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**Social Memory, Conviviality,
and Contemporary Antiracism**

Valongo, Pretos Novos, Aflitos, and Saracura
Mário Augusto Medeiros da Silva



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Social Memory, Conviviality, and Contemporary Antiracism: Valongo, Pretos Novos, Aflitos, and Saracura

Mário Augusto Medeiros da Silva

Abstract

I analyse actions of newly active social movements that, in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, have been engaged in guiding, disputing and defending social memory politics for territories that have been historically understood as Black and Indigenous: Cais do Valongo and Cemitério dos Pretos Novos (Rio de Janeiro); Liberdade/Aflitos and the region of Saracura (São Paulo). They have been considered as places of memory where the Black and/or Indigenous populations have demanded rights, and are objects of cultural heritage policies and/or disputes with the real estate market, the state and other public and private agents. I study how such demands have developed in recent years, their scope and limits on the political agenda of discussion about the struggle for rights in cities, the antiracist struggle and debates about collective memory and rights. The meanings of the notion of conviviality are also a component of the disputes, testing their potentials for a study of this nature.

Keywords: conviviality | social memory | antiracism | cultural heritage

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Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Conviviality, Conflict and Social Memory	2
3. The Dead and the Graves: Valongo (Rio de Janeiro, 1722-1830) and Aflitos (São Paulo, 1775-1858)	3
4. The Unwanted of the Land: Saracura, Bixiga, and the Subway	10
5. Forgetting, Silencing, Violence: Conviviality and Conflict	13
6. Conclusion: Does the Present Time Have Sensitive Listening? Social Struggle, the Right to the City, and Power	16
7. Bibliography	18

1. Introduction

This text aims to analyse actions of newly active social movements that, in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, have been engaged in guiding, disputing and defending social memory politics for territories that have been historically, affectively and politically understood as Black and Indigenous. Marked by the violence of slavery, colonial torments, discrimination and racism even in the republican experience, the Cais do Valongo (Valongo Wharf) and Cemitério dos Pretos Novos (Pretos Novos Cemetery) regions (Rio de Janeiro, 1722-1830); Largo da Forca (Gallow's Square), Capela dos Aflitos (Chapel of the Afflicted) (1775-1858) and the Saracura region, in Bixiga (São Paulo, 19th century) have been considered places of memory and where the Black and/or Indigenous populations have demanded rights, based on the historically occupied territories in the cities where they are located, being objects of cultural heritage policies, and/or disputes with the real estate market, the state and other public and private agents. Therefore, I am interested in analysing how such demands have developed in recent years, their scope and limits on the political agenda of discussion about the struggle for rights in cities, the antiracist struggle, and debates about collective memory and rights, observed according to the demand for tangible and intangible heritage policies. The debate on the meanings of the notion of conviviality is also a component of the disputes, testing their potentials for a study of this nature.

Both created in the 18th century, the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos – rediscovered in 1996, transformed into the Instituto dos Pretos Novos (Pretos Novos Institute) and a place of memory in 2005 – and the Cais do Valongo – rediscovered by excavations in the port area in 2011 and made a UNESCO Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017 – are contemporary examples of antiracist activism through collective memory.

Still in the capital of São Paulo, one of the most spectacular recent actions, in the context of the antiracist and anticolonial demonstrations of 2020 (motivated by the murder of George Floyd) was the act of burning the Borba Gato statue, a symbol of the resignified figure of the *bandeirantes*, colonial mercenaries from the São Paulo state, carried out by the Revolução Periférica Collective (São Paulo) in July 2021 (Rocha 2024; Ramos 2021; Revolução Periférica n.d.). However, one of the reactions of the São Paulo municipal government synchronous to the situation of transnational and local demonstrations was, in addition to arresting protesters and activists, hiring Black artists and erecting monuments in honour of Black personalities in the city: until now, for Tebas (a Black builder of the 18th century), Madrinha Eunice (the creator of the first samba school in the city of São Paulo), Itamar Assumpção (musician), Geraldo Filme (musician), Adhemar Ferreira (Olympic champion and politician), and Carolina Maria de Jesus (writer). In the late 2023, a public vote was held on the internet and the following personalities were chosen for future works: Mãe Sylvia de Oxalá (religious authority),

Elza Soares (singer), Chaguinhas (corporal sentenced to the gallows), Lélia González (intellectual) and Milton Santos (geographer) (Expresso Estadão 2023).

Nevertheless, these actions in São Paulo did not pacify the context of antiracist questioning concerning social memory. The 2021 subway excavations for the construction of the orange line in the Bixiga region revealed what has been called the Quilombo da Saracura, known through the bibliography on the city and the memory of Black activists: it was the Bixiga region, historically occupied by Indigenous and Black people, later receiving Italian immigration as another layer of social memory, constituting a working-class neighbourhood with strong Black ancestry. The memories of Black intellectuals such as José Correia Leite (Correia Leite and Cuti 1992), of studies on the origins of São Paulo samba (Britto 1986; Simson 2007), of Black organizations in the twentieth century, such as the Centro de Cultura e Arte Negra (Silva 1994) and the Movimento Negro Unificado in the neighbourhood, or also the very existence of the Vai Vai samba school in the neighbourhood show a historical occupation of the Black population in the locality, employed in the present time as a reference for disputes around cultural heritage and the right to the city.

