Subaltern Spaces and Diasporic Imaginaries in Rio de Janeiro's Valongo Wharf

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ABSTRACT

In 2011, a private-led renovation project sought to redevelop and privatize Rio de Janeiro's port area. In this context, the ruins of an old slave wharf re-emerged, becoming a symbol of Black resistance and, alongside nearby sites and small-scale organizations, have contributed to the memorialization of the "Black Atlantic," an expression borrowed from Paul Gilroy's notorious work. In this paper, I recall the history of the site, pointing out to the relevance of such small and subaltern institutions, which counter hegemonic discourses that de-emphasize the relevance of historically-marginalized Black populations. As a site that recalls histories and memory, I argue that the Valongo is a place of past and present, being one of the many locations connected to the African Diaspora, and part of a transnational global diasporic imaginary that challenges Eurocentrism, while emphasizing the role of Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Latin Americans in the formation of society, despite the many challenges they face and have historically faced.

KEYWORDS: Slavery; African Diaspora; Memorialization; Archaeology; Afro-Latin America; Afro-Brazilian Studies

RESUMO

No ano de 2011, iniciou-se um projeto de reurbanização da zona portuária do Rio de Janeiro liderado pela iniciativa privada, o qual tinha como objetivo o redesenvolvimento e a privatização de tal região. Em tal contexto, as ruínas de um antigo cais de escravos reemergiram, tornando-se um símbolo de resistência negra, ao longo de outros locais próximos e de pequenas organizações, que têm conjuntamente contribuído para a memorialização do "Atlântico Negro", expressão da notória obra de Paul Gilroy. Neste artigo, examino a história do local, discutindo a relevância de tais instituições pequenas e subalternas, as quais promovem um contraponto a discursos hegemônicos que minimizam a relevância de populações negras historicamente marginalizadas. Como um local que lida com história e memória, argumento que o Valongo é um espaço de passado e presente, sendo uma das várias localidades ligadas à Diáspora Africana, compondo um imaginário

diaspórico global e transnacional que desafia visões eurocêntricas ao ressaltar o papel de afro-brasileiros e afro-latino-americanos na formação de suas sociedades, a despeito dos muitos desafios que estes enfrentam e historicamente enfrentaram.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Escravidão; Diáspora Africana; Memorialização; Arqueologia; Afro-América Latina; Estudos Afro-Brasileiros

INTRODUCTION

On a sunny Monday morning in July 2018, dozens of *candomblé* followers, members of Black social movements, port area residents, reporters from a state-owned news agency, homeless persons and curious pedestrians gathered at the ruins of an old wharf, entrenched in Rio de Janeiro's seafront, renovated just before the 2016 Olympic Games. The discreet signs surrounding the site, some of them oddly telling the history of public buildings located kilometers away, such as the beaux-arts Municipal Theater, exposed a short summary of what the Valongo Wharf once was. Listed by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site just one year before, the ruins were regarded as the "most important physical trace of the arrival of African slaves on the American continent" by the international body (UNESCO, *Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site*), shedding more light on an already sensitive space. The annual religious celebration in that morning was the seventh consecutive one and the first after the above-mentioned inclusion by the United Nations cultural and educational arm, but it was far from being a strictly religious manifestation. *Mãe de santo* Edelzuita do Oxoguian, a well-known activist linked to black social organizations such as Unified Black Movement – MNU and the Municipal Committee for the Defense of Black People's Rights – Comdedine (Cicalo), blessed the site, leaving a heart made of flowers on the fence that surrounds the ruins and subsequently leading a march to the entrance of an old warehouse, located just across the street. In front of the industrial, brick-façade building designed in 1871 by the first Afro-Brazilian engineer, André Rebouças (Lima, Sene, et al.), the crowd loudly repeated "*we* want *our* museum." While this religious-political event occurred roughly two months before

the worldwide-reported National Museum fires, which turned Brazil's most complex museum and most of its extensive collection into ashes when the institution had just reached its 200-year anniversary, leading to relevant and timely analyses on the role of museums and academic institutions in Brazil, this paper will rather focus on what the Valongo represents within a broader discussion on the silenced histories of the African Diaspora and present-day activism against racial inequality, stressing the role of subaltern institutions in such debates.

While my broader research also investigates the impacts of megaevents in Brazil, in special subaltern economies and moral panics surrounding these events, drawing for the work, for instance, Gregory Mitchell's extensive work on the recent megaevents hosted by the Latin American country, as well as Paul Amar's literature on militarized private-sponsored urban renovations and their securitization of Black and queer bodies, this piece will not focus on the Olympic Games or on the status of racialized spaces in Brazil. Instead, I have chosen to address the broader significance of the Valongo Wharf, arguing that the ruins not only constitute a slavery-era site, but also stimulate and serve as concrete proof of centuries of marginalization of Afro-populations, which were subjected to trade and slavery and which to this date are affected by lack of housing and public services, as well as other forms of exclusion. I also argue that the ruins also contribute to an emphasis on the resistance of Afro-populations, reflected by academic analyses that have shifted from discussions on miscegenation and slave labor to an emphasis on the contribution of Afro-Latin Americans to their societies, who, through diasporic and cultural perspectives, are regarded as "creative subjects contributing to their own experiences" (Offen, 488), having participated of a myriad of skilled craftsmanship and in both rural and urban settings (Baronov, 19), and having acted in processes of emancipation and achievement of rights, before and after abolition (Ferreira and Seijas).

Figure 1. João Gabriel Rabello Sodré
The blessing of the Valongo Wharf. 2018.

This paper emerges from a two-year project, of which I have recently spent three months in Brazil specifically attending events related to the port area, visiting alternative, subaltern, institutions, and meeting different actors involved in the counter-narratives that emerged amidst the mainstream port renovation project. Whereas the UNESCO is one of the actors involved with the preservation of the Valongo, this paper focuses on the significance of subaltern institutions and on the

engagement of actors from below in this ongoing memorialization process. As part of an ethnographic approach, I visited the port area repeatedly – often touring the area with other professors and students –, building my academic network with new contacts, conversing with representatives of (mainstream and grassroots) institutions in their capacity as such, taking pictures, attending symposiums and conferences and collecting printed material – i.e. flyers, booklets, books – produced or distributed by academics as well as those subaltern repositories themselves. This paper, thus, exposes findings obtained through such open ethnography, while also engaging with a pertinent bibliographical analysis that connects the Valongo to a global discussion on the memorialization of Afro-Diasporic sites, allowing for an emphasis on the the alternative counter-narratives that emerge from such localities and that challenge mainstream narratives that attempt to silence the long-lasting existence and resistance of the African Diaspora.

