

Global South Perspectives on Stonewall after 50 Years, Part I— South by South, Trans for Trans

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Abstract: The riots against a New York City police raid at the Stonewall Inn bar in June, 1969, are often identified as having sparked the movement for LGBT rights, and the commemoration of the riots one year later in June, 1970, inaugurated a series of annual LGBT Pride events that continues to this day worldwide. In this two-part Forum, we reflect on the contradictory effects of Stonewall's international legacy. Which facts or legends are celebrated and which are marginalized fifty years later? How has the sign 'Stonewall' come to inspire and/or sideline other resistances as the US event became appropriated globally? In this first part of the Forum, Silva and Jacobo consider how trans women of colour in the Global South have pursued the struggle of the pioneering trans women activists in New York City and engaged the history of Stonewall beyond the United States, negating the whitewashing of discourse on the riots by hegemonic cis gay men and cis lesbian women of the movement, even in their respective nations, Brazil and the Philippines. This forum contribution pays tribute to black and brown trans persons whose bodies had been thought of as monstrous in the heart of empire and elsewhere, where empire remains. The authors together aspire to think the planet from their coordinates: *south by south, trans for trans*. From the sisterhood they forged, these two trans women from Rio de Janeiro and Manila, imbricated in their wounds but bound together by a will to heal, theorize resistance and reexistence as women in a decolonial, transfeminist present.

Keywords: Stonewall; Global South; trans resistance; *travestilidade*; *kabaklaan*.

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Towards a Final Absolution: A South by South Approach to Trans Resistance from Brazil and the Philippines

Mariah Rafaela Silva and Jaya Jacobo

*They don't care if you were with them
at the beginning of the gay movement,
demonstrating in drag with them.*

They don't care.

– Marsha P. Johnson

I have been beaten. I have had my nose broken.

I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job.

I have lost my apartment for gay liberation.

And you all treat me this way?

– Sylvia Rivera

A south by south trans perspective

A bit more than fifty years ago, two trans women were among those leading a strike in order to resist police abuses in New York City. Since then, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera have been known for inspiring a movement of the gender-diverse community within what was called the Stonewall Uprising. Yet Stonewall was not just a local occurrence, as far as trans communities all over the world are concerned. Johnson's and Rivera's acts reverberated beyond New York; their struggles have inspired gender-diverse people globally to take courage in laying the ground for their own revolutions.

In 1992, the first national meeting of Brazilian trans women and travestis took place in Rio de Janeiro. By the beginning of the 21st century, the *Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais* (ANTRA) was founded.¹ In 2004, a group of trans women in Brazil entered the National Congress building for the first time to reclaim their rights, marking what is called the first *Dia da Visibilidade Trans* (Trans Visibility Day) in Brazil. A couple of years later, the country also saw the establishment of a couple of other organisations dedicated to the fight for trans rights.

In 2002, the first organisation of trans women in the Philippines was established by a group of women in Metro Manila who called themselves the Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines (STRAP). Soon after, the Coalition for the Liberation of the Reassigned Sex (COLORS), Gender and Development Advocates (GANDA) Filipinas, the Association of Transgender People in the Philippines (ATP), the Transpinay Association of Antipolo (TAO), and clinics dedicated to and initiated by Filipina trans women like *Victoria by Love Yourself* and *Diossa by Lily* were also established in the archipelago.²

This brief retrospection shows us how in other parts of the world, especially in the global South, trans women situated in their own particular contexts have pursued the

struggle of the two pioneering trans women activists in New York City and engaged the history of Stonewall beyond the United States, negating the whitewashing of the discourse by hegemonic cis gay men and cis lesbian women of the movement, even in their respective nations, namely Brazil and the Philippines. Given these difficult but significant shadows from Stonewall in North America, the more important question for us trans women in the global South is how, in particular, Brazilian and Filipino trans women have created their own forms of resistance which respond to the singularity of their suffering back home. At the same time, while Marsha and Sylvia are not forgotten in Rio de Janeiro and Manila, we also need to propose how places outside the imperial metropole can compare experiences and learn from each other. As the struggles of these two trans women of colour in New York have shown, this resistance from Rio de Janeiro and Manila possesses an ethno-racial dispositif. We are not white. And we pay tribute to black and brown bodies who had been thought of as monstrous in the heart of empire, and elsewhere, where empire remains. In the same gesture that Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe (2018) has thought about the world becoming black, we also aspire to think through the planet from our coordinates: *south by south, trans for trans*. Inspired by the trans discourse inaugurated by Johnson and Rivera in the global North, we compare Brazilian and Philippine global South experiences of transness, move forward from learning about the similarities and differences of our herstories, and return to the ethos of trans protagonism instigated in Stonewall. From the sisterhood forged between us, two trans women from Rio de Janeiro and Manila, imbricated in our own wounds but bound together by a will to heal after all manner of uprising, we theorise resistance and reexistence as women in a decolonial, transfeminist present. This forum reflection consists of six parts: 1) an introduction that articulates a south by south, trans for trans perspective that takes inspiration from the work of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera; 2) a narration of Brazilian trans protagonism; 3) an exposition of two landmark legal cases which provide an impetus for Filipina trans activists to pursue their battle toward self-determination; 4) a contrapuntal account of how the Brazilian and Philippine trans movements figure in the contemporary project of global social justice; 5) a herstory that relates the pioneering gestures of Johnson and Rivera in Stonewall with current victories in Brazilian and Philippine trans activism; and a 6) manifesto of transfeminist autonomy forged from a south by south sorority.