In the case of the Liberdade neighbourhood, in São Paulo, also formerly occupied by Indigenous and Black populations, later the site of extensive Japanese immigration (which even modified the characteristics of the neighbourhood in the mid-twentieth century), as well as the pressures of the São Paulo real estate market and the precarious conditions of maintenance of the Capela dos Aflitos (Chapel of Our Lady of the Afflicted) and the Igreja dos Enforcados (Church of the Hanged), the excavations shed light on a movement that is demanding respect for that place of memory as an Afro-Indigenous space and the construction of a memorial by the government. All these situations have been intensely disputed with different public and private agents, being undefined currently, in 2023, the future scope and limits of the social movements which are still making as yet unmet demands for certain public policies.

2. Conviviality, Conflict and Social Memory

There is a dispute of narrative meanings (in the sense of being able to talk about and have rights) about these large metropolises and the possibilities of democratic existence of traumatic memories with a reckoning about the present. I am committed to investigating the articulations between social memory, antiracism and social trauma (Alexander 2012), through disputes around memory preservation policies. Brazilian society, with a slaveholding past, had different governments and social institutions that organized various public images about the non-existence of racism, the disappearance and assimilation of the Black and Indigenous populations; the practice of racial

democracy and harmonious coexistence between the “races”; to deny racial prejudice, discriminatory behaviours and structural racism as a practice of power, producing inequalities related to gender, race, and class and obstacles to civil, social, and political rights. While the white ruling class sought to create these images, the different Black and antiracist movements continuously opposed them, with a agenda proposing rights and emancipation of Brazilian society (Gomes 2021; Tosold 2021; Baldraia 2021).

Racism is a social relationship of the exercise of power that, in contemporary Brazil, allows for systematic violation of the rights of the Black population and native peoples, confirmed by official data on homicides and femicides according to skin colour, violence towards Black youth suffering high mortality, the massacre of native (indigenous) and *quilombola* peoples in the struggle for their lands, unequal access to the right to education, health, decent housing, and justice systems (IPEA and Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2019). However, there has been much less discussion about the articulation between racism, trauma and social memory and the struggles to resignify the existence, in the present, of painful memories, giving them a restitutive, active significance in the present time (Heymann 2006; Sarr and Savoy 2018).

By analysing the actions disputing collective memory and processes carried out by the agents involved in the four cases listed in this project, in the capitals of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, we can systematically follow the public debate between parts of society, the state and economic agents in those cities, permeated by the antiracist struggle, territorial disputes, and real estate exploitation, with the meanings of collective memory as a centre of discussion. The hypothesis propounded by Sergio Costa regarding the notion of conviviality and figuration is also useful to reflect on the negotiations of the conflict of social memory in such spaces in the present time (Costa 2022). It indicates the possibility of analysing, according to sociological propositions of Norbert Elias, what he calls convivial figurations (or figurations of conviviality) having as important points for observation the structural dimensions (political, legal and economic context); negotiations (cooperation, conflict, violence); and, finally, representations (how humans represent coexistence or life in common). As much as possible, I will seek to observe this, through a literature review, interviews, and analysis of primary and secondary sources.

3. The Dead and the Graves: Valongo (Rio de Janeiro, 1722-1830) and Aflitos (São Paulo, 1775-1858)

The extant bibliography on the Cais do Valongo and Cemitério dos Pretos Novos is quite interesting and connects, as it is based on the materiality of the discovery of the place where before there was one of the most important ports in the reception of slave

trafficking in the Americas, at a time of urban reorganization in Rio de Janeiro, for historiographic debates and action of Black movements, in conjunction with researchers of history and social sciences for cultural heritage actions, as explained by historian Mônica Lima:

The history of the Cais do Valongo can be considered an example of this process of identifying and erasing the past and creating traditions. The existence of the wharf was known through historical documents, but its precise location was not known until it was unearthed in 2011 in the urban reform works in the port region of Rio de Janeiro. [...] It is a story of silencing. Over time, the Cais do Valongo underwent a process of material and symbolic burial. No longer functioning as a landing site for enslaved Africans in 1831, it was covered up in 1843 for the arrival of Emperor Pedro II's wife. The new wharf was renamed Empress's Wharf and was built over the first, stone on stone – and this concealment is visible today in the historical-archaeological site of the wharf, where the layers of this history can be seen perfectly, overlapping. And not only those that refer to the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the city remodeling works that sought to bring the airs of progress of the republican era, similarly, built a square over the Empress Wharf, which buried it (Lima 2018: 101-102, our translation).

The rediscovery of the wharf confirms the knowledge contained in the specialized bibliography and that generations of Black movements kept in the collective memory, transmitting information: there was in that region a territory, a circuit of the African and Black experience in Brazil. In 2018, the Cais do Valongo was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which was intended to have an effect on its surrounding area to encourage memory preservation policies, including by Pedra do Sal and Instituto dos Pretos Novos. This has been the subject of disputes, with social movements and researchers denouncing the government's disregard for the protection of the spaces (Hirszman 2022): municipal, state, and federal governments are responsible for taking care of heritage, but in fact they have done little in that regard.