UNCOVERING THE VALONGO

Amidst Brazil's promising socio-economic growth and rising global prominence, which included the award to host two major sports events – the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games –, the City of Rio de Janeiro launched a public-private partnership which sought to renovate the city's port area. A private consortium of companies was selected through a public bid to re-urbanize and maintain an entire district for fifteen years, being accountable for management and maintenance tasks such as the construction of new sidewalks, the replacement of asphalt, the installation of new utilities, and the provision of basic services as vital as trash collection and public lighting (I. C. da C. Cardoso; Gonçalves). As part of the funding structure, the City of Rio issued Certificates of Additional Construction Potential – CEPACs; tradeable titles which allow purchasing parties to build taller buildings in the port area – authorizing fifty-story buildings in specific blocks –, all of which were purchased by state-run bank Caixa Econômica Federal for R$ 3.5 billion

in June 2011; approximately US$ 2 billion at the time (Sánchez and Broudehoux). Alongside the privatization of public space, a privatized security program funded by an association of businessmen, consisting of specific patrol units that focus exclusively on certain neighborhoods, was extended to the port area with the installment of a patrol unit in a visible point at the region's landmark square, Praça Mauá, enlarging a private-led model of security and control (De Lisio and Rabello Sodré). On the same square, new museums were established, including the "Museum of Tomorrow," funded by Santander, IBM as well as the Fundação Roberto Marinho, a private foundation connected to Brazil's largest media conglomerate. The museum was designed by celebrity-architect Santiago Calatrava, ahead of contemporary works such as the World Trade Center Terminal and its emblematic "Oculus," in Manhattan, and was erected over a concrete pier, overlooking Rio's Guanabara Bay. West of the museum, a viaduct, built in the 1960s and once a symbol of modernity, was demolished in 2013 and replaced by an underground car tunnel, over which a promenade, later named Olympic Boulevard, was constructed. On the day of the demolition, mayor Eduardo Paes stated to the local press: "The city, we know, has spent a long time without being able to look ahead. I think Rio is being reborn here...a lot of things started here. Samba started here, there is a lot of history here" (Torres et al.).

The boulevard soon became the new commons of the city, receiving graffiti murals by graffiti celebrities, among them Brazilian artist Eduardo Kobra, whose work also marks other warehouse brick walls of major global cities, among them New York and Tokyo. "*Todos somos um (etnias)*" – "We are all one (ethnicities)," oddly translated as "All Are One" by the artist's official website, suggesting a semantic distortion (Kobra) –, a 3,000 square-meter mural, which depicts indigenous persons of African, Native American and Asian descent, in a colorful depiction of an imagined multicultural world, echoing the globalizing trends of the 1990s. Nonetheless, the recently-uncovered stone ruins have challenged the private enterprise, echoing

histories of slave trade, slavery and racism, calling for the retelling of history from the perspective of marginalized groups, while also serving as an important symbol for the current agenda of historically-marginalized social groups, notably Black Brazilians and Afro-populations across the globe.

Figure 2. Idem
The tram on the Olympic Boulevard and the mural "Ethnicities" by Eduardo Kobra. 2018.

Motivated by the comprehensive urbanistic intervention in the area, organized to conduct excavations on a specific site close to the epicenter of the project (Lima, Souza, et al.). Though historical records pointed out to the existence of a slave complex on that site, only in the 2010s an archeological excavation occurred in the area (Lima, Souza, et al.; Soares). The exposure of the ruins of an old slave wharf, and the extraction of several objects, led to the elaboration of a report by the Brazilian body accountable for historical preservation, the IPHAN, according to which over 900,000 individuals have been disembarked in the area known as Valongo (Instituto

de Patrimônio Histórico e Arístico Nacional). The document was subsequently submitted to the UNESCO, which designated the ruins as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO, *Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site*). The inclusion by the international organization has emphasized Rio's history in global terms, exposing transnational connections that transcended imaginaries of the stereotypical carnivalesque happiness to which the city has been commonly associated. Though slave trade and slavery have been addressed by copious literature, historicizing this site is key to understanding why specifically the Valongo became an important slave wharf at the height of global slave trade and, more recently, site of remembrance and social activism, with a transnational potential.

RIO AS A GLOBAL SLAVE TRADE HUB

Starting with Rio's position as a global slave trade hub, such status was not reached upon the city's foundation in 1565. In fact, the city's political and economic importance only increased in the eighteenth century due to its strategic position for military purposes, making it an ideal place for a local seat of government (Bicalho, 84), but most fundamentally due to the expansion of a mineral extraction economy in inner provinces, such as Minas Gerais, which demanded the flow of commodities to the coastal area, fostering the growth of the municipality's port area (Needell). In 1763, in view of such strategic traits that favored economic and administrative control, the Portuguese crown determined the transference of the colonial capital from Salvador, located in the more distant Northeastern region of Brazil, to Rio de Janeiro, in the Southeast; a change that marked the above-mentioned economic shift (Bergad, 132-164). The growth of the extraction of valuable minerals and the development of new crops in the nineteenth century, notably coffee, demanded more workforce (Klein and Luna, 35-73) and hundreds of thousands of new enslaved workers were trafficked to Brazil. Although estimates of an approximate number of enslaved persons brought to the Americas vary, a multi-campus tool computes data obtained

by various scholars into a single database, titled Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, according to which about five million individuals were trafficked to Brazil between the early 1500s and mid-nineteenth century (The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database). While this quantitative approach exposes the monstrous dimension of slave trade, it has been criticized for (1) creating a structure in which the human dimension is not duly expressed; (2) relying on data on the premises that it is entirely reliable; and (3) disregarding contraband, a relevant practice in the Iberian-American context (Ferreira and Seijas). Regardless of its possible flaws, the estimates corroborate the fact that most enslaved persons came to Latin America, where they were distributed to a diverse range of areas in the subregion (Andrews, "Inequality: Race, Class, Gender"; Putnam). Moreover, the TASTD has also allowed researchers to map trade routes, revealing an intricate trans-continental system, with multiple layers and networks, but also determinable links from Angola to Cartagena and Veracruz, from Luanda and Benguela to Rio, among other important Trans-Atlantic connections (Putnam).

Figure 3. Idem
Overview of the ruins of the Valongo Wharf. 2018.