The Brazilian scenario: creating pathways between debris and trauma

We have witnessed in the past fifty years a few significant advances in Brazilian trans rights. Sex reassignment surgery, for example, was one of the important achievements of the trans movement that deserves to be highlighted, because for many years, such procedures had been stigmatized under the guise of *amputação* (amputation).³

It took a long medico-legal process until 'complete' authorisation for transgenitalisation surgeries was realized in Brazil. A landmark resolution crafted by the Federal Council of Medicine (Conselho Federal de Medicina), resolution number 1482 released in 1997, authorised surgical procedures on an experimental basis (Federal Council of Medicine

[Brazil] 1997) Until that time, surgeries in this category were considered ‘a crime of serious mutilation by the Brazilian Medical Code of Ethics and their performance justified the withdrawal of the right to [the practice of] medicine, which could lead to prison’ (Borba 2016: 55, our translation). The Council, for example, took a stand against surgeries for implanting breast prostheses in transsexual women and travestis in the 1970s. As was astutely observed by scholar Rodrigo Borba (2016: 55), the 1997 resolution is not to be read as a spontaneous, voluntary act by the CFM, but must rather be interpreted as the result of social pressure against the hegemony exercised by the medical field over trans bodies. It was in the midst of this battle between forces that the judiciary entered the field. This is because university hospitals did not receive funds from the Ministry of Health to fund such procedures, forcing transgender people to go to court to guarantee their right. This clash forced both the Federal Council of Medicine and the Ministry of Health to regulate trans-specific healthcare practices within the scope of Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS), the public health system in Brazil. The 1997 resolution was repealed by resolution 1652 of 2002 (Federal Council of Medicine [Brazil] 2002), which was subsequently overturned by resolution 1955 of 2010 (Federal Council of Medicine [Brazil] 2010).

It is important to highlight the year 2008 in which the Ministry of Health implemented within the scope of SUS the so-called *Processo Transsexualizador* (transsexualising process), the result of years of struggle and pressure endured and mobilised by the transsexual women’s movement. Until such an accomplishment, judicial battles cannot be ignored. Most significant is the decision of the Superior Justice Tribunal on 14 August 2007 that declared the fundamental right of transsexual people to access specific surgeries and treatments. This decision was overturned however by the Supreme Court in December of the same year as it understood that the situation should be analysed on a case-to-case basis. The victory a year later is a realisation that the trans movement, to paraphrase Frantz Fanon (2008: 126), refuses, with all its strength, to accept the stigma of amputation⁴, emphasising that the State has a duty to promote a safe environment for the development of the individual in their plenitude, in line with the constitutional principle of human dignity.

Since 2009, the social name, the name a trans person uses in their community (in contradistinction to the civil or legal name) was also gradually implemented in public reparations by ‘normative resolutions,’⁵ promoting the possibility for trans women to be recognized by the name that represents their genders. The first body to institute the use of the social name was SUS, also as an effect of the pressure from the national trans movement. Later, universities and other municipalities gradually began to adopt the possibility of using the social name by trans people, each instituting its own regulations.⁶

After that, in 2018, the Supreme Court approved the possibility of any trans person to rectify their name and gender marker in their birth certificates without the need of surgery or a judicial process. These are only a few examples of the advances in Brazil, which must be noted as having involved the initiation and participation of local deputies and city councillors. More recently, the Brazilian Supreme Court decided in 2019 that transphobia and homophobia are crimes akin to racism.

These conquests in the realm of rights point to the singularity of the narrative of dispute, mourning, visibility and protagonism that trans people have won in recent years. The gesture of strength and desire to inhabit the future initiated by Marsha and Sylvia continues to produce resonances and their example inspires the Brazilian trans movement itself to fight even more. Despite social achievements and advances, Brazil remains one of the most violent countries to be trans in the world.

In this sense, Brazilian activists have on their horizon not only the guarantee of rights, but above all, and especially, the desire to build polyphonic and multi-methodological strategies (epistemology, education, public policy, health promotion, employability, housing, etc.). In academia, examples like professor Jaqueline Gomes de Jesus (with several books on gender studies, especially *Transfeminismo: teorias e práticas* (2018)) and scholar Viviane Vergueiro (who recently launched the book *Sou travestis* (2019)) must be recognised. In the political and social field, it is important to remember Gilmara Cunha, a black travesti and community leader in one of the most violent *favelas* in Rio; Indianare Siqueira, founder of the Casa Nem shelter; and Érica Mulunguinho, the first black transsexual woman elected to the City Council of São Paulo. In art, performers like Jota Mombaça, Castiel Vitorino, Ventura Profana have opened the way to rethink aesthetics and reshape artistic grammar on a global level. Trans men like Guilherme Almeida, a university professor, and Leonardo Peçanha, a black trans male physical trainer, among others, have contributed to rewriting the history of the struggles against oppression started by Marsha and Sylvia.

Certainly, there are countless other important names whose contributions mark the history of the struggle of trans movements in Brazil: a fight against prejudice, lack of rights, social and economic neglect and also sexual exploitation and human trafficking; this is a fight initiated by two courageous women who dared to believe it was possible. Today our efforts unfold from a gesture of their courage. For sure, the judiciary has been a strategic path, but we know that it is still insufficient to guarantee respect in the field of culture, and of course, in everyday life.

The Philippine predicament: breaking through the carceral discourse of nature

No legal framework supports the right of Filipina trans women to self-determination, unlike in the Brazilian context. The indignation that this has sown upon the trans community may not have not coalesced into a form compelling enough to launch a model of Philippine trans street resistance, at least not yet, but Johnson's and Rivera's long struggle from Stonewall is a reminder to trans women leaders that the path to justice must be fought and won from the bitter lessons of a herstory that has yet to unfold on its own.