It is therefore highly revealing in this sense to analyse the Proposal for Registration on the World Heritage Site List: Cais do Valongo Archaeological Site (IPHAN 2016), the dossier produced by the federal and state spheres of government, which was coordinated by the transdisciplinary team composed of Milton Guran (anthropologist), Monica Lima (historian), José Pessoa (architect) and Rosana Najjar (archaeologist). In 2016, the Cais do Valongo was proposed to UNESCO for the status of cultural heritage for being, according to historian and diplomat Alberto da Costa e Silva, “[...] the most complete slavery memory site known” (IPHAN 2016: 7). The estimates for the reception of enslaved Africans in the Cais do Valongo are around seven hundred

thousand people. The idea of being a complete site derives from the slave trade complex produced when it was created, according to the dossier:

In its original configuration, the area where the wharf was built was located in a small cove at the mouth of the narrow valley between the hills of Valongo and Livramento, also known as Valonguinho, which was part of a larger cove, protected by the hills of Livramento and Saúde, known as Valongo beach. This geographically protected environment saw the operation, between 1774 and 1831, of the Rio de Janeiro slave market, which included the slave deposits and warehouses, the Pretos Novos Cemetery, which received the bodies of those who could not resist the harsh conditions of crossing the Atlantic Ocean, and the Gamboa *lazaretto*, intended for the quarantine of newly arrived sick slaves. It was the largest slave trade complex in the Americas (IPHAN 2016: 21, our translation).

This slave trade exploitation complex underwent different processes of concealment and production of invisibility of the memory of Africans, both in the imperial period (the overlapping and redevelopment of the space for the reception of Empress Leopoldina, in 1843, transforming it into the Empress's Wharf and wanting to erase the presence of slavery in the place) and in the republican period – simultaneously aiming to erase the memory of the monarchy and enslaved Africans, from 1889 when it was renamed Cais da Saúde [Health Wharf], until 1904, when new urban development construction concealed more parts of it (IPHAN 2016: 25). In these processes, street names were changed several different times, physical spaces were altered, aiming to make invisible the locations of African and Black memory in Rio de Janeiro. Thus, the archaeological work carried out from 2011 in the region by experts played a crucial role in revealing the layers of social memory that had been literally buried by racist and discriminatory urbanism:

However, no archaeological research can be limited only to superartifacts, and, in this aspect, the research at the Cais do Valongo Archaeological Site was also extremely fruitful with regard to mobile artifacts. In the context of the excavation, the concentration of mobile archaeological materials related to the African diaspora collected in the vicinity of the wharf and on the sides of the site should be considered exceptional. These materials would be directly related to those who lived and resided in the neighbourhood and frequented the wharf, feeling that space as their own. Diverse types of artifacts were unearthed by the research, such as shells or ornaments, such as metal earrings and bracelets, almost all loaded with deep religious symbolism (IPHAN 2016: 43, our translation).

The importance of archaeological research will be recurrent in all these processes studied, because in addition to legal requirements, when it comes to the research of tangible and intangible heritage in similar case,¹ it concerns the possibility of highlighting places of memory and the conviviality of those social groups studied, their cultural and political experiences, their religiosity and the daily construction in that space, in the city and despite it:

The archaeological collection obtained at the Cais do Valongo site is considered exceptional – totalling 1.2 million pieces – particularly due to the quantity and concentration of materials associated with the African diaspora. These archaeological artifacts alone deserve special attention, as they give us access to customs, daily life, religious symbolism, and the resistance of enslaved Africans to the system imposed on them (IPHAN 2016: 67, our translation).

In addition, another element of material culture that maintains the memory of the sufferings experienced by the enslaved and cruel examples of conviviality in slavery are precisely the remains of the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos. The entire region of Valongo was at the service of the slave machine, being simultaneously a place of arrival, exhibition, trade, precarious treatment of health, and death for the newly disembarked people coming from African ports. Surviving slaves, slave owners, and traders, freed Black people, mestizos, whites of varied social strata, all lived for generations with the experience of life and death in that place, overtly, daily, for decades. Similarly, that entire region was eventually buried with the aim of erasing the memory of a daily experience with which the population of Rio de Janeiro lived and connected nationally and internationally: the slave trade articulated with international capitalism and supplying the domestic market with forced exploitation of labour. In 1996, this story came forcefully to light and again the dead without a grave claimed, symbolically and concretely, the dignity of memory and the responsibility of the present time:

[...] Until 1722, Africans were buried in a small cemetery in the central region of the city, but then this cemetery was transferred to the Santa Rita Church Square. However, when the enslaved Africans began to land at the Cais do Valongo, the authorities decided to transfer to there the cemetery of the newly arrived slaves who died. Thus, near Valongo beach, on the way to the Gamboa cove, the new Pretos Novos Cemetery was established, also called Cemetery of Valongo in some documents of the time. This Pretos Novos Cemetery, still known by this name, was represented for the first time in the city plans surveyed in 1791[...]. Active until 1831, it is considered to have been the largest slave cemetery in

¹ Archaeological sites are protected by Federal Law No. 3924 of July 26 1961 which provides for Brazilian archaeological and prehistoric monuments, and are considered as federal assets by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988.