There are at least four factors for such influx of enslaved persons to Brazil. The first one involves Portugal's early colonization of Atlantic islands, establishment of trade outposts in continental Africa and use of slave workforce in such insular areas, which granted the Portuguese a dominant position in the Atlantic, leading to the forced transportation of hundreds of thousands of persons to the Americas, including to Spanish possessions (Ferreira and Seijas). The second aspect involves the direct connection between coastal Africa and the Brazilian seashore – that is, instead of a triangular trade system, such as the one implemented in other colonies, namely North American ones, the Portuguese colonial outposts in both South America and Africa favored a direct and efficient exchange of goods between the two sides of the Atlantic (Klein and Luna, 66). Such system also encompassed an intricate slave trade network in Africa itself, where European merchants exchanged textiles from India for enslaved persons, contributing to the intensification of slave trade between the two continents (Ferreira and Seijas). The third factor, correlated to the previous ones, involves Rio's position as a hub for the transshipment of enslaved persons, in which it was a key port in what has been designated as "trans-imperial slave trade" (Ferreira and Seijas, 35); a long land and maritime route which connected East and West Africa, from where ships would transport enslaved persons from the African coast to Rio, finally transshipping them to Spanish-administered Buenos Aires, from where many of these persons would be reallocated to the profitable mines of Potosí, in present-day Bolivia. Given its significance to global slave trade, Rio de Janeiro became, in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the largest port of entry for enslaved persons in Brazil (Conrad, 34-65). Finally, another aspect that places Rio in a global historical context and that corroborates its intense activity and decline in the period comprised between the second half of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century, is the correlation between slavery and European industrialization. Scholars such as Eric Williams argue that the slave system contributed to the accumulation of capital in Europe, initially supporting the Industrial Revolution but

later becoming less profitable than the industrial economy, which would eventually lead to its abolishment (Bergad, 132-164). Portugal and England have been allied since the fourteenth century, making this pact, except for a few interruptions, the oldest still-existing alliance in the world (Prestage). In different moments this relationship was ratified, as it was the case of 1808, when a decree issued by Portugal, then facing an imminent invasion from Napoleon, with its court re-based in Rio, conceded to end the colonial trade monopoly held with Brazil, allowing other states to engage in direct trade in Brazilian ports, benefiting the industrialized British. In 1810, Portugal, reflecting the growing presence of the British in Rio, authorized the Anglican church to function in private houses and buildings with non-ecclesiastical façades (Weaver). Later, in 1811, an Anglican cemetery was established in Rio's port area (Figueiredo).

The growing influx of black persons, many of them arriving deceased or in a terminal health condition, became a nuisance to Rio de Janeiro's elites, leading to logistical changes that led to the establishment of the Valongo. The issue was soon addressed by the local authority, the Marquis of Lavradio, who determined the transference of the slave wharf to a more discreet location in 1774: the Valongo site (Conrad, 34-65; Lara; Soares). Conrad (58-59) transcribes an excerpt of a letter written in 1779 by the marquis to his successor, in which the administrator states:

> Havia... nesta cidade, o terrível costume de tão logo os negros desembarcarem no porto vindos da costa africana, entrar na cidade através das principais vias públicas, não apenas carregados de inúmeras doenças, mas nus [...] e fazem tudo que a natureza sugeria no meio da rua [...]. Minha decisão foi a de que quando os escravos fossem desembarcados na alfândega, deveriam ser enviados de botes ao lugar chamado Valongo, que fica em um subúrbio da cidade, separado de todo contato, e que as muitas lojas e armazéns deveriam ser utilizados para alojá-los

Just as the marquis had foreseen, the Valongo site became not only a slave wharf, but rather a complex of slavery-related facilities, which included markets in which men, women and children would be sold, as well as a lazaretto (a quarantine facility

for ill enslaved persons) and burial grounds. Such burial grounds even had some degree of specialization, as it was the case of the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos*, where those who died upon their arrival would be buried (Lima), or, more precisely, dumped (Soares), until its closure with the issuance of an anti-slave trade law in 1831 (Honorato). The Valongo complex was, thus, simultaneously "near and far from downtown" (Broudehoux and Monteiro), which means that it at some extent attempted to hide the destructive machinery of slavery from the eyes of the elites while being conveniently close enough to the city center.
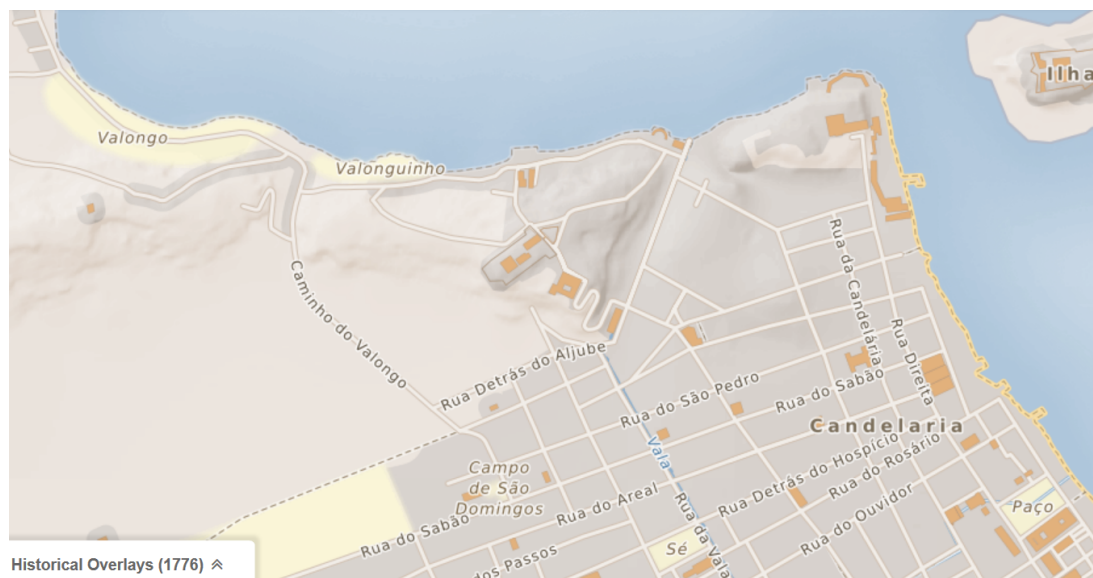