Since 2007, when the Supreme Court of the Philippines upheld the Court of Appeals' overturning of a regional trial court decision in favour of Mely Silverio, it has been impossible for trans people in the Philippines to affirm themselves via official documents.⁷

With epigrams lifted from the Bible on God creating 'man in his own image' and a passage from a folk myth establishing the sex binary through the primordial figures of

Malakas (Strength) and *Maganda* (Beauty), the decision proceeds to ask: ‘When is a man a man and when is a woman a woman?... May a person successfully petition for a change of name and sex appearing in the birth certificate to reflect the result of a sex reassignment surgery?’ (Supreme Court [Philippines] 2007: 1). Mely Silverio, who had just received her doctorate in Sociology from the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, came home to the Philippines to have her documents changed after undergoing hormone therapy and psychological testing in the United States and gender affirmation procedure in Thailand. Her Filipino doctor and her US fiancé served as witnesses in the trial.

The Supreme Court decision states that since there is no law in the state that addresses sex reassignment, the petition is fatal to Silverio. It asserts its fundamental intervention on the question of sex and gender however by saying that ‘the sex of a person is determined at birth’ (Supreme Court [Philippines] 2007: 7), a predicament that transgender people contest in their adult affirmation of the gender that is misaligned with their birth sex. Furthermore, the decision buttresses its case by referring to a denotative definition of sex as the ‘sum of peculiarities of structure and function that distinguish a male from female,’ specifying male as ‘the sex that produces spermatozoa for fertilizing ova’ and female as ‘the sex that produces ova and bears young’ (Supreme Court [Philippines] 2007: 8). Given the reproductive premise of the argument (woman is merely a conduit of the egg cell and the offspring that develops from it), the prose can only exclude people ‘who have undergone sex reassignment’ (Supreme Court [Philippines] 2007: 8), and even proceeds to argue that the particular case, if affirmed, may have effects on the notion of marriage and the status of women (Supreme Court [Philippines] 2007: 8), because, of course, woman in this sense must only be born *as such*, and the partnership acknowledged by the state must be with a man *as such*. The ruling concludes with the exhortation that legislative intervention is necessary for the definition of sex to include that of transsexuals (Supreme Court [Philippines] 2007: 9).⁸ While transsexual subjectivity is named here as a future possibility, that is, to be embodied in a law to come, its presence is also foreclosed in the defence of the sexual binary and the refusal to acknowledge the distinction that gender identity may present to *natural* and *normative* preconceptions of male and female bodies in the Philippine state.

A contrapuntal case must be cited to signal some sort of movement from this loss as far as trans as a category is recognized judicially.⁹ In 2008, just a year later after Mely Silverio lost her case, Jeff Cagandahan, an intersex person, won his appeal to affirm himself through his chosen name and gender marker. A crucial paragraph in the Supreme Court decision must be quoted here at length: ‘In deciding this case, we consider the compassionate calls for recognition of the various degrees of intersex as variations which should not be subject to outright denial... The current state of Philippine statutes apparently compels that a person be classified either as a male or as a female, *but this Court is not controlled by mere appearances when nature itself fundamentally negates such rigid classification*’ (Supreme Court [Philippines] 2008: 7, our emphasis).

Here, a purportedly more enlightened perspective on nature is made possible not only with the intersex figure as a negation of the law, but with the agency for such negation

of the law deriving from nature for the intersex man to identify himself according to a gender he has chosen: *'Respondent here has simply let nature take its course and has not taken unnatural steps to arrest or interfere with what he was born with.* And accordingly, he has already ordered his life to that of a male.' (Supreme Court [Philippines] 2008: 7, our emphasis). Nonetheless, as it is revealed that Jeff's gender only appears to be concomitant to a concept of nature as inevitable, because pre-ordained, such gender is intimated, in the end, as ancillary to nature itself and to the sexual binary premised on such an a priori. The decision attempts to free itself from such binarism, through the liminality that only an intersex figure can summon as a space of deliberation and judgment, and yet it only does so asymptotically, insofar as the predominant notion of natural sex is preserved in the end.

If the ruling is to be read as a premise for trans recognition in a decision to come, then intersex subjectivity can only serve as that moment that enables a cusp to emerge as an opportune moment enabling the judicialisation of gender-diversity, that is according to subjects who dare contest the limits as well as the licences that the law can instantiate. If the aspect of agency in the decision to accept the gender one has become is recognized as natural to intersex subjects, as it attends their condition, from predicament to volition, can it also be extended to transsexual and transgender subjects? Or will the concept of nature revert to its previous composure when confronted with the 'unnaturalness' of 'interferences' the latter decides to assert as affirming herself?

A south by south trans paradigm of reexistence

In both the Philippines and Brazil, the judiciary plays a central role in resolving social (sometimes political) conflicts. While the Brazilian judiciary has endeavoured to promote the inclusion of transgender people in society, the Philippine justice system has yet to guarantee their civil rights (and more broadly, human rights). With a colonial modern mentality prevailing in some sectors of the judiciary however (Mombaça 2016), historical and social discrepancies that make up contemporary societies can only be ignored in court rulings, especially when it comes to addressing certain disputes which affect people in countries of the Global South, in this case, Brazil and the Philippines.