the Americas, in which 20,000 to 30,000 people were estimated to have been buried. Deactivated, the cemetery was covered by the urban grid. Only in 1996, due to the works being carried out in house No. 36 at Pedro Ernesto St., the Pretos Novos Cemetery was finally discovered and its location revealed. The Pretos Novos Cemetery, or the Cemetery of the Gamboa, was registered as an archaeological site by IPHAN, and has since been the object of research and, above all, has driven the preservation of the memory of Afro-descendants in the region. [...] The remains of the Pretos Novos archaeological site provide the evidence and concrete proof of the terrible crime against humanity that was the transatlantic slave trade and the enslavement of Africans in the New World, which gives them a unique character (IPHAN 2016: 94–97, our translation).

Connecting the wharf to the place of undignified burial for those who did not survive the crossing, the Pretos Novos, as well as, in the case of survivors, for those people who occupied the nearby hills and lived there, not only subalternized by slavery and its legacy, with Pedra do Sal [Salt Stone]:

If in the vicinity of the wharf there is the Pretos Novos Cemetery, in whose shallow mass grave the newly arrived Africans who could not resist the harshness of the crossing were buried, there is also Pedra do Sal where, at that time, captives and freedmen gathered to tell and sing their stories, after days of hard work in the port, in the capoeira circles and to the sound of *batuques* [drums] – and it is the same place where a *quilombo* woven in Black identity and solidarity was later formed, by migratory processes in the post-abolition period (Lima 2018: 107).

The bibliography and public interest about the Pretos Novos Cemetery is growing and the most voluminous of the cases (Pereira 2006; Haag 2011; Soares 2013; Soares, 2016; Tavares et al. 2020; Zorzetto 2021), with one of the most important works about the Pretos Novos Cemetery being Júlio Cesar Pereira's dissertation that became the book *À flor da terra: o cemitério dos pretos novos no Rio de Janeiro* (Pereira 2014). Bones found in 1996 during construction work on a house in the region and, with the support of the owners of the property, as well as researchers and members of Black movements, led to the establishment in 2005 of the Instituto dos Pretos Novos, protecting an archaeological site and becoming a place of memory of enormous importance (Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória Pretos Novos n.d.).

*

Similarly, but with a smaller volume of research on the dimension of disputes of meanings of collective memory, there is also the history of the Igreja dos Enforcados and the Capela dos Aflitos in the Liberdade neighbourhood. An old study on the churches of

São Paulo already revealed some of the key issues about the region that has been in dispute in the space of the São Paulo neighbourhood since 2020:

[...] The Igreja dos Enforcados or Santa Cruz dos Enforcados, next to skyscrapers at Liberdade Street, which was born from the thrice-repeated hanging of Chaguinhas, on the eve of Independence, and of his companion Contindiba, on September 20, 1821, is full of legend. The little church of Nossa Senhora dos Aflitos began as a chapel of the cemetery that existed there long ago, much sought after by São Paulo devotees (Arroyo 1954: 365–366, our translation).

According to Leonardo Arroyo, the Metropolitan Curia of São Paulo recorded that in 1779 the cemetery was consecrated next to the chapel of Nossa Senhora dos Aflitos (Arroyo 1954: 366). The place had already functioned as a space for torture since 1775 and the cemetery operated until 1858. In that territory, enslaved Africans, Indigenous people, prostituted women, and people considered criminals were subjected to torture, sentenced to hanging, and buried. The case of corporal Francisco José das Chagas (Chaguinhas) and soldier José Joaquim Cotindiba, identified as Black men, both from the 1º Batalhão de Caçadores de Santos [1st Battalion of Hunters of Santos], sentenced in 1821 to death on the gallows after leading a mutiny for non-payment, gave rise, simultaneously, to the name of the neighbourhood and to a popular cult in the chapel, which exists even today: the gallows are said to have broken three times and the public watching the execution began to shout “Freedom!”. Nevertheless, they were still executed and buried in the cemetery near the church. From then on, it was recorded that people requesting thanks to the souls of the afflicted, in honour of Chaguinhas, knocked three times on the door of the church or on the wood of the velarium to fulfil their religious obligations or make their requests and declare their intentions on pieces of paper.

The Black occupation in the place, including the setting of violence (it was the location of the São Paulo *pelourinho* [pillory], place of public punishments of the city), since the seventeenth century, is well documented. In one of the monographs on the stories of the neighbourhoods of São Paulo sponsored by the municipal Department of Historical Heritage, the volume dedicated to the neighbourhood of Liberdade records the location of torture, descriptions of the period of torture, hangings and burials of enslaved people. Largo do Pelourinho, known as such in 1610, would become Largo 7 de Setembro [September 7th Square] after independence and later Largo da Liberdade [Liberty Square] in the 19th century, and the transformation of one of the oldest territories of São Paulo, especially in the 19th century, from a distant passageway into a neighbourhood that gradually becomes incorporated into the central region of the city (Guimarães 1979: 39).

