Furthermore, by emphasizing Funk Brasileiro as Afro-diasporic culture, comparative studies beyond the Brazilian context are recommended, more specifically with dancehall, twerk and reggaetón. In conclusion, the field analyzed here thus offers many possibilities for scholarly engagement with the potential of corporeal knowledge production in postcolonial realities.

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