Figure 4. Imagine Rio
The close-yet-far Valongo area

Following the official outlawing of the importation of enslaved persons in 1831 – though it continued to occur illegally in the following decades (Conrad, 90-117; Galotti and Grinberg; Soares) – the Valongo complex declined and a new function had to assigned to the once busy wharf. Brazil's independence, declared by the son of the Portuguese king in 1822, established a monarchical regime, which required, as usual, arranged marriages following sumptuous celebrations at the expenses of the populace. In 1843 a new dock was built over the Valongo and named "Wharf of the Empress," marking the arrival of Princess Teresa Cristina of the Two Sicilies, in view

of her marriage to Dom Pedro II (Lima, Sene, et al.; Soares). Lima et al cite a report from a local authority, who displayed their excitement with the historical and social cleansing promoted by the makeover: "the old dirty beach of Valongo has just been converted into an elegant square...after the construction of the Empress' Wharf." Further urban modifications were adopted at the turn of the century, as part of a global urban renewal trend, which had its branch in major cities of the Global South.
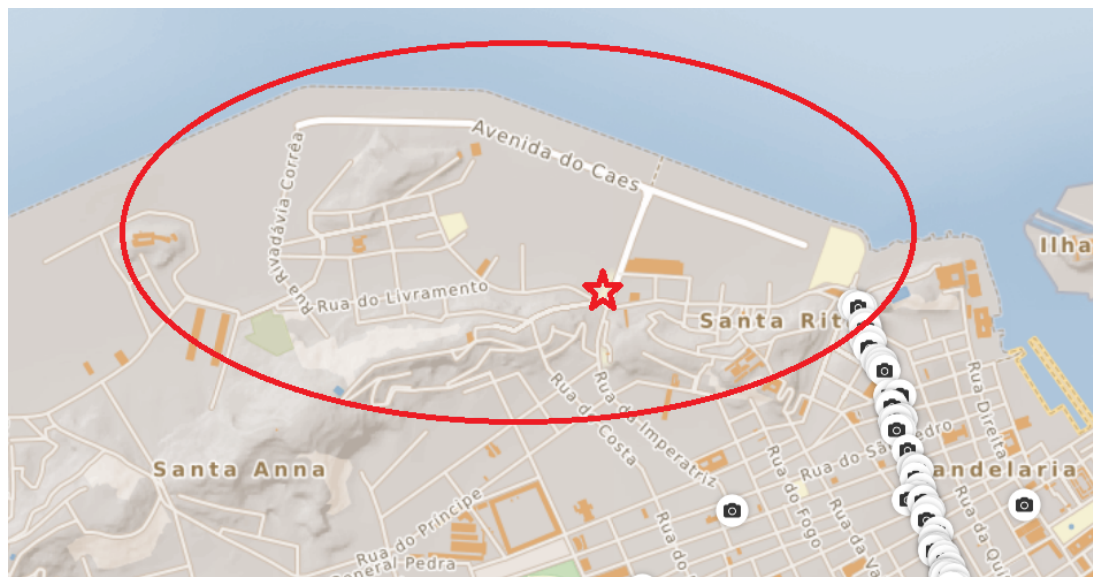

Figure 5. Idem

Rio's landfilled port area in 1906 (red circle) and the Valongo site (red star)

In the late nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, colonial structures contrasted with the "civilizational" aesthetics of the Belle Époque, which had then reached Latin America in a form of cultural neo-colonialism (Almandoz Marte, 2). Aiming at fitting in such European standards, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, among other Latin American capitals, implemented urban renovations inspired by Haussmann's experience in Paris, with the construction of arborized avenues, opera houses and museums. In Rio, whose population increased from 235,000 inhabitants in 1870 to 522,000 individuals in 1890, multiple-family residences, indistinctly referred to as *cortiços*, became targets for authorities, on the grounds of their alleged poor hygiene and their association to diseases; a justification that masked social hygienist

ideals (Vaz). The association of the colonial cityscape to anachronism and poor hygiene standards can be inferred by a 1903 report from commissioner Alfredo Américo de Souza Rangel to mayor Pereira Passos, in which the official argued that the city's sanitation problems depended on the reconstruction of buildings and the construction of wide avenues, in order constructions perceived as anti-hygienic to be removed and trees added to the cityscape (Rangel). The memorandum also recommended expanding the access to the port area, regarded by the commissioner as an important part of maritime commerce which was inconveniently secluded by hills; a clear departure from the seventeenth-century idea of an opportune separation, then motivated by the commerce of enslaved persons. In the early twentieth century Rio's port area was landfilled for the construction of a modernized port and remained as such until the beginning of the Porto Maravilha project, almost one hundred years later.

SUBALTERN SPACES AND ALTERNATIVES HISTORIES

While the Valongo tells a history of oppression, it also recalls histories of resistance. Rio's deindustrialized port area is home to one of the city's oldest favelas, Providência (Gonçalves; McCann). While favelas initially hosted former soldiers and former enslaved populations in their early development, they eventually became the residence of other working-class populations – many of them Afro-Brazilian – and portions of Rio's central area would be soon referred as "Little Africa" (Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000*), carrying a dense cultural heritage, having served as one of the gathering spots of the early forms of carnival, the *ranchos* (Santos, 124), and also reflecting the fact that Black persons have been an integral part of the "Black Atlantic," term adopted by Gilroy to suggest the intensive participation of Black persons in the formation of the Atlantic economy and its societies (Gilroy). Which is to say that there is an alternative narrative that counters the Eurocentric one, and in

the case of Rio's port area, subaltern institutions have been attempting to highlight such other perspective.

One of the alternative institutions that emerged in the area is the Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória Pretos Novos (IPN), located not far from the wharf ruins, and part of the complex mentioned in the introduction. In the 1990s, Merced dos Anjos, a daughter of Spanish migrants, was just one of the many residents of an inner street in the neighborhood, when an unexpected discovery changed her life. While redecorating her old house at Rua Pedro Ernesto, a narrow street with a row of nineteenth-century buildings, Merced was astonished when bones, initially thought to be animal remains, were found buried under the floor. The subsequent confirmation that such remains were, in fact, human bones buried in what came to be designated as the Cemetery of the Newly-Arrived Blacks, led to the foundation of a small museum in 2005, which now occupies a house just next to the residence of Mrs. dos Anjos. The archaeological work on the site has suggested that 6,119 individuals were buried on the site between 1824 and 1830, from different age groups and biological sexes (Pereira, 87). The IPN was established well before any proposal of the current port urban renewal project, has been administered by Merced herself, and has received funding in the form of donations. The building is composed of three rooms: an auditorium, a permanent exhibition room which displays some of the archeological findings, including a full-body skeleton seen under a glass floor, as well as a third room dedicated to exhibitions on the African diaspora and Afro-Brazilian culture with, which also hosts an adjacent small library accessible to the general public.

Figure 6. João Gabriel Rabello Sodré
The picture to the left shows the exhibit room at IPN, where historical information, as well as objects and human remains, are displayed. The picture to the right shows the remains of a preserved skeleton. 2018.