Once again, in both the imperial and republican periods, in two different cities, we sought to bury an undesirable social memory and replace it with another. Arroyo's description of skyscrapers in the 1950s must be accompanied by another characteristic of the Liberdade neighbourhood in the first half of the twentieth century: with the arrival of Japanese immigration in 1908, the region is occupied by this migratory group and Liberdade gradually becomes known as the "Oriental Neighbourhood".

This even had the support of the government, in 1969, when a plan for the "Orientalization" of the neighbourhood was announced (Guimarães 1979: 91), with white lanterns and red poles that became characteristic of the main streets of Liberdade. The intention, with the support of the Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese commercial communities, was to shape something similar to a Chinatown in São Paulo. The action occurred concurrently with the creation and expansion of the subway works in the region, in the 1970s, where there is now a Blue Line (North-South) station with one of the exits precisely at Liberdade Square, less than 300 metres away from the Igreja dos Enforcados.

In the capital of São Paulo, this mix of elements comprises a decades-long series of disputes culminating in intense conflict in 2020 regarding the meanings of the collective memory of the neighbourhood and the struggle of different social movements for the right to memory: the relationship with the layers of memories of local occupation (Black neighbourhood or Oriental neighbourhood?); the conflictive relationship of the Asian trade community and the Igreja dos Aflitos; the relationship between the government and the Companhia do Metrô de São Paulo and excavations in the neighbourhood; the intense dispute of toponyms (Largo da Liberdade, Praça da Liberdade, Praça da Liberdade-Japão, Praça da Liberdade África-Japão) (Lima Neto 2023; g1 SP 2023);² the material preservation of the Capela dos Aflitos, squeezed and poorly cared for between buildings, as well as the recognition of the cult of Chaguinhas as intangible cultural heritage, and ultimately the constitution of a Union of Friends of the Capela dos Aflitos (UNAMCA), a centre for devotees, researchers and activists that becomes the organization responsible for defending the interests of the Black and Indigenous memory of the region, requesting from the government the construction of a Memorial of the Capela dos Aflitos (UNAMCA n.d.b, n.d.a).

By 2023, progress on issues that became inflamed in 2020 remains the subject of a dispute with the Municipal Department of Culture: a tender process for construction of a Memorial was held, but the bid of the winning architect did not respect UNAMCA's stated goals, rendering it illegitimate in the eyes of the movement, which then put pressure on the government for a new tender process (Ferreira 2024; Berth et al.

² There is also the official documentation, in the City Council, changing the names in 2018 to Liberdade Japão (Decree No. 63,604, of July 24, 2018) and in 2020 to Liberdade África-Japão (Bill 71/2020).

2022; Dias 2023). This dispute, ongoing at the time of this research, bears closer scholarly attention as it moves forward.

4. The Unwanted of the Land: Saracura, Bixiga, and the Subway

The Saracura region, near Liberdade, whose toponym is due to the stream, is a floodplain area, historically populated by enslaved people and escaped or freed Black individuals (Guimarães 1979: 20). Recent disputes around the politics of collective memory and anti-racism consist with aspects of previous stories. The region where the neighbourhood is today, Bixiga, is also one of the oldest areas of São Paulo (Marzola 1979), created in the sixteenth century, having derived its name either from a former landowner or from the disease that would have plagued São Paulo in the sixteenth century, smallpox, also known as “*bexiga*” [bladder]. In any case, the establishment of the name of the neighbourhood would have occurred in the eighteenth century (Marzola 1979: 37). What became known as Chácara do Bixiga was a floodplain area and that, already in the nineteenth century, worried the government as an area of *aquilombamento* of escaped slaves, rebels, and people accused of crimes, by the bushes [*capoeiras*] near the Saracura river and Anhangabaú.

The transformations of the Bixiga region and the accompanying processes of social change in São Paulo led to significant changes in the territory and surroundings throughout the nineteenth century which intensified after the Abolition (1888) and the institution of the republican coup d'état (1889) as temporal landmarks. The state and private sponsorship of the arrival of Italian immigrants, who start to coexist with the local working population, Black, descendants of formerly enslaved people, as well as the proximity to the factories of the west and centre of the city, give a proletarian neighbourhood profile to the locality. The urban reorganization that led to the opening of Avenida Paulista and Morro dos Ingleses created an immediate proximity between the proletarian class and a region of services for the bourgeois class of São Paulo and abroad. However, this set of public places (Bixiga, Paulista, Morro dos Ingleses), also called the Bela Vista neighbourhood “[...] was, from the beginning, a proletarian neighbourhood, occupied mainly by immigrants and freed slaves” (Marzola 1979: 70).