In the Brazilian case, the role of the judiciary in the conquests and guarantees of rights of the trans population, must be observed with circumspection. Despite the solid activism of the best transsexuals across Brazil, the State has always been silent in promoting citizenship and the inclusion of these people in society, especially those living in favelas. Resorting to the judiciary, however, was only possible from two decisive moments in Brazil's recent history: the first would be at the end of the military dictatorship and a relentless effort by social actors to reposition authoritarianism in the country; the second would be around the 'democratic turn' and the fundamental civilising stimulus promoted by the Federal Constitution of 1988, considered as 'the citizen Constitution' whose foundational guarantees revolve around the promotion of human dignity and a better quality of life socially (at least in theory). In any case, the Constitution of Brazil is invoked in the whole process that seeks to enforce minority rights and guarantees.

The judicialisation of trans life, bodies, and subjectivities must be viewed with caution in both Brazil and the Philippines (and beyond), since the guarantee of rights through such means does not mean an effective change of conscience in significant sectors of the population. Above all, more conservative sectors have been gaining ground in the political and institutional context of recent years with the uprising and the conquest of power by the extreme right in Brazil, but also in the Philippines and elsewhere. In Brazil such sectors have managed to elect a significant mass of politicians to the Congress and the Senate, and have escalated a method of judicial activism that culminated in the coup d'état against former president Dilma Rousseff. They have succeeded in dismantling the individual and collective guarantees of minorities, especially in sectors that are fundamental to social development, such as education. There are countless bills that aim to retrocede the guarantees already in Brazil. Jair Bolsonaro's election is paradigmatic in this sense, as it symbolises the most perverse and dangerous face of the ruralist sector (committed to land grabbing and the extermination of indigenous peoples), religious sector (committed to orthodox dogmas and medieval practices), and the *bancada da bala* (bullet benches, committed to pro-gun policies and to civilian armaments in an unbridled way), in addition to sectors committed to the militarisation of the public sphere and the return of the dictatorship. Such political pressure resonates in the Brazilian social body, especially through fake news, making possible judicial decisions that for a decade have reconfigured the social recognition of minorities. The activist articulations of these groups in Brazil promote frontal attacks on the country's superior justice courts, putting in detriment the social advances which have gained their ground from the efforts of minorities themselves.

It is in these senses that, again, such judicial achievements must be observed with circumspection. Although the chances of inflection of rights are slim, they are not guaranteed by citizenship and do not effectively change the collective social mentality, at least not in the short and medium term, given the increasing number of attacks on and threats to trans people, and certainly their deaths, in Brazil. For efficacious change, a broader project that would establish legal limits for aggressors would be necessary, not only considering the creation of law itself, but also promoting awareness of citizenship and a sense of humanity through education, culture, leisure, health and employability of trans people. A project of this magnitude depends on collective efforts by the three branches of government (legislative, executive, and judiciary), without exempting any part of responsibility. Notwithstanding this emphasis on good governance, we must not also fail to mention the importance of social organisations in the effective promotion of a democratic state of rights. Social organisations empower people to involve themselves in political action. They also work around 'supervising' state affairs, to promote citizen peace and build a national civil unit. Their presence evokes social participation in decision-making. The collectives they forge assure the community that life will be preserved and human dignity will be protected, as typified in the Federal Constitution.

Both Brazil and the Philippines experienced a period of dictatorship and adopt new citizens' constitutions around the same time, yet trans people continue to struggle even after democratic dispensations have already established themselves in both places. The

Philippine Constitution of 1987, ratified in the Republic established after the fall of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, is phrased to include the promotion of the 'dignity' and 'human rights' (1987 Philippine Constitution, art. 3. sec. 1) of all Filipino citizens, but no matter how activists and their allies hearken back to this fundamental law, what happens on the ground remains contentious as far as transgender people are concerned. Many trans women have been harassed and arrested for simply walking on the street at night, with police assuming they are promenading for sex work, still considered illegal by the Philippine state (UNDP and APTN 2017: 58). Colonial and neoliberal prejudice are entrenched in all aspects of life, such that no trans person is ever given equal opportunity to fight for a life of wellbeing. How many trans people have been denied work when during the interview, they are revealed to be trans, and if ever offered the job, this happens only with the precondition of changing their present self-presentations during the first day at the office (UNDP and CHRP 2018: 27)?¹⁰ If given work, are these women allowed to carry the names which affirm them? Are they also given the freedom to choose the restroom of their gender? The killing of Jennifer Laude remains a traumatic event for the trans population of the country. While American serviceman Lance Corporal Joseph Scott Pemberton was sentenced by the Regional Trial Court of Olongapo City in 2015, it was not for the murder charge filed by the prosecution, but for homicide due to 'passion and obfuscation, and intoxication' (UNDP and CHRP 2018: 16), in other words, trans panic. The Philippines remains one of the most dangerous countries in Asia and the world for trans people. In 2020, Pemberton was granted absolute pardon by the President.

How can trans women feel safe in the Philippines when their gender identity can be used against them in instances where their right to life is threatened? How is it possible to contend with loss and survival itself when transness, as far as it is judicialised in this case, becomes the alibi for death and violence? It is in this scene of violation confronted everyday by transgender and transsexual people that a legal framework to grant them citizenship through the name and gender that are fundamentally pertinent to their affirmative political visibilization becomes, without question, necessary. This granting of the right to 'gender self-determination' (Stanley 2014: 89-91) is the genre of judicialisation that can only combat the current mode of justice accorded to trans folk¹¹ in the state, that is, if not as criminals who have broken the law, then as victims who, by sheer jurisprudential illegibility, cannot be upheld by the law itself. Trans people in the Philippines remain bodies which populate the already suffocating spaces of a highly cisheteropatriarchal 'prison-industrial complex' (Vitulli 2014: 162-164; UNHDP and CHRP 2018: 43-44), a sphere where they are doubly incarcerated as objects of pleasure and violence by inmates of the opposite sex.