The institution hosts a myriad of activities, all managed by Merced from her busy office in the back of the building, where she spends a large amount of time multitasking, as seen in my visits to the institution – she would be constantly on the phone and on her computer, managing the organization's finances, offering guided tours to those who would ring the bell and organizing courses. The IPN invites scholars as well as graduate students, some of whom I met during my time in the field, to lecture on themes related to the Afro-Atlantic world, ranging from urban history to race, ethnicity and identity –, all of which are open to the public through a small contribution. This alternative institution provides educational services and is an

example of the intense involvement of lay individuals in the efforts for the memorialization of Afro-Brazilian history and culture.

A few meters away from the Valongo ruins, an even more discreet but active institution, the Organização dos Remanescentes da Tia Ciata – ORTC, celebrates the heritage of Hilária Batista de Almeida. Better known as Tia Ciata, Hilária was a candomblé leader who moved to Rio from the Northeastern state of Bahia, settling in the one of the port's favelas, Morro da Conceição, in the 1870s (Soares), being regarded as a prominent figure in early samba circles (R. Cardoso; Gomes) and influential in the elaboration of the first known samba composition (Dunn). Gracy Mary Moreira, Tia Ciata's great-granddaughter and Black activist, presides this alternative institution located at a small room in an old building owned by the municipality and ceded to the organization by a previous mayor. Gracy herself greets every guest, telling stories about her great-grandmother and her mythical presence in the cultural circuit of the city, while pointing at pictures on the walls, objects that decorate the room and a mannequin with garments associated to Tia Ciata. Despite the discreetness and simplicity of the space, it is visited by many guests, from middle school students to international visitors, as seen on the many signed pages on a long guestbook.

Figure 7. Idem

Exhibit room at ORTC. 2018.

Just as the IPN, the ORTC also relies on donations from visitors and hosts events related to Afro-Brazilian culture, all of which are advertised on social media. Both organizations, despite the specificities of their names, function not only as non-mainstream, non-academic, repositories of history, but also as spaces where current-day discussions take place, as seen in the large number of flyers, found at ORTC, related to greater ongoing debates on race, among which an elucidative one issued by the Committee for the Defense of Black People's Rights – Comdedine as well as a radical manifesto from the Black Women's March with a list of demanded rights and a call for a scheduled march with a solid slogan: "for the lives of Black people: more Black women in power." The flyers echo an often disregarded in historical terms: in the Brazilian context of social activism and engagement, Black association Estrela da Redenção was founded in the same year slavery was officially abolished in Brazil (1888), with the posterior establishment of similar congregations in the following years; a trend that included the publication of various Afro-Brazilian newspapers and magazines as early as 1889, all of which promoted a wide discussion on racial

inequality across regions in Brazil (Domingues). Tia Ciata was contemporaneous with such movements, and the presence of such thriving material also reminds us of the centuries-old struggle against racism.
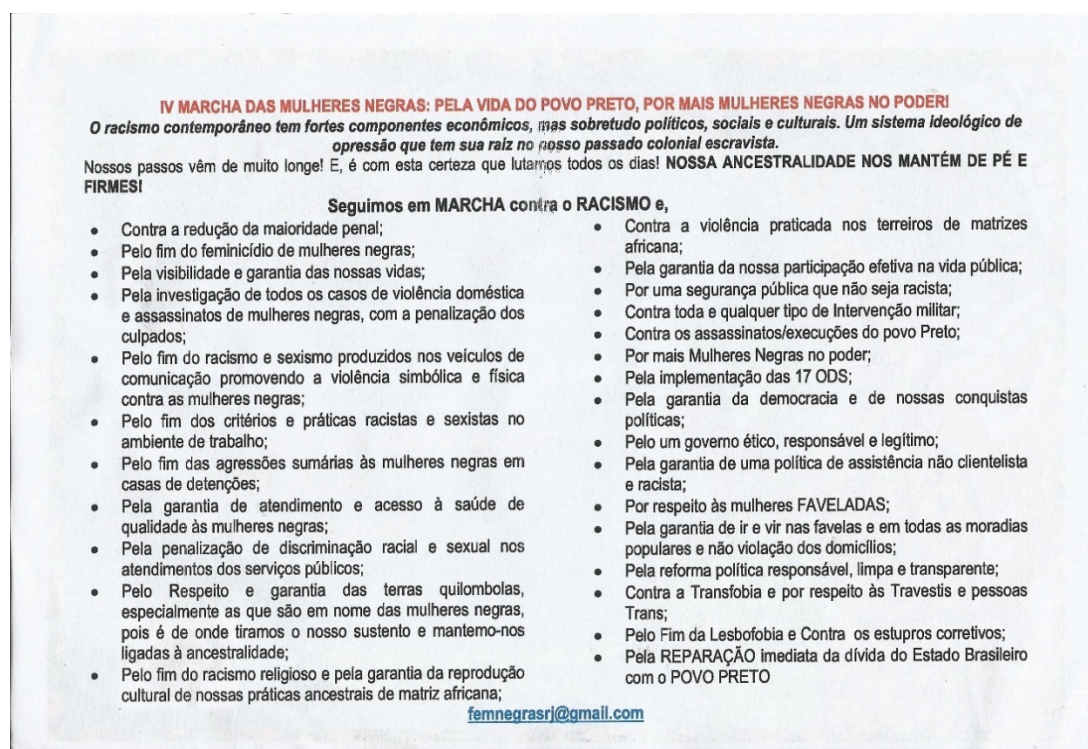
IV MARCHA DAS MULHERES NEGRAS: PELA VIDA DO POVO PRETO, POR MAIS MULHERES NEGRAS NO PODER!

O racismo contemporâneo tem fortes componentes econômicos, mas sobretudo políticos, sociais e culturais. Um sistema ideológico de opressão que tem sua raiz no nosso passado colonial escravista.