The channelled and buried rivers of the city, among them the Saracura (but also Lavapés, the Glicério region, among others) also modify the urban landscape but not the concern of the government to socially sanitize a region seen with historical distrust due to the abundant presence of Black people and all sorts of prejudices associated with their existence. One of the most important works on this topic that deals directly with the political struggles of memory and practices of erasure permeated by prejudice and racial discrimination is that of the Indigenous historian Casé Angatu, Carlos Ferreira

dos Santos. In *Nem tudo era italiano: São Paulo e pobreza (1890-1915)*, the author discusses in detail the meanings assumed by the ideology of progress and hygienism in the transformations of areas of the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Floodplains, such as those of Carmo or Saracura were places of work for washerwomen, resting places for horses, and cheaper residence districts for domestic workers. First of all, it was the location of native populations in São Paulo. Subsequently, washerwomen, herb dealers, merchants from distant regions, inhabitants of low-cost housing, workers, mostly Black, *caboclos* (descendants of Indigenous people) and *caipiras* [rural people] and *pretos véios* [old Black men] occupying for decades the very spaces that the city despised and feared:

[...] not only the diseases and flies caused fear, but also the behaviour of those subjects associated with the floodplain. The use and perception they had of that space, expressed largely in the way they appear in photographs related to the floodplains – washing clothes and horses, driving carts, etc. – in addition to representing aspects of the way they lived their experience in the city, they opposed the desired norms and codes, thus corresponding to “subversive and marginal discourses” (Santos 2017: 90, our translation).

This image of a region of experiences of lives disqualified and feared by the government has a colonial and racist origin which is grounded in the history of slaveholding in São Paulo. The bibliographic references consulted indicate the formation of *quilombos* or *aquilombamento* processes in the Bixiga region since the nineteenth century, near the Saracura river, with something similar occurring in other regions later considered as “Black territories” of São Paulo (Rolnik 1989), such as Glicério, Liberdade, Barra Funda, Piques, and other areas considered inhospitable near the floodplains (Anhangabaú, Tamanduateí), from which the Black and poor population was gradually expelled and pressured to find cheaper and farther housing.

Chácara do Bixiga, in the middle of the last century, was a much wilder place than could be inferred from a first contact with the history of São Paulo. [...] [T]he repression of fugitive and *aquilombado* slaves was severe. They hid in the *capoeiras* and grasslands that were around the Tanque Reuno, in Bixiga, and in other points of Anhangabaú and Saracura. According to the Minutes of the City Council of São Paulo, in 1831, members of the administration even asked for the closure of the Anhangabaú stream “to the sides of Bixiga” on whose banks thieves and rebellious slaves lurked (Marzola 1979: 39).

The experiences of the Black population after abolition also made the Bela Vista region, where Bixiga is located (with streets called Treze de Maio [13 May] and Abolição [Abolition]), a renowned landscape marked by popular, collective housing,

villages and tenements, places of residence of the working class which could thus be employed closer to the city centre, having access to the services of the region (Kowarick 2007, 2013). This class has gender and colour: Black men and women, workers and craftsmen of different services, international and national immigrants (northeasterners, especially), non-Black workers, white and Black women employed in factories and in domestic service over the following decades. “Most of the tenement inhabitants were not immigrants but domestic workers, unskilled workers and, mainly, Black people” (Marzola 1979: 84).

The ideas about *aquilombamento* do Bixiga and the memory of the tenements resurface in 2022 when, due to actions to build the Orange Line of the São Paulo subway, one of the stations, initially called 14 Bis (after the square of the same name), was planned, ignoring the proximity to Bixiga, to the Saracura river, and to the Black territory experienced throughout the twentieth century with the presence of the Cordão Carnavalesco Vai-Vai (1930), later Escola de Samba Vai Vai (Britto 1986; Simson 2007) in the region (Oliveira 2023; Rocha 2022). These facts lead to a series of conflicts and disputes, including the loss of the samba school’s headquarters, in the late 2021, due to the creation of the subway line.

Again, governments, subway works, excavations and discoveries of artifacts of African and indigenous material culture, on the one hand (Machado 2022; Soares 2022); on the other, real estate exploitation interests with urban remodeling, purchase of houses and the remaining old tenements (inhabited since the end of the nineteenth century by the Black, poor and non-Black working population of the neighbourhood) to erect buildings for classes different from the traditional income standard in the neighbourhood generated an contentious, ongoing public debate on respect for collective memory, antiracism, and the organization of social movements, such as the Mobiliza Saracura/Vai-Vai Movement. Its first meeting took place on May 13, 2022, and it takes responsibility for organizing residents, researchers, white people, Black people, descendants of native peoples, antiracist organizations and those interested in the dispute for the collective memory of the territory of Bixiga as an *urban quilombo*, whose memory must be preserved and updated for the struggle for territorial, environmental and housing rights at the present time (Estação Saracura/Vai-Vai n.d.; Alexandre 2022; Rolnik 2022). The movement first demanded that name of the subway station be changed from 14 Bis to Saracura Vai-Vai, and pressed this demand with the cultural heritage agencies and the municipal and state governments (Alesp 2022a, 2022b). At the time of writing, this discussion is still underway. On June 7, 2024, the Governor of São Paulo issued a decree naming the station “14 Bis-Saracura”, but the controversy surrounding construction is long from over (Meier 2024).

5. Forgetting, Silencing, Violence: Conviviality and Conflict

These four cases narrated above deal with struggles for citizenship rights that have occurred in recent years and are still in dispute and involved in incomplete processes which deserve to be studied in a sustained manner. From the perspective of this study, sociological analyses challenge the disputes for the collective memory of subalternized groups, which aim to broaden the experience of rights and the anti-racist struggle.