The election of populist figure Rodrigo Duterte from Southern Philippines as President of the Philippine Republic may have symbolised for the majority of Filipinos who had voted for him a solid rejection of bourgeois, oligarchic and neoliberal values which have dominated governance in the islands since the establishment of a post-colonial state in 1946; nonetheless, his adoption of a war on drugs which has resulted in an astounding statistic of extra-judicial killings, a foreign policy sympathetic to China in the context of territorial disputes in the West Philippine Sea, and a slap-dash program on

national social amelioration during the COVID-19 pandemic have only proven the systems and structures of bourgeois, oligarchic, and neoliberal power remain in spite of the rhetoric that seems more intelligible and relatable to the most marginalised of constituents (Beltran 2020). The figure of the strongman who has entitled the police and the military and who has controlled both houses of Congress and even the Supreme Court is not foreign to Filipino collective memory, but 34 years since the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, it all seems like Martial Law has become a proximate possibility, and this time, seemingly without a formidable resistance movement to mobilise itself.

In his speeches, Duterte has joked about women in the context of rape (Regencia 2018) and has often dismissed his political opponents as effeminate, *'bakla'* and *'bayot'* (Cupin 2016), which are the Filipino vernacular categories gender-nonconforming people may also embrace alongside 'gay,' 'queer,' or 'trans' itself. However such history of gender diversity has been occluded by contemporary toxic masculinity, which misrecognizes gender dissidence as signifier of moral weakness (Jacobo et al 2019). It would seem a populist figure who is also head of state would echo more honourable folk sentiments on archipelagic minorities, but his popularity is mostly premised on models of toxic masculinity drawn from centuries of feudal privilege. He might have invited to the Presidential Palace for a dialogue with right-wing LGBTQI activists an aggrieved trans woman who was mistreated in a mall while entering the female restroom (Jacobo 2019), but the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE) Bill, since it was first filed almost 20 years ago, has yet to be ratified as law during his term.

Trans liberation in the Philippine context must be articulated not only in conversation with the general LGBTQI movement but also in colloquy with the larger debates in women's rights, which has yet to include notions of cisgenerity and transness: gender identity must be distinguished from sexual orientation and assigned birth sex in public discourses. Moreover, the suffering of trans folx has yet to be visualised intersectionally, that is, alongside the oppression of urban poor in the slum, peasants in the agrarian margins, migrant workers and indigenous peoples. While, of course, there is a particularity to each situation of human life from multitude to multitude, the universality of human dignity and the entitlement to rights across sectors of society must be accorded equally. And the framework to liberate identities must, without condition, consider the historical exigencies of the Philippine state as a nation yet to decolonize itself.

In both Brazilian and Philippine settings, the resistance models established over the last few decades do not seem to have any more practical effects, as the resistances seem to account for sheer oppositional forces, without actually producing *reexistence* (Silva 2018). Resistance can only be self-defeating without the 'utopic' vision of reexistence, inasmuch as reexistence is unimaginable without a genealogy of resistance. To this end, an increasing participation in politics by transgender people would be a critical point in this sense, since it would constitute a type of 'affirmative power' and no longer merely a 'power of containment.' Likewise, trans protagonism in the most varied spheres of power, from the judiciary to the medical, would contribute not only to reconfiguring the discourses for the broader realisation of new methodologies and technico-scientific approaches to important themes

of life in society in favour of a future inhabitable by our bodies, sexualities and desires: a future that no longer depends on the will of a cis person, but only on our potency to live and think collectively.

In all cases, resistance is a process started in the streets. By 'process,' we mean a singular movement led by the desire to freedom and equality. As an example of what we are saying, we can cite the phenomenal form of resistance by Brazilian travestis in the late 1980s, in what was known as *Operação Tarântula*, as brilliantly narrated by Céu Cavalcanti and co-authors (Cavalcanti, Barbosa, and Bicalho 2018). During that time, there was so much hatred toward travestis in the city, attributing to them the spread of HIV, a stereotype that still persists and against which the trans movement in Brazil is struggling. In *Operação Tarântula*, police were mobilised to arrest travestis in order to control their bodies and subjectivities. Given this pressure on travestis all over São Paulo, the women insisted on continuing to populate the streets, knowing the consequences of such visibility, and created a singular form of resistance against the enmity directed towards their further abjection in their contexts of life and livelihood.

In 2015, the Filipina trans women in Manila also went to the streets. During the trial of Lance Corporal Joseph Scott Pemberton in the case of murder of Jennifer Laude, trans activists in Manila protested in the streets, even travelling to Olongapo, the former seat of an American military base, knowing all too well that for the first time violence against trans women in the country, and the kind of justice that such crime deserved, had become politically visible and possibly radical. This, in the absence of an institutionalised national trans march, accounts for a kind of mobilization trans women exposed to severe forms of punitive action by the nation and the empire at large can organize and sustain.

In São Paulo and Olongapo, we see how Brazilian and Filipina trans women had been willing to risk visibilising themselves as resistive, if only to point to a future where they could reinvent themselves, existing. Street visibility is political action that is done when all manner of structure can no longer support the sense of wellbeing and social justice that the State must provide for its citizens. In the two scenes above, the State has proven itself to only promote repression. We have seen this indignation in the Occupy Movement in the United States and in the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, and of course, this brings us back to the night in June 1969, in New York City. With a history police violence directed against gender-diverse people culminating in Stonewall, it was time for the subaltern to take action and bring the revolution to the streets.