Nossos passos vêm de muito longe! E, é com esta certeza que lutamos todos os dias! **NOSSA ANCESTRALIDADE NOS MANTÉM DE PÉ E FIRMES!**

Seguimos em MARCHA contra o RACISMO e,

- Contra a redução da maioridade penal;
- Pelo fim do feminicídio de mulheres negras;
- Pela visibilidade e garantia das nossas vidas;
- Pela investigação de todos os casos de violência doméstica e assassinatos de mulheres negras, com a penalização dos culpados;
- Pelo fim do racismo e sexismo produzidos nos veículos de comunicação promovendo a violência simbólica e física contra as mulheres negras;
- Pelo fim dos critérios e práticas racistas e sexistas no ambiente de trabalho;
- Pelo fim das agressões sumárias às mulheres negras em casas de detenções;
- Pela garantia de atendimento e acesso à saúde de qualidade às mulheres negras;
- Pela penalização de discriminação racial e sexual nos atendimentos dos serviços públicos;
- Pelo Respeito e garantia das terras quilombolas, especialmente as que são em nome das mulheres negras, pois é de onde tiramos o nosso sustento e mantemo-nos ligadas à ancestralidade;
- Pelo fim do racismo religioso e pela garantia da reprodução cultural de nossas práticas ancestrais de matriz africana;

- Contra a violência praticada nos terreiros de matrizes africana;
- Pela garantia da nossa participação efetiva na vida pública;
- Por uma segurança pública que não seja racista;
- Contra toda e qualquer tipo de Intervenção militar;
- Contra os assassinatos/execuções do povo Preto;
- Por mais Mulheres Negras no poder;
- Pela implementação das 17 ODS;
- Pela garantia da democracia e de nossas conquistas políticas;
- Pelo um governo ético, responsável e legítimo;
- Pela garantia de uma política de assistência não clientelista e racista;
- Por respeito às mulheres FAVELADAS;
- Pela garantia de ir e vir nas favelas e em todas as moradias populares e não violação dos domicílios;
- Pela reforma política responsável, limpa e transparente;
- Contra a Transfobia e por respeito às Travestis e pessoas Trans;
- Pelo Fim da Lesbofobia e Contra os estupros corretivos;
- Pela REPARAÇÃO imediata da dívida do Estado Brasileiro com o POVO PRETO

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Figure 8. Idem
A manifesto-style pamphlet found in mid-2018 at the ORTC, connected to the IV Black Women's March, denounces the structural racism found in Brazilian society

Representatives of both the Instituto and the Casa da Tia Ciata not only host their own events, but also attend third-party events in which the relevance of the Valongo area and its importance to the African Diaspora are discussed. Moreover, the IPN and the ORTC attend social mobilizations that seek to present an alternative to the official port renovation project and its hegemonic discourse, such as the above-mentioned Valongo blessing ceremony. Both organizations memorialize not only specific sites and persons, but also promote events on a broader range of issues, including lectures and short courses on racism and social exclusion, as well as cultural events with music and dance presentations.

A third subaltern site and of a different typology – not a building or alternative museum – is known as Pedra do Sal, a well-established cultural spot, where hundreds of people gather every Monday to celebrate samba music. The weekly event also marks the space as an important place of resistance, where locals have been advocating for is recognition as a *quilombo*. The term was initially used in reference to a rural community formed by runaway slaves who succeeded in fleeing plantations and later expanded to embrace communities formed by socially marginalized black individuals in other contexts, including urban ones (Bowen). Even though runaway or maroon communities existed in all societies where slavery existed, as seen in the *palenques* of Cuba, Brazil is regarded as the place with the largest, most widespread and longest-lasting quilombos in the Americas as a reflection of the enormous proportions of slavery there (Klein and Luna, 189-211) and also due to a territorial advantage that difficulted raids by slave catchers if compared, for example, with the much smaller Cuban territory (Bergad, 202-250). In this process of reconceptualization, the element of social mobilization around a cause has been highlighted as an important factor for the recognition of a quilombo; a departure from the earlier colonial definitions of the term, which largely relied on the racialized assumption that a community formed by "runaway" black persons was per se a quilombo (Almeida).

Amidst efforts of anthropologists in moving away from such colonial definitions and reaching this broader perspective, the expression *cidade quilombada* has been used to characterize the Afro-Brazilian city that Rio turned into in the nineteenth century (Batista, 204); a terminology that emphasizes the urban presence and agency of Afro-Brazilians in contrast to the efforts of Europeanization that were then taking place. Though the expression *cidade quilombada* suggests a more fluid application of the term, the classification of an area as a quilombo still relies on the existence of certain characteristics, which have been found in an area known as Pedra do Sal, also located in the port area and declared a state heritage site in 1987 due to its relevancy

as a historical meeting point for black workers, members of Afro-Brazilian religions and due to is centrality in early samba music circles (Mattos and Abreu; Corrêa). An association has been founded to advocate for the memorialization and classification of the area as a quilombo (Mattos and Abreu) and one of the leaders of this movement, Damião Braga, stated on a report by a Brazilian agency then accountable for the demarcation of quilombo, that despite the achievement of the World Heritage Site classification, *"entendemos que não se protege o patrimônio sem proteger as pessoas, e essas pessoas somos nós, os quilombolas."* (Corrêa, 15). Damião also cites the large amount financial resources present in the port renovation, pointing out to the lack of participation of the community in the project as well as its lack of access to such funds. In any case, just as the IPN and the Casa da Tia Ciata, the Pedra do Sal, albeit more mainstream in its subalternity, also presents itself as a repository of history while simultaneously highlighting a contemporary Afro-Brazilian struggle.

The three institutions exemplify the engagement of grassroots institutions in a process of memorialization, calling for an analysis of Gramsci's concept of subalternity. While the term has been sometimes regarded as a strategy to circumvent censorship due to an alleged replacement of the original Marxian term "proletariat," scholars such as Crehan reject the argument of synonymy and reduction of the word to social class, seeing the concept as "broadly inclusive, encompassing all those who are oppressed rather than oppressing, ruled than ruling" (Kate A. F. Crehan, 15). According to this perspective, women, people from different races, religious groups, among others, would fall into this category (ibidem). Crehan also examines the divergence in regard to their ability to resist and respond, stating that while to the postcolonial studies scholar Spivak subaltern voices are muted, James Scott contends that the subaltern can hold their own "critique of power" (Kate A. F. Crehan, 13). Adhering to the latter, Roseberry recalls a quote from Marx and Engels, who stated that "the individuals composing the subordinate class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think" (Roseberry, *Anthropologies and Histories*, 47),

and contends that the clash of dominant cultural definitions and ordinary people's lived experiences may be "the focal point for the production of new alternative meanings, new forms of discourse, new selections from tradition or conflicts and struggles over the meaning of particular elements within tradition" (Ibidem). Roseberry's observation dialogues with Gramsci, who emphasized that the subaltern also produces culture, and that the folklore, not understood as something static, transmitted through generations, but as something oppositional, that challenges the "official conceptions of the world," is a relevant manifestation (Kate A. F Crehan). Drawing from the possibility of subaltern expression, if at one hand these alternative spaces struggle with their subaltern condition, their subalternity also allows them to politically engage and provide their own perspective on current issues and their own experiences. Rosebery, in that sense, stresses that Gramsci never suggested that subaltern groups are "immobilized by some sort of ideological consensus" (Roseberry, *Hegemony and the Language of Contention*), but rather argued that "relations between ruling and subaltern groups are characterized by contention, struggle and argument" (Ibidem). Roseberry also argues that the term should thus be understood in a context of struggle, not merely consent, and if the State attempts to impose, it may not be successful in obliging the dominated to follow its orders. Following the examination of this Gramscian concept by Crehan, Roseberry and Scott, the IPN, the ORTC and the social organizations engaged with Pedra do Sal may struggle with the reluctance of some – including the State –, but their mission continues, and so does the African Diaspora.