I am drawing on several theoretical debates to understand the issue of collective memory articulated with the antiracist struggle: in the locations of so much annihilation and reconstruction, such as those of Western bourgeois modernity, colonialism, and neocolonialism, the issue of social memory is imposed on Black lives and indigenous peoples, surrounded by death, violence and the exercise of necropower (Mbembe 2018). The subject of social memory, as a form of socialization, is theorized precisely in contexts of war, destruction and social reorganization (Halbwachs [1925] 1952, [1950] 2006). The remembrance of societies is a permanent construction and restructuring, at the present time, mediated by different interests. Social memory is a form of power of certain social groups over others, which even determine who has the right to public remembrance or not.

The social groups that historically played a hegemonic role in the exercise of power in Western bourgeois modernity and in the neocolonial condition also conditioned the collective memory, excessively masculine, white, urban, linked to specific religious cults, to places of memory of the economically dominant classes, with national heroes (agents of massacres and erasures); mostly patriarchal heteronormative and pacifying, at various times, unresolved conflicts.

Historically and socially subalternized groups, in local contexts, demand a “duty of memory”, of remembering the brutality, so that the subjects of the present never allow violations and abuses again (Heymann 2006; Pollak 1989). Evidence of human devastation is part of the experience of transnational Black life under the experience of modernity and colonialism and is part of the necessary criticism of those social processes and of the possibility of Black existence. Biological death does not end the violent process of elimination of Black lives: I argue that there is also a death of the social memory of Black people in Brazil, a constant elimination of narratives, records, historical archives, with permanent violation of the right to the dignity of social memory and its public narrative, treating Black life as “precarious life” (Butler 2017) as much as the social markers of difference are intersectional (Collins and Bilge 2021). The Brazilian Black movements, historically articulated in a transnational agenda, respond to this (Jiménez et al. 2020; Coalizão Negra por Direitos n. d.).

Among other important agendas, the issue of social memory is imposed on Black individuals, surrounded by so much death and violence. Remembering and forgetting are human capacities. It is one of the first ways to learn to live socially, socialized as we are in memories of others, in collective behaviours. However, this requires the transmission of knowledge by subjects, who need to be socialized in collective experiences. In the case of experiences of Black and Indigenous people in Brazil, this has been particularly challenging. Social memory is a form of power. Collective remembrance does not concern the past. It is always a task of the present time, by means of selectivity. The social groups that historically had a hegemonic role in the exercise of power in Brazil also conditioned this collective memory.

The social practice of forgetting is an issue of collective memory and of the exercise of power. Focusing on Black lives, it means a double death. The duplication is due, on the one hand, to the death of Black bodies being a sad, violent reality in the modern world and in our contemporaneity. And it is clear that other bodies marked by difference from the modern and colonizing dominant standard are at risk (women, homosexuals, transsexuals, disabled people, native populations, etc.). On the other hand, biological death does not end the violent process of eliminating Black lives. I argue that there is also a death of the memory of Black and subalternized people in general. The vilification of the memories of what the black existence was has been a constant until the moment of the complete elimination of narratives, records, historical archives.

Considering the relatively lower age for violent Black death in Brazil, with tragic cases involving children and adolescents, we are as a society continuously erasing our Black social memory. Worse: we have not even guaranteed Black people the right to have personal or collective memory and to transfer it. The genocide of the Black Brazilian, as Abdias Nascimento wrote about in his 1978 book, has sadly been updated as genocide of the Black population in the present day (Nascimento [1978] 2016). It is no longer about masked racism but about extermination consented to and authorized by society. Collective memory, as a right, is equally destroyed.

The struggle against the social practice of forgetting is a struggle waged by social movements against this ongoing double condition of the death of the subalternized people, whether by valuing local cultures, or by including and recognizing actions of Black people in the history of modernity (inventions, scientific solutions or participation in similar social processes) or even fighting against the plundering of traditional territories (*quilombos*, lands of Black people, *terreiros*). A component of collective memory is also that of social experience, being part of the efforts of social movements linked to the struggle for the right to preserve Black memory to establish the mechanisms of transmission of such experiences for the present and the future.

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The research on these contemporary disputes of anti-racist collective memory in cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro is also justified by theoretical components, understanding the struggle for social, civil, and political rights as part of the struggle for collective memory and for different social experiences to be narrated and transmitted to the present and future time. When it comes to violent experiences and insubordination, we must also ask about their meanings for Black life. One research strategy is to have on the horizon the debate on social experience, anti-racism, and collective memory, with contributions already addressed previously and augmented with the following reflections.

Writing about the invisibility of experience and the task for historians like her of documenting the lives of “omitted or neglected people”, Joan Scott stated that if “stories are written from fundamentally different perspectives or points of view”, there would be a possibility of denying misogynistic, sexist, racist, and hegemonic constructions (Scott [1991] 1998: 300). An expansion of the framework of experience, as she said, always contingent and political, permanently historicized and localized. The experience of a hegemonic view (male, white, bourgeois, Western, heteronormative, ableist) also shapes social memory and has an impact on the double death of the subalternized, here seen partially as Black people and Indigenous people.