A night that conjures the end of the world

Without doubt, Stonewall is a milestone for the LGBTIQI movement in the United States. To imagine however that the importance of Stonewall is restricted only to the context of that country would be a profound mistake. In the spirit of its intersectionality, Stonewall can only be a planetary movement.

That night of June 28, 1969, the New York police invaded the Stonewall Inn, a bar aimed at the city's queer public, initiating a process of revolt that would definitely mark

the history of the LGBTQI movement. Fed up with the tyranny of the policemen who had constantly intruded upon the place, Marsha P. Johnson decided to throw a glass cup at the police, marking a legendary moment. Beside Marsha was Sylvia, a trans Latinx woman who was not intimidated by police brutality and bravely went out for the riot initiated by her friend. Two peripheral black trans women. Two stories of prejudice, as well as the resistance to it. Two stories that echo across the corners of the planet. This gesture of fatigue, revolt and desire for change marks the emergence of a transnational movement that, decade after decade, has solidified the claim to rights for its people.

The pivotal role of these two pioneers has nonetheless become invisible at a global level. Why so? In a sense, Hollywood can provide us with some clues. In 2015, the film of the same name, *Stonewall*, by German director Roland Emmerich brought to the screen the story of that night by focusing on a fictional character called Danny Winters. Emmerich usurps not only Marsha's role but also confers a racial erasure by 'whitening' and 'cisgendering' the gesture that started the LGBT civil rights revolution. Does the hero always have to be cisgender, male and white, we ask?

Emmerich's gesture, moreover, reveals something else that unfortunately still presents itself as a major challenge for the LGBTQI movement at a global level: how does one build visibility within the movement that overflows with cisgender, white, patriarchal and gay-centric representation of privilege? This violence of this act wounds even more deeply when we consider the unsolved case of Marsha's death in 1992.

This place of representation and the struggle for public policy that arises from such visibility are among the most salient objects of contention of this essay. In a sense, the invisibility of Marsha's and Sylvia's revolutionary gestures resonates in contemporary LGBTQI movements. Their marginalisation might have been partially redressed with contemporary histories of Stonewall acknowledging their erasure from the narrative by mainstream gay and lesbian discourse, but the trans community in the present still experiences a subordinate role within the collective movement. Many black trans activists in the United States were quick to point out an intersection that is forgotten when the banner of 'black lives matter' is unfurled. 'Do black trans lives matter too?' was a question that was raised during the protests in the advent of George Floyd's murder in Minnesota. The contemporary reckoning of civil rights seems to have neglected the most marginal of women – black, trans, poor – not realising their liberation can only announce the liberation of everyone else. The structures which oppress poor black trans women are the ones that must be dismantled, once and for all. If white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy and capitalism must remain, then everyone else after our sisters can never free themselves.

The importance of Marsha and Sylvia is not limited to the night of 28 June 1969. Together, the two trans women founded, about a year later, the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), which started to function as a reception centre and shelter for queer people and young sex street workers who are extremely prone to violence. Considered a model for other organizations, STAR actually would become a reference for what we now call intersectional policy making and programming. Sylvia and Marsha are the LGBTQI mothers who are expelled from home or are in a situation of misery due

to the structural exclusion and social stigma that their bodies and identities are subjected to. In this sense, that night of struggles in Stonewall was, in fact, a night that began an affective conjunction of bodies towards a definitive absolution of stigmas, violence, social amputation, the restriction of the right to be empowered, in other words, that night was a conjuration of the end of the 'world,' to allow a new one to give birth to itself.

More than fifty years later, shelter centres for LGBTQI people in Brazil, although still few, are a fundamental reality for the survival of these people, especially for travestis and transsexuals who still occupy a place of specific vulnerability in society. Present in several Brazilian cities, shelter centres provide essential services to the LGBTQI population on the street and in sex work. In addition, programmes of empowerment and promotion of citizenship of these people make these places at the forefront of public policies for the promotion of life, insofar as they offer housing, food, health care, education, culture, leisure and projects of employability, making these people feel part of society. In the Philippines, the pandemic has exposed the fundamental quarantine that has dispossessed Filipina trans women before all manner of quarantine. Many were displaced from the few opportunities of work that entitled them to a semblance of wellbeing. While trans-specific shelters are still to be established in Manila and other cities in the archipelago, such places of refuge where dreamed of and rehearsed in residences and apartments where trans women were receiving fellow trans women fleeing their own homes that shunned them and families that abused them during isolation. In Zamboanga, a city in Mindanao island, an organization called Mujer LGBT provided a space within its community centre for trans and gender-nonconforming persons escaping antagonistic family situations. This model is significant if one considers the context of conflict specific to Mindanao, that is, violence between Muslim and Christian Filipinos, between military and dissident forces. Trans and queer people are caught in this crossfire, and spaces which shelter them become more significant in the discourse of the peace that is aspired for.

The glass cup that Marsha fired at the police 51 years ago, therefore becomes a reference for civil emancipation, a gesture of anger that aims to bring a renegade part of society to a field of immanence whose function is to build a social improvement policy that recognises as human those who have always been treated as animals, as monstrous beings. This gesture is, in this sense, one that escapes history itself, insofar as it becomes a reference for insurgency around the planet, producing a special resonance in the global South.