THE VALONGO AND THE DIASPORA

During my research, the term "diaspora" appeared in conversations on the issues of Trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery, from conference presentations to the description of courses offered by the IPN through its online mailing list. This usage often suggested a definition of "diaspora" as the displacement from Africa to the

Americas, in a violent process that is represented by the ruins of the Valongo. An interview transcribed by Cicalo with Black activist Eloi Ferreira Araújo, former president of the prestigious Afro-Brazilian organization Fundação Palmares, reflects such usage: "those stones speak, they convey the suffering that enslaved men and women experienced when disembarking from the slave ships, stepping on those stones on their way to the slave markets" (Cicalo). The struggle for the memorialization of the past while acknowledging challenges of the present has been part of the African Diaspora's active engagement across the globe, with Black activists resisting colonial narratives and attempting to highlight the agency of Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American subjects. Araujo contends that such phenomenon gained strength in the 1980s and 1990s due to the "emergence of local identities that became more prominent as a reaction to an era when globalization interconnected societies and populations" (Araujo, 277). The scholar divides the initiatives regarding the memorialization of slave-related sites into four categories: (1) the promotion of existing slave-related sites in Africa and the Americas, usually dungeons, forts and depots in the former and wharves, markets and former plantations in the latter; (2) newly-built memorials and monuments, resulting from "processes that combined collective, public, and official memory" (Araujo, 278); (3) festivals and celebrations that celebrate the immaterial heritage of the African Diaspora; and (4) state-owned, private or community-managed museums that address the theme of slavery. In line with the first and third typologies described by Araujo, Bonilla cites this process in the French Caribbean as part of a *devoir de memoire*, or the "duty of memory," exemplified, in Guadeloupe, by the construction of statues of Black activists and the painting of murals, but also by the appropriation of sites "as important realms of memory, most notably by using them as gathering points for historical marches and other commemorative events" (Bonilla, 322). The author also stresses how these subaltern engagements contrast with commodified touristic initiatives, which exalt the island's slave past by offering plantation tours and similar endeavors instead of

highlighting the engagement of enslaved persons in terms of resistance and the legacies of slavery in current times. Such commodification of tourism and its obstacle to the memorialization of sites connected to slave trade has been stressed by the UNESCO, who in 1994 established the "Slave Route Project," which aims at forming a "global mapping of these sites and places and facilitate the development of an inter-regional tourism of memory, not only as an income-generating activities but also an expression of a new solidarity and dialogue between Africa and the countries which benefitted from the contributions of people of African descent" (Moussa Iye). A report, reflecting the concerns from Guadeloupeans, states that initiatives connected to tourism may lead "tourism professionals to overvalue colonial legacy," as it is the case of tours on plantation manors, fortifications and other structures, which do not highlight the value of the skills of enslaved persons, nor their "resistance against oppression and to their social, cultural and economic creativity to survive the dehumanization to which they were destined" (Ibidem).

Similar engagements involving memory and memorialization are also taking place across from the Americas, on the African coast. In the context of post-independence Africa and growing postcolonial conversations, the UNESCO expanded its World Heritage List towards the Global South, adding a group of slave castles in Ghana to its repository in 1979. The organization states that such fortifications, built between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, constituted a "significant part in the developing slave trade, and therefore in the history of the Americas, and, subsequently, in the 19th century, in the suppression of that trade" (UNESCO, *Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions*). As Mowatt & Chancellor examine the case of the Ghanaian castles, they contend that these fortifications "hold a special place in the heritage of the Black Diaspora, serving as both a reservoir to experience identity and historical proof of slavery" (Mowatt and Chancellor, 1414), stressing the transformation of the sites into heritage tourism attractions, where Black visitors from the United States, Latin America and the

Caribbean seek what the authors refer to a quest for "confirmation" of their identity through the complex experiences arising from the visitation of such forts. As a Jamaican-American herself, Sandra Richards questions comparisons with the US Holocaust Museum, where, other than history lessons, visitors are exposed to a myriad of personal objects that once belonged to children, adults and elders brutally assassinated by the Nazi regime, which recall the free existence of such persons prior to their imprisonment and death. Unlike the DC-based museum, the scholar contends that other than "few chains and leg irons [in Ghana] . . . nothing stands in for the pretraumatic moment, whose representation might rescue victims from the category of commodified abstraction and allow visitors to appreciate the particularity of their lives" (Richards, 626). According to Richards, this allows for visitors to play the role of the absent remains and objects, imagining themselves as part of the diaspora that emerged from those castles. While Mowatt, Chancellor and Richards lean to a generally positive perception of tourism and its effect on the subjective imaginaries of the African Diaspora, the case of Ghana is also marked by mixed views on such kind of visitation. The castles have received funding from the Ghanaian government, the UN, US agencies and multinational companies such as Shell for restoration purposes and for the implementation of tourist facilities on site (Richards). Controversies included a proposed restaurant at one of the castles, which would allegedly allow visitors to enjoy longer visits; a project which was rapidly criticized by African-American groups, who saw the measure as threatening to the sacred character of the castle, suggesting a conflict between the Diaspora and the Ghanaian government, which, in return, classified the foreign visitors as merely visitants, who cry but do not invest (ibidem). Richards also mentions possible flaws on the exhibitions at the Elmina and Cape Coast Castles, where guides sometimes ignore exhibition spaces and where nationalistic narratives seem to overshadow the horrors of slavery, suggesting a sort of replacement "in which a healthy actor or progress narrative stands in for the dehumanized body and tale of abjection" (Richards, 632)

or through which ahistorical imageries are exhibited to the public. Such nationalist lens that overshadows the European dominance while cheering pre-colonial African kingdoms recalls Prashad's critique, in *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, on the flaws of the Third World movement, which despite its achievements, in some contexts led to the strengthening of nationalistic discourses in the Global South (Prashad).