A new positionality of the view and production of knowledge – and also the production of memories – is present in the debate of Black feminist thought. Far from exhausting it here, see Patricia Hill Collins’ discussions about the experience of Black American women as “outsiders within” whose status would provide “African American women with a special point of view regarding the *self*, family and society” (Collins [1986] 2016: 100) or about the need for a new view in the face of the structures of oppressions with which the subjects are confronted in a relational, positional and individual manner (Collins [1989] 2015). This perspective seems theoretically interesting for thinking about the disputes of contemporary social memory for cities and their urban territories, in dialogue with studies on conviviality and conflict.

Gender, race, and class articulated by the experience of Black women require that new questions be asked for the present – “race, class and gender position Asian-American women, Native American men, white men, African American women and other groups that have varying degrees of punishments and privileges” (Collins [1989] 2015: 20) – but also require a re-reading of the past, in her view, of a society shaped by slavery: “I suggest that slavery was a specific institution of race, class, and gender” (Collins [1989] 2015: 21, our translation). And the past and present feedback in the spaces of everyday experiences of hierarchies, privileges, and power:

Are elite white men overrepresented among the top administrators who control the finances and policies of your university? [...] Do African Americans, Hispanics, other races and ethnicities constitute the majority of the invisible workers who feed you, who wash your dishes, who clean your office and your library after everyone else has gone home? (Collins [1989] 2015: 23–24).

In addition, this disposition of power that is also articulated with time led Collins to think about the images of control that are deposited in bodies and in the dissimilar experiences of the differences between men and women, of different ethnicities and classes (Collins [1989] 2015, [1986] 2016). In a society shaped by slavery, what was the colour of the enslaved people and what stereotypes were attributed to their descendants in the period of freedom? My argument is that questioning gender, race, and class in this reading key also means reflecting on the prisons of social memory in relation to the experiences of freedom of those who are descendants of stereotyped groups, controlled by images that, at the limit, mean brakes for social changes in the present time. The violent death of bodies, the social practice of forgetting in collective memory, structural obstacles to social change, vilified or unreachd rights: these are, among others, the challenges that have led social movements and anti-racist initiatives, such as those described so far, to organize and to deserve to be studied.

6. Conclusion: Does the Present Time Have Sensitive Listening? Social Struggle, the Right to the City, and Power

The social processes involving disputes over the narrative of social memory and antiracism are currently subjects with transnational impact: Along with the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and the thousands of victims of the disease around the world, 2020 also had antiracist and anticolonial protests among its global issues. The triggering factor for such actions, shown by the media and social networks, was associated with the murder of African American citizen George Floyd, asphyxiated on the ground, for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, a victim of police violence, on 25 May, 2020 (8m46s n.d.; Rubio 2020). Different social movements took to the streets in large global cities, with slogans against racism, racial violence and white supremacy (O Estado de S.Paulo 2020; Miguel 2020).

In the following months, demonstrators organized actions regarding monuments and public places in public spaces, places of memory, commemorative statues, etc. that honoured subjects, actions, dates and values understood now to be racist and colonialist. There were common discussions about what should be done and ways to pressure governments about the tangible or intangible cultural heritage of traumatic memories: destruction, removal from the public space and sending to museums,

insertion of educational signs, replacement or maintenance of the empty space (Sandoval and Breña 2020; Tavares 2021). Discussions also focused on how to value places of memory associated with the experience of Black and Indigenous populations.

Demonstrations of this type and the discussion about the cultural preservation of traumatic memories in the public space are older than 2020, considering the capitalist history of catastrophes and liabilities of violence (Seligmann-Silva 2000; Heymann 2006; Sarlo 2007; Laurore 2016; Sarr and Savoy 2018; Moody 2020). The combination of Floyd's murder and those movements fostered the discussion about antiracism and anticolonialism, connecting cities such as Minneapolis, Los Angeles, New York, Washington, São Paulo, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, Amsterdam, London, Lisbon, Berlin, Paris, Tokyo, Beirut, Addis Ababa, Beijing, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, reaching countries such as Syria, Wales, Chile, and Australia, among other locations, in a global network of local collective actions that expressed common sense in questioning the hierarchy of power and frustrating attempts to stabilize an unequal and violent narrative about the past in those places.

Thus, slavery, colonialism, massacres promoted by national states, authoritarian governments and religious institutions, processes of assimilation of native populations, consolidated in public monuments and places of memory, which would serve as frameworks of reference and ritualization (Halbwachs [1925] 1952; Nora 1993; Pollak and Heinich 1986; Jelin 2002) were exposed as expressions of the power exercised by dominant groups and classes in a certain configuration of time and space, which could no longer, in the view of those who protested, be silently endured in the present time, given that some were witnesses of abuses and violations of rights (Pollak and Heinich 1986; Jelin 2017). Collective memory is a contingent social process, never stabilized in the present time, and which continually resignifies the meanings of the past.

The social processes involving the rediscovery of the Cais do Valongo and the Pretos Novos Cemetery, the cultural heritage policies and the organization of movements and social institutions around them; the political disputes and debates with the government and private markets involving the Memorial dos Aflitos at Liberdade and the Saracura/Vai-Vai Movement at Bixiga need to be understood according to the composition of the social movements and their activists, forms of organization and activation of reference frameworks of the antiracist collective memory that they trigger. That is what I initially tried to present in this work and intend to continue researching for the next years, based on the experience with Mecila.

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