If, on the one hand, trans protagonism has been usurped by mainstream policies of representation, on the other hand history itself has worked to promote due recognition of justice. Today, we can say, that trans movements around the planet have promoted great advances to achieve the rights of the entire population. In this sense, it is again important to point out the work carried out by Indianare Siqueira, the mistress of *Casa Nem*, a shelter centre for the LGBT population, and Gilmara Cunha, woman in charge of the *Grupo Conexão G*, the first and only organisation of the type dedicated to the promotion of citizenship and rights of LGBTQI people from favelas. In the Philippines, trans activism was initiated by the Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines (STRAP). This group coined the term 'transpinay,' to liberate Filipino trans women from centuries of

bigotry associated with names which disparage their identity, prefiguring paths toward feminist agency as well as coalitional possibilities with cis feminist accomplices, siblings within the queer spectrum, and femme persons who do not necessarily identify as trans but are grounded in vernacular understandings of gender diversity. Inspired by the initiatives of trans organisations all over in world, especially in the United States, South Africa, Malaysia and Brazil, STRAP, with the AIDS Society of the Philippines, and various partner organisations, ran a fundraiser that aided 300 women all over the country. These organisations have in their DNA the mark of fortitude and courage left as a legacy of the struggles of Marsha and Sylvia and have kept alive the revolutionary ethic that started that night.

Trans women in Brazil and the Philippines may have divergent herstories to tell, and yet we inspire each other to look after each other every other sister beyond Latin America and South East Asia. The right to one's name and the marker of identity and to one's affirmative body may not have arrived yet in Philippine shores, but the Brazilian narrative has a lot to teach Filipina trans women on what paths they can take to assert their womanhood in the nearest horizon of the future. Brazilian transsexual women and *travestis* can look at their transpinay sisters translating between 'trans' and vernacular categories of gender diversity like the *bakla* and recall how their negotiations with *bicha* culture have also solidified multiple pathways toward self-determination. Linguistic diversity in the Philippines does not only signify the diversity of regional dialects of one dominant language, but a diversity of languages itself. This makes for a situation where 'trans' has to be literally translated and categories of gender variance vary by both region and language. The vernacularity of *travesti* and *bicha* accounts for possibilities of self-identification particular to the Brazilian gender-diverse experience escaping Western categories that tend to efface a diversity of genders elsewhere whenever 'trans' and 'queer,' for example, travel. The Philippine trans experience of a recurrent wave of fascism reminds their Brazilian cohorts of similar structures of oppression which repeat in their own herstory, and trans protagonists from both localities can only converse and think through the force that will allow waves of dissent to resurface and settle on the ground of permanent change, so that storms and stresses of white colonial patriarchy can thrive no more. The role that these assemblages play is definitely revolutionary. Each time they move, the glass cup is whole again, shines, breaks again, shines even more, and breaks slowly, sharply against each police car parked by a queer inn anywhere in the world, anytime of the night.

Trans women from the global South carry in their bodies the particles of strength that our predecessors left us as an ethical principle of fighting for life; because we have been disputing life at the level of life, even when we are killed or somehow our protagonism of courage and struggle has been usurped: we will move forward towards a final absolution. We sing this nocturne each night.

Towards a final absolution: a south by south trans manifesto

We were together somewhere in Northeastern Brazil trying to heal some wounds and create pathways far beyond the trauma. We cried together, countless times, when rescuing

memories of a life that we did not have the chance to live, but we still persisted. 'Don't forget, you are a trans woman. Pain will always be your ghost. WE GOTTA BE STRONG, GIRL!' Although those words echoed through the room, the resonances were beyond, far beyond it; it was felt in and around the world: a world that takes lives and precarities dreams; a world that is, as Jota Mombaça says (2017), *my* trauma.

Perhaps our unconscious projects things and builds desires to keep us minimally interested in life. Maybe that's why we miss things we never had; those things only existed in desire? In the desire to fracture that damn *cistem!*¹² In the desire to shout at those who, at the cost of perversity and transphobia, usurp our right by surfing the wave of sovereign power. From a power invented at the expense and the blood of those who were abominably dominated in a coloniality that persists and crosses the time of our murderers.

We should not be waiting for someone to come save our lives. Instead, we must wait for a definite absolution. We will no longer deposit our hopes, our future in somebody else's hands. This absolution means no longer searching for men, but for purity, the jewel, the diamond inside, the most genuine singularity of ourselves. Trans and queer black slum people somehow have the know-how to survive; despite the pain, the abandonment, the poverty, the prejudice, they find the way.

A war is now taking place in the spiritual plane, to show us we can no longer keep living the way we treat people and nature. 8 billion people. The planet no longer has the capacity to hold all of us. We must start to do something, to create a more equal world, for all of us, not just for a few.

We yearn for freedom, yes. Deep inside we are longing for it. And yet, when we are freed from something, we get stuck in some feeling, a blackhole pushing us into another battle we must surpass again. There is a need to create a force to overcome this, and finally find freedom. Nonetheless, if freedom is a constant and infinite battle, especially for us, can we ask for an absolution from this infinite search? Because we are always searching for something – love, sanity, romance, sex, money, work... And if we are absolved, shall we finally find peace?

There is an unpayable debt. One that invests in trans subjectivity, bodies in a necro-economy that kills us in so many ways. We have come so far from where we began. We have created our paths through pain, trauma, the ruins of a world to which pleasures we were never entitled. If we have arrived here, however, with injured feet and blood in our eyes, with rage, but also with beauty and love, it is because we believe in life, most of all. In this unbearable life where the horror of necrotopographs¹³ have insisted on investing its strength. We will continue to fight for life on the level of life, no matter how much they want to kill us: we will no longer die! We will continue our visceral struggle in the face of all the brutalisation of our bodies, until our final absolution.