The histories and the tensions from the cases of Guadeloupe and Ghana place the Valongo in global diasporic network of spaces that should transcend museums and tourist spots and, in fact, have been turned into arenas for social activism and for the re-reading of history from the perspective of those who have been systematically silenced (Trouillot), which, nevertheless, suffer from different kinds of pressure from the State and private actors. Therefore, the case of the Valongo contributes not only to a desirable historical revision, but also proposes another lens for comprehending global networks of Afro-resistance, placing Rio as a global city not in the market-oriented definition, but rather as a site for resistance, amidst an ongoing global process that has emphasized the role of the city in civil engagements toward consistent social transformation (Sassen). In different ways, activists and scholars in Rio reproduced that same idea, often historicizing the Valongo in a very specific Brazilian context, which did not always establish immediate global connections with other similar ports or, more specifically, with diasporic imaginaries, which have otherwise been remarkably present in Brazilian cultural manifestations, such as music lyrics and dance performances. Whereas the potential diasporic discussions seemed to be contained by very local narratives, activists and scholars encountered in the field had a very clear vision of the port area and the Valongo itself as important spaces for Afro-Latin Americans, both due to slave history and due to the significance of the cultural manifestations that had the area as an important stage.

The concept of "diaspora," however, has become a contested one, due its overuse in academia, as seen in a myriad of publications which incorporate the term

in their title or subtitle, especially since the 1990s (Cohen). William Safran contests such wide usage, proposing the adoption of the concept almost exclusively in reference to the Jewish and Armenian cases. While acknowledging the usage of the word in reference to various forms of migration and displacement, the scholar contends that the term should be used in specific cases, in which a community is marked by: (1) a center-periphery dispersal; (2) a collective memory about a homeland; (3) a belief in lack of full adherence to their host community; (4) a belief that their homeland is the true place where their descendants should return to; (5) an effort to the restoration of their homeland; and (6) the existence of a relationship with that homeland, which is fostered by some forms of communal bonding and solidarity (Safran). By restricting the concept of diaspora to such terms, the author excludes communities that have migrated and assimilated the culture of their new country, also arguing that a lack of forced displacement would elides the idea of diaspora. When it comes to African Americans, the scholar states that, although historically they formed a diasporic community, in current times there is no clear defined common African heritage to be preserved, nor a homeland to be restored; though networks of solidarity between Black populations in the United States and Africans may be formed (Safran). A clear-cut definition for the term "diaspora," however, is far from being reached. Academic dialogues on the concept remain intense due to its vast use in scholarly discussions, while Safran's proposed "checklist" has been criticized for its excessive idealism. Clifford contends that the "ideal type" proposed by Safran, which leaves little room for different diasporic groups to be recognized, contradicts the historical experiences of Jews themselves, which form the possibly most consensually recognized diasporic group. The scholar argues that many Jews have not adhered to at all requirements set by Safran, namely the "strong attachment to and the desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland" (Clifford, 305).

The wharf ruins and nearby burial grounds materialize the horrors of slave trade, the deadly middle passage, and the disposable treatment given to human

beings, whose remains have been encountered in various locations across the port area. Taking a different direction, Tölölyan states that the term "shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community" (Tölölyan, 4). The author's concept emphaticizes mobility and, thus, includes guest workers and other modalities of migration, regardless of the existence of a relationship to ideals concerning a homeland, but with a shared exposition to economic exploitation in a global context. possible to consider communities that face exclusion from the state as diasporic. Cohen, exposing the above-mentioned perspectives, states that the term "diaspora" is generally used as (1) the displacement of homogeneous populations from a specific space and time; (2) successive resettlements of populations for long time lapses, that lead to the establishment of a (temporary or permanent) "home away from home;" or (3) a sense of displacement from national territories attached to a desire to "return or claim entitlements" in regard to such territories (Cohen). Diaspora may be, thus, a way of thinking of conflicts with the hegemonic nation-state, a position-condition of communities in relation to a state that has historically excluded them. Cohen's perceptions of diaspora, that unlike Safran's view, are not necessarily connected to objective, concrete-spatial requirements, are complemented by Werbner, who recalls that scholars of diaspora have been reviewing the idea of diasporic communities being affectively linked to a single homeland, stating that perceiving the "national homeland as the only possible sacred center and place of pilgrimage for a diaspora" (Werbner, 16) is, in fact, a mistake, as with the lapse of time, new alternative sacred centers are formed and observed by diasporic communities.

The psychic dimension of the diaspora, alongside the possibility of using the term in relation to the long-lasting physical marginalization of Black populations resulting from their contentious relationship with the State and dominant white upper classes, allows for a dialogue of the term, and of the diasporic framework, to the

Valongo. Entrenched in an unusual and complex geographical setting, lying between oddly-shaped hills, the Atlantic Ocean, a large bay, and one of the world's largest tropical urban forests, Rio de Janeiro is a place of contradictions, disparities, and contiguous unequal neighborhoods/communities.

CONCLUSION

Rio de Janeiro's global significance for slave trade networks, which connected the city to the Africa, the metropolis and other parts of Latin America, has been recorded and revived by the findings in the Valongo area. However, while activists and scholars of the Valongo call for a diasporic analysis of the site that goes beyond the institutional one proposed by the UNESCO, the global character of the area still clashes with the narrow perception of such trait, often reflected in the usage of the term "diaspora" when referring to the Middle Passage, but not in reference to the constellation of similar sites that exist elsewhere, from Ghana to Guadeloupe, nor in reference to the psychic facet of the term or the possibility of adopting the concept in relation to the marginalization of Afro-Brazilians by the Brazilian state itself. Such reduced discussion of the concept contrasts with the much broader perspectives brought up by Afro-Caribbean and American authors engaged with Diaspora Studies, as well as by the effective actions of activists on the ground.

In that sense, subaltern institutions and their members in Rio effectively adopt a diasporic lens to counter mainstream narratives – and concrete actions, as the privatized port renovation project –, highlighting the agency of Afro-Brazilians and of members of the African Diaspora in the construction of their societies. As a place of reunion of people from different backgrounds – residents, candomblé followers (*povo de santo*), social movement activists, pedestrians and homeless individuals – but shared global Black roots – activities surrounding the Valongo attempt to emphasize its relevance as a hub of Trans-Atlantic slave trade, but also memorialize the present. In that sense, the social engagement around the Valongo has been crucial for Afro-

Brazilians to re-think and respond to the challenges, framing the Valongo at global and local levels, proposing the site no only as a place of memory, but also as site for very present engagements.

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