Notes

- 1 See <https://antrabrazil.org/historia/> for a more detailed account of Brazilian trans herstory.
- 2 The following women need to be acknowledged for their valuable accounts here: Brenda Alegre, Yanyan Araña, Kaye Candaza, Naomi Fontanos, Mikee Inton-Campbell, Ayesha Tolentino Lopez Corchus, Melai Lopez, Rica Paras, Charlese Saballe, Rain Villagonzalo.
- 3 In 1971, a Brazilian doctor was prosecuted for performing a sex reassignment surgery on a trans woman. He was charged with the crime of 'amputation' and the legal case gained public notoriety and lasted for years.
- 4 In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2008) describes what he calls 'amputation of being,' to exemplify a kind of 'superiority complex' of the Antillean who returned from France, thus adopting French instead of Patoá, a local dialect. For Fanon, such a complex would make black people identify themselves as 'almost white.' In this essay, we work with the idea of amputation to demonstrate that trans activism, on the contrary, does not accept the 'inferiority complex' imposed on trans experiences. Against such amputation of being, Fanon (2008: 126) then declares: 'I refuse this amputation with all my strength. I feel like a soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers, my chest having a power of infinite expansion. I am a gift, but the humility of the sick is recommended... Yesterday, opening my eyes to the world, I saw the sky squirm from side to side. I wanted to get up, but a gutless silence threw its wings over me Irresponsible, riding between Nothing and Infinity, I started to cry' (our translation). Like Fanon, we have seen that trans activism since Marsha and Sylvia has viscerally refused this amputation.
- 5 A normative resolution is a type of internal document of the institutions that regulate the surgical operation and medical treatment procedures of the public.
- 6 Mariah Rafaela Silva serves an important role in this story. She was the first transsexual woman to take university exams using a social name in 2009. At the time, she took advantage of a loophole in the policy of the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (State University of Rio de Janeiro) that designated and differentiated services to people with 'special needs'; it was not an easy task, but after contending with a lot of bureaucracy, she succeeded. Then, as a university student, she was responsible for leading a riot, which culminated in the resolution to use the social name at one of the most important universities in Latin America, the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro). In this case, Mariah, in addition to leading the riot, was responsible for having the text of the resolution drafted and unanimously approved by the Graduate Council after much pressure. The resolution was made public in February 2015 after almost two years of much struggle on the part of Mariah.
- 7 Prior to the Silverio ruling, Filipina transgender women, citing Republic Act 9048 (Clerical Error Law of 2001), succeeded in having their names and gender markers changed through a simple petition lodged at the local civil registrar's office. See United Nations Development Programme and Commission of Human Rights of the Philippines (2018: 38).
- 8 In his critique of this decision, legal scholar Michael Vincent A. Maté (2008: 202) wrote: '... Through *Silverio*, the Court has effectively closed the door against any remedy that may be afforded to transsexuals seeking to give legal recognition to their true status – not to mention that it also closed the door against the possibility of legal recognition itself.'
- 9 We owe Leo Fernandez Almero for pointing out to us this contrapuntal case. See Almero (2019), which was part of a panel on the situation of transgender women in South East Asia organized by Jaya Jacobo.
- 10 We would also like to thank Brenda Alegre for sharing anecdotal accounts regarding these situations.
- 11 'Folk' is used, instead of 'folks,' as a more inclusive term to embrace gender-diverse and nonbinary identities within the LGBTQIA collective identity.
- 12 We employ the word 'cistern' to demonstrate a set of hegemonic practices of gender and sexual identity that take cisgenerativity as a reference, operating in the form of a true 'system' of social gears that limits the diverse experience and multiple expressions of gender and desire.
- 13 'Necrotopographies' shed light on the indications of the mobility of categories of death and destruction promoted to colonial rationality. In general, these movements of annihilation reach more easily certain territories and life experiences that are fundamentally racialised and gendered, marginalised and impoverished.

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Perspectivas do Sul Global sobre Stonewall após 50 anos, Parte I–Sul pelo Sul, Trans por Trans

Resumo: Os distúrbios contra uma batida policial em Nova York no bar *Stonewall Inn* em junho de 1969 são frequentemente identificados como tendo desencadeado o movimento pelos direitos LGBT e a comemoração dos distúrbios um ano depois, em junho de 1970, inaugurou uma série de eventos do Orgulho LGBT que continuam até hoje em todo o mundo. Neste fórum de duas partes, refletimos sobre os efeitos contraditórios do legado internacional de Stonewall. Quais fatos ou lendas são celebrados e quais são marginalizados cinquenta anos depois? Como o sinal ‘Stonewall’ veio para inspirar e/ou marginalizar outras resistências conforme o evento dos EUA se tornou apropriado globalmente? Nesta primeira parte do Fórum, Silva e Jacobo consideram como as mulheres trans negras no Sul Global têm perseguido a luta das mulheres trans ativistas pioneiras na cidade de Nova York e engajado na história de Stonewall além dos Estados Unidos, negando o branqueamento do discurso sobre as revoltas por homens gays cis e mulheres lésbicas cis hegemônicas do movimento, mesmo em suas respectivas nações, Brasil e Filipinas. Esta contribuição do fórum homenageia pessoas trans negras e pardas, cujos corpos foram considerados monstruosos no coração do império e em outros lugares, onde o império permanece. As autoras juntas aspiram a pensar o planeta a partir de suas coordenadas: sul pelo sul, trans por trans. Da irmandade que forjaram, essas duas mulheres trans do Rio de Janeiro e de Manila, imbricadas em suas feridas, mas unidas pela vontade de curar, teorizam a resistência e reexistência como mulheres em um presente decolonial transfeminista.

Palavras-chave: Stonewall; Sul Global; resistência trans; *travestilidade*; *kabaklaan*